



## COMPUTER ASSISTED ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION TRAINING TO UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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### ABSTRACT

The importance of English has increased with the advent of globalization and a revolution in information technology. English is a lingua franca and a language of opportunity and chance. G.B. Shaw said that English is a rich language, perhaps the most illogical language. Many words in English are spelt in one way and pronounced in another way unlike the Indian language i.e. Sanskrit, Hindi, Urdu or Tamil. Hence, non-native speakers of English find it a bit difficult to pronounce correctly. Pronunciation training is an important aspect of learning a new language in general and English language in particular. It includes segmental and the supra-segmental aspects. Computer Assisted Language Learning has become popular tool to train pronunciation to students of the second language (L2) because it offers extra learning time and authentic material as well as the possibility to practice in a stress free environment. The efficiency of English pronunciation training can be promoted through CALL and CAPT technology etc. This paper focuses on the various features of the CALL for learning English pronunciation that help the ESL students to listen to, repeat, record, and get feedback. Imitation is the most fundamental practice to copy a speech model.

**Keywords:** CALL, CAPT, pronunciation, ESL, feedback, material, segmental and the supra-segmental.

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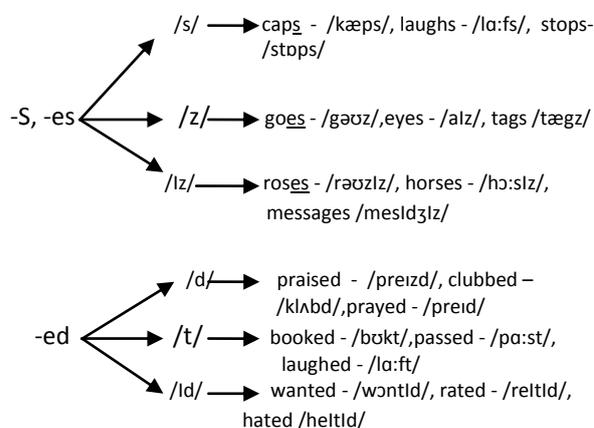
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Learning English as a Second Language (SL) or Foreign Language (FL) is a bit difficult at the time of acquisition of a language. Most of the Indians learn English from books and from teachers but books are unable to speak and ESL teachers speak English as they speak their mother tongue. Pronunciation is an important aspect of speaking. One of the commonest problems in teaching English as a second language to non-native learners is the interference of mother tongue. It is fact that when a child learns his mother tongue, his mind is like a clean slate. He learns his mother tongue in a natural way. When he has to learn English in school or colleges, the influence of his mother tongue is deeply embedded in his consciousness that he cannot remove it. It is obvious that pronunciation plays an important role within such a language curriculum, and the training of this skill is still often neglected within traditional ELT classroom instruction. Intelligible pronunciation is one of the needed skills for speaking effectively in English. The non-native speakers of English especially the Indian speakers of English face certain problems in articulating certain sounds of English. As there are many irregularities in English pronunciation, a learner needs to take care of learning spelling and pronunciation. This is so because the twenty-six letters have to function of forty-four sounds. The sound system of English is divided into two main aspects: segmental and supra-segmental. The segmental aspect of the sound system includes individual vowels and consonants, and the supra-segmental aspect comprises of words, phrases, and sentence stress, pitch contour or intonation, and rhythm. Sounds are the pillars of pronunciation. Fortunately, forty-four sounds are not difficult to learn. Few of them are difficult to learn for the Indian students. A single sound might be represented by a number of letters or letter combinations in different words. The pronunciation of the same letter is pronounced in different ways. For example the letter 's' is pronounced in the following words like /s/ in 'sun', /ʃ/ in 'sugar', /z/ in 'visual', and /z/ in eyes, and the /k/ in character, /tʃ/ in choice, /ʃ/ in chef. It is inevitable to a learner to learn all these different sounds through listening. These sounds should be learnt carefully. Otherwise, he/she cannot speak the

correct pronunciation in English. Indian speakers have troubled with the articulation of the suffixes: -s, -es, and past suffix -ed.



Speaking skill is developed at the time of childhood by all of us in our mother tongue. A child imitates sounds and words of his/her parents and elders. If the child listens to the same sound or word repeatedly many a time to a particular object, later the child uses the same sound or word wherever he/she needs it. Such sounds are recorded gradually in the mind of the child through listening incessantly. It is needed repeated listening to recognize such sounds or words. Thus, a speaker primarily recognizes and stores the information in the mind and speaks the same when the situation demands. Likewise, the method that works the most consistently in developing fluency and proficiency is extensive practice with native speakers. This repeated communication allows the learners to make mistakes, receive feedback, and make corrections in their pronunciation.

Scientific inventions have influenced every aspect of human life. With the development of technology, computers play a significant role in day to day life in the twenty-first century. Computers are being used in classrooms for instruction in composition, literature, decoding, reading comprehension, spelling, pronunciation, vocabulary, grammar, usage, punctuation, capitalization, brainstorming, planning, reasoning, outlining, reference use, study skills, rhetoric, handwriting, drama, and virtually every other area of language arts. Computer Assisted Language Learning (CALL) is



the use of technology enhanced methods and techniques in language learning and teaching (Kedrowicz & Watanabe, 2006; Gruba, 2006).

Speaking is a skill that has usually been regarded as a difficult one to teach through the computers. However, using current CALL technology, even with its current limitations, for the development of speaking abilities, has gained much attention. CALL provides three ways of advantages for speaking skills:

- Tasks that require the learners to speak (video or conferencing).
- Tasks that peripherally assist the skills required for speaking through focusing on other skills (text – based, Computer – mediated communication (CMC)).
- Tasks that require the computer to recognize and respond to language input.

One of the aspects of CALL is Computer Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) which is based on the use of technology for teaching and learning the segmental and supra-segmental features of the sound system. CAPT technology is specifically designed to evaluate and improve pronunciation in foreign languages. Pronunciation of English can be improved through the use of digitized speech Rostron and Kinsell (1995). Hardison (2004) believes that there are significant effects of CAPT in the acquisition of L2 prosody and generalization to segmental accuracy and novel sentences. CAPT systems allow students to access virtually unlimited and realistic L2 input through different channels to practice individually as many times as they wish, and to enjoy unlimited patience from the tutor.

### THE MUSIC OF ENGLISH

Stress, rhythm, and intonation are the most important features of English. These features are also called as prosodic features or supra-segmental features which are called the music of English. These features are very different from the features found in the languages of India. So they should be learnt and practiced carefully by the Indian students. Non-native speakers of English have difficulty in producing stress patterns. Words can be split into two or more syllables which have a distinct stress. The shift in stress changes the pronunciation and in some cases their meanings also. For example, **object (noun) /'ɔb-**

**dʒɪkt/** and **object (verb) /əb-'dʒekt/**. Each and every word has its own stress. Hence it is needed to understand which parts of a word receive stress and which ones do not. According to Zhang (1998) that computer technology can be useful and successfully incorporated into a teaching curriculum to improve pronunciation. Hirata (2004) also opines that CAPT is effective in improving the ability of L2 learners in producing and perceiving pitch and intonation. Raux and Kawahara (2002) also state that recent computer-assisted pronunciation learning focuses on two major areas: evaluation of and instruction of the different aspects of pronunciation such as stress and intonation.

Teaching and learning different aspects of pronunciation, CAPT offers a variety of interactive software packages for providing ESL/EFL learners with the opportunity to perceive and practice pronunciation. CAPT offers many advantages which are not usually available in traditional contexts. Neri, Cucchiari, & Strik (2002) state that digitized pronunciation software allows students:

- To afford high-quality sound and video clips of native speakers of English, which gives the learner the opportunity to look at articulatory movements that are used in producing sounds (LaRocca, 1994). A person may also compare his voice to a model made by the native speakers.
- CAPT seems to be effective in improving pronunciation accuracy. For a wide variety of pronunciation skills, learners improve through the use of well-designed CAPT instruction.
- CAPT can also offer learners a chance to use many prerecorded materials.
- To access unlimited and realistic ELT input material through different channels individually and provide individualized feedback automatically and instantaneously.
- It has become possible to use computers, speech technology, and linguistics together to enable learners to hear a voice of a native speaker who mastered Standard English Shirer (2005). Students may then compare



their performance to that model, sound by sound, and track their progress over time.

- CAPT systems can offer abundant, realistic, and contextualized spoken examples from different speakers by means of videos and recordings that learners can play as often as they wish. They can also provide opportunities for self-paced, autonomous practice; by inviting users to repeat utterances or to respond to certain prompts.
- CAPT provides immediate feedback effectively that allows learners to know which parts of their pronunciation are correct and which are not.
- It also provides native-like rhythm intonation can also be learned.

Some studies have stated the benefits of using CALL application. Eskenazi (1999) found that learner's difficulties with specific areas of pronunciation namely phonemes and prosody could be detected in the speech waveform used in the system, which could be used in giving correction to learners.

- English as Second Language (SL) Foreign Language (EFL) learners who have rare chances to be engaged in speaking practice outside of the classroom, such applications of CALL create an environment which increases the opportunities for them to practice speaking.
- A noteworthy obstacle for EFL learners in learning to speak is their fear in 'losing face' in class when they make mistakes during practice. Programs equipped with Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) technology would allow learners to practice speaking without embarrassment. Thus, enhancing learning when learners feel at ease when practicing speaking as a foreign language.
- For EFL/EFL learners, who have rare opportunity to interact with native speakers, instructional materials with ASR technology can assist those who are shy, who are afraid of 'face - losing' or who rarely have chances to speak with native speakers.

## CONCLUSION

In the last two decades, English Language Teaching (ELT) in India has changed considerably. The use of computers in the ELT classroom has proven advantageous in more than one respect. The computers provide something that is not available in traditional teaching methods. Majority of the students hailing from the semi-urban and the rural areas are vernacular. Thus, the computers play a vital role in the process of teaching English pronunciation. Computer Assisted Pronunciation Training (CAPT) can help students to understand the differences in pronunciation, stress and intonation of English. It can help the learning of unfamiliar sounds, vocabulary, syntax, gestures, and dialogue structures that the student can quickly understand and appropriately respond to sentences directed at them. Automatic speech recognition, voice synthesis, audio materials and highly interactive 3D environments can be used to learn, practice English pronunciation and can be memorized with ease. It has made learning pronunciation easy and also made the learning pronunciation interesting and enjoyable for the undergraduate students. Computers can support their learning process and they create interest among them to understand and to improve their pronunciation in English.

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