

Information Communication Technology (ICT) and BBC Received Pronunciation: Focus on English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions.

Oluchi Nwodim , J.

Liberal Studies Department, School of General Studies, Federal Polytechnic Kaura Namoda, Zamfara State.

Keyword:

*Pronunciation,
English, ICT, BBC,
Technology*

Abstract

Pronunciation exercises can be quite difficult especially for ESL learners. But if we take out everything difficult from language teaching and learning, we may end up doing very little beyond getting students to play simple communication games. Obviously noticed are the predicaments threatening pronunciation proficiency for ESL learner in Nigeria tertiary institutions. The problems regarding pronunciation have attracted academic contributions from linguists globally. This article adding to their voices explains the differences between first language (L1) and second language (L2) around theories; identifies the pronunciation problems ESL learners face in Nigeria tertiary institutions; explores (ICT) as an effective tool for learning pronunciation in English as second language – causes of pronunciation problems as well suggests teacher/ learner pedagogical commitments to assuage the problems so that learners can attain proficiency level in English pronunciation.

Introduction

The BBC Received Pronunciation (RP) is a pronunciation chosen by British teachers to teach to foreign learners. The accent has been mostly described and used as the basis for textbooks and pronunciation dictionaries. In exploring the potency of ICT in ESL pronunciation learning in Nigeria tertiary institution, the focus is on the standard accent handed down to Nigeria by Britain. This accent is typical of broadcasters with English accent that possesses useful degree of consistency in the broadcast speech of the speakers (Roach, 2009).

Therefore as phonological problems in ESL education rises, teachers/learners will resort to pedagogies to allay the problems. Pronunciation has been a problem to ESL learners in Nigeria especially in tertiary institutions. Fortunately, language is the key to knowledge acquisition thus making its education central to any educational context. It means that the success of educational systems depend largely on its linguistic achievements. English language therefore is the key means of communication in Nigeria as well as the chief manifestation of thought. Bamgbose, (1976), and Obasi (1995), point that, English is used in government as official language for all types of official records, instruction in business, and commerce for all transaction and publicity. It is also used in education as the language of instruction, the mass media, the radio, T.V, etc. The national policy on education (1981) instates English language as the language of communication in examinations. It is thus given a special position in schools and preserved as means of expression in and out of school. As a result of these, students need an adequate knowledge of spoken and written English. There are rules in English language on word pronunciation, and there are also exceptions in applying those rules. Understanding this trick as regards to pronunciation will help us to be more sensitive to ESL learners' problems.

ICT on the other hand, give learners real life contact with 'inner circle' English speakers, exposure to their cultures, and enable them access and research information worldwide. Its resources such as email, blogs, video conferencing etc, facilitate students' interaction and communication with native speakers and other English speaking communities, with the intent of exposing them to the use of the language for real life purposes and in real context.

This paper explains the difference between L1 acquisition and /L2 learning around theories, identify and explains the problems that ESL learners encounter in pronouncing English words and the causes. The article will explore ICT and teaching pronunciation in ESL in Nigeria tertiary institution.

Differences between First Language Acquisition and Second Language Learning: Around theories

First language Acquisition or learning has been praised extravagantly by linguist as a process of a language acquisition through exposure whilst a child. First language is therefore defined as a primary language not necessarily mother tongue but any language that a child first acquired and used on a constant basis. Any language one acquires during critical stage or period is the first language (Jessica, 2014; Lennenberg 1967 as cited in UKessay, 2018). Second language acquisition or learning on the other hand, is learning a second language after a first language is already established. One interesting concept of second language acquisition or learning is Krashen's concept of 'language acquisition and language learning'. Krashen makes an important distinction between language acquisition and language learning. Children acquire a language through a subconscious process during which they are unaware of grammatical rules. This process is similar to how they acquire their first language. They get a feel for what is and what isn't correct. To acquire language, the learner needs a source of natural communication. Young students who are in the process of acquiring English can get on-the-job practice by communicating with their classmates. Second language learning, on the other hand, is not communicative. This type of learning comes from direct instruction about the rules of language. Learners have conscious knowledge of the new language and can talk about what they know. They can memorize the rules of the language and perhaps succeed on a standardized test, but they still may not have strong speaking or writing skills (1988).

However, first language acquisition is a natural process which is genetically triggered at the most crucial stage of the child's cognitive development in which children subconsciously process and develop the linguistic knowledge of the setting they live in and are unaware of grammatical rules.

In contrast, second language learning takes place where the target language is the language spoken in the language community that differs from the first language. Second language is not genetically triggered in any way unless the child grows up bilingually in which case; it is not considered second language learning at all.

First language acquisition is mostly passive. Children usually listen to the people around them, their speech melody, their sounds, their words, and their sentence structures. Before the child can even read or write a single word in his first language, he is already using an impressive vocabulary and many important grammar structures. Some people never learn how to read or write but can still speak their first language fluently. Most babies learn rules while listening to the people around them. They are able to distinguish sentence structures at the early age of seven months as experiments have shown. They also pick up new words from their surrounding people. At the age of six, most children have acquired their native language(s) without any effort.

Second language learning, on the other hand, is an active process. Second language learners need to learn vocabulary and grammar in order to achieve their goals. Most people will need an instructor, either a teacher at school or the instructions of a course book or audio course. For those learners to achieve fluency or near fluency in a second language, it requires years of studying and likely a long stay in another country. Many people will never reach anywhere near fluency with any second language. Most experts see the ages between three to four years as the critical age when first language acquisition ends and second language learning begins.

Another area of difference between first language acquisition and second language learning is input – specifically the quality and quantity of input. Language learning process depends on the input frequency and regularity. The quantity of exposure to a target language a child gets is immense compared to the amount an adult receives. A child hears the language all day every day, whereas an adult learner may only hear the target language in the classroom – which could be as little as three hours a week.

ESL learners' problems in pronunciation and causes

The BBC Received Pronunciation is a big problem for ESL learners in Nigeria tertiary institution and more difficult for some students than for others. A

learner's first language determines the degree of difficulty and types of difficulties learners' will have. Some problems that Nigeria ESL learners in the tertiary institutions encounter in pronunciation include:

Pronunciation problem with vowel sounds: According to the position of cardinal vowels and durations, the vowels are of two kinds- short and long vowels and students make mistakes to differentiate between these two types of vowels for example:

It has been observed that students pronounced daughter /dɔ:te(r)/ as /dote(r)/. A good number of students pronounce do /du:/ as /du/.

Most students' pronounce father /fɑ:ðə(r)/ as /fɑðə(r)/. Students uttered first /fɜ:st/ as /fɒst/. From this analysis, it is obvious that students got puzzled and interchanged between long and short vowels while pronouncing English words. Students pronounce the word examination /ɪg,zæmɪ'neɪʃn/ as /eg,zæmɪ'neɪʃn/. Moreover, in following words, one short vowel was replaced by another one by the students: network /netwɜ:k/ as /nætɜ:k/, son /sʌn/ as /sɒn/, else /els/ as /æls/, away /əwe:/ as /æ:we, again /əgeɪn/ as /ægeɪn/, women /wɪmɪn/ and what /wɒt/ as /wɒmen/ and /whʌt/. Students uttered young /jʌŋ/ as /jɒŋ/. English diphthongs comprise of two English vowels but students' mispronounce a number of diphthongs for example: potato /pətetəʊ/ and day /deɪ/ as /pəteto/ and /de/ etc. Some diphthongs become monophthongs or lengthened monophthongs: /eu/ ~ /o:/ and /ei/ ~ /e:/. A diphthong and a pure vowel constitute a trip-thong or 3 pure vowels constitute a trip-thong. Students pronounce the triphthongs at their convenient way, not following the structure of pronouncing triphthong for example player /pleɪə(r)/ and lower /ləʊə/ as /pleə(r)/ and /ləə(r).

Bilabial consonant “p” and “b” are mispronounced for example the word paragraph as /færəgrɑ:f/, poison /fɔɪzən/ and apple /ʌfl/ instead of /pærəgrɑ:f/, /pɔɪzən/ and /æpl/. Similarly, department /dɪpɑ:tmənt/ is pronounced as /dɪfɑ:tmənt/ etc. Sultana and Arif (2007) have also observed that Students pronounce P as F. This is traced to Northern Nigerian ESL learner. So when a person from this region reads partner, he has to make sure of not reading it as fartner. These mistakes have been observed as a problem that ESL learners suffer even in Bangladesh. Again, the English labio-dental fricative /f/ and /v/ are absent in phonemic inventory, that is why students commonly adopt these

sounds as the bilabial aspirated plosives /p/ and /b/. Therefore, some students pronounced leaf /li:f/ as /li:p/. Some others pronounced verb /vɜ:b/ as /bɜ:b/ and very /ve:ri/ as /be:ri/. The sounds of English consonant clusters are also problematic for some students to produce correctly. The **inter-dental consonant /θ/** is mispronounced by students. They pronounce thank /θænk/ as /tænk/, alveolar consonant /d/ as /d/, e.g. data /deɪtə/ pronounced as /dætə/. Some **consonants** were uttered by some students in a very unusual way. For example: /'mɒnstə(r)/ as /mɒnestər/, /'ɪntrəstɪŋ/ as /'ɪntərəstɪŋ/, /lɪtrɪʃʊə(r)/ as //lɪtərəʃʊə(r)/. Contractions were also uttered erroneously by students. Example: aren't /ɑ:nt/ and isn't /ɪznt/ were pronounced as /ʌrɒnt/ and /ɪzɒnt/.

Problems in **Minimal Pair**: Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1987, P.178, as cited in Begun & Azizul, 2016) defines- minimal pair as two words in a language which differ from each other by only one distinctive sound and also differs in meaning. So students sometimes inter-mingle one word with the other at the time of pronunciation. So, the meaning or the structure of the sentence is changed by the students because they cannot differentiate the minimal pairs. Students face problems in following sounds: surpass~surpasses, ask~asks, disclose~disclosed, discuss~discusses, undisturb~undisturbed, get~gets, etc.

Problems in **Elision, Stress and Intonation**: There are some words in English in which some sounds disappear under certain circumstances. Students of tertiary level sometimes face this kind of problem and they mispronounce some English words by omitting a single sound from a word. They utter /skɪrɪpts/ as /skɪrɪps/, /ækts/ as /æks/, here the phoneme, 't' has disappeared. Students don't pronounce stressed words perfectly. For example: (interesting) /'ɪntrəstɪŋ/ as /ɪntərəstɪŋ/, (literature) /'lɪtrɪʃʊə/ as /lɪ'tərəʃʊə/, (tourist) /'tu:rist/ as /tu:rist/. So, in producing some words, students' don't pay heed to the stress and intonation patterns of English language. For example, the word (import) /ɪmpɔ:t/ is pronounced by students with a long stress in the first syllable when the word gives noun meaning and with long stress utterance at the final syllable when the word gives verb meaning.

The account of the problems above was borne out of observation during long period of teaching English Language in Nigeria tertiary institution and being in constant communication contact with ESL students in other parts of the country,

(Hoque,2010; Mujaffa,1999; Roach, 2010) and many other linguist around the world have as well made some contributions on this issue. It therefore calls for fast intervention by the appropriate quarters to introduce ICT in ESL education to curtail these problems. The writer believes that with ICTs, learners will have contact with the native speakers in the cause of their lessons and correct the existing problems and prevent emerging ones.

Some factors are responsible for poor pronunciation in ESL, which unfortunately most ESL teachers are not aware of (Shuchi, 2013 cited in Begun and Azizul, 2016). These factors are from interaction with the teachers and students, that include: social factors, such as – students are not motivated by their friends and family members and teachers even the learning materials to produce correct English; lack of efficient teachers in phonology; lack of the use of modern technology at the educational institutions; economic factor; lack of motivation; students’ lack of exposure to the target language; poor pronunciation standards of the teachers; massive L1 interference and pre – established systems of English pronunciation (Begun and Azizul, 2016).

Another suggested factor is deficient instructional material. Instructional materials are the materials that teachers use in their classrooms to teach learners. Teachers use different instructional materials to motivate learning (Awotua-Efebo, 2001 as cited in Rabiati, 2017) through the use of textbooks, charts, models, graphics, and real objects as well as improvised materials. Success is achieved especially when an instructional situation depend on the suitability of the instructional materials, adequacy and effective utilization of the materials (Olaitan & Agusiobo, 1994). Instructional materials is effective in promoting students’ academic performance in teaching and learning because it provides the much needed sensory experiences needed by the learners for an effective and meaningful behavioral change. Instructional materials are central as (Omabe, 2006; Umoren, 2004; Mathew, 2012 cited in Rabiati, 2017) rightly pointed, and proceeded to say that its effective use in teaching and learning of English language compliment efficiency of a teacher, and effectiveness in lesson delivery. The writer’s target in the above is the use of modern technology underlying in ICT specified as bone of contention in this article.

Information Communication Technology and teaching pronunciation in ESL

ICT means Information and communication technology and refers to those technologies that give us access to information via telecommunication. The

focus of ICT is primarily on communication technologies though similar to Information Technology (IT). The properties of ICT includes: wireless networks, computer, cell phone and all other communication mediums. UNESCO(2008a,2008b) points out that ICT - as a scientific, technological and engineering discipline and management technique, is used in handling information, application and association with social, economic and cultural matters. In essence, teachers which include the ESL teacher can use ICT to improve the educational status of the society in every field. Teachers can restructure their educational programs and classroom facilities to suit their teaching and learning with the use of ICT. Some of the computer and internet connection the teacher can use to communication information for learning purpose are:

E learning - a learning program that uses information network such as the internet, an intranet (LAN) or extranet (WAN) whether wholly or in part, to deliver a course, have interaction and/or facilitation. According to Tinio (2002), Web-based learning is a subset of e learning and it is referred to as learning using an internet browser such as the model, blackboard or internet explorer.

Blended Learning - learning model that combines the face-to-face classroom practice with e-learning solutions. **Constructivism**- is a paradigm of learning that assumes that learning is a process (Johassen, 1991), through which individuals “construct” meaning or new knowledge based on their prior knowledge and experience. **Learner- centred learning environment** - is a learning environment that pays attention to knowledge, skills, attitudes, and beliefs that learners bring with them to the learning process where its impetus is derived from a paradigm of learning called constructivism. In the context of this article, it means students personal engagement to the learning task using the computer and or the internet connection (Ratheeswari, 2018) necessary and effective. The condition to effectively harness these ICT potentials, students and teachers must have sufficient access to digital technologies and the Internet in their classrooms, schools, and teacher education institutions which the writer suggests is another thing of concern in Nigerian tertiary education context.

ICT helps to keep pace with the latest developments with the help of different technologies included in it. www – www stands for world wide web which is one of the most important and widely accepted services (like IRC, E-mail etc.)

of the Internet. Its popularity has increased dramatically, simply because it's very easy to use colorful and rich content. The ESL teacher can make use of the following ICTs to drive pronunciation lessons in Nigeria tertiary institutions as they have been found effective. For example:

For group discussion – **Internet Relay Chat** (IRC) is among the popular Internet service people mostly use for live chatting. Group of people with common interest can exchange views / opinions with each other instantly through Internet. Description of the internet technologies required to support education via ICTs (www, video conference, TeleConference, Mobile Conference, CD Database, WordProcessor, Intranet, Internet etc.)

E-Modules – Modules written are converted and stored into digital version into a computer using word processor accessible by the user through internet.

Teleconferencing

1. **Audio – Conferencing** – It involves the live (realtime) exchange of voice messages over a telephone network when low – band width text and still images such as graphs, diagrams or picture can also be exchanged along with voice messages, then this type of conferencing is called audiographic. Non-moving visuals are added using a computer keyboard or by drawing / writing on graphics tablet or whiteboard.
2. **Video – Conferencing** – Video Conferencing allows the exchange not just of voice and graphics but also of moving images. Video-Conferencing technology does not use telephone lines but either a satellite link or television network (broadcast / cable).
3. **Web – Based Conferencing** – Web-based conferencing as the name implies, involves the transmission of text and graphic, audio and visual media via the internet; it requires the use of a computer with a browser and communication can be both synchronous and asynchronous.
4. **Open and Distance Learning**

All these services availed through ICT plays a great role in teacher education. It allows higher participation and greater interaction. It also improves the quality of education by facilitating learning by doing, directed instruction, self-

learning, problem solving, information seeking and analysis and critical thinking as well as the ability to communicate, collaborate and learn.

ICT can provide teachers with enjoyable and interactive environment, help students attain native-like pronunciation, improve the quality of teacher's pronunciation instruction, and increase teacher/learner confidence. For teachers to experience the effectiveness of the ICTs, they must have the knowledge and skills to use the tools and resources in order to help all students achieve high academic standards.

Conclusion

Teaching pronunciation in ESL has been found to be a difficult task according to linguist based on some factors discussed in this article. But the fascinating information is that ICT has come to alleviate the ESL teachers and learners of these troubles to a great extent. Therefore, English pronunciation instruction can be facilitated through using appropriate materials that are provided for English as Second Language teachers. And learners need computer-based materials for learning pronunciation and teachers can also use these materials as the effective means of improving their teaching.

Recommendation

After exploring issues bordering on teaching BBC Received Pronunciation in Nigeria tertiary institution with ICTS, the writer wish to recommend that:

Government should be specific on the English version that should be taught in tertiary institutions in their educational language policies if any - that will reflect in school curriculum and quip their institutions with ICT equipment.

The school administrators and teachers should avail the learners' information on the version of English upon which their pronunciation lessons are based so that they will develop in that line.

Government and school administrators need to sponsor trainings for teachers as well learners on how to use ICT equipment.

From time to time encourage and sponsor teachers for seminars or workshop to update their knowledge on ICTs.

Teachers should monitor students while on task to ensure they are on track as well motivating them.

School administrators should ensure that only those teachers who are qualified to teach pronunciation are assigned because a blind cannot lead a blind.

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