

Research Article

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 a second language or as a foreign language. It is equally difficult for an instructor to make learners learn correct pronunciation. The challenge is greater for both learners and instructors when learners are adults or adolescents. The study aims to identify commonly mispronounced English words in Bihar and U.P. It analyzes these mispronounced words, identifies patterns of error, and examines their causes. Furthermore, the study recommends ways to improve learners' pronunciation skills and provides an (not exhaustive) list of mispronounced words. The study uses a convenience sampling method and a covert observation technique to collect the data. The data has not been collected at a single point in time, but rather over several years and across different parts of the Hindi-speaking region.

Keywords: Pronunciation, ESL, EFL, mispronounced words, Error Analysis

Introduction

In India, English is learnt for academic and professional reasons. Learners are expected to master the language competently, with added focus on the spoken form, especially ensuring that articulation and pronunciation of spoken English are free of traces or influence of the mother tongue (MT) and match international standards. The buzzword most often used in pronunciation teaching in India is the Neutralization of Indian English. We are aware of the manner in which pronunciation corrections are generally made in classrooms. Although research on the use and effectiveness of visual feedback in computer-based teaching began more than thirty-five years ago, its potential remains underexplored.

Relevance of Learning and Teaching Pronunciation

To communicate effectively, we must understand the technical aspects of pronunciation and apply them in practice. This implies that the manner of producing speech sounds plays a significant role in communication. When the teaching of spoken English in India is considered, especially the teaching of pronunciation, it has now begun to emerge from its often neglected or marginalized place in the curriculum to hold a place of prominence. In today's changing landscape, great emphasis is placed on communication skills, especially oral communication, in the 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 effective communication.

Teaching English pronunciation has been an often-overlooked aspect of English language teaching in India. Pronunciation is considered a complex aspect of language that can be introduced at a higher level. Except for elite convent schools, primarily available in the urban areas, the teaching of pronunciation has not been a priority for schools in India. Learning correct pronunciation has been one of the major challenges for a language learner, whether as a second or a foreign language. It is equally difficult for an instructor to make learners learn correct pronunciation. The challenge is aggravated for both learners and instructors when learners are adults or adolescents. One reason for this difficulty is the learners' MT. Psychologically, learners often fail to approach the target language as a separate entity. In other words, they try to learn the target language using the linguistic structure of their MT. ESL (English as a Second Language) and EFL (English as a Foreign Language) learners face more problems learning English pronunciation, as 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 consider the question from the perspective of ESL and EFL learners, the answer is yes: it is relatively difficult in terms of pronunciation. ESL and EFL learners and linguists cite many reasons, but three important factors contribute most to the difficulty of learning English pronunciation. 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 is pronounced differently in each word. It means one cannot always determine the pronunciation of English words based on 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 for ESL and EFL learners to pronounce is 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 enables its users to communicate more effectively. Pronunciation of the most borrowed words is adapted in accordance with the phonological rules of the English language. The problematic words are those that are not adapted to the language. In other words, the original pronunciation patterns of words have been retained in English, for example, words like 'resume' (as a noun), 'rendezvous', etc. These two words are 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 with the largest number of vowel sounds. How much a language is relatively difficult or easy in terms of pronunciation also depends on the number of vowel 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 fewer vowel sounds. For example, Hindi has eleven vowel sounds, whereas English has twenty. For example, learners whose MT and/or first language is Hindi generally mispronounce the word 'pay' (/peɪ/) as /pe/.

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 ways to improve the pronunciation skills of the learners
4. To provide a list (not exhaustive) of mispronounced words

Methodology

The data have been collected using a convenience sampling method (a non-probability sampling method). The researcher used the covert observation technique to collect the data. The educational qualifications of the subjects (learners) were intermediate. Their voices were observed and recorded using a high-quality voice recorder. The study uses correct pronunciation for reference from *the 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 is rarely observed that an Indian speaker of English uses Received Pronunciation (RP). Therefore, the study includes only those words that are pronounced by most of the Hindi-speaking people with the replacement of phonemes, omission of phonemes, accent on the wrong syllable, or use of phonemes from the first language, etc. However, RP has been the target of English pronunciation teachers for Indian students.

One of the purposes of the present study is to provide a list of commonly mispronounced English words by ESL learners from the Hindi-speaking region of India. However, the findings can also be generalized to other regions in India and Southern Asia. The list has been prepared based on the researcher's observations. 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.

Placing stress on the inappropriate syllable

One reason for pronunciation errors is placing the stress on the wrong syllable. It has been observed that learners consistently place stress on the first syllable, irrespective of their grammatical category. 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.mənt/	/dɪˈvel.əp.mənt/
Success	/ˈsʌkses/	/səkˈses/
Antecedent	/ˈæn.tisi:.dent/	/,æn.tiˈsi:.d ə nt/
Academic	/əˈkæd.ə.mik/	/,æk.əˈdem.ɪk/

Interference of Mother Tongue in English Pronunciation

Properties of MT affect the acquisition of the second language (hereafter SL). Sometimes MT interferes with the process of learning the SL, and sometimes it helps accelerate the acquisition of the SL. When the patterns of MT and the SL are similar, positive transfer occurs: the first language facilitates learning of the SL; whereas when they are dissimilar, negative transfer occurs: the first language hinders 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 one language, i.e. as a result of language contact’ (01). In other words, another reason for 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 its system of sounds. Whenever a learner learns a new language, particularly after the critical period, he/she is, in most cases, unable to completely get rid of the sound patterns 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 similar sounds in their mother tongue. For example:

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

Spelling pronunciation

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

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Adjective	/æddʒ.ek.tɪv/	/ædʒ.ek.tɪv/
Asthma	/ʌsthəma:/	/æs.mə/
Corps	/kə(r)ps /	/kɔ r /
Pizza	/pi:za:/	/pi:t.sə/

Prolongation of vowel sounds

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

Words	Wrong pronunciation	Correct Pronunciation
Pen	/peɪn/	/pen/
Give	/gi:v/	/gɪv/
If	/i:f/	/ɪf/
Sit	/si:t/	/sɪt/

Breaking 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 pronouncing the words. After all, the part(s) of the word 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	/gri:n.wɪtʃ/	/,ɡren.ɪtʃ/
Automobile	/ɒtə 'mæʊ.bɑɪl/	/'ɔ: .tə.məʊ .bi:l/
Today	/tu(:)'de/	/tə'deɪ/

Errors in pronouncing individual consonant Sounds

The learners mispronounce the consonant sounds, /θ/, /ð/, /f/, /w/, /z/, /tʃ/, /ʃ/ and /z/. The degree and amount of deviation from RP and SIEP vary from sound to sound. For example, learning the correct pronunciation of /θ/ and /ð/ requires a lot of training and practice, as the sounds are fricatives rather than stops. These dental fricatives are replaced in Hindi and other regional languages by the dental plosives /th/ (voiceless) and /d/ (voiced). /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/ are theoretically unable to pronounce it properly. They use the place of articulation correctly but have difficulty producing audible friction. The manner of articulation is closer to plosive than to fricative. Most of the learners pronounced the /w/ sound without rounded lips.

As far as the /z/ sound is concerned, it has been observed that this sound is almost unavailable in the pronunciation of all the learners. Even after learning how to pronounce the sound /z/ (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 it a problematic sound for Indian English speakers. The present study suggests that the CIEFL (1972) study has reliability. /tʃ/ sound is generally pronounced correctly, but some learners pronounce it as alveolar rather than palato-alveolar.

/ʃ/ sound is correctly pronounced by the learners who are educated in good schools where the 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 received education in good schools where the medium of instruction is English either lack this sound in their linguistic repertoire or are unable to distinguish between /s/ and /ʃ/. Most learners find it difficult to pronounce /z/ sounds. They replace it with a similar sound, /dʒ/.

Errors in pronouncing individual vowel Sounds

In comparison with Hindi and other regional languages spoken in the Hindi belt, English has more vowel sounds. The problematic vowel sounds are /æ/, /ə/, /ɔ:/, /eɪ/, and /oo/. In pronouncing the /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 a 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 the final position, most of the learners slightly prolong it, and some of them pronounce it like the /ʌ/ sound. The next problematic vowel sound is /ɔ:/, an open-mid back-rounded vowel. Almost all the learners pronounced the vowel as an unrounded one, and they pronounced it from almost the mid position of the mouth. The /eɪ/ sound is not available in the learners' linguistic repertoire, since all the learners have pronounced it as /e/. Like the /eɪ/ sound, /oo/ is not pronounced as a diphthong but as a pure vowel. They pronounce it like /o/.

Finding and recommendation

The analysis of the data suggests that learners are unaware of the importance of correct pronunciation. Their priority is to learn grammar, vocabulary, literature, and related areas. However, some learners from good schools where English is the medium of instruction tend to have better pronunciation and are, to some extent, aware of the importance of correct pronunciation. It also indicates that teachers pay less attention to improving learners' pronunciation in schools. In other words, the teaching of pronunciation is given the least priority in the teaching of the English language.

The first recommendation is for teachers to prioritize teaching English pronunciation. Teaching pronunciation is as important as other aspects of language teaching, such as vocabulary and grammar. The teachers, as well as the learners, will need to put their MT pronunciation patterns 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
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
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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