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## **Phonetic Peculiarities of the English Language in India**

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### **Abstract**

In India, English has the status of an official language along with Hindi. According to linguists, the English spoken in India is different from the one spoken in other countries, with it being an independent version of the English language. While working on the research, the general trends of differences between the Indian English pronunciation and the Standard English pronunciation were discovered. In our work, the phonetic peculiarities of Indian English were studied. There is a particular tendency towards assimilation with other indigenous languages of India – softening and reduction of some sounds and the abolition of reduction in others, the appearance of retroflex sounds, the replacement of interdental sounds with dental occlusive sounds, the transposition of stress, etc. Phonetic peculiarities of Indian English are explained by a different structure of the articulation apparatus of people living in India. Despite this, the educated population of India, when using Indian English, strives for a more prestigious pronunciation.

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## 1. Introduction

In 1835, the public proclamation of the Macaulay's Minutes making English mandatory was the first milestone passed by the then people of India. Macaulay's dream of making India an anglicized nation did not come true. However, the foundation of English education was laid during the colonial period. All national and international transactions are done through the medium of English. Its journey from its inception to the present era from a foreign language to the stature of the Associate Official Language of Administration has been a noteworthy achievement (Kumar, 2018).

English remains the second language in India - as the official language of the Union, as the official and higher education language, and as a link language among educated people if they do not share a common Hindi language. Therefore, it has created its language patterns as a result of the influence of different Indian languages and socio-cultural contexts in the country. Deviation from native English is much greater in terms of phonological and phonetic patterns, although there are differences in vocabulary and grammar (Bansal, 1990; Pandey, 2015).

The difference between dialect and language often poses a serious challenge, as linking these concepts is usually not an easy task. In recent decades, research has been done on various aspects of language and society, and dialectology has made an interesting contribution to social linguistics. In fact, people's specific accent or pronunciation can usually speak louder than they can about people and their background/context. This shows that dialectology contributes a lot to social linguistics and that languages can represent countless dialects, all of which are valid and none of which is superior. The variety of English spoken in India is no exception. Although less than 10 percent of India's population speaks English, the language has deep roots in Indian society and is used by universities, the media, and the government. In addition, more than 1,500 languages spoken in English have been translated into Second Language in various forms. Although it is undoubtedly difficult to reach an agreement on the standard type of this

diversity due to the complex linguistic landscape in the country, in recent years, several attempts have been made to present English as a gift from a simultaneous and two-time perspective (Chand, Kapper, Mondal, Sur, & Parshad, 2017; Saikia & Singh, 2016).

India is the seventh-largest country and the second-largest populated country. Its population is about 17% of the population of the whole globe. In addition to 22 official languages, there are numerous dialects. English is an official language along with Hindi, although it plays a more supporting role.

Kachru (1986) notes that English currently performs both national and international functions, which are different and complement each other. English, in this way, gains the position of power and new elitism. Notwithstanding it, the debate about the English language continues so far (Ennsner-Kananen, Escobar, & Bigelow, 2017).

There have been some campaigns against English in Indian society, and it is natural as ethnic feelings and the desire to preserve identity are rooted in the historical people's consciousness (Ashrapova, Litvinenko, & Shakirova, 2019). The national language is one of the essential factors of distinguishing peoples (Akhunzhanova, Galiullina, & Khadieva, 2016).

According to some researchers of Indian English, its most striking peculiarity is phonetics. In Indian English phonetics, a number of deviations from the British English pronunciation standards are observed. Researchers of Indian English explain these phonetic peculiarities by the fact that peoples inhabiting India have a different articulation apparatus than peoples inhabiting the British Isles. The characteristic feature of this apparatus is the jaws being looser and the distance between the upper and lower teeth being relatively more comprehensive, so the oral cavity is more and even much more open than the standard British pronunciation implies (Farzadnia & Giles, 2015; Sahgal, 1988).

## 2. Theoretical Framework

There are quite a large number of studies dealing with the Indian English language. Kumar (2018) writes in his article that when a

scholar surveys every city in India, he discovers varieties of English by virtue of the impact of the regional language and mother tongue of the user. Multilingualism in India has brought bounteous problems in the teaching-learning process of English. It is owing to the fact that English is a non-phonetic language like French, and Indian languages are phonetic. This is the first and foremost barrier in the English language in India. Our syllabi have to be redefined on the basis of this oceanic geographical distinction. For the above relevant reason, innumerable English Coaching Centers and English Institutes have been mushrooming in every nook and cranny of streets.

And then he answers problems with solutions: after having journeyed briefly through the ebb and flow of the form and function of English, it can be logically inferred that students are in need of what is rightly called 'Functional English', which comprises form and function of the English language. No matter what grade English is prescribed from, what matters is to prescribe what is useful to students in improving their English language skills. This is an urgent and inevitable need. It is pathetic to say that the phonetic aspect has been totally ignored, and the authorities concerned have turned a blind eye to the teaching of English pronunciation. Coming to vocabulary, a proper plan has to be tailored to enrich students' word power. Form refers to the grammatical structure of English and function to the colloquially earmarked nuances. A meticulously designed special Functional English Course has to be graded, and it is the pressing urgency. Some of the salient features of Functional English are: It equips students with the understanding, skills and knowledge necessary to use and apply English in everyday life. Acquiring these practical skills will enable students to make the most of their future work and education. Applied English is a separate independent degree that can be taken whenever your students are ready. Students need to pass writing, reading, listening, speaking, and communicating to qualify. (Kumar, 2018; Rajendran, Soman, Anandkumar, & Sankaralingam, 2021).

In English, lexical stress provides basic information that guides vocabulary activation. However, little is known about lexical strain

processing in post-colonial Englishers. The present study examines the perception of lexical stress in non-idiomatic words by standard Indian adult English speakers. The results show that in amoebic words (emphasis added syllable), participants act with 54% accuracy regardless of social context. In terms of the trochanter, participants with significantly better performance (60% accuracy;  $p < 0.05$ ) with private tutoring approach the level of accuracy reported for Australian English listeners than those with a public school background. The results of research by Maxwell and Fuchs (2019) suggest that processing of the commonly occurring trochaic condition is easier for participants from private schools, while processing of the rare iambic pattern is not eased by such experience. First language background and the onset of learning English show no systematic effect on participants' performance. Variability in Standard Indian English is shaped mainly by schooling and not L1 background (Maxwell & Fuchs, 2019). But there has been no comprehensive research on phonetic peculiarities of the English language in India.

### 3. Methodology

The main research approach is descriptive-analytical (DA), with its main constituents: observation, generalization, and interpretation. In the social sciences, observation is one of the most vital research approaches and, at the same time, one of the most diverse. The term includes several approaches and methods which are difficult to compare in terms of approval and predicted results. The choice should be appropriate to the research issue and the scientific context. In fact, observation may be the basis of everyday life for most people. We observe behaviors and the material environment (Ciesielska, Boström, & Öhlander, 2018).

A generalization is a form of abstraction whereby common properties of specific instances are formulated as general concepts or claims. Generalizations posit the existence of a domain or set of elements, as well as one or more common characteristics shared by those elements (thus creating a conceptual model). As such, they are the essential basis of all valid deductive inferences where the process of verification is necessary to determine whether

a generalization holds true for any given situation. For the purpose of a comprehensive analysis of the linguistic features of speech, a comparative historical method is also used, which allows you to identify some trends in the development of the grammatical system of the national literary language; during the study, comparative-typological and statistical methods are also used.

#### 4. Results

Since Indian vernacular languages are phonetic languages, Indians face difficulties in giving stress and producing tone and intonation while speaking English. They encounter a number of difficulties in pronunciation, tone, and intonation. Let us examine some of the problematic sounds which Indian students find difficult to overcome. They have problems with consonant sounds: /f/-/v/. Most Indians cannot differentiate the /v/ sound from the /f/ sound. It is done in two ways: firstly, they produce sounds for them representing the Indian sounds /f/ and /w/, respectively. It is because, in Indian languages, there is no /v/ sound. For example, they pronounce the word, veil /weɪl/ instead of /veil/. Secondly, if they try to produce the two sounds like native speakers, they face difficulty in producing and differentiating the sound /v/ from /f/, and they pronounce /v/ as /f/. Most of the Indian English speakers cannot recognize the basic difference between them, i.e., the /f/ sound is voiceless, yet the /v/ sound is voiced. Most Indians face the same kind of difficulty while producing /s/ and /z/ sounds. The /s/ sound is voiceless, whereas /z/ is a voiced sound. They pronounce the sound /z/ as voiceless, like /s/ sound.

In case of aspirates (unvoiced) /p/, /t/, /k/ most Indians pronounce them as voiced sounds. When letters p, k, t, and k come at the beginning of words, they must be aspirated like /ph/, /th/, and /kh/ whereas when they come in the middle or at the end of the words, they are unaspirated. Most Indians pronounce them as voiced sounds irrespective of their places. For example, in the word paper, the first letter, p is aspirant (unvoiced), and the second p is voiced. In the word, taint, the first t is an aspirant, and the second t is voiced. In the word kick, the first letter k is an aspirant, and the second ck is a voiced sound. For example:

paper /p p (r)/, pauper /p p (r)/, pepper /pep (r)/, pipe /p p/, pop /p p/, pup /p p/, taint /t nt/, tent /tent/, tilt /tilt/, tot /t t/, toot /t t/, tut /t t/, crack /kr k/, kecks /keks/, kinetic /knetɪk/, kook /k k/. A similar problem rises in case of producing / / sound; most Indians produce the sound as in Hindi letter tha. In some parts of India (no specific areas in this case), Indians end certain words with the sound /ʊ/ unnecessarily, these words generally end with the sounds such as /t/, /n/ for example that /t/ instead of /t/, but /b t/ instead of /b t/ or /b t/, pen /pen / instead of /pen/. Mostly northern Indians fix /t/ sound before the words begin with the letter s. For example, they pronounce the word school as /ɪsk l/, instead of /sk l/. The letter t in certain word sounds as /d/ rather than /t/, for example, water /w t (r)/ is pronounced as /wɔ:d (r)/.

It is believed that a characteristic feature of the Indian English pronunciation is the replacement of alveolar consonants with retroflex consonants being formed by the tip of the tongue curving to the hard palate. And the sounds [t] and [d], which are called alveolar explosives, are most susceptible to this process. However, the voiceless consonant sound [t] can only be sometimes retroflex, while the sound [d] is always replaced by a retroflex [ɖ] (Bytko, 2017). The other scholar claims the explosive consonants [t] and [d] often to be retroflex in Indian English, especially in southern India, and in general, the use of retroflex consonants to be the standard for this language variant.

As for the soft and hard [l] (like in the words 'milk' and 'leaf'), in Indian English, there are no differences between these sounds, with the soft [l] being strictly used in this case.

In southern India, the sound [l] is replaced by a retroflex [ɭ], yet this sound is not typical of standard Indian English. Nevertheless, the Tamil and Malayalam languages have the rule to voice an explosive consonant when it is between vowels or stands after a nasal sound. Thus, the word 'simply' will be pronounced as [sɪmblɪ].

Other striking examples of phonetic deviations are: replacing the sound [r] with a trembling, vibrating, or retroflex one. The sound [r] in Indian English mostly does not vibrate, which is borrowed from the standard British pronunciation. It acts as a frictionless alveolar



approximant, or an alveolar sound; [r] is silent in such words as 'bird', 'car', 'park', 'hurt', 'higher' etc. However, it appears when words end with the letter 'r' being followed by words starting with a vowel: The *car* [r] is here; the *player* [r] indicates his displeasure. The final [r], for example, in the words 'here' and 'displeasure' is not pronounced. Similarly, the intrusive [r], being the feature of Oxford pronunciation, is absent in Indo-European languages. In phrases such as 'India and China', 'the idea of it,' the sound [r] is not articulated while in the Oxford pronunciation, [r] may appear between the words 'India' and 'and' and between 'the idea' and 'of'. They even suppose such a pronunciation seems ridiculous to the Indians (Bytko, 2017).

It is also known that in Indian English, the consonants [p], [t], [k] are not aspirated. The Indian language (with the exception of Tamil) has phoneme differences between aspirated and unaspirated explosive consonants. It is mainly characteristic of the voiceless consonant sound [θ], as there are no interdental fricative sounds in either the Indian language or Indian English. The sound [θ] can still be audible sometimes, but the sound [ð] frequently disappears during the articulation process. The voiceless sound [θ] is most often replaced by the unaspirated voiceless dental occlusive [t], which is present in Indian languages (Bytko, 2017).

In Indian languages, with the exception of Tamil, there are aspirated and unaspirated explosives and constrictive consonants. Those ones, which are spelled as 'th', are often aspirated. In the Tamil language, instead of the sound [θ], the unaspirated voiceless occlusive dental [t] is used (Bytko, 2017).

Bytko (2017) emphasizes that if the aspiration of the voiceless sound appeared due to the influence of the pronunciation, then we could pronounce the sound [d] as an analog of the sound [ð], but in the words 'mother', 'bathe' we get the smooth sound [d]. Thus, the voiced [ð] is replaced by the voiced dental occlusive [d] like in words *these*, *those*, and *weather* (Bytko, 2017).

Speaking of the aspiration, it should also be noted that in Indian English, the aspiration cannot always be predicted with its being related directly to the spelling. In words with

the first letter followed by 'h', the aspiration of the first consonant is evident, no matter whether it is voiceless or voiced. Thus, in the words 'ghost' and 'why', the first sound is aspirated.

In the Indian variant of the English language, the contrast between the sounds [v] and [w] is often not audible, with the labio-dental approximant [ʋ] being used instead of them, which is also widely spread in some Indian languages, in Hindi, in particular. The pronunciation of this sound is characterized by the upper teeth approaching the lower lip but not touching them. So, the words 'wet' and 'vet' will often be homophones.

Most Indian languages (except Urdu) do not have the voiced alveolar fricative [ʒ]. Although having the closest equivalent of the voiceless [s] in their native language, Indians mostly use palato-alveolar affricate [dʒ] as in the Korean accent. Thus, for example, the words 'zero' and 'rosy' sound like ['dʒi:ro] and ['ro:dʒi:] accordingly. Moreover, the latter variant of pronouncing 'rosy' is characteristic, especially of northern India.

Many Indians, whose level of English is not high, pronounce [f] as an aspirated voiceless explosive [p<sup>h</sup>]. Such replacement is less common than the replacement of the sound [z] and, in fact, [f] is also often used instead of [p<sup>h</sup>] by the local Indians. Thus, they seem to be interchangeable (Bytko, 2017).

The sound [ŋ], remaining the same at the end of words in the Indian version of English, often adds the sound [g] to itself when being in the middle of a word. Thus, the word *ringing* will be pronounced as ['riŋgiŋ] (Bytko, 2017).

Syllabic [l], [m] and [n] are often replaced in Indian English by the vowel-consonant (VC)-group of the sounds [əl], [əm], [ən], or [il], as, for example, the word *button* will be pronounced as ['bʌtən], and *little* as ['lɪlɪl].

In Standard English, as well as in American English, when the plural index follows an alveolar palatal fricative or affective sound, it is pronounced as [əz] or [ɪz] as, for example, in words *fridges* or *kisses*. In Indian English, the plural index is introduced by [s] or [ɛs], almost always deafening the final sound. Similarly, the past tense indicator in American

English is always [d] or [ɛd]. That is to say that, in the standard English pronunciation, when the final consonant is deaf, the past tense indicator will be deafened as well, as, for example, in the word 'trapped'. In American English, it will remain voiced, and the word *trapped* will be pronounced as [træpd] (Bytko, 2017).

Since there are no groups of consonants standing together in Indian languages, their reduction in Indian English is a common case. The word *acts* will be pronounced as [æks], and *film* can be uttered as [fɪləm]. *School* may sound like [səkul] or [is'ku: l]. In general, in the system of vowel sounds, Indian English is less different from the Standard English pronunciation. This is especially true for those whose native language is Hindi, with its system of vowels being a bit similar to the English speech. But there are still differences. For example, the two vowels of the central row [ə] and [ʌ] do not differ in standard Indian English. And in some dialects, the back vowel [ʌ] is replaced by the front vowel [a].

Many Indians did not see the difference between the vowels [ɒ] and [ɔ:], such as in the words *cot* and *caught*. Moreover, some of them, especially those living in southern India, replace the rounded sounds [ɒ] and [ɔ:] with [a]. Accordingly, *coffee* in South India will be pronounced [kafi]. The diphthongs [eɪ] and [oʊ], like in words *pale* and *hole*, being characteristic of the standard British pronunciation, in Indian English are often replaced by monophthongs [e:] and [o:]. Also, in non-standard Indian English, except diphthongs [ɔi] as in *boy* and [aʊ] as in *cow*, all other diphthongs are changed to long vowels, and the sound [r] is added, so *poor* is pronounced [pu:r], *beer* as [bi:r], *tour* as [tu:r], *pear* as [pe:r] (Bytko, 2017). Also, many Indians pronounce such words as *flower* and *our* like [fla:(r)] and [a:(r)], accordingly, instead of [flavə(r)] and [avə(r)].

'Prosodic structures differ across languages and language varieties and influence the way listeners use prosodic cues. The subject of the present study is lexical stress, which refers to the lexically specified distinction between strong and weak syllables in a word. In stress languages, such as English, lexical stress is cued by a number of robust acoustic

parameters that make stressed syllables more salient to listeners. Similar to other dimensions of prosody, stress is not universal. Not all languages contrast stressed with unstressed syllables, and even within the category 'stressed', languages can have various patterns. Given such differences in the function and physical properties of stress, listeners may use acoustic information in the speech signal differently. While most varieties of English as Native Language (ENL) have a distinction between stressed and unstressed syllables, it has been suggested that this may not be the case in many post-colonial varieties of English, such as Nigerian English, Singaporean English, or Indian English. This could be due to the influence of typologically distinct first languages, which differ in their prosodic systems and the use of prominence. Empirical evidence on such varieties, however, is often limited or presents conflicting results, at times suggesting a lack of distinction for stressed/unstressed syllables' (Maxwell & Fuchs, 2019).

Researchers note that Indian English is usually syllabic, which means the non-observance of alternating stressed syllables at regular intervals of time. Besides, syllables that are unstressed in other variants of the English language sometimes get stressed in Indian English, with the abolition of vowel reduction being observed. Example: syllable - ['silə 'bel] instead of ['siləb(ə)l] (Sahgal, 1988). All this makes Indian English difficult to understand.

Thus, the stress in standard Indian English is a somewhat confusing phenomenon. The stress falling depends on the weight of the syllable. A syllable is considered to be light if it contains only one short vowel, and the number of consonants preceding the vowel does not matter. So, the syllable CV with a short vowel will be light. The heavy syllable contains a long vowel or a vowel with a consonant: V:C or VCC. An unusually heavy syllable is the one in which a long vowel is followed by a consonant (V:C) or a short vowel is followed by at least two consonants (VCC or VCCC) (Garesh, 2004). Thus, some linguists suggest while teaching a target language, studying special notes indicating differences in accent options and their normative assessments (Mordinova & Sadykova, 2017).

The stress falls on the first syllable of a two-syllable word, except the cases where the second syllable is especially heavy *'taboo*, *'mistake*. In three-syllable words, the stress also falls on the first syllable. But if the second syllable is heavy, in this case, it is this syllable that will be stressed: *mo' desty*, *char 'acter* (Garesh, 2004). But since many speakers ignore these rules, there are many individual variations.

Some speakers of standard Indian English put the stress in the words where it stands in standard English pronunciation, for example, *mist 'ake*, *terr' ific*, having probably learned this pattern word by word (Bytko, 2017). Another oddity of Indian English is the tendency to emphasize with stress the first pronoun in a sentence, such as: 'She is coming by train'. Also, in some varieties of IE (but not in standard Indian English), there is a tendency to emphasize with stress more words in a sentence, without avoiding service words, for example: 'This 'is CNN (this feature began to appear in American English by radio or television announcers, who may have wanted to excel).

## 5. Discussion

In Indian English, complete intonation divides phrases according to the target orientation of the expression and shows all kinds of psycho-emotional tones. Communicating intonation in the narration is formed by lowering the tone towards the end of the phrase. Interrogative intonation is created by enhancing the tone towards the end of a phrase and highlighting the word that shows the essence of the question. Incentive intonation is similar to communicating intonation in its sound coloring. But the beginning of an incentive phrase is pronounced in a tone higher than the beginning of a narrative phrase. We can meet incomplete intonation in complex sentences where the subordinate part is separated from the central part by a short pause. In the intonation of Indian English, there are speech pauses that carry meaningful functions. They can be between morphemes, between verbal foundations, and between phrases that are a part of a sentence. Speech pauses can be:

a) at the docking of morphemes when adding different affixes to the word.

b) at the docking of verbal foundations when forming a compound word.

c) at the junction of reducing the short vowel (a).

d) between semantic combinations in the context of a sentence.

e) between two parts in a complex sentence.

Often people in India make a pause between two words in a phrase to avoid phonetic ambiguity. Let's consider as an example the speech of the filmmaker and the actor from Mumbai on the television show "BVB media":

... In economics, there is a principle called the theory of comparative costs which says that you may grow rice and you may grow wheat, but you have to decide which one you can grow better and concentrate on that and let some other countries grow the other. The other thing is similarly with arts you may be a painter, you may be a writer you ...

We hear the lack of difference between the soft and hard [l], as, for example, in the word 'principle' called with soft [l] being used. The next phonetic peculiarity is that the sound [w] is similar to the labio-dental approximant [ʋ], as in 'with', 'wheat'. The syllabic [l], [m] and [n] are replaced with a VC-group of sounds [əl], [əm], [ən], or [il], like in the word 'concentrate' instead of the British variant of pronouncing ['kɒnsntreit], we hear ['kɒnsəntreit]. We can also note the pronunciation of the sound [z] as [s] and vice versa; for example, in the word 'rice', instead of the usual British [rais], we hear [raiz]. Another phonetic peculiarity is the replacement of the voiceless sound [θ] by the non-aspiratory voiceless dental occlusive [t]: for example, in the word 'thing', instead of pronouncing [θɪŋ], we hear [tɪŋ]. Phrasal stress falls on practically all stressed syllables. The speech is pronounced categorically. As for the intonation, mostly, the falling tone is used.

Indian English is used throughout India, and some of its peculiarities are common with the standard British pronunciation, while others differ, being exclusively Indian. Indian English, used by less educated people, is even more heavily influenced by local languages. However, no one can say exactly how diverse the pronunciation of the English language can

be throughout this vast country, so this is a topic for further research.

While working on the research, the general trends of differences between the Indian English pronunciation and the Standard English pronunciation were discovered. And as a result, phonetic peculiarities of Indian English have been described: the peculiarities of using consonants and vowels in the speech of Indians. Also, the peculiarities of using stress and intonation in the Indian version of the English language were considered.

Overall, it can be concluded that phonetic peculiarities of Indian English are defined through a distinctive structure of the articulation apparatus of people residing in India. However, India's academic community, while utilizing Indian English, attempts for a more prestigious pronunciation. The results of this research may be used in studying the Indian version of the English language, as well as in further studying differences between this variant of the English language and the standard pronunciation. In general, the material given in the work may be useful for those who have to communicate with representatives of India in English, either in formal or informal situations.

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