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# A STUDY OF STRESS IN ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION FACED BY ENGLISH AS SECOND LANGUAGE (ESL) LEARNERS IN INDIA

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## **ABSTRACT**

Language is a means to communicate one's thoughts, ideas, and feelings with one's surroundings through speech, writing, gestures, symbols, signals, objects, sounds, pictures, etc. According to A. C. Gimson "A language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community". Speaking and understanding are as natural as breathing. English is a foreign language so people are comparatively quiet shy and they feel uncomfortable in their speech. The ability of speaking English depends on the correctness of pronunciation with proper word stress and sentence stress which directly affects the appropriate communication in conversation. According to George, (2002), "foreign-language learning is basically a mechanical process of habit formation." Although there are more than two hundred local languages spoken in the Indian subcontinent but very few of them are considered the official language. English along with Hindi is the most official languages widely used all over the subcontinent of India. English is spoken in almost all educational, public and governmental settings, media, etc. It is also used as the written medium in many newspapers. A study was conducted to know the stress in English pronunciation by the English as second language learners. The Investigator collected data from 500 students and 60 teachers from 20 educational institutions situated in the area of NCR Delhi in order to know their knowledge of stress in Pronunciation English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in India.

The findings of the study show that more than 86% students read monosyllabic words with proper stress about 84% students read the bisyllabic words with proper stress an average of 72% students read three-syllable words with proper stress and the number of students who read the polysyllable words were least. Only 67% of students from the sample were able to read the given sentences with proper stress. Majority of the students were found at the moderate level of speaking ability and below average speaking ability test in English. There existed a mixture of Indian language accent among sample students in speaking ability test in English. Most of the students mispronounced the English consonants that do not exist in Indian language and other consonants. Most of the students were found at the moderate level of writing ability and below average writing ability test in English. Majority of teachers (78.33%) liked speaking English, 86.67% teachers favoured that regularly using a foreign language influence their native language. About 80% of teachers' used English for communication regularly in the classroom and 85% of teachers try to answer the questions in English whenever they got a chance.

About 80% of teachers give special emphasis to teaching English pronunciation along with other skills. 40% of teachers make their students practices how to pick the odd word out while only 26.67% teachers used to teach syllable stress pattern in words.

KEYWORDS: Language, Stress, ESLs, Phonetics, Pronunciation

# **INTRODUCTION**

Language is a means to communicate one's thoughts, ideas, and feelings through speech, writing, gestures, symbols, signals, objects, sounds, pictures, etc. According to **A. C. Gimson** "A language is a system of conventional signals used for communication by a whole community'. English is a foreign language so people are afraid of making mistakes. They feel uncomfortable in their first attempt at the speech in English and they are afraid of failure, laughter and ridicule. English along with Hindi is the most official languages widely used all over the subcontinent of India. English is spoken in almost all educational, public and governmental settings, media, etc. It is also used as the written medium in many newspapers. The basic historical perspective of Indian English literature is an effort to contextualize the growth and rise of this genre-from its inception to its present-day glory. India's association with the British and hence English is even older. It is now a universally acknowledged fact that Mughal Emperor Jahangir had granted William Hawkins license to trade in India in the year 1608 and that was when the English had placed its first step upon the oriental soil. In the due course of history, the British concluded their conquest of India in a triumphant and scheming manner.

Phonetics is the word derived from the Greek word *phone* which means *sound/voice*. According to Robins (1975), Phonetics is the "study of the science of speech sound, their production and sighs used to represent them". It is concerned with the spoken language or the aural medium as given to the three aspects:

- The speaker- who produces sounds
- The hear- who hears the sounds
- The transmission of the sounds through the air from the speaker to the listener.

Phonetics is a fundamental branch of Linguistics. It has three different aspects:

- **Articulatory Phonetics**: Articulatory Phonetics describes how vowels and consonants are produced or "articulated" in various parts of the mouth and throat.
- **Acoustic Phonetics**: Acoustic Phonetics is a study of how speech sounds are transmitted. When sound travels through the air from the speaker's mouth to the hearer's ear it does so in the form of vibrations in the air.
- Auditory Phonetics: Auditory Phonetics is a study of how speech sounds are perceived. It looks at the way in
  which the hearer's brain decodes the sound waves back into the vowels and consonants originally intended by the
  speaker.

The actual sound produced, such as a simple vowel or consonant sound is called a **phone**. Phonology is the study of the sound system of languages which includes social attitudes to features of sound such as accent and intonation finding objective standard ways of recording speech, and representing this symbolically. Phonology focuses on the way languages

use differences between sounds in order to convey differences of meaning between words. All theories of phonology hold that spoken language can be broken down into a string of sound units (**phonemes**). A phoneme is a speech sound that helps us construct meaning. A phoneme is the smallest 'distinctive unit sound' of a language. It distinguishes one word from another in a given language. This means changing a phoneme in a word, produces another word that has a different meaning. A phoneme may have several **allophones**, related sounds that are distinct but do not change the meaning of a word when they are interchanged.

English pronunciation is also divided into two main accent groups, the **rhotic** and the **non-rhotic**, depending on the pronunciation of the phoneme /**r**/. Rhotic speakers pronounce written "**r**" in all positions while non-rhotic speakers do not pronounce "**r**". They pronounce /**r**/ only if it is followed by a vowel such as; **r**ight, **r**ain, **r**oom, **R**obert, far away, etc.

In English Phonetics, there are 44 speech sounds. The number of speech sounds in English varies from dialect to dialect, and any actual tally depends greatly on the interpretation of the researcher doing the counting. To represent the basic sound of spoken languages linguists use a set of phonetic symbols called the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA). The IPA symbols used to represent the sounds of the English language are also categories as phonetic vowels and phonetic consonants. This is the standard set of phonemic symbols for English (RP and similar accents).

## **STRESS**

Stress is the relative emphasis that may be given to certain syllables in a word, or to certain words in a phrase or sentence. In English, stressed syllables are louder than non-stressed syllables. Also, they are longer and have a higher pitch. English is a stress-timed language. That means that stressed syllables appear at a roughly steady tempo, whereas non-stressed syllables are shortened. According to Roach (1993), all stressed syllables have one characteristic in common, and that is called prominence. Stressed syllables are recognized as stressed because they are more prominent than unstressed syllables. How important is teaching to place stress on the right syllable in English, it would be worth quoting to Clifford et.al. (1985) who says that stress is the key to the pronunciation of an English word, and the location of the accent always be learned with the word. If the speakers stress the wrong syllable it may be quite impossible for anyone listening to understand what they are trying to say.

Stress is a dynamic feature of a language. It may be described as the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. It is essentially a subjective action. A strong force of utterance means the energetic action of all the articulating organs. It is usually accompanied by a gesture with the hand or head or other parts of the body. It involves a strong push from the chest wall and consequently a strong force of exhalation which generally gives the objective impression of loudness. Weak force of utterance involves the weak action of the chest wall resulting in a weak force of exhalation, and giving the objective acoustic impression of softness. In English, some syllables are spoken with a greater degree of force than the others are. Syllables that are pronounced more forcibly than the others are said to be stressed syllables that are pronounced without much force are called unstressed, or more accurately weakly stressed. As English is a stress-timed language so it is a vital part of both speaking and listening. The stress can occur on both syllables in a word and words in a sentence. So stress can be divided as word stress and sentence stress.

# WORD STRESS

The term 'stress' is defined as the syllable prominence which may, of course, derive from several phonetic factors such as increased length, loudness, pitch movement or a combination of these aspects (Ball and Rahilly, (1999). **Roach** (1983) identifies the four characteristics that make a syllable stressed. A stressed syllable;

- Is louder,
- Is longer,
- Has a higher pitch and
- Contains a vowel different in quality from the neighboring vowels.

There appears to be a significant correlation between the weight and position of syllables within a word and their prominence. In some languages, each syllable in each word is pronounced with the exact same stress. English is not one of those languages. English has its own rhythm, complete with its own vocal music. This means that one part of a certain word is said louder and longer than other parts of the same word. It is something that is completely natural for English speakers, but something ESL students can learn from learning the correct way to pronounce new words, practicing their conversational skills, and by learning the rules for using word stress. There are some rules with reference to stress in English;

- 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. Remember that there are exceptions to every rule.

# SENTENCE STRESS

Sentence stress means the stress in the sentence. The stresses that can occur on words sometimes become modified when the words are part of sentences. The most frequent modification is the dropping of some of the stresses (Ladefoged, 2001). English words have the stress on their first syllables when they are used alone. But when used in a sentence, the stress shifts. If we put the stress on the first syllables of all the words in the sentence, it will not sound nice and the meaning may be hardly understood. As Ravi's younger brother wanted twenty ball pens. The sentence should be 'Ravi's younger brother wanted twenty ball pens.' The first syllables of 'younger', 'wanted' and 'ball' are pronounced without stress.

The place of the stress in sentences is indicated according to such reasons as emphasis or contrast in the meaning. So, we can divide sentence stress into some types of stress which are tonic stress, emphatic stress and contrastive stress.

## NEED AND SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The English spoken on the Indian subcontinent has some distinctive characteristics that set it apart from other international varieties of English such as RP (Received Pronunciation) and GA (General American). These differences arose as a result of a long period during which English was in constant contact with languages spoken natively in India. British and American English are the reference norms for English as spoken, written and taught all over the world. Most of the countries concerned have developed their own unique dialects, particularly with respect to pronunciation, idioms and vocabulary. Much research has already been done on US and British English Spelling differences, differences in grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation, accents etc. by numerous authors starting from **Noah Webster** in the 18th century to authors of the present decade like D. Barton who in an article "Potentially confusing and embarrassing Differences between American and British English" commented,

"I realize that perhaps a lifetime of watching American Television and a half hour speech is not adequate preparation for appreciating and coping with the differences between American and British speech".

In the 1970s, a number of investigations revealed strong influences of different indigenous Indian languages on the variety of English spoken in India (Bansal, 1970; Balasubramanian, 1972). Around this time, Indian English (IE) was standardized in a monograph issued by the Central Institute of English and Foreign Languages so that there would be a consistent variety for use in primary and secondary education (CIEFL, 1972). The standardized variety was called General Indian English (GIE), and it has several salient phonological features such as a reduced vowel inventory compared to the Received Pronunciation (RP) of British English, the substitution of retroflex stops for RP British English alveolar stops, and the omission of some fricative sounds (Bansal, 1976; Wells, 1982).

Hindi has the most speakers among the Indo-Aryan language family. Hindi is the official language of 11 states, and its speakers account for 41.03% of total population of India. Hindi is known to be phonologically distinct as the Hindi vowel inventory includes tense-lax distinction and a quantity difference as well as a central vowel /i, i:, e:,  $\epsilon$ ,  $\epsilon$ ,  $\epsilon$ , a, a, a, c, o:, u, u:/ (Ohala, 1999) . Hindi is described as of quantity sensitive. It has been described as a syllable-timed language (Crystal, 1995; Dauer, 1983).

In the present study, the researcher tried to identify the performance and areas of problems in the process of stress in learning of linguistic skills of English language by the Indian English learners and the problems faced by them on English pronunciation. It is also tried to suggest certain remedial measures to overcome the problems or hindrance encountered by Indian English learners. The study aimed to test the hypotheses, also to investigate the causes of inadequate stress in the pronunciation of English by native Hindi speakers and the possible solutions in order to remove their problems. So, it was really imperative to unearth real causes behind the improper stress in English pronunciation by the Indian English learners. The implications of the study may be useful to students, teachers, business personals, common Indian English speakers and policy-making bodies in restructuring the Indian education system.

## Statement of the Problem

Title of the research is given as "A Study of Stress in English Pronunciation Faced by English as Second Language (ESL) Learners in India.

# Objectives of the Study

The under-mentioned objectives were framed for the current research work:-

- To identify the problems encountered by the Indian English learners in the process of oral communication.
- To identify Indian English learners' recognizing ability of sound stress, vocabulary, and information in the process of reading, speaking, writing and listening English with correct pronunciation.
- To suggest remedial measures to improve the linguistic skills of English.

# **Hypotheses Tested**

Keeping in view of the objectives the following null hypotheses were tested.

- The native language has no any direct impact on the correct pronunciation of English.
- Indian English learners do not differ significantly with respect to the stress in English pronunciation.
- None of the variables play any role in the correct pronunciation of English speaking.

## METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

Research methodology, refers to the broader framework that is used by the researcher to conduct the research which decides the types of methods the researcher use, the theoretical perspectives, etc. The researcher used the Descriptive Analytical Method. The aim was to collect data objectively through utterance and questionnaire then coding data collected numerically to describe the relationship in a phenomenon. The data of this study was collected by means of questionnaires. In this study, participants, whose first language was Hindi or any native language and second language was English, were the respondents. The male and female participants were included in the study. The average age of the students' participants was 16-24.

## RESEARCH DESIGNS

A research design is the set of methods and procedures used in collecting and analyzing measures of the variables specified in the research study. It is the framework that has been created to find answers to research questions. In the present research work, the researcher tried to study the stress in English Pronunciation among Indian English learners of NCR, Delhi. The direct impact of speakers of native language on the Indian English learners was covered for the present study. The participants were given a stack of cards containing words/ phrases/ clauses or sentences in English to read the written materials on those cards. Their stress and pronunciation was recorded in a tape recorder and matched with standard RPA pronunciation they were again asked to read the words/ phrases/ clauses or sentences on each card at a comfortable speed. This process was applied on all Participants with instructions given in the language that corresponded to the language of the cards. Participants were alternated until 3 repetitions of all the words, phrases, clauses and sentences obtained from each participant. The cards were shuffled between each re-reading so that the words, phrases, clauses and sentences were read in a new random order every time.

## **Population**

Population for the present study consisted of the students and teachers of the educational institutions located at NCR Delhi where English is taught as the second language.

## Sample

The Investigator selected 500 students, 60 teachers from the 20 educational institutions located at NCR Delhi where English is taught as a second language. The sample and the educational institutions were selected by random sampling technique.

#### Tools Used

The under mentioned tools were used for the data collection for the present study;

- Questionnaire For Students
- Questionnaire For Teachers Prepared By The Investigator

## **Delimitation of the Study**

- The study was delimited to the Indian English learners in various academic institutions of NCR /Delhi.
- The study was delimited to Indian English learners whose native language was Hindi.
- Criteria for analysis of pronunciation were based on British and American English.

## FINDINGS RELATED TO STUDENTS RESPONSES

The findings on the basis of the responses of the students are given below;

# Findings Related to Reading Test

- Almost 86% of students read the given monosyllabic words properly.
- About 84% of students read the bisyllabic words with proper stress.
- An average of 72% students read three-syllable words with proper stress.
- In most two syllable nouns and adjectives, the first syllable takes on the stress. About 67% of students read these words with proper stress.
- In most two syllable verbs and prepositions, the stress is on the second syllable. Only 57% of students read these
  words with proper stress.
- Only 67% of students from the sample were able to read the given sentences with proper stress. The stress was not proper in their pronunciation.

• The mean of sentences reading ability test containing 10 sentences was calculated to be 5.12 with standard deviation of 1.83. Therefore, it can be concluded that very few students among the sample were able to give the correct pronunciation of the sentence after making necessary corrections.

- Majority of the students were found at moderate reading ability and below average reading ability. There existed
  incorrect stress among sample students in the pronunciation of words with varying word syllables...
- Most of the students did not have mastery of pronunciations of different types of sentences. Only 6% of students
  were found at the low level of reading ability.

# **Findings Related to Speaking Test**

- Majority of the students were found at moderate and below average speaking ability test in English. There existed a mixture of Indian language accent among sample students in speaking ability test in English.
- Out of 500 students, only 1.2% of students were found at the extremely high level of speaking in English.
- Most of the students mispronounced the English consonants that do not exist in Indian language and other consonants.
- The mean of speaking ability test was calculated to be 5.30 with standard deviation of 1.90. Therefore, it can be concluded that very few students among the sample were able to respond correctly.
- The mean of speaking ability test after changing into plural form was calculated to be 13.72 with standard deviation of 3.30. Therefore, it can be concluded that very few words after making them into plural were spoken correctly

# Findings Related to Listening Test

- Majority of the students were found at the moderate level of listening ability and below average listening ability test in English.
- The mean score of listening ability test was calculated to be 6.39 with standard deviation of 1.73. This aspect of response was for the meant to know students' knowledge of listening homophones and speak them with correct pronunciation.

## **Findings Related to Writing Test**

- Most of the students were found at the moderate level of writing ability and below average writing ability test in English.
- The mean score of writing ability test was calculated to be 15.30 with standard deviation of 1.90. This aspect of response was for the meant to know students'

## FINDINGS RELATED TO RESPONSES OF TEACHERS

- Majority of teachers (78.33%) liked speaking English, 86.67% teachers think that regularly using a foreign language influence their native language 93.33% teachers to think that it is important for students to develop their speaking and listening skills.
- Only 46.67% teachers were satisfied with the way the learners listen to them in the classroom 60% teachers hoped
  that the material in the textbook fulfills their students' expectations as far as concerned to speaking and listening
  skills.
- About 80% of teachers' use English for communication regularly in the classroom and 85% of teachers try to answer the questions in English whenever they get a chance. 75% teachers were able to recognize the errors they make while speaking English, 81.67% teachers attempted self-correction while speaking English and 88.33% teachers agreed that mother tongue has an impact on their pronunciation while 78.33% teachers responded that they practice to find correct meaning of a word. Only 65% teachers responded that they try to find out the lexical meaning of words.
- Only 68.33% of teachers responded that they feel that the speech organs affect their pronunciation. Only 35.00% of teachers responded that they are unable to break the word/s in its syllable.
- Only 46.67% teachers study transcription along with a word only 53.33% teachers gave more importance to learning the basics of pronunciation. Out of 60 teachers taken as sample 81.67% teachers responded that they communicate with their students in English.
- Almost 80% of teachers give special emphasis to teaching English pronunciation along with other skills 86.67% teachers teach correct pronunciation of words to their students.
- Only 40% teachers responded that their students take interest in pronunciation activities in classroom 88.33% teachers encourage their students to learn correct pronunciation of words 85% teachers responded that they make students practice correct pronunciation of commonly mispronounced words.
- According to data analysis, it is clear that 86.67% teachers try to make their students' pronunciation mistakes correct on the spot. Only 40% of teachers make their students practices how to pick the odd word out while. Only 26.67% teachers teach syllable stress pattern in words.
- Out of 60 teachers taken as sample 75% teachers responded that they make the relationship between spellings of words with a pronunciation of words.
- Only 30% of teachers responded that they teach the difference between vowel and consonant sounds by the
  position of vocal organs.
- Only 38.33% teachers responded that they consult Oxford or Cambridge dictionary for exact phonetic transcription of words.

• The analysis of data shows that 76.67% teachers check and confirm the correct pronunciation of words in each lesson before going to class.

- It's clear from the data analysis that 68.33% students had no difficulty understanding the speech of their teachers. 80% teachers use effective strategies and techniques for making content accessible for English language learners.
- The results of the teachers' data show that 71.67% teachers encourage students' independent and creative thinking using stimulating language.
- Only 53.33% of teachers responded that they believe that it is possible to achieve pronunciation similar to a native speaker.

# **CONCLUSIONS**

It is clear from the data analysis that simple and familiar words enable the learners to comprehend them easily and unfamiliar vocabularies hinder them to understand the concept. Thus, they failed to recognize the distinction between plural and singular nouns, stress, the phonological and morphological structure of words and sentences. Many respondents from the selected sample were not too conscious to the stress in pronunciation with in the words. Further, they were not able to distinguish between voiced and voiceless; aspirated and unaspirated fricatives and affricatives. Finally, in the test of recognizing and recalling number majority of the students performed well. However, some of the students failed to pronounce them with proper stress. General observation suggests that it is those who started to learn English after their school years are most likely to have serious difficulties in acquiring intelligible pronunciation, with the degree of difficulty increasing markedly with age. After all, many native speakers pronounce individual sounds differently from the norm, with no problems for intelligibility. The problem is that they do not have concepts of them as separate sounds, but rather think of them as indistinguishable variants of a single sound. The difficulty such a learner has in imitating an English pronunciation of sentences is caused by the cognitive interpretation of the relevant sounds. The sentence as it is produced is a continuous flow of vowels and consonants.

# IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

Since the study concentrates on stress in English pronunciation, it will present a total picture about the English language spoken in India and suggest remedies in order to remove errors in pronunciation. Correct pronunciation and grammar is emphasized. It is thus important to understand the factors affecting correct spoken English. Teachers in the Hindi speaking belt can benefit from the study and help their learners work on their pronunciation skills by planning appropriate classroom activity and instruction.

In the case of the second language, it may be useful to integrate the systematic study of cognates into teaching programmes, as Meara (1993) suggested that it may also be possible to express some productive morphological rules in terms of translation equivalences.

• A good way to learn English reading, speaking and listening skills is with the video. Everyone loves interesting and funny stories about different characters. The learner should repeat the activities several times.

- For practicing, correcting and developing the pronunciation the ESLs should listen regularly to English sounds
  and words using audio aids like cassettes, CDs and sound dictionaries. These tools are very useful for practicing
  pronunciation.
- Appropriate teaching can help learners to develop realistic equivalence hypotheses, appropriate compensatory strategies and an understanding of the nature of the error.
- Careful preparation and integration, pronunciation can play an important role in supporting the learners' overall communicative power.
- Easy and simple vocabularies may be used in reading materials. Further, the hard and unknown vocabularies may be introduced in familiar the context of the students.
- It is advised that the teachers should provide a basis for students to pronounce a word correctly and identify the physical reasons for inaccurate pronunciation, enabling them to give precise instructions which help ESLs correct, faulty pronunciation.
- Mapping second-language vocabulary onto the mother tongue is a basic and indispensable learning strategy, but also inevitably leads to error.
- Observing public announcements (Railway announcement, corporation transport announcement, etc.) will help to strengthen the sociolinguistic knowledge and the presence of mind.
- Pronunciation must be viewed as more than correct production of individual sounds or isolated words. Instead,
  it must be viewed as a crucial and integral part of communication that should be incorporated into classroom
  activities.
- Teachers can help students by highlighting elements of sounds, syllables, stress, and intonation.
- Teaching should focus on both recognition and production i.e. teachers should recognize the pronunciation errors
  and correct them and teach the students how to pronounce these sounds correctly.
- The students can be made to listen to different current vocabularies and allow them to write down the synonymous and antonymous words for those vocabularies.
- There should be pronunciation lessons ranking the same as lessons in other skills e.g. Grammar, and vocabulary and sentence structure to draw the attention of the ESLs to the importance of pronunciation in learning English.

# SUGGESTIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

On the basis of the present study, some of the areas are identified in the same field for further study.

 The present research has advocated some apt remedial measures to eliminate the problems encountered by the students in the process stress in the pronunciation of English language. The other linguistic aspects may be included for further study.

• L1 influences on L2 and its impact on other skills of language i.e. speaking, reading and writing. This phenomenon can be studied further.

- Negative and positive transfer of L1 between L2 writing can be studied separately.
- Error analysis can also be made in the process of learning speaking of English as a second language.
- A comparative study may be made between the two or more states or countries with reference to the communicative competence of the English language.

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