

## **Mother Tongue Influence and Its Impact on Spoken English of Kashmiri Speakers**

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### **Abstract**

Language is a medium of communicating information, ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of arbitrarily produced symbols. In a multilingual Kashmiri Society, where English acts as a second official language, the teaching of English is not doing good to help the learners to overcome regional accents, wrong pronunciation and train them in proper articulation. The reason, mother tongue plays a vital role in deciding the proficiency level of the learner's target language. The researcher, while attempting to study the impact and interference of mother tongue on the English language, studies the MTI in phonological level. The present study also identifies the effect of the differences and/or similarities between the structures of L1 and L2 on the target language. The aim of this article is to discuss the mother tongue influence in the process of English Language proficiency and how a teacher can help to overcome some of the problem encountered by a Kashmiri learner of English as well as to improve his/her proficiency and articulatory level.

**Keywords:** Kashmiri Speakers, Mother Tongue Influence, Spoken English, competence, proficiency, multi-lingual, interlanguage, language transfer, native language, target language, consonant clusters.

### **Introduction**

Due to Globalization every aspect of our world is undergoing a transformation. In the present scenario those who are well versed in English can reap its benefits, those who are not are marginalized. The changing and fast evolving times have witnessed the growing importance of English language in all spheres of life. Conscious and unconscious use of English words in our everyday conversation bears evidence to this fact. As we know very well that language learning is a great fascinated experience especially the learning of a foreign language or Second language, but the influence of mother tongue has become very important area and is usually referred to as "Language Interference, Transfer or Cross-lingual Influence." Language learning entails the successful mastery of steadily accumulating structural entities and organizing this knowledge

into coherent structures which lead to effective communication in the target language (Rutherford, (1987).

In the second language teaching learning context such as in Kashmir, pronunciation of the target language is generally not given adequate importance. But it plays a pivotal role in the entire process of language learning. It develops the communicative skills and helps the learners to acquire a good command of the language he learners. It is normally argued that to acquire command of a second language, a learner has to develop four basic skills listening, speaking, reading and writing. All these four skills interact with each other and they are essential for teaching and learning of second language. Even if the non-native speaker's vocabulary and grammar are excellent, but their pronunciation falls below a certain threshold level, they are unable to communicate efficiently and effectively. A second language learner has a tendency to transfer his habits from his mother tongue to the second language system. This transfer of L1 linguistic features to L2 is called Interlingual Interference. This interference can be of two types:

1. Interference of the First language items with the second language items where both possess certain similarities.
2. Interference of L1 items in L2 items which do not possess similarities.

A lot of Mother Tongue Influence (MTI) of Kashmiri is visible while a Kashmiri speaker is using English. This is also true with the educated Kashmiris, who are influenced by this MTI (Mother Tongue Influence) in their speech.

1. There are many consonants which are present in Kashmiri language but are absent in English language, e.g. /ɽ, ɽ<sup>h</sup>, ɽ<sup>h</sup>, ts, ts<sup>h</sup>, c<sup>h</sup> and /ɲ/. Although these sounds do not create many problems while speaking English, yet sometimes certain sounds do come in the way e.g. many Kashmiri speakers of Kashmir use /ɽ<sup>h</sup>/ in place of /t/ in English. For example, many speakers pronounce English word 'Thomas' as /θɔmas/ instead of /tɔmas/.
2. In Kashmiri language there are two sounds /f/ and /ph/ as a fricative and stop respectively. But in English /f/ is a fricative. Many Kashmiri speakers use /ph/ in place of /f/ as in English word *fruit*, fat, food, feet etc as /p<sup>h</sup>ru:t/, /p<sup>h</sup>æt/, /p<sup>h</sup>ud/ and /p<sup>h</sup>ɪ:t/ but not as /fru:t/, fæt/, /fu:d/ and /fɪ:t/.
3. Maximum speakers use sound /v/ in place of sound /w/ as in words like woman, watch, walk, waste, while, wear, web, weather, word and wedge, etc.

4. While coming to consonant clusters there are lot of problem Kashmiri speakers face in their English speech. In Kashmiri language we do not have many consonant clusters which are present in English language. For example, sk, sl, kl, ml, lp, ks, kd, gs, ts, bl, sp, pl, st and lk. While using these consonant clusters most Kashmiris speakers decluster them by inserting a vowel in between them. See the following data:

Skill	/sɪkɪl/
slip	/sɪlɪp/
clif	/kɪlɪf/
Milk	/mɪlɪk/
Help	/heləp/
Socks	/sɔkəs/
Logs	/logəs/
School	/səku:l/
reports	/rɪpɔrtəs/
Plate	/pələɪt/
Stay	/sɪteɪ/
Supports	/səpɔtəs/
Sports	/səpɔtəs/
Texts	/tekəstəs/
Institution	/ɪnɪstɪtʃʊʃən/
Constitution	/kɒnəstɪtʃʊʃən/
Blood	/bəlʌd/
Stray	/sɪtreɪ/

5. A lot of Kashmiri speakers often get confused while using certain vowels. They cannot make the difference between them because of their mother tongue influence. Here are some examples:

Most of the speakers use sound /a:/ in place of sound /ɔ/.

e.g. Word like ‘water’ is pronounced as /wa:tər/ instead of /wɔtər/

‘Walk’ as /wa:l/ instead of /wɔlk/

‘Watch’ as /wa:tʃ/ instead of /wɔtʃ/

‘Talk’ as /ta:k/ instead of /tɔk/  
 ‘On’ as /a:n/ instead of /ɔn/  
 ‘Cal’l as /ka:l/ instead of /kɔl/  
 ‘Salt’ as /sa:lt/ instead of /sɔlt/  
 ‘Cot’ as /ka:t/ instead of /kɔt/  
 ‘Caught’ as /ka:th/ instead of /kɔ:th/  
 ‘Hot’ as /ha:t/ instead of /hɔt/  
 ‘Hall’ as /ha: l/ instead of /hɔl/

Front half open long vowel /eɪ/ is used for the English /æ/, as in *black, catch, sack etc.* they will use /bleɪk/, /keɪtʃ/ and /seɪk/ instead of /blæk/, /kæʃ/ and /sæk/. Sometimes speakers use sound /e/ in place of sound /ə/ e.g. In words like ‘alone’, they pronounce it as /elu:n/ instead of /əlu:n/ and word ‘ago’ is pronounced as /egəu/ instead of /əgəu/, etc. They have difficulty in using diphthongs as well, many speakers use wrong diphthongs at times. e.g. In word ‘goat’, they pronounce it as /gɔ:t/ instead of /gəut/; in word ‘sow’ they will pronounce it as /sɔ:/ instead of /səu/. These speakers have also difficulty in diphthongs like /ɪə/, /eə/ they get confuse where to use which diphthong e.g in terms of words like: ‘here and hair’, ‘ear and air’ and ‘their and there’.

6. The importance of pronunciation in communication cannot be denied. In fact, it is as important as grammar and vocabulary. Yet, the evidence of *mother tongue influence* on English is very obvious. This manifests in the form of incorrect pronunciation. Pronunciation error may be due to many issues. Guesswork or vagueness of the correct form of a word or sentence, or a general ineptness of the language could be the reason of mispronunciation. The most common reason is transfer or interference from the mother tongue. Generally, errors made in pronunciation are due to difference in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English.

### Some Suggestions

1. Bilingualism is gaining importance and good support. Using L1 is not a major issue, but the problem is when and how to use it. The target language must be used wherever possible, and L1 when necessary. In this regard, a good strategy, however, is to be proactive. This means that the teacher should actively control and influence how, when and where the mother tongue is used.

2. The second language teacher should present a good model of utterance. He should encourage the learners to speak in English as far as possible because for meaningful teaching learning, it is essential to develop the learner's speaking and linguistic abilities.
3. To help reduce this problem in Kashmiri schools, it is vital that while on one hand spoken English be encouraged and promoted, on the other hand, such sound patterns as which are likely to be confused and faltered be identified and drilled. The learners should be able to practice these sound patterns over and over again using a model voice to emulate.
4. It has been realized that such activities when done in digital language labs, not only help eliminate the mother tongue influence, but also hasten the acquisition of the target language. Digital language labs equipped with this facility allow learners to listen to correct pronunciation of a word and the check their own learning during the practice session.
5. As a regular practice, the teacher is seen as a model for correct speaking in class. The learners are expected to be introduced to the pronunciation of words in English by their teacher during the day-to-day interaction. It is when the teacher her/himself has colored pronunciation that the learners are unable to acquire correct skills in spoken English. The pronunciation samples they are exposed to in their classroom environment being inappropriate, the learners are most likely to adopt a similar pronunciation skill.
6. It is the challenge of the fossilized sound system of the mother tongue of the learners that inhibits the acquisition of the pronunciation and sound system of the second language. It is understood that if the second language is introduced to the learners before puberty, the chances of attaining a native-like pronunciation skill is easier. This challenge can surely be met by using the mother tongue removal tool offered in good digital language lab.

## Conclusion

English is valued highly in the Kashmiri society with a lot of prestige being attached to the language. A lot of time and energy is dedicated to teaching or learning English in the schools. Despite this, not much attention is given to enhance the speaking skill in the average classroom. That the learner will pick up the skill from general classroom activities and instructions over a period of time is a false assumption made. As a result, the learners are not able to develop this skill and hence lack confidence while conversing in English.

Though articulation of individual sounds while teaching this language is addressed, teaching of pronunciation is not given much importance either. The areas of sound relating to spoken English and to pronunciation in the Kashmiri context need to be consciously addressed to

counter this challenge. Enabling Kashmiri speakers to acquire native-like English accent is plausible.

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