



NEUTRALIZATION OF MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE- ITS IMPORTANCE

Dr. ROOPA SUZANA

Associate Professor and Head
Department of Linguistics and Phonetics
The English and Foreign Languages University
Hyderabad, Telangana, India.



ABSTRACT

This paper discusses some of the different varieties of English pronunciation in India and how these regional varieties lead to unintelligibility of speech. The paper establishes the importance of weaning away of mother tongue influences from one's speech to acquire a neutral pronunciation. It also throws light on how one must get familiarized with the unphonetic nature of the English language and grapple with the rules and technicalities of accurate English pronunciation which helps achieve high grades in education, employment, promotions and business opportunities. The paper reiterates the fact that in order to move ahead with confidence and grab privileges and opportunities of upward mobility and social advancement, one should be able to speak with impeccable pronunciation.

KEYWORDS: Unintelligibility, mother tongue influences, unphonetic nature.

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In the global village that we are living in today, we all have become aware of the competitive advantage that proficiency in the English language gives us in the international market. Subject knowledge in any area of specialization is very important. But that alone is not sufficient. Today, one must grapple with the emerging trends and become conscious that hard skills alone will not suffice. Hard skills must be coupled with a command in communication and pronunciation skills. Together, they will help to consolidate one's position for a rewarding future. Universities and industry world-wide are in the lookout for people who can speak the English language effectively.

One must spend some time and effort to train oneself in effective articulation skills which is extremely essential for national as well as

international intelligibility. Today, it has become obligatory to be extremely competent in English speaking skills in order to get jobs in multinational/Indian companies, universities, banks, etc. It is difficult to exist with dignity without being able to speak effectively in the English language. Indian students are very hard working and therefore are sought for different important positions in the international market. However, unfortunately, they do not manage to be successful and their dreams remain unfulfilled because they lack crisp English language speaking skills.

In India there are a number of regional varieties of English, each having its own peculiarities depending on the first language of the region. These varied pronunciations stem from the phonology of the first language that the students are exposed to

but one common reason is that most learners of English as a second language, fail to understand the unphonetic nature of the language and depend largely on the spelling to decipher pronunciation. For example the word *atmosphere* is pronounced as /et'mo:ʃfiə/ instead of /'ætməʃfiə/ with the vowel in the second syllable being pronounced as /ɔ:/ just because there is an <o> in the spelling. The word *all* is most often pronounced as /ɑ:l/ instead of /ɔ:l/ the choice of the sound /ɑ:/ can be attributed to the letter <a> in the spelling. Some others may pronounce words like *music*, *observe*, *society* as /mju:'sɪk, 'ɒbzərv, so'saɪəti/ instead of /'mju:zɪk, əb'zɜ:v, sə'saɪəti/. The /z/ sound in *music* becomes /s/ only because there is the letter <s> in the spelling. The vowel <ə> is replaced by the GIE vowel /o/ because of the presence of the letter <o> in the first syllables of the words *observe* and *society* respectively. Sometimes letters that are supposed to be silent are pronounced. For example, *almond* is articulated as /ælmənd/ instead of /'ɑ:mənd/ and *lamb* as /læmb/ instead of /læm/.

Most Indian students articulate the <r> in the spelling realizing the /r/ sound in all environments and pronouncing words like *alarm*, *church*, *circle* etc. as /ʌ'lɑ:rəm, tʃɜ:rtʃ, 'sɜ:kəl/. Correct pronunciations such as /ə'lɑ:m, tʃɜ:tʃ, 'sɜ:kl/ are rarely used. They do not understand that although the <r> appears in the spelling it is not realized as the /r/ sound at the word ending positions and when followed by consonant sounds.

Some Telugu speakers tend to pronounce words like *yellow*, *young* etc. as /elo:, enj/ instead of /'jeləʊ, jʌŋ/; where they must use the /j/ sound they don't and where they must not they tend to use it. For example words like *egg*, *fan* etc., are pronounced /jeg, fjæn/ instead of /eg, fæn/. Some Bengali speakers who often have a problem with the length of the vowel sounds may pronounce words like *pill*, *pen* and *full* as /pi:l, pe:n, fu:l/ instead of /pɪl, pen, fʊl/; which can well be understood by the listener as *peel*, *pain* and *fool* respectively. Others with Bihari as mother tongue may say words like *station*, *vision* *measure* as /iste:sn, vɪʒn, meʒə or mezə/ instead of /'steɪʃn, 'vɪʒn, 'meʒə/ clearly showing that they have a problem in articulating the palato-alveolar fricatives /ʃ/ and /ʒ/. Most Indians

tend to add an epenthetic vowel in order to break a consonant cluster (two or more consonant sounds occurring in succession in a single syllable) which they find difficult to articulate. For example words like *school*, *station* etc. are articulated as /ɪs-ku:l//ɪs-te:ʃn/ instead of /sku:l/ and /'steɪʃn/. Some Telugu speakers also tend to pronounce words like *zebra*, *zinc*, *zoology* etc. as /dʒed, dʒi:'brə:, 'dʒu:ɒləʒi/ instead of /zed, 'zi:brə, zə'ɒlədʒi/. They simply replace /z/ with /dʒ/ and this happens because there is no /z/ sound in Telugu phonology. In doing so a Telugu speaker is very likely to pronounce the word *exams* /eg'dʒæm/ instead of /ɪg'zæm/ which a native listener may well interpret it as *egg* and *jam*!

Often these regional varieties of English are unintelligible to the native speakers of English. The goal of every Indian should be to speak a variety of English that is intelligible to the native speaker as well as their own countrymen from other states. They need not speak the "Queen's English" but at the same time their speech should not be influenced by their mother tongue and sound incongruous and significantly different from the native variety. It should be a neutral variety of English without any influences of the mother tongue. The listener should be able to comprehend easily whatever is spoken without identifying the person's state/region.

The English language co-exists only as one among the many Indian languages in the mystifying mosaic of multilingualism that the Indian population exists in. The mother tongue is the first language that a child is exposed to. English in India is most often learned as a second language much later in school, which invariably tends to be influenced by the sound system of the mother tongue. We need to wean ourselves away from the strong influences and interferences of the mother tongue and approximate our English language to the standard norm so that our speech is intelligible and effective.

English has an unphonetic script. There is no one to one correspondence between sound and spelling. Therefore it is necessary for Indian students to make a systematic study of the English sound system; the *Phonetics* of English and understand the nuances of pronunciation. They must have ample exposure to both the rules and technicalities of pronunciation and a great deal of practice as well. An

exposure to accurate pronunciation of English helps in acquiring the same easily because much of how we speak depends on what we listen to. Effective speaking skills help in achieving high grades in education, employment, promotions and business opportunities. When students face interviews, their speech is expected to be impeccable. And only those with impeccable pronunciation invariably move ahead with confidence and grab all privileges and opportunities. They are the ones who race ahead in the upward mobility and social advancement. Accurate pronunciation adds luster to the speaker's credentials. Therefore neutralization of mother tongue and use of accurate pronunciation is extremely essential in order to surge ahead towards success in all spheres of life.

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