



## ENGLISH LANGUAGE IN INDIA: PROBLEMS AND SUGGESTIONS

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In the present age of globalization English is the only lingua-franca for the entire world but students and teachers of English face numerous problems related to the study and teaching of the language. Initially it enjoyed the status of the first language. Then its status was changed into that of a second language used for official work throughout the country. Then it was demoted to the position of an optional second language. Though, today it is well-known to the sizeable number of people in the country, it is on the way to become a foreign language.

The learning of English as second language is bound to pose a number of difficulties both the teachers and the learners. Even among the linguists there have been differences in opinion as to how to proceed to teach the language. While according to some scholars the real difficulty of learning of foreign language lies in mastering its vocabulary. There are others who hold that the real problem is in mastering the sound system and the structure of the language. Similarly the problem is posed by differences in culture between mother tongue and English language.

“Mother tongue is not just a verbal pile. It is a psychology, an environment, a source of cultural and cognitive sustenance, an emotion, a bond and many collateral things”(Singh 33). To attempt to guard against its interference is an act of violence with a pernicious potential to damage some vital nerves of the emotional-cultural-artistic continuum of a learners personality. In a seminar Mulk Raj Anand said, “We cannot write like the English. We should not. We can write only as Indians” (Anand 1972).

The mother tongue of a student learning English as second language is bound to have different phonology. And their English is much more affected by their regional accent and it is rather difficult to avoid the pull of one’s mother tongue standing in the way of correct pronunciation of English. In order to give effective teaching the teacher must have a good knowledge of mother tongue (L1) and English language (L2) and the differences between the two.

English, as it is internationally spoken, has more than one accent. Apart from two standard models (American English and British English) there are native speakers of this language in Canada, Australia, Newzealand and South Africa. But British RP (Received Pronunciation) still enjoys world-wide recognition.

In India we may have English speakers from Assam, Bihar, M. P., U. P., Delhi, Tamilnadu and Maharashtra with variations. Some Bengali and Bihari speakers, for instance, replace /v/ by /b/, instead of pronouncing ‘vinay’ they pronounce ‘binay’ and some speakers from U. P. and M. P. replace /s/ by /sh/, instead of pronouncing



'shobha' they pronounce 'sobha'. There is a section of Indians, who by efforts and training, have achieved the approximation to the British standard pronunciation. It may be clear that it is neither possible nor necessary for everyone to get mastery over the British RP (Received Pronunciation). But to aim at international intelligibility, approximation to the above standard can be tried out. Within India the model of General Indian English (GIE) which is the desirable model to achieve intelligibility within India, would suffice.

In this age of globalization, international tourism, travel and trade, exchange of resources and knowledge, spoken form of English is getting due importance. Therefore, international intelligibility of spoken English should be the learner's aim. There are some tips for learning correct pronunciation of English:

The first thing that the students should be taught is naturally concerned with the English *sound system*, i.e., without teaching phonetics to the students, he must teach them the correct pronunciation of various English sounds both individually and when they are used in connected speech. The discrepancy between written symbol and actual pronunciation of various English sounds will have to be made known to the students.

One must know all the 44 English speech sounds and their symbols. 20 of these are vowel sounds and 24 are consonant sounds. With knowledge of these sounds and symbols, a learner can easily distinguish /s/ from /ʃ/ (sh).

#### **Voiced and Voiceless Sounds:**

In articulating the vowel sounds and the consonants b, d, v, z, m, n, l, r our vocal cords vibrate. All these sounds are called voiced-sounds. Rest of the speech sounds i.e., p, t, k, h, ʃ, ʒ, are called voiceless sounds. This information is very useful and is part of training in spoken English. Adding 's' to cut gives /s/ sound; as cuts /kʌts/. But adding 's' to pen gives /z/ sound; as pens /penz/. Reason is clear if inflection of 's' follows a voiced sound (i.e., /n/ in pen) it sounds /z/.

Knowledge of syllable structure is also helpful in the direction of achieving the correct pronunciation. Syllable is a word or a part of word which has one vowel sound. For example the word CAT /kʌt/ has one vowel sound that is /ʌ/ and the first and the last sound in this word are consonants.

#### **Aspirated Sounds:**

Aspiration is an important feature of native English. Most Indians substitute unaspirated /p/, /t/, /k/ for aspirated /pʰ/, /tʰ/, /kʰ/ at the beginning of accented syllables. For instance in the word 'paper' the first /p/ is aspirated and the second is unaspirated so the word is pronounced /pʰeipʰ/ by a native speaker of English, whereas it is pronounced /peipʰr/ by most Indians. It is interesting to note that unaspirated voiceless plosive at the beginning of accented syllables sound like voiced plosives to the ears of native speaker. The following example illustrates this point:



Word	Pronounced by An Indian as	Understood by a native speaker
Touch	/tʰʊ/	Dutch
Pack	/pʰʌk/	back
Character	/kʰæktʰər/	director

This clearly illustrates that communication positively breaks down if the initial voiceless plosives in accented syllables are not aspirated. Aspiration of plosives should not be a problem to Indian speakers because in most Indian languages the aspiration of plosives is distinctive. The only trouble is that in English the same letter P is used for /ph/ and /p/.

#### **Substitution of /s/ for /z/:**

There is no one to one relationship between spelling and sound. House has /s/ as the final sound whereas noise has /z/. The letters ss are pronounced /s/ in essence but /z/ in Scissors. The letter /x/ is /ks/ in except but gz in exact.

Plural endings are pronounced /s/ by most Indians and peace and peas are thus homophones in their speech. Some other homophones used by Indian learners are; fans and fence, peas and piece, knees and niece, falls and false.

Thus our English language is much more affected by our regional accent and it is rather difficult to avoid the pull of one's mother tongue standing in the way of correct pronunciation of English. In order to learn correct pronunciation one should keep all these points in mind and he should be a keen listener to BBC Programmes and Doordarshan news readers, which may help in forming habits of speaking English correctly. So far as vocabulary is concerned he may be directed to seek the help of a dictionary. So by and large a practical teacher is bound to face many challenges when he tries to teach this language to whom it is a foreign language.

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