

ABSTRACT

The concept of General Indian English (henceforth GIE) claims Pan-Indian features in the spoken variety of English in India. The aim of this study is to re-examine this claim in the light of the variety of English spoken by people whose mother tongue (or the most effective first language) is Tamil and who are residents of Pondicherry. This study gives a phonological description of the variety of English spoken by Tamilians in the Union Territory of Pondicherry. It is found that although there are common features in the English written by various Indians, the spoken variety is very clearly marked by the phonetic and phonological features of the mother tongue of Indian speakers of English. This is true especially of vowels and suprasegmental features. The system of vowels in the English spoken by Indians and the way they assign stress and choose intonation contours differ according to the speaker's mother tongue or the effective first language. The concept of General Indian (spoken) English therefore needs detailed examination. The investigator feels that such a variety can be claimed to exist ONLY AFTER the "Englishes" of India -- Tamilian English, Punjabi English, Telug English, Kashmiri English, Marathi English and so on -- are described in detail. It is with this object in mind that the present study was attempted. It proves that the English spoken by

Tamilians in Pondicherry and Karaikal (henceforth ETPK) differs to a great extent from GIE in its system of vowels.

This study, basically a descriptive one, instead of listing the deviations of the variety of English taken up for study from R.P. tries to get an insight into the <sup>process of</sup> Second Language Acquisition from the so-called deviations. The investigator feels that these differences in the manifestation of the Second Language are actually triggered by the learning processes used mostly unconsciously. The informants of this study are basically those who have mastered or expected to have mastered the use of English, for, they are graduates or postgraduates and are active users of English. The way they have manifested English reveals the unconscious learning strategies clearly. These strategies, the researcher (who is a teacher too) feels, if highlighted where necessary, will be a very effective tool of teaching English in India. For, when we highlight the strategies, we are able to reinforce some of them, suggest the proper use of some of them and perfect some more of them. This makes the learning process easy and much more effective than it would otherwise be.

Chapter I states the aim and scope of the study. This study attempts a detailed phonological description of the segmental and suprasegmental features of English spoken in Pondicherry (Town) and Karaikal by native speakers of Tamil.

The region chosen was the Union Territory of Pondicherry because it is like a microcosm of India in its linguistic variability. It uniquely adopts a five language formula. The cultural heritage of Pondicherry has made it a "millennial meeting place of East and West". The developing Union Territory very heavily depends on English because of the coming together of people speaking four different languages -- French, Tamil, Telugu and Malayalam. Geographically, the Union Territory of Pondicherry comprises Pondicherry (Town) and Karaikal which are situated in Tamil speaking Tamilnadu, Yanam which is a part of Andhra Pradesh where Telugu is the mother tongue of the people and Mahe which is a part of the State of Kerala where the mother tongue of the people is Malayalam. Since, during colonial occupation of India, Pondicherry was a French Colony when it was annexed to India the people were given an option to be French Nationals, We have people who use French as their most effective first language. Of these various linguistic groups in Pondicherry/<sup>Tamilians</sup>were chosen for this study because the major part of Pondicherians are Tamilians and the majority of teachers at the Primary and Tertiary levels are Tamilians. The students of the present generation are hence exposed to the variety of English spoken by Tamilians. Any study of English in Pondicherry, therefore, could be of some use only if it deals with the English spoken by the Tamilians.

Chapter II is an elaborate description of the method of study adopted. Unlike the other phonological studies which begin with a formal reading of a list of words, sentences and a passage followed by <sup>a</sup> spontaneous speech sample two to three minutes long; this study took up spontaneous speech samples ranging from ten to fifteen minutes duration for its pilot study. Because, it was felt that only in such a sample, we ~~are~~ <sup>would be able to come</sup> into contact with the mind's free manipulations of the L<sub>2</sub>. The insights gained from this were expected to be a genuine and dependable guide to the researcher in the preparation of her test instruments. The preliminary analysis was made with an aim to see if their use of vowels is rule-governed. The analysis did reveal that there is a system in their use of vowel phonemes. The second chapter ends with the statement of the method of analysis adopted to describe the suprasegmental features.

Chapter III is a description of the segmental features of ETPK. It was hypothesised that the system has

Fifteen pure vowels /i:, i, e:, e, ə, ʌ, ə, ə:, a:, ɔ,  
ɔ:, o:, o, u:, u /

and Five diphthongs /ʌi, əi, ʌu, iə, uə /

and it was found that the system has

fifteen pure vowels /i:, i, e:, e, ə, ʌ, ə, ə:, a:, ɔ, ɔ:, o:  
o, u:, u /

and three diphthongs /ʌi, əi, ʌu/.

Unlike in other varieties of Indian English, in ETPK the vowels /ʌ, ɐ e:/ are retained as phonemes and so are /ɑ:, ɔ:, ɔ:, o:/ . Though there are substitutions of /ʌ/ for /ɐ / and /ər/ and /ɑr/ for /ɔ:/ we do find Pondicheri<sup>ans</sup> using appropriate sounds in minimal pairs. In the back vowels too, /o:/ is substituted for the R.P. vowel /ɔ:/ and the diphthong /əw/. But, the substitution of /o:/ for /ɔ:/ occurs only in the case of words having or <sup>and gar</sup> in the spelling form. Orthographic or is productively manifested as /o:/ due to the learning strategy of using spelling as a guide for pronunciation. But, in the case of the words sort and cork we find an exception, that is, NONE of the informants has used /o:/ in these two words. This reveals the fact that there is a selective rule application in the case of words they are exposed to, to a great extent. This makes us feel that if the teachers of English draw the students' attention to the phenomenon, the students can easily be guided to the right kind of pronunciation.

In the case of consonants the ETPK has twenty three consonants /p, b, t, d, t̪, d̪, k, g, tʃ, dʒ, m, n, ŋ, f, v, s, z, ʃ, h, l, r, j, w/. In the use of consonants the following tendencies were noted:

- (a) They tended to use aspirated plosives in the final positions. Sometimes they used unreleased stops

word-finally. Because of the influence of their mother tongue they introduced a reduced vowel /ə/ when plosives occurred finally. This introduction of the vowel was extended to fricatives too occasionally.

- (b) In the use of Fricatives, it was found that they tended to substitute the voiced, palato-alveolar fricative /ʒ/ with /ʃ/ and /ʒ/.
- (c) They tended to substitute the dental fricatives /θ/ and /ð/ by the dentalalveolar plosives /t<sub>n</sub>/ and /d<sub>n</sub>/ as it happens in many other varieties of Indian English.
- (d) In the place of /v/ and /w/ they used a voiced, labio-dental frictionless continuant /v/.
- (e) They tended to retroflex the consonants /t, d, n, l/ when these sounds were preceded or followed by plosives or back vowels. The former tendency and this are found in other varieties of English spoken in India.
- (f) The following natural phonological processes were found in their speech:
  - (1) Harmony of Voice, Place and Manner;
  - (2) Vowel Harmony;
  - (3) Consonant cluster simplification by dropping a consonant, or introducing a vowel or dropping a nasal and nasalising the vowel;

(4) Progressive and Regressive Assimilation,

(5) Omission of unstressed syllables.

(g) In the case of vowels and consonants, a pronounced influence of orthography was found.

Chapter IV describes in detail the suprasegmental features of ETPK. The speakers' characteristic use of stress and intonation contours is portrayed elaborately. Regarding stress at the word level, in the polysyllabic words they tended to stress the first syllable. If the word has more than three syllables they tended to stress the first and last syllable. Contrastive stress is not there. At the sentence level, we do not find rhythmic stress. This absence is due to the use of strong forms, stress on consecutive syllables and stress on prepositions and pronouns too. They tended to stress the modifier, the head and the qualifier in the nominal groups e.g., 'large quantities of 'spices, 'four 'measures of 'rice and so on. In the verbal groups they stressed the auxiliary and the lexical verbs e.g. 'can you re'move, 'would have 'come ...

Regarding intonation, the division of tone groups is mostly effected by pausing. The pitch change does not take place on any particular syllable. In other words, there are tone groups without nucleus. These pauses occur

arbitrarily. The tone groups effected can neither be called breath groups nor sense groups. Grammatical categories get split. For e.g. in the nominal groups there are pauses among the modifiers, between the modifier and the head, the head and the qualifier and within the qualifier itself. In the verbal groups the pauses occur among the auxiliary verbs, between auxiliary and lexical verb and in the infinitives. Some speakers have tone groups which have two or more nuclei. The following tones are used:

- |               |                |               |
|---------------|----------------|---------------|
| (a) High Fall | (b) Fall       | (c) Low Fall  |
| (d) High Rise | (e) Rise       | (f) Low Rise  |
| (g) Level     | (h) Fall Level | (i) Fall Rise |

Of these there is a predominant preference for the High Fall and Fall tones for they are used in Statements, Wh-questions, Commands, Exclamatory Sentences and Independent Clauses. The High Rise, Rise and Fall Rise tones are used in Yes/No Questions, requests and dependent clauses. In the use of suprasegmental features we find the influence of their mother tongue.

Chapter V deals with the application of this study by researchers and teachers. Researchers can use this study in the preparation of linguistic Atlas of English spoken in India and in the preparation of materials which can channelise the learning strategies mentioned in the study

to help the Second Language acquisition. The teachers are the most important agents who can apply this study meaningfully. They can adapt their methods of teaching according to the glimpses the study has of the so-called 'black box' -- the human brain -- regarding the learning of Second Language. The subconscious application of learning strategies like

- (1) making use of orthography as an aid to pronunciation,
- (2) using sounds in mother tongue which are closer to the target language sounds,
- (3) extending target language rules to effect a seeming regularisation,

can be exploited and made meaningful by

- (1) focusing the attention of the students on orthography where there is uniformity in the realisation,
- (2) explaining how the mother tongue sounds cannot be introduced always, and
- (3) controlling the application to relevant contexts.

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