

English spoken by the Speakers of Dravidian Languages: A phonetic Analysis

Dr.Kiran Babu Ganta

Abstract

International communication happens in the most widespread language in the world which is English. It is clearly evident and inevitable that no two people pronounce exactly alike, because of various differences. Nevertheless RP English still serves as a standard model for educated people to learn pronunciation. The focus of the study is the speakers of major Dravidian languages. The four main languages of the family are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam which are spoken in their respective states. The existing phonemic inventory of those languages and the deviations seen in speakers of Dravidian languages are listed below. Phonemic symbols are taken from the IPA. It is found that the duration in diphthongs of Dravidian languages is lesser than the diphthongs of RP English. On the other hand consonants of Dravidian languages also have some deviations from the consonants of RP like alveolar sounds made retroflex, dental fricatives replaced by dental plosives. The importance of pronunciation and hindrances to achieve it are mentioned and few suggestions are given to help learners to learn pronunciation. Finally, it is concluded that as we take these steps to teach pronunciation to learners we can expect greater results in learners in the near future.

Aim of the paper

The aim of the paper is to throw light upon the importance of pronunciation and the factors that hinder the pronunciation of Dravidian speakers. Implications are made for the betterment of the pronunciation of Dravidian speakers. The objective is to aid and equip the aspirants of English Pronunciation RP English with the right pronunciation by emphasizing the tools that play a vital role in mastering the pronunciation.

Introduction

English is unquestionably the most widespread language in the world and it has been adopted as a language for international communication. The population uses English into three circles Kachru (1982). There are: the inner circle that represents all the native users of English, the outer circle or the extended circle that represents the people who use English as a second language, and the expanding circle that represents the people who use English as a foreign language.

“No two people pronounce exactly alike. The differences arise from a variety of causes, such as locality, early influences and social surroundings; there are also individual peculiarities for which it is difficult or impossible to account” (Jones, Daniel. 1966: 3).

English in India

English is spoken as a second language by a large number of people in South Asia: Pakistan, India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. It is a native language for some people. The varieties of English, one comes across in India may be considered to be distinct variants of the language. They evolved out of British English imbibing several features of pronunciation, grammar and semantics of the native languages of India. A superset of all those varieties could be referred to as “General Indian English” (GIE) is, however, a more apt phrase for these varieties. There is a great deal of regional variation in terms of pronunciation within Indian English. Similar to the different regional accents of English in Britain, Indian English has very distinct pronunciation patterns in the different regions of India. Although the patterns of Indian English were originally due to the fact that the speakers spoke an Indian language natively, and thus acquired English with an Indian accent, these patterns have now become established as the norm for Indian English. Nevertheless, RP still serves as a model for educated people. Obviously, there is considerable variation in such a large area, based both on education and on different native languages.

Dravidian Family

The Dravidian family is a group of over 25 languages, most of which are found close together in the southern and eastern area of India. Through emigration, speakers of main Dravidian languages are today found throughout Southeast Asia, in eastern and southern regions of Africa, in major cities of the world.

The four main languages of the family are Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam. Each language can be identified with a state in southern India- Andhra Pradesh, Tamil Nadu, Karnataka and Kerala respectively.

Consonants that do not exist in English

Table 1

Manner of Articulation							
Place of Articulation		Labials	Dental-alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
	Stops	Bh	t th d dh	ʈ ʈh ɖ ɖh	ɕ ɕh ʝ ʝh	gh	
	Fricatives			ʂ			
	Nasals			ɳ			
	Lateral			ɭ			
	Approximants	ʋ					

Table 1 shows the consonant sounds that do not exist in English (BBC). Which are seen in the major Dravidian languages? The phonemic symbols are taken from the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).

Vowels that do not exist in (RP) English

Table 2

Vowels	Front	Back
High		
Mid	e:	o o:
Lower mid		
Low		

Diphthongs *ais*, *au* in Dravidian languages are shorter than RP **ai** and **au**.

Table 2 shows the Vowel sounds that do not exist in English (RP), which are seen in Major Dravidian Languages. The phonemic symbols are taken from the IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet).

Differences in (RP) English and English speakers of Dravidian Languages. There can be many other deviations from RP, but few are given below.

Deviations from RP English

RP Form	transcription	Telugu	Tamil	Kannada	Malayalam
Path	/pa:θ/	[pa:t̪]	[pa:t̪]	[pa:t̪]	[pa:t̪]
That	/ðæt/	[d̪at̪]	[d̪at̪]	[d̪at̪]	[d̪at̪]
Teeth	/ti:θ/	[t̪i:t̪]	[t̪i:t̪]	[t̪i:t̪]	[t̪i:t̪]
Door	/dɔ:/	[d̪o:r̪]	[d̪o:r̪]	[d̪o:r̪]	[d̪o:r̪]
Clock	/klɔ:k/	[klɔ:k]	[klɔ:k]	[klɔ:k]	[k̪lɔ:k]
Measure	/meʒə/	[medʒar]	[medʒar]	[medʒar]	[medʒar]
Old	/əʊld/	[o:l̪d̪]	[o:l̪d̪]	[o:l̪d̪]	[o:l̪d̪]
Where	/weə/	[we:r̪]	[wæ:r̪]	[we:r̪]	[we:r̪]
Came	/keɪm/	[ke:m]	[ke:m]	[ke:m]	[ke:m]

Dravidian Languages do not have rising diphthongs /ei/, /ai/ ^{*}, /ɔi/, /əʊ/, /aʊ/ ^{*} and centering diphthongs also respectively /iə/, /ʊə/, /eə/.

There is always a difference in English spoken by the speakers of Dravidian Languages among them due to non existence of the above said phonemes, but some of the speakers are able to speak and produce the non existing sounds in the Dravidian Languages, based on their practice.

*diphthongs ai and au in dravidian languages are shorter than RP diphthongs.

Comparing „Indian English“ with RP English, we find many changes. A few examples are: (1) Diphthongs in RP English are corresponding to pure long vowels in Indian pronunciation (e.g. “Take” and “poor” pronounced as [te:k] and [pu:r], respectively); (2) The alveolar sounds /t/ and /d/ of RP pronounced as “retroflex” (harsher sounds) [ɽ] and [ɽ̣] ; (3) the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ replaced by soft [t̪] and soft [d̪] (e.g. “Think” pronounced as [t̪ɪŋk] rather than /θɪŋk/ and “then” pronounced as [d̪en] rather than /ðen/).

Importance of Pronunciation

Bansal (1969:15) says, “To be intelligible, the speaker must articulate his sounds and words clearly, so that the wearer does not have to stop to think what word was meant. The vowels should be pronounced with right quality and the consonants should be sharp and clear in their articulation”. Eg: the word ‘fears’ was understood as ‘fierce’ because the final consonant was not voiced. Similarly, ‘twelve’ was understood as ‘dwell’ because the voiceless plosive ‘t’ was not aspirated.

As we saw in the above examples mispronouncing of words may lead to misunderstanding. The message can’t be decoded correctly and it may lead to chaos. So, proper training should be given to people with regard to pronunciation. These days’ pronunciations are also a livelihood for many like one can be an accent trainer or a translator. The mother tongue influence can only be avoided through training in pronunciation and thorough practice. This is also seen as one of the facets of any language. There are languages in which with a small sound change in the word would give different meaning altogether.

Hindrances for pronunciation

- a) The process needs some time as it comes with the practice
- b) If the student is not interested it is difficult to learn
- c) Lack of encouragement
- d) Lack of learners’ effort
- e) Lack of utilisation of resources

Conclusion

The teaching of pronunciation has fallen far behind that of other skill areas in meeting the communicating criteria that now guide second language instruction. In the past many years, studies of language acquisition process have illuminated its complexities and have shown that the theoretical foundation for pronunciation teaching has been too narrow, not only in terms of its linguistic basis, but also in that it has not taken into account the degree to which the learner contributes to the language learning process. However, pronunciation teaching methods and materials have been slow to respond to these developments as a result, many teachers still believe that pronunciation teaching means teaching students to pronounce discrete sounds accurately.

Developing pronunciation in a second language is a complex and delicate process. Pronunciation, as one facet of language is a form of behaviour, but more than any other, it seems to expose an individual sense of self. Moreover, for change to take place the learner must first recognize a need for change. But the motivation for the change, once recognized, can easily flag because the process is often too slow for impatient learners. Thus, measures to sustain this motivation must be built into the learning experience. These learning considerations are just as important as insight into the language itself. Exposure to spoken English is important for pronunciation developers, but exposure alone does not guarantee results. For many learners, it is focused to listening that makes difference.

Following are a few suggestions which are expected to aid the aspirants of English Pronunciation RP English.

The major components of the spoken English system should be shown clearly how these components contribute to the expression of meaning and to communicate in general. Also students should be taught how to perceive components of spoken English in natural speech as well as in their own speech. Not only these, but unless students are given tools to develop their pronunciation themselves, it is not possible for them to reach their goal.

Pronunciation instructions should be learner centred. The goal of pronunciation teaching is to foster communicative effectiveness. The level of communication effectiveness depends on the learner, but in general, all learners need to be minimally intelligible.

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