

# INFLUENCE OF MOTHER TONGUE AND REGIONAL EFFECT ON ENGLISH AS A SECOND LANGUAGE LEARNERS IN INDIA: A CRITICAL STUDY.

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## Abstract

In this age of Science and Technology, English has become the 'Lingua Franca' where managing without the knowledge of this language has become unimaginable in India, especially in professional circumstances. Acquiring proficiency in English Language for students coming from the different parts of the country is a trial. Each scholar is an individual with a unique mother tongue which turns into a hindrance to learning the accurate diction of English which is a second language for them. English, not only helps the people of our country to remain united by acting as a linguistic tool, but also, it serves as a language of wider communication. Unfortunately and unknowingly, it overlaps with the local dialects and an individual's mother tongue in certain sphere of influence and public domains due to which, the students coming from different regions of our country, particularly studying around Delhi feel a kind of an inferiority and subordination among their peer groups. This leads to unproductive and ineffective communication in our day to day lives.

Language is a system and is made up of habits that solve the purpose of giving expressions to ideas and feelings. Pronunciation defines how the speaker will be understood by others not only in terms of the personality but also in the socio-cultural, educational, and regional backgrounds. The acquisition of the first language or mother tongue is different from learning any foreign or second language in many ways. It is a natural process learnt in natural environment in a clean state of mind. When a native speaker learns second language, the habit of his mother tongue continuously conflicts with the foreign language in all areas viz. sounds, structures, vocabulary, speech habits, grammar, pragmatics and anatomy of the organs of speech.

This paper will not only find out how Mother Tongue Influence (MTI) and regional effects of first language (L1) create problems in pronunciation thus affecting successful communication, but also offer a few solutions to the problem.

## KEY TERMS

*Communication, Pronunciation, MTI (Mother Tongue Influence), Accent, Indianism, ESL (English as a Second Language), TESL (Teaching English as a Second Language), L1 (First language or Mother tongue), L2 (Second or Foreign Language).*

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## Introduction

Language is man's most remarkable achievement and merged with our lives like a natural habit. Human is a slave of habits and for this very reason we often take language learning process for granted and ignore the core features

which leads us to commit unconscious errors. Language is a system. O. Jespersen defines language as a “*set of human habits, the purpose of which is to give expression to thoughts and feelings, and specially to impart them to others.*” English is a globally accepted and understood spoken and written medium of communication. In northern India Hindi is the most commonly spoken, written and read language. English is not only considered as an associate language but as a link language in Indian at two important levels. First, English is responsible for our inter-state and intrastate communication and for the contact with the outside world.

As a link with the west, English is bound to be at a prominent place. We can't isolate ourselves just like any other country in the world for political, cultural and economic development. Second, India is a multilingual country and it is said that in India language changes in every 2 miles of the distance covered. English serves as a link language in India. People in different states have different mother tongues (L1). English serves as a link for inter-state communication. It is a link between union government and non-Hindi speaking state.

Not only this, English represents in the minds of Indians as symbol of better education, better culture and higher intellect. In pre-independence era English was considered as foreign language but now in schools the foreign language columns have other European languages.

David Crystal's (English as a Global Language) gives the estimate about the users of English taken from various sources. David Crystal says about the importance of English language that, —it is the language on which the sun never sets. After the information technology revolution English has become useful and essential thing at international level. The British empire of English has disappeared but the empire of English language has been extending through the whole world. Now, it has become a neo-colonial empire and its influence and importance is such that it has become an inevitable and necessary for everyone.

Even the part of general native Indian speakers who are not formally educated in this language they also understand it and considered as receptive bilinguals. Considering the role of English as an international language as a window on the outside world, as a library and as a link language both in India and foreign countries, we cannot dispense with the study of English as a second language.

### **ENGLISH LANGUAGE TEACHING IN INDIA.**

Before independence English was the medium of instruction for some subjects in the high school classes and for all subject at the university level. This was one of the names of our educational system. Despite opposition from eminent leaders because the use of regional languages as medium of education from the Lowest to highest stage was a matter of profound importance for nation integration The Kothari Education Commission (1966) said, “Mother tongue has a pre-eminent claim as a medium of instruction at the school and college stages. Moreover, the medium of instruction at the school and higher education should generally be the same. The regional language should, therefore, be adopted as medium of instruction at the higher stage”

### **CONDITIONS UNDER WHICH ENGLISH LANGUAGE IS TAUGHT**

The deplorable state of English as a medium of written and spoken language is a result of the condition under which English is taught and learnt in our foundation levels. Eliminating the elite and high stature public schools and considering the government schools affordable to the middle and lower middle class, the teaching of English in our schools are in chaotic state today.

Pupils are taught English for about six periods a week for six years (Class VI-XII) but it has been estimated that they hardly know 150 words by the time they join a university. This means they have hardly been able to learn English words at the rate of one word per period.

They don't know how to use the most basic structures in English. Quoting the Chief Minister H D Kumaraswamy from The Indian Express *'Though primary education in mother tongue is a state policy, the CM has decided to offer English medium at higher primary level — from Class 6.'*

Because of the conditions of the teaching English vary from place to place. By and large the performance of the students in urban schools is better than that of the students in rural schools of the Hindi speaking belt. Likewise, the attainment of the students in public schools is better than that of their counterpart in non-public schools.

Some of the shortcomings in specific to our English language Learning programs system can be considered as follows

### Lack of clear-cut policy

The stature of English language in India isn't well defined since post-independence. It has been changing constantly with the time. In certain states it is no longer essential for students to pass English to get through the high school examination.

The result is that the students have no necessity to learn English language formally but when they get an exposure to working world, they have to acquire the functioning knowledge of the English language but at a huge cost of pronunciation problems and mother tongue influence. For example, in the eastern Bihar the pronunciation of table becomes *"tabul"*, multiple becomes *"multipull"*

### The Aim of Teaching English is not defined.

In our current degree acquisition tug of war the sole aim of an English Language teacher is to push the students to get through the examination by cramming methods for the pass percentage and not enable them to learn the language proficiently by mastering the skills of English as a second language

### Dearth of competent teachers

However in schools and colleges as per the policies B.Ed. and UGC qualification are mandatory but considering the mushrooming English coaching and language learning centers, it is ironic to find that many instructors who did not offer teaching of English and are not proficient in their training, teach this subject.

Quoting a report from NDTV'17 *"The top 6 states and UTs which had the greatest number of elementary teachers in 2016 were Jharkhand (38.39%), Bihar (34.37%), Delhi (24.96%), Punjab (23.39%), Chandigarh (23.07%) and Uttar Pradesh (22.99%)."*

*In case of secondary school is teachers, India is short by more than 1 million teachers than the sanctioned number. The top 5 states and UTs with the greatest number of secondary school teacher vacancies in 2016 were Uttar Pradesh (50.0%), Bihar (36.09%), Tripura (34.15%), and Chhattisgarh (28.98%). The total number of vacant posts for elementary school teachers was 907585 and the number of vacant posts for secondary school teachers was 106906. This is again, the data present in government records and the ground reality may be far different.*







system of a language and vocabulary is its least stable part of a language.

The correctness in terms of accurate pronunciation, syntax and grammatical structure, and word bank, does not rest upon the usage. The only basis of correctness in the language is the usage by its native speakers (L1). The functions of grammar or dictionary is only to record the usage as language is changing usage also changes from time to time.

It is a wrong notion that some languages are not learnable. Any person can learn any language under favorable conditions. Some of these conditions are motivation to learn the language, the right type of environment and teachers, and the time devoted to learn the language. As we already know that the first language (L1) is acquired as a natural learning process but in second language acquisition (SLA) we have to pay attention to what, how and where we are learning.

It is not only about getting acquainted with one language but also practicing it in day to day use. Not being in the native land of the language affects the learning process to a large extent.

Our organ of speech, manner and speaking habits are developed according to our native language. Unless we spend a good time among the native of the second language it is difficult to know the correct manner of articulation of that language.

One of the biggest challenges we face in L2 pronunciation is the Regional effect. The incorrect English is a result of translation method used in language teaching. E.g. in Lucknow the colloquial for first person is 'Ham' so they say 'hum ja rahe hain' where they mean 'I am going', which literally gets translated into English as 'we are going'.

Another problem we face in pronunciation due to regional effect is the native language has different sound system for example In Rajasthan and Haryana, the Hindi alphabet is learnt as /kae/, /khae/, /gae/, /ghae/ but in Uttar Pradesh the same Hindi alphabet is learnt as /ka/, /kha/, /ga/, /gha/ and if a person from Bengal or Assam is asked to speak the Hindi alphabet the pronunciation would be /ko/, /kho/, /go/, /gho/. Resulting the pronunciation of a person from haryana speaking the word 'behind' is /bɪ'hænd/ instead of /bɪ'hɪnd/.

### **MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE IN LANGUAGE LEARNING AND PRONUNCIATION.**

Learning a language is an art and not a science. The basis of art is 'practice' but the basis of science is 'knowledge'. Knowing a language and knowing about a language are not the same thing. Just like dancing and painting cannot be acquired without constant practice, the same is with the language learning. We know that the child learns his mother tongue through reception and practice, similarly the second or foreign language has to be learnt in the same manner as Harold E. Palmer says "language learning is essentially a habit-forming process. A process during which we acquire the new habits. one of the difficulties in learning a second language is that the child has to cultivate a new set of the habits he has already acquire and he has to keep at bay the habits of first language which continuously gets on his way. Some of the speaking habits are using syllogism, uptalk or vocal fries, incorrect or expression less intonation, excessive use of fillers etc.

The implications of the principles of the teaching of English is that he should provide ample opportunity to the learners to practice the language. They must be able to use patterns of English as natural habits.

The learning of mother tongue (L1) differs from learning the foreign language (L2) in a number of ways like the learning of mother tongue is a natural process. The learner has the strongest motivation to learn it because he wants to express his needs and wants. If the learner does not learn the mother tongue, he cannot adjust himself in society.

On the other hand, learning a foreign language is an artificial process. Mostly the learner in his initial stage as a child has little motivation to learn and the will to learn a foreign language is missing. As the child learns the mother tongue in a natural enjoyment he is surrounded by a number of teachers like his parents, relatives and teachers to coax him. To learn the language, he listens to the mother tongue most of his waking hours but the foreign language is taught in an artificial environment more often. Mother tongue interferes in the learning of foreign language and a number of ways. This is but natural when the speaker learns his mother tongue, there is no language getting in the

way but when he learns foreign language, the habit of his mother tongue continually conflicts with those of the foreign language. The conflict arises in all areas like sounds, structure, and vocabulary

Many Indians claim that Indian English is very similar to British English, but this opinion is based on a surface level examination of lexical similarities. The Devangari script used in Hindi contains 10 vowels and 40 consonants and is characterized by bars on top of the symbols. Hindi is highly phonetic in which the pronunciation of new words can be reliably predicted from their written form. In comparison with English, Hindi has approximately half as many vowels and twice as many consonants. This leads to several problems of pronunciation. Compared to English Hindi has weak but predictable word stress. Learners therefore have considerable difficulty with the irregular stress patterns of words such as photograph / photographer.

A vowel is a sound that is created without diverting or blocking sound. Speaking vowels, our mouth is open and fairly relaxed. Though vowels do not divert or block sound, there is facial movement in creating them. In fact, in American English, most vowel sounds are large and we move the mouth a lot. The only vowels with little facial movement are the Short e, the Short i and the Short u.

Indian English has a system of 17 vowel sounds as compared to 20 vowel sounds in BRP (British Received Pronunciation). In contrast with 12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongal glides in BRP, Indian English has 11 pure vowels and 6 vowel glides.

## SOUNDS

The sound system in two language is never same. Different languages have different sounds. If you compare the sound system of English and Hindi we find that whereas English has 20 vowels and Diphthongs, Hindi only has ten. The English vowel sounds which do not occur in Hindi are the vowels sounds in 'set', 'cat', 'pot', 'all', 'bird' and the initial vowel sound in 'above'. The English diphthongs and aspirated sounds as in 'fly', 'toy', 'cow', 'dear', 'fair', 'tour' are also not found in Hindi. Some English consonant are also not available in Hindi. They are the initial sound in 'west', 'thin', 'this', 'zebra', and the middle sound in 'measure'.

Besides the differences in individual sounds in these two languages, there are differences in stress, rhythm and intonation. Whereas English is a stressed time language but Hindi is a syllable time language. These differences in the sounds, stress, rhythm and intonation make it difficult for a Hindi speaker to acquire correct English pronunciation

This speech habits of a learner's mother tongue continually gets in the way he has to keep a baby at the habit of his mother tongue and cultivate a fresh set of habit. When we try to learn English *through* our mother tongue, it naturally influences what we say. For instance, in some South Indian languages, "el" is always pronounced "yel". In some North Indian languages, words never start with certain consonants. Therefore, "school" is pronounced "isskool". These influences naturally carry over when we try to learn English through our mother tongues.

In order to know the voiced and unvoiced consonants, simply place your fingers gently on your voice-box as you speak and feel the vibrations there. These consonants are voiced: b, d, g, z, m, n, ng, l, r, w, y, "-si-" (television) voiced "th" (this). But some consonants as p, t, s, k, h, th, sh, "ch" (cheese) are voiceless, or unvoiced.

There is no easy rule about when to voice the sound, it is simply a case of becoming familiar with the words. But the first step is to make sure that the students can make both sounds accurately. Consonants are affected by the sounds around them, because there are some situations where it is uncomfortable or very difficult to pronounce an unvoiced consonant next to a voiced consonant or surrounded by vowels.

While speaking the simple past tense verb ending with "-ed," it doesn't always have the voiced "d" sound. If the verb ends in an unvoiced consonant (e.g. "wash," "pick"), the "-ed" sounds like "-t" (although it is still written the same). Just try saying "washed" or "picked" to hear that "-t" sound I'm talking about. Indian English speakers tend to stress the first syllable in a word. It can be noticed where they put the stress in certain words.

There are some Word stress rules as given below:

- A word can only have one stress.
- In a very long word, you can have a secondary stress, but it is always a much smaller stress.
- Only vowels are stressed, not consonants.
- The vowels in English are a, e, i, o, and u. The consonants are all the other letters.
- There are many exceptions to the rules. The word stress rules in English are complicated.
- It is important that we should stress the right syllables, so people can hear and understand our words.

## STRUCTURES

The arrangement of words into sentences is different in mother tongue (L1) and the foreign language (L2) the learner tends to build sentences in the foreign language in the same way as he does in his mother tongue. following examples show how the speakers from Hindi Belt has language structure different from the English.

- In English the object follows the verb but in Hindi it precedes the verb.
- In English the helping verb precedes the main verb whereas in Hindi it comes after it
- In English interrogated sentences are formed with the question words or the helping verb in the beginning whereas in Hindi question words alone makes a question.
- In English the gender of subject does not affect the verb but in Hindi it does
- In English gender or number of the thing does not affect its adjective but Hindi it does.

## Vocabulary and Redundancies in English

Learners make many mistakes because of the influence of the mother tongue. E.g mistakes in the use of preposition and articles They write

*“it is 10 o'clock in my watch” instead of “by my watch”  
for “meri ghadi mein 10 baje hain”  
“I have watch” instead of “I have a watch” for “mere pass ghadi hai”*

There is a tendency to translate literally and this is also known as *Indianism*. By Indianism we mean a word or phrase which is a characteristic of Indian English. Indianism may also refer to the way a sentence has been structured as if it was literally translated from an Indian language to English.

Indianism is a significant factor when hiring for ITeS companies in Delhi-NCR, especially if they are dealing with international calls. In an actual work scenario, while most of these Indianism would sound as bad grammar and poor sentence structuring to the listener (client), some can actually cause miscommunication resulting in serious issues.

The biggest problem with Indianism is that many candidates who otherwise have good Spoken English, still use Indianism unknowingly, and it doesn't get detected easily during the selection process of companies, leading to bad hires.

Around 100 applicants were assessed on AMCAT SVAR and scored on the following parameters:

- Pronunciation
- Fluency
- Spoken English Understanding
- Active Listening
- Grammar
- Vocabulary
- Indianism

Recruitment cutoffs were applied on the first six parameters, and 32.9% candidates who met the required cutoffs were shortlisted. Additional cutoffs on Indianism were applied on these shortlisted candidates and 25% of them did not meet them and were additionally filtered.

The following sentence shows these tendencies.

*'The station has come' = 'we have reached the station'*

*'meet me behind the period' = 'meet me after the period'*

*'The question does not take birth' = 'The question doesn't arise'*

speaking habits and vocabulary like *'revert back'*, *'do one thing'*, *'real brother'*, *'cousin sister'*, *'do the needful'*, *'out of station'*, *'prepone'*, *'repeat again'*, *'me and my friend'*, etc.

### **Redundancies in English**

Redundancies are unnecessary, repetitious words. They may appear before and after the main word. They make your communication longer, but not better. Usually redundancies occur in speech unintentionally. In rhetoric, the term "redundancy" tends to have a negative connotation and may be perceived as improper because of its use of duplicative or unnecessary wording (and some people expand the definition to include self-contradictory wording, similar to double negation); however, it remains a linguistically valid way of placing emphasis on some expressed idea. Some of the commonly used examples are

Basic fundamentals/essentials, End result, Final outcome, Free gift, a.m. in the morning/p.m. in the evening, Past history, Same identical, suddenly exploded, Unintended mistake and more.

The interference from the mother tongue can be minimized by drilling the correct forms in the learners. Mistakes in pronunciation grammar and usage should be pointed out immediately so that the students learn the correct form. Experience tells us that individuals differ from one another as to their ability to pronounce English correctly. At least six factors have been identified by teachers of TESOL. These are:

1. The influence of the learner's native language.
2. The learner's age.
3. The learner's exposure to English – length and intensity of exposure.
4. The learner's innate phonetic ability.
5. The learner's attitude and sense of identity.
6. The learner's motivation and concern for good pronunciation (Celce- Murcia and Goodwin 1991:137).

### **Conclusion**

The mother tongue has influence on every aspect of the decoding process of the second language including acoustics, phonetics, serial perception, phonological level, lexical access, and sentence and text comprehension. If a child has weaker decoding abilities in the mother tongue, it will reflect low performance in second language acquisition as well. The problem of mother tongue influence, regional effect, Indianism, vocabulary and speech habits are some serious language and pronunciations problems faced by Indian English speakers while learning English as second language. This automatically leads to ineffective communication amongst people. Incorrect pronunciation of similar sounding words or lexical differences can all together change the meaning of the sentence thus leading to blunders in Communication. While dealing with the Speaker of native language we need to keep in mind to avoid using the Mother tongue speaking habits and be conscious about not making them for rewarding and fruitful communication.



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