

How to be Phonetically Intelligible in English?

Dr. Shafiulla M. Alim Khan

Assistant Professor, N.M.D. College, Gondia, (M.S.) India

Abstract

English is a widely spoken language and it has become a global language. However, it suffers from mispronunciation of its sounds and words by the non-native speakers of the language. Since English is a syllabic language and the majority of Indian languages including Hindi and Marathi are alphabetic languages. English words form their pronunciation by combination of syllables whereas in Hindi and Marathi the alphabets have marks or 'matras' to form pronunciation of words. Indians always find English spelling system and its pronunciation difficult to understand. Though English language too has vowel and consonantal sounds like Hindi and Marathi languages but there are certain sounds in English which differ in sounds and their way of pronunciation. Therefore, the study of sounds of English and their pronunciation could help Indian speakers of English to become intelligible.

Keywords: Monophthongs, Diphthongs, Syllable, Plosive, Affricate

Introduction: All Indian students of English or Indians who want to speak in English face the dilemma of being unintelligible. They are unintelligible to native speakers of English when they speak the language. Similarly they find it difficult to understand the language when it is spoken by the native speakers of English. To understand this dilemma and to clear the clouds of doubt it is necessary to fathom the reasons behind it. These reasons can be understood in the light of the sound system of English Language, the sound system which involves vowels and consonants of English language. The various accents of English language, its stress and intonation need to be understood to comprehend this dilemma.

Majority of Indian languages and English belong to one very large family of languages called Indo-European family of languages. However, all the Indian languages have their

own sound system and they do not necessarily conform to the sounds of English. When Indian students of English learn the language, they use the sound system of their mother tongue rather than English. In this process the Indian speakers of English language pronounce the language according to the sounds, stress and intonation of their mother tongue. Thus, a Hindi speaking person has distinct Hindi accent; a Punjabi speaking person would have a distinct Punjabi accent and so on. These Indian accents might be intelligible to the Indians but are unintelligible to native speakers of the language. Similarly, when English is spoken by the native speakers Indians find it difficult to understand. If everyone speaks English as per the sounds of his mother tongue and its stress and intonation English would fail to become a global link language joining different linguistic communities.

It is, therefore, necessary to follow a single code of pronunciation by all the speakers of the language. However, it is not possible that all would be able to speak with equal precision, but a close approximation to the sounds of English is desired. One must also bear in mind that English language itself has five accents known as the British accent, the American accent, the Canadian accent, the Australian accent and the South African accent. An accent is a particular way of pronouncing words that is connected with the country, region and social class that one comes from. Thus, one can observe a distinct way of speaking in all these five accents but the sound system of these accents remains the same. On the contrary the foreign speakers of English language including Indians use sound system of their own mother tongue while speaking it. The difference in the sound systems not only renders these foreign speakers unintelligible to the native speakers of English language but also, they find it difficult to understand when spoken by the native speakers.

A comparative study of the sounds of

English language and one's mother tongue can help the foreign speakers of the language to train their tongues to be intelligible and to cultivate an ear for the language. A study of sound system of English language prescribed by Daniel Jones can help the foreign speakers in this regard. One needs to study the sounds of English Vowels and Consonants to identify their differences and similarities with their mother tongue.

The consonants are described in terms of the place from where they are actually articulated with the help of different articulators main amongst all of which is the tongue, and the way of articulation. The pronunciation of the consonantal sounds, unlike the vowels involve either total or partial obstruction of the air in the oral cavity. Total obstruction which results into the articulation of plosives or stop (like /p/, /b/ etc.), partial obstruction produces fricative sounds like /f/, /v/ etc. as shown in the chart below. Place of Articulation and Manner of articulation of English Consonants can be seen in the following chart.

Table 1:

Classification of NAE Consonant Phonemes							
Manner of Articulation	Place of Articulation						
	Bilabial	Labiodental	Dental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Stop							
Voiceless	p			t		k	
Voiced	b			d		g	
Fricative		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
Voiceless							
Voiced		v	ð	z	ʒ		
Affricate					tʃ		
Voiceless							
Voiced					dʒ		
Nasal							
Voiced	m			n		ŋ	
Liquid							
Voiced				l	r		
Glide							
Voiced	w				y		

In the above table of English Consonants majority of the sounds have their identical sounds in Hindi, Marathi and majority of Indian languages. However, there are few consonantal sounds in English which do not have parallels in Indian languages like Hindi and Marathi. For example, the fricative sound /f/ is a labio-dental sound. Fricative sound means a sound which is pronounced when the articulating organs come close to each other and the exhaling air passes through these organs with a frictional sound. The organs which come close to each other in case of /f/ sound are lower lip and upper teeth ridge and that is why the sound is called a labio-dental sound. In case of Hindi and Marathi speaking individuals, if they are not instructed to pronounce the sound /f/ correctly it is pronounced as /ph/ using both the lips and completely stopping the exhaling air and then releasing it like a

plosive sound. Similarly, /z/ is another fricative sound in English which is palato-alveolar which means it is pronounced when the tip of the tongue comes closer to the area where palate and alveolar meat and the air passes through these organs. The Hindi and Marathi speaking individuals mispronounce the /z/ sound as they stop the air between tongue and palate and alveolus. The English consonants /v/ is labio-dental fricative and /w/ is a semi-vowel. /v/ is pronounced by lower lip and upper teeth ridge with these organs coming closer to each other and producing a frictional sound. On the other hand, /w/ is pronounced with the help of rounding of the lips and there is no obstruction in the oral cavity. Thus, a good understanding of English Consonants and their manner and place of articulation is necessary to pronounce these sounds correctly.

List of English Vowels: Monophthongs and Diphthongs:

Vowel Sounds (20)		
Monophthong Sounds (12)		Diphthong Sounds (8)
Short Vowel (7)	Long Vowel (5)	
/ɪ/ pit	/i/ bean	/ɪə/ peer
/e/ pet	/ɑ/ barn	/eə/ pair
/æ/ pat	/ɔ/ born	/ʊə/ poor
/ʌ/ putt	/u/ boon	/eɪ/ bay
/ɒ/ pot	/ɜ/ burn	/aɪ/ buy
/ʊ/ put		/ɔɪ/ boy
/ə/ another		/əʊ/ no
		/aʊ/ now

www.literaryenglish.com

As there are certain consonantal sounds in English which differ from the sounds of Hindi and Marathi, there are such vowel sounds which are not found in Hindi and Marathi. There are twelve monophthongs or single vowel sounds in English. These monophthongs or single vowel sounds have their parallels in Indian languages like Hindi and Marathi but the sounds of English differ from these parallels in terms of their pronunciation. For example, there are three /a/ sounds in English pronounced as /ʌ/, /ə:/ and /ə/. Among these the upside down /ʌ/ is a sound which is pronounced with stop of the release of the air stream as in the middle of the words 'such' and 'but'. /E:/ is pronounced when the air is released for a longer time as in the middle of the words 'bird' and 'heard' and /ə/ is pronounced when the air is released for a shorter period of time as in the initial position of the words 'above' and 'among'. Thus, these three sounds are produced with different ways of releasing the air and stopping it.

Similarly, the pronunciation of English language also differs from Indian languages because it has eight diphthongal glides or diphthongs apart from monophthongs. A diphthong is a combination of two vowel sounds in which the articulating organs

pronounce the first vowel sound and touch the second vowel sound. For example, /ei/ is a diphthong used in play pronounced as /plei/ in which the vowel sound /e/ is pronounced completely and the second vowel sound /i/ is touched pronouncing it as /ei/. Similarly, the other diphthongs of English are pronounced and those who are not acquainted with the diphthongal glides find it difficult to pronounce correctly and understand when they are pronounced by the native speakers.

Conclusion: It is mandatory for a foreign speaker of English language to understand that like all languages English too has its unique sound system and way of pronunciation. The foreign speakers of English should understand the sounds of English and make an attempt to pronounce them as closely as possible. A close approximation to English sounds and pronunciation is expected so that English becomes intelligible when it is spoken by the foreign speakers. Similarly, the foreign speakers of English can understand the spoken language when it is spoken by the native speakers.

Bibliography:

- I. <http://teachingpronunciation.weebly.com/consonant--vowel-charts-nae.html>
- II. <https://allthingslinguistic.com/post/143133795554/how-to-remember-the-ipa-consonant-chart>
- III. <https://literaryenglish.com/introduction-to-vowel-sounds-english-vowels/>
- IV. <https://www.abaenglish.com/en/aba-english-masterclass/the-phonetic-alphabet-in-english/>