Introducing English Pronunciation Teaching in Indian Educational System – 'Why' and 'How'

Reena Maskara, Masters Student

Abstract

English is used as a l*ingua franca* in India. However, English has diverse dialects due to the influence of various local languages of India. In addition, the Indian educational system does not give much stress on learning English pronunciation causing variation in spoken English. The influence of local language in spoken English could be minimized by introducing phonetics (English pronunciation) English language-teaching curriculum of India. This paper aims to a) explore the existing English pronunciation problems; b) find the need addressing these problems; c) propose various solutions and their priority. We found that English pronunciation as a problem and phonetics' teaching is a need for Indian students. The IPA phonetic symbols should be part of the Indian education system. Even a surface level awareness of phonetics might bring a lot of uniformity in various Indian English dialects.

Keywords – English, Lingua Franca, IPA, Phonetics, India

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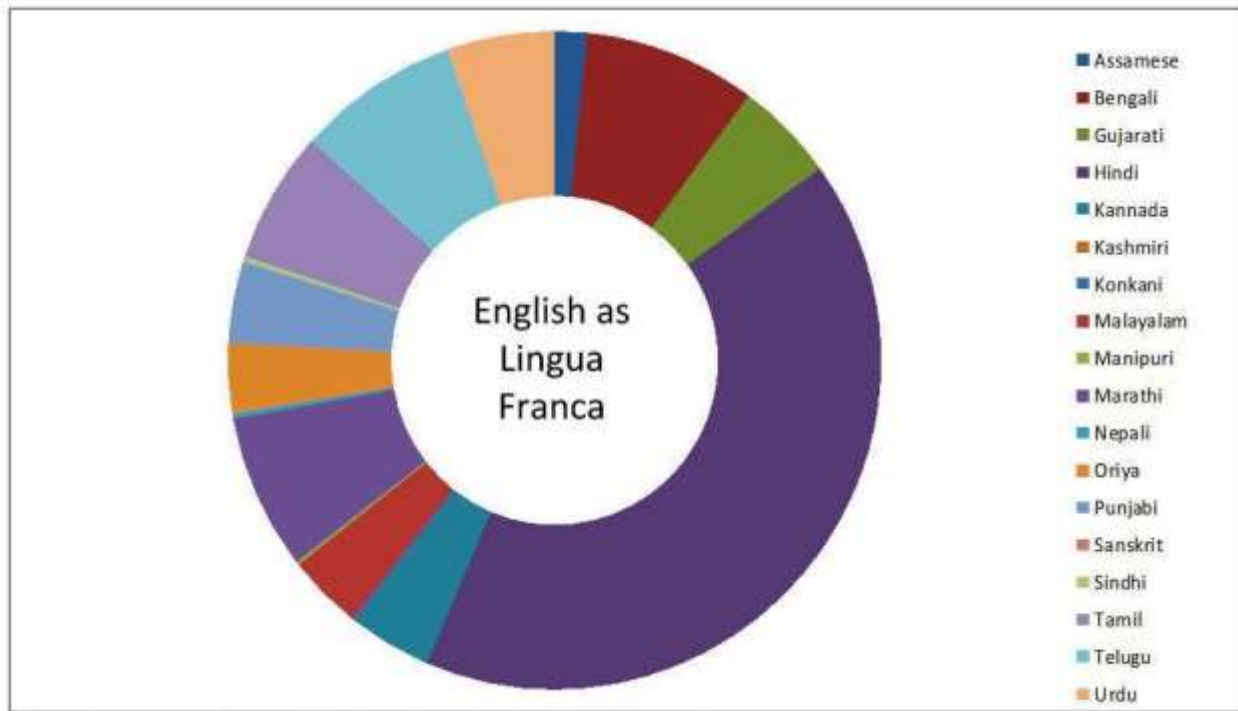Introducing English Pronunciation Teaching in Indian Educational System – 'Why' and 'How'

When we talk about the World Englishes, we cannot ignore Indian English because it is widely spoken. The Indian census has not actually counted the numbers of English speakers recently; however, the English speakers are estimated to be in the range 9 percent (100 million) to 33 percent of her population (350 million speakers). There are 100-200 million fluent speakers of English, and 300 - 400 million people can manage to speak (Enokizono, 2000).

In India, there are 28 states and more than 18 official languages as listed in Figure 1. Recently, the survey said that around 325 languages are spoken, and more than 700 dialects exist in India. Most languages in India link up with to one of the four language families: Indo-Aryan, Dravidian, Tibeto-Burmese and Austro-Asiatic (Vanishree, 2011).

Gujarati, Bengali, Urdu, and Sindhi are common languages in North India. These languages originated from the Sanskrit language and linked to the Indo-European group (Mallikarjun, 2002). The people of North India often use Hindi language as a Lingua Franca (Hohenthal, 2003). On the other hand, the South Indian languages such as Telugu, Tamil, Kannada and Malayalam originated from Dravidian group, a very different group (Mallikarjun, 2002). When a North Indian migrates to South India and vice versa, English is used as a Lingua Franca - a language that inherited from the British during their two-hundred-year rule (Enokizono, 2000; Syam, 2012). English is popular in India not only because English is an international language, rather English is a need for Indian people to communicate each other (Syam, 2012).

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Source: http://www.languageinindia.com/nov2001/1991Languages.html

Figure 1 – Distribution of Indian Languages and English as Lingua Franca

English has various dialects in India due to the influence of local languages. In the school, students have to study both local language and English as compulsory language. On average, an Indian student needs to learn 3-4 languages. For example, someone from Western India, has to learn the West Indian language Marwari, a dialect of Hindi, to deal with local shopkeepers, servants, workers, whereas Hindi and English languages as a required course in the school. In some cases, as a student has to move to another part say West India to East India, he/she may have to learn an additional local language. These local languages mainly influence the English pronunciation because people resort to local language to learn English pronunciation

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(Pickering & Wiltshire, 2000). Phonetics is not part of the English language-teaching curriculum.

The students learn English through their first local language.

For example, Hindi speakers learn English through following chart:

Vowels		Consonants				
अ	a	क् k	ख् kh	ग् g	घ् gh	ङ् n
आ (T)	A					
इ (ि)	i	च् c	छ् ch	ज् j	झ् jh	ञ् n
ई (ी)	I					
उ (ु)	u	ट् T	ठ् Th	ड् D	ढ् Dh	ण् N
ऊ (ू)	U					
ऋ (ृ)	R	त् t	थ् th	द् d	ध् dh	न् n
ॠ (ॄ)	RR					
ऌ (ॢ)	lr.	प् p	फ् ph	ब् b	भ् bh	म् m
ए (े)	e					
ऐ (ै)	ai	य् y	र् r	ल् 1	व् v/w	
ओ (ो)	o					
औ (ौ)	au					
अं (ं)	m.	श् S	ष् sh	स् s	ह् h	ज्ञ् jn
अः (ः)	:					

Source: http://www.cedar.buffalo.edu/script/dscript.html

Similarly, a Tamil (South Indian) learns English through following chart:

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க k [k, g, x, ɣ, h]　　த t [t̪, d̪, ð]　ல l [l]　　　ஜ j [ʤ]

ங ṅ [ŋ]　　　ந n [n̪]　　வ v [ʋ]　　ஷ ṣ [ʂ]

ச c [ʧ, ʤ, ʃ, s]　ப p [p, b, β]　ழ z, l, r [ɻ]　ஸ s [s]

ஞ ñ [ɲ]　　　ம m [m]　　ள ḷ [ɭ]　　ஹ h [h]

ட ṭ [ʈ, ɖ, ɾ]　　ய y [j]　　ற r, R [r, t, d]　க்ஷ kṣ [kʂ]

ண ṇ [ɳ]　　　ர r [ɾ]　　ன ṉ, N [n]

ஃ = āytam - turns p into f and j into z, e.g. ஃபீ fī [fiː]　ஃஜி zi [zi]

Above two examples show how teachers use local languages to teach English. We can look at one example like English alphabet M=/m/ is taught in different ways, at different places in India, for an example, */m/ = yum, /m/= am, /m/ = ma.*

The teachers also believe that it would be easy for students to learn English, if they use local language to teach English (Gurrey, 1955). Somehow, this type of teaching actually works. In a good English medium school, where students start English learning in kindergarten, they start to read and memorize spellings in the first standard, similar to their first language. The teachers do not put much effort to teach pronunciation; rather they concentrate on teaching vocabulary and grammar. The teachers believe that students' English should be grammatically correct. A speaker should be fluent. They rarely care about global English.

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However, nowadays, a good intelligible accent is a need of Indian students. In 2006, around 123,000 students studied outside India (White). The number of students studying in the USA is 100,270 in 2011–12 (Abrams, 2012). Many Indian students go to UK, Australia and New Zealand for higher study. Recently, several IT companies outsourced their work to India. A lot of doctors and engineers travel abroad for a job. In all those situations, a person has to interact with other countries' people - native or non-native speaker. In this case, intelligible accent becomes a priority for a person, much more than grammar and vocabulary.

I. Introducing English Pronunciation Teaching in Indian Educational System - 'How'

We can see from the preceding discussion that English worked as a Lingua Franca amidst various Indian languages as a 'need'; however, various accents of the same English word due to various local language influences produce various dialects of English in India (Sarangi, 2004). This is an issue posing several difficulties in communication within as well as outside India. This motivates us to teach Standard English Phonetics to Indian students. However, how to teach international accent to the student, at what level, who should teach, what should be the phonetics' syllabus, all these questions require some study in Indian context. In addition, some concerns also arise whether teaching English pronunciation may affect other aspects of English learning. We proposed following pilot study design to address the concerns.

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1. **Consider International Phonetic Alphabet represented Received Pronunciation (IPA-RP) as a baseline**

   The spoken Indian English is close to Received Pronunciation (Standard British English); therefore, IPA-RP might be considered as a baseline (Hohenthal, 2003).

2. **Compare the prominent language of each state with RP to find problems associated with each state**

   India is geographically divided into 28 states based on language. We can find the English pronunciation problem of each state. For example, we selected three languages of India (Hindi, Tamil, and Bengali) and prepared a list of problems through literature review. Table 1-3 shows a partial list of English pronunciation of three Indian states – Hindi, Tamil and Bengali respectively.

Table 1 - Hindi speakers' accent (Abayasekara, 2012; Yang, 2012)

Consonant:

- *Aspirated sound in the word initial of p/t/k/ is pronounced like the un-aspirated sound /p/ /t/ /k/*
- *Do not distinguish between /v/ and /w/ sound*
- *R pronounced as a trill /r/*
- *Sometime does not distinguish between middle position, or final position /s/ and /z/, for example, please is pronounced as /pli:s/ instead of /pli:z/*
- *Do not distinguish between /z/ /ʒ/ /dʒ/ sound*
- *Sometimes do not differentiate between /s/ and /ʃ/ sound*
- *Syllabic /l/ /m/ /n/ are replaced by voiced clusters [/l/, /m/ and /n/ are usually replaced by the VC clusters [əl], [əm] and [ən] (as in button /ˈbuʈən/)*

Vowel

- *Many Hindi speakers cannot distinguish between /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/. sound like [cot] and*

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> *[caught]*
>
> - *Sometime Diphthong is pronounced as monophthong*
>
> - *Sometime cannot distinguish between said and sad*
>
> - *Cannot distinguish between tell and tale*
>
> - *Diphthongs are not as long as a native speaker like baby /beiːbi/ and potato /peteiteu/ pronounced as /beːbi/ and /poteːto/*
>
> **Stress**
>
> - *Hindi is the syllable-timed language, whereas English is a stress-timed language. When some Hindi speakers speak English, they appear to put the stress accents at the wrong syllables, for example, Photographer /fəˈtɒgrəfə(r)/ pronounced as /fotoˈgrɒfər/*
>
> - *The stress 'as a noun' and 'as a verb' changes in English language. For example, 'récord' as a noun and 'recórd' as verb, but Hindi speakers pronounce as 'recórd' in both cases.*
>
> - *Sometime stress shift from one place to another, when we add inflectional morpheme (-sion, -ical, -ity, -alty, etc.) with the root word. For example, ˈnation and natiaˈnalty, ˈmethod and methoˈdology, however Hindi speakers stress on basic sound in both cases.*

Table 2 - Tamil speakers' accent (Tench)

> **Consonant**
>
> - *Aspirated sound in the word initial of p/t/k/ are pronounced like the un-aspirated sound /p/ /t/ /k/*
>
> - *Sometime no differentiation between /s/ /ʃ/*
>
> - *Sometime no differentiation between /j/ and /i/ east pronounce as /yiːst/*
>
> - *Sometime Word final cluster /f/ /l/ /ʃ/ are problematic*
>
> - *If at the end, there is consonant, they add /u/after a consonant, like /fan/ pronounce as /fanu/*
>
> - *The tendency to add in word- initial position /j/ before front vowels, and /w/ before back vowels*

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Vowel
• *Sometime does not distinguish between long vowel and short vowel like /ɪ/ / ɪ:/ and /u/ /u:/ commonly used long vowel*
• *The problem with diphthongs like Hindi speakers*
Stress
• *Stress problem is similar to Hindi speakers*

Table 3 - Bengali speakers' accent (Maniruzzaman, 2008; Manniruzzaman)

Consonant
• *Sometime no difference between /sip/ and /ʃip/, /s/ and /ʃ/ sound, commonly used /ʃ/sound*
• */f/ pronounce as bilabial, when actually pronounce is labio dental*
• *Sometimes, they replace /v/ by /b/*
• *Aspirated sound in the word initial of p/t/k/ is pronounced like the un-aspirated sound /p/ /t/ /k/*
• *Sometime does not differentiate between /w/ /v/ /j/*
Vowel
• *Sometime no distinction between long monophthongs and short monophthongs; all are pronounced as a long monophthong*
• *Sometime difficult to pronounce Schwa sound*
• *Diphthongs are not as long as English diphthongs*
• *Sometime difficult to differentiate between men and man*
Stress
• *Stress problem is similar to Hindi speakers*

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Four Kinds of Problems

If we take a close look at the problems of the above-mentioned three languages, the list reveals four kinds of problems:

a. **Global problem -** According to Jenkins (2000), some less significant phonetics' problems might be ignored. For examples, many Hindi speakers cannot distinguish between /ɒ/ and /ɔ:/. sounds such as [cot] and [caught]. In Tamil language, sometime no differentiation between /j/ and /i/, for example, 'east' is pronounced as /yi:st/. This type of problems exists even among native English speakers and acceptable on the global level; therefore, the teacher can exclude from the syllabus if they wish.

b. **Lack of awareness** – For example, in Hindi language they have both sound aspirated /p/t/k/ (in Hindi ph/th/kh) sound and un-aspirated /p/t/k/. The students do not know that if p, t, k come initially in the word; we should pronounce as aspirated /p/t/k/ (in Hindi ph/th/kh). Similarly, */s/* and */ʃ/* sound - short and long vowel- are available in Hindi language. An awareness of these might help students to improve pronunciation.

c. **Common problem**s - Some problems are common to all Indian states. Some common problems identified from Hindi, Tamil, and Bengali are as follows.

   Consonant

   - *Aspirated sound p/t/k/*

   - *Difficult to distinguish between v/w*

   - *Difficult to distinguish between /s and/ /ʃ/*

   - *Difficulty with final cluster*

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Vowel

- *Long vowel and short vowel*

- *Diphthongs*

- *Supra segmental feature (stress) problems are common*

d. **Specific problem** - some problems are specific to the state, for examples:

- *Difficulty with /v/ and /b/ sound in Bengali language*

- *If there are consonants at the end, Tamil speakers add /u/ sound in the end*

- *R is pronounced as a trill /r/ in Hindi language*

3. **Prioritize the problem and design the phonetics' curriculum according to the priority order**

Firstly, teachers should find if any problem is acceptable on the world level. The teacher could exclude such problems from the teaching syllabus or might just explain briefly, but no need to focus. After this, the teacher should start with phonetic awareness and then common problems across all states of India, and finally, the state-specific problem should be addressed.

4. **Implementation guidelines**

- In India, teachers need three to six-month teacher training, before joining any teaching job; therefore, the new pronunciation awareness course should be part of teacher's training curriculum in order to improve their pronunciation.

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- The listening skill is the most neglected one, in second language teaching in India (Thirumalai, 2002). However, this is as indispensable as speaking skills, and teachers should focus on both skills.

- In the kindergarten, the teachers should start teaching correct pronunciation by using native speakers' rhymes, story, audio, and video, which would motivate children to imitate the native speaker's pronunciation. The assessment is not required at this level.

- In elementary school, the teachers should teach children how to pronounce correctly, and ask them to listen to the native speakers' story and rhymes. The IPA-RP chart and assessment of pronunciation are not required at this level.

- The teacher should introduce the IPA-RP chart at 8th or 11th. The surface level phonetic understanding should be adequate for students. Some grade should be awarded based on pronunciation. The teacher can judge students' pronunciation through viva, Oral repetition, multiple-choice hearing identification, reading aloud, simple dialogues, and simple narrations (Thirumalai, 2002).

5. Assessment

We must assess whether teaching English pronunciation affected other aspects of English learning such as vocabulary, grammar, and so forth.

II. Conclusion

Overall, we feel that phonetics is a need for Indian students. The IPA phonetic symbols should be part of an Indian education system. Even a surface level awareness of phonetics might bring a lot of uniformity to the various dialects of English in India.

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Reena Maskara, Masters Student
Department of Foreign Languages and Applied Linguistics
Yuan Ze University
135, Yuan Tung Road, Chungli, Taiwan, 320
reena.maskara1984@gmail.com

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