

# Teaching of Spoken English in Uttar Pradesh: The Role, Problems and Possible Solutions



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## Abstract

The social purpose of language and the value of speech as a medium of communication are stressed in all linguistic theories today. Unfortunately the emphasis is laid on reading and writing prominently and not on listening and speaking in India in general and in Uttar Pradesh in particular. In this way we mar the natural process of learning the language. The pronunciation of English varies from one country to another and there are marked phonological and phonetic features associated with English spoken in important English speaking countries- the UK, USA, Canada, and Australia. England itself has different pronunciation existing within a small geographical area. So it is quite natural that there is a considerable difference between GIE (General Indian English) and RP (Received Pronunciation) and Uttar Pradesh is no exception in this regard. The main aim of the paper is to trace out this difference and make teachers and students aware of it. Then causes of defective pronunciation and retardation in the formation of good speech habits and possible measures to improve speaking must be prominently recognized.

**Keywords:** RP, GIE, Phonetics, Phonology, Accent, Intonation.

## Introduction

The third world countries struggling hard for gaining access to modern knowledge have by and large realised the importance of spoken English in education. Of late, the role and function of English has undergone significant changes. The developing countries very rightly view the English language not merely as the language of foreign rulers once used for administrative convenience, but as a means for gaining new technological and scientific knowledge quite significant for all kinds of development. No matter how many attempts are made to arouse sentiments against the English language by viewing it as `an alien language` by some politicians for political reasons, its importance cannot be denied and it is on continuous increase.

People make use of language to communicate with those around them and people belonging to different linguistic communities use different languages for purpose of communication. Whatever be the language used for communication English, Hindi, Marathi etc. it is possible to use two mediums for linguistic communication. These are speech and writing. Out of these two spoken language is more important. It comes first in the history of every language community. The history of every language reveals that the spoken form of the language came centuries before the written form. It comes in the life of every individual human being too. All of us start speaking long before we start writing.

As far as teaching English as a second language in Uttar Pradesh is concerned, we must always keep in mind that learning to speak a language is by far the shortest road to learning to read and write. Speech training must have precedence over learning to read and write, in point of time as well as in point of significance. Since speech is the groundwork, all the rest is built up from it. It may be stated here that nearly 37 % of the respondents opine that speaking is the most important language skill (Table 01).

**Table-1**  
**Respondents on Which One is the Most Important Language Skill**

Inst.	Listening No. (%)	Speaking No. (%)	Reading No. (%)	Writing No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	21 (38.89)	23 (42.59)	6 (11.11)	4 (7.41)	54 (100)
Inter College	11 (36.67)	11 (36.67)	3 (10)	5 (16.67)	30 (100)
Jr. Hs	6 (25)	11 (36.67)	4 (16.67)	7 (29.17)	24 (100)
Primary School	3 (17.65)	5 (29.41)	5 (29.41)	4 (23.53)	17 (100)
<b>Total</b>	<b>41 (32.8)</b>	<b>46 (36.8)</b>	<b>18 (14.4)</b>	<b>20 (14.4)</b>	<b>125 (100)</b>

Through speech, the student learns to make the direct connection between the English word or phrase and the object, action or thought it bears. He learns the skill of employing words in the right sentence-structures and phrase structures and he can learn this in no other manner.

Education is a medium of conversation. Through this medium we convey our ideas to others and know the ideas of others. Learning to speak has got a significant place in teaching English. Moreover, speech has its own influence and attraction. However, there has been a great deal of thinking on the point as to what should be the standard of speech in English in India. The pronunciation of English varies from one country to another and there is marked phonetic and phonological features associated with English spoken in important English-speaking countries. Even within the UK there are variations among England, Wales, Scotland and Ireland. England itself has different pronunciations existing within a small geographical area. One particular accent, nevertheless, has acquired social prestige in England. It is often called Received Pronunciation (RP) to indicate that it is the result of social judgement. Similarly, there are several different varieties of English in India that are distinct from RP. But it is possible to use the term 'General Indian English' (GIE) in spite of the differences that exist within India. Illustrating the term GIE Balasubramanian writes, "By General Indian English is meant a certain variety of English spoken by educated Indians. General Indian English is free from regional features. It is both a descriptive and a prescriptive model. It is descriptive in the sense that it describes the phonological features of a variety of English, and prescriptive that it is prescribed at CIEFL to Indian speakers of English as a model of spoken English to imitate. This model, if acquired, will at least make the spoken English of Indians free from those features which make it Telugu English, Punjabi English or any one particular variety of Indian English."

It has been well-established that there is an Indian pronunciation of English as spoken by educated Indians, and this standard is, more or less, used by the best speakers of English in Uttar Pradesh too. This General Indian Pronunciation of English can serve as a standard if the aim is communication with

other Indian speakers in the country. However, this notion of standard Indian pronunciation of English words is vague and the exact meaning behind this term is yet to be made clear. It must be admitted that pronunciation of English words in Uttar Pradesh is not mature enough to be designated as standard pronunciation of English words.

#### **Aims of the Study**

During last twenty years stay in Uttar Pradesh and getting involved in teaching and learning English at the graduate and postgraduate level, I have been trying to get acquainted with phonetic and phonological problems of students and causes of the retardation in the formation good speech habits. The objectives of the present study are altogether different from those that are considered necessary for states and metro cities having very sound English background. The study aims to review the causes and present a possible solution so as to help in enhancing the standard of English teaching and learning.

#### **Tools**

A survey was made of a cross section of teachers from Degree Colleges, Inter Colleges, Junior High Schools and Primary Schools situated both in urban and rural areas of Uttar Pradesh. Total 125 teachers (54 from Degree colleges, 30 from Inter Colleges, 24 junior high Schools, 17 from primary schools) responded to the questionnaire provided to them.

#### **Discussion and Chief Findings**

There are lots of causes of retardation in speech and these causes vary from individual to individual. In schools and colleges of UP less attention is paid to speech training. It may be that teachers do not understand its importance. They rely too much on the grammar-translation method. Consequently, there is almost no speech training in the classrooms. In fact, spoken English is generally no longer used outside the English classroom in our schools and colleges in Uttar Pradesh. One is not sure how far it is used even during the English periods in schools and colleges. Lack of facilities and opportunities to speak English is a significant factor responsible for retardation in speech. It is worth noting that nearly half of the respondents (51% to be precise) have supported this view.

Table 2

Respondents on what is/are the Vigorous Cause/Causes of Retardation in the Formation of Good Speech Habits

Inst.	Lack of speaking	Lack of phonetic knowledge	Mother-Tongue speech habits	Defective Examination System	Defective Teaching System	Lack of Anyother Oportunities	Exposure To English
DegreeCollege	30(55.55)	31(57.40)	27(50)	24(44.44)	29(53.7)	40(74.07)	22(40.74)
Inter College	17(56.66)	11(36.66)	18(60)	15(50)	15(50)	21(70)	16(53.33)
Jr.High School	10(41.66)	08(33.33)	09(37.5)	04(16.66)	09(37.5)	15(62.5)	05(20.83)
Primary School	07(41.17)	11(64.7)	07(41.17)	06(35.29)	10(58.82)	13(76.47)	03(17.64)
Total	64(51.2)	61(48.8)	61(48.8)	49(39.2)	63(50.4)	89(71.2)	46(36.8)

*\*Most of the respondents gave more than one response.*

Our teachers are not well-equipped in phonetics. The reasons are numerous. There is no provision for teachers to get trained in phonetics and phonology at a large scale. Then, audio-visual aids that can be very useful in learning correct pronunciation are neither available at the training centres nor at the institutions where the teachers serve. Besides, Board and Universities too do not lay stress on oral tests. At the university level, there is a regular feature to take a viva-voce test at the end of PG examination in English, but the aim is to evaluate the amount of memorized content of the courses. There is indeed scarcity of good books on pronunciation, though pronunciation cannot be taught through books alone.

Regionalism and regional standards of speech put obstacles in learning correct sounds of English words because of differences in speech habits or muscle habits. In India the regional speech habits have absorbed spoken English and they have regionalised pronunciation of English words. They tend to substitute sounds from the mother-tongue for English sounds. For example, school / sku:l / is pronounced as / is'ku:l / in Uttar Pradesh whereas in Haryana and Punjab, it is pronounced as / sʌku:l/. Likewise, / pi:pəl / for / pi:pl / and / te:bəl / for / teibl /. In south the pronunciation of / t / is soft. In certain parts, people replace / s / by / · / and vice-versa. In the same way, / f / is replaced by / ph /. In certain provinces they do not speak / z / sound and it is invariably replaced by `ja`, `jo` or `jh`. In some provinces they pronounce / ɔ / sound in place of / a: / and / d / is replaced by / t /. On account of this regional standard in English, spoken English becomes less intelligible, especially in a gathering representing all parts of the nation and the state as well. The problems of students and teachers increase as there is no one-to-one relationship between letters of the alphabet and the sounds they represent.

It was found that students of the state commit several mistakes while speaking English. Therefore, it is essential to correct the mistakes while speaking. But the question arises when these mistakes should be corrected. Should these mistakes be corrected when the students are speaking? No, this is not acceptable. This will mar the initiative of the students. They will know more if they are encouraged to speak. In fact, their mistakes should be corrected when they have finished speaking. While the pupil is answering a question or saying something, the teacher should listen to it properly. Afterwards, when

he has finished speaking, the teacher should point out the mistakes and encourage him to correct them.

The teacher should also point out the mistakes made by a student in mispronouncing a sound or word. To serve this purpose, it is indispensable that the teacher's own pronunciation is reasonably good. Every teacher of English as second language must be well aware of the existence of phonetics. Phonetics is the study of the medium of spoken language, that is, the production, transmission and reception of the sounds of human speech. It is almost impossible to teach a second language without giving some attention to pronunciation so that no bad speech habits are formed by faulty imitation. Phonetics can help students overcome problems relating to pronunciation because, it deals with the organs of speech; vowels and consonants; syllables (including stressed and unstressed syllables); accent and intonation; allophones and allomorphs; phonemes and morphemes; etc.

Phonetics has proved very effective in teaching of spoken English particularly in the states like Uttar Pradesh where spoken English is not at an ideal stage. It is based on scientific principles. Therefore, there are no chances of distorted speaking. The teacher should spare no pains to include phonetics in his classroom teaching and make it more and more useful. However, table no. 3 shows that 40.8% respondents comprising 24.07 per cent Degree College teachers, 56.67 per cent Inter College teachers, 66.67 per cent Junior High school teachers and 76.47 per cent Primary school teachers themselves have no knowledge of phonetics at all. These observations are really regrettable.

Table-3

Respondents on the Question Whether They have Knowledge of Phonetics

Inst.	Yes No. (%)	No No. (%)	Total No. (%)
Degree College	41 (75.925)	13 (24.07)	54 (100)
Inter College	13 (43.33)	17 (56.67)	30 (100)
Junior High School	8 (33.33)	16 (66.67)	24 (100)
Primary School	4 (23.53)	13 (76.47)	17 (100)
Total	74 (59.2)	51 (40.8)	125 (100)

Besides, to improve the standard of spoken English in schools and colleges of Uttar Pradesh we will have to make changes in the present examination

system if we can not totally remove it. It will have to be made more orally oriented. Unfortunately, the tests we use at present examine the writing skill only. Listening comprehension and speaking as skills are neglected. Our emphasis in tests is on knowledge of structures, vocabulary and idiomatic phrases. Students get no incentive for speaking English. Hence, the result is the poverty of comprehension; the poverty of spoken English, of expression and the poverty of knowledge. It will be fair enough to set some exercises on speech training and pronunciation while taking any examination at the higher secondary

stage or even later. Some marks should be allotted for oral expression in English. A graded scheme may be followed in the monthly, periodical and annual examinations.

#### Conclusion

The most important thing is that more emphasis should be laid on spoken English. The teacher can serve as the best model for his students. If he takes care to improve his own speaking and pronunciation and trains his students also, the desired goal may be achieved in schools and colleges of Uttar Pradesh.

Table-4

Inst.	Much Practice of speaking should be Emhasized No. (%)	Audio-visual aids should be used No. (%)	Changes should be made in the present examination System No. (%)	Teachers should improve their own Speaking No. (%)	Any Other No. (%)
Degree College	34 (62.96)	29 (53.7)	31 (57.41)	26 (48.15)	21 (38.89)
Inter College	19 (63.33)	16 (53.33)	15 (50)	17(56.67)	10 (33.33)
Jr. High School	16 (66.66)	15 (62.5)	12 (50)	9 (37.5)	6 (25)
Primary School	13 (76.47)	12 (70.58)	9 (52.94)	10 (58.82)	6 (35.29)
Total*	82 (65.6)	72 (57.6)	67 (53.6)	62 (49.6)	43 (34.4)

Now, it is the responsibility of the teacher that the students are provided with proper and ample opportunities for speaking and conversation. The most important thing is that more emphasis should be laid on spoken English. And the teacher can serve as the best model.

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