About Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/about/

Archive: http://www.the-criterion.com/archive/

Contact Us: http://www.the-criterion.com/contact/

Editorial Board: http://www.the-criterion.com/editorial-board/

Submission: http://www.the-criterion.com/submission/

FAQ: http://www.the-criterion.com/fa/

Features of Malayali English Consonants

Reshma Jacob
Jawaharlal Nehru University.

Abstract:

This research paper focuses on the features of Malayali English Consonants. Malayali English (MalE) is the variety of English that is spoken by the people of Kerala, the southern state of India. As it is well known, first language influence on L2 is inevitable and therefore, MalE is also impregnated with a number of such influences which make MalE different from other varieties of English. This paper, however, focuses only on the segmental features of MalE consonants. Understanding of such influences will help ESL learners to realize their errors and areas to focus on. Similarly, such a study will facilitate the English Language Teaching (ELT) as it helps in formulating the syllabi and enhancing the whole approach towards ELT.

Keywords: Malayali English, Segmental Phonology, Second Language, ESL, MalE consonants.

1. Introduction

The main motive behind a person learning and using English is to enhance his/ her effective communication. The degree of this "effectiveness" relies on various factors of which intelligibility is the primary concern. When a second language learner of English conveys his idea in English to a native speaker, the intelligibility of the speech is measured on the basis of grammar, vocabulary, pronunciation and accent of the speaker and the listener. It is understood that there are a number of varieties of English around the world and the ESL learner does an effective communication when he/she abides by the pronunciation patterns of the native speaker. However, this is an ideal situation since the mother tongue influence on the second language speech is inevitable. Conforming to the speech patterns of the ESL with minimal or moderate interference of the first language features is relatively a better standard.

Malayali English is impregnated with many such features of Malayalam. Some of such segmental features that make Malayali English different from the other varieties of English are discussed in this paper. The listed sounds are identified as phonemes of Malayali English in such a way that these sounds were produced frequently by majority of the informants. Sounds that were produced by the other informants are considered to be a variation of the same.

2. Methodology

The present study is an attempt to know how Malayali English consonants are different from British English R.P by analyzing its segmental features, and to what extend has Malayalam influenced English. So as to understand the phonetic features of Malayali English, I have

collected data from 20 speakers (10 male and 10 female) whose L1 is Malayalam. All the speakers belong to the age group 20- 30 years and have college education in various disciplines. All the 20 informants have learnt English only as a second language in school. They did their schooling in Malayalam medium schools, where they learnt English as one of their subjects. All the informants speak Malayalam at home and do not have any special training in Phonetics.

Different set of questionnaires were prepared so as to elicit the required data. Informants were first asked to talk about themselves in English. Questionnaires were given to the informants five minutes prior to the recording and were asked to go through the sentences to get familiar. They were asked to read out the sentences (three times each) in a natural way as much as possible. As an attempt to attain a completely spontaneous speech, the choice of Free speech was also adopted.

3. Consonants

The phonemic inventory of the Malayali English consonants may not have a number of sounds that are seen in the R.P and vice versa. Many sounds are deleted, added and some are substituted.

Stops: [p] [b] [t] [d] [k] [g] are the sounds in English that occur without much interference in the M.E. However, in Malayali English the sounds [p], [t] and [k] are not aspirated in the syllable initial positions.

Similarly, the sounds [t] and [d] are found in free variation with their retroflex counterparts [ʈ] and [ɖ]. Out of the 20 informants 14 used the retroflex [ʈ] in the initial, medial and final positions of the words. For example, *teacher* [ʈiːččər], *photo* [foːʈo] and *don't* [ɖoːnʈ]. The other six, however, varied in their use of [ʈ] in the initial position and used [t]. However all the 20 informants replaced the alveolar [d] with [ɖ] in all the postions except when preceded by alveolar [n].

decide [ɖisaiɖ]   *bridge* [briɖǰ]   *said* [seɖ]   mind [maind]   find [faind]

The alveolar /t/ and /d/ is always retroflexed when followed by the retroflex nasal /ɳ/. Another important observation was made in the substitution of the retroflex [ʈ] in the final position of a word. A constant pattern was seen here. It was found that the alveolar [t] was substituted by the retorflex [ʈ] in the final position of a word when [t] is preceded by back vowels and voiced consonants. For example,

it   [it]   *foot*   [fuːʈ]   *met*   [met]   *slot*   [sl̥oːʈ]   *pervert*[perveːrʈ]

get   [get]*got* [goːʈ]*bolt*   [boːlʈ]   *goat*   [goːʈ]*wet* [wet]*seat* [siːt]

In American English the alveolar /t/ and /d/ are sometimes a flap /ɾ/. However, this is not found in MalE. Besides, the alveolar /t/ and /d/ are realised as dental sounds in certain words. For example,

dentist   [d̪ent̪ist]   *dental*   [d̪ent̪əl]

Nasals: Apart from the R.P nasals [m], [n], [ŋ], Malayali English also has the palatal nasal [ɲ] and the retroflex nasal [ɳ]. The retroflex nasal [ɳ] does not occur word initially. Similiar to the retroflex stop [ʈ], the nasal retroflex [ɳ] also occurs when preceded by a back vowel. It could be understood from the examples that are given below.

money	[mʌɳi]	*even*	[i:ven]
ground	[grauɳḍ]	*can*	[kæn]
consonants	[ko:ɳsoɳent]	*green*	[gri:n]
amount	[emouɳʈ]	*paint*	[peint]
android	[ɑ:ɳḍro:iḍ]	*instance*	[instens]
woman	[wumʌɳ]	*man*	[mɑ:n]
own	[o:ɳ]	*nor*	[no:r]
spoon	[spu:ɳ]		

Apart from the above mentioned environment the alveolar nasal [n] is also realized as [ɳ] when preceded by the liquid sounds /r/ or /l/. For example,

incarnation [inkɑ:rne:ʃən]   *vulnerable* [vaɭɳerəbi]   *vernacular* [verɳɑ:kulər]

The occurence of the palatal nasal [ɲ] is a significant feature of MalE. [ɲ] substitutes the alvoelar [n] when followed by an affricate. Similarly, it makes the following voiceless affricate voiced. Post nasal voicing is a significant feature of MalE. Voiceless stops when followed by [m] or [n] also becomes voiced. For example,

munch	[mʌɲj̆]	*ampute*	[ɑ:mbju:ʈ]
spunch	[spʌɲj̆]	*anklet*	[ɑ̃:ŋglet]
stingy	[stiɲji]	*spunching*	[spʌɲj̆iŋ]

Affricates: Both [č] and [j̆] are found in MalE. These sounds are generally found with no or less interferences except for the voicing when followed by a palatal retroflex nasal, as mentioned above. All the 20 informants produced the same.

Fricatives: [f], [v], [θ], [ð], [s], [z], [ʃ], [ʒ] and [h] are the fricative sounds that are present in the R.P. MalE does not have many of these sounds and those sounds are replaced with other sounds that are present in the phonemic inventory of Malayalam. [f], [s], [ʃ] and [h] generally occur in the Malayali English without any variations. However, [v] is mostly found in free variation with [ʋ]. In the connected speech of R.P /f/ is realized as [v], as in *of* [əv]. This variation is not realized in MalE. The interdental fricatives do not exist in Malayali English. All the informants, however, replaced the interdental fricatives with dental stops [t̪] and [d̪]. Unlike the other North

Indian varieties, the dental stops are produced without any aspiration. Thus *thing* is realized as [t̪iŋ] and *father* is realized as [fɑ:d̪er].

Similarly, [z] is also absent in MalE. [z] is always replaced by the voicelss [s] regardless of the phonetic conditions. [z] is realized as [s] when it follows a voiced sound and in the plural morpheme. For example,

zebra [si:brɑ]   *bags* [bɑ:gs]   *buses* [bəses]   *cease* [si:s]

None of the informants produced /z/ in any of the above cases. However, when asked to repeat the same words thrice, 6 of the informants produced the words *zebra* with /z/ in their second and third attempts. However, /z/ was not realized in any other words even in the conscious speech.

Another fricative sound that is absent in MalE is /ʒ/. This is almost always replaced by [ʃ], as in *visual* [viʃual] and sometimes realized as [ĵ] as in *mirage* [mire:ĵ]. It is observed that the speakers realize [ʃ] and [ĵ] according to the word's spelling.

The glottal sound [h] is realized in MalE. Gargesh (2004) states that South Indians tend to replace /h/ with euphonic /j/ and /w/ [jill] for *hill*, [jæd] for *had* and [laɪvliwud] for *livelihood*. However, this was not found in the speech of any of the informants. None of them realized /h/ as /j/ or /w/ even in the fast speech.

Glides: As mentioned earlier, the glide [ʊ] is found in free variation with [v] and is also inserted between the vowel sounds [ua]. In MalE the glide [j] is found to be inserted between diphthongs in words like *fear* [fijər], higher [haijer], *wear* [vijer]. This will be discussed in *section 2.4*

Liquids: [l] and [r] are the two liquids present in the R.P. The /l/ in MalE has two realizations, i.e., [l] and the retroflex [ɭ]. It was observerd that /l/ becomes [ɭ] when occuring in a Cɭ cluster in the beginning of a syllable, where C is /p, b, k. g, f, s/. Besides, /l/ is realized as [ɭ] when back vowels precede the lateral liquid. For example,

application	[ɑ:.pɭi.ke:.ʃən]	*ball*	[bo:ɭ]
tumbler	[tʌm.bɭər]	*full*	[fuɭ]
glass	[gɭɑ:s]	*skull*	[skʌɭ]
plate	[pleit]		
flash	[fɭɑ:ʃ]		
blast	[bɭɑ:st]		
close	[kɭo:s]		
slide	[sɭaiɖ]		

The phoneme /r/ has various realizations in the English R.P. It is realized as a trill, approximant and is post vocalically null. On the contrary, MalE mostly has a trill and sometimes a pre-alveolar tap. The trill [r] is often heard in the MalE. It is even pronounced post vocalically. /r/ is realized as a trill [r] whenever it is in the initial, and final position of a word. When /r/ forms a cluster with any of the other other consonant sounds, it is again realized as a trill. For example,

surf   [sʌrf]   *march* [mɑ:rč]   *write* [rɑit]   *arrest* [ɑrest]

/r/ is usually realized as a pre-alveolar tap [ɾ] when it is preceded by a long vowel sound and followed by [i]. All the informants conformed to this pattern. For example,

marry [mɑ:ɾi]   *fury* [fju:ɾi]   *mary* [me:ɾi]   curious [kju:ɾijəs]

However, certain words like *Marathon* [mɑ:rɑt̪ən], *Arrow* [a:ro], *Aristocrat* [ɑɾistokrɑ:t] also produced the approximant.

Another significant feature of MalE is the addition of the retroflex approximant /ɻ/. The insertion of this phoneme was observed in the speech of most of the informants. Only 4 out of 20 informants retained from using this. It is also important to note that the distribution of this sound is restricted that [ɻ] is only inserted between a long vowel and [s]. Generally, the sound [ɻ] is only produced in such cases where /r/ is not produced as trill or as a pre-alveolar tap, post vocalically. For example,

nurse [nɜ:ɻs]   *worse* [wɜ:ɻs]   *mars* [mɑ:ɻs]   *universe* [ju:ɳive:ɻs]

The only instance where /r/ was null in MalE is when /r/ forms a rC cluster in the end of monosyllabic words,where is C is a nasal. For example,

form [fo:m]   *porn* [po:ŋ]   *intern* [inte:ŋ]

However, when these words are added with a derivational suffix, the syllabic structure changes and the rC cluster breaks, which results to the realization of the trill [r]. For example,

formation [fo:r.me:.ʃən]   *pornography* [por.ɳo:.gra.fi] *internal* [in.te:r.ɳəl]

Hence, in M.E the sound /r/ is realized as a trill, a pre-alveolar tap, a retroflex approximant and null.

Thus, Malayali English has a total of 29 consonantal sounds. The phonemic chart of Malayali English Consonants, is given below.

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Pre-Alveolar	Alveolar	Retroflex	Palatal	Velar	glottal
Stops	p b		t̪ d̪		t d	ʈ ɖ		k g	
Nasal	m				n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	
Trill					R				
Tap				ɾ					
Fricative		f v			s	ʃ			h
Approxi-mant		ʋ				ɻ	j		
Lateral approxi-mant					l	ɭ			
Affricate							tʃ dʒ		

Fig 2.1: The Phonemic chart of Malayali English Consonants

4. Characteristic features of MalE

4.1 Gemination

Gemination occurs mostly in such words where the same letter occurs consequently in its spelling. However, this is not the only case. For example,*super*[su:pper], *timing* [taimmiŋ], *meter* [mi:tter], *bucket*[bʌkket].

4.2 Morphophonological Alternations

Morphophonological alternations in MalE do not occur as it does in the R.P. The addition of plural morphemes and the past morphemes will be discussed in this section. Before going any further, it is to be noted that the irregular morphemes are found in MalE whereas the underlying morpheme is absent. Similarly, the irregular morphemes that occur in MalE may not be the same as it is in the R.P. This can be understood with the help of some examples. The plural morpheme

in English is written as 's' or 'es'. In R.P the underlying plural morpheme is /-z/ and is realized as /s/, /z/ and /iz/ in words like *mats, bags and churches*. That is,mat + s = /mæt + z/ → /mæts/, bag + s = /bæg + z/ → /bægz/, church + es = /tʃɜ:tʃ + z/ → /tʃɜ:tʃɪz/.

The sound of the underlying plural morpheme itself is absent in MalE. Therefore, the regular morpheme /z/ is not realized but the irregular alternation [s] is realized where /z/ and /s/ are to be used. Similarly, /ɪz/ is always replaced by [es]. Thus, the words mentioned above are realized in MalE as [mɑ:ts], [bɑ:gs], and [tʃʌrtʃes] respectively.

The past tense morpheme is represented by the spelling '-ed' in English and the R.P realizes it as /-t/, /-d/ and /-ɪd/ as in *asked, played and parted* respectively.That is, the allomorph /t/ is realized after a verb that end in any voiceless consonant except /t/, /d/ is realized after a verb ending in any voiced sound other than /d/ and /ɪd/ is realized when the verb ends in /t/ or /d/. That is,ask + ed → /æskt/, fund + ed → /fʌndɪd/, part + ed → /pa:tɪd/.

However, In MalE the past tense morpheme is almost always realized as [ɖ] for /t/ and /d/ and [ed] for /id/. The sounds /t/ and /ɪd/ were not pronounced by any of the informants. [eɖ] and [eɖə] were also observed in the speech of some informants regardless of the morphophonological conditions. For example, in words ending with a voiceless consonant except for /t/ the allomorph /t/ was not found in the speech of any of the informants. *asked* was realized as [ɑ:skɖ], [ɑ:skeɖ], and [ɑ:skeɖə]. Whereas, the words *mixed* and *fixed* were realized as [mikseɖ] and [fikseɖ] by all the informants. *funded* was realized as [fʌɳɖeɖ] and *played* as [ple:jɖ]. In the speech of some speakers [ə] was added after [ɖ] in funded and played.

In MalE, the addition of non-neutral affixes, sometimes, do not bring any phonological change in the consonants or vowels of the base morpheme. Thus the pronunciation of the root word remains the same as in the following examples,

 psychology and *psychological*   [saiko:ʲəĵi] [sɑiko:ʲəĵikəl]

photo, photograph and *photography*   [fo:ʈo] [fo:ʈogrɑ:f] [fo:ʈogrəfi]

supreme and *spremacy*   [supri:m] [supri:məsi]

pronounce and *pronunciation*   [prənauɳs] [prənauɳsije:ʃən]

severe and *severity*   [sivijer] [sivijeriti]

4.3 Elision

Dropping of the sound /j/ is yet another feature that was observed. It has also been noticed that most of the informants dropped the /j/ sound in the initial position of a word when it is followed by a front vowel. This was noticed in the speech of 17 informants. For example, the words *yellow, yesterday, yeast, year* are pronounced as [ello], [esterɖe:], [i:st], and [ijer] respectively. Whereas, the words *your, yam, universe, and yog,* are realized as [juʊər], [jɑ:m], [ju:ɳive:ɻs] and [jo:gɑ] respectively.

Similarly, /j/ is dropped in a CCV(C) syllable, where the initial C is any consonant, the second C is /j/ and V is the back vowel /u/. The CCV structure breaks and a simple CV structure is formed.For example,

fabulous   [fɑ:.bu.ləs]   *insulin*   [in.su.lin]

institute   [in.sti.tu:ʈ]   *communication* [kʌm.mu:.ŋi.ke:.ʃən]

calculate   [kɑ:l.ku.le:t]   *nutrition*   [nu. ʈri:. ʃən]

Though this pattern is maintained in most of the words, certain words like *fury, mute, computer* produced the sound /j/ and maintains the CCV structure.

4.4 Spelling Pronunciation

Pronunciation of MalE largely depends on the spelling pattern of the word. Any letter that is present in the word is pronounced distinctly. Thus, the sounds that are silent in R.P are distnctly pronounced in MalE. For example, in words like *tomb, bomb, debt, fridge,* and *budget,* /b/ and /d/ are silent in R.P. However in MalE, these words are realized as /to:mb, /bo:mb/, /debt/, /fridʄ/ and /bʌdʄət/. Post vocalic pronunciation of /r/, gemination and realization of /h/ in *honest* are examples of spelling pronunciation.

5.Influence of Malayalam

Some of the phonological alternations and segmental features of MalE that were discussed in the previous sections occur primarily due to the inevitable influence of Malayalam on MalE. Understanding the phonemic chart of MalE makes it clear that most of the sounds that replaced the English sounds are the phonemes of Malayalam. The interdental affricates are replaced by dental stops, /z/ replaced by /s/, and /ʒ/ by /ʃ/, retroflexion of [ʈ,ɖ,ɳ,ɭ], and insertion of /ɻ/. Malayalam does not have any interdental affricates. Similarly, /z/ and /ʒ/ are also absent in the sound system of Malayalam. The insertion of /ɻ/ in words like mars, nurse is an important feature. These words occur in Malayalam as loan words and while they are written in Malayalam, the letter that produce the /ɻ/ is used post vocalically.

This can also be seen when it comes to the insertion of /j/ and /ʋ/ between the vowels of diphthongs. The letter representing /jɑ/ and /ʋɑ/ are used while words like mayor and pure are written in the Malayalam script. In most of the words the diphthongs /ai/ and /au/ are realized with less interference and this might be because these are the only diphthongs that are present in the Swarakshara of the Malayalam alphabetic system.

Lack of aspiration is yet another influence of Malayalam on MalE. Though Malayalam has aspirated stops, it is generally not found in the colloqial speech of the native speakers. Unlike the North Indian languages, aspirated stops are not contrastive in Malayalam and hence this feature is unlikely to be seen in the spoken Malayalam and MalE.

6. Conclusion

This paper discussed the consonant system of Malayali English. The study on the segmental features of Malyali English threw light on the distinct pronunciation pattern of the L2 speakers. As mentioned earlier the influence of first language, in this case Malayalam, is inevitable in the speech of L2 speakers. Similarly, there exist other features that cannot be explained as an influence of Malayalam. Rhoticity, lack of aspirated sounds, dentalization of affricates, retroflexion, simplification of diphthongs, post nasal voicing, elongation of vowel sounds, lack of flapping are some of the characteristic features of Malayali English. All these features along with slower speech rate and difference in the stress pattern makes MalE different from R.P.

Works Cited:

Gargesh, Ravinder. Indian English: Phonology. In K. Bernd (eds), A Handbook of Varieties of English Vol.1. Mouton De Gruytor:Berlin. (998-1000)

Mohanan, K.P. and Mohanan, T. *The lexical phonology of Malayali English: structure formation in transplanted second language systems.* Unpublished manuscript, Stanford University, 1987.

Mohanan, T.*Syllable Structure in Malayalam*. In Linguistic Inquiry, Vol. 20, No. 4, pp. 589-625. The MIT Press. 1989.

Mohanan, K.P, and Tara Mohanan. *Towards a Theory of Constraints in OT: Emergence of the Not-so-unmarked in Malayalee English*. National U of Singapore, 2003. Print.

Pandey, Pramod. "Indian English Prosody." In Gerhard Leitner, Azirah Hashim and Hans-Georg Wolf (Eds.)*Communicating with Asia.* Cambridge UP, Forthcoming.

Rajalakshmi, V. R. "Mother-Tongue Interference In The English Vowels Of Malayali Speakers In English." IJDL. International journal of Dravidian linguistics 37.1 (2008): 215-227.

Roach, Peter.*Phonetics*. Oxford: University Press, 1981. Print.

Sailaja, Pingali. *Indian English*. Edinburgh University Press, 2009.

Warrier, Tara. "The Phonetics and Phonology of Malayalam and Its Pedagogical Implications- A Generative Phonological Study. " Diss. CIEFL: Hyderabad, 1976. Print.