

Indian English

Historical Background

The English language was introduced to India in the 17th century when English businessmen came to the country as traders. Even after the British rule was over in the middle of the 20th century, English remained in use in India. Almost two hundred thousand people claimed English as their first language and 125 million claimed it as a second language. Together with Hindi, English is used as the official language of the Indian government. It is familiar to almost all people of India.

Nowadays, English is used in many fields such as business, education, administration and law. All rules and regulations should be written in English according to the country's constitution. It is also used as the medium of communication among college-educated people. It is mostly used in formal situations, whereas Indian languages are used in personal conversation. For example, English is used for the news in TV, but serials are in Indian languages.

Indian English (IE)

The English language in India has developed its own dialect since it has been used there for a long period of time. It has also been influenced by regional Indian languages.

Many people are aware of the importance of English and try to speak it well. Some people try to speak it with a British accent. However, more recently people are moving towards the American accent.

Phonetics and Phonology

Consonants

1- /r/

There is a lot of regional variation in Indian English due to the existence of many local languages. However, the standard Indian English pronunciation (SIEP) is non-rhotic, which is derived from Received Pronunciation as spoken in the UK. So the /r/ is not pronounced in words such as *bird* and *park*, but it is pronounced in word-final position where the following word begins with a vowel such as *the writer is my friend*. In IE the /r/ sound may be realized as a frictionless alveolar approximant or as an alveolar tap.

2- the labio-dental approximant /ʋ/

IE shows no contrast between the /v/ and /w/ sounds. The standard /v/ sound is produced with the top teeth making contact with the lower lip and air is blown between the articulators to cause turbulence, and the standard /w/ sound is made by rounding the lips and bringing them together and then moving them apart, without actually making contact. However, in IE speakers produce the labio-dental approximant /ʋ/ in which the top teeth come close to the bottom lip but do not actually touch before moving away again. This sound is used for both /v/ and /w/.

3- /θ/ and /ð/

It is usually difficult for Indian English speakers to master the sounds /θ/ and /ð/. In SIEP the voiceless version /θ/ is sometimes pronounced but the voiced version /ð/ is almost always absent. /θ/ is mostly replaced by an unaspirated /t/, whereas /ð/ is used for the voiced /ð/ in words such as *these, those* and *weather*.

4- /t/ /d/ /t̪/ and /d̪/

In words such as *tight, tin, den* and *dinner*, IE speakers retroflex all alveolar stops. In addition, SIEP does not have alveolar sounds. Therefore, the voiceless /t/ sound may be retroflexed resulting in /t̪/ and the voiced /d/ is almost invariably retroflexed /d̪/.

5- /l/

In SIEP, there is almost no distinction between dark and light /l/ with the light /l/ being used all the time.

6- Aspiration

In English, only the voiceless plosives /p^h/, /t^h/ and /k^h/ are aspirated when they occur in initial position in a stressed syllable. However, in SIEP aspiration is not always predictable and is related to spelling. For example, words with an *h* after an initial consonant like *ghost* and *why* are likely to be aspirated, whether the consonant is voiced or voiceless.

Vowels

1- Monophthongs

In SIEP, the two central vowels /ə/ and /ʌ/ are not usually distinguished. The RP back /ɔ/ is rarely used except by news announcers.

2- Diphthongs

There are six diphthongs in SIEP: /ɪə/ as in *beer*, /ʊə/ as in *poor*, /eə/ as in *fair*, /aɪ/ as in *night*, /ɔɪ/ as in *soil*, and /aʊ/ as in *town*. However, the diphthongs /eɪ/ and /əʊ/, as in *pale*

and *hole*, that are used in British RP, in non-standard IE are often replaced by long versions of the monothongs /e:/ and /o:/. Also, in non-standard IE, many diphthongs are converted to a long vowel plus /r/, so *poor* is /pur/, *beer* is /bir/, *tour* is /tur/, *pear* is /pær/.

Morpho-phonology

When the plural marker on nouns follows an alveolar palatal fricative or affricate, it is pronounced as /əz/ or /ɪz/ in RP or American English, like in the words *fridges* or *kisses*. However, in IE the plural marker is realized as /s/ or /ɛs/ with the final sibilant always devoiced. Also, the past tense marker is always realized as /d/ or /ɛd/ depending on the word. Even if the final consonant of the word is voiceless such as in *trap*, the past tense marker is always voiced in IE. So *trapped* is pronounced as /træpd/ in IE, whereas in British English it is pronounced as /træpt/.

Consonant Clusters

Consonant cluster reduction is common in SIEP because Indian languages do not use consonant clusters. For example, they pronounce *acts* as /æks/. In addition, in most dialects there is no syllabic consonant in words such as *bottle*. Instead an intrusive shwa is inserted. However, high frequency words such as *film* are usually pronounced /film/ in SIEP but may be produced as /filəm/ in IE.

Bibliography

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