



## A CASE STUDY OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE STUDENTS PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS IN NSS COLLEGE OF ARTS AND COMMERCE, PARLI-VAIJANATH

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### ABSTRACT

*This research paper investigates the problems in English pronunciation experienced by the second language learners whose first language is Marathi. The study is to find the problematic sounds and the factors that cause these problems. Then find some techniques that help the Marathi speaking students to improve their pronunciation. Fifteen students of B.Com first year from Navgan Shikshan Sanstha, College of Arts and Commerce, Parli-Vaijanath, were selected for the study. The students belong to rural areas with a deep influence of mother tongue which creates hurdles in their English pronunciations. The instruments used for collecting the data were observation during teaching Phonetics in their syllabus and the structured test. The findings of the study revealed that Students of English whose language background is Marathi, had problems with the pronunciation of English vowels that have more than one way of pronunciation in addition to the consonant sound contrasts e.g. /f/,/z/,/w/,/3/ blends like 'wh' and 'ed' sounds in final position of the words. Based on the findings, the study concluded that factors such as Interference, the differences in the sound system in the two languages, inconsistency of English sounds and spelling militate against Marathi Students of English competence in pronunciation.*

**Keywords:** English pronunciation, problematic sound, ESL (English Second Language), SLA (Second Language Acquisition)

### INTRODUCTION

English language claims high standards within the global economy of languages, and learning English language is increasingly being promoted for international development initiatives.

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The focus of this article is on English as a second language ESL, and it is seen that around the world there are lot of people with strong desire to learn and speak English with correct pronunciation. There are many barriers that hinder the speakers to speak with good English pronunciation. Many studies have demonstrated that the errors made by the speakers of other languages, who speak English, are something systematic rather than random as they mingle the unfamiliar sounds with the sounds of the native language. (Ronald Carter and David Nunan, 2001); (O'Connor, 2003) noted that the errors of pronunciation that learners of English from different language backgrounds make are systematic and not accidental. So they concluded that the main problem of the speakers of other languages, who speak English, is substitution of sounds i.e. they substitute the sounds that they don't have in their native language, with other sounds which are close to them in the place of articulation. Many linguists and researchers on SLA concluded that the English pronunciation problems among speakers of other languages are the same but it is according to each language background.

In the present study the researcher had taught phonetics to the first year students of NSS College as prescribed in their syllabus. The syllabus has consonant and vowel sounds with blends and diagraphs. The students are to learn the correct pronunciations to transcribe the given words in exams and write the words of the IPA symbols of the English alphabets. The research paper mentions here the obstacles faced by these fifteen students in articulating sounds of some alphabets. Marathi language speakers faces problems in the sounds which are not familiar to them, basically consonant sounds as they replace it with the sounds of Devanagri scripts. So the research paper highlights some of the factors that influences on learning second language (L2) -English, pronunciation in particular. It also tries to identify the exact reasons behind such errors and finally try to find the suitable techniques and strategies that help the students improve their English pronunciation.

### **Factors that Influence Learning English in General :**

Researchers and linguists have drawn some linguistic dimensions such as the differences of the articulation system between the (L1) and the (L2), the inconsistency of some sounds in English language, the mother tongue interference and the influence of spelling on pronunciation. The paper gives a detailed review on the observations done by the researcher in the language classroom during a span of two months which it took to complete the specific syllabus of phonetics.

#### **1. Mother Tongue Interference**

As per the research conducted it is (Brown, 2000) found that a second language learner meets some difficulties, because his L1 affects his L2 specially in adulthood, and this effect is a

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result of L1 transfer; so it is a significant source of making errors for second language learners. (Ladefoged, 2001; Carter & Nunan, 2001) showed that mother tongue has clear influence on learning L2 pronunciation. Where L1 and L2 rules are in conflict, errors are expected to be committed by foreign learners. As also it is (Ghatage,2013) noted that Marathi has its own grammar and phonetic and therefore there is a mother-tongue pull while speaking second language .The students tend to pronounce words the way they say them in Marathi. The sounds of /f/ is therefore replaced by the sound ^ in the English words like fan, fish; /w/ is often replaced by 3 sound as in well, wish; due to this influence of L1 on L2, English uttered by these students sounds more like Marathi than English. The spellings like 'which' pronounced as /which/ instead of /wi tj7.The mispronunciation of the above sounds is the result of the over practice of the first language, as the main language of communication among these students is Marathi. The adults vocal musculature is set to pronounce foreign sounds with an accent (Yule; O'Connor, 2003) reported that the main problem of English pronunciation is to build a new set of sounds corresponding to the sounds of English, and to break down the arrangement of sounds which the habits and the systems of our LI have strongly built up. There is need of new ways of hearing and new ways of using our organs of speech. So it is too difficult to change such habits which a learner has obtained since his childhood or at least it needs very long years to be changed and after also very long time and regular practice, and all that is linked to a certain age of the learner.

## **2. Sound System Differences between L1 and L2**

Another study on the effect of sound system on learning pronunciation was done by (Alkhuli, 1983) who showed that the main problem in teaching and learning English pronunciation result from the differences in the sound system of English and the native language, so these speakers of Marathi is not accustomed to pronounce for instance /z/sound and/3/ sound, because they do not find it in their native language. This means that the organs of speech of the learner are not trained to produce such sound systems because they are unfamiliar to them; that is why its replaced by the nearest sounds such ^ as in zoo, zip and by «r sound as in measure, pleasure . English has twelve pure vowels.

These differences between the sound systems are regarded as a barrier against competence in the pronunciation of English, because the new sounds still remain strange for their organs of speech specially if they start learning English after the age of adulthood, but this problem is expected to be solved after a long time of regular practice and hard work.

## **3. Inconsistency of English Vowels**



According to Yardi (1998) Marathi has only six pure vowels these are /i, e, a, o, u, a/ while English has twelve pure vowels. Yardi (1978) in his article 'Teaching English Pure Vowels to the Marathi Learner: Some Suggestions' has mentioned that Marathi has less complex vowel system than that of English. All vowels can be short and long, depending on their positioning the word. The Marathi speakers often find it difficult to pronounce a short vowel in word-final position and a long vowel in non-final position. The Marathi learners find it bit difficult to differentiate between / o:/ and / o/. This is because Marathi does not have sound analogous to either. e.g. in words like sword and shot respectively. The Marathi speakers find it difficult to distinguish between /u/ and /u: / so they pronounce /hook/ or /look/ as / h u:d/ or /lu:k/ respectively instead of / huk/ or /luk/. Thus in English language there are twenty-four consonants and twenty vowels; that mean there are forty-four phonemes in English language. Learners of different language backgrounds will of course face some difficulties to pronounce them because of their language background (O'Connor, 2003). Researchers and linguists always connect such problems with the complexity of the vowels sound system that exists in English and the inconsistency of its pronunciation. (Cruttenden, 1994) noted that the inconsistency of English vowels causes difficulties for other language learners of English. English has eight diphthongs and in Marathi there are four (the debate is still on about the number) diphthongs. (Ghatage,2013). While pronouncing /ei/, the Marathi speakers always make mistake they can't distinguish between the sound /e/ and / ei/. The Marathi speakers find it difficult to realize the RP pure /e/ (short) vowel in the words like 'led', 'met'. They might make it long in the words like 'laid', 'made'. They have problem with /ei/ and /au/ they substitute these diphthongs with /e/ and /o/ respectively. The diphthongs in English are one vocalic element but in Marathi two separate vocalic elements. eg /ai/ is aai, and /au/ as aau. So this causes many difficulties to the learners and leads them to a mispronunciation (Cruttenden, 1994) noted that the main difficulty for all those whose own languages have a less complex vowel system, lies in the establishment of the qualitative oppositions. Instead of using the exact quality and quantity of a special sound, the learner erroneously changes either the quality or the quantity of the sound; so in a certain word the learner tends to use the variant sounds.

#### 4. Influence of Spelling on Pronunciation

It is observed that the students have difficulty in pronouncing the words from the written text. This problem is due to the spelling system in English language, because in Marathi language students can easily pronounce a word from a written text just by looking at it; so each letter represents one sound, so the relationship between the orthography and the phonology is very easy to distinguish, in addition to that there is no silent letter in Marathi language as it is found in English. Many words in English have letters, which are not pronounced. (Yule,2001) noted that the sounds of spoken English do not match up, a lot of time, with

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letters of written English In English, there are twenty-four consonants and twenty vowels; if we give to each of these forty-four units a special letter, in that way undoubtedly we can show what the student should say. If the learner knows that each letter represents a certain sound (e.g. equal number of sounds to the Letters), he can simply avoid the difficulty of spelling on pronunciation. Some words which are ordinarily spelt in the same way, are different in their pronunciation, for example lead which is pronounced /li:d/ in a phrase like, lead the way, but /led/ in another phrase lead pipe. Also there are some words spelt differently, but sound the same e.g. rain, rein, reign, all of them are pronounced /rein/. The learner who still doesn't have the mastery of pronunciation of such words, pronounces each of them by looking at its spelling, and he is expected to mispronounce them (O'Connor, 2003) e.g. the spellings ending with 'ed' is stressed by the Marathi speakers while in English it's to be pronounced as final /t/ sound. The explanatory potential of sound-spelling relationships (Carter; Nunan, 2001) reported; is something teachers should be aware of, since correspondences between orthography and phonology enables the students to predict the pronunciation of words from their spelling. So if the learner doesn't know such relationship between sound and spelling, he mispronounce words by just looking at their spellings e.g. before the n the k is silent; knee, know, knot, knight a student who didn't learn their pronunciation correctly, pronounces them with the /k/ sound. One of the problems Marathi language learners of

English face is the (r) which is very weak in its pronunciation in English (Cruttenden, 1994; Ladefoged, 2001) noted that in most forms of British English (r) can occur only before a vowel e.g. in words like red, ruler, ride, but the foreign learner should notice that its very weak and it is not pronounced like the one in Marathi.

The research paper has tried to bring to light the major problems faced by these rural students in learning phonetics and the areas of their weakness. Some suggestions are made here for these students to help them to adapt to the articulation system of English Language.

### Suggestions:

- Teaching should be focused on both recognition and production i.e. teachers should recognize the pronunciation errors and correct them and teach the students how to pronounce these sounds correctly. (Hassan, 2014)
- The use of ICT should be made for better learning of pronunciations through Language Labs. The students should use headphones to hear the standard English pronunciations for practicing phonetic transcriptions.



- The students should be motivated to speak English to practice the newly learned sounds and get used to those sounds.
- A regular practice of writing spellings should be adapted to overcome spelling mistakes.
- Reading aloud should be practiced to develop the understanding of the rules of pronunciations.
- The use of audio dictionaries should be referred to learn correct articulation and to know the meanings.

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