A Study on English Pronunciation in the Hindi Speaking Region in India

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Abstract

Learning correct pronunciation has been one of the major challenges for a learner who learns a language either as second language or as foreign language. It is equally difficult for an instructor to make learners learn correct pronunciation. The challenge aggravates both for the learners and for the instructors if the learners are adult or adolescent. The study is an effort to find out the commonly mispronounced English words in Bihar and U.P. It analyzes the mispronounced words and find out the patterns of errors and look into the causes of errors. Furthermore, the study recommends the ways to improve pronunciation skill of the learners and provides a list (not exhaustive) of mispronounced words. The study uses convenience sampling method and covert observation technique to collect the data. The data has not been collected at one point of time rather for several years and at different parts of Hindi speaking region.

Key Words: Pronunciation, ESL, EFL, mispronounced words, Error Analysis

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Introduction

In India it can be observed that English is learnt out of academic and professional necessity. Learners are expected to competently master the language with added shove on the spoken form of the language, especially the articulation and pronunciation of the spoken English must be without traces or influence of the mother tongue (MT) and it must match the international standards. The buzz word that is most often used with pronunciation teaching in India is Neutralization of Indian English. We are aware of the manner in which corrections of pronunciation are generally made in the classrooms. Although research on the use and effectiveness of visual feedback for teaching with the help of computers began more than thirty-five years ago, its potential is not completely explored.

Relevance of Learning and Teaching Pronunciation

In order to communicate effectively, we must know the technical aspects of pronunciation and apply them for proper communication. This implies that the manner of production of speech sounds has a significant role in communication. When the teaching of spoken English in India is considered, especially of the teaching of pronunciation, it has now started emerging from its often neglected or marginalized place of instruction in the curriculum to hold a place of its own prominence. In today's changing scenario a great emphasis is laid on the communication skills, especially the oral form, in education and corporate sectors. There is a genuine concern for correct, standard pronunciation, or what we call the Received Pronunciation (RP) as an essential part of an effective communication.

Teaching English pronunciation has been one of the ignored aspects of English language teaching in India. Pronunciation is considered a complex aspect of language that can be introduced at higher level. Except elite convent

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schools, primarily available in the urban areas, teaching of pronunciation has not been in the priorities of schools in India. Learning correct pronunciation has been one of the major challenges for a learner who is learning a language either as second language or as foreign language. It is equally difficult for an instructor to make learners learn correct pronunciation. The challenge aggravates both for the learners and for the instructors if the learners are adult or adolescent. One of the reasons behind this difficulty is the MT of the learners. Psychologically the learners, in most of the cases, are failed to approach the target language as a separate entity. In other words, they try to learn the target language with the help of linguistic structure of their MT. The ESL (English as Second Language) and EFL (English as Foreign Language) learners have to face more problems in learning pronunciation of English since English is considered, from the learners' perspective, a difficult language in terms of pronunciation.

Is English a difficult language in terms of pronunciation?

If we try to answer the above question from the perspective of ESL and EFL learners, the answer would be: yes, it is a relatively difficult language in terms of pronunciation. There are many reasons cited by ESL and EFL learners, and linguists but there are three important reasons that contribute maximum to increase difficulty of learning pronunciation of English. The first reason is that there are lots of irregularities in the correspondence between graphemes and phonemes (symbols and sounds). For example, look at the following words and try to observe irregularities in their pronunciation.

Tough

Thought

Through

We can observe that the common cluster of letters in the above words is 'ough' but if we look at the pronunciation of the word we find that the cluster of letters

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pronounced differently in each word. It means one cannot always decide pronunciation of English words on the basis of their spelling. Another good example may be the resultant sounds for the spelling 'ch' in words like 'monarch', 'church', 'cache'. The sounds represented through 'ch' are /k/, /tʃ/ and /ʃ/ respectively.

The second reason that makes the English language difficult in terms of pronunciation for ESL and EFL learners is the borrowed words. English is among the top borrowers in the world. Most of the words in the English language have been borrowed from French, Latin and Germanic languages. However, borrowing words, linguistically speaking, enriches a language and it facilitates its users to communicate in a better way. Pronunciation of the most borrowed words is adapted in accordance with the phonological rules of the English language. The problematic words are those which are not adapted in the language. In other words, the original pronunciation pattern the words has been retained in the English language, for example words like, 'resume' (as noun), 'rendezvous', etc. These two words pronounced in the English language in the same way as they are pronounced in French.

The third reason is that English is one of the few languages which has maximum number of vowel sounds. How much a language is relatively difficult or easy in terms of pronunciation also depends on the number of vowels sounds. The more vowel sounds a language has the more problematic it will be for the ESL and EFL learners if their MT and/or first language has/have relatively less vowel sounds. For example, Hindi has eleven vowel sounds whereas English has twenty. For illustration the learners whose MT or/and first language is Hindi they generally mispronounce the word 'pay' (/peɪ/) as /pe/.

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Aim and objective of the study

The objectives of the study are:

1. To find out the commonly mispronounced words of Bihar and Uttar Pradesh

2. To analyze the mispronounced words and find out the patterns of errors and look into the causes of errors

3. To recommend the ways to improve pronunciation skill of the learners

4. To provide a list (not exhaustive) of mispronounced words

Methodology

The data has been collected with the help convenient sampling method (one of the non-probability sampling methods). The researcher used the covert observation technique to collect the data. The educational qualifications of the subjects (learners) were intermediate. Their voice were observed and recorded with the help of high quality voice recorder.

The study uses correct pronunciation for reference from *English pronouncing Dictionary (16th Edition).* However, the comparison has been made with 'generalised Indian English' CIEFL (1973), 'Educated Indian [English] Pronunciation' (Gokak 1964, Parasher 1991, Nihalani et al. 2005 and/or 'Standard Indian English Pronunciation (SIEP)' (Shailja, 2009). It has rarely been observed that an Indian speaker of English speaks Received Pronunciation (RP). Therefore, the study includes only those words which are pronounced by most of the Hindi speaking people either with replacement of phonemes or omission of phonemes or accent on wrong syllable or use of phonemes from the first language, etc. However, RP has been the target for the teachers who teach English pronunciation to the Indian students.

One of the purposes of the present study is to supply a list of commonly mispronounced words of English by ESL learners belong to Hindi speaking region of India. However, the findings can also be generalized in other regions

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in India and Southern Asia. The list has been prepared with the help of observation by the researcher. It took almost ten years to collect the mispronounced words. Each word has been tested properly to ensure that the selected words are mispronounced by at least 50% of the respondents.

Analysis of the data

Placing stress on the inappropriate syllable

One of the reasons for pronunciation error is placing the stress on the inappropriate syllable. It has been observed that the learners place the stress always on the first syllable irrespective of their grammatical categories. For example, most of the nouns receive stress on the first syllable whereas verbs receive stress on the second syllable in English (Ashby, 162). Let us look at some mispronounced words from the list.

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Development	/ˈde.vel.əp.ment/	/dɪˈvel.əp.mənt/
Success	/ˈsʌkses/	/səkˈses/
Antecedent	/ˈæn.tisiː.dent/	/ˌæn.tiˈsiː.d ə nt/
Academic	/əˈkæd.ə.mik/	/ˌæk.əˈdem.ɪk/

Interference of Mother Tongue into English pronunciation

Properties of MT affect the acquisition of the second language (hereafter SL). Sometimes MT interferes in the process of learning the SL and sometimes it helps and accelerates the acquisition of SL. When the patterns of MT and the SL are similar, the positive transfer occurs and the first language facilitates learning of the SL and in the case of dissimilarity, the negative transfer occurs and the first language hinders the learning of the Target Language (hereafter TL). This phenomenon is known as MT interference. Weinreich defines interference as 'instances of deviation from the norms of either language which occur in the speech of bilinguals as a result of their familiarity with more than

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one language, i.e. as a result of language contact' (01). In other words, another reason of mispronunciation is that the learners try to replace some of the sounds of English with the similar sounds available in their mother tongue. Every language differs in terms of system of sounds it has. Whenever a learner learns a new language, particularly after the critical period he/she, in most of the cases, unable to completely get rid of the sound pattern of his/her mother tongue (Clark, 367). Learners' articulators are attuned to the sounds of their mother tongue. It happens because learners' ears are attuned to the sounds of their mother tongue. Whenever, they are exposed to new sounds, they try to replace them with the similar sounds they have in their mother tongue. For example:

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Earth	/ʌrth/	/ɜ:θ/
Genre	/dʒenər/	/ʒɑ̃.rə/
Church	/tʃʌrtʃ/	/tʃɜtʃ/
Then	/ḍen/	/ðen/

Spelling pronunciation

If we take Hindi and other regional languages spoken in Hindi belt into account, 'there is a fairly regular correspondence between the script and the pronunciation' (Kachru, 30). However, there are some exceptions but primarily every letter represents a sound and it is pronounced. The learners try to pronounce every English word with the help of its spelling. They try to pronounce each and every letter in words. However, their pronunciation of many words with the help of Spelling pronunciation are correct. Some mispronounced words are given below in the table.

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Adjective	/æddʒ.ek.tɪv/	/ædʒ.ek.tɪv/
Asthma	/ʌsthəma:/	/æs.mə/

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| Corps | /kɔ(r)ps / | /kɔ r / |
| Pizza | /piːzaː/ | /piːt.sə/ |

Prolongation of vowel sounds

Replacing short vowels with long ones is one of the pronunciation errors the learners. The pattern of error is quite common in the learners whose mother tongue is either Bhojpuri, Magahi or Maithili. These languages have more long vowels than the short ones as well as the short vowels can also be prolonged in some environment, particularly in Bhojpuri (Ahmad, 42-53). Some of the examples are given below in the table.

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Pen	/peɪn/	/pen/
Give	/giːv/	/gɪv/
If	/iːf/	/ɪf/
Sit	/siːt/	/sɪt/

Braking up polysyllabic words into two separate units

It has been observed that learners sometimes break up the polysyllabic words into two separate units (not necessarily syllables) to pronounce them. Perhaps they do so because they feel comfortable in pronouncing the words because the part(s) of words is/are available in the SL as a word. Sometimes, they wrongly assume that the word consists of two separate lexemes (loosely words).

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Greenwich	/griːn.wɪtʃ/	/ˌgren.ɪtʃ/
Automobile	/ɒto ˈməʊ.baɪl/	/ˈɔː.tə.mə ʊ .biːl/
Today	/tu(ː)ˈde/	/təˈdeɪ/

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Errors in pronouncing individual consonant Sounds

The learners mispronounce the consonant sounds, /θ/, /ð/, /f/, /w/, /ʒ/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/ and /z/. The degree and amount of deviation from RP and SIEP vary from sound to sound. For example, to learn the correct pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ needs a lot of training and practice as the sounds are fricatives rather than stops. These dental fricatives are replaced by Hindi and other regional languages dental plosives /th/ (voiceless dental plosive) and /ḍ/ (voiced dental plosive). /f/ sound is mispronounced by the learners who come from rural areas and small towns as /ph/. Most of the learners who know the difference between /f/ and /ph/ theoretically unable to pronounce it properly. They use the place of articulation correctly but find it difficult to produce audible friction. The manner of articulation is very near to plosive than that of fricative. Most of the learners pronounced /w/ sound without rounded lips.

As far as /ʒ/ sound is concerned, it has been observed that this sound is almost unavailable in the pronunciation of all the learners. Even after learning of how to pronounce the sound, /ʒ/ (voiced Palato-alveolar fricative), they find it difficult to pronounce. About this sound, as Shailja claims, is 'prevalent in SIEP' (22). However, CIEFL (1972) finds is a problematic sound for Indian speakers of English. The present study suggests CIEFL (1972) study has reliability. /tʃ/ sound is generally pronounced correctly but some learners pronounce it as alveolar rather than plato-alveolar.

/ʃ/ sound is correctly pronounce by the learners who are educated in good schools where medium of instruction is English and/or who come from big cities. The learners who come from or belong to rural areas of Bihar and eastern UP and have not got education from good schools where medium of instruction is English, either they do not have this sound in their linguistic repertoire or they are unable to distinguish between /s/ and /ʃ/. Most of learners find it difficult to pronounce /z/ sounds. They replace it with the similar sound, /dʒ/.

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Errors in pronouncing individual vowel Sounds

In comparison with Hindi and other regional languages spoken in Hindi belt English has more vowel sounds. The problematic vowel sounds are /æ/, /ə/, /ɔ:/, /eɪ/ and /oʊ/. In the pronunciation of /æ/ sound the learners make two errors. First they do not open their mouth almost completely since it is a near-open front unrounded vowel. Secondly they pronounce it in relatively shorter period of time in comparison with RP. /ə/ sound is pronounced correctly at the medial and final position in a word but at final position most of the learners slightly prolong it and some of them pronounce it like, /ʌ/ sound. The next problematic vowel sound is /ɔ:/, open-mid back rounded vowel. Almost all the learners pronounced the vowel as unrounded one and they pronounce it from almost from mid position of the mouth. /eɪ/ sound is not available in the learners linguistic repertoire since all the learners have pronounce /eɪ/ sound as /e/. Like /eɪ/ sound, /oʊ/ is not pronounced as diphthong but as a pure vowel. They pronounce it like /o/.

Finding and recommendation

The analysis of the data hints that learners are not aware of the importance of correct pronunciation. Their priority is to learn grammar, vocabulary, literature, etc. However, some learners who come from good schools where medium of instruction was English have relatively better pronunciation and they are, to some extent, aware of the importance of correct pronunciation. It also reflects teacher pay less attention on improving pronunciation of the learners in schools. In other words, the teaching of pronunciation is given the least priority in the teaching of English language.

The first recommendation would be for the teachers to prioritize the teaching of English pronunciation. Teaching of pronunciation is as important as the other aspects of language teaching like, vocabulary, grammar, etc. The teachers as

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well as the learners will have to try to put his/her MT pronunciation pattern on hold while learning SL pronunciation.

The list of commonly mispronounced words in the Hindi region of India has been produced below:

1. Ability	53 Develop	105. Pizza
2. Academic	54. Diagonal	106. Pleat
3. Adjective	55. Disagree	107. Plumber
4. Advertisement	56. Dose	108. Poignant
5. Agree	57. Dozen	109. Police
6. Air	58. Draught	110. Posthumous
7. Albeit	59. Earth	111. Product
8. Alias	60. Eavesdrop	112. Pronunciation
9. Almond	61. Electoral	113. Quasi
10. Alzheimer	62. Engineer	114. Rationale
11. Anesthetist	63. Epitome	115. Recollect
12. Antarctic	64. Etc.	116. Refer
13. Antecedent	65. Etiquette	117. Relative
14. Anxiety	66. Executive	118. Release
15. Apathy	67. Extempore	119. Rendezvous
16. Arithmetic	68. Flower	120. Repertoire
17. Ascertain	69. Genre	121. Representative
18. Asia	70. Geographic	122. Reprimand

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19.	Assume	71.	Geometry	123.	Rumour
20.	Asthma	72.	Gnarl	124.	Russian
21.	Atmosphere	73.	Greenwich	125.	Scarcity
22.	Automobile	74.	Healthy	126.	Schedule
23.	Auxiliary	75.	Hyperbole	127.	Science
24.	Bear (v)	76.	Increase	128.	Scythe
25.	Business	77.	Indict	129.	Society
26.	Cache	78.	Intestine	130.	Southern
27.	Cacophony	79.	Iron	131.	Spinach
28.	Cadet	80.	Jewellery	132.	Stimuli
29.	Cadre	81.	Lease	133.	Strategic
30.	Cambridge	82.	Literature	134.	Success
31.	Canal	83.	Loose	135.	Suggestion
32.	Caricature	84.	Loosely	136.	Suicide
33.	Castle	85.	Lucid	137.	Suite
34.	Catastrophe	86.	Mass	138.	Tear
35.	Cavalry	87.	Medicine	139.	Telepathy
36.	Clerk	88.	Medieval	140.	Temperature
37.	Climb	89.	Memory	141.	Theory
38.	Congestion	90.	Miniature	142.	Thermometer

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39.	Conservative	91.	Mortgage	143.	Threw / grew
40.	Consume	92.	Moustache	144.	Tier
41.	Corps	93.	Nuptial	145.	Tomato
42.	Cough	94.	Oxford	146.	Tomb
43.	Creature	95.	Panorama	147.	Tortoise
44.	Crèche	96.	Panoramic	148.	Tour
45.	Dais	97.	Parents	149.	Tuition
46.	Data	98.	Patrol	150.	Use (N)
47.	Daughter	99.	Penal	151.	Usually
48.	Deaf	100.	Penalize	152.	Measure
49.	Debris	101.	Penalty	153.	Vowel
50.	Dengue	102.	Peon	154.	Wear
51.	Denizen	103.	Petrol	155.	Women
52.	Determiner	104.	Pivotal	156.	Yacht

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