

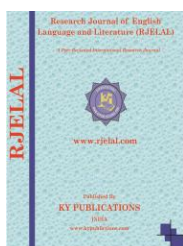


## AN ANALYSIS OF SELECT PHONEMES USED BY ESL LEARNERS AT SCHOOLS

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### Abstract

A research on phonetics is commonly concerned with the enunciation of human discourse sounds, and contrasts in way of explanation positively draw consideration of individuals utilizing a specific language as first language or second/unknown dialect. This suggests the way of creation of discourse sounds has a role to play in communication. In this fast forward communication era, an accentuation is laid on the relational abilities in the form of communication, particularly the oral structure, in training and corporate areas. There is a need for right, standard articulation, or what we call the RP as a fundamental piece of a successful correspondence. Consequently, the high school students need to adhere to the examples of standard elocution for viable communication in the scholastic world and at global level as well. In this way it is alluring to explore the degree to which these students, who get formal introduction to English as second language, cling to the standard elocution. Moreover, the analyst will likewise examine the impedance of the primary language into their spoken English on account of deviation from the RP designs.

**Keywords:** Phoneme, English language, deviation, Received Pronunciation, SL.

### Introduction

As we know that phonetics is the scientific study of sounds of human speech. It is scientific because it has a system that describes how a sound is produced in a particular way in a particular word. All of us who are worried about pronunciation would agree that there is no one to one correspondence between spellings and their pronunciation. There is no doubt that correct use of vowel sounds plays pivotal role in an individual's life to be an effective speaker. As a result, it would be right to say that correct pronunciation which is known as Received Pronunciation (RP) is essential for the chosen learners to be an effective communicator. Here an attempt is made to examine the use of select sounds used by the high school students in Jabalpur.

### Acquisition of phonology of second language

The second language learners also have a problem of interference from the side of the sounds in MT. Furthermore, the second language learners get very limited chances of getting exposed to the standard phonology of TL as the teachers and others may not be following the standard norms of TL phonology. Due to these reasons, the second language learners rarely achieve native competence in Phonology of TL.

### Model chosen

The aim of this study is to look at the two vowel sounds namely /ɑ:/ and /ɜ:/ conformity to RP used by the high school students enrolled in the various schools of Jabalpur. Therefore, it seems appropriate to choose RP as model of English and

see the direction of deviation from it as well as the possible reasons for this variation. Thus, the RP model has been chosen for the following reasons:

- (a) It is the accent of the B.B.C. and it enjoys considerable prestige throughout the world.
- (b) R.P. is highly intelligible and widely accepted all over the world.

#### **The variables**

The test phonemes in English spoken by the high school students in the city of Jabalpur are studied at three levels namely, gender, place of school education and medium of school education. It is because gender, place of school education and medium of instruction may have a significant role to play in the acquisition of second language. Hence, the selection of these variables may locate the identity of the deviants that will make it possible for the researchers of this field to use a suitable approach for effective teaching of English as second language.

There have been several research studies in the field of language and gender and it is a common belief that females use more standard and prestigious language than males (Eckert and Ginnet 292-94) as females are more conscious of the standard norms of language. Here, an attempt has been made to see whether there is any difference between those who got their school education in the rural areas and those who got their school education in the urban areas in terms of using these forty four sounds. The rural students do not get very good facilities of education and they get very limited exposure to English, while the urban students get comparatively better facilities of education and better exposure to English both in quality and quantity.

As the students whose medium of instruction at school level is Hindi, get less exposure to English than the students whose medium of instruction at the school level is English, an effort has been made to see whether or not the medium of instruction affects learners' acquisition of these sounds.

#### **Subjects of the study**

The subjects for the present research were selected from among the high school students of Jabalpur. Twenty-five students each from both Hindi and English medium background in school were chosen for the present study. All the students belong to Madhya Pradesh State Board Schools which are located in different parts of Jabalpur, Madhya Pradesh. The speakers were selected with random sampling method in the sense that the researcher had no prior notion of their academic achievement nor their level of proficiency in spoken English. Considering the comparative nature of the research, the speakers were selected in such a way that they could be placed into specific groups with regard to their sex, place of school, and medium of instruction.

High school is crucial stage for students because after completion of class 10<sup>th</sup> they get into pre stage of various courses like engineering, medicine, computers and management sciences which is taught in English only. How well students will be able to choose and get the proper career will depend on their English speaking ability. Students after passing out class 10 face problems in speaking English. Students who were at the end of class 10 were chosen for recording to find out the phonetic features of their spoken English. The researcher chose the high school students as it could be expected that these students may have good command of English and possess a reasonable competence in the use of English language. Most of them take their lectures and write their examinations in English medium. After the completion of class 10 many of them will go for different streams there is every possibility that they will use the English language as their medium of communication. As they are in the age group of 14 to 16 and use the English language in academics and several other sorts of formal communication, they can represent the society of the English language users of M.P. in general and of Jabalpur in particular.

Since the study was on the spoken English of high school students of the different schools in Jabalpur, the researcher approached the principals of the respective schools and sought their permission to collect the data from the students.

They extended their full cooperation and the recording was completed within a week. A room with fair acoustics was arranged for the recording and students were sent inside one by one. All the students were very cooperative. In addition, each speaker was given a form to be filled up in their own handwriting, containing relevant information regarding their education, medium of instruction at the intermediate level, education level of their parents etc.

### Test Phoneme

In order to minutely understand the nature and practice of the use of sounds, two prominent phonemes were chosen to study as under:

Heart /ɑ:/ back open unrounded vowel

Hurt /ɜ:/ central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open

### Detailed analysis of [ɑ:]

The use of the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] was tested in the word as *heart* as given in the questionnaire. 56% of the total subjects were found using a back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] sound that was in proximity with RP. The direction of deviation was towards the low central unrounded vowel [a:] and central unrounded short vowel [ə]. The subjects who used low central unrounded vowel [a:] instead of a back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] constitute 38% and the remaining 6% was found using central unrounded short vowel [ə]. Most of the subjects were found making no difference between [ɑ:] and [a:]. As the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] does not exist in the phonemic inventory of Hindi, the acquisition of this sound falls in the area of difficulty for the Hindi speaking learners of English as a second language. Due to negative transfer, they tend to replace the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] with the low central unrounded vowel [a:]

In the case of females 72% were found were using the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] while the corresponding percentage in case of the males was 40%. 28% females deviated in the direction of the low central unrounded vowel [a:], while 48% males deviated in the direction of the low central

unrounded vowel [a:]. There is difference of 20% between the male deviants and the female deviants.

Pearson chi-square test was performed to see whether gender is significantly related to the use of back open unrounded vowel. Significance was tested on .05 level of confidence. The calculated value of chi-square is 5.195 with 1 degree of freedom which is above the critical value of 3.841 for significance level of .05. Thus, there is a significant difference between male and female in terms of using this sound.

When the data was analysed on the basis of the place of school education, it was found that 13.33% subjects, who got their school education in the rural areas, were found using the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] while 74.28% of the subjects, who got their education in the urban areas, were found using the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] in the reading of the word like *heart*. When the relation of the use of the back open unrounded vowel with the place of school education was tested with the help of the chi-square test, it was found that the use of the back open unrounded vowel and the place of education are significantly related. The calculated value of chi-square at significance level of .05 is 15.832 with 1 degree of freedom. This value is far above the critical value of 3.841. This shows that there is a significant difference between the Hindi medium students and the English medium students in terms of using this sound.

It was found that 10% subjects, whose medium of instruction at school level was Hindi, were found using the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] in the reading of the words like *heart*, while 86.66% of the subjects whose medium of instruction at school level was English used the back open unrounded vowel [ɑ:] in the reading of the same word. Pearson chi-square test was performed to see whether medium of instruction is significantly related to back open unrounded vowel in the word-initial position. Significance was tested on .05 level of confidence. The calculated value of the chi-square is 28.626 with 1 degree of freedom which is far above the critical value of 3.841 for significance level of .05. Thus, there is a significant difference between male and female in terms of using this sound. Thus,

it can be said that the medium plays a significant role in getting a better exposure to English which the English medium students get and the age at which they get this exposure. On an average, a Hindi

medium student gets lessons in English only six hours a week while an English Medium student gets almost all his lessons in English.

Sounds	Total	[ɑ:]%	[a:] %	[ə]%
Males	25	40	48	12
Females	25	72	28	0
Rural	15	13.33	80	6.66
Urban	35	74.28	20	5.71
EM	30	86.66	13.33	0
HM	20	10	75	15
Total	100	56	38	6

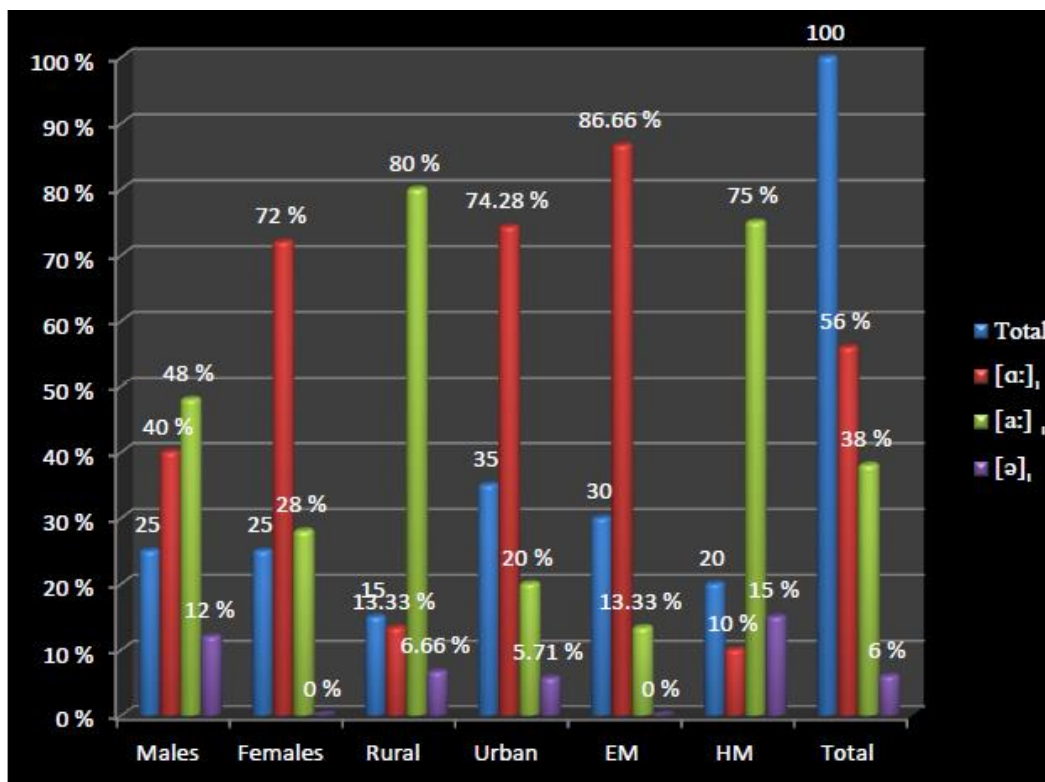


Figure 1.1

**Detailed analysis of [ɜ:]**

The use of the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] was tested in the word as *hurt* as given in the questionnaire. 48% of the total subjects were found using central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] sound that was in proximity with RP. The direction of deviation was towards the low central unrounded vowel [a:], central unrounded short

vowel [ə] and back rounded vowel just above the open position [ɒ]. The subjects who used low central unrounded vowel [a:] instead of the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] constitute 2%, those who used back rounded vowel just above the open position [ɒ] constitute 2% and, while a majority of students 48% was found using central unrounded short vowel [ɜ]. Most of the subjects were found making no difference

between [ɜ:] and [ə]. As the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] does not exist in the phonemic inventory of Hindi, the acquisition of this sound falls in the area of difficulty for the Hindi speaking learners of English as a second language. Due to negative transfer, they tend to replace the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] with the low central unrounded vowel [a:], central unrounded short vowel [ə] that exist in the speakers mother tongue.

In the case of females 64% were found using the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:], while the corresponding percentage in case of the males was 32%. 32% females deviated in the direction of central unrounded short vowel [ə] and remaining 4% used back rounded vowel just above the open position [ɒ]. 64% males deviated in the direction of central unrounded short vowel [ə]. There is difference of 32% between the male deviants and the female deviants.

Pearson chi-square test was performed to see whether gender is significantly related to the use of central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open. Significance was tested on .05 level of confidence. The calculated value of chi-square is 5.128 with 1 degree of freedom which is far above the critical value of 3.841 for significance level of .05. Thus, there is a significant difference between male and female in terms of using this sound.

When the data was analysed on the basis of the place of school education, it was found that 20% subjects who got their school education in the rural areas were found using the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] while 60% of the subjects who got their education in the urban

areas were found using the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] in the reading of the word like *heart*. When the sound was tested with the help of the chi-square test, it was found that the use of the voiced labiodental fricative and the place of education are significantly related. The calculated value of chi-square at significance level of .05 is 6.731 with 1 degree of freedom. This value is above the critical value of 3.841. Thus, there is a significant difference between the Hindi medium students and the English medium students in terms of using this sound.

It was found that 10% subjects, whose medium of instruction at school level was Hindi, were found using the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] in the reading of the words like *heart* while 76.66% of the subjects whose medium of instruction at school level was English used the central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open [ɜ:] in the reading of the same word. Pearson chi-square test was performed to see whether medium of instruction is significantly related to central unrounded vowel between half-close and half-open in the word-initial position. Significance was tested on .05 level of confidence. The calculated value of chi-square is 21.33 with 1 degree of freedom which is above the critical value of 3.841 for significance level of .05. Thus, there is a significant difference between male and female in terms of using this sound. Thus, it can be said that the medium of instruction influenced better exposure to English which the English medium students get and the age at which they get this exposure. On an average, a Hindi medium student gets lessons in English only six hours a week while an English Medium student gets almost all his lessons in English.

Sounds	Total	[ɜ:]%	[ə]%	[ɒ]%	[a:]%
Males	25	32	64	4	0
Females	25	64	32	0	4
Rural	15	20	73.33	6.66	0
Urban	35	60	37.14	0	2.85
EM	30	76.66	23.33	0	3.33
HM	20	10	85	5	0
Total	100	48	48	2	2

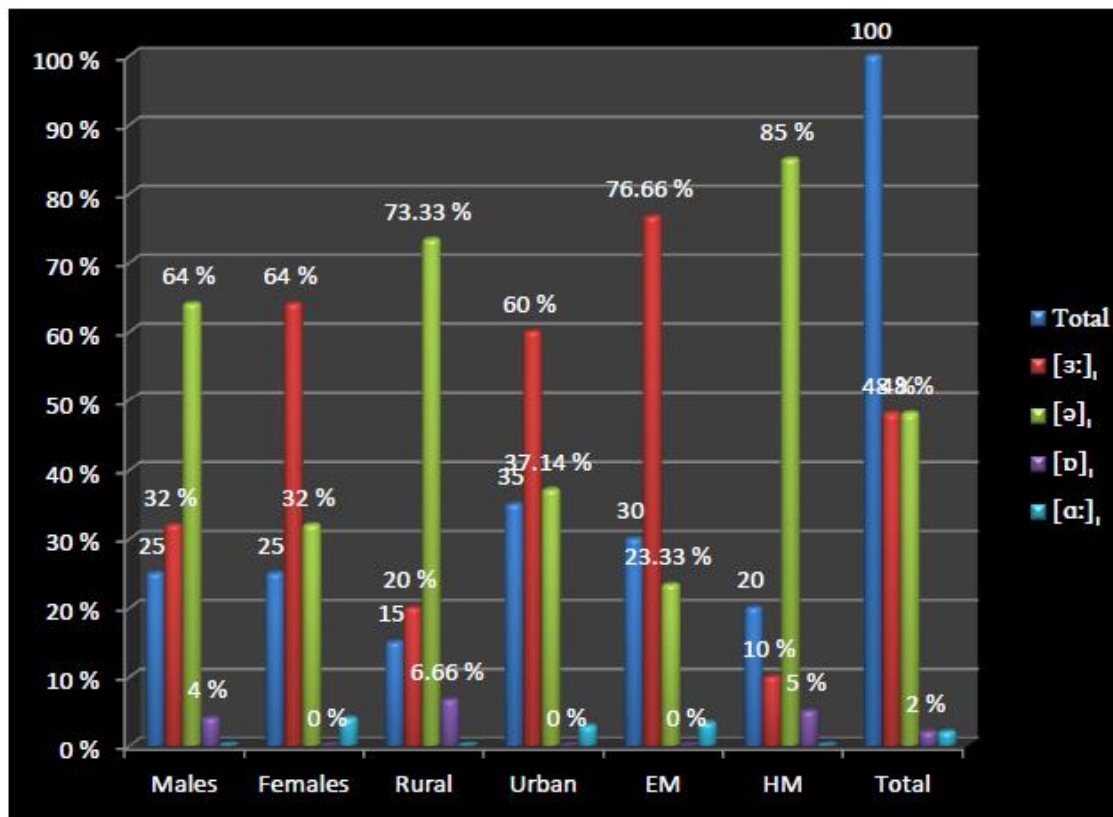


Figure 1.2

**Conclusion**

To sum up, it can be said that the chosen phonemes significantly differ from standard pronunciation at the level of gender, medium of instructions and the area of education. /ɜ:/ was realized as / ə / in words like ‘hurt’ by all the speakers as found in the reading of the word. Deviation of the vowel indicates the interference of spelling while rendering these words. However, /ɑ:/ in the word ‘heart’ was realized as Hindi /a:/ by 38% speakers and [ə] by 6% speakers. The exceptions constitute 56%. It is interesting to note that 86.66% EMBS speakers had the pure vowel /A:/ whereas only 10% of the HMBS speakers had the vowel in their vowel inventory.

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