

An observation on 'The Intervention of L1 while learning English'

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Abstract:- English is known to be a global language. It is considered as one of the most spoken languages in the world. It is the official language in 53 countries and is spoken as a first language by around 400 million people worldwide. English is considered as our second language. As we all know that how far English language is vital in this competitive world. Nowadays, English is widely used in every sectors like Education, Business, Medical Departments and what not. Thus understanding and learning English become an integral part of our lives. Therefore people started learning this language through offline and online courses for their educational and professional betterment and people start speaking English as well. However it seems to be different when Malayali speakers speak English. We can see some difference in their way of pronunciation. In this study, I attempt to focus the intrusion of first language (L1-malayalam) while learning the target language (English). In this paper, it also focuses some of the reasons behind the mispronunciation especially in the case of Malayalees, which occurs owing to the intervention of L1 while speaking L2. It also points out some easy ways to ignore these mistakes when we speak the second language.

Key words: Intervention, first language, target language, English, mispronunciation.

Introduction

Why English is so important?

Nowadays, Learning English is very very important. As it is a mostly spoken language, English is a must everywhere. Thus fluency in English language is a must skill to be acquired by every learner. English is used in every field. It is one of the widely used languages. The places like Bangalore, Mumbai, Kochin etc. we can see even the autoriksha drivers are using English in a good way. Since these places are considered as some of the busy cities and many foreigners come to these places and there are people who speak many different languages, so even the local people know that, it is quite difficult for them to move forward without knowing a language like English. Because English is a language that is very familiar to everyone and easy to understand. So it shows how far this language is used by the people and how far it is important in their work place. English has now raised to the position of a global, international language. English plays a vital role in sectors like banking, engineering, education, medicine, media, tourism etc. Therefore people become more conscious on this and even it sees most of the house wives are learning English nowadays. We can see a plenty of institutions are offering online courses for improving the quality and fluency of English like Cambly, English House, Engvarta etc. These are some of the widely used online English learning applications.

English language learning will allow people to communicate effectively with people from all over the world, making travelling a lot easier and helping people to learn more about different cultures. The importance of English language can be seen in almost every aspect of our lives.

Reasons behind the mispronunciation of Malayalees

In English, there are 44 speech sounds. These speech sounds are mainly classified into two, 20 vowels and 24 consonants. All these sounds are represented by only 26 alphabets. Thus its way of articulation or the way of pronouncing words/phrases varies from place to place and from person to person. Hence, it may create some problems among the people while pronouncing English words. Or it can be one of the reasons for mispronunciation of Malayalees. As we all know that Malayalam is a phonetic language whereas English is not a phonetic language. It is a stress-timed and syllable-timed language. Syllable is a small unit of spoken language that make up words which always consist of a vowel. Stress is a

degree of force or emphasis given to a certain syllable in a word or in a phrase or sentence. Therefore, We give stress when we speak or articulate words ,eg:- **Ex-am-i-na-tion** - /ɛg ,zami'neiʃn/, in this word we give stress on the fourth syllable - **'na-tion**. Stress is marked as a vertical line ('). If we speak English without giving proper stress , it may change the accent and also it leads to the change of meanings too. But in Malayalam, there is no such stresses. As malayalam is a phonetic language, the pronunciation is based on the written alphabets such as അ, ആ, ഇ , ഇത്ര etc. Hence ,we malayalees spell the words based on the written letters. Or we can say, in Malayalam, as it is a phonetic language, we can see a direct relationship between the spelling and the sound. But as English is a non- phonetic language, there is no relationship between the spelling and the sound . So in English, we often do not say a word in the same way it is spelled . In English we can have many words with same spelling and different pronunciation. For instance, 'I **read** books', 'She **read** the book yesterday'. Here, in the first sentence the word 'read' is pronounced as (/ri:d/'- reed), and in the second sentence the same word 'read' is pronounced as (/red/'- red).If we examine these two sentences, we can see that the pronunciation of words with the same spelling changes. We malayalees ,simply pronounce every words in the same manner without any stress . Thus it leads to mispronunciation and also create confusions among the listeners. Therefore it is important to understand about the speech sounds in English.

In Malayalam, there are 51 letters. Here the pronunciation is completely based on the written letters . If we say 'ക' in Malayalam, it sounds only 'ക', eg:- കക്ക, കൂട്, whereas in English it represented by many letters and each letter sounds differently. Example:-In English the letter 'ch' is pronounced as both/ k/ and /tʃ/ sounds. In the word 'school' it is pronounced as the sound /k/ or 'ക' , But in the word 'chalk' the same letter 'ch' is pronounced in a different way. It is pronounced as /tʃ/ or in malayalam the sound 'ച' . Here we can see how the pronunciation of the words are changing with the same letters. This will also create mispronunciation among the malayali speakers. Likewise when malayalees speak ,we used to spell all the written letters in a word , whereas in English there are some sounds which is not pronounce all the time. There are silent phonemes in English. For example, Hour, Honest, Comb, Climb etc. In these words some sounds are silent, but malayalees are not always aware about this ,so they often used to pronounce these words the same way they pronounce malayalam words .

They say ഹറവർ , ഹോണസ്റ്റ് , കോമ്പ് , ക്ലൈമ്പ് instead of saying അറവ [Hour - /'aʊə(r)/] here the letters 'h' and 'r' is silent. ഓണസ്റ്റ് [Honest - /'ɒnɪst/] Here the letter 'h' is silent. കോം [Comb-

/kəʊm/] and ക്ലൈം [Climb- /klaɪm/] Here the letter 'b' is a silent phoneme. This will also lead to mispronunciation. Another English pronunciation challenge for malayali speakers arises as a result of lack of certain corresponding English sounds in Malayalam phonology. As there no equivalent to the English vowel sound /æ / (the sound ' a ' in cat) in Malayalam, the speakers deal with this problem by introducing an extra ' y ' or it can be called an " intrusive y ". For eg:- Cat is mispronounced as ' Kyaat ' but it is ['kæt], then for Cap ['kæp] , they pronounce as 'kyaap'. The letter 'f' and 'h' is mispronounced as yef and yech. Another problem malayalis struggle with is the sound 'Z', they always replace this 'z ' sound to 's' sound . For eg:- Zebra is mispronounced as seebra and Zero is mispronounced as seero .

Almost every malayalees pronounce the sound 'v' and 'w' in the same way, therefore for them both Verse and Worse sounds the same. There is also some problem with the pronunciation of numbers like twenty, twelve and eleven. These numbers are mispronounced as tonty , tolove, and leven . Then they used to add some extra letters/ sounds to words such as ' omlette ' [/ ómlət /] and 'divorce' [/di'vɔ:s/] . Hence, these words are mispronounced as omplate and diavorse . Wrong assimilations also lead to mispronunciation. For instance, words such as Uncle (['ʌŋkl], Simple [/'sɪmpl/] and Computer [/kəm'pjʊ:tə/] are often mispronounced as ungle, simble and compyuterr. These are some of the common mistakes made by malayali speakers while pronouncing English words. For a better understanding, some more examples are given below.This will help the learners or beginners to rectify their mistakes in pronunciation.

The L1 transfer of Malayali English speakers in pronunciation.

- 1) Bridge , Budget, Badge, Adjourn, Cudgel (here in these words letter 'd' is silent, so the correct pronunciation of these words are Brijj, Bujet, Baaj, Ajourn and kajul, but Malayalees pronounce this as Baadge, Budjet, Adujurn, Kadjel etc.
- 2) Bomb, Crumb (here letter 'b' is silent, it is correct pronunciation is bom and krum)

- 3) Annhilate, Honour (here letter 'h' is silent , so the correct pronunciation is annilate and ooner) .
- 4) Ballet (mispronounced as baallet instead of balei)
- 5) Fixed, Mixed(mispronounced as Fiksed, miksed instead of Fiksd and miksd)
- 6) Queen (mispronounced as kyuun instead of kween)
- 7) Alarm (mispronounced as alaaram instead of alaam)
- 8) Vitamin (pronounced as vitaamin instead of vytamin)
- 9) Marriage , College (pronounced as maarriage instead of marage and kollaige instead of kolege)
- 10) Pizza (mispronounced as Pisa instead of pitza)
- 11) Rise (pronounced as rais instead of raiz)
- 12) Cucumber (mispronounced as Kukkumberr instead of kyookumba)
- 13) Film (pronounced as fileem instead of saying filim/film)
- 14) Cinema (pronounced as sinimaa instead of saying sinemaa)
- 15) Bear (mispronounced as biyar instead of beye)
- 16) Psychology (mispronounced as sykkoolaji instead of saikawluhjee)
- 17) Flower (mispronounced as flavurr instead of flau/flau-uh)
- 18) Captain (mispronounced as kyaapten instead of kaptin)
- 19) Sample (pronounced as samble instead of saying sampl)
- 20) Aunt (pronounced as aanty instead of aant)
- 21) Car (mispronounced as kaarr instead of kaa)
- 22) Heart (mispronounced as haart or hurt instead of haatt)
- 23) Cancer , Cancel (mispronounced as kyaanser, kyaansel instead of kan-suh and kansel)
- 24) Looked (mispronounced as lukkud instead of lukt)
- 25) Birthday (mispronounced as birthaday instead of buthdai/ buhth- day)
- 26) Mischievous (pronounced as mischeeevious instead of mischuvus)
- 27) Sir (pronounced as saarr instead of sir)
- 28) Repetition (mispronounced as repeetashon instead of repitishn/ reh-puh-tishn)
- 29) Salon (mispronounced as saloon instead of sa-lon)
- 30) Fasten (pronounced as fastten, here the letter 't' is silent actually and they used to utter all letters . The correct pronunciation is fassen)

We can say that ,we Indians speak only our first language upto a particular age. In our country, pupil are rarely taught English from the childhood. Therefore, when they start speaking English after a long period or a certain age, it become very difficult for them to understand the flexibility of pronouncing sounds in a new language such as English.

Thus, L1 interference or negative transfer over English can be seen everywhere in India especially in Kerala, among Malayalees. It can be ignored by regular practicing, reading aloud, by listening English podcasts, watching BBC news and movies in English and people can also make use of reliable English speaking coaching .

Conclusion

Coming under these observations made it is clear that as every letter is in one to one correspondence with the sound in Indian languages, people read it accordingly. They go spelling and pronounce as it is spelled. However, these mistakes are often common in everywhere especially among Malayalees. The one main reason is as we said earlier, Malayalees used to spell all the written letters because Malayalam pronunciation is completely based on the written letters (aksharamala). Having a good command of English helps us to have more opportunities in life, first of all, in our career. To learn the correct pronunciation of words in English, it is necessary to have a sound awareness, awareness of stress and intonation. Thus it is important to be familiar with Phonetics or English phonology. Phonetics must be taught compulsory in every school from the smaller class itself. Having a good understanding in phonetics will help the learners to overcome these mistakes to some extent.

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