



THE SOUNDS OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT



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Language is defined as a system of sounds, form, structure, and meaning. All the methods of teaching English except the grammar translation method emphasize the importance of speech and oral work in the classroom. But in India, traditionally, we have been more concerned with reading and writing English and analyzing its structure and less concerned with spoken English. We also know that teaching spoken English is a part of communication skills. In our multilingual country, English serves as a valuable link language. Many of us are bilingual and intersperse our own language with English liberally. There are many styles and varieties of spoken English we have to be familiar with. There are many situations that demand English language proficiency. Single speaker situations, where the speaker uses English. Example, T.V/Radio broadcasting, cricket commentary etc. Interactions in English between two persons or more in offices, travel, hotels, etc., And the interviews, where students have to interact with members of the selection committee. All these situations point out the need for cultivating good spoken English. This paper aims to analyse the sounds of English language and the ways of pronouncing them, to make the communication a standardized one.

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INTRODUCTION

The teaching of spoken language has always lagged behind in our schools and colleges. The teacher of English in India is aware of the existence of phonetics, though uncomfortably, he/she is advised to practice good spoken English at all training courses. In actual practice however, many teachers resent the emphasis on phonetics and wonder whether it has a bearing on language teaching at all. They do not make sincere attempts to cultivate a good model of spoken English in spite of many books, dictionaries and audio lingual aids to help them. Some Indian academicians also felt that there was no need to cultivate the native speaker's standard of spoken English that is the RP- Received Pronunciation. Although many Indians themselves achieved a near RP standard in their spoken English, spoken English is neglected in schools because of the diversity of speakers of English, the absence of good models and the fact that it is not an examination subject.

PHONETICS AND PRONUNCIATION

Spoken English has to be given due attention in schools and colleges. That means every teacher using English has to have knowledge of phonetics and train students in spoken English. There is no escape from having phonetics and good phonetics at that point.

The standard of spoken English that is RP is the English used by the BBC and spoken by the educated Englishmen, in the school though in England there are varieties of English like the Scotch English, Irish English, Welsh English, Kerala English, Telugu English, and so on. In the first half of the century our models of spoken English were the English men living and working in India. Spoken English was picked up largely by imitation, when the model disappeared it was acquired by all possible means – tapes and recorders, radio and TV imitation of teachers, spelling pronouncing false analogies too.

English speech in India gradually degenerated as Babu English besides developing its own regional flavours, teachers became indifferent to spoken English, with English as a compulsory subject for the millions of primary school children, and Spoken English became a real casualty.

INDIAN ENGLISH

However there have been some attempts to define educated Indian English. Prof. Gatenby says, "Setting an Indian standard of English would save a good deal of time in teaching and learning the language." Prof.VK Gokak suggested the taperecording of the speech of educated Indians and studying the sound and speech habits leading to a working standard, intelligibility, effectiveness and social acceptance were the criteria for spoken English.

Prof Bansal says that there is a marked Indian variety of English recognized by British listeners. An Analysis of the speech of educated Indians shows that even though the qualities of the speech of educated Indians may vary from state to state. The sound system that they use is fairly uniform throughout the country. The number of phonetics that is the number of sounds does not vary much from region to region. Indian English pronunciation is thus Indian. The CIEFL evolved general Indian English which is free from regional features. Still there are many people who recommend RP as a model, also RP is better understood than any other regional variety, and most English speaking countries understand that.

PHONETICS

Indian teachers need not acquire all the knowledge of professional phoneticians, which takes years of hard work and training. A basic knowledge of phonetics will help them acquire correct pronunciation and the ability to detect mistakes in pupil's speech and correct them. On the theoretical side, he/she should know the phonetics, how the vocal organs work and how utterances may be analysed for teaching purposes; he/she should know the phonetics structure of English and of his pupil's native language. On the practical side, the teacher should have an ear sufficiently trained to diagnose mistakes and vocal organs under control to produce isolated English and of his ways of correcting mistakes. Abercrombe says, "Phonetics is a technique for the teacher not a subject to be taught. The teacher should teach pronunciation not phonetics. Or better the teacher should teach English not just pronunciation".Phonetics is thus a part of spoken



language , the other and more important part includes the element of grammar, vocabulary , usage, and social acceptability and fluency as well. The content of communication is as important as how of it. Besides good pronunciation, the speaker should know how to use the right words in the right order and all in the relation to the context or situation. These skills are as important as pronunciation itself.

PHONETIC TRANSCRIPTION

The English alphabet has 26 letters of which 5 letters are vowels, the rest all consonants, these letters and letter combination give rise to 44 sounds. Of these, there are 20 vowel sounds and 24 consonants. One or two letters represent each of these sounds. The teacher should say the sound represented by the symbol. Some letters represent more than one sound each unlike Indian languages, when one letter stands for one sound only.

For example:

LETTER	SOUND	WORD
A	/æ /	man
	/a:/	father
	/e/	many
	/ɪ/	village
	/ei/	name
	/ə/	above

The spelling combination *ough* gives rise to different sounds as in enough, bough, through, though. In some words different spellings represent the same sound

e.g. these, trees, dream, receive, machine, all representing /i:/ sound.

Therefore the international phonetic association devised a special alphabet called the international phonetic alphabet , in which each letter stand for the actual pronunciation , so the teacher should be familiar with the phonetic symbol and the phonetic script to be able to speak English correctly. He / She may consult a dictionary by Daniel Jones or the advanced learner's dictionary of current English by Hornby and others. Phonetic transcription helps us In teaching correct pronunciation, In correcting the mistakes of students, In comparing the

sounds system of native languages and English.

VOWELS (Pure Vowels)

Vowels are made by the vibration of the vocal cords and the air passing freely through the mouth. Different vowel sounds are made by a variation in the position of the tongue and by a variation in the state of the lips.

SOUND

/i:/

/ɪ/

/e/

/æ/

/a:/

/ɒ /

/ɔ:/

/ʌ/

/ɜ:/

/u/

/u:/

WORDS

sea, police, these

sit, rich, village,

ten, men, pen

man, hat, sat

father, laugh, rather

cot, pot, hot

hall, fall, call

up, cup, Luck

bird, turn, Learn

push, foot, good

fool, cool, fruit

These are pure vowels. A sound made by combining two vowels, specifically when it starts as one vowel sound and goes to another, like the oy sound in oil is called diphthong.

Thus various sounds exist in English and it is very much interesting to study about them in detail.