

Pronunciation Problems of the Marathi Speakers

Dr. Mrinalini Mukund Ghatage

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Abstract

This paper tries to find out the problem areas in pronunciation faced by Marathi speakers of English and it also tries to find out the causes of these problems of mother tongue (L1) interference/ pull. After taking into consideration the problems of the learners, it also tries to suggest some pedagogical measures so that the problem of L1 interference will be not eradicated totally but certainly will be reduced to some extent. The sample taken for this paper is from S.N.D.T. Arts and Commerce College for girls, Pune. The students are from B.A. (Marathi medium).

- Introduction/ Importance of English

In the present world perspective, English is an important language. It is an international language. It is spoken and understood by a vast majority of people living on the globe. It is, therefore, a world language. Knowledge of English is essential for establishing intellectual, cultural, economic, commercial and political relations with the rest of the world. Therefore, English serves as a link language.

For such an active participation, study of English is a must, for it is a window to the world. Thus, it has been assigned the role of a library language. More and more knowledge produced through English language has made it a living stream of growing knowledge. Mastery of English means an easy access to the vast treasures of knowledge. Hence, everyone should have the knowledge of English.

The importance of speech in language learning: a language is a system of arbitrary vocal symbols adopted by a whole community. It has its own patterns of pronunciation, arrangement of words, and the association of meaning with words. A child acquires the frame work of his spoken language with constant exposure to the spoken form.

Pronunciation is the way in which a particular language or a dialect is spoken. It is much concerned with speech sounds as with features like stress, rhythm and intonation. My research concentrates on the pronunciation and also on use of the language in different situations. This paper is an attempt to outline the difficulties of Marathi speakers learning to speak English with special reference to the pronunciation and to suggest remedial measures and provide practice material to improve pronunciation. This paper has some limitations. As not much study is done on the suprasegmental features of Marathi, this paper does not focus on the suprasegmental features of Marathi and the syntactic problems faced by the Marathi speakers of English.

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- Background of the Sample

A sample of 30 students was taken from Shreemati Nathibai Damodar Thackersey (SNDT) Arts and Commerce for Women, Pune. These students are from B.A. As I have been working in the same institute for the last 11 years, I am aware of the learners' background and the problems they face while speaking in English I have observed that the students of B.A. are unable to communicate in English and they are unable to form simple sentences in English. Even if they try and speak in English, the pronunciation is mixed with their Mother tongue and it has their mother tongue interference in it.

Thus, the purpose of this research is to find out what the needs of the learners are as far as the Spoken English is concerned. This paper tries to find out why they are not able to communicate in English and it will also concentrate on the problems faced by the Marathi speakers while speaking English. Some remedial measures will be suggested so that it will help the Marathi speakers of English to improve pronunciation and tone. The improvement in the pronunciation and tone will make the students confident to use the language especially while facing the interview and get the job.

- The Problems faced by the Marathi Speakers

Every language has a fixed number of speech sounds or a phonetic system, it has a number of meaningful symbols made of a succession of these sounds, it has devices to give these symbols distinctive forms and roles in an utterance to enable them to convey a particular meaning in a given situation i.e. it can bestow definite functions on the various forms. In short, every language has a grammar of its own. Marathi has its own grammar and a phonetic system. Similarly, English has its own grammar and a phonetic system. While speaking English, the speaker's mother tongue interferes. We can say that there is a mother-tongue pull while speaking second language (i.e. English). They tend to pronounce words the way they say them in Marathi. It becomes hardly intelligible to either native speakers of language or to other foreign speakers of it. If the level of intelligibility is low the language breaks down as a system of communication and does not serve the purpose intended.

- About letters of Marathi and English

English has Roman script. A, B, C, D down to Z are letters of the Roman alphabet. They are not sounds. A, E, I, O, U are not vowels sounds and the rest consonants sounds as is popularly supposed. They are the letters used to represent the sounds. English has twenty six letters of alphabet but it has twenty vowel sounds and twenty four consonant sounds. There is no one to one relationship between letters and sounds.

Marathi makes use of a slightly modified variety of Devanagari script. They are not sounds. Marathi too has more sounds than it has letters to represent them. The letter च for instance, represents two sounds, /tʃ/ as in the word 'wheel' and /ç/ as in the word 'four'. This shows that the pronunciation has to be learnt independently. The letters do not offer adequate help in learning the pronunciation. Compared with English, Marathi is largely phonetic. But no language can absolutely be phonetic. Marathi is not completely phonetic either. In a phonetic language all the words are spelled very much as they are sounded.

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- The difference between Marathi and English , and the problems faced by the Marathi speakers

The distinctive sounds of Marathi can be tabulated as under:

Consonants							
	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Retroflex	Alveopalatal	Velar	Glottal
Voiceless stops	p p ^h	t t ^h		ʈ ʈ ^h	ç ç ^h	k k ^h	
Voiced stops	b b ^h	ɖ ɖ ^h		ɖ ɖ ^h	ʝ ʝ ^h	g g ^h	
Voiceless fricatives			s		ç		h
Nasals	m m ^h	ɳ ɳ ^h		ɳ ɳ ^h	ɲ	ŋ	
Liquids	l l ^h		l l ^h r ^h	ɭ ɭ ^h	ʎ		

Phonetic table of English Consonants (24)

(Chart A)
Phonetic Table
English Consonants (24)

Place →	Bilabial		Labio-dental		(Inter-dental)		Alveolar		Post-alveolar		Palato-alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal		
	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	V1	Vd	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	Vi	Vd	
Plosive (Stop)	p	b					t	d									k	g	
Fricative			f	v	θ	ð	s	z		r	ʃ	ʒ							h
Affricate												tʃ	dʒ						
Lateral							l												
Nasal		m						n										ŋ	
Semi-Vowel				w													j	w	

A comparison between the Marathi consonantal system and English consonantal system shows that Marathi has a large number of plosive sounds (8) and a very small number of fricative sounds. Marathi has eight plosive sounds all of which could be aspirated thus a total number of 16 plosive sounds (aspirated and unaspirated).

It has only 3 or 4 fricative sounds but English has only six plosive sounds. And because of this difference, the Marathi speakers often tend to substitute plosive aspirates for English fricatives. This confusion affects the intelligibility. They substitute /f/ with /ph/, /θ/ with /th/, /v/ with /wh/ and /z/ with /dzh/.

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e.g. when /p/ occurs in a stressed syllable it is pronounced with aspiration, the word 'pun' is pronounced as [phʌn] which is often equated by the Marathi speakers with the word 'fun'. Because of the wrong pronunciation, it leads to confusion.

Most of the Marathi speakers get confused with /v/ and the Marathi aspirated semi-vowel /wh/. The Marathi semi-vowel is a bi-labial sound while the English /v/ is a labio-dental sound. Aspiration in Marathi /wh/ weakens word-finally leaving a clear /w/ sound which is not the same as the English /v/ sound. Similarly, other difficult sounds for the Marathi speakers are /θ/ and /ð/. These are generally replaced by either by /tʰ/ and /d/ or //dʰ/.

Marathi speakers of English often substitute /z/ with /dzh/. And they find it very difficult to say a sound /ʒ/ like in measure, pleasure. It is difficult because /ʒ/ does not occur in Marathi.

Marathi has four nasal consonants i.e. **ड, ण, न, म**

There are some sounds which are already in Marathi so while saying these sounds the Marathi speaker of English does not face any problem. For example, while pronouncing /h/, /k/, /l/, /s/ and /ʃ/ since we have a corresponding sound in Marathi.

A comparative chart (chart A)

Chart C

	Bi-labial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-Alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Velar
English		f v	θ ð	s z	r	ʃ ʒ	h
Marathi initial		ph wh	tʰ d [dʰ]	s - dzh	r	ʃ -	h
medial		ph wh	tʰ d	s dzh	r	ʃ ʃh	h
final	Φ β	ph w	tʰ d	s - dz, z	r	ʃ -	

Vowels

The English alphabet has only five letters a, e, i, o, u to represent twenty vowel sounds, twelve are pure vowels (i.e. while articulating the sound the position of the organs of speech remains more or less unchanged) and eight are diphthongs.

English has twelve pure vowels. According to Yardi (1998:49) Marathi has only six pure vowels. These are /i, e, a, o, u, ə/ and he (1998) further adds that the reason why we do not have /r:, ʊ:/ is that they are not inherently long or short vowels in Marathi. Of these only one corresponds completely with the English vowel / ə/. Marathi has /æ/ and

/ɒ/ which occur in loan-words and so they have become a part of its phonological system.

Marathi speakers often fail to make a clear distinction between the vowels /ɪ/ and /i:/. This is because Marathi has only one vowel /i/ which different from both the vowels /ɪ/ and /i:/.

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 long vowel occurring almost exclusively indicates a pause at the end of meaningful sequence of sounds. The vowel in a monosyllabic word, open or closed, is generally long. For example, (mi) [I], (na:v)[name]. The last vowel of a word is long, except when followed by a combination of consonants such as nt, tr, kt. For example, (pɔ̃trɔ̃) [letter]. Otherwise vowels are short. It is unnecessary to indicate vowel length in Marathi. The Marathi speakers often find it difficult to pronounce a short vowel in word-final position and a long vowel in non-final position.

Marathi does not have pure long vowels like /ɑ:/ and /ə:/. (/ɑ:/ does not have its 'short' counterpart, while the opposition between / ə:/and / ə/ is mostly one of length, according to the present analysis). The quality of the English vowels /ɛ/,/ɔ:/, and /ʌ/ is slightly different from the quality of the corresponding Marathi vowels /e/,/o/ and /ʌ/, while the complex of quality and quantity which marks the opposition between pairs /i:/ /i/ / ɔ:/ / ɔ/ and /u:/ /u/ is foreign to the Marathi learner.

The Marathi learners substitute back open vowel /ɑ:/ with the central near-open vowel /a/. They fail to retain the vowel length in the non-final position. The English vowels /e/ and /ʌ/ have near equivalents in Marathi /e/ and /a/. The difference is /a/ is a bit open than /ʌ/.

The Marathi learners find it bit difficult to differentiate between / ɔ:/ and / ɔ/. This is because Marathi does not have sound analogous to either. e.g. in words like lord and hot respectively.

The Marathi speakers find it difficult to distinguish between /u/ and /u:/ so they pronounce /good/ or /book/ as / g u:d/ or /bu:k/ respectively instead of / gud/ or /buk/. In Marathi, vowels are nasalised. English does not use nasalised vowels. The words like 'and' /æ-n-d/, 'answer /ɑ:-n-s-a/.

Generally, the second language learners of English whose L1 is Marathi pronounce / ɒ/ in the word initial position as /a/.

Diphthongs

English has eight diphthongs and in Marathi there are four (the debate is still on about the number) diphthongs.

English has eight diphthongs, all falling. These are /eɪ/ (as in day), /əʊ/ (as in go), /aɪ/ (as in buy), /aʊ/ (as in now), /ɔɪ/ (as in boy), /ɪə/ (as in here), /eə/ (as in hair), and /ʊə/

(as in sure). In Marathi, these four diphthongs are /əɪ/, əʊ, /aɪ/ and /aʊ/. (the debate is still on about the number).

While pronouncing /eɪ/, the Marathi speakers always make mistake. He cannot distinguish between the sound /e/ and /eɪ/. The Marathi speakers find it difficult to realize the RP pure /e/ (short) vowel in the words like 'get', 'wet'. They might make it long in the words like 'gate', 'wait'. They have problem with /eɪ/ and /aʊ/ they substitute these diphthongs with /e/ and /o/ respectively. For example, when the word 'way' is said as '/we/' and not as /weɪ/ and instead pronouncing 'go' as '/gəʊ/' they pronounce it as /go/.

The diphthongs in English are one vocalic element but in Marathi two separate vocalic elements. eg /aɪ/ is aai, and /aʊ/ as aau. The learner might get confused with ऐ and औ. The Marathi speakers do not find it difficult to pronounce the diphthong /əɪ/ as there are many loan words, like boy and toy, in Marathi.

The Centring Diphthongs e.g. /ɪə/, /eə/, and /ʊə/ do not cause any difficulty to the Marathi speakers.

Common Mistakes

Apart from the problems of pronunciation, the Marathi speakers have other problems too. Most of the Marathi speakers of English commit some common mistakes. When they use the past tense, they do not pronounce the way RP pronunciation expects. The past tense marker 'ed' after /d/ is pronounced /ed/ and not /ɪd/. The retroflexion is used in the production of /t/ and /d/.

The /r/ sound is used at the end of the word when it is not pronounced in RP. The Marathi speakers have a tendency to pronounce /r/ at the end of the words. e.g. ear, car, pure

As there is no article in Marathi, Marathi speakers may tend to omit it while speaking English. They omit the definite article ('world' in place of 'the world'). They have a problem in using prepositions as well. In Marathi, preposition comes after noun.

e.g.

pen (N)	tabla(N)	+	war (Prep.)	aahe (V).
Pen	table	+	on	is.

Pen is on the table.

A funny example of wrong usage of 'on' is ... in Marathi

Maze	tuzya	+	war	prem	aahe.
I	you	+	on	love	is/am.

I love you.

We may translate it as it is and say
* 'I love on you'

We cannot distinguish between 'on' and 'above', as Marathi has only one word for 'on and above' i.e., war and 'under' and 'below' and one word for 'under and below'.

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here is that the context should be as neutral as possible; a context that is too supportive will elicit the correct word even if the student's pronunciation of it is faulty.

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Dr. Mrinalini Mukund Ghatage, M.A., M.Phil., PGCTE, PGDTE, Ph.D.

Assistant Professor

S.N.D.T. Women's University

S.N.D.T. Arts and Commerce College for Women

Pune-411038

Maharashtra

India

mrinalinieflu@gmail.com