Learning English: Phonological Problems for Assamese Medium Learners

Anima Baishya, M.A., Ph.D. Scholar

Abstract

Assamese is the medium of instruction in the Assamese medium schools of Assam. The learners' first language is basically Assamese. They learn the English language from their primary level stage of their formal education. However, a very little exposure of English in almost all the skills of the language has been clearly noticed at this level. Hence, a good number of errors have been sustained by Assamese medium learners as a result of interference from their mother tongue while speaking English.

Both English and Assamese belong to the common Indo-European language family. This makes us feel that some features are bound to be common to both the languages. Yet, because of the fact that there is a gap of thousands of years after the separation of Sanskrit (from which Assamese descended) and primitive Germanic (from which English descended), some features of differences are also bound to happen.

Though both the languages belong to the same Indo-European family, they developed differently at two distant places over the centuries. The phonological aspects of both English and Assamese are different from each other. This paper is limited to the phonological problems faced by Assamese medium learners of English while learning to speak English.

Introduction

English occupies the unique position being the language used by the largest number of people in the world. David Crystal (1985: 7-9) provides an optimistic estimated figure of 2 billion users of English. English in India enjoys nearly a dominant place in our educational system as well as in our national life as it did in the pre-1947 era. The pride of place it enjoyed at that point of time stemmed from official patronage; today it is due to globalization, market forces and democratic aspirations of the common people. In addition English is now a language of opportunity and the language of upward social mobility.

The phenomenon has resulted in millions of pupils learning English in primary and secondary schools in the country and this situation prevails also among the Assamese medium learners of English.

Phonological Features

As far as the phonological features of both English and Assamese are concerned, they have some common elements, but at the same time they have their own features which give their own individual character, distinct from one another. It is quite common that a second language learner experiences the phonological difficulties related to phonemes, combinations of phonemes and also supra-segmental features and the same is true in the Assamese speakers' context also. What makes some words phonologically more difficult is very much determined by the learner's inability to discriminate between some phonemes and subsequent confusion of words differing precisely in these areas. I assume that a student who comes in contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. The elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult (Lado, 1957). In such a situation a learner would speak the new language with his available phonological system as if it were indispensable.

Influence of Assamese in English Used in Assamese Medium Schools

It is already established that English words are affected by the Assamese phonology regarding its acquisition by the Assamese learners of English. The English phonemes which do not have acceptable equivalents in the pupils' mother tongue usually constitute a learning problem for them. In such cases, they tend to substitute for the English sounds nearly similar sounds (at least to their ears) from their mother tongue and this can be called 'substitution of phonemes'.

It should be noted that Assamese learners of English pronounce the English words seeing the graphic forms of the words and that is why, the substitution of phonemes takes place. Substitution of phonemes consists of three types of substitution, viz., substitution of vowel phonemes, and substitution of diphthongs and substitution of consonants.

From Sound to Sentence Structure

It is a well-established fact that every language has its own sound system. When one considers two languages from the point of view of examining and studying the similarities and differences, the process needs to start from the smallest element of the language structure which is the sound.

Focus on RP – Received Pronunication

When I talk about English phonemes, I will concentrate on British RP and the way General Assamese speakers produce their own inventory in speaking English phonemes will be termed as General Assamese English. General Assamese English is a cover term which means a variety of English, spoken by educated Assamese speakers. It is based on Assamese phonological system which has eight (8) vowels, seventeen (17) diphthongs and twenty-one (21) consonants. It is a descriptive term in the sense that it describes the phonological features of the variety of English realized by Assamese speakers and which is concentrated only in Assam.

In the context of comparing RP English and General Assamese English at the level of phonology at least, two possibilities do exist:

1.   There could be some degree of similarity between the sounds of British RP and General Assamese English.

2.   The sounds under consideration in the process of comparison could exhibit totally different configurations between General Assamese English and British RP. Such partial similarity and total dissimilarity could become the areas of difficulties and problems in the process of learning English vocabulary items rather in a wider sense, a foreign language like English.

The Purpose of This Study

The purpose of the study is to explore the problem areas confronted by Assamese medium learners of English while dealing with the spoken form of English vocabulary items. I will restrict myself to the problem areas of vowels (monopthongs + diphthongs), consonants and consonant clusters of English faced by Assamese learners while learning English.

1. Vowels

As far as the problem areas of learning English vowel system for Assamese medium learners are concerned, we have to take into account the substitution of vowels. British RP comprises of twenty (20) vowels, viz., twelve (12) monopthongs and eight (8) diphthongs., whereas General Assamese English has seventeen (17) distinct vowel phonemes of which eight (8) are pure vowels and nine (9) are diphthongs.

1.1.   Monopthongs

In RP, there are twelve pure vowels or monopthongs .These are/ iː, ɪ, e, æ, ɜː, ə, ʌ, ɑː, ɒ, ɔː, u, uː/ (Balasubramaniam, T. 1981; Bansal, R. K. and J. B. Harrison. 2001). These sounds are represented by only five letters viz. a, e, i, o, u. On the other hand, there are eight pure vowels in General Assamese   English and these are:/i, e, E, a, O, o, U, u/.In General Assamese English, no long vowel   sounds are there. RP /iː, æ, ɜː, ə, ʌ, ɑː, ɔː, uː/ are absent categories in G.A.E. RP monopthongs are substituted by Assamese medium learners as the following:

1. /i:/ > /i/, for example, /i:t/ > /it/ 'eat'.

2. /æ/ > /E/ ~ /e/ ~ /a/, for example, /bæt/ > /bEt/ 'bat', /æsɪd/ > /esid/ 'asid', /əkædəmɪ/ > /Ekademi/ 'academy'.

3. /ɜ:/ > /ar/ ~ /Or/, for example, /ɜ:θ/ > /arth/   'earth', /wɜ:d/ > /wOrd/ 'word'.

4.   i) /ə/ > /E/ 1 , for example, / əbaut/ > /Ebaut/   'about'.

      ii) /ə/ > / i/ ~ /e/ ~ /a/ ~ /O/ ~ /U/ 2, for example, /pɒləsɪ/ > /pOlisi/ 'policy', /prɒbləm/ > /prOblem/ 'problem', /feɪməs/ > /phEmas/ 'famous', /dɪvələp/ >/dEbhElOp/ 'develop', /eərəpleɪn/ > /ErUplen/ 'aeroplane'.

      iii) /ə/ > /a/ ~ /ar/ ~ /Or/3, for example, /drɑ:mə/ > /drama/ 'drama',   /pɪktʃə/> /piksar/ 'picture' , /dɒktə/ >/dOktOr/ 'doctor'.

5.   /ʌ/ > /a/ ~/O/, for example, /bʌs/ > /bas/ 'bus', /kʌmpənɪ/ > /kOmpeni, 'company'.

6.   /ɑ:/ > /ar/, for example, /tʃɑ:t/ > /sart/ 'chart'.

7.   /ɔ:/ > /O/ ~/a/ ~ /o/, for example, / ɔ:l/ > /Ol/ 'all', /w ɔ:l/ > /wal/   [Ual] 'wall', /bɔ:d/ > /bord/ 'board'.

8.   /u:/ >/u/, for example, /pu:l/ > /pul/ 'pool'.

9.   /ɒ/ >/O/, for example, /hɒt/ >/hOt/ 'hot'.

10.   /ɪ/ > /ɪ/ ~/e/ ~/ai/,for example, /pɪn/ > /pin/ 'pin', /bɑ:skɪt/ > /basket/ 'basket', /dɪrekt/ > /dairekt/   [dairek] 'direct'.

1.2.   Diphthongs

Diphthongs of RP also pose a problem for the Assamese learners of English. RP diphthongs are /eɪ/, /əu/, /ɑɪ/, /ɑu/, /ɔɪ/, /ɪə/, /ɛə/ and /uə/ whereas General Assamese diphthongs are/ ei , ai , au , Oi , ia , iU , ue , ou , iu /. RP diphthongs are substituted either by G.A.E monopthongs or General Assamese English diphthongs and which are as the following:

1.   /eɪ/ > /ei/ ~/e/ ~/O/ ~/a/,for example, /reɪn/ >/rein/ 'rain', /geɪt/ > /get/ 'gate', /brɔ:dgeɪdʒ/ > /brOdgOɟ/ 'broad-gauge', /deɪtə/> /data/ 'data'.

2.   /ɑɪ/ > /ai/ ~/i/, for example, /frɑɪ/> /phrai/ 'fry', /krɑɪst/ > /khrist/ 'christ'.

3.   RP /ɑu/ > /au/ ~/o/,for example, /kɑu/> /kau/ 'cow', /ɑɪbrɑu/ > /aibro/ 'eyebrow'

4.   /əu/ > /U/~/o/ ~/O/, for example, /pəust/> /pUst/ 'post', /gəu/ >/go/ 'go', /əupən/ >/Open/   [open] 'open'.

5.   /ɔɪ/> /Oi/ ~[oi], for example, /ɔɪl/ >/Oil/ [oil] 'oil'.

6.   /ɪə/ > /i/ ~ /e/ ~ /iar/, for example, /zɪərəu/ > /jirU/ 'zero', /zɪərɔ:ks/> /jerOks/ 'xerox', /nɪə/>/niar/ 'near'.

7.   /eə/ >/e/ ~ /iar/, for example, /eərəpleɪn/ >/erUplen/ 'aeroplane', /beə/ > /biar/ 'bear'.

8.   /uə/ >/u/ ~/iU/~/ue/~ /ou/, for example, /tuə/ > /tur/ 'tour', /ʃuə/> /siUr/ 'sure', /ɪnfluəns/> /inphluens/ 'influence', /puə/> /pour/ 'poor'.

2.   Consonants

British RP comprises of twenty four consonantal phonemes whereas General Assamese English comprises of twenty two. In RP, there are ten places of articulation and in G.A.E, there are five places of articulation. Similarly there are differences to be seen in case of manner of articulation. In G.A.E. /ph, bh, th, dh, kh, gh/ are aspirated phonemes and these are absent categories in British RP, though RP /p, t, k/ are aspirated at the beginning of accented syllables./b, d, g/ are never aspirated in British RP. RP /f, v, θ, ð, z, ʃ, ʒ/ are absent categories in General Assamese English. Besides, there are no affricate sounds to be found in G.A.E (Baruah, T.C. 2007). /tʃ, dʒ/ are palato-alveolar affricates in British RP. Moreover, G.A.E. approximants /w/ and /y/ are rarely articulated by the Assamese learners of English of rural areas. As the Assamese learners of English of rural areas are rarely exposed to English sounds, they tend to substitute /u/ or/U/ for /w/ and /i/ for /y/.while the educated Assamese speakers of urban areas make a conscious effort and they use /w/ and /y/ due to the proper exposure of English in T.V., radio or mass-media. RP consonants are substituted by Assamese medium learners of English as the following:

1.   / tʃ/ >/s/, for example, / tʃeɪn/> /sen/ 'chain'.
2.   /dʒ/ >/j/, for example, /dʒʌst/ >/jast/ 'just'.
3.   /f/ >/ph/, for example, /fæn/>/phEn/ 'fan'.
4.   /v/ >/bh/, for example, /væn/>/bhEn/ 'van'.
5.   /θ/> /th/, for example, /θri:/> /thri/ 'three'.
6.   /ð/ > /d/. For example, /ðen/> /den/ 'then'.
7.   /z/ > /j/, for example, /zebra/ >/jebra/ 'zebra'.
8.   /ʃ/ >/s/, for example, /ʃɒp/ >/sOp/ 'shop'.
9.   /ʒ/ >/j/, for example, /meʒə/> /mejar/ 'measure'.
10.   /w/ >/hw/~ [hOa], for example, /wɒt/ >/hwat/ [hOat] 'what'.

3.   Comparison of Phonological Systems of RP and General Assamese English

Like RP and G.I.E, there is also a marked difference as well as similarity of the vowel and the consonant systems of both RP and General Assamese English to be seen. There are forty four phonemes in British RP, while General Assamese English has thirty nine phonemes.

3.1.   Monopthongs

1)   RP has twelve pure vowels and G.A.E has eight pure vowel phonemes or monopthongs.

2)   In RP a phonemic distinction between short and long vowel is seen. There are seven short vowels and five long vowel phonemes in RP, whereas all the eight vowels are short in General Assamese English.

3)   In G.A.E /a, U, o/ are found whereas these three vowels are totally absent in RP.

4)   G.A.E has /a/ corresponding to four distinct vowel phonemes /ɑ:, ɜ:, ə, ʌ/ of RP.

5)   There are three front vowels /i, e, E/ in G.A.E, whereas RP has four /i:, ɪ, e, æ/.

6)   There are three central vowels / ɜ:, ə, ʌ/ in RP ,but there is one central vowel found /a/ in G.A.E.

7)   There are five back vowels /u: u, ɔ:, ɒ, ɑ: / in RP, but there are four back vowels /u, U, o, O/ in G.A.E.

8)   RP/ɒ/ and G.A.E/O/ are almost similar vowels.

9)   /ɪ/ of RP is partially similar to G.A.E /i/ that is, G.A.E /i/ is closer and less centralized than RP /ɪ/.

10)   /u/ of RP is partially similar to G.A.E/u/that is, G.A.E /u/is closer and less centralized than RP /u/.

3.2.   Diphthongs

1)   RP has eight diphthongs but General Assamese English possesses nine diphthongs.

2)   Except /ei/, /ai/, /au/ and /Oi/, other five diphthongs /ia, iU, iu, ou, ue/are only found in G.A.E.

3)   /ai/ of G.A.E is almost similar to RP /ɑɪ/.

4)   /au/ of G.A.E is almost similar to RP /ɑu/.

5)   /ei/ of G.A.E is almost similar to RP /eɪ/.

6)   /Oi/ of G.A.E is almost similar to RP /ɔɪ/.

3.3.   Consonants

1)   There are twenty four consonantal phonemes in RP, whereas there are twenty two consonants in G.A.E.

2)	The plosive phonemes of RP comprises of three pairs:
/p, b/; /t, d/; /k, g/; whereas there are three sets of four each in G.A.E:

/p/	/ph/,	/b/	/bh/;
/t/	/th ,	/d/	/dh/;
/k/	/kh/,	/g/	/gh/.

3)	G.A.E has four fold distinctions among plosives---voiceless unaspirated, voiceless aspirated, voiced unaspirated and voiced aspirated.

4)	In both RP and G.A.E, plosive phonemes are articulated at three distinct places of articulation: bilabial, alveolar and velar.

5)	In RP [pʰ], [tʰ] and [kʰ] are allophones of the phonemes /p/, /t/ and /k/ respectively. That is, /p/, /t/, /k/ are aspirated at the beginning of accented syllables, but in G.A.E /p, ph, t, th, k, kh/ are different phonemes.

6)	G.A.E /ph, bh, th, dh, kh, gh /are absent categories in RP.

7)	/b, d, g/ are never aspirated in RP.

8)	There are nine fricatives in RP, whereas there are three fricatives available in G.A.E.

9)	/f, v, θ, ð, z, ʃ, ʒ/of RP are absent categories in G.A.E.

10)	In RP /h/ is a voiceless glottal fricative whereas,/h/ is a voiced glottal fricative in General Assamese English. /ɟ/ of G.A.E is absent in RP.

11)	There are no affricates found in G.A.E, whereas RP has a set of two affricates /ʧ, ʤ/.

12)	Both RP and G.A.E have three nasal phonemes: /m, n, ŋ/.

13)	In RP, there is no trill sound available, but G.A.E has one trill phoneme /r/. In RP /r/ is used only before vowels, it does not occur word-finally and before consonants, whereas it is not so in G.A.E.

14)	Both RP and G.A.E have semi vowels: /w/ and /j/ in RP and /w/ and /y/ in G.A.E. and they occur initially and before a vowel.

15)	In RP /w/ is labio-velar whereas, it is bilabial approximant in G.A.E.

16)	/w/ in G.A.E has two realizations: [u]and [U] by rural Assamese speakers, but it is not so in RP.

17)	/y/ in G.A.E is realized by rural Assamese speakers as [i] whereas it is not so in RP.

18)   /p, b, t, d, k, g, s, m, n, ŋ, l/ are almost similar phonemes both in RP and G.A.E consonantal systems.

5. Consonant Clusters

As far as the problem areas of consonant clusters of RP English from the point of view of Assamese medium learners are concerned, I will concentrate on consonant clusters of British RP that do not occur in General Assamese English and these are indicated below:

5.1. a. Plosives

CC Initial Cluster with Plosive as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member	
p, t, k, b, d	**w**	**j**
p		×
t	×	×
k	×	×
b		×
d	×	×

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/pjuə/	\<pure\>	/pyur/
/twin/	\<twin\>	/tuin/
/tju:n/	\<tune\>	/tyun/
/kwik/	\<quick\>	/kuik/
/kjuə/	\<cure\>	/kyur/
/bju:ti/	\<beauty\>	/byuti/
/dwel/	\<dwell\>	/duel/
/dju:/	\<dew\>	/dyu/

CC Final Cluster with Plosive as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member		
p, b, t, d, k, g	**l**	**θ**	**n**
p	×	×	
b	×		
t	×	×	×
d	×	×	×
k	×		
g	×		

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/kʌpl/	\<couple\>	/kapUl/
/depθ/	\<depth\>	/depht/
/teibl/	\<table\>	/tebul/
/bɒtl/	\<bottle\>	/bOtOl/
/eitθ/	\<eighth\>	/eith/
/kɒtn/	\<cotton\>	/kOtOn/
/pædl/	\<paddle\>	/pEdel/
/widθ/	\<width\>	/uith/
/sʌdn/	\<sudden\>	/saden/
/tækl/	\<tackle\>	/tEkel/
/gɑ:gl/	\<gargle\>	/gargUl/

CC Final Cluster with Plosive as the Second Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member
v, ð	**d**
v	×
ð	×

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/lʌvd/	\<loved\>	/labhd/
/bri:ðd/	\<breathed\>	/brithed,/

CCC Cluster in word final position with Plosive as the Final Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First and Second Member		Third Member
l	**v**	**d**

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/sɒlvd/	\<solved\>	/solbhd/

5.2. b. Nasal

CC Initial Cluster with Nasal as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member
m, n	**j**
m	×
n	×

Examples

RP   **G.A.E.**
/mju:z/   <muse>   /myuɨ/
/nju:/   <new>   /nyu/

CC Final Cluster with Nasal as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member	
m, n, ŋ	**l**	**θ**
m	×	×
n	×	×
ŋ		×

Examples

RP   **G.A.E.**
/kæml/   <camel>   /kEmel/
/wɔ:mθ/   <warmth>   /uarmth/
/ʧænl/   <channel>   /sEnel/
/tenθ/   <tenth>   /tenth/
/leŋθ/   <length>   /leŋth/

CC Final Cluster with Nasal as the Second Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member	
z, d, f, v, s	**m**	**n**
z	×	×
d		×
f		×
v		×
s		×

Examples

RP   **G.A.E.**
/prizm/   <prism>   /priɟOm/
/kʌzn/   <cousin>   /kaɟin/
/sʌdn/   <sudden>   /saden/
/stifn/   <stiffen>   /stiphen/

/ʃeivn/   <shaven>   /sebhEn/
/ʧeisn/   <chasten>   /sesten/

CCC Final Cluster with Nasal as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second and Third Member							
m, n, ŋ	f	l	d	l	θ	s	g	l
m	×							
n			×		×			
ŋ					×		×	

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**
/traiəmfl/   <triumphal>   /traiamphel/
/kændl/   <candle>   /kEndel/
/mʌnθs/   <months>   /manths/
/leŋθs/   <lengths>   /leŋths/
/ʤʌŋgl/   <jungle>   /ɉaŋgUl/

CCCC Final Cluster involving Nasal as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.:

First Member	Second Member	Third Member	Fourth Member
n	d	l	z

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**
/kændlz/   <candles>   /kEndels/

5.3.c. Lateral

CC Final Cluster with Lateral as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member
l	θ

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**
/helθ/   <health>   /helth/

CC Final Cluster with Lateral as the Second Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member
p, b, t, d, k, g, s, z, f, v, ʃ, m, n, ŋ	**l**
p	×
b	×
t	×
d	×
k	×
g	×
s	×
z	×
f	×
v	×
ʃ	×
m	×
n	×
ŋ	×

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/kʌpl/	<couple>	/kapUl/
/bʌbl/	<bubble>	/babUl/
/kætl/	<cattle>	/kEtUl/
/midl/	<middle>	/midUl/
/tækl/	<tackle>	/tEkel/
/gɑːgl/	<gargle>	/gargUl/
/kɑːsl/	<castle>	/kastUl/
/pʌzl/	<puzzle>	/paɟUl/

/rɑifl/	<rifle>	/raiphOl/
/rɑivl/	<rival>	/raibhel/
/mɑ:ʃl/	<marshall>	/marsel/
/kæml/	<camel>	/kEmel/
/ʧænl/	<channel>	/sEnel/
/æŋgl/	<angle>	/EŋgUl/

5.4. d. Fricatives

CC Initial Cluster with Fricative as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member			
f, v, θ, s, ʃ	r	l	w	j
f	×	×		×
v				×
θ	×		×	
s			×	
ʃ	×			

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**

/frɑɪ/	<fry>	/phrai/
/flɑɪ/	<fly>	/phlai/
/fju:/	<few>	/phyu/
/vju:/	<view>	/bhyu/
/θri:/	<three>	/thri/
/θwɑ:t/	<thwart>	/thUart/
/swɒn/	<swan>	/sUan/
/ʃrɪŋk/	<shrink>	/sriŋk/

CCC Initial Cluster with Fricative as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second and Third Member
s	k w

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**

/skwi:z/	<squeeze>	/skuiɟ/ 4

CC Final Cluster with Fricative as the First Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member		
f, v, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ	**l**	**d**	**n**
f	×		×
v	×		×
ð		×	
s			×
z	×		×
ʃ			×
ʒ			×

Examples
RP   **G.A.E.**
/rɑɪfl/   <rifle>   /raiphOl/
/stɪfn/   <stiffen>   /stiphen/
/rɑɪvl/   <rival>   /raibhel/
/ʃeɪvn/   <shaven>   /sEbhen/
/bri:ðd/   <breathed>   /brithed/
/ʧeɪsn/   <chasten>   /sesten/
/neɪzl/   <nasal>   /nEj̯el/
/breɪzn/   <brazen>   /brEj̯en/
/mɪʃn/   <mission>   /misOn/
/vɪʒn/   <vision>   /bhij̯On/

CC Final Cluster with Fricative as the Second Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First Member	Second Member				
p, t, d, f, v, θ, ð, m, n, ŋ, l	**f**	**θ**	**s**	**z**	**v**
p		×			
t		×			

d		×			
f		×			
v				×	
θ			×		
ð				×	
m		×			
n		×			
ŋ		×			
l		×			×

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/depθ/	<depth>	/depht/
/eitθ/	<eighth>	/eith/
/widθ/	<width>	/uith/
/fifθ/	<fifth>	/phiphth/
/livz/	<lives>	/libhs/
/fɔ:θs/	<fourths>	/forths/
/bri:ðz/	<breathes>	/briths/
/wɔ:mθ/	<warmth>	/Uarmth/
/mʌnθ/	<month>	/manth/
/leŋθ/	<length>	/leŋth/
/helθ/	<health>	/helth/
/sɒlv/	<solve>	/solbh/

CCC Final Cluster with Fricative as the Final Member not occurring in G.A.E.

First and Second Member		Third Member		
		s	**θ**	**z**
p	**θ**	×		
t	**θ**	×		
k	**s**		×	

f **θ**	×		
n **θ**	×		
l **f**		×	
l **v**			×

Examples

RP		G.A.E.
/depθs/	<depths>	/dephts/
/eitθs/	<eighths>	/eiths/
/siksθ/	<sixth>	/siksth/
/fifθs/	<fifths>	/phiphths/
/tenθs/	<tenths>	/tenths/
/twelfθ/	<twelfth>	/tuelphth/
/sɒlvz/	<solves>	/solbhs/

4.   Geminates

There is one-to-one correspondence between spelling and pronunciation in General Assamese English. Assamese speakers tend to pronounce the word with medial double consonant letters with the consonant in question considerably prolonged. It is seen only in the following example with prolonged /ll/ by the Assamese speakers. For example,

/jeləu/   <yellow>   [iyello]

5.   Supra-segmental Features

Most of the English words are bound to be pronounced with an appropriate stress, and stress contrast affects the lexical meaning of words. As compared to English, Assamese has weak stress. Assamese speakers do not pay much attention in pronouncing the English words with stress. There are no specific rules of stress, rhythm and intonation to be traced out as far as supra segmental features of General Assamese English are concerned.

Regarding syllable stress , for example, ' ˈpresent ' (noun) and ' preˈsent ' (verb) , it is found that an Assamese learner of English doesn't make any distinction between ' ˈpresent' (n) and 'preˈsent' (v). Likewise, at the level of sentence stress also, it is found that an Assamese learner of English doesn't put any emphasis on a particular word as such.

6.   Conclusion

From the above discussion I may come to the conclusion that Assamese medium learners have their problems in articulating English vowels (monopthongs+diphthongs), consonantal phonemes as well as consonant clusters. Though the study is very brief and synoptic in nature, I have tried to locate the problem areas faced by Assamese medium learners while

acquiring English sounds with the observation that how absent phonemes of English (in their mother-tongue) are replaced by available phonemes. Final consonants are replaced by vowel epenthesis. However, the following observations are also important: metathesis, prothesis, anaphyxis, devoicing of voiced consonants that take place in General Assamese English.

Notes

1.   If /ə/ occurs word initially in RP.
2.   If /ə/occurs word medially in RP.
3.   If /ə/occurs word finally in RP.
4.   It is interesting to note that majority of the Assamese learners of English in rural areas insert [i] at the beginning of a cluster that starts with fricative /s/ (Baishya, A.K. 2010).

References

 Baishya, A.K. 2010. 'Phonology of English Loan Words in Assamese'. *Assam University Journal,* Humanities and Social Sciences, vol. V, no,1. Silchar: A.U.

Balasubramaniam, T. 1981. *A Textbook of English Phonetics.* Macmillan India   Pvt.Ltd.

Bansal, R. K. and J.B.Harrison. 2001 *Spoken English*. Orient Longman, New Delhi.

Baruah, T.C. 2007. *The English Teachers' Handbook.* Sterling Publishers Private Limited, New Delhi.

Crystal, D. 1985. 'How many millions? The statistics of English today'. *English Today* 1:7-9.

 Jones, D. 1995. *Everyman's English Pronouncing Dictionary,* UBS, New Delhi.

Lado, Robert. 1957 . *Linguistics Across Cultures*. An Arbor Michigan: University of Michigan Press.

Anima Baishya, M.A. (English), Ph.D. Scholar
Department of Linguistics
Assam University
Silchar 788011
Assam
India
momibsh543@gmail.com