

Changing Contours: The Interference of the Mother Tongue on English Speaking Sylheti Bengali

Arpita Goswami

Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, India

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Abstract

The Sylheti Bangla, a variety of Bangla language is primarily spoken in the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, Barak Valley of Assam, Tripura, especially in North Tripura. The systematic perusal on English spoken by Sylheti Bangla speakers demonstrates that it carries a huge difference with English (RP) specially in respect to pronunciation, syllable structure, stress, intonation. The disparities between Sylheti English and English (RP) are because of a number of divergent variances between Sylheti Bangla and English which often makes the acquisition of English an arduous job for the Sylheti speakers. The errors committed by Sylheti speakers during their speaking in English can be attributed to the interference of the rule of mother tongue in learning the second language. This interference can be of phonological, morphological and sentence structure. However, the domain of this paper is exclusive to phonological interference of L1 on L2 through the contrastive analysis of the phonological aspects of Sylheti Bangla and English (RP). This paper intends to improve the status of English teaching-learning process compared to contemporary practices. Thus, it aspires to contribute to the theory of second language acquisition with a particular focus on learning English by the Sylheti speakers.

Keywords: Mother tongue interference, Sylheti English, phonological interference, contrastive analysis

Introduction

All languages have their own patterns of linguistic system and the nature of this system differs from one another. Due to this variety of patterns in linguistic system, when a learner consciously begins the process of learning a second language or a foreign language, the distinctiveness of the second language in terms of its properties with that of the mother tongue of the speaker inhibits the process of his/her acquisition of the second language disregarding his/her consciousness of the intrinsic differences between the

two. This interference impels the learners of the second language to attempt to change the system of the target language in order to match it to their own language.

When a learner's native language affects the learning of second/foreign language, it is called interference of mother tongue (Thyab, 2016). In Dulay and Burt (1976, p. 71), the term 'interference' is defined as "the automatic transfer, due to habit of the surface structure of the first language onto the surface of the target language" (cited in Lott, 1983, p. 257). According to Lott (1983), interference refers to the errors committed by learners of second or foreign language that "can be traced back to the mother tongue". At the phonological ground, this interference is most prominent. It is because most of the phonological aspects are language specific. The concept of "transfer" can be best understood from Ellis (1994). He comments that L1 transfer usually refers to the "incorporation of features of the L1 into the knowledge system of the L2 that the learner is trying to build" (Ellis, 1994, p. 28). The behavioristic approach proposes that in learning L2 speakers transfer the "habit" of the L1 into L2.

So, from the above definitions of interference, it is understood that interference is the transfer of the grammar of the first language upon the target language of the grammar. If the target language is different from L1, this transfer results into interference or negative transfer; on the contrary, if L1 and L2 are similar, positive transfer occurs. Thus, the transfer of L1 can both facilitate and hinder the learning process of L2. In order to obtain a clear concept of the role of L1 in learning L2, I refer to the work of Hayati (1997). He mentions that when there are more differences between first language and target language, learners face more difficulties to learn it. On the contrary, if the two languages share more similarities, the learning of second language becomes easier for learners. Due to this reason, people can learn some languages more easily than other languages. For example, the acquisition of Hindi is easier for a Bengali speaker than the acquisition of English language. It is because Bangla and Hindi have many identical forms in respect of linguistic features. If the learners' mother tongue and target language belong to same language family, it makes the learning process of target language easy for learners and vice versa.

Many previous works uphold that the application of Contrastive Analysis (CA) methodology between L1 and L2 helps to predict the reasons behind the errors made by second language learners. The emergence of CA in second/foreign language teaching primarily engendered in Fries (1945). In his work, it is stated that "the most effective materials are those that are based upon a scientific description of the language to be learned, carefully compared with a parallel description of the native language of the learners" (cited in Dulay, Burt, & Krashen, 1982, p. 98).

According to Dulay et al. (1982, p. 97), "[c]ontrastive Analysis took the position that a learner's first language "interferes" with his or her acquisition of a second language, and it therefore comprises the major obstacle

to successful mastery of the new language”. Brown (2007) states that the CA is rooted in behavioristic and structural approaches. In his book, the concept of Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis refers to the idea that,

the principal barrier to second language acquisition is the interference of the first language system with the second language system and that a scientific, structural analysis of the two languages in question would yield a taxonomy of linguistic contrasts between them which in turn would enable linguists and language teacher to predict the differences a learner would encounter. (Brown, 2007, p. 220)

Based on such aforementioned works on CA, it can be stated that CA is a methodology which can be applied to explore the areas of difficulties faced by L2 learners and provide guidelines for the students, teachers, L2 material planners to plan language learning and teaching lesson plan.

The systematic perusal of English spoken by Sylheti speakers exhibits that it carries a huge difference with English (RP) with respect to a number of linguistic attributes especially in pronunciation, syllable structure, stress, and intonation. Due to these divergent variances, the acquisition of English has always been an arduous job for the Sylheti speakers. This almost always leads to a lot of flaws and gaffes. These errors, for the most part, can be attributed to the interference of the rule of mother tongue in learning the second language. Based on the methodology of Contrastive Analysis, in this paper, I attempt to demonstrate the differences between Sylheti Bangla (henceforth, SHB) vis-a-vis that of English (RP) with respect to phonology. The contrastive analysis throws significant light on the reasons behind the errors committed by Sylheti learners of English, and it will help us to get an empirical profile of the Interlanguage (i.e. IL) phonology of Sylheti English (henceforth, SHE), a variety of English spoken by Sylheti speakers. This will unequivocally help them to attenuate the gap between Sylheti English and English (RP).

The study examined some basic phonological aspects of SHB such as segments, syllable, stress, and intonation, and evaluated the interference of mother tongue in Sylheti learners of English. The findings will contribute to the theory of second language acquisition with a particular focus on learning English by the Sylheti speakers.

Literature review

Though a substantive number of researches has been done on the interference of first language in learning second language, not a single work is available in the literature on the interference of Sylheti Bangla in learning English. Therefore, it would be a novel approach to discuss some previous works based on the interference of L1 on L2 with regard to some other languages in order to grasp a clear view of the concept of “interference” and the methodology of Contrastive Analysis. Keeping this in mind, in this section, I will cite some

previous works on the interference of L1 on L2. These citations will also help me to understand the fact that the interference of mother tongue in learning second language is a very common phenomenon in second language acquisition, and the English spoken by Sylheti speakers is also not devoid of this interference.

The first work which I refer to is of Derakshan and Karimi (2015). After reviewing some previous works they establish the fact that second language learners always face some problems in learning second language because of transfer of first language on target language. In their opinion, a lot of factors work behind this interference. For example, whether the structure of two languages is similar or different from each other, and existing knowledge of the learners. They propose that if L1 and L2 are similar in structures, L2 learners encounter less difficulty in learning L2. On the contrary, if L1 and L2 differ from each other in structures, learners face many problems in the acquisition of L2.

The research work of Malana (2018) examines how Ilocanos, Ibanags and Itawes use their own mother tongue in learning English. Ilocanos have the tendencies of transferring rules or patterns of intonation from their L1 in learning L2. For that reason they commit more errors while they communicate in English. The Ibanags tend to transfer the L1 pronunciation rule to L2. That is why they commit errors on pronunciation. The author investigates that when speaking in a target language code-shifting and code-switching are tendencies of L2 learners like the Ilacano, the Ibang, and the Itawes. The learners use these strategies when they find it difficult to proceed with a learning task in L2.

Another significant study on L1 transfer in the acquisition of L2 is Radhika (2014). This work examines the mother tongue interference on learning spoken English by the learners coming from Tamil, Telugu, Hindi, and Bhojpuri languages. The author investigates that when Tamil learners of English pronounce the voiced and voiceless plosives /p/ and /b/ they confront difficulty and mother tongue interference occurs in their English. They pronounce /pin/ and /bin/ alike. The reason behind this is that there is no exact letter for each sound in Tamil. One letter can be used for three sounds. For instance, for “pa”, “ba”, pHa”, “bHa” Tamil speakers use one letter “pa”. Telugu students pronounce English words end with the vowel sound /u/ e.g., “girl” is pronounced as “girlu”. Explaining the reason behind it the author mentions that in Telugu most of the words end with the vowel sound /u/ like “kooralu”, and “bommalu”. Now coming to Bhojpuri, the author investigates that Bhojpuri students shorten the long vowel sounds and pronounce nasal sounds such as consonant sounds. Bhojpuri students pronounce “Rajeev” as “Rajv” because the long vowel sounds are not found in Bhojpuri language.

Also, Hu (2015) states that English is difficult for Chinese learners. It is because Chinese and English have different language structures. English is part of Indo-European language family, on the other hand, Chinese is part of the Sino-Tibetan language family. Due to the significant differences between

Chinese and English many Chinese English learners rely on their mother tongue while they try to learn new languages. His research proposes that Chinese English learners encounter difficulty to pronounce English sounds because their similar Chinese sounds influence a lot. For example, Chinese students can not differentiate the distinction between the alveolar nasal sound /n/ and the alveolar liquid lateral sound /l/. As a result, they mispronounce “knife” and “life” as well as “need” and “lead”. Chinese learners face difficulty to pronounce words like “English” and “rose” correctly because English sounds /r/ and /s/ differ from Chinese /r/ and /s/.

While examining Bengali speakers, Saha and Mandal (2014) reveal that Bengali English learners encounter difficulty to pronounce some American English consonant and vowel sounds. As a consequence, they make error in pronouncing the vowels and consonants of American English. This paper proposes that as Bengali Speakers face problem with American English consonants and vowel sounds, they try to replace these sounds by the similar sounds of their mother tongue Bengali. His research shows that Bengali speakers replace American English consonants such as /f/, /v/, /T/, /D/, /z/ by /pH/, /bH/, /tH/, /dH/, /dZ/ respectively, and vowels such as /e/ and /E/ are transferred to /e/, /u/ respectively, and /uè/ becomes /u/.

The work of Thyab (2016) also provides the interferences of mother tongue in second language learning by Arab speakers. His work shows that the article system, especially the notion of definite and indefinite article is different in Arab than that of the English language. As a result, Arab learners of English face problems in the correct use of articles in English language.

Ullah (2011) also deals with the interference of L1 on L2. He claims that the errors committed by learners in learning second language are the result of the transfer of L1 on L2. He investigates the differences of consonants between English and Pashto language. Their work finds that English consonant sounds which are not present in Pashto create problems for the Pashtan learners of English such as English sounds /t/, /v/, and /z/.

Like Thyab (2011), Crompton (2011) also reveals that how Arabic learners of English face problems in using English article correctly due to the transfer of L1 article system on L2. Das (2001) shows how Tripura Bangla speakers in their use of English language get deviated from the stress pattern of English because of the interference of the core pattern of the first language on English.

A background study of Bangla language and Sylheti Bangla

From the celebrated work of Chatterjee (1926), it is known that Bangla originated from Indo-Aryan (IA) or the Indic Sub-branch of the Indo-Iranian branch of the Indo-European (IE) language family. Commenting on the Bangla language, Gope (2016) claims that in India, Bangla is the second most spoken language (behind Hindu and Urdu).

Sylheti dialect belongs to eastern variations of Bangla. The origin of

Sylheti dialect presented in Anowar (2013) is stated below.

Indo-European>Indo-Iranian>Indo-Aryian>Easterngroup>Bangali-Assamese>Sylhet.

This dialect is primarily spoken in the Sylhet District of Bangladesh, also known as Surma valley. Sylhet district is located in the North-Eastern region of Bangladesh. It has five divisions Sylhet, Habiganj, Maulavi Bazar and Sunamganj. Apart from Bangladesh, this dialect is also spoken in the North parts of Tripura, Barak Valley of Assam, and some parts of Meghalaya.

Anowar (2013) claims that Sylheti has its own script known as “Sylheti Nagari”. In Bangladesh during Afgan reign “Sylheti Nagari” was used for the print of Afgan coin. Sylheti Nagari has similarity with Kaithi alphabet. However, this dialect varies from Standard Colloquial Bangla in terms of linguistic aspects.

Methodology

Data were collected from native speakers (approximately 20, 10 males and 10 females and aged between 11-15 years of age) of SHB. The speakers were the students of primary school of vernacular medium. They grew up in and around Dharmanagar district of North Tripura where SHB is spoken. For the examination of segments, syllable pattern and stress, a list of English words was given to them to read out. For the intonation part, the speakers were asked to produce both Sylheti and English scripted sentences. The data were recorded into a Samson CUIU PRO USB microphone attached to a laptop. The recordings were made in Audacity software in Praat (Boersma and Weenink, 2019). Recorded sentences were saved in Praat and segmented manually. In order to analyze the data for intonation, 2 tier Praat Textgrid file was created. In the first tier, the divisions of the words of the sentences were shown, and in the second tier, the pitch contour of the sentence was shown. The speakers were asked to repeat each sentence three times. In a quiet environment, the recordings were made. It is pertinent to mention that the present researcher herself is a native speaker of SHB. First, the data have been collected, verified and then cross-checked with the researcher’s native language’s knowledge and intuition. The data collected from the native speaker-informants along with the perception and judgement of the native speaker-researcher has been the mainstay of the work.

Results

Phonological aspects of SHB

In this section, I will outline the nature of the basic phonological properties of SHB such as segments, syllable, stress, and intonation. The delineation can be started off with a brief account of these phonological aspects.

Speech sounds are classified into consonants and vowels. Phonetically consonant sounds are defined as sounds “made by a closure or narrowing in the vocal tract so that the airflow is either completely blocked, or so restricted that audible friction is produced” (Crystal, 2008, p. 103). Based on the manner of articulation consonants are divided into two parts — obstruents and sonorants. During the production of obstruents, “the airflow is noticeably restricted, with the articulator either in complete closure or close approximation”, on the other hand, in the case of sonorants “either there is no such restriction in oral tract, or the nasal tract is open; either way the air has free passage through the vocal tract” (Davenport & Hannahs, 2005, p. 18). Depending on the stricture type, obstruents have three classifications — stops, fricatives, and affricates. The subdivisions of sonorants are nasals, liquids, and glides. The contact of active and passive articulators completely closes the oral tract and this closure is suddenly released during the production of stops. Due to this closure, the flow of air can not escape from the mouth. If a voiceless stop begins the word, during its articulation air is released with an “audible puff”. This phenomenon is termed as aspiration. For example, in the case of English sound /pʌi/ “pie”, /p/ is an aspirated sound. With regard to the production of fricatives, active and passive articulators make contact in such a way that there is a narrow gap between the articulators which allow the airflow to exit from the passage of the mouth. In the words of Davenport and Hannahs (2005, p. 27), “fricatives are produced when the active articulator is close to, but not actually in contact with the passive articulator”. In the articulation of affricates, the articulators create complete closure like plosives but in the case of release they follow fricatives as the release is very slow. So affricates possess the nature of both plosives and fricatives. In Crystal (2008, p. 16), the affricates are defined in the following way:

when the air-pressure behind a complete closure in the vocal tract is gradually released; the initial release produces a plosive, but the separation which follows is sufficiently slow to produce audible friction, and there is thus a fricative element in the sound also.

When the air passes through nasal cavity, nasal sounds are produced whereas, liquid sounds are produced with “unhindered airflow”. Like vowel sounds, in the case of articulation of glides, there is no contact of the active and passive articulator. But their nature is like consonants as they cannot form syllable nuclei; they appear at the edge of the syllable.

During the articulation of vowel sounds due to the wide gap between

articulators the airflow exit without any obstruction. Vowels can be divided into monophthongs, diphthongs, and triphthongs. In the case of monophthongs, there is no tongue movement, whereas diphthongs involve tongue movement during its production. In Crystal (2008, p. 311) monophthongs are defined as pure vowels “where there is no detectable change in quality during a syllable”, and diphthongs or triphthongs refer to the vowels change in quality. Diphthongs can be again subdivided based on their ending vowel – fronting, centering and backing diphthongs. In the case of fronting diphthongs, the tongue glides towards the front vowel, when this glide is towards the centre vowel, it is called centering diphthongs; whereas, in the case of backing diphthongs, tongue movement ends in the back vowel.

In a language, sentences are not simply constructed by adding up individual segments. First, segments are externally organized to form an “invisible” unit that is syllable which exists between the melody of segments and metrical organization of linguistic structures. In Crystal (2008, p. 467), it is defined as “a unit of pronunciation typically larger than a single sound and smaller than a word”. This abstract unit is termed as “syllable” by Greek people and in Latin, it is known as “syllaba”. In Indian tradition, in order to understand the concept of syllable the term “akshara” has been used. The etymological meaning of “Akshara” refers to something which can not be destroyed.

The cross-linguistic studies tell us that in almost all languages there is a variation in the relative prominence of syllables. The prominence of syllables is referred to as stress. In Crystal (2008, p. 454), it is defined as “a term used in phonetics to refer to the degree of force used in producing a syllable”. For example, in the English word “parrot”, the first syllable “pa” is more prominent than “rrot”, so the first syllable is stressed and second syllable is unstressed (Davenport and Hannahs, 2005). In selecting the appropriate syllables for prominence placement, factors like rhythm, position, quantity, and morphology play vital roles. Prominent syllables also tend to be of longer duration and higher intensity. The absence of clear phonetic property of stress makes it difficult to detect stressed syllables in a language. In general, stress assignment is based on rhythm and/or syllable weight which looks at the rhyme structure.

While speaking in any language of the world a native speaker produces various kinds of melodies. It is because while we speak the pitch of our voice sometimes goes up, sometimes down and sometimes it remains level or steady. The pitch is the basic element for both tone and intonation. Tone is a property of individual syllable or word while intonation is a property of longer stretches such as phrases or sentences. Like consonants and vowels, tone plays an important role in distinguishing the meaning of the word. In Nupe language, the sequence [ba] can be produced using three different varieties of pitch. When low pitch is used it means “to count”, high pitch means “to be sour”, whereas if the pitch level between high and low is used, it means “to cut” (Davenport and Hannahs, 2005).

A language may or may not have lexical tones but intonation contours over a phrase or a sentence occur in all languages. Intonation contour on phrases or sentences helps to transmit differences in meaning. For example, in English falling and rising intonation contours over an utterance are used to distinguish a statement from a question. An utterance that has a falling intonation contour as in “He eats an apple” is usually perceived as a statement whereas the same sentence produced with a rising intonation contour would be perceived as a question – “He eats an apple?” To point out the basic nature of intonation, Cruttenden equates it specifically with pitch movement, while Coulthard identifies it with prosody which would include not only pitch movements but also loudness, length, speed, and even voice quality (Ranalli, 2002).

Segments of SHB

Being a speech form of Eastern Bengal areas, though SHB shares an identical form of phonetics as well as phonology with all other dialects of Bangla of this area, there exist some particular properties in SHB such as, its distinctive sound system, its excessive indulgence on friction, its unique tone and intonation properties which give it a unique picture compared to other dialects of Bangla. SHB sound system exhibits certain special properties which are traceable in no other dialects of Bangla. For that reason, people of other dialect areas of Bangla can hardly understand anything of it.

After investigating SHB words it is found that SHB carries five monophthongs — /i u ε ɔ a /. With regard to SHB diphthongs, I divide them into three sections based on their ending vowel — fronting diphthong ending in i, centering diphthong ending in a, and backing diphthong with u, ɔ . The sixteen diphthongs of SHB are / ui ei ai au oi eu iɔ ua ou ɔa εa iu ia εɔ aɔ uɔ/.

In respect to consonants, SHB has twenty sounds — seven non-aspirated stops /b t̪ d̪ t̪ d̪ k g/ three voiceless aspirated stops /t̪^h t̪^h k^h/, four fricatives, /ʃ s z x /, three nasals /m n ŋ/, one alveolar flap /r/, one retroflex flap /ɽ/, one lateral /l/ and one glide /y/. SHB lacks voiceless bilabial stop /p/, voiceless and voiced alveolar stops /t d/, voiceless and voiced labiodental fricatives /f v/, voiced palato-alveolar /ʒ/, palato-alveolar affricates /tʃ dʒ/.

Syllable pattern of SHB

The syllable structure of SHB consists of onset and rhyme. Onset is composed of only one consonant immediately located in front of the nucleus and rhythm is further classified into nucleus and coda. SHB is not very strict about having

onset and coda in every syllable. So, it can be logically claimed that in SHB onset and coda may be optional. The general rule of syllabification in SHB words is very simple. Word can begin with both a syllabic element V (in VC) as in /am/ “mango” or a non-syllabic element C (in CV) as in /ga/ “body”. Consonant clusters are not allowed in word initial and word final position. Medial CCC cluster is found though very rare. In an open monosyllable the vowel can be lengthened.

From the examination of consonant+vowel sequences in SHB monosyllabic words, eight types of syllable structures (four for open and four for closed syllables) are found in this dialect as demonstrated below.

Open syllable

V ɔ ‘is it?’

VV ou ‘this’

CVV boi ‘book’

CV ga ‘body’

Closed syllable

VC am ‘mango’

VVC ail ‘boundary of a paddy land’

CVC xam ‘work’

CVVC ɔour ‘run’

Stress pattern of SHB

SHB words are classified into three groups based on their internal structure – words containing only light syllables, words containing only heavy syllables and words containing both light and heavy syllables. SHB native words containing four or five syllables are very rare. There appear to be two degrees of stress: primary and secondary. Light+light combination SHB words form trochaic feet from left-to-right such as (ˈba.ɾi) “home”. In a sequence of three light syllables, a trochee is constructed on the two left-most syllables with initial prominence and third syllable remains unparsed because of its light monosyllabic nature such as (ˈgu.la)bi “pink”. SHB speakers discard an alternative option of L(LL). It implies that they prefer to construct foot aligning with the left edge of the grammatical word. In SHB only VC, CVC

and CVVC type syllables are considered as heavy attracting stress. Canonical vowel length of V: type is not distinctive in SHB. In the case of heavy+heavy combination, only the first syllable attracts stress obeying syllabic trochaic feet form from left-to-right for example, (ˈbain̩.gɔŋ) “eggplant”.

SHB speakers discard stressing two successive heavy syllables. Thus the principle weight-to-stress (WSP) is dominated to avoid clash between two successive syllables. In sequences of three heavy syllables HHH, the first two heavy syllables form a trochaic foot with primary stress on the left. The third one being heavy also initiates a foot with secondary stress.

Disyllabic words of light and heavy combination attract initial stress irrespective of its internal structure for example, (ˈba.liʃ) “pillow”, (ˈhuk.na) “thin”. However, in the cases of tri-syllabic words stress distribution becomes apparently irregular due to the presence of heavy syllables. Heavy syllable attracts stress and this is so powerful a requirement that it can override otherwise inviolable principles of word-initial primary stress and of non-final prominence. Primary prominence shifts to the second syllable if the first syllable is light and second is heavy in the case of tri-syllabic words for example, (ˈpɹɪz.ɪ.xər) “prize”. The third initiates a foot with secondary stress after the primary foot is constructed over the two initial light syllables, for example, (ˈdɔʊ.t̩.ən) “dawn”. This results in sequences of successive feet. However, two successive heavy syllables do not initiate two feet. So, one can argue that SHB is quantity sensitive, *albeit partially*.

Intonation pattern of SHB

For the intonation part in this paper, I have only investigated wh-question of SHB. It is because the interference of the rules of wh-question of SHB in learning the wh-question of English is very prominent compared to other types of sentences. From the experiment on wh-question, it is noted and pointed out that in the wh-question, the wh-phrase is considered by the native speakers as the most significant phrase in the sentence. For example, in the sentence //xər boi iʔa// “Whose book is this?”, the wh-phrase /xər/ “whose” is the prominent phrase of the sentence. Therefore, within the phonological phrase of wh-question, the wh-word is considered to be the nuclear accent of the question and within the intonational phrase of wh-question the phonological phrase which bears wh-word receives the strongest stress of the intonational phrase.

In the case of wh-question with utterance initial or medial wh-word, the left-most word is the main stressed word which attracts pitch accent and in the case of wh-questions with utterance final wh-word the rightmost word of the strongest phonological phrase is the main stressed word; in all the cases the P-phrase bearing the most stressed wh-word receives the strongest stress of its I-phrase.

The following demonstration shows the stress pattern of representative SHB wh-question with sentence initial wh-word.

x			Phrasal level
x	x	x	Word level
x	x	x	Syllabic level

[[xar]_P [boi]_P [iʔa]_P]_{IP}
 //xar boi iʔa// “Whose book is this?”

In the above stress pattern of wh-question //xar boi iʔa// “Whose book is this?” has three phonological phrases i.e. [xar], [boi] and [iʔa]. In the first p-phrase [xar], wh-word /xar/ “whose” is the main stressed word. Since p-phrase [xar] bears the main stressed word of the whole sentence so this leftmost phrase is the strongest phrase of Intonational Phrase //xar boi iʔa//. Now we examine the stress pattern of SHB wh-question with sentence medial wh-word.

x			Phrasal level
x	x	x	Word level
x	x	x	Syllabic level

[[ma.la]_P [ki.ʔa]_P [xai.bɔ]_P]_{IP}
 //ma.la ki.ʔa xai.bɔ// “What will Mala eat?”

In the above representation of stress, it is noticed that SHB wh-question //ma.la ki.ʔa xai.bɔ// “What will Mala eat?” has three phonological phrases i.e. [ma.la], [ki.ʔa], and [xai.bɔ]. In the second p-phrase [ki.ʔa], wh-word /ki.ʔa/ “what” is the main stressed word, and the first syllable /ki/ of the phonological word /ki.ʔa/ is the main stressed syllable. Since p-phrase [ki.ʔa] bears the main stressed word of the whole sentence so this phrase is the strongest phrase of Intonational Phrase //ma.la ki.ʔa xai.bɔ//.

Now we demonstrate stress pattern of a representative wh-question with sentence final wh-word given below.

	x		Phrasal level
x	x	x	Word level
x	x	x	Syllabic level

[[ʔɔr]_P [nam]_P [ki.ʔa]_P]_{IP}

//t̚ɔr nam ki.ɬa// “What is your name?”

The above wh-question //t̚ɔr nam ki.ɬa// has three phonological phrases [t̚ɔr], [nam] and [ki.ɬa]. The left syllable /ki/ of the phonological phrase /ki.ɬa/ is the main stressed syllable and the word /ki.ɬa/ is the strongest word of this phrase. Since p-phrase [ki.ɬa] bears the main stressed word of the whole sentence so this right most phrase is the strongest phrase of Intonational Phrase //t̚ɔr nam ki.ɬa//.

After finding out the main stressed word in SHB wh-questions we move on to demonstrate the intonation contour of SHB wh-questions. From our experiment on SHB wh-questions it is revealed that in SHB wh-questions with utterance initial or medial or final wh-word high (H*) pitch accent falls on the most prominent word i.e. wh-word and intonational phrase boundary is marked with low tone (L%).

Now coming to SHB wh-question with utterance initial wh-word, it is noticed that the contour starts with a rise and high (H*) pitch accent falls on the nucleus of wh-word and low (L%) boundary tone falls on the utterance final position (see Figure 1).

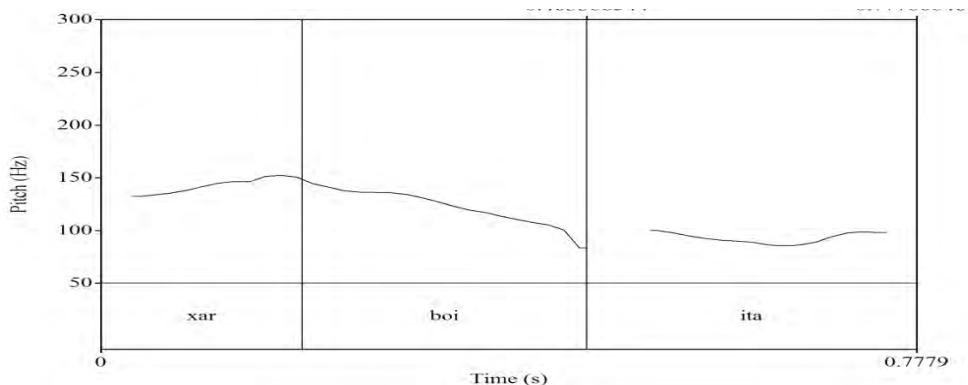


Figure 1. //xar boi ita// “Whose book is this?”

In Figure 1, wh-word /xar/ “whose” is placed at sentence initial position which starts with a shallow rise and H* tone falls on its peak. Here also low (L%) boundary tone falls on the sentence final position. Figure 2 demonstrates the intonation contour of a representative wh-question with utterance medial wh-word in SHB.

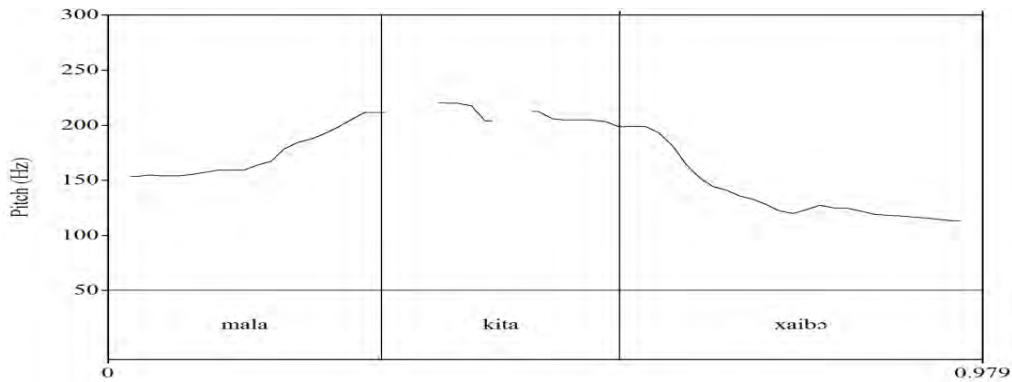


Figure 2. //ma.la ki.ʈa xai.bɔ// “What will Mala eat?”

In Figure 2, we see that in the phonological phrase [ki.ʈa], wh-word /ki.ʈa/ “what” is the main stressed word and the first syllable /ki/ of the phonological word /ki.ʈa/ is the main stressed syllable which carries H* pitch accent. The boundary tone that falls here is low (L%). So in the I-Phrase //ma.la ki.ʈa xai.bɔ// “What will Mala eat?”, the *leftmost* Phonological phrase [ki.ʈa] “what” is the strongest phonological phrase as it carries main stressed word /ki.ʈa / which attracts pitch accent.

Like the previous examples, in the case of wh-question with utterance final wh-word the same intonation contour is noticed. The main stressed word i.e. wh-word /ki.ʈa / receives H* pitch accent and boundary tone of IP receives Low tone (L%).

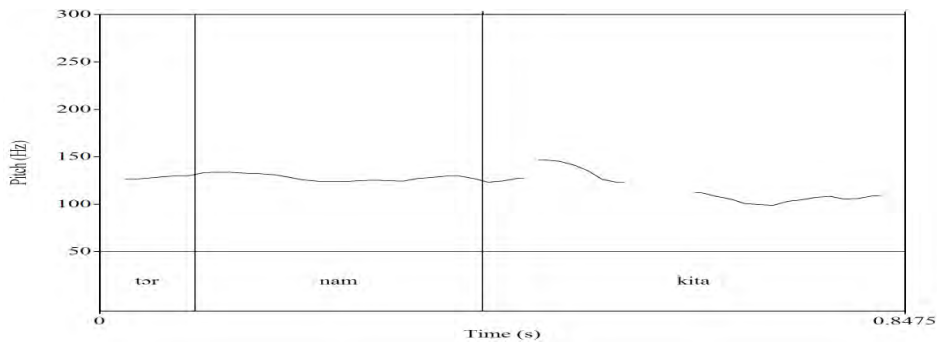


Figure 3. //ʈɔr nam ki.ʈa // “What is your name?”

In Figure 3, wh-word /ʈɔr nam ki.ʈa/ “what” is placed at sentence final position and it is the main stressed word in the sentence. The pitch accent that falls on the nucleus of the first syllable /ki/ of the wh-word /ki.ʈa/ is high tone (H*), and low (L%) tone acts as a boundary tone.

From the simplest description of SHB wh-questions with utterance initial or medial or final wh-word, it can be stated that in SHB the intonation

contour of wh-questions is rise-fall. Besides the above examples of SHB wh-questions, there are some other examples of wh-questions where SHB speakers use clitic – ba. In such cases also the same rise-fall contour is noticed (see Figure 4). In Figure 4, wh-word /xɛ/ “who” occurs with the following clitic /-ba/ and the same intonation pattern i.e. H* as a nucleus tone and L% as a boundary tone are used.

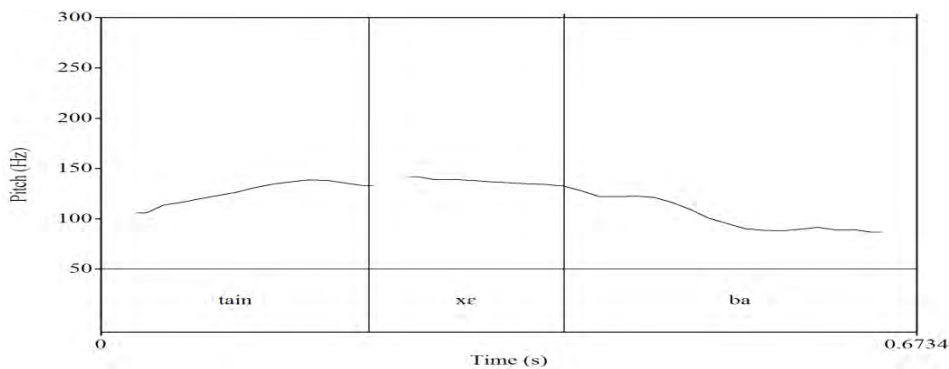


Figure 4. //t̪ain xɛ ba// “Who is he?”

Contrastive analysis between English and SHB

In this section, first I will demonstrate the contrastive picture of English and SHB in respect to phonological aspects such as segments, syllable, stress, and intonation. Then, I will discuss the phonological aspects of Sylheti English, a variety of English spoken by Sylheti people.

In spoken communication clear pronunciation is essential. When learners have good command over pronunciation and intonation they are more likely to communicate effectively even though they produce minor inaccuracies in vocabulary and grammar. The various features that constitute the production of sounds in English are illustrated below.

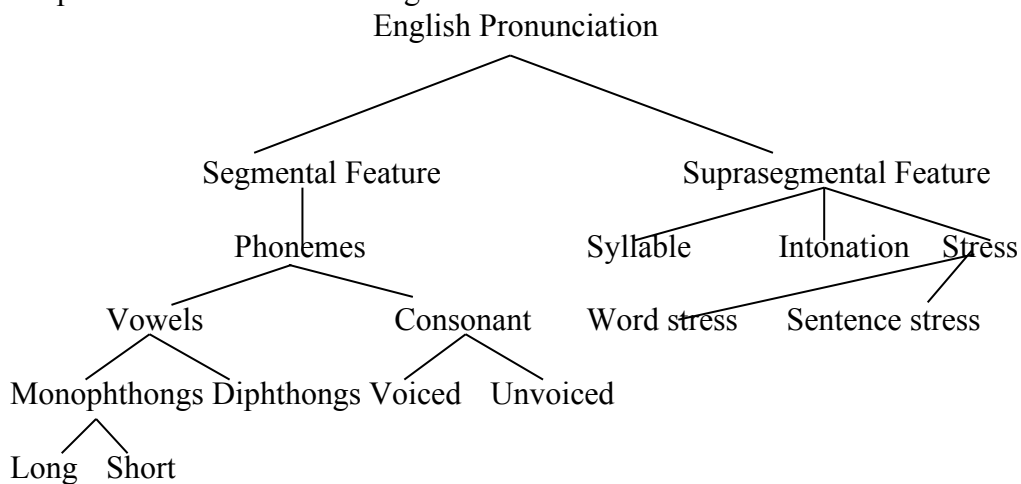


Figure 5. Aspects of English pronunciation in respect of segmentals and suprasegmentals

Figure 5 illustrates the aspects of English pronunciation in respect of segmentals and suprasegmentals. I start with segmental features. In comparison with the picture of the vowel inventory of the L1 of the SHE speakers, the target language i.e. English has a system of twelve monophthongs including long and short that are shown in Tables 1 and 2.

Table 1

English short monophthongs

	Front unrounded	Central unrounded	Back rounded
High	ɪ		ʊ
High-mid	e	ə	
Low-mid		ʌ	ɒ
Low	æ		

Table 2

English long monophthongs

	Front unrounded	Central unrounded	Back rounded
High	i:		u:
High-mid			
Low-mid		ɜ:	ɔ:
Low			ɑ: (unrounded)

In SHB there are five vowels –/ i u ɛ ɔ a / with one allophonic variant each of /ɔ/ and /ɛ/ i.e. the high mid vowels o and e respectively. For clarity Table 3 shows SHB monophthongs.

Table 3

SHB monophthongs

	Front unrounded	Central unrounded	Back rounded
High	i		u
High-mid			
Low-mid	ɛ		ɔ
Low			

It is obvious from the comparison between the two vowel systems that English carries more variations regarding monophthongs in comparison with

SHB. Our findings tell us that when SHB speakers learn English they have a tendency to reduce English vowels according to the system of their L1 vowel phonology. Table 4 shows the reduction of English monophthongs in SHE by SHB speakers.

Table 4
SHE sounds

English	SHE
i: ɪ →	i
e æ →	ɛ
ɜ: ʌ ɑ: →	a
ɒ ɔ: →	ɔ
u: ʊ →	u
ə →	Null

The left column of Table 4 shows RP vowels and the right column their reduced correspondents in SHE. The first point of difference is the lack of [ATR] feature in the reduced version. It implies that SHB phonology does not possess phonemic difference between short and long vowels. Hence during their pronunciation of English vowels [+ATR] feature is lost. In the reduced version SHB speakers retain only [+high] and [-back] features. We show the change from long front vowel i: to short high vowel i, to begin with.

i: → i

English	SHE	Gloss
it	iʔ	“eat”
bit	biʔ	“beat”
mi:n	mi:n	“mean”

English /e æ/ turn into one single vowel of SHB /ɛ/. For this reason, pronunciation of many words gets deviated from the standard RP.

e æ → ɛ

English	SHE	Gloss
bæd	bɛd	“bad”
kæt	kɛʔ	“cat”
gæs	gɛʃ	“gas”

This reductionism results in the birth of SHE vowels / i ɛ/ from

English vowels /i: ɪ e æ/ in the front zone. In the back flank a similar picture is noticed — two English back high vowels /u: ʊ/ get reduced to /u /.

u: ʊ → u

English	SHE	Gloss
bu:t	bʊt	“boot”
pʊl	ɸul	“pull”

In the same way two non-high non-low English back vowels /ɒ ɔ:/ are reduced to /ɔ/.

ɒ ɔ: → ɔ

bɒdi	bɔɰi	“body”
bɔ:l	bɔl	“ball”

On the back flank we witness the reduction of English back vowels from four to two in SHE: /u: ʊ ɒ ɔ:/ → /u ɔ /.

As for central vowel reduction occurs not only in respect of quantity but also quality. Central vowels /ʌ ɜ: / are reduced to low front vowel /a/. Sometimes /ʌ / changes into /ɔ/.

ʌ → a/ɔ

English	SHE	Gloss
fʌn	ɸan	“fun”
nʌmbə	nɔmbɔr	“number”

RP central long vowel /ɜ:/ is articulated as /a/ in SHE.

ɜ: → a

English	SHE	Gloss
bɜ:d	barɰ	“bird”
sɜ:kl	sarkɰl	“circle”

This SHB low front vowel /a/ also takes the place of English lowest back vowel /ɑ:/.

ɑ: → a

klɑ:k	xlak	“clerk”
fɑ:m	ɸam	“farm”
mɑ:stə	mɑʃtɔr	“master”

The net result of all these reductions is that SHE vowel system emerges with a spectacular presence of L1 (i.e. SHB) vowels: /i u e ɔ a/ which is demonstrated in Table 5.

Table 5
SHE vowels

	Front unrounded	Central unrounded	Back rounded
High	i		u
High-mid			
Low-mid	ɛ		ɔ
Low	a		

Another mid central English vowel /ə/ creates a problem for SHB learners of English, as this vowel does not have an exact equivalent in SHB. This vowel is specially used in English in unstressed syllables. Then, which vowel do SHB speakers adopt for the articulation of the segment? It is noticed that SHB speakers replace /ə/ by a vowel from their native ones thanks to ignorance or imperfect knowledge. For instance, the first vowel in /ə.bʌv/ “above” is pronounced in English as [ə]. SHB speakers replace it with [ɛ] and place stress on it: [ɛ.bʌv]. Many such instances are noted in SHE and some are cited below.

ə → ɛ a

English	SHE	Gloss
əbaʊt	ɛbaʊt	“about”
əbaʊnd	ɛbaʊnd	“abound”
kəlkt	xalkɛt	“collect”
sɪgərət	sɪgɛrɛt	“cigarette”

This reduction gives birth to many homophonous words in SHE. In English these sounds have different pronunciations with different meanings, whereas in English they have distinct pronunciation with distinct meanings, such as, in SHE both “bet” and “bat” are replaced as /bɛt/. Some more examples are demonstrated below.

English	SHE	Gloss
fi:l	ɸil	“feel”
fil	ɸil	“fill”
kɔ:t	xɔt	“caught”
kɒt	xɔt	“cot”
bed	bɛd	“bed”

bæd	bɛd	“bad”
fu:l	ɸul	“fool”
fʊl	ɸul	“full”

Coming to diphthongs, while SHB carries 16 diphthongs English has only eight. The frequent errors SHB speakers make in respect of English diphthongs are a) in SHE, many English words with monophthongs are pronounced with diphthongs and b) many English diphthongs are substituted by monophthongs.

Monophthongs → Diphthongs		
English	SHE	Gloss
fɔ:	ɸlour	“floor”
mɔ:(r)	mour	“more”
bel	bɛl	“bell”
Diphthongs → Monophthongs		
English	SHE	Gloss
fɔləʊ	ɸɔɔ	“follow”
nju:zpeɪpə	niuzɸɛɸɛr	“newspaper”
nəʊtɪs	nuɸɪʃ	“notice”
dɛɪndʒərəs	ɸɛnzaras	“dangerous”
elbəʊ	ɛɔ	“elbow”
eɪbl	ɛbul	“able”
prəʊtɪn	ɸɔɸɪn	“protein”
reɪl	rɛl	“rail”

Like vowels, consonants also show significant variations between SHB and English. English has six plosives, nine fricatives; seven sonorants: three nasals, three approximants, and one lateral. SHB has ten plosives, four fricatives, three nasals, one lateral and two liquids. Tables 6 and 7 capture the comparative pictures.

Table 6
English consonants

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatoalveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
	Vl	Vl	Vl	Vl	Vl	Vl	Vl	Vl
	Vd	Vd	Vd	Vd	Vd	Vd	Vd	Vd

Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Flap								
Lateral				l				
Approxima nt	w				r	j		

Table 7
SHB consonants

		Labia l	Denta l	Alveola r	Retrofle x	Alveo - palatal	Vela r	Glotta l
		Vl Vd	Vl Vd	Vl Vd	Vl Vd	Vl Vd	Vl Vd	Vl Vd
Plosiv e	Un- asp	b	t̚ d̚		t d		k g	
	As p		t̚ ^h		t ^h			
Fricative		ɸ		s z	ʃ		x	h
Nasal		m		n		ŋ		
Flap				r	ɾ			
Lateral				l				

The important fact about /r/ is that in English during its articulation the tip of the tongue does not touch any part of the mouth, it only approaches the alveolar area. However, SHB pronunciation of /p/ is different from RP pronunciation: in SHB during its pronunciation tongue makes contact with palate. Again, in English /r/ is uttered in several ways depending on its position in a word. It is uttered before vowel word-initially and word-medially. In word final position it is not pronounced except when it is

followed by a vowel in the next word. The English examples below from Roach (2000) bear this out.

Prevocalic r		Postvocalic and word final r	
red	“red”	kɑ:	“car”
əraiv	“arrive”	evə	“ever”
hiəriŋ	“hearing”	hiə	“here”

On the contrary, in SHB /r/ is pronounced in all positions of the word. The difference is noticeable in the pronunciation of some English words by SHB speakers. SHB learners, orthographically guided and lacking in phonological information, pronounce r. Remember, SHB is a rhotic language, English is not.

SHE	Gloss	SHE	Gloss
xar	“car”	hard	“hard”
ɛvar	“ever”	b ^h ars	“verse”

Like vowels, for consonants also in SHE English consonants are frequently substituted by the consonants of SHB (Table 8).

Table 8
English and SHE consonants

English (RP)	SHE
p f →	ϕ
k →	x
θ ð →	t ^h ṭ ḍ
t d →	ṭ ḍ
s ʃ →	ʃ s
ʒ ʒ →	z
w j →	ui ia u i

Due to the fricativization of plosives SHB speakers always commit errors in pronouncing English plosives k and p as evidenced by the examples below.

p → ϕ, k → x		
English	SHE	Gloss

pɒkɪt	ɸɔkɛt	“pocket”
pəʊst	ɸouʃt	“post”
klɑ:s	xɛlɑʃ	“class”
kæp	xɛɸ	“cap”

In SHE, English voiceless dental /θ/ is pronounced as aspirated /tʰ/ in word initial position and in other cases non-aspirated /t/. The voiced dental /ð/ is pronounced as /d/ everywhere in SHE. These sounds are pronounced in English “with the tip touching the inside of the lower front teeth and the blade touching the inside of the upper teeth” (Roach, 2000, p. 51). However, in SHE dental /t d/ are pronounced with the tongue touching behind the upper teeth. The comparative examples shown below illustrate how in SHE English dentals change into SHB sounds.

θ → tʰ, t	ð → d	
English	SHE	Gloss
θru:	tʰru	“through”
dʌs	dʌz	“thus”

Voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ and voiceless palato-alveolar affricate /tʃ/ in most of the cases change into SHB voiceless sibilant sound /ʃ/ or voiceless alveolar fricative /s/ in SHE. The examples below bear this out.

tʃ → s, s → ʃ		
English	SHE	Gloss
tʃɑ:t	sɑt	“chart”
tʃɔ:k	sɔk	“chalk”
sʊt	ʃʊt	“suit”
stɑ:f	ʃtɑɸ	“stuff”

English voiced alveolar affricate /dʒ/ and voiced palatal fricative /ʒ/ are substituted by SHB voiced alveolar fricative /z/ in SHE.

dʒ ʒ → z		
English	SHE	Gloss
meʒə	mɛzə	“measure”
trezə	tɛzə	“treasure”

ɔ̃ækɪt zəkɛɿ “jacket”

English voiceless and voiced alveolar plosives /t d/ are replaced by SHB alveo-retroflex /ɿ ɿ/ in SHE.

t → ɿ, d → ɿ

English	SHE	Gloss
ti:tʃə	ɿisar	“teacher”
tɔ:k	ɿɔk	“talk”
dɒg	ɿɔg	“dog”
dɒl	ɿɔl	“doll”

In English, “when the voiceless plosives /p t k/ begin the word, there is likely to be an audible puff of air following the release” (Davenport & Hannahs, 2005, p. 22). In SHB we notice aspiration only in the case of a few segments such as dentals /t d/. Velar /k/ retains aspiration selectively and this aspiration is phonemic as it distinguishes meaning. Due to the absence of phonetic aspiration of voiceless plosives SHB speakers do not apply this rule in SHE. The following data is illustrated.

English	SHE	Gloss
p ^h en	ɸɛn	“pen”
t ^h aim	taim	“time”
keik	xeik	“cake”

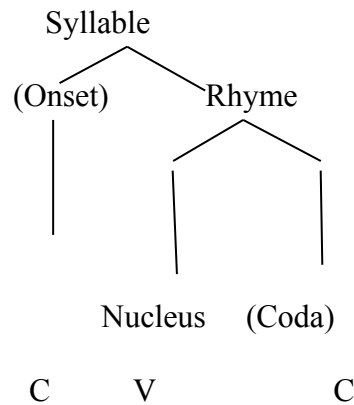
In English there are two semivowels /j w/, but SHB attests no clear presence of semivowels. How do SHB speakers cope with the English semivowels!

j → i/ia	w → u/ua	
English	SHE	Gloss
wɔ:k	uak	“walk”
wɒn	uantɿ	“want”
jʌŋ	iaŋ	“young”
jes	ies	“yes”

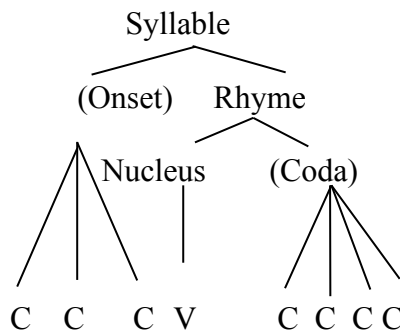
SHB speakers replace English semivowels /w/ and /j/ by vowels /u/ and /i/ respectively. Like the errors occur in segments SHB speakers also do supra-segmental errors regarding syllable, stress, tone and other factors. The process of syllable division of the word is a natural process in a language. The arrangements of the syllables in a word are shared by the native speakers dictated by intuition. For example, in English there are some words which can

have variable pronunciation: “bottling” can be parsed into two or three syllables; “realistic” in three or four. So, variable syllabification is a reality, though treated as marginal and hence immaterial in literature. Let us look at the picture of syllable structures of SHB vis-a-vis English.

Syllable structure in SHB



Syllable structure in English



From the above, it is obvious that English has a complex syllable structure unlike SHB. The former permits consonant clusters at syllable margins i.e. onset and coda. The language allows three consonants in the beginning of a syllable and up to four in the end. The following set testifies to this point.

CV(C)

- ki: “key”
- rʌn “run”
- fi:l “fill”
- sæt “sat”

CCV(C)

- stɪŋ “sting”
- plei “play”
- traɪ “try”
- sməʊk “smoke”

CCCV(C)

- splɪt “split”
- stri:m “stream”jw
- strɒŋ “strong”
- straɪk “strike”

One important thing is that in comparison to CCC- clusters, CC- clusters show a huge variety of combinations. There are some constraints operational on English syllable structure and these are as follows. In English except /ŋ/ any other single consonant can function as an onset of a syllable. Besides this, in English no words can begin with nt, lk, mp, tl, dl, ps, pm, vw, rd. /t d θ/ cannot be combined with /l/ in onset cluster; nasals cannot be combined with stops in onset. In the onset cluster the fricatives /v ð z ʒ / never occur. In case of three element onset clusters, the initial consonant is invariably voiceless alveolar stop /s/, the medial one a voiceless plosive such as /p t/ or /k/ while the third or final consonant before the vowel should without exception be any one of the set of liquids and glides /l r w j/.

Like the onset, in the field of English coda we find it permits up to four consonants to end a syllable. The two consonant coda clusters are predominant compared to three consonant clusters. In English /l w j / never occur as coda consonant. English coda contains from zero to four consonants as testified by the following words.

VC	VCC	VCCC	VCCCC
i:z “ease”	bent “bent”	tempt “tempt”	tempts “tempts”
æm “am”	bæŋk “bank”	tekst “text”	teksts “texts”
ɔ:t “ought”	belt “belt”	nekst “next”	prompts “prompts”

From this comparison, it is obvious that syllable structure of SHB is much simpler than in English. So pronunciation of an English syllable with cluster becomes problematic to the SHB learners of English. One needs to investigate how SHB speakers negotiate with the clustered margins of English. SHB speakers of English adopt certain strategies so as to pronounce the English clusters according to the phonotactics of their own language. In such cases, learners delete a consonant from the cluster or sometimes they insert a vowel inside the cluster or before the cluster, and re-syllabify the syllable according to SHB phonotactics. The following examples illustrate this.

Vowel Epenthesis in onset cluster

English	SHE	Gloss
blaus	bɛ.lauz	“blouse”
sleit	sɛ.lɛt	“slate”
plastik	φɛ.las.tik	“plastic”
klas	xɛ.laʃ	“class”

Deletion in onset cluster

English	SHE	Gloss
preznt	ɸɛzɛn	‘present’
praivt	ɸaibɛt	‘private’
ɔreɪn	ɔɛɪn	‘drain’

Deletion in coda cluster

English	SHE	Gloss
pænt	ɸɛn	pant
læmp	lɛm	lamp
pʌmp	ɸam	pump

Now we examine some other common errors of SHB speakers in speaking English. However, before analyzing these errors we will look at how English speakers pronounce them and what is the reason behind these types of pronunciation. In English some syllables are strong and some are weak. There are some strategies to identify strong syllable and weak syllable. Weak syllables are always unstressed. Strong syllables always have coda if the vowel is short. At the end of the word, there may be a weak syllable ending with a vowel. The vowel /ə/ is always associated with weak syllables which is common in English. /ə/ or schwa is typically found as the first vowel in “above” or the last vowel in “extra”.

This phenomenon of weak and strong syllable is absent from SHB phonology. That is why SHE speakers do not resort to reducing unstressed vowel: in fact, the phenomenon of reduction is absent in SHB phonology. The examples below make it clear.

English	SHE	Gloss
lɪtrətʃə	lɪtʃɛsɛr	“literature”
bɛtə	bɛtɛr	“better”
næʃnlə	nɛʃnɛl	“national”
əʊpən	ɔɸɛn	“open”

A vowel acts as a nucleus in almost all syllables of a language and on either side of this vowel, there may have one or more consonants as its margins. For example, in /bed/ the vowel acting as the nucleus is /e/ and the consonant at the margins are /b/ and /d/. In English, some consonants act as the nucleus of syllables. English consonants /n m l r/ can function in this way: /teɪbl/ “table”. These consonants are called syllabic consonants. In SHB only

vowel can act as nucleus: the phenomenon of syllabic consonants is absent. For that reason, SHB learners of English face trouble during the pronunciation of English words with syllabic consonants as they treat them as consonants and insert a vowel before it as exemplified in the comparison below of English and SHB examples.

English	SHE	Gloss
sɪmpl	simɸul	“simple”
bɒtl	buɸl	“bottle”
pædl	ɸɛɸl	“paddle”
ləukl	lukal	“local”
strʌgl	ʃtʌgul	“struggle”

In English, listeners can identify the words based on their stress patterns. For that reason, if stress patterns of English are not noted carefully by the English learners in the pronunciation of the words, it results in errors in speech. In this regard, Bansal (1976) opines that in India misperception arises because of the errors in the stress patterns of English.

To get a clear picture of English stress patterns Roach (2000) is helpful. He mentions that the rhythm structure of English language is “stress-timed”. This means that in English “stressed syllables tend to occur at relatively regular intervals whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not” (Roach, 2000, p. 134). Three levels of stress are primary stress, secondary stress, and absence of any stress. The strongest type of stress is the primary stress whereas secondary stress is stronger than the unstressed syllable but the weaker than the primary stress. The stress system of English is not fixed and there are many variations which give a complex stress system to English.

In English, the falling of stress on a syllable is dependent on the structure of the syllable, whether it is light or heavy. A syllable is considered as heavy in English if it consists of a long vowel or diphthong or a vowel followed by a coda. On the contrary, when a syllable is formed with a short vowel and it does not have any coda, it is considered a light syllable. The stress system is also based on “whether the word is morphologically simple, or whether it is as a result either of containing one or more affixes (that is, prefixes or suffixes) or of being a compound word or the grammatical category of a particular word (noun, verb, adjective), or how many syllable the word has, or what the phonological structure of those syllable is”. (Roach, 2000, p. 97). Another fact is that in English the occurrence of stress can be on any of the syllables: antepenultimate, penultimate or final. However, stress pattern may vary within different forms of the same word for example “logic” has main stress on “lo”, but in “logicality”, “ca” bears main stress, and in “logician” it is “gi” which is most prominent. Another kind of stress in English

is function stress that helps to distinguish words. For example, words like “perfect”, “combat”; each of these has two different stress patterns depending on the position of the main stress. If the first syllable is stressed the word is noun, and if the second syllable is stressed we have a verb.

Other factors involved in English stress system include ascertaining the word class (noun, adjective, verb.), and the nature of suffixes that may form part of the word (-ate, -ic, -ity). Discussion on these follows as per Roach (ibid.).

In two-syllable words, only one syllable gets stressed — either the first or the second, never both. The rule is that stress always falls on strong syllable e.g., /ˈkʌm.fət/ “comfort”, /ˈkʌm.pəs/, “compass”, and /ˈfeɪ.və/ “favour”. Converse, second syllable, being strong, gets stress in /ə.ˈbrɔːd/ “abroad”, and /ə.ˈbrest/ “abreast”. If the final syllable contains əʊ, it is considered unstressed such as /ˈreɪ.dɪəʊ/ “radio”, and /ˈbɒ.rəʊ/ “borrow”. In the case of nouns, stress placement is governed by a different rule. Stress is placed on the first syllable if the second syllable is formed with a short vowel (/ˈmʌ.nɪ/, “money”, /ˈprɒ.dʌkt/ “product”). However, if the second syllable is heavy, stress falls on the second – /ɪ.ˈsteɪt/ “estate”, /dɪ.ˈzaɪn/ “design”.

In three-syllable words stress pattern is complicated. In the case of verbs, the stress falls on the final syllable if it is heavy, for example, /en.tə.ˈteɪn/ “entertain”, /re.zə.ˈrekt/ “resurrect”. Otherwise, the preceding syllable attracts stress if it is strong. For example: /ɪŋ.ˈkaʊn.tə/ “encounter”, and /dɪ.ˈtɜː.mɪn/ “determine”. The initial syllable attracts stress if both the second and third syllables are weak, such as /ˈpæ.rə.dɪ/ “parody”. Like disyllabic words, in tri-syllables also nouns require a distinct rule. A final weak syllable or a final one ending in əʊ is unstressed. If the middle syllable is strong, it takes stress as in /dɪ.ˈzɑːs.tə/ “disaster”, /pə.ˈteɪ.təʊ/ “potato”. The first syllable gets stressed if both the second and third syllables are not strong as in /ˈkwɒn.tə.tɪ/ “quantity”, /ˈkʌs.tə.dɪ/ “custody”. Thus, the above rules ensure that stress falls mostly on strong syllables.

English polysyllables are generally derived through affixation and hence complex. Sometimes an affix itself receives the primary stress: /se.mi.sɜːkl/ “semicircle”. Stems getting stressed is the norm otherwise: compare /ˈple.zn̩t/ “pleasant” with /ˈʌn.ple.zn̩t/ “unpleasant”. Under affixation stress can shift albeit within the stem e.g. /ˈmæɡ.nət/ “magnet”, /mæɡ.ˈne.tɪk/ “magnetic”. When polysyllabic suffixes are attached commonly the first suffixal syllable gets the primary stress. In case the stem too consists

of more syllables than one, one non-final in the stem will get secondary stress. For example, /dʒə.'pʌn/ “Japan” → /dʒæ.pə.'ni:z / “Japanese”. Some examples of words where suffixes that do not affect stress are “-able”: /'kʌm.fət/ “comfort”, /'kʌmf.təbl/ “comfortable”. Some suffixes, -eous, -ic affects stress. In such cases, the primary stress falls on the last syllable of the stem such as /əd.'vɑ:n.tɪdʒ/ “advantage” but /,æd.vən.'teɪ.dʒəs/ “advantageous”; /'klaɪ.mɪt/ “climate” but / klaɪ.'mæ.tɪk/ “climatic”. Finally, when suffixes such as -ance, -ant and -ary are used in stems consist of only single syllable, stem tends to attract stress. When the stem has more than one syllable, the stress is on one of the syllables in the stem.

With these Roach (2000) also points out some other necessary rules to remember for learning the correct stress placement of English words. First, before stress placement, the speaker should determine whether the word is simple or complex. Next, the speaker should know the parts of speech of the word such as whether the word is noun or verb or adjective. In addition to the number of syllables and the phonological structure of those syllables in the word. Significantly, though Roach’s set of rules does not help to explain the stress pattern of all English words, they can still be applied to major categories of English lexical words such as nouns, verbs, and adjectives, though not to function words such as articles and prepositions.

Compared to English SHB metrics is very simple. SHB metrical pattern is binary. Word stress is syllable based as this dialect builds syllabic trochee from left to right iteratively. The minimal requirement for the prosodic word template is disyllabic. This disyllabic requirement is also fulfilled for a monosyllabic word or an odd-numbered heavy syllable stranded otherwise at the edge of the prosodic zone with the presence of a virtual syllable - a mechanism popularly called catalexis. A heavy syllable that normally attracts stress is constituted of a light monophthong followed by a coda consonant.

In the case of word stress of SHE the influence of SHB phonology is strongly present. English is a language in which lexical stress can be movable. Excepting a few instances in most of the cases regardless of grammatical class, an inviolable rule of SHB stress system dictates that the first syllable of a word has to be stressed. In SHB, stress placement takes place from left to right in a word. However, in English the direction is from right to left for example /dɪs.'mɪs/. SHB speakers misplace the stress applying it from left to right as in /'dɪs.miʃ/. The examples below of stress system of SHE show how it is different from English stress system due to the influence of mother tongue.

Stress placement in SHE

English	Foot Typology	SHE	Foot Typology	
ˈpre.znt (N)	(ˈLH)	ˈφɛ.zɛn (N)	(ˈLH)	“present”

pri.ˈznt (V)	L(ˈH)	ˈφε.zɛn (V)	(ˈLH)	“present”
bə.ˈlʊn	L(ˈH)	ˈbɛ.lʊn	(ˈLH)	“balloon”
di.ˈzɑːn	L(ˈH)	ˈdʒi.zain	(ˈLH)	“design”
ˈkɒn.dʌkt (N)	(ˈHH)	ˈkɒn.dʌk (N)	(ˈHH)	“conduct”
kən.ˈdʌkt (V)	L(ˈH)	ˈkɒn.dʌk (V)	(ˈHH)	“conduct”
di.ˈleɪ	L(ˈL)	ˈdʒi.le	(ˈLL)	“delay”
kə.ˈmi.ti	L(ˈLL)	ˈxɒ.mi.ti	(ˈLL)L	“committee”
ˈdem.dʒə.rəs	(ˈHL)L	ˈdʒɛn.za.ras	(ˈHL)(H)	“dangerous”

The other aspect of prosodic phenomenon namely intonation will be looked upon now. Intonation has a great role in communication. Along with conveying linguistic information, it also regulates discourse.

As for SHB wh-questions we noted earlier that in SHB wh-phrase is considered by the native speakers as the most prominent one in wh-questions. Therefore, the pitch accent of the wh-phrase acts as the nuclear accent of the question. Another thing noted is that in SHB wh-questions also a low boundary tone (L%) is placed at sentence final position.

However, in English “the nuclear accent in wh-questions normally goes on the rightmost content word as in declaratives” (Ladd, 2008, p. 224). Ladd shows that English has, “Where are you GOING?”, rather than “WHERE are you going?” It means, in the sentence “Where are you going?”, a special neutral location for the main stress is “going” rather than “where” which indicates falling (HL%) boundary tone in the English wh-question.

As for the English wh-question spoken by SHB speakers, we realize that a significant influence of mother tongue intonation pattern falls on SHE. In the case of SHE wh-question, the prominence always falls on the wh-phrase rather than the rightmost content word, and low boundary tone (L%) is assigned rather than falling (HL%). The Intonation pattern of wh-question in SHE is shown in the following representatives of SHE wh-questions (Figure 6).

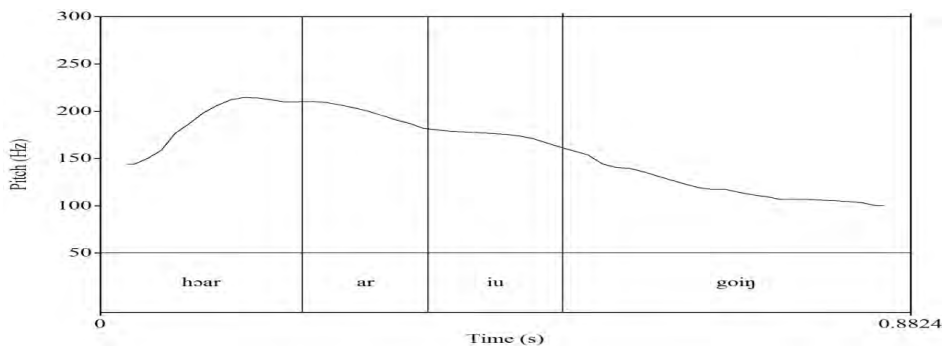


Figure 6. //ɔa ər iu ɡoɪŋ// “Where are you going?”

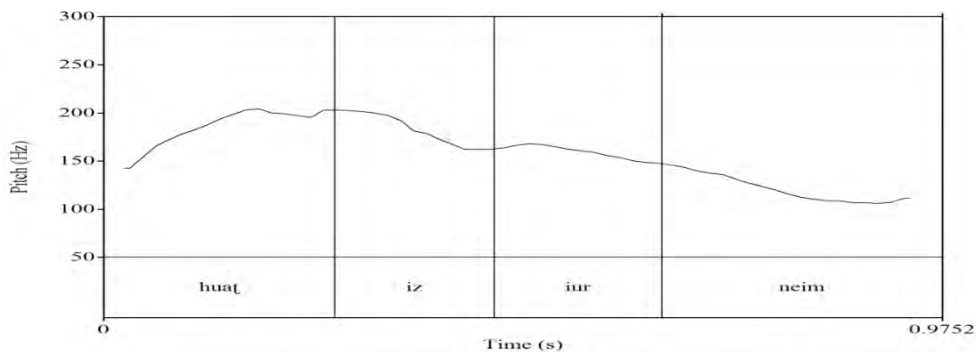


Figure 7 //uaɤ ɪz iur naim// “What is your name?”

Figures 6 and 7 show that SHB speakers give more prominence to wh-word “where” or “what” rather than the rightmost content word “go” or “name”, and they attach low boundary tone (L%) under the influence of their mother tongue intonation. So it can be said that the “error” made by SHB speakers is due to the interference of L1 with L2. The “incorrect” intonation pattern may also convey some kind of meaning, but it may not express the intended meaning and misunderstanding may easily take place. So there is a need for SHB speakers to learn proper intonation pattern of English.

Recommendations

The results of the comparative study of English and SHB sounds help us to understand the factors regarding the errors committed by SHB speakers during their pronunciation of English words. While teaching English to SHB students the concerned teacher must keep in his/her mind some important points. Students should be aware of the fact that the application of mother tongue rules in the target language produces wrong structures. SHB students should be familiarized with the complex syllable structure of English including complex margins. Teachers should make SHE speakers refrain from using vowel epenthesis, initial or internal, as the latter distorts English complex margins. SHB learners of English should have proper knowledge of the function of /ə/ in English. Besides making the SHE speakers learn the rules, equal emphasis should be given on regular drills to maximize learners’ awareness about the differences between the native system and the target system.

For a learner of English to predict the stress pattern from a written form of the English word is a difficult task. On the contrary, native speakers do not face such problems as they are able to guess the stress pattern of unfamiliar words. It implies that there are some underlying rules of English stress system though these rules for stress are complex and have many exceptions. As English stress system is in part rule-governed so it is good for learners of English to learn the most useful patterns of English stress system. The guidelines are like traditional advice to non-native English learners for

memorizing the stress pattern of words when they learn and they must apply them. Since incorrect stress placement causes major intelligibility problems for foreign learners it needs to be treated seriously. Finding appropriate practice and testing materials for word stress is effective for use in the classroom.

So to remove the hindrances which SHB speakers face during their speaking in second language, the teacher should make SHB learners of English aware of the items of difference between the phonetics and phonology of the two systems and alert them about the L1 interference with L2. Therefore, the awareness of L1 and L2 phonological systems will be of immense help to improve second language learning. The appropriate application of the approaches mentioned above promises to improve pronunciation, stress placement, and intonation of SHB speakers. Besides learners of English, these pedagogical issues will be beneficial to the teachers, material producers, language planners, and researchers as well. A systematic analysis of the learners' errors will help in improving the status of the teaching-learning process compared to the one(s) that exists now.

Conclusion

This paper offers a contrastive picture of SHB and English phonology to show how the differences create hindrances in the way of SHB speakers' learning of English correctly. In the process, it has highlighted the causes behind the systematic errors committed by SHB speakers. From the analysis of English data spoken by Sylheti speakers, it comes to the fore that while learning English, the properties of SHB phonology interfere with the phonology of English. Due to this interference, SHB speakers commit many errors in their spoken English.

The CA between SHB and English phonological properties will make the Sylheti learners of English aware of the divergences between their mother tongue and second language. This knowledge is sufficed to aid them to attenuate the gap between SHE and English and thus, making the SHB learners better users of English.

The study, nevertheless, has some limitations. It primarily exhibits the interference of Sylheti Bangla in learning English with regard to phonology. However, it is also observed that Sylheti speakers not only commit errors in the case of pronunciation but also in other areas such as in the use of English articles, and prepositions. The learners also face difficulties in constructing sentences. These errors indicate that besides phonological interference, English spoken by Sylheti speakers also encounters interference of L1 grammar, syntax, and morphology. Since the domain of this paper is exclusive to phonological interference, the potential examination of interference of L1 in other linguistic aspects can be studied in further research.

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Note on Contributor

Dr. Arpita Goswami is working as an assistant professor in the school of Humanities at Kalinga Institute of Industrial Technology, Bhubaneswar, Orissa, India. She has completed her Doctorate degree in English from Tripura University (A Central University). She is NET (UGC) and NESLET qualified. Email: arpig99@gmail.com