

Major Obstacles against Teaching and Learning English for the Speakers of Other Languages: A Comprehensive and Critical Study

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ABSTRACT: *The English language has become an international and dominant language today. No doubt, it is spreading by leaps and bounds everywhere on the planet earth. As far as English language teaching and learning is concerned, it involves a number of limitations, obstacles and challenges for both the teachers and the learners. The delight of teaching and learning a language lies in the contentment of seeing themselves develop in linguistic proficiency and in fruitfully assembling their communication interests and needs. However, there are some problems which are very difficult and challenging for both of them to attain perfection in this language easily. Sometimes the teaching methods is wrong, sometimes the learners are not capable of learning and sometimes the English language itself discourages the new learners on account of its fundamental and illogical grammar rules, pronunciation variations, rich vocabulary and spelling methods. These shortcomings which are the major barriers against the success of teaching and learning are well described in this research paper. This research paper aims at investigating and identifying some common and major reasons behind the struggles faced by both the teachers and the learners from different viewpoints.*

KEYWORDS: Archaic Words, Conundrum, Homograph, Homonyms, Homophones etc.

INTRODUCTION

To continue and accelerate the speedy growth of globalization a widespread language is utterly needed, today. Luckily English has got the recognition to become that widespread language for communicating among the different countries. It is the language of preference in plenty of countries of the globe. Basically, Australia, Canada, New Zealand, South Africa, UK and USA are honoured as the native speakers of English. English is becoming the part and parcel of almost all parts of the world more or less in the sense of a secondary or foreign language. It is used like a second language in India, France, Pakistan, etc. The strength of English is superior to many other languages of the planet. It is the language of information technology, international politics, industry and trade. It is frequently used as one of the authorized languages of the UNO. It is a link language of the commonwealth nations. It has become the language of cultural give and take. Consequently, English is playing a vital role

in bringing the world together. Therefore, plenty of people are paying attention on teaching and learning English like native speakers. In spite of their ardent interest, the English language teachers and learners face a range of difficulties and challenges with varying responses of the learners and the trainers time and again.

- He is going to play the match. (Present Progressive Tense)
- The match is going to be started at 5.00 p.m. (Simple Future Tense)

This research paper covers plenty of such obstacles which are caused due to a number of facts or topics of grammar which are well discussed here.

FINDINGS, DETAILS AND DISCUSSIONS

Major Obstacles Caused by the English Language Itself:

Spelling

Spelling is a subject of memorization in the English language because of a variety of words that sound one way and are spelled in another way. There are thousands of confusing words in the English language. There are some words which have same sound or pronunciation but spell or mean differently. Some are spelled same but pronounced or meant differently. Some are spelled and pronounced same but mean differently. These variations make the teaching and learning very difficult. Besides, these create hesitation and weak confidence in them. They become afraid of committing mistakes. This stops the fluency for the teachers and learners of other languages.

Homophones:

‘Phone’ has to do only with sound. When we talk on a telephone, we hear the other person’s voice. When people in the 1800s used gramophones, in fact, they were listening to music. Phonology is the study of the sounds of a language. That’s why ‘homophone’ means ‘same sound’. Homophones are sounded the same but spelled and meant different.

Beet- BrE / bi:t /; NAmE / bi:t /; (Noun): a type of vegetable plant, especially for feeding animals or making sugar

Beat- BrE / bi:t /; NAmE / bi:t /; (Noun, Adjective, Verb): to defeat somebody in a competition or game

Deer- BrE / diə(r) /; NAmE / dir /; (Noun): an animal with long legs which eats grass or leaves

Dear- BrE / diə(r) /; NAmE / dir /; (Adj.): loved by or important to someone

Dew- BrE / dju: /; NAmE / du: / (Noun): the very small drops of water

Due- BrE / dju: /; NAmE / du: /; (Adj.): caused by somebody or something; because of somebody or something

Die- BrE / dai /; NAmE / dai /; (Noun, Verb): to stop living

Dye- BrE / daɪ /; NAmE / daɪ /; (Noun, Verb): to change the colour of something, especially by using a special substance

Feat- BrE / fi:t /; NAmE / fi:t /; (Noun): an action which needs skill, strength or courage

Feet- BrE fi:t /; NAmE fi:t /; (Noun): plural of foot

Homographs:

‘Graph’ has to do with only writing or drawing. When we think about a graph, we envision a picture. If we read graphic novels, we know they have pictures. They are drawn by someone. That’s why homograph means same picture or same writing. Homographs are written or spelled the same but pronounced and meant different.

Content- BrE / 'kɒntent /; NAmE / 'kɑ:ntent /; (Noun): the things that are contained in something

Content- BrE / kən'tent /; NAmE / kən'tent /; (Noun, Adjective, Verb): happy and satisfied with what you have

Minute- BrE / 'mɪnɪt /; NAmE / 'mɪnɪt /; (Noun, Verb): 60 seconds

Minute- BrE / mɪn'ju:t /; NAmE / mɪn'ju:t /; NAmE / mɪn'u:t /; (Adjective): extremely small

Resume- BrE / 'rezjumeɪ /; NAmE / 'rezəmeɪ /; (Noun): a written record of your education and the jobs you have done, that you send when you are applying for a job

Resume- BrE / rɪ'zju:m /; NAmE / rɪ'zu:m /; (Verb): to begin again or continue after an interruption

Use- BrE ju:s /; NAmE ju:s /; (Noun): the act of using something; the state of being used

Use- BrE ju:z /; NAmE ju:z /; (Verb): to utilize for a particular purpose

Wind- BrE / wɪnd /; NAmE / wɪnd /; (Noun, Verb): air that moves quickly as a result of natural forces

Wind- BrE / waɪnd /; NAmE / waɪnd /; (Verb): to have many bends and twists

Homonyms:

‘Nym’ is meant as ‘name.’ William Shakespeare and William Wordsworth have the same title name, but we know they are two different people. It is the same with homonyms. They are spelled the same i.e. homographs and pronounced the same i.e. homophones, but they are meant different.

Bass- BrE / bæʃ /; NAmE / bæʃ /; (Noun): a sea or freshwater fish that is used for food

Bass- BrE / beɪs /; NAmE / beɪs /; (Noun, Adjective): the lowest tone or part in music, for instruments or voices

Bat- BrE / bæʔ /; NAmE / bæʔ /; (Noun): an animal like a mouse with wings, that flies and feeds at night (= it is nocturnal).

Bat- BrE / bæʔ /; NAmE / bæʔ /; (Noun, Verb): a piece of flat wood with a handle used to play baseball, cricket or table tennis

Bear- BrE / beə(r) /; NAmE / ber /; (Noun): a heavy wild animal with thick fur and sharp claws

Bear- BrE / beə(r) /; NAmE / ber /; (Verb): to be able to accept and deal with something unpleasant

Object-BrE 'ɒbdʒɪkt /; NAmE 'ɑ:bdʒekt /; 'ɑ:bdʒɪkt /; (Noun): a thing that can be seen and touched, but is not alive

Object-BrE 'ɒbdʒɪkt /; NAmE 'ɑ:bdʒekt /; 'ɑ:bdʒɪkt /; (Verb): to say that you disagree with, disapprove of or oppose something

Plant- BrE / plɑ:nt /; NAmE / plænt /; (Verb): to put plants, seeds, etc. in the ground to grow

Plant- BrE / plɑ:nt /; NAmE / plænt /; (Noun): a living thing which grows on the surface of earth and has a stem, leaves and roots

Problems of Dumb and Repeat/Extra Letters:

Column-	BrE / 'kɒləm /; NAmE / 'kɑ:ləm /
Commissioner-	BrE / kə'mɪʃənə(r) /; NAmE / kə'mɪʃənər /
Committee-	BrE / kə'mɪti /; NAmE / kə'mɪti /
Embarrassment-	BrE / ɪm'bærəsmənt /; NAmE / ɪm'bærəsmənt /
Knowledge-	BrE / 'nɒlɪdʒ /; NAmE / 'nɑ:lɪdʒ /
Miscellaneous-	BrE / ,mɪsə'leɪniəs /; NAmE / ,mɪsə'leɪniəs /
Reconnaissance-	BrE / rɪ'kɒnɪsɪns /; NAmE / rɪ'kɑ:nɪsɪns /

Vocabulary:

It is one of the most comprehensive and difficult aspects of the English language for the teachers and the learners of the other languages to master it thoroughly. There are plenty of terms which are originated from the other foreign languages like French, Latin and Greek. But, these are used with a lot of European languages. The English language is quite liberal and flexible and adopts a number of words every year that make it vast and rich. According to the statistics of the Global Language Monitor, there are almost 1,025,109.8 words in English as estimated on January 1, 2014. But, this feature becomes very difficult when other nations adopt them as their second language.

Pronunciation:

In fact, pronunciation is the method of producing the sounds of a language. For speaking any language, the different sounds forming the words and the sentences are spoken. The effective speaking skills depend on accurate pronunciation of words under the English language. Even a slight change in the pronunciation changes the entire meaning of the word. In the pronunciation of words, we become aware of the great variations and these variations sometimes create a great hindrance against both the language teachers and the language learners.

Chandelier- BrE / ʃændə'liə(r) /; NAmE / ʃændə'liər /

Colonel- BrE / 'kɜ:nl /; NAmE / 'kɜ:rnəl /

Ewe-	BrE / ju: /; NAmE / ju: /
Friend-	BrE / frend /; NAmE / frend /
Grandeur- 'grændjər /	BrE / 'grændʒə(r) /; NAmE / 'grændʒər /; BrE / 'grændjə(r) /; NAmE / 'grændjər /
Heir-	BrE / eə(r) /; NAmE / er /
Lieutenant-	BrE / lef'tenənt /; NAmE / lu:'tenənt /
Niche-	BrE / ni:ʃ /; NAmE / ni:ʃ /; BrE / nɪʃ /; NAmE / nɪʃ /
Psychology-	BrE / saɪ'kɒlədʒi /; NAmE / saɪ'kɑ:lədʒi /
Tomb-	BrE / tu:m /; NAmE / tu:m /

Stress:

Stress is the degree of force with which a sound or a syllable or a word is articulated. In the case of English words which consist of more than one syllable, some of these syllables are uttered with a greater degree of force than others. But this becomes an obstacle before the teachers and learners of the English language. We can interpret a sentence which has a group of words in different ways based on the stress laid upon the words in the sentence. Such a variation is very rare in other languages of the world. Let's read the words in the following sentences where the stress or emphasis is determining the meaning of the sentence:

1. I cook the best chicken curry.
2. I cook the best chicken curry.
3. I cook the best chicken curry.
4. I cook the best chicken curry.
5. I cook the best chicken curry.

Now, let's find out the different meanings?

1. It is I who make the chicken curry not anybody else.
2. I don't just eat chicken curry, but I do cook it.
3. I cook the chicken curry in the best way.
4. I cook the best chicken curry, and not the fish curry.
5. I cook the best chicken curry, and not the chicken butter masala.

Accent:

One word when pronounced with different accents reveals different meanings and parts of speech:

Address	AD-dress	Do you know William's AD -dress? NOUN
	Ad-DRESS	He does not have permission to ad- DRESS the minister! VERB
Converse	CON-verse	Does he think firm A is more successful than firm B? I think the CON -verse is right. NOUN
	Con-VERSE	We can con- VERSE in two different languages. VERB
Insult	IN-sult	What he said felt like an IN -sult. NOUN
	In-SULT	Please don't in- SULT me. VERB
Present	PRES-ent	He gave me a nice PRES -ent on my birthday. NOUN
	Pre-SENT	Allow him to pres- ENT my friend, Donald. VERB
Record	RE-cord	He always keeps a RE -cord of what he spends every month. NOUN
	Re-CORD	It's important to re- CORD how much we spend every month. VERB

Conundrums:

English is known for being difficult also because of contradictions. There are several instances of conundrums in English. They mean different than they appear. We hardly ever stop to think how illogical many of the things we speak really are. We are just used to them. Unless we have been brought up speaking English, how can we possibly begin to learn all these oddities? It is little surprising that people trying to learn English finish up feeling confused.

For instance:

- There is no ham in the food hamburger.
- Neither is there any apple nor pine in a pineapple.
- Overlook and oversee have opposite meanings, whereas look and see mean almost the same.
- 'C' for car (BrE / kɑ:(r) /; NAmE / kɑ:r /) but why 'C' for centre (BrE / 'sentə(r) /; NAmE / 'sentər /)
- 'But' pronounced BrE / bət /; NAmE / bət /; BrE strong form / bʌt /; AmE strong form / bʌt / but why 'Put' is pronounced BrE / pʊt /; NAmE / pʊt /

Double Meaning:

In English there are few words which give double meanings one positive and one negative which create a big problem amongst the new speakers if it is not expressed properly.

- Can I borrow these, ladies?
(This is misinterpreted for- Can I borrow these ladies?)
- The article revealed intimate details between Jenny and John.

(This sentence is misinterpreted for two meanings- 1. The sexual relationship, 2. The close friendship.)

Archaic words:

This is also one of the obstacles in English. In English new words are added more frequently and some old words die with course of time. Though they die from everyday uses, they remain alive in literature forever. This also creates a big hurdle in its success for the others. For instance:

A. “Behold her, single in the field,
Yon solitary Highland lass!
Reaping and singing by herself;
Stop here or gently pass!” (*Wordsworth, ‘The Solitary Reaper’*)

B. “It is an ancient Mariner,
And he stoppeth one of three.
‘By thy long grey beard and glittering eye,
Now wherefore stopp’st thou me?’” (*Coleridge, ‘The Rime of the Ancient Mariner’*)

Some more words- ain’t, thee, kirk, shalt, hast, doth, hither, soothsayer, thither, whence etc.

English Grammar:

Grammar is the study of the organization of words into sentences. Plato and Aristotle were the initiators to acquire grammar seriously. It is the sum total of rules and regulations which govern over the system of language and structure by which we communicate with each other. But, for the speakers of other languages, this becomes a time taking process because of its variations time to time and place to place in a sentence:

Articles

Honest Boy- An honest boy

Hotel- A hotel

Syntax

Singular subject takes singular verb.

Example:

He writes.

But,

I write. (Singular subject is taking the plural verb.)

I do not write.

You (*singular subject*) write. (The singular subject is taking a plural verb.)

You (*singular*) do not write.

Number

The rule says there are some nouns which are uncountable and they do not take any article; but on the other hand the same uncountable nouns take articles somewhere. For example:

- a) That wall is made of stone. (Uncountable)
- b) He threw a stone at me. (Countable)
- c) She has beauty. (Uncountable)
- d) She is a beauty. (Countable)
- e) There is no life without fire. (Uncountable)
- f) She made a fire to warm herself. (Countable)
- g) This room is full of smoke. (Uncountable)
- h) Don't have a smoke. (Countable)
- i) She is suffering from headache. (Uncountable)
- j) She has a headache. (Countable)

Verb Forms

Bid-	bade	bidden
Bid-	bid	bid
Get-	got	got / gotten
Hit-	hit	hit
Lay-	laid	lain
Lead-	led	led
Let-	let	let
Lie-	lay	lain
Lie-	lied	lied
Read-	read	read
Sit-	sat	sat

Distributive Determiner: Either

Either gives two different senses and are used differently-

Any of the two different persons or things:

We can have the meeting either on Friday or Saturday. (It means 'or')

Both

There were trees on either side of the road. (It means 'both')

Difficulties of Prepositions:

There are almost 150 prepositions in the English language. However, this is a very small number if you talk of the thousands of other words. The prepositions are important words. They are used more frequently than other individual words in English. True speaking, the

prepositions **in, of, to** etc. are the frequently used words in English. They make the biggest confusion for students who use English as a second language.

It is said:

1. He is **at the hospital** to visit a relative who is **in the hospital**.
2. He lies **in bed** but **on the couch**.
3. He watches a movie **at a cinema hall** but **on TV**.

Besides, we can interpret one preposition used in a sentence in a number of ways. For example:

‘TO’

1. as far as something
2. before the start of something
3. directed towards; concerning
4. in honour of somebody/something
5. in the direction of something; towards something
6. located in the direction mentioned from something
7. reaching a particular state
8. it is used after verbs of movement to mean ‘with the intention of giving something’
9. it is used to introduce the second part of a comparison or ratio
10. it is used to show a quantity or rate
11. it is used to show a relationship between a person or thing
12. it is used to show somebody’s attitude or reaction to something
13. it is used to show that two things are attached or connected
14. it is used to show the end or limit of a range or period of time
15. it is used to show the person or thing that is affected by an action
16. it is used to show the person or thing that receives something
17. it is used to show what somebody's opinion or feeling about something is
18. it is used while something else is happening or being done

Exceptions:

This is the biggest problem in English grammar. It is said that there are more exceptions and less rules in English. This makes very difficult to get mastery over it in a short period of time by the speakers of the other languages. There are few of them below:

Exception 1

The uses of auxiliary verbs in the Simple Present and Simple Past Tenses:

We have already learnt that the present indefinite tense is used to talk about universal truths and general habits. For instances:

1. My elder brother lives in London. (Affirmative Sentence)
2. My elder brother does not live in London. (Negative Sentence)
3. Does my elder brother live in London? (Interrogative Sentence)

4. We agree with all of you. (Affirmative Sentence)
5. We do not agree with all of you. (Negative Sentence)
6. Do we agree with all of you? (Interrogative Sentence)

As we can see in the simple present tense, affirmative sentences do not have any auxiliary verb. However, this rule has got exceptions. And these exceptions add extra emphasis to the sentences given below.

1. We do agree with all of you. (More emphatic than we agree with all of you.) This sentence means that we really agree with you.
2. She does want to go with them. (She really wants to go with them.)
3. He does want to stop abusing. (He really wants to stop abusing.)
4. She does want to go on a leave.
5. I do respect all of them.

Exception 2

Present Tense to Talk About Future:

The simple present tense is used to talk about future events which are already planned. The general verbs which are used with the simple present tense in this way are as follows: arrive, begin, depart, end, leave, open, start, etc.

- The mart reopens on Monday.
- The match starts at 4.30 p.m.
- He comes on Monday.

Exception 3

Number:

A. If a singular countable noun ends in **-f** or **-fe** then the plural is formed by changing **-f** or **-fe** into **-ves**:-

Examples:

Calf	Calves
Elf	Elves
Knife	Knives
Leaf	Leaves
Life	Lives

Exception:

Belief	Beliefs
Chief	Chiefs
Gulf	Gulfs
Proof	Proofs
Safe	Safes

B. If a singular countable noun ends in **-o** and precedes a consonant then the plural is formed by adding **-es** to the singular countable noun:-

Examples:

Echo	Echoes
Hero	Heroes
Mango	Mangoes
Potato	Potatoes
Volcano	Volcanoes

Exception:

Canto	Cantos
Memento	Mementos
Photo	Photos
Piano	Pianos
Solo	Solos

C. If a singular countable noun ends in **-y** and precedes a consonant then the plural is formed by changing the **-y** into **-ies**:-

Examples:

Army	Armies
Baby	Babies
Duty	Duties
Fly	Flies
Lady	Ladies

Exception:

Boy	Boys
Day	Days
Key	Keys
Monkey	Monkeys
Play	Plays

Some Other Common Obstacles faced by both the English Language Teachers and Learners:

1. Lack of Interest
2. Lack in Need or Scope
3. Hatred against the Colonization
4. Unsuitable Environment
5. Government Policy
6. Hesitation or Shyness

7. Dearth of Language labs
8. Sense of Patriotism
9. Regional Dialects
10. Lack of Trained Resources or Faculty

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The data have been collected solely by the author himself. The data have been collected keeping the fact in mind of all the obstacles which are faced truly by the speakers of other languages when they switch to a foreign language. The data are original and have been produced mainly by the author avoiding all sort of plagiarism. The source of the data which have been adopted from somewhere else, have been mentioned clearly in the reference in MLA style. The data have been collected from printed and electronic sources i.e. books, e-journals and different websites. The research work took almost 3-4 months for the completion. The completed work has been proof checked plenty of times to find out possible mistakes and errors.

CONCLUSION

The above discussions clarifies that this research paper finds out some issues to prove that there are certain difficulties and challenges in teaching and learning the English language as a foreign language. Though this research paper proves some complications and challenges to learn as well as to teach English as a second language, no one can refuse or deny the fact that English has become the most popular language to communicate among the people of different nations, different other languages and different cultures. And most of the people of other languages can learn or teach English very easily in the comparison of other languages of the world. Because it consists of only twenty six letters, understandable grammatical rules and very sober feminine pronunciation. This language is very liberal and flexible. Plenty of words are borrowed normally to English language time and again. Because of this reason, many speakers of other languages find some well-known words of their own language in this. This has contributed a lot for the English language to become an international language.

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