

***DR. C. VISWESWARA RAO1**
ASSOC. PROF. OF ENGLISH
DEPT. OF HSS
C. V. RAMAN COLLEGE OF ENGG.
BHUBANESWAR, ODISHA, INDIA

****N. MURALI**
ASST. PROF. OF ENGLISH
DEPT. OF BS & H
AITAM, TEKKALI
SRIKAKULAM, AP, INDIA

HOW TO OVERCOME ENGLISH PROBLEM SOUNDS IN INDIAN CONTEXT

Abstract

It is crystal clear that English has become lingua franca of the people of this globe. But it is always difficult for the non-native speakers of English to pronounce some of the English words since there is no direct correspondence between the letters in a word and the sounds they produce. It is because English language is not a phonetic language. Most of the languages spoken all over the world are phonetic languages. Thus, when the non-native speakers of English use the language in their oral communication, they mispronounce some of the English words. In this research paper the authors have brought into light what they have observed about the mispronunciation of some English sounds and words by Indian speakers and how regional languages influence the process of foreign language learning and how those regional languages have become barriers in pronouncing the English sounds with correct pronunciation. Most of the times the non-native speakers tend to speak certain sounds by guessing its pronunciation basing on the sounds of their mother tongues. Hence it results in mispronunciation of many words with

the same spelling structure. They have tried to give certain suggestions and recommendations as to overcome the English sounds which create problems while pronouncing.

Keywords: Problem sounds, differences, confusion, suggestions, recommendations

Introduction

At present, Learning and speaking English has become a must and, at the same time, advantageous. For the technical students, they have to be ardent learners for getting opportunities both at home and abroad. If the technocrats determine to grab the opportunities abroad, they must be fluent in English speaking. Even for the students those who aspire to study in foreign countries, it is mandatory to qualify themselves in entrance examinations such as IELTS, TOEFL. Apart from other aspects of those tests, fluency and accuracy in pronunciation of English is very important. If one is good at pronunciation of English words, phrases and sentences, it will help them to get through the interviews conducted for higher studies and/ or employment abroad.

There is no shade of doubt in saying that the first language influence is immense on the pronunciation of the target language and it is a quite common experience of English language teaching teachers in India that their learners get confused with sounds of their mother tongue and those of English. They always identify the sounds of English words with the sounds of their mother tongue. It is one of the major reasons why the learners face problems in pronouncing certain words in English language.

Problem sounds in Indian context

Since Indian vernacular languages are phonetic languages, Indians face difficulties in giving stress and producing tone and intonation while speaking English. They encounter a number of difficulties in pronunciation, tone and intonation. Let us examine some of the problem sounds which Indian students find difficulty to overcome.

Problems with consonant sounds and vowel sounds

Consonant Sounds:

/f/-/v/

Most Indians cannot differentiate the /v/ sound from /f/ sound. It is done in two ways: firstly they produce sounds for them representing the Indian sounds /f/ and /w/ respectively. It is because in Indian languages, there is no existence of the sound /v/. For example, they pronounce the word,

veil /weɪl/ instead of /veɪl/. Secondly, if they try to produce the two sounds like the native speaker, they face difficulty in producing and differentiating the sound /v/ from /f/ and they pronounce /v/ it as /f/. For example, they pronounce the word move /muːf/ instead of /muːv/. Most of the Indian English speakers cannot recognize the basic difference between them i.e. the /f/ sound is voiceless and the /v/ sound is voiced.

/s/-/z/

Most Indians face the same kind of difficulty while producing /s/ and /z/ sounds. /s/ sound is voiceless whereas /z/ is voiced sound. They pronounce the sound /z/ as voiceless like /s/ sound.

In case of aspirates (unvoiced)- /p/, /t/, /k/ most Indians pronounce them as voiced sounds. When the letters, p, k, t and k come at the beginning of words, they must be aspirated like /ph/, /th/, and /kh/ whereas when they come in the middle or at the end of the words, they are unaspirated. Most Indians pronounce them as voiced sounds irrespective of their places. For example in the word, paper, the first letter, *p* is aspirant (unvoiced) and second *p* is voiced. In the word, taint, the first *t* is an aspirant and the second *t* is voiced. In the word, kick, the first letter *k* is an aspirant and the second *ck* is a voiced sound.

Ex: paper /peɪpə(r)/, pauper /pɔːpə(r)/, pepper /pepə(r)/, pipe /paɪp/, pop /pɒp/, pup /pʌp/, taint /teɪnt/, tent /tent/, tilt /tɪlt/, tot /tɒt/, toot /tuːt/, tut /tʌt/, crack /kræk/, kecks /keks/, kinetic /kɪnetɪk/, kook /kuːk/,

A similar problem rises in case of producing /θ/ sound; most Indians produce the sound as in Hindi letter *tha* /त/.

In some parts of India (no specific areas in this case), Indians end certain words with the sound /ʊ/ unnecessarily, these words generally end with the sounds such as /t/, /n/ for example that /bʌtʊ/ instead of /bʌt/, but /bʌtʊ/ instead of /bat/ or /bʌt/, pen /penʊ/ instead of /pen/.

Mostly northern Indians fix /ɪ/ sound before the words begin with letter *s*, for example they pronounce the word, school as /ɪskuːl/ instead of /skuːl/.

The letter *t* in certain word sounds as /d/ rather than /t/, for example water /wɔːtə(r)/ is pronounced as /wɔːdə(r)/.

Most Indians mispronounce *eer*. They pronounce it as /i:r/ instead of /iə(r)/ and they do not drop the final *r* sound. For instance *care* /ker/ instead of /keə(r)/, *engineer* /ɪndʒɪnɪ:r/ instead of /ɛndʒɪniə(r)/

Most Bengali, Odia and Bihari speakers replace /v/ sound with /b/ sound, for instance, they pronounce the word *very* as /beri/ instead of /veri/.

Most speakers from U. P. and M. P. cannot distinguish the difference the two sound /s/ and /ʃ/. They pronounce the word *shop* /sɒp/ instead of /ʃɒp/.

One significant problem in Indian pronunciation is that of the letter *r* in words. In British English pronunciation, letter *r* is silent or less stressed when it is preceded by an vowel and receded by a consonant, the sound of *r* is always dropped and the vowel becomes long, for example *card* /kɑ:d/, *convert* /kɒnvɜ:t/, *bird* /bɜ:d/, *sort* /sɔ:t/, *churn* /tʃɜ:n/. the problem with Indian pronunciation is that most Indians silent the sound of letter *r* but they do not produce long sound of the preceded vowel.

Note: In British English when the letter *r* comes at the end of a word (even in case of it is followed by *e*), its sound is always dropped, for example *clear* /kliə(r)/, *mar* /mɑ:(r)/, *care* /keə(r)/, *center (centre)* /sentə(r)/.

In Indian context there is a lot of confusion when producing the sound like /v/ and /w/- most of the Indians produce the sound for them alike. /v/ sound must be produced by releasing air by touching the lower lip to the upper teeth, whereas /w/ should be pronounced making both lips round pushing them forward, for example *veil* /veil/, *water* /wɔ:tə(r)/, *revive* /rɪvaɪv/, *move* /mu:v/.

Note: when the *w* comes in the middle or at the end of a word, it will not generally produce any of its own sound like /w/ but it is converted into a vowel sound for example *answer* /ɑ:nsə(r)/, *ewe* /ju:/, *bow* /baʊ/, *how* /haʊ/.

/f/ vs. /v/

Most Indians pronounce the two words: *raise* and *rise* alike /raɪz/ but the former must be pronounced as /reɪz/ (*raise*) and the latter should be pronounced as /raɪz/ (*rise*).

Most Indians pronounce the two words: disease and decease alike /dɪsɪ:s/ but the former must be pronounced as /dɪzɪ:z/ (disease) and the latter should be pronounced as /dɪsɪ:s/ (decease).

Most of the Indians can see no differentiation among the fricative sounds: /s/, /ʃ/, /z/, /ʒ/, /ð/. They mostly produce all the sounds the first two sounds /s/, /ʃ/ as /s/ and the next three sounds /z/, /ʒ/, /ð/ they pronounce as /z/ and most of the times they cannot distinguish them from one another.

Vowel Sounds

In Indian context the vowel sound in words like all, ball, call, doctor, gall, mall, salt, saw, small, tall etc. is produced as /ɑ:/ instead of /ɔ:/. For example, most Indians pronounce the word, all /ɑ:ll/ instead of /ɔ:ll/ and gall /gɑ:ll/ instead of /gɔ:l/

In Indian context in some words the vowel sounds are mispronounced for example, sack /sɑ:k/ instead of /sæk/ and man /mɑ:n/ instead of /mæn/. In some words they reverse the sounds for example, staff /stæf/ instead of /stɑ:f/.

In Indian context the vowel a (/eɪ/) sound in words like bake, cake, lake, make, shake, take etc. is produced as /e/ instead of /eɪ/. Ex: bake /bek/ instead of /beɪk/.

Ending Sounds

Verb Forms

The ending sounds of verbs are of two types: type one is the ending sound of the Simple Present form of the verb which is used with third person singular forms (he, she, it) and the second type is the ending sound of the Simple Past and Past Participle form of the verb.

The three variant sounds that produced the endings of the Simple Present forms:

/z/: Verb forms that end with letters *b, d, g, m, n, r, v, w* and *y* used in Simple Present Tense with third person singular numbers such as *he, she, and it*, most Indians pronounce the -s or -es or -ies as /s/ instead of /z/. For example, burns /bʌrns/ instead of /bɜ:ɜ:nz/ and flies /flaɪs/ instead of /flaɪz/.

/ɪz/: Verb forms that end with letters *ch* /tʃ/, *dge* /dʒ/, *s* /s/, *sh* /ʃ/, and *z* /z/ used in the Simple Present Tense with third person singular numbers such as he, she, and it, most Indians pronounce the plural -s or -es or -ies as /s/ instead of /ɪz/. For example, matches /mætʃes/ instead of /mætʃɪz/, lodges /lɒdʒs/ instead of /lɒdʒɪz/ and buzzes /bʌzɪs/ instead of /bʌzɪz/.

The basic sound of /s/ is produced by Indians exactly as the native speakers and the verb forms that end with letters *p* /p/, *t* /t/, *k*, (*ck*), /k/ and *th* /θ/. Thus, there is no problem with this sound regarding Indian pronunciation.

The three variant sounds that produced the endings of the Simple Past and Past Participle forms: In case of past and past participle forms of the verbs, most Indians pronounce the final sound /ed/ irrespective of the final sound of the verb forms. It is well known that (in case of regular verbs) the past and past participle forms of a verb that end with either *d* or *ed* or *ied* have different sounds but most Indians produce the same sound for the three. The three different sounds are /t/, /d/, and /ɪd/. Let us examine the three different ending sounds carefully.

/t/: Verb forms that end with letters / sounds such as *p* /p/, *k* (*ch*) /k/, *th* /θ/, *gh* /f/, *s* /s/, *sh* /ʃ/, *ch* /tʃ/, most Indians pronounce /ed/ instead of /t/ for example, jumped most Indians pronounce the word as /dʒʌmpd/ instead of /dʒʌmpt/, bathed /bɑːθd/ instead of /bɑːθt/, coughed /kɒfd/ instead of /kɒft/ kissed /kɪsd/ instead of /kɪst/, brushed /brʌsd/ instead of /brʌft/, reached /riːtʃd/ instead of /riːtʃt/.

/d/ Verb forms that end with letters / sounds such as *b* /b/, *g* /g/, *th* /θ/, *th* /ð/, *v* /v/, *z* /z/, *s* /ʒ/, *dg* /dʒ/, *m* /m/, *n* /n/, *ng* /ŋ/, *r* /r/, *l* /l/, most Indians pronounce /ed/ or /ud/ instead of /d/ for example, grabbed /græbd/ instead of /græbd/, mugged /mʌgud/ instead of /mʌgd/, earthed /ɜːθd/ etc.

/əd/ or /ɪd/ Verb forms that end with letters / sounds such as *t* /t/ and *d* /d/, most Indians pronounce /ed/ instead of /əd/ or /ɪd/ for example, painted /peɪntəd/ instead of /peɪntɪd/, branded /brændəd/ instead of /brændɪd/, spreaded /spreddəd/ instead of /spreddɪd/

Noun Forms

/z/

In case of plural forms of nouns that end with letters *b, d, g, m, n, r, w* and *y* most Indians pronounce the plural -s or -es or -ies as /s/ instead of /z/. For example, they say the word, bands /bænds/ instead of /bændz/ and rows /rəʊs/ instead of /rəʊz/.

In case of plural forms of nouns that end with letters *ch, dge, s, sh,* and *z,* most Indians pronounce the plural -s or -es or -ies as /s/ instead of /ɪz/. For example, marches /mæ:tʃs/ instead of /mæ:tʃɪz/ and clashes /klæ:sɪz/ instead of /klæ:ʃɪz/.

Some Other Ending Sounds

Mother tongue influence is very clear in Indian pronunciation of some other ending sounds of certain English words.

1) Most Indians mispronounce the ending sound of the words that end with *~cious*. For example, auspicious /a:spɪʃɪəs/ instead of /ɔ:spɪʃɪəs/, malicious /mə'lɪʃɪəs/ instead of /mə'lɪʃəs/. Here we can perceive one thing that most Indians do not pronounce /ɪ/ sound in the above words, instead of that /ɪ/ sound they say /s/ sound.

2) Most Indians mispronounce the ending sound of the words that end with *~cian*. For example, electrician /elektrɪʃɪən/ instead of /ɪlektrɪʃn/, technicians /tekniʃɪən/ instead of /tekniʃn/. In this context also most Indians do not pronounce /ɪ/ sound in the above words, instead of that /ɪ/ sound they say /s/ sound. It is the major reason for their wrong pronunciation of these words.

3) It is another category of mispronunciation of most Indians, they pronounce the ending sound of the words that end with *~ment*. For example, entertainment /entəteɪnmənt/ instead of /entəteɪnmənt/, improvement /ɪmpru:vment/ instead of /ɪmpru:vmənt/, movement /mu:vment/ instead of /mu:vmənt/ etc.

Most Indians pronounce wrongly the words, *menu* as /menu:/ instead of /menju:/; *women* /wɔ:men/ instead of /wɪmɪn/.

Most Indians confuse with the pronunciation of certain English words which are used as both noun and verb. They produce same sound for both noun and verb. For example, they pronounce the word, *use* /ju:s/ when it is used as both as verb and noun. In fact, when the word, *use* is used as verb, it should be pronounced as /ju:z/ and when it is used as noun, it should be pronounced as /ju:s/. *useful* /ju:sfəl/, *usefully* /ju:sfəli/, *usefulness* /ju:sfʊlnəs/, *useless* /ju:sləs/, *uselessly* /ju:sləsli/, *uselessness* /ju:sləsnəs/ are the other forms.

It is found that majority of people in the some of the south and north eastern parts of India peculiarly pronounce some words. They never discriminate the long /i:/and short /i/ sounds for example they pronounce both live and leave alike /li:v/ (live) instead of /lɪv/ and /li:v/ (leave) respectively.

Most frequently mispronounced words by Indians are listed below in tabular form.

| Word | Most Indians pronounce | Received Pronunciation (RP) |
|--------------------------|------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Accept | /æksept/ | /əksept/ |
| Expect | /ekspekt/ | /ɪkspekt/ |
| Rode (past test of ride) | /rɒd/ | /rəʊd/ |
| Chain | /tʃam/ | /tʃeɪn/ |
| Chamber | /tʃɑ:mbə/ | /tʃeɪmbə/ |
| Decision | /desɪsn/ | /dɪsɪʒn/ |
| Disease | /dɪsi:z/ | /dɪzi:z/ |
| Noise | /nɔɪs/ | /nɔɪz/ |

| Word | Most south and north eastern Indians pronounce | Received Pronunciation (RP) |
|-------|--|-----------------------------|
| Said | /seɪd/ | /sed/ |
| Sit | /sɪt/ | /sɪt/ |
| Son | /sɒn/ | /sʌn/ |
| Pan | /fæɪn/ | /pæɪn/ |
| Very | /beri/ | /veri/ |
| Again | /ægaɪn/ or /ɑgaɪn/ | /ɑgen/ |
| Same | /sɒm/ | /seɪm/ |
| Is | /i:z/ | /ɪz/ |
| Us | /əz / | /əs / |

Barriers

While teaching or learning English pronunciation, both the teachers and learners have to recognize learning barriers. The language learning barriers can be listed as Mother tongue influence; Start acquiring seriously the second language after fourteen years age; Lack of facilities in school and colleges; Lack of efficient English teaching faculty in school and colleges; Learners' reluctance to learner the intricacies of the target language

How to overcome these problems

It is very important for the learners to learn English language as a skill rather than as a subject. Since it is learnt for the communication purpose, it should be taught and learnt as a skill or language. But the pitiful thing in Indian context is that even today English is taught and learnt as a subject rather as a skill or language till intermediate or plus two level. This means that the learners lose the very precious time of acquiring a language.

It is widely suggested by both linguists and psychologists that the acquisition of any language-second language or foreign language must be done before fourteen years old of a learner. The acquisition of other languages than mother tongue after fourteen years old is a difficult process. Fromkin and Rodman wisely say: 'it is more appropriate to say that L2 acquisition abilities gradually decline with age and that there are "sensitive periods" for the native like mastery of certain aspects of the L2. The sensitive period for phonology is the shortest' (Fromkin, V., R. Rodman and Hyams, N. 350). In India most of the students concentrate learning a second language (English) seriously after entering graduation. This means that they have crossed the sensitive period of second language acquisition. Thus, the teaching and learning process of a second language must be done from the very beginning of educational life. In fact, In India the learning of English language starts from very early stage of a student but English is not taken seriously and not taught so seriously as the seriousness required.

Another major factor that hinders second language learning process is vernacular influence. There is no shade of doubt in saying that the first language influence is immense on the pronunciation of the target language and is a significant factor in accounting for foreign accents.

This so-called interference from the first language is likely to cause errors in aspiration, stress, and intonation in the target language.

Keeping the above points in mind, the language teachers or instructors must be careful in teaching L2. They have to concentrate on certain key factors which play crucial role in shaping one's English pronunciation. The following are helpful to them in this regard.

Learners should be initiated to the IPA transcriptions very authentically and make them practice of IPA transcriptions perfectly.

Inculcate the habit of referring to Standard English dictionaries like OALD in students which helps the learners enrich their use of stress and intonation of English

Provide them with tongue twitters and the practice of tongue twisters is a great help to improve pronunciation. Their help is no little importance; tongue twitters sharpen the fluency of speech.

Play audio and video clips of native speakers. Listening to the English speeches delivered by eminent native personalities will help the listeners improve the stress and intonation.

Watching and listening to English documentaries by BBC and other international organisations will perfect the speech patterns of the learners.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Giving an idea about the sounds of the target language has become a difficult task for the language teacher. Thus, the language teacher must have a good knowledge in phonetics of the particular language to make his or her students to learn good pronunciation.

Academic:

- Explain the learners that no two languages are alike in their structure and sounds and pronunciation.
- Illustrate the difference between the phonetic language and non-phonetic language.
- Explain the general problems encountered by the non-native speakers while speaking English.
- Let them know the articulatory places: the teeth, lips, tongue, palates, nasal cavity and the vocal cords etc. which knowledge help the learners how to produce sounds.
- Let the learners observe the position of lips, teeth, tongue etc (of the native speakers) while producing sounds.
- Let the learners practice accent modification regularly: use English video clips for practicing it.

- It is teachers' responsibility to make the instruction of phonetic sounds interesting which the learners feel very much boring to listen and practice.
- Make the class or instruction must be student centric one which is more important aspect in making an instruction alive and active.
- Create interesting situations in which the learners acquire language aspects by enjoying it.
- Show interested and exited video clips which stimulate the curiosity in the learners to speak in English and make interest in them learn English.
- Learners should be informed that all English sounds do not exist in their mother tongue, at the same time some sounds in their mother tongue may seem alike but they are, in fact, not. For the possible extent, teachers try to avoid making comparisons between English sounds and that of mother tongue of the learners. Practicing of speech in English only can help them to modify their pronunciation.

General

- Encourage the learners by nullifying their negative attitudes towards English language learning.
- Let the learners realize learning English is not an academic purpose but it is a target oriented one.
- Let them realize the fact that a language can best be learnt outside the class rather than in the class.
- Let the learners realize that a language can be learnt by listening to its native speakers continuously and thoroughly.
- Ask the learners to spend some time for speaking with someone in English.
- Ask them to read English news paper or novel or any other piece of writing in English aloud daily.

Conclusion

It is quite nature to have some sound problems in the process of acquiring other language and it is the responsibility of both teachers and learners for improving proficiency in the target language by avoiding language problems. Every student should determine to learn accurate articulation of speech sounds. Their interest is the lynchpin for learning not only sounds of

English but also everything in the realm of education. The language teacher should spend in giving more attention to advising students on different issues related to the difficulties. Motivate and encourage students to work harder. Motivation is an influential factor in second language learning. Motivation plays a crucial role in language achievement. When students are not motivated in the class they disturb the classroom atmosphere and this may have negative impact on the learning of the motivated students.

References

Fromkin, V., R. Rodman and Hyams, N. An Introduction to Language. Australia, Brazil: Thomson Wadsworth. 2007.

Johnson, J. S. & Newport, E. L. Critical period effects in second language learning. Cognitive psychology, 21, 1989.