

A Contrastive Study of English spoken by Students coming from the Regional and the English Medium Schools

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Abstract

The paper explores the interference of mother tongue in learning English as a second language. It is generally observed that the English spoken by the students coming from regional schools and those from English medium schools is different in various respects. The aim of the present chapter is to make a contrastive analysis of English spoken by these two sets of students who fall in the age group of 19 to 24 years, have Hindi as their mother tongue, and are from semi-urban background. The chapter attempts to identify errors/problems in pronunciation of English sounds in the following eight areas namely, aspirated and unaspirated sound, voiceless and voiced sound, confusion in pronunciation of /f/ and /v/, or interchange of these sounds in pronunciation, difficulty in correct pronunciation of /θ/and/ð/, /tʃ/and /dʒ/, semi-vowel /w/ confused with fricative /v/, deletion of semi-vowel /j/ in certain words, appropriate pronunciation of /r/ in three word-positions namely, before a vowel, before a consonant, and at the end of a word, and confusion or inability to appropriately pronounce sounds namely, /s/ , /z/, /ʒ/ and /ʒ/. The features of speech that are studied are Plosives - /p/, /b/, /t/, /d/, /k/, /g/, Fricatives - /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /s/, /z/, /ʃ/, /ʒ/, /h/, Affricates - /tʃ/, /dʒ/, Semi-vowels - /w/, /j/, and Frictionless Continuant - /r/.

Keywords— mother tongue, interference, English, second language, regional schools, English medium schools, Hindi, English sounds

I. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Both mother tongue and foreign tongue have their own features in structure, grammar, lexical, phonology, morphology, etc. The difference in one's mother tongue and English makes the learners confused. The influence of the mother tongue is affected by the hypological distance between the languages involved and by sociological and psychological factors, etc. Some scholars argue that the stable achievement over twenty years shows that students are acquiring knowledge of English but it is not good enough to prepare them for the job market. The jobs of tomorrow require high level communication skill with other skills such as reading and writing. So if the schools do not prepare or support the young aspirants to perform well in English language then their chances of becoming successful in the job market are quite gloomy. English is not only to be learnt from English teachers but also from other resources like news, magazines, native speakers of English, and by conversing in English language with others, etc. If exposure is given to learners, then they would learn the language quite easily.

Extensive research has already been done by some scholars in the area of interference of mother tongue in learning English as second language. The views, opinions, discussions and observations of some scholars are worth mentioning here. According to Bhela (Mother Tongue Interference with Foreign Language,1999), "Foreign language learners though appear to be accumulating enough knowledge, they come across problems of organizing, coherently speaking, structurally writing and so rely on mother tongue showing a gap between gathering knowledge and producing it orally." When the learners try to express their views or ideas, the gap between gathering the contextual words and producing them orally increases and makes the situation complex to solve. It is then that the mother tongue interference emerges. Karen Stanley (in Teaching English as Second or Foreign Language, 2002) discusses the use of mother tongue in learning second language and accepts the use of mother tongue of students in the class room to teach them English with some limitations. L1 (mother tongue or the first language of learners) as the medium of instruction may sometimes help

the learners to acquire knowledge of L2 (second language of learners) as well as to enrich their level of comprehension of L2. But there must be some limitations in using L1 in the language class because it could lead to confusions for learners when it comes to the application of L2. The usage of L1 in language class may enable slow learners or learners with low intelligence levels to learn English easily and effectively. Some scholars suggest that the bilingual usage is a normal aid in learning English grammar. It is a strong belief among many scholars in learning English that second language acquisition is influenced by the grammatical patterns of the L1 of the learner. Some scholars argue on Karen's statement about the usage of mother tongue in the classroom and opine that though the usage of mother tongue in the language class helps to make the classroom teaching/learning process more effective, there needs to be a limit to its usage. On the other hand, some scholars have investigated how one's native language helps learners to build their knowledge in acquiring second language. Some suggest that the link between these two languages could enrich the learners' knowledge. Kelly (in *Socio-politics of English Language Teaching*, 1969) mention that by the end of the 18th century the grammar of foreign tongue was introduced only by analyzing the L1 grammar rule. Though some scholars suggested using L1 in English classroom to learn, teachers do not allow the learners to use L1 inside the classroom because it might affect learners' ability to concentrate. However using L1 in teaching/learning process for the slow learners of the class to a certain limit works wonderfully. The researcher as a faculty of English at one of the post graduate colleges of Uttar Pradesh experienced in a multi lingual class of her college that using L1 with some limitations to explain the grammar rules to the slow learners, worked amazingly well. Simultaneously, there was opposition from other scholars for not permitting the use of mother tongue in the English class room. They said that the use of L1 in English class room led to wastage of time, distracted other language students, disturbed the students who practised English by speaking and decreased the opportunity in general for students to use English language. However, the interference of L1 while learning L2 was refused by some research scholars. They argued that if one modifies teaching methodology, there is no need to bring the mother tongue into the L2 class room. Some scholars contend that teaching bilingually does not mean return to the grammar translation method. Rather the fact remains that various processes such as thinking, feeling, counting, etc. remain very much rooted to their mother tongue as they interact with friends, relatives and neighbours. The actual impulse to speak can be found in the mother tongue itself. Darcy

(1953) in a *Journal of General Psychology*, a Review remarks that bilingualism is detrimental to the process of learning a foreign language. The knowledge of a second language can be achieved but the emotional aspect of the language cannot be derived in total. Hence bilingualism is a detrimental process in learning English as second language. Interference is the interaction or a change in linguistic structures and structural elements. It is evident that there is a deviation from linguistic standards or norms in the spoken and written language. When one has good command over the two languages (i.e.) one's mother tongue and foreign language then there is no problem of interference. In the case of subordinate bilingualism, second language is not mastered and then the mother tongue dominates and influences the second language acquisition that causes the issue of interference. When the learners make mistakes in oral and written form of foreign language expression, interference is explicit. Then the learners transfer language habits from their native language or L1 to the foreign language or L2 and ignore the rules of L2. Interference at various language levels such as phonetic, lexical, grammatical, etc. may occur more often when English is taught to learners with Tamil and Telugu as their L1, and to learners of North India because the pronunciation and writing patterns in these languages are completely different. In such a situation, teaching/learning process in a bilingual classroom becomes quite difficult and tedious.

II. METHODOLOGY

Twenty informants are selected randomly who are studying in the same post-graduate college. Ten informants are from regional schools while the other ten are from English medium schools. In both the sets of informants, five are male students while five are female students. To note errors/problems in pronunciation, three words each are selected for sounds mentioned above in initial, medial and final positions of words. Each informant is asked to pronounce each of the above mentioned words only once. As the informant speaks out the words, it is recorded on an instrument in the language lab.

- a) The techniques that are employed to study the above mentioned aspects of pronunciation by the informants are thus: First, to find out if the informant produced an aspirated sound at the correct place, I asked him/her to place the palm of hand before the mouth and produce the sound and see if the sound produced is accompanied by a puff of breath. I further verified the error by using PRAAT. Second, to find if the informant has produced a voiceless or voiced sound at appropriate

place, I listened to the recordings again and again and also used PRAAT. I linked this point with point (d) given above regarding the informants' difficulty or inability to distinguish/ correctly pronounce sounds /ə/and/ð/. Third, to find out if the informant has confused /f/ with /v/, or has pronounced /f/ or /v/ at wrong place in a word (may be, interchanged these two sounds), I used PRAAT. Fourth, To find out if the informants could pronounce sounds /tʃ/and /dʒ/, I talked to the informants and questioned them if while pronouncing these two sounds, the tip of their tongue touched the back of upper front teeth and also if the front of their tongue was raised towards hard surface of roof of the mouth. Fifth, To find if informants have confused the semi-vowel /w/ with the fricative /v/, I closely observed lip movement of informants as they pronounced the words *west, war, wool, underworld, linguist, sweet*. To find if the informants delete semi-vowel /j/ in certain words, I listened to the recording of informants' speech over and over again. Sixth, to find if informants appropriately pronounced /r/ in three positions namely, before a vowel, before a consonant, and in word final position, I listened to the recordings again and again. I also talked to the informants about their tongue position when they uttered sound /r/ in words *part, burnt, clearly, father, tyre, bother*. Seventh, to find if informants are able to correctly pronounce sounds /s/, /z/, /ʒ/ and /ʃ/, and if they are able to use these four sounds at appropriate places, I listened to the recordings again and again.

After the above procedures, probable reasons of mispronunciation/difficulty in pronouncing certain sounds by informants are deduced and remedial measures suggested. Finally, a set of implications of the research are outlined so that further research can be carried out in the area.

III. RESULTS

- a) All the informants (boys as well as girls) whether coming from regional medium school or English medium school said that they either did not feel any puff of breath while producing the sound /p/ in word-initial position as in *push, palm, paper*, or /b/ as in *boy, beach, bull*, or felt it negligibly.
- b) I verified the error through PRAAT and found that there is no disturbance after /p/ or /b/ is articulated in word-initial position that could indicate that /p/ or /b/ is pronounced with complete closure followed by aspiration or puff of breath when it occurs in word-initial position as in *push* or *bull* respectively.

- c) I found that all the ten informants coming from regional schools and the ten informants coming from English medium schools could not correctly pronounce voiced sound /ð/ in words *sheathe, loathe, bathe, wreath, bequeath*.

Only one informant from regional school could correctly pronounce sound /ð/ in word *northern* while the nine other informants pronounced it incorrectly or as /ə/. In case of informants from English medium schools, six informants could correctly pronounce sound /ð/ in word *northern* while four pronounced it incorrectly or as /ə/.

One informant from regional school could not appropriately pronounce sound /ð/ in words *therefore, thus* while all the ten informants could appropriately pronounce sound /ð/ in words *therefore, thus*.

The above results were arrived at not only by listening to the recordings repeatedly but by using PRAAT as well. In case of the word *northern*, there is friction after /ɔ/ which shows that the informant produces a voiceless sound. In the spectrogram for *northern*, there is a break after /ɔ/ in pitch curve which indicate that informants pronounce /ə/ which is a voiceless sound and has no pitch. If the informants had produced sound /ð/ which is a voiced sound, there should have been regular cycles, and no break in pitch curve.

Similarly, in case of word *sheathe*, there is friction at the end which indicates that a voiceless sound is produced. Had informants produced /ð/, which is devoiced in word final position, the waves would have been seen as very low and tapering off.

- d) I found that all informants whether boys or girls of both English medium schools and regional medium schools could not pronounce the /v/ sound in the words *nephew* and *of*. The speech wave for *nephew* shows that after the /e/ sound there is friction which indicates that the informants pronounce 'ph' as /f/. If informants had pronounced 'ph' as /v/, then the waves would have shown regular cycles as /v/ is a voiced sound. Same is true for the word 'of' in which informants pronounce 'f' as /f/ and not as /v/. This is evident from the speech wave which shows that there is friction after /ɔ/ as informants pronounce 'f' as /f/. If they had pronounced 'f' as /v/, then speech wave would have shown regular cycles as /v/ is a voiced sound.

The spectrogram for *nephew* shows that after the /e/ sound there is a break in the pitch curve which indicates that the informants pronounce 'ph' as /f/ as /f/ is a voiceless sound and thus has no pitch . If informants had pronounced 'ph'

as /v/, then the pitch curve would have been continuous as /v/ is a voiced sound and has pitch. Same is true for the word 'of' in which informants pronounce 'f' as /f/ and not as /v/. This is evident from the speech wave which shows that there is friction after /ɔ/ as informants pronounce 'f' as /f/. If they had pronounced 'f' as /v/, then speech wave would have shown regular cycles as /v/ is a voiced sound. The spectrogram for *of* shows that after the /ɔ/ sound there is a break in the pitch curve which indicates that the informants pronounce 'f' as /f/ as /f/ is a voiceless sound and thus has no pitch. If informants had pronounced 'f' as /v/, then the pitch curve would have been continuous as /v/ is a voiced sound and has pitch.

e) I found that all the ten informants from regional schools could not pronounce sound /tʃ/ in the word *righteous* while nine informants from English medium schools could not pronounce sound /tʃ/ in word *righteous*.

In case of sound /dʒ/ in words *budget, gadget*, only two informants coming from English medium schools could not produce it appropriately while five informants from regional medium schools could not do so.

In case of sound /dʒ/ in word *adjacent*, two informants from English medium schools could not pronounce it correctly while nine informants coming from regional schools could not do so.

In case of sound /dʒ/ in word *huge*, two informants from English medium schools could not pronounce it correctly while eight informants coming from regional schools could not do so.

In case of sound /dʒ/ in word *large*, all the informants from English medium schools could pronounce it correctly while three informants coming from regional schools could not do so.

In case of sound /dʒ/ in word *badge*, two informants from English medium schools could not pronounce it correctly while eight informants coming from regional schools could not do so.

f) On observation, I found that nine informants from English medium schools and all the ten informants from regional schools pronounced /w/ as /v/ in which their upper teeth touched the lower lip in words *west, war, wool, underworld* which is incorrect way of producing sound /w/. Nine informants from English medium schools and nine informants from regional schools could pronounce /w/ correctly in words *linguist, sweet* by maintaining a stricture of open approximation and by rounding their lips. There was one boy from English medium school and one boy from Regional medium school who could not pronounce the word *linguist*. Only one girl from

English medium school could correctly pronounce all the words *west, war, wool, underworld, linguist, sweet* in which her lips were rounded and stricture was of open approximation when she produced semi-vowel/w/ in these words.

g) All the informants both from regional schools and English medium schools could appropriately pronounce the semi-vowel /j/ in words *yet, yeast, yellow, onion, beauty, value*.

h) All the informants, girls and boys whether from regional schools or from English medium schools pronounced sound /r/ in words *part, burnt, clearly* where /r/ occurs before a consonant, and in word final-position as in words *father, tyre, bother*. Though I could make out this error by repeatedly listening to the recordings, I also investigated it by talking to the informants. I asked the informants if they could feel their tongue moving towards the back part of upper front teeth when they uttered sound /r/ in words *part, burnt, clearly*. All the informants agreed that they felt their tongue moving towards the upper front teeth when they uttered /r/ in words *part, burnt, clearly*. In case of words *father, tyre, bother*, I asked informants if their tongue felt retracted or moving towards the upper front teeth when they were about to completely utter the words *father, tyre, bother*. All the informants said that their tongue moved towards upper front teeth or it was retracted towards the end of the words *father, tyre, bother* which shows that the informants pronounce sound /r/ in word-final position.

i) I listened to the recordings over and over again and found that

- all the informants coming from regional schools could not pronounce sound /ʒ/ in words *genre, vision, measure, revision, garage, rouge, beige* while in case of students coming from English medium schools, all the informants could not pronounce sound /ʒ/ in words *genre, garage, rouge, beige*, and eight informants could not pronounce sound /ʒ/ in words *vision, measure, revision*.
- all the informants coming from English medium schools could appropriately pronounce sound /s/ in words *scene, cement, seething* but four informants from regional schools could not pronounce sound /s/ in word *scene* and one informant from regional school could not pronounce sound /s/ in words *cement, seething, assess, ascend*.
- Four informants could not correctly produce sound /z/ in words *zoo, zinc, zebra, cousin*,

exact, scissors, please, bags, amaze while two informants from English medium schools could not appropriately pronounce sound /z/ in words *zoo, zinc, zebra*.

- All the informants from regional schools could not pronounce correctly sound /ʃ/ in words

schedule, shoot, sugar, machine, mission, action, posch, trash, bash while three informants from English medium schools could not correctly pronounce sound /ʃ/ in words *shoot, sugar, posch, trash*.

A Comparative Study of the Results

Percentage of informants from regional medium schools and from English medium schools who could correctly pronounce a sound/word

Table 02

S.No.	Sound/Words	% of informants from English medium school	% of informants from Regional medium school
1.	aspiration of /p/ in word-initial position as in <i>push, palm, paper</i>	0	0
2.	aspiration of /b/ in word-initial position as in <i>boy, beach, bull</i>	0	0
3.	/ð/ in words <i>sheathe, loathe, bathe, wreath, bequeath</i>	0	0
4.	/ð/ in word <i>northern</i>	60	10
5.	/ð/ in words <i>therefore, thus</i>	100	90
6.	/v/ in <i>nephew</i> and <i>of</i>	0	0
7.	/tʃ/ in <i>righteous</i>	10	0
8.	/dʒ/ in <i>budget, gadget</i>	80	50
9.	/dʒ/ in <i>adjacent</i>	80	10
10.	/dʒ/ in <i>huge</i>	80	20
11.	/dʒ/ in <i>large</i>	100	70
12.	/dʒ/ in <i>badge</i>	80	20
13.	/w/ in <i>west, war, wool, underworld</i>	10	0
14.	/w/ in <i>linguist, sweet</i>	90	90
15.	/j/ in <i>yet, yeast, yellow, onion, beauty, value</i>	100	100
16.	/ɪ/ in <i>part, burnt, clearly</i> (before a consonant)	0	0
17.	/ɪ/ in <i>father, tyre, bother</i> (word final-position)	0	0
18.	/ʒ/ in <i>genre, garage, rouge, beige</i>	0	0
19.	/ʒ/ in <i>vision, measure, revision</i>	20	0
20.	/s/ in <i>scene</i>	100	60
21.	/s/ in <i>cement, seething, assess, ascend</i>	100	90
22.	/z/ in <i>zoo, zinc, zebra</i>	80	60
23.	/z/ in <i>cousin, exact, scissors, please, bags, amaze</i>	100	60
24.	/ʃ/ in <i>shoot, sugar, posch, trash</i>	70	0
25.	/ʃ/ in words <i>schedule, machine, mission, action, bash</i>	100	0

Reasons of mispronunciation/difficulty in pronunciation of certain sounds by the informants:

Almost all the informants from regional medium schools said that in school, teachers never paid any attention towards improving their reading or speaking skills. The method adopted by their teachers was that they would write down the answers on the blackboard or dictate them and the students would simply copy it/write it down. Then all they did was to cram the answers, reproduce them in examinations and finally forgot them!

This accounts for the wrong pronunciation by students of even very simple sounds such as sound /dʒ/ in words *budget, gadget*, or sound /s/ in word *scene*.

The informants from English medium schools said that though the students were asked to interact with each other/talk to the teachers in English, teachers did not really pay much attention to students' pronunciation. Thus, whatever knowledge they could gather in the field of pronunciation was by listening to the teachers when they read aloud the chapters in English in the class. This is supported from the observation of the data collected that students from English medium schools could appropriately pronounce sounds/words that are quite common such as sound /s/ in words *scene, cement, seething*, or sound /dʒ/ in word *large*, but when it comes to some uncommon words/sounds such as sound /ʒ/ in words *genre, rouge, beige*, or sound /ð/ in words *sheathe, loathe, bequeath*, they could not pronounce them correctly.

Both in regional medium schools and English medium schools no efforts are being made towards teaching correct pronunciation to the students, even with respect to some very basic sounds. This is supported by the results of the project. For instance, students coming from regional medium schools and English medium schools did not know that the sound /r/ should not be heard in word-final position or when it occurs before a consonant as in *clearly*, or that 'ph' in *nephew* and 'f' in *of* are pronounced as /v/ and not as /f/. Similarly, students are never corrected in schools for mispronouncing as simple a sound as /ʃ/. Hence, it becomes a habit with students to confuse sound /s/ with /ʃ/ or vice versa.

For some sounds such as /ʒ/, the possible reason of students' inability to pronounce it correctly is that their mother tongue (Hindi, in this case) does not have much of this sound /ʒ/. Thus it becomes difficult for students to pronounce such sounds. This difficulty is made more intense when students are not given any training in such sounds in schools also.

Remedial measures taken to enable the informants to produce certain sounds correctly:

- I informed the informants that an aspirated sound is produced correctly when it is accompanied by a puff of breath. I gave them practice by asking them to place the palm of their hands in front of their mouth and then produce the /p/ sound in words *push, palm, paper* in such a way that it is accompanied with a puff of breath.
- In case of sound /r/, I told the informants the rule that sound /r/ should not be heard when it occurs before a consonant as in words *part, burnt, clearly*, or when it occurs in word-final position as in words *father, tyre, bother*
- To help the informants produce sound /w/ and not /v/ in words as *west, war, wool, underworld*, I told them that the lips should be rounded and the stricture should be of open approximation while the upper teeth should not touch the lower lip.
- To enable the informants to distinguish between voiced and voiceless sounds (and thus produce sounds /s/ and /z/ correctly at appropriate places), I asked the informants to cup their ears with palm of their hands allowing the palms to rest lightly on the cheeks and then produce the sounds /s/ and /z/. If a voiceless sound is produced, the informant would hear a hissing sound at lip region with no vibration, but if a voiced sound is produced, the informant would hear reduced hissing sound and greater vibration in palms and finger tips.
- To help the informants produce sound /ʒ/, I gave them the place and manner of articulation. I told them that they should feel that the front part of their tongue should touch the hard palate and the tip of the tongue the back of the front teeth. I gave them practice in producing this sound though they found it difficult.

Implications of the Research:

- The research gives an idea about the proficiency level of speaking (only pronunciation) English of students coming from English medium schools and regional schools, and also facilitates a contrastive analysis between the two.
- The research gives an indication of the kind of training in speaking English that students receive in schools (English medium schools as well regional schools). It reveals that students in regional schools are hardly given any exposure to English and the opportunities available to them in such schools to speak English, listen English or

read English aloud are almost non-existent. In the case of students coming from English medium schools, though their ability to speak English is better than those students coming from regional schools, there are many sounds (such as /z/, or an aspirated /p/ or /b/, etc.) which they pronounce incorrectly or do not know of at all. This points towards the fact that even in English medium schools, no extra attention is paid towards improving students' skill of correct pronunciation of English.

- The paper facilitates knowledge regarding the problems that students face in pronunciation and that are common to students coming from regional schools and from English medium schools. For instance, students from both the type of schools are unable to produce semi-vowel /w/ at appropriate place, or they confuse /s/ with /ʃ/.

The paper brings into light those areas of pronunciation in English language in which informants coming from regional schools and from English medium schools are lacking and need training.

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