

A Study on Teaching of Spoken English through Phonetics to Non- Native Speakers of Fatehpur District

Abstract

Spoken English has almost become a part and parcel of the modern middle class social culture in India. Fatehpur district is the state that has two languages in place of one used as a medium of instruction in schools and colleges, though Hindi is predominantly more widespread than English. However, in the modern scenario, the situation has become really critical for those students who are sitting on the borderline between studying English knowing the language but without having the complete command over Phonetics, pronunciation and spoken English which blocks their road to fulfill their ambitions even if they are good in other areas of knowledge and skills. In district Fatehpur, English students lag behind in the race for acquiring good jobs only because their command over spoken English and correct pronunciation is not impeccable, though, we have several methods of teaching English as a foreign language trying their best to impart spoken English to students.

Keywords: Spoken English, Phonetics, Linguistic Community, RP, GIE.

Introduction

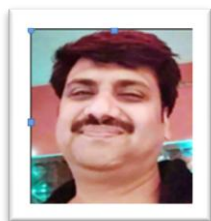
The chief purpose of language and the value of speech as a medium of communication are stressed in all linguistic theories today. People make use of language to communicate with those around them and people belonging to different linguistic communities use different languages for the purpose of communication. Whatever be the language used for communication- English, Hindi, Marathi etc. - It is possible to use two mediums for linguistic communication. These are speech and writing. Out of these two, spoken language is more important. It comes first in the history of every language community. The history of every language will reveal that the spoken form of the language came centuries before the written form. It comes first in the life of every individual human being, too. All of us start speaking long before we start writing.

As far as teaching English as a second language in India is concerned, we must keep in mind that learning to speak a language is by far the shortest road to learning to read and write. Speech training must have precedence over learning to read and write, in point of time as well as in point of significance. Since speech is the groundwork, all the rest is built up from it. It must be stated here that nearly forty five per cent of the respondents opine that speaking is the most important language skill.

(Table 01)

Respondents on which one is the most important language skill

Inst.	Listening No. (%)	Speaking No. (%)	Reading No. (%)	Writing No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	8 (35)	9 (42.85)	3 (14.28)	1 (4.76)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	2 (20)	4 (40)	3 (30)	1 (10)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	1 (10)	4 (40)	2 (20)	3 (30)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	1 (7.69)	7 (53.84)	4 (30.76)	1 (7.69)	13 (100.00)
Total	12 (22.22)	24 (44.44)	12 (22.22)	6 (11.11)	54 (100.00)



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Through speech, the student learns to make the direct connection between the English word or phrase and the object, action or thought it bears. He learns the skill of employing words in the right sentence structures and phrase-structures and he can learn this in no other manner.

Phonetics is the study of the medium of spoken language, that is, the production transmission and reception of the sounds of human speech. It is almost impossible to teach a second language without giving some attention to pronunciation so that no bad speech habits are formed by faulty imitations. Every teacher of English must know phonetics and all English teachers must be phoneticians. Only phonetics can help students overcome problems relating to pronunciation, as it deals with the organs of speech; vowels and consonants; syllables (including stressed and unstressed syllables); accent and intonation; allophones and allomorphs; phonemes and morphemes; etc.

Aims of the Study

Being involved in teaching and learning English at the graduate and postgraduate level at Fatehpur, I have been trying to get acquainted with phonetic and phonological problems of students and causes of the retardation in the formation of good speech habits. The objectives of the present study are altogether different from those that are considered necessary for states and metro cities having very sound English background. The study aims to review the causes of retardation in spoken English and correct pronunciation and present a possible solution so as to help enhance the standard of English teaching and learning in the district.

Hypothesis

The following working hypothesis were formulated on the basis of previous observations and objectives of the study-

1. There will be difference in problems among students belonging to different classes and colleges.
2. There will be difference in nature of phonetic problems across different sections of students.
3. There will be difference in issues related to spoken English between students of urban and rural areas.
4. Students' English pronunciation will be vastly different from Received Pronunciation (RP).

5. Students' English pronunciation will vary from GIE.
6. Students are still taught through worn out methodologies and unnatural approaches to teaching conversational English. Thus There will be sub standard fluency in spoken English.

Tools

A survey was made of a cross section of teachers from Degree Colleges, Inter Colleges, Junior High Schools and Primary Schools situated both in urban and rural areas of Fatehpur. Total 54 teachers (21 from Degree colleges, 10 from Inter Colleges, 10 from junior high Schools, 13 from primary schools) responded to the questionnaire provided to them.

Chief Findings

It has been well-established that there is an Indian pronunciation of English as spoken by educated Indians, and this standard is, more or less, used by the best speakers of English in almost each state. This General Indian Pronunciation (GIE) of English can serve as a standard if the aim is communication with other Indian speakers in the country. However, this notion of standard Indian pronunciation of English words is vague and the exact meaning behind this term is yet to be made clear. It must be admitted that in Fatehpur district pronunciation of English words is not mature enough to be designated as standard pronunciation of English words.

The real problem in Fatehpur, however, is the retardation in the formation of good speech habits as far as pupils of English as a second language are concerned. There are lots of causes of retarding in speech and these causes vary from individual to individual. In the schools and colleges of the district, less attention is paid to speech training. It may be that teachers do not understand its value. They rely too much on the grammar-translation method. Consequently, there is almost no speech training in the class-rooms. In fact, spoken English is, generally, no longer used outside the English class-room in schools and even in most of the colleges. One is not very sure how far it is used even during the English periods in schools and colleges here. Lack of facilities and opportunities to speak English is a significant factor responsible for retardation in speech. It is worth noting that nearly half of the respondents (42.59%, to be precise) have supported this view.

Table 02

Respondents on what is / are the vigorous cause / causes of retardation in the formation of good speech habits*

Inst.	Lack of speaking opportunities	Lack of phonetic knowledge	Mother tongue speech habits	Defective examination system	Defective teaching system	Lack of exposure to English	Any other
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Degree College	11 (52.38)	9 (42.85)	8 (38.09)	10 (47.62)	11 (52.38)	14 (66.67)	6 (28.57)
Inter College	4 (40)	2 (20)	4 (40)	5 (50)	5 (50)	4 (40)	2 (20)
Jr. High School	3 (30)	3 (30)	2 (20)	2 (20)	5 (50)	3 (30)	1 (10)
Primary School	5 (38.46)	4 (30.77)	4 (30.77)	3 (23.08)	2 (15.38)	2 (15.38)	0 (0)
Total	23 (42.59)	18 (33.33)	18 (33.33)	20 (37.04)	23 (42.59)	23 (42.59)	9 (16.67)

* Most of the respondents gave more than one response.

Majority of the teachers here are not well-equipped in phonetics.

Table 03
Respondents on the question
Whether they have knowledge of phonetics

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	19 (90.47)	2 (9.52)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	4 (40)	6 (60)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	2 (20)	8 (80)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	3 (23.08)	10 (76.92)	13 (100.00)

For this the reasons are numerous. There is no provision for teachers to get trained in phonetics and phonology at a large scale. Then, the helpful aids such as the television, CD-player, tape recorder, lingua phone etc. that can be very useful in learning correct pronunciation are neither available at the training centers nor at the institutions where the teachers serve. Besides, the Boards and Universities also do not lay stress on oral tests. At the end of PG Examination in English, there is a viva-voce exam, but the purpose is to evaluate the amount of memorized content of the courses. No stress is laid on the fluency or pronunciation. There is indeed a scarcity of good books on pronunciation, though pronunciation cannot be taught through books alone.

Regionalism and regional standards of speech put obstacles in learning correct sounds of English words because of differences in speech habits or muscle habits. In Fatehpur the regional speech habits have absorbed spoken English and they have regionalized pronunciation of English words. They tend to substitute sounds from the mother tongue for English sounds. For example, /sku:l/ is pronounced as /is'ku:1/ in Fatehpur district.

Overcrowded classrooms are another humongous problem in Fatehpur district. We will have to shift our priority from the conventional classroom to innovative systems through distance education. Almost 50% respondents support the view.

Table 04
Respondents on the question whether
Distance Education is capable of meeting the
needs of the New Learner whereas the
conventional system of education is not

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	9 (42.86)	12 (57.14)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	4 (40)	6 (60)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	5 (50)	5 (50)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	8 (61.54)	5 (38.46)	13 (100.00)
Total	26 (48.15)	28 (51.85)	54 (100.00)

Discussion

Education is a medium of conversation. Through this medium, we convey our ideas to others and know the ideas of others, Learning to speak has got a significant place in teaching English and speech has its own influence and attraction. It takes a person a long way in life. The more a person is efficient in speaking and conversation the more he will be able to

attract others. It is, therefore, very essential to make the students efficient in the art of speaking.

However, there has been a great deal of thinking on the point as to what should be the standard of speech in English in India. There are numerous varieties of spoken English – English as spoken by the British, English as spoken by the Americans, English as spoken by the Africans or English as spoken by the Indians. The pronunciation of English varies from one country to another and there are marked phonetic and phonological features associated with English spoken in important English-speaking countries. Even within the U.K. there are variations between England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. England itself has different pronunciations existing within a small geographical area. A specific pronunciation, nevertheless, has acquired social prestige in England. It is often called Received Pronunciation (RP) to indicate that it is the result of social judgment. Similarly, there are several varieties of English in India that are distinct from R P. But it is possible to use the term 'General Indian English' (GIE) in spite of the differences that exist within India.

Illustrating the term GIE, Balasubramanian writes, "By General Indian English is meant a certain variety of English spoken by educated Indians. General Indian English is free from regional features. It is both a descriptive and a prescriptive model. It is descriptive in the sense that it describes the phonological features of a variety of English, and prescriptive as it is prescribed at the CIEFL to Indian speakers of English as a model of spoken English to imitate. This model, if acquired, will at least make the spoken English of Indians free from those features which make it Telugu English, Punjabi English or any one particular variety of Indian English." This difference is likely to remain, but students must know the difference between RP and GIE. However, 37.04% respondents think differently.

Table 05
Respondents on the question whether it is
essential for students to know the difference
between GIE and RP

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	16 (76.19)	5 (23.81)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	5 (50)	5 (50)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	4 (40)	6 (60)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	9 (69.23)	4 (30.77)	13 (100.00)
Total	34 (62.96)	20 (37.04)	54 (100.00)

It is of paramount importance that speech training should be a pleasant activity, otherwise it will fail. In the beginning the child should be encouraged to make progress with more familiar sounds-proceeding from known to unknown. To begin with, oral composition may take the form of a simple object, story, animal or incident. The teacher should get its main points from the pupils and write them in their proper sequence on the black-board.

In higher stages, the dialogue is the best kind of text to teach the spoken language. The reason is that it presents the language directly in the contexts in which it is most commonly used. The students practice in the same way. In this way, there is a link between language and situation. In addition, the dialogue accommodates within its framework several features of the spoken language and key patterns. The students participate actively in the lesson. Though, the dialogue must be well-constructed. The structural items should be restricted to one or two primary structures. The situations should be realistic. The dialogue should not be very long and it must be interesting. In all these activities phonetics should be the chief tool to teach correct pronunciation.

To improve the standard of spoken English in schools and colleges of the district, we will have to make changes in the present examination system, if we can not totally remove it. It will have to be made more orally oriented.

The use of modern audio-visual aids is very essential as far as the teaching spoken English is concerned.

Table 06
Respondents' opinion about the
Question whether the application of modern
audio-visual Aids are useful to make the teaching
more fruitful

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	20 (95.24)	1 (4.76)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	7 (70)	3 (30)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	7 (70)	3 (30)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	8 (61.54)	5 (38.46)	13 (100.00)
Total	42 (77.78)	12 (22.22)	54 (100.00)

Modern audio-visual aids can prove to be effective in teaching of spoken English particularly in the districts like Fatehpur where English is taught as a second language quite unscientifically. Phonetics too is based on scientific principles. Therefore, there are no chances of distorted speaking. The teacher should spare no pains to include phonetics in his classroom teaching and make it more and more fruitful. However, above presented Table. No. 03 shows that 76.92 per cent respondents themselves have no or very little knowledge of phonetics. These observations are regrettable.

Though, a great majority of teachers agree that much practice of speaking should be emphasized.

Table 07
Respondents on how to overcome speaking problems*

Inst.	Much practice of speaking should be emphasized	Audio-visual aids should be used	Changes should be made in the present examination system. It should be made more orally oriented	Teachers should improve their own speaking	Any other
	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)	No. (%)
Degree College	15 (71.43)	12 (57.14)	13 (61.90)	11 (52.38)	6 (28.57)
Inter College	5 (50)	4 (40)	4 (40)	4 (40)	2 (20)
Jr. High School	6 (60)	3 (30)	5 (50)	3 (30)	2 (20)
Primary School	7 (53.85)	4 (30.76)	4 (30.76)	4 (30.76)	3 (23.08)
Total	33 (61.11)	23 (42.59)	26 (48.15)	22 (40.74)	13 (24.08)

* Most of the respondents gave more than one response.

Limitations

Definitely some remarkable limitations have been realized in the study carried out. The study is concerned with the views of 54 college/school teachers only. Had the larger area been covered, the result could have been satisfactorily generalized.

Conclusion

The most important thing is that more emphasis should be laid on spoken English. The teacher can serve as the best model for his students. If he takes care to improve his own speaking and pronunciation and trains his students also, the desired goal may be achieved. Thus, phonetics can prove to be effective in teaching of spoken English particularly in the districts like Fatehpur where faulty pronunciation is a major issue. Our 80% respondents too think on the same line.

Table 08
Respondents' opinion about the question whether
the knowledge of phonetics is necessary for
English learning students of India

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	18 (85.71)	3 (14.29)	21 (100.00)
Inter College	7 (70)	3 (30)	10 (100.00)
Jr. High School	8 (80)	2 (20)	10 (100.00)
Primary School	7 (53.85)	6 (46.15)	13 (100.00)
Total	40 (74.07)	14 (25.93)	54 (100.00)

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