

RHYTHMIC ERRORS IN NONNATIVE ENGLISH PRONUNCIATIONS

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ABSTRACT

For successful oral communication, intelligible pronunciation is essential along with grammatical accuracy, lexical appropriateness and meaningful discourse. Communication is likely to fail if what is said is neither intelligible nor comprehensible, especially in native-nonnative speaker interaction. English rhythm is the most important component among the suprasegmental elements, i.e., stress, rhythm, and intonation because English speech, unlike many other languages, is a rhythmic language the lack of which is likely to pose comprehension difficulty for the listener. It has been found that Arabic, for example, though it deviates from standard English with respect to some segmental features of standard English, its speakers of English, unlike Bengali speakers, for example, are less incomprehensible and less unintelligible to a native English speaker though it is not quite as rhythmic as English. What is interesting to note is that though the Inner-circle Englishes may vary among themselves, in other phonological aspects as well syntactic, lexical and discourse features, rhythm-wise, they vary little because English rhythm is based on word stress the rules for which are more or less fixed across varieties. Speech Rhythm, as such, is the most important suprasegmental feature of English pronunciation deviation from which is highly likely to make nonnative oral English highly unintelligible, incomprehensible and, in some cases, unacceptable. This article is a sequel to one written by the same author (2020, KLiCELS 16) on segmental errors of nonnative English speakers; this time, however, the focus is on rhythmic errors in a few nonnative pronunciations generalizable to other nonnative pronunciations as well. The article illustrates and explains the deviations against Standard English speech rhythm in a few nonnative Englishes which can be generalized to other nonnative Englishes. Then, it deals with the implications of these deviations for teaching English pronunciation, followed by pedagogic suggestions for this very important suprasegmental element of English pronunciation. In the end, the significance of the paper is well expressed by pointing out that of all other components of English phonology, word stress and rhythm are the most significant components of English phonology because the focus of the message depends upon them. Then, a few pedagogical suggestions are made including one that pronunciation should be taught in integration with the other aspects of the language starting at an early stage of learning.

Keywords: Supra-segmental features, word stress, shifting stress, tonic stress, speech rhythm.

INTRODUCTION

OBJECTIVES/PURPOSE OF THE PAPER

This article examines the difference between the speech patterns of a few nonnative English pronunciations like Indian, Bengali, Japanese, Kurdish and Hong Kong and Iranian English to highlight deviations which can be generalized to other nonnative pronunciations of English. English speech is stressed-timed meaning the time between two stressed syllables is of equal timing. The following sentence (or utterance) from Roach (1991, p.121) should explain the matter:

Walk down the path to the end of the canal

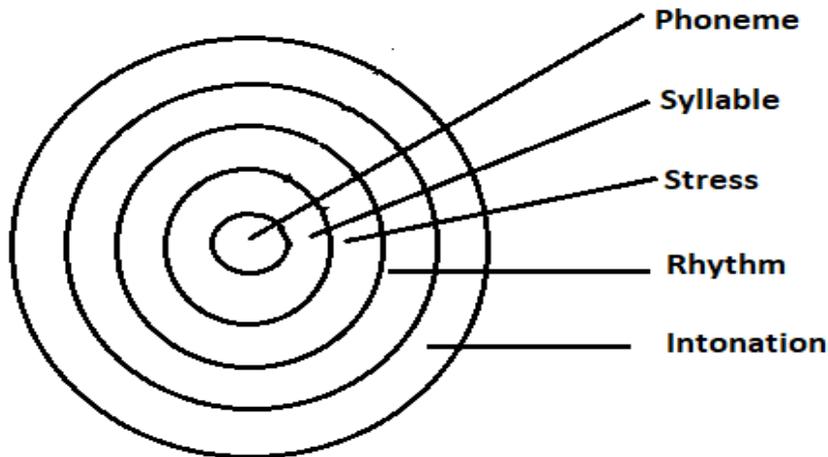
Each stressed syllable is highlighted and the time between one stressed syllable and the next is the same giving the utterance a rhythm pattern unavailable in most nonnative pronunciations. In the utterance above, there are five rhythm units depending on the number of stressed syllable in it; clearly, there are five stressed syllables, so five rhythm units or feet. This feature of English is “stressed-time” whereas most nonnative English speech is “syllable-timed”, so do not have the rhythm of English speech. This lack of rhythm in nonnative Englishes renders them unintelligible and may pose comprehension difficulty for native English speakers.

The paper examines the speech patterns of the languages as mentioned above and then puts forth some suggestions for teaching English speech rhythms using effective techniques.

ENGLISH SPEECH RHYTHM FURTHER EXPLAINED

English is spoken not only by native speakers but also by a host of nonnative speakers of the language across the globe representing varieties in terms of phonology, morphology, syntax and discourse. A hierarchical arrangement of the English phonological system is shown in the diagram below:

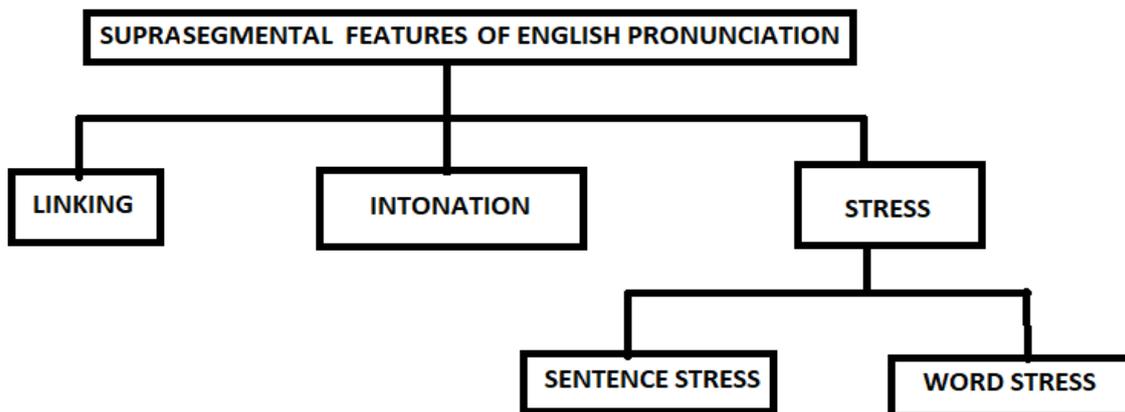
Figure 1: Hierarchical arrangement of English phonological components



From Syed, M.I. 2019)

The innermost circle represents segmental phonology, i.e. the consonant and the vowel phonemes, whereas the rest represent the suprasegmental features put forth in a hierarchically arranged order. Such an arrangement is also shown in the flowchart below:

Figure 2: Flowchart of suprasegmental features



(Adapted from Gilakjani, A. P. (2012)

In the above diagram, apart from linking, other co-articulatory features of English prosody, i.e., contractions and weak forms which contribute to rhythm should have been included. As regards word stress, it is the most important element because rhythm depends on it. Arguably, among the components of English prosodic features, rhythm is the most universal in all varieties of English the reason being that it depends on word stress the patterns of which hardly vary across varieties of English.

In many languages, such rhythm is absent; rather, there is nothing called prominent syllable making a word longer, louder and having a higher pitch than the surrounding (unstressed) sounds. In Bengali English, a nonnative English variety, there are no stressed syllables, so there is no rhythm; Bengali itself has the same characteristic which influences Bengali speakers' English, i.e. there is no rhythm in it; rather it is syllable-timed; more the number in a word, longer would it take to say it. As a matter of, a Bengali speech habit is transferred to a English speech habit. Hindi language, on the other hand, sometimes has too many stressed syllables in an utterance making it 'sing-song' which is equally incomprehensible to native English speakers as is Bengali for the lack of word stress.

The reason for incomprehensibility for native speakers of English is that the information content is dependent on the stressed syllables so either the lack of stress on a word or too many of them, as in Hindi or General Indian English (GIE), makes speech difficult by way of demanding attention of the listener to every syllable distorting the message of an utterance. In the following example English sentences, the meaning is picked up from the stressed syllables as highlighted:

1. There's **cat** under the table (not a dog or anything else. The listener's attention to the word 'cat' as stressed will restrict his/her attention mainly to this word whereas the rest may not be focused on).

2. I'll go to the station by **CAR** (not by bus or any other means of travel. In Bengali speakers' English speech, because lack of stress on a particular syllable, a native English speaker may find it difficult which part of the utterance contains the important information. So the utterance becomes difficult for the native speaker to comprehend.

For Hindi speakers of English, the problem presents itself differently. In this sentence, I am going to see him as soon as I can.' every word or syllable is uttered with similar stress making it difficult for a native speaker to focus on the content.

Rhythm, thus, is a very important feature of English pronunciation lack which may hinder intelligibility and comprehensible because what is not intelligible is prone to be incomprehensible.

English rhythm is also connected to what is known as Intonation in English speech which means the rise and fall of the pitch of the voice which signals different functions like grammatical, attitudinal, or discursal. This article, however, discusses rhythm alone leaving intonation and other co-articulation features aside.

METHODOLOGY

This paper is not a primary research report; it has no methodology as such but it is still an investigation which is carried out through illustrations of nonnative English word stress and rhythm patterns collected from a few syllable-timed nonnative English pronunciations and some stress-timed utterances but not quite like those in English and they are contrasted with stressed-timed native-speaker English (NSE). The erroneous stress- and rhythmic patterns are analyzed with reference of native speaker Englishes and are found to deviate from them. Though the data occurs from quite a few nonnative varieties of English, its nature and characteristics can be generalized to many other varieties of nonnative English because, as mentioned earlier, word stress and rhythmic patterns in NSE (Native speaker English) are universal and almost all syllable-timed nonnative varieties of English share common properties. In the end, a few suggestions are made for the teaching of English pronunciation.

NONNATIVE ENGLISHES: SYLLABLE-TIMED OR STRESSED-TIMED?

What follows is a collection of speech data from various nonnative Englishes, which, though they belong to specific speech communities, can be generalized to other nonnative English varieties because of the nature of the deviations.

INDIAN ENGLISH

From the various Indian Englishes, a central variety known as GIE (General Indian English) has evolved across India (Pandey, 2015) the rhythmic patterns of which variety have been examined and compared rhythm patterns in standard English. The comparison, however, sounds vague because Hindi is a syllable-timed language, so has no rhythm nor has it word stress as Bansal (1976) observes. To the contrary, in Hindi representing GIE, like many other languages, every syllable in an utterance is equally strong taking the same duration for pronunciation (Kachru, 1983). The initial syllable, however, appears to have some stress on it which appears to be duplicated in English; so here comes the comparison. The following examples will suffice to show how deviant Indian English word stress patterns are from Standard English because of interference from GIE (General Indian English).

Develop (verb) vs *Develop* (in NE)

Tattoo vs *Tattoo* in NE

Cassette vs *cassette* (in IE)

Prolific vs *prolific* in NSE

Career vs *career* in NSE

Pandey (ibid) generalizes the word stress patterns in Hindi as follows:

- a. Many stress patterns which are not phonologically predictable in NSE (Native speaker English), are regular, so predictable in Indian English, i.e. after the influence of Hindi, like **CAS**sette, **CA**noe and **DEG**ree etc
- b. However, complex words do not have fixed primary stress patterns in GIE or general Indian English (Pandey, 1989).
- c. Compound words, on the other hand, have a fixed pattern in GIE. The first member of the compound word has primary stress. Both compound stress and phrasal stress on Modifier+ Head constructions alike have primary stress on the first word and secondary stress on the second word; thus the compound word 'white house' and the phrase 'a white house' are pronounced alike. The English examples above are copies of syllable-timed English words in Indian English where every first syllable in Hindi is loud and strong. Indian speakers of English, therefore, pronounce English like they do Hindi – the first syllable is always prominent and louder than the rest.

As mentioned earlier, Hindi is a syllable-timed language like many other languages, so word stress is absent; rather, words are pronounced in a flat manner as are their respective first languages, but how does word stress determine rhythm? As earlier discussed and illustrated, word stress patterns are integral to rhythm. In the following sentences, 'The manager is here' and 'The man is here' are of equal length in NSE but the first sentence would be longer than the second because of 'manager' is longer than 'man' in Indian English. This first language habit of the Indians, thus, influence their English pronunciation habit (Adams, 1979). Urdu speakers' speech rhythm is no less erratic because both Hindi and Urdu are identical in terms of syntax and morphology except for

the lexis of the two languages; in fact, the two languages would have been considered two dialects of the same language had they not been spoken by two peoples separated into two geographic locations, i.e. Pakistan and India.

Besides unstressed words, function words and weakened vowels do not exist in Indian, neither do they exist in Bengali English; rather all vowels are strong regardless of whether they are content words or function words. Madhabi (2009) (reported in Pandey (2015, *ibid*) conducted a reading test of 26 function words and 8 contracted forms by 34 Indian students. The result showed that out of 34 forms, 10 were pronounced as weak forms and 22 words were pronounced in their strong forms representing 100% per of the respondents. In some varieties, however, too many words, content or function words alike, are strongly pronounced or are stressed giving Indian English the nickname of ‘Sing-song’ English. .

Though only one stressed syllable is available in a rhythm unit or foot, in the next higher unit or the tone unit, which is bigger than the rhythm unit, stress may shift from one syllable to another for contrast or new information giving the stressed syllable the status of the tonic or nuclear syllable which is the focus of information. Tonic stress may be wrongly placed in both Indian and Bengali languages themselves and later be transferred to English as a mother tongue induced habit. Such misplacement of tonic stress is likely to make meaning strange, ludicrous and incomprehensible. In the following sentences the tonic stress shift correctly and meaningfully:

1. I will go there by **car**
2. I’ll go there by a **new** car
3. I’ll go there by a **very** new car

In the above sentences, the highlighted syllables are examples of tonic stress which shifts because of new information and contrast but what happens when they are wrongly placed?

1. Take the **medicine**
2. Take the **medicine** daily (wrongly placed tonic stress; **daily** is correct tonic stress)

1. I’ll go by **train**
2. I’ll go by the 9:30 **train** (wrongly stressed; nine **thirty** is correct)

Such inappropriate placement of tonic stress is commonplace in Indian English. An ‘All-India’ radio announcement in which the tonic stress misplacement is further attested by the examples below:

1. // In LIEu of the QUEStion hour...// (IE) vs //...in LIEu of the QUEStion HOUR...// (NSE)
2. //...and SEEK a FRESH mandate...// vs //...and SEEK a FRESH MANDate ...// (NSE)
3. //...in the forty-EIGHT over...// vs //in the FORTY-EIGHT Over// NSE...//

BENGALI ENGLISH

All of the features of Indian English as discussed above are available in Bengali as well because Bengali is also a syllable-timed language and it is also an intonation language; sentence stress and tonic stress also exist in Bengali which is often wrongly placed which is the reason for its wrong placement in English too. We know that sentence stress shifts because of new information and contrast. But in Bengali, like in Hindi, sentence stress or tonic stress is often misplaced in Bengali speech making it incomprehensible as illustrated in the utterances below, translated from Bengali into English:

1. a) I want to buy a **BOOK**.

b) I want to buy a story **BOOK**.

In b) **STORY** should have received the tonic stress because it is new information.

2. a) Take the medicine twice **DAILY**.

b) No, take the medicine thrice **DAILY**

In b) native speakers of English would put, and naturally so, on **THRICE** because of contrast, instead. Word stress in Bengali is absent, like Hindi English, an utterance is likely to be produced without any rhythm as present in NSE thus causing serious comprehension problem for native English speakers because of confusion as to what the information is and about its whereabouts.

As already mentioned, there is now word stress in Bengali; rather it is syllable-timed language, so rhythm which causes intelligibility and comprehensibility for native English speakers. However, sentence stress is available in Bengali at whole-word level as opposed word-stress at syllable level though the nuclear stress is often misplaced in case of variable sentence because of new information, and contrast. However, sentence level nucleus stress in Bengali is frequently misplaced signaling wrong meaning to an utterance. In the following utterances, the nuclear stress is misplaced in each one of them:

The sentences are instructions given in a television advert about how to administer a medicine to a child:

1. At one month ONE drop daily.
2. At sixth month, take TWO drops daily
3. At one year, take three SPOONS daily

The last stress is obviously wrong because 'spoons' is stressed instead of THREE which contrasts with TWO which would have been correct. Such misplacement of nuclear stress frequently occurs in Bengali itself; consequently, it is common in English, too because of a mother tongue habit. It may be mentioned here one of the most significant cause of pronunciation errors is the influence of the respective mother tongue influence of the L2 learner across languages.

KURDISH ENGLISH

Kurdish, like many other languages, is a syllable-timed language but in a Kurdish multi-syllable word, one syllable stresses where the rest are unstressed. And the shift in stress means a meaning change. BARzi is 'You are tall but barZI is height. Stress generally falls on the last syllable whereas in English there are different rules for different word stress patterns (Rahimpur et al, (2011). Rahimpur et al also observe that unlike English, where the stress is usually at the beginning of the word, in Kurdish it is usually at the end. But there is one similarity that in Kurdish English too, stress in a sentence shifts to a new syllable which provides new information (Kelly, 2010).

JAPANESE ENGLISH

Like Indian and Bengali languages, Japanese is also a syllable-timed language without rhythm. But interestingly, in Japanese, usually the function words are stressed whereas these words in English are generally unstressed because they are considered weak unless there are special reasons to stress them in an utterance as Kelly (2010) observes. In Japanese, like Bengali, linking does not exist, i.e., all the words are distinctly and clearly pronounced; most words are detached from one another which, though intelligible, would sound unnatural to an English speaker. Jackson (2018) shows how the suprasegmental aspects of Japanese phonology are different from those of Standard English pronunciation in many respects. Catford (1977) points out that the following sentences, the amount of time to say them differs, depending on the number of syllables. Ohata, K. (1996) illustrates how the time to utter the following sentences would take different durations because of the difference in syllable numbers:

1. To/ri/ha/mu/shi/wo/ta/be/ru (9 syllables)
2. So/no/to/ ri/ ha/so/no/mu/shi/wo/ta/be/ta/da/ro/u/ (16 syllables).

HONG KONG ENGLISH

Though Hong Kong English is not a syllable-timed language, it is somewhat stressed though the patterns are different from those in Standard English. Setter (2006) conducted research to find out the properties of stress and rhythm in Hong Kong English. The participants produced monologues which were recorded and analyzed using computer software. It was found that weak and unstressed syllables in HK English are not as short as they are in English; rather, the overall duration of the syllables in Hong Kong English is longer than that is in British English though Hong Kong English has a greater proportion of unstressed syllables than does British English. From the speech data collected, the following percentages of unstressed syllables and weak forms respectively were found:

Unstressed syllables	Weak syllables
43.64% in Hong Kong vs 26.96 in British English	19.3% in Hong Kong English vs 34.81 in British English

It is clearly evident that though the percentage of unstressed syllables outnumbers British English, they were not as unstressed in Hong Kong English, one main reason being the lack of weakened vowels in HKE (Hong Kong English) which subscribe heavily to speech rhythm along with contractions besides other unstressed syllables. The presence of a fewer contractions and weak forms make HK English sound different from standard English; consequently, Hong Kong English is likely to be less intelligible and less comprehensible to a native speaker of English.

What is interesting note is that the lack of syllable weakening compared to Standard English is caused by the L1 of the learners and users of English, i.e., influence of Cantonese Chinese language which has the properties as mentioned above (Bauer and Benedict, 1997)

IRANIAN ENGLISH

Iranian or Persian English is somewhat stressed-timed because of the influence of Persian in which word stress exists but is usually fixed and falls on the last syllable of the word (Khorasgani, et al. 2015, p.195.) whereas in English there are variable word stress rules. Besides, when meaning of the same word changes from a noun to a verb in English, stress shifts from the first syllable to the second, e.g., from 'IMport' (as a noun) to 'imPORT' (as a verb) whereas in Persian no such shifting occurs.; it still falls on the initial syllable (Khorasgani, et al, ibid). Yet another difference is reported by the people mentioned above. In Persian, most stressed

syllables are different from unstressed syllables with respect to a higher 'pitch'; English stressed syllables are distinguished from unstressed syllables with respect to loudness and length alone. Surprisingly, the authors failed not to have taken into account the two other elements of prominence, i.e. a higher pitch and the difference in quality (see Roach, 1991, p. 86), a higher pitch being the most important aspect of a stressed syllable. It is worth assuming that because English speech rhythm is based on word stress (or syllable stress precisely), speech rhythm in Iranian English is highly likely to deviate from NSE (Native Speaker Englishes).

DISCUSSION

As already mentioned in the article, among the components of the suprasegmental features of English pronunciation, speech rhythm is the most important which is a universal feature among all Englishes which is based on word stress which varies little across varieties of English speech varieties. The main difference between Standard English and nonstandard nonnative Englishes is lack of word stress in nonnative speakers' pronunciation resulting in their English being syllable-timed whereas Standard English is stress-timed. The notion of 'word stress' may be confusing because it is not the words which are stressed but only one syllable among the rest which is prominent or strong. Among the Englishes examined, Indian English is one among others which is also referred to as GIE (General Indian English). Although there are very many other Englishes like Malayalam English, Tamil English, Gujarati English and other varieties, GIE is the most prominent type which most Indian speakers of English understand and speak which is also referred to as HE (Hindi English). Hindi is the most prominent of the Indian languages and Hindi English, for that matter, is an important nonnative English variety spoken across India. In this article, therefore, GIE or HE (Hindi) is interchangeably used. In stress-timed pronunciations, speech is rhythmic which is based on word stress, i.e. one syllable is stressed in a word whereas in a syllable-timed language, all of the syllables in a word are equally timed.

Stress in NSE (Native speaker English) is generally unpredictable, and there are specific word stress rules in English whereas in IE (Indian English) Words follow a predictable pattern.

Besides, there are no weak forms in nonnative Englishes and neither do they have contracted forms and linking all of which are integral to stress-timing in NSE not to be found in syllable-timed languages.

In Standard English, among the words which are not stressed are function words or grammatical words, e.g., pronouns, BE verbs, conjunctions, prepositions etc which are usually unstressed whereas the content words (the syllables, in fact) are stressed with the time spent between them being equal resulting in the the unit containing one stressed syllable being rhythmic. This feature of Indian English, Bengali English, among others flat rendering these English pronunciations unintelligible as wells as incomprehensible to a native speaker of English.

Although, nonnative pronunciations lack word stress and hence speech rhythm, sentence stress is available in them with one word being stressed (the whole word, not just a syllable) as found in the data reported. Sentence stress shifts because of new information and contrast, but is very often erroneously placed making the meaning as illustrated by the data collected from Indian and Bengali English.. Wrong shift of sentence stress, causes comprehension difficulty not for the speakers of the same language and this L1 habit also poses problems for native English speakers as well.

In some Englishes stress-timing may exist but placement may vary syllable-wise, as in Kurdish, the inappropriate shifting of which may be the cause of confusion and comprehension difficulty.

As already pointed out, function words or grammatical words in Standard English are usually unstressed and weak unless stressed for a special reason, i.e., accentuation, new information or contrast, in some nonnative Englishes, Japanese for examples, function or grammatical words are stressed which cause comprehension difficulty to native English speakers resulting from confusion about the identification of the message content which in Standard English is often on the information or content words. As mentioned earlier, native English speakers usually do not focus on function words for meaning.

Finally, in some nonnative Englishes as in HK (Hong Kong English) stress-timing exists, but interestingly, the number of unstressed syllables is greater than it is in Standard English but they are not as short as in Standard English. This, again, is a deviation and causes comprehension difficulty to Standard English users who are likely to be confused by the content of the message because an utterance is over-packed with strong words making it difficult for the listener to tell the important from the unimportant.

SIGNIFICANCE OF ENGLISH SPEECH RHYTHM AND SOME PEDAGOGIC SUGGESTIONS

The following are a few observations about English speech rhythm and a few suggestions about how to teach English pronunciation in general and English speech rhythm in particular:

1. The common core, therefore, of all native varieties of English is speech rhythm which is almost fixed in almost all varieties of Native speaker Englishes, e.g. British English, General American English, Australian English or New Zealand English. For international communication, therefore, as Nihalini (1995) claims, the prosodic feature of English speech rhythm may be taught before the segmental features which widely vary within native speaker varieties as well as across nonnative varieties of English. The localized segmental varieties may be adhered to for national identity and ease of communication while for international intelligibility and communication speech rhythm should be taught taught and practised as reflected in the words of Professor Tommy Koh, Singapore's former Ambassador to the United States:

“... when one is abroad, in a bus or train or an aeroplane and when one overhears someone speaking, one can immediately say this is from Malaysia or from Singapore”

2. For intelligibility and comprehensibility in communication, clear pronunciation is a must. As Burns (1983) claims, among the elements of English pronunciation, it is clear that speech rhythm is the most salient feature of English pronunciation which is dependent on word stress which is fixed in almost all varieties of Native speaker English.. The teaching of speech rhythm should be prioritized even over the segmental phonology, i.e. the sounds of English.. Field (2005) holds that they can recognize stress in multi-syllable words by learning word stress rules.

3. When we talk about the importance of teaching the prosodic features of English pronunciation preferably even before teaching the segmental features, the most important element among the features which constitute speech rhythm, i.e. words stress, weak forms and contractions, tonic stress or nuclear stress, is the most crucial as Jenkins (2007) observes because in English speech, the information content or the message of an utterance lies with the tonic syllable which is focus of the message which the native speakers of English usually focus on. All other stressed syllables which constitute the “Heads” (Roach, 1981) of the tone unit lose their prominence to the tonic syllable which carries the message. We have already seen with examples from Bengali how tonic stress is often wrongly shifted signaling wrong meaning. Misplacement of tonic stress, on which meaning of an utterance rests, therefore, is a big problem of nonnative English speakers’ pronunciation which is highly likely to pose both intelligibility and comprehension difficulty for native speakers of English. Jenkins (ibid) believes it should, therefore, be given special attention while teaching pronunciation.

4. Pronunciation, as whole, should be treated as equally important as other materials, not as a poor relative of general teaching texts as Jenkins (ibid, p.13) believes. The author also has the opinion that besides teaching pronunciation to students, the teachers need to improve their own English pronunciation. This issue needs to be addressed fast because most nonnative teachers have serious pronunciation problems, Bengali speaking English teachers being a case in point. The teachers studying in Bengali medium schools in Bangladesh have problems at both segmental and suprasegmental levels, especially in handling speech rhythm which is an L1 factor resulting from syllable-timing. The teacher training colleges have a very minor English language teaching syllabus in their Bachelor of Education programmes and, worse still, little on pronunciation teaching.

5. Celce-Murcia et al (1960) hold that pronunciation teaching is to be integrated with the teaching of the other aspects of language, not in isolation; a similar view is that pronunciation should be treated as part of communication and discourse, so it should be incorporated into language teaching before puberty after which it becomes not impossible to teach but extremely difficult for nonnative English learners to improve their English pronunciation because the elasticity of the speech muscles and the resilience of the brain gradually diminish with age.

6. Liang (2003) suggests that enough practice is given through drills in the use of function words in sentences as well as practice in weak forms.

7. Regarding the techniques for teaching pronunciation at large, Rahimpur, M. (2011) envisages CA (Contrastive Analysis) as an effective tool for teaching pronunciation. The reason may be that by comparing the aspects of the two languages, learners become aware of the differences between their various features and through practice would find it easier to form new habits.

8. Among the other techniques for teaching pronunciation, especially English speech rhythm, as Marks (1999) observes, rhymes provide a convenient framework for the perception and production of a number of problematic features of English pronunciation including stress and rhythm.

CONCLUSION

The description and illustration of lack of speech rhythm in nonnative English speakers’ English pronunciation indicates that it is because of lack of word stress (the meaning of which been made clear earlier in the paper) which is the basis for speech rhythm in English. These pronunciations are syllable-timed, i.e., every syllable in every word is strongly pronounced and the longer the word, greater the time it takes to produce it whereas in native speaker English only the stressed syllables are pronounced strongly and there is one such syllable in a rhythm unit which occurs at regular intervals making the unit rhythmic. Such rhythmic utterances are absent in most nonnative Englishes resulting in their being flat; moreover, because of a general absence of weak forms and contractions, which contribute to English speech rhythms, the vowels are always strong, a mother tongue habit which interferes with the pronunciation English.

Deviant speech rhythms or their absence of it is often the result of a mother tongue habit which can be corrected by using CA (Contrastive Analysis), among others, which overtly explains pronunciation differences between the two languages concerned (learners’ L1 and the target language); the result is learners’ attention is drawn to them; consequently, they notice the differences and are ready to change old habits and form new ones.

This paper also has made some important observations about the role of pronunciation in intelligibility and comprehensibility of the message and has suggested some effective techniques for pronunciation teaching.

The paper has made a very significant point that among all the aspects of English pronunciation, speech rhythm is the most important feature for international communication in English because meaning, by and large, depends on this very important

element among all of the suprasegmental features of English phonology and, therefore, should be seriously attended to. As for the teaching of pronunciation at large, it should be integrated with the teaching of the other aspects of the language and not only learners but teachers as well should try to improve their English pronunciation because it is undeniably important for intelligible, comprehensible and successful oral communication in oral English.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE PAPER

This paper has significantly made the notions of syllable-timed and stress-timed languages clear. Because the speakers of syllable-timed languages are unaware of stress resulting in rhythm, this clarification should make it clear about the need for stress and rhythm in English. One other significant point the paper has established that rhythm is dependent on word stress the lack of which makes speech flat a characteristic of many mother languages which influence the pronunciation of English. too.

The paper has also established that word stress which is the basis for rhythm in English is the most universal suprasegmental component of Englishes irrespective of localized varieties and be learnt without being biased by individual varieties and so most learnable of the phonological components of English including the variations at the segmental level.

The paper has made a significant discovery that most rhythmic deviations are because of interference from the respective first languages of the nonnative speakers of English speaking it as a second- or a foreign language.

It has made it clear that success in oral communication heavily depends on intelligibility and comprehensibility which primarily depends on stress and rhythm as mentioned earlier.

The implication of the discussion of speech rhythm has brought forth suggestions for teaching pronunciation at large. The significance of the paper partly lies on the suggestion being made that English pronunciation should be taught in integration with the other aspects of the language and should start at an early stage of learning.

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