Phonological Contrastive Analysis of Consonant and Vowel Phonemes of R.P. and GIE with Special Focus on Gujarati Phonology

Dr. Paresh Joshi
Dept. of English, Christ College, Rajkot, India
paresh.leo@Gmail.com

Reference

Abstract
Present paper is an endeavor to investigate underlying differences in segmental phonology of Received Pronunciation (RP) and General Indian English (GIE) with special focus on Gujarati English Phonology (GEP). The analysis takes into consideration peculiar features of all the three phonologies i.e. RP, GIE and phonology of Gujarati English.

Although a contrastive analysis of RP and GIE brings out gross phonological peculiarities of all the Indian Speakers of English including Gujarati Speakers of English (GSE), the rationale for such a contrastive analysis is to arrive at gross segmental phonological features which are very peculiar to Gujarati Speakers of English (GSE) under the influence of Gujarati phonology with a view to devising pedagogical strategies to resolve pronunciation problems pertaining to segmental phonology thereby enhancing the international intelligibility of GSE.

Key Words: Contrastive Analysis, Supra-Segmental Phonology, General Indian English (GIE), Gujarati English Phonology (GEP), Non-native speakers (NNS), Native Speakers, Guajarati Speakers of English, and Received Pronunciation (RP).

1. Introduction

English has a very strange history in India. What was seen as an oppressor’s language initially has been nativized to the extent that it has become an official language and has emerged as the second most spoken language within the country, second only to Hindi which is the national language. India, today, claims to have second largest English speaking population only next to China. Until 2010 India was world’s largest English speaking country. (Walker) Indian English has its unique identity in the world. Its uniqueness lies in the number of varieties that it offers because of various regional languages. With its multilingual and multicultural structure India presents many spoken varieties each resulting out of cross-fertilization with regional languages.

English is spoken as the first language in several countries in the world namely England, Scotland, Ireland, America, Canada, South Africa and New Zealand. Just as Tamil spoken in India differs from the Tamil spoken in Sri Lanka and other countries, the English spoken in England differs a great deal from the English spoken in the USA and other countries. The grammar, vocabulary and pronunciation of American native speakers of English are not identical to the grammar, vocabulary and
pronunciation of British speakers of English.

‘Even within a country, one can see some difference between a language spoken in one part of the country and the same language spoken in the other part of the country. Hindi spoken in U.P. is different from the Hindi spoken in M.P. which is different from the Hindi spoken in Bihar. In other words, there are a number of dialects of the same language and the difference is mainly in the area of pronunciation (Balasubramanium: 123) which provides the basis to intelligibility research world over.

There are different British Isles where a number of varieties of English is spoken; each one being unique in its own way. For instance British accent is evidently different from the English spoken is Scotland. Even within England, there are several regional dialects of English. In London people speak Cockney which is different from the English one hears in Yorkshire so much so that there are varieties of spoken English which are at times mutually unintelligible in Britain.

The variety of English which is considered as the Standard English is a dialect called Educated Southern British English also called Received Pronunciation (RP) or BBC English or Oxford English. The word received which is employed to mean socially acceptable, shows that this is a social rather than a regional dialect. It is a dialect of English spoken by educated southern British. RP has its origin in public schools where aristocrats of the time studied. It is the accent of highly educated, posh population of England. The fact remains that a very small population in England speaks RP. It is important to make a distinction between England and rest of United Kingdom which normally are taken as synonymous to each other.’ With regards RP it is worth noting that in Scotland, Welsh and Northern Ireland there is a negligible number of RP speakers.’ Estimates of number of RP speakers vary. Wells believes that around 10% of population of England (around 4.5 million). Trudgill & Hannah estimates it to be 3 to 5% around 2 million, either figures in comparison with the roughly 300 million non-native (NS) shows that is very much a minority accent (Brown: 22). Beyond the numbers, one needs to accept the fact that a very few people in England speak this dialect, no doubt, but a good amount of work has been done on this dialect by renowned phoneticians like Denial Jones, Gimson, Abercrombie etc.

Although there are many varieties spoken in India, they are largely mutually intelligible because these varieties merge into one variety which is popularly known as General Endian English (GIE). Indian English (IE) is a new dialect of English with millions of speakers in the Indian subcontinent (India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal) and worldwide. English was brought to India by the British in the seventeenth century, and after India’s independence in 1947, English was recognized as one of the 15 official languages in the constitution, to be used in the government communications and taught in the school system. Indian English is primarily learnt in a classroom situation as a compulsory language unlike native speakers who acquire it from their surroundings. (Balasubramanium, 123) Hence, almost all IE speakers who are multi-linguals by birth, acquire English in addition to others, including the language(s) spoken at home and prominent languages at the national level, such as Hindi.

IE varieties are thus products of a complex contact situation. IE has been called a “transplanted variety” because it is not taught as merely a foreign language to be used with native speakers, but as a second language, used in daily life in India with other Indians, particularly those with other first languages. A transplanted system differs from an inter-language system, in which some native system of that language has not been fully acquired. A transplanted system, by contrast, is stable and self-replicating; the learners are exposed to the nativized variety of the second language system, which they master, rather than incompletely acquiring a foreign target language system. (Ka-
For generations, British English has been serving as a target model in schools and colleges given the colonial history. However, it was professor R.K Bansal’s efforts during 1960s which brought the formal recognition to the idea of a Generalized Indian English (GIE) model. It was recognized as a variety that can serve as ‘a socially acceptable pronunciation devoid of regional peculiarities that may impair communication with speakers from within and from outside the country (Bansal, 1981: 123 ).’ Presently GIE is considered as a prestigious variety shared among educated users of the language which is the target to which learners aspire.

The system of GIE has been described by CIEFL in 1972.

It should be borne in mind; however, that most educated Indians who speak English did not learn it from an RP speaker. It also should be remembered that most Indians who learn English learn their own Indian language before they are exposed to English. In other words, they have in them very strongly formed linguistic habits when they attempt to learn English and these linguistic habits (which are mother-tongue habits) are bound to interfere with their learning English. The phonological system of the mother tongue will have an influence on the phonology of their English (Bansal, 1981: 123).

Apparently, the term Indian English cannot be employed in the same sense as French English or German English because of the multi-lingual character of it in India. Indian English as the term refers to a vast pool of regional varieties of English. Taking into consideration all the local Indian languages, Indian English branches in to varieties like Tamil English, Telugu English, Kannada English, Malayalam English, Bengali English, Urdu English, Oriya English, Punjabi English and so on. An analysis of the varieties of Indian English listed here, we will no doubt find certain common phonological features. If the common phonological features of several varieties of Indian English are juxtaposed and regional peculiarities are removed from each local variety, a variety of English will emerge which can be called General Indian English.

In fact, scholars at the CIEFL now EFLU, Hyderabad, have analyzed the English speech of several educated Indians and the concept of General Indian English emerged from such analyses. GIE refers to a certain variety of English spoken by educated Indians. GIE 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 because it is prescribed by the EFLU 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 regional features which make it Telugu English, Punjabi English or any one particular variety of Indian English.

2. Received Pronunciation (RP), General Indian English (GIE): A Phonological Contrastive Analysis

Present Contrastive analysis takes into consideration primarily the phonologies of RP and GIE with special focus on phonological peculiarities of English spoken by Gujaraties which can be termed as Gujarati English. Gujarati being one of the languages of India, it is apparent that it shares the phonological feature of GIE yet the effort is made to shortlist very peculiar phonological features of GE so as to arrive at phonological priorities for devising corrective strategies for GSEs.

Indian accents vary to a great extent. Some Indians speak English with an accent very close to a Standard British accent...
(though not the same); others lean towards a more ‘vernacular’, native-tinted, accent for their English speech. It is an accepted fact that the L1 interferes with the second language, and more so phonologically. Hence when a speaker uses second language in fact he functions it through the phonology of his L1 i.e. GSE tends to show strong L1 features in the other; by and large they speak English with phonology of Gujarati which they have acquired in their formative years. Hence, the distinction is very clearly felt. This is the reason why one is able to identify that one is a Gujarati more or less while one uses English. In this manner Indian English differs from British R.P in the following respects. The comparison is divided in two parts namely segmental phonology and supra segmental phonology. The following account relies on Dr. R. K. Bansal’s conception of GIE and takes into account other sources to get different perspectives.

A contrastive analysis of the system of consonant of both English and GIE would indicate that majority of times difference is in the articulation of phonemes for example the case of /ʒ/ which is completely missing from Gujarati phonology. Of the 53 distinctive phonemes articulated as international consonants as per International Phonetic Association (IPA), RP uses of 24 distinctive phonemes while Gujarati Phonology has 31 distinctive phonemes as consonants. The following contrastive analysis is based on Bansal’s (1998: 16-34) and Balasubramanian’s (124-129) conception of GIE. However the analysis has a special focus on the phonological peculiarities GE which display sizable difference in comparison to RP:

CONSONANTS PHONEMES

- A common feature of GIE including Gujarati is the use of retroflex plosives /ʈ/ and /ɖ/ instead of the corresponding alveolar plosives of English /t/ and /d/. According to Bansal the English alveolar plosives sound more retroflex than dental to the Indian ears.

- In Gujarati, all alveolar plosives of English are transcribed as their retroflex counterparts. One good reason for this is that unlike most other native Indian languages, Gujarati does not have true retroflex plosives. The so-called retroflexes in Gujarati are actually articulated as apical post-alveolar plosives, sometimes even with a tendency to come down to the alveolar region. So a Gujarati speaker normally cannot distinguish the difference between their own apical post-alveolar plosives and English's alveolar
plosives. (Vyas: 60).

- GIE speakers including Gujarati do not differentiate between voiced labiodental fricative phoneme /v/ and voiced labiovelar approximant phoneme /w/ although Punjabi, Marathi and Bengali are an exception here. They use a frictionless labio-dental approximant phoneme /ʋ/ for words with either sound, possibly in free variation with /v/ and/or /w/. Thus, wet and vet are homophones and wine is pronounced like vine. There is also a visible tendency of changing /w/ to /v/, this means 'ven' would be pronounced as 'when' or vice versa "I will pay with Weeza" for "...Visa".

- Most regional languages in India including Gujarati lack the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/. These phonemes are replaced by aspirated voiceless dental plosive /tʰ/, /dʰ/. This means, thin would be pronounced as /tʰɪn/ in place of /θɪn/ by North Indians it would be unaspirated in case of South Indians. Such a tendency can create confusions for instance themselves can be perceived as damsels by the NNSs.

- Unlike RP and General American English (GAE) voiceless plosive sounds /p/, /t/, /k/ is always unaspirated in Guajarat and GIE. In most Indian languages the distinction between aspirated and unaspirated
plosives is phonemic. Hence pen would be realized /pen/ by Indians as against /pʰen/ in RP and most native accents. In GIE there is tendency to equated stops with the unaspirated rather than the aspirated phonemes of the local languages. Of the three stages of articulation the closure seems smoother and shorter while compression has wide range and release which doesn’t result in any loud burst in comparison to R.P. Moreover as against three pairs of plosives (6) in RP, there are eight pairs (16) in Guajarati i.e. /k,kh l, / g,gh l, / t,th l, / d,dh l, / t,th l, / d,dh l, / p,ph l, / b,bh l/(Vyasa thesis)

- All native languages of India including Gujarati do not have the voiced postalveolar fricative /ʒ/. Typically, /z/ or /dʒ/ is substituted, e.g. treasure /tre.zəːr/, pleasure /plezə:r/ etc. Peter Roach remarks that /ʃ/ is a common and widely distributed phoneme, but /ʒ/ is not.

- Interestingly enough speakers GIE including Gujarati confuse /s/ and /z/ at the time of forming plurals. For instance Gujarati, Sanskrit and Urdu can be taken as an exception here, /z/ is not a phoneme as also any other voiced sibilant. Hence /z/ can be sometimes pronounced as /dʒ/ by people in rural backgrounds. Moreover, in Bhojpuri a dialects of Hindi most of the times /ʃ/ is spoken like /s/, a phenomenon which is also apparent in their English. Exactly the opposite is seen for many Bengalis.

- Normally post-alveolar affricates /tʃ/ and /dʒ/, are articulated from the palatal region, rather than post-alveolar since they have their corresponding affricates articulated in the regional languages and they have more of a stop component than fricative in GIE including Gujarati; this is reflected in their English. Another feature is /tʃ/ /dʒ/ is articulated with tongue tip down.

- Almost all Indian languages excluding Guajarati lack the voiced alveolar fricative /z/. Instead of replacing it by the closest unvoiced phoneme /s/ it is strangley replaced by voiced palatal affricate/post alveolar /dʒ/. This tendency leads them to produce zoo as /ˈdʒuː/ and rosy as /ˈroːdʒiː/, the second typically in Northern India. Similar tendency is shown by Koreans too.

- This replacement is equally true in case Persian and Arabic loanwords into Hindi. The probable reason is
the confusion created by the use of the devanagari grapheme < ज > (for /ʤ/) with a dot beneath it to represent the loaned /z/ (as < ज़>). This is common among people without formal English education.

- Many Indians especially Gujarati with lower exposure to English also may pronounce /f/ as aspirated voiceless bilabial plosive /pʰ/. Again it is worth noting that in Hindi (devanagari) the loaned / f / from Persian and Arabic is written by putting a dot beneath the grapheme for native /pʰ/ < फ >: < फ़ >. This substitution is rarer than that for /z/, and in fact in many Hindi-speaking areas /f/ is replacing /pʰ/ even in its native words.

- In RP /r/ has various phonetic realizations but one of the very peculiar features of RP is sound /h/ which articulated only when it is followed by a vowel whereas in GIE it invariably a roll [r] or a tap [ɾ]. Moreover most Indians in all positions wherever letter r is found in spellings. Unlike RP many Indians including Gujarati pronounce words such as flower as /flaː(r)/ instead of /flaʊə(r)/, and our as /aː(r)/ instead of /aʊə(r)/.

- There is tendency among speakers of GIE and Gujarati to double in if the spelling gives such hint. e.g., drilling /dril.ˈliŋg/.

- Inability to pronounce certain (especially word-initial) consonant clusters by people of rural backgrounds can lead to problems in pronunciation. During the articulation of such clusters is usually dealt with by epenthesis. e.g., school /is.ˈkuːl/. On the other hand digraphs ‘ng’ which pronounced /ŋ/ in the final position, GIE speaker deceived by the spelling generally add phoneme /g/ after it. They would pronounce ringing /ˈriŋ.ɪŋ/ as /ˈriŋ.ɡiŋ/.

- In case of syllabic consonants /l/, /m/ and /n/ are converted into the VC structure /əl/, /əm/ and /ən/ as in button /ˈbuːt.ˈtən/, the case is different if a high vowel proceeds, by /i:/ (as in little /ˈliːt.ˈliː/). Similar is the case in the clusters ending in schwa e.g., meter, /ˈmiːtə(ɹ)/ → /ˈmiːʈər/.

- In GIE digraphs gh is normally pronounced as aspirated voiced velar plosive /ɡʰ/. e.g., ghost /ɡʰoʊst/ although words rough, dough, etc. are pronounced as in RP.

GIE speakers normally make use of clear /l/ in almost all positions as against other varieties which use clear /l/ in syllable-initial positions and dark /l/ in coda and syllabic positions.

### 3. Vowel Phonemes

In comparison to consonants, GIE vowels have lesser peculiarities when compared to RP vowels. In fact there are some similarities in the vowel system of RP and GIE. However it would be essential to study areas of differences to be able to device pedagogical strategies for II.

As against the 12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongal glides of R.P., Indian English, according to Bansal, has 11 pure vowels and
6 vowel glides. The pure vowels are /ɪː, ɪ, e, æ, a, ɒ, o, u, ʊ, / and vowel glides are / Iə, eI, ʊə, ɔI, əʊ, ə, aI, aʊ /.

Whereas R.P. has /ɜː/ and /ə/ as two distinct phonemes, Indian English uses only one. (Bansal, 1998: 16) Accordingly, English contains twelve pure vowels against eight in Gujarati. But both systems contain five short vowels / I, e, ə, ɒ, o / but there is a difference in the number of long vowels. They may have little variation in their position of articulations. These five short vowels are the most frequently produced vowels in both the languages. Following is the contrastive analysis of the vowel system of GIE and RP based on Bansal (1998:16-34) and Balasubramanium, (124-129):

- GIE has one phoneme / ɒ / corresponding to British R.P. / ɒ / and /ɔː/. For instance both shot and short would be pronounced with short vowel / ɒ /. Many GIE speakers fail to clearly distinguish between vowels /ɛ/ and /æ/ as well as between /ɒ/ and /ɔː/. Thus GIE like GSE generally do not distinguish between caught and cot.
- The tendency among GIE is to replace R.P. glided diphthongs /eɪ/ and /ɔʊ/ by long monophthongs /eː/ and /oː/ respectively which is considered valid in GAE of course.
- In place of RP vowels /æ/, /ə/ and /ɜː/ GIE has only /ə/. Indians would pronounce bird as /bərd/ and cup as /kəp/.
- Like in GAE some south Indian speakers substitute the rounded /ɒ/ or /ɔ:/ by /a:/ . This makes the word not sound as /nat/ similarly coffee will be pronounced as /ka:fi:/ and copy as /ka:pi:/.
- English words borrowed from French are pronounced in RP with a proper French pronunciation, but in India, such words are sometimes pronounced according to the rules of English pronunciation. e.g. the word bouquet /bu.kɛt/ or /bau kwɛt/.
- Many Indian speakers always pronounce the /ðiː/, irrespective of the fact whether the definite article comes before a vowel or a consonant, or whether it is stressed or not.
- Similarly, GIE pronounce /a/ as /eː/ (always) and never or rarely as /ə/ for instance the word ago as /e:gəʊ/.
- Most Indians have the trap–bath split of Received Pronunciation. Not using the trap–bath split is often popularly construed as attempting to imitate an American.

To conclude it can be stated that the contrastive analysis clearly indicates phonological differences among the concerned phonologies. These differences are responsible for problems in pronunciation leading to issues related to intelligibility. It is also observed during the contrastive analysis that due to these differences, NNSs tend to phonemically deviate from the native phonological features. Clearly, these deviations are usually towards NNSs’ native phonology. The deviations are due to the fact that GIE speakers generally try to find the nearest approximations of English phonemes from their own phonologies to compensate for the phonemes which are different in the target language phonology. These deviated regional varieties threaten the ineligibility of NNSs. India with its multilingual legacy gives birth to numerous regional varieties. If the regional varieties of Indian English are taken into consideration, the present problem can multiply manifold in the Indian context. Apparently GIE is seen as phonology of educated English speakers exclusive of speakers who are not highly educated and therefore show higher amount of L1 transfer. Further GIE doesn’t take into account regional varieties and resulting regional accents which cause unintelligibility. Hence intelligibility research requires focus on language specific strategies to establish measures for International Intelligibility.
References


Author Bio

Paresh Joshi (PhD) has been working as senior assistant professor in the Department of English, Christ College, Rajkot, since June 2001. He has done M. Phil research on ‘Teaching pronunciation to English Major Students at UG Level’ and doctoral research on ‘Strategies for Reducing MTI in Guajarati Learners of English for Attaining International Intelligibility’. He is also associated with Station-e Language Lab, an emerging national player in Skills Development with special focus on Communication Profligacy in English as member of the core team which conceptualized the concept of the language Lab.