Abstract

The aim of the present study is to describe some aspects of the phonology of Indian English with a view to gaining an insight into the theoretical implications involved in the study of non-native varieties of language.

The present study demonstrates that it is possible to assume the same underlying representation of English words for different regional varieties in India and predict their surface representations through the same set of rules. The divergences between different regional varieties are, thus, demonstrated to be only dialectal whereas divergences between the Indian and native pronunciations of English are shown to be like those between two independent language varieties i.e., native and non-native varieties. It is claimed that due to circumstances peculiar to them, Indian speakers, unlike native speakers of English, treat orthography as the underlying representation to which a set of syllable and prosodic structure rules applies to generate the observed pronunciations. These pronunciations are generally very different from those in some native varieties and are also likely to be unintelligible to speakers of native varieties. It is also claimed that rules and structures in Indian English are simpler than those in the phonologies
of native varieties of English and that such simplifications are attested in other second, pidgin and creole language varieties too.

This study is divided into four chapters. Chapter I outlines a theoretical perspective for the present study. Criteria for identifying the variety termed Indian English in this dissertation are proposed here and it is said after a brief review of earlier studies of its phonology that its peculiarities can be examined in a better manner by studying them in the perspective of certain universal principles affecting language learning. It is suggested here that there is a tendency in language learners to build the simplest of the possible grammars and languages often conspire through rules to constrain arbitrariness and create preferred structural patterns. Simplification of rules and structures witnessed in Indian English and other pidgin language varieties is argued to be a consequence of this tendency. The scope of this study and organization of its chapters are also described here.

Chapter II, the heart of this thesis, presents Syllable Structure Rules for Indian English. With data from only one of its regional varieties, it is demonstrated that orthography can be treated as the underlying representation of Indian English words. It is said here that
Indian English conspires through certain rules and principles applying to orthographic symbols to generate a maximally preferred pattern of heavy and light syllables in a given string which has consequences for stress assignment.

Chapter III presents a set of metrical Stress Rules for Indian English. These rules apply to the output of the rules of the kind given in the earlier chapter. With data from several regional varieties of Indian English it is demonstrated here that word stress in all of them can be predicted with one set of rules. Surface differences between different regional varieties are shown to be dialectal and predictable by making stress rules sensitive to dialectal preferences for syllable and prosodic structures.

Chapter IV, the final chapter, talks about some Low-Level Rules which predict phenomena like vowel elision, consonant gemination and tensing of word-final vowels that seem to occur after stress assignment in Indian English. Some of these phenomena are said to be optional and dependent, primarily, upon the tempo of speech. It is, thus, shown here that these phenomena are not arbitrary but rule governed and whenever they occur they affect the syllabic shape and also, perhaps, the intelligibility of the Indian English word. Data in this chapter are also taken from several regional varieties of Indian English.
Thus it is demonstrated in the present study that various syllable structure and prosodic processes like lengthening, reduction, addition and elision of vowels, stress assignment and gemination of consonants are rule governed phenomena in Indian English and can be predicted in its several different varieties by the same set of rules.
"sam taim gud rod get, samtaim olsem ben get, enguru 'angle' get, no? enikain seim, olsem hyuman laif, olsem -- gud rodu get, enguru get, mauntin get, -- no? awl, enikain, stawmu get, nais dei get -- olsem, enibadi, mi ossem, smawl taim"

(Sometimes there is a good road, sometimes there's like bends, corners, right? Everything is like that. There's good roads, sharp corners, there's mountains, right? All sorts of things, there's storms, nice days -- it's like that for everybody, it was for me too, when I was young.)