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## **English Letters and Their Combinations with Varying Sound Values: Challenges and Instructional Strategies for Malayali Learners of English**

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### **Abstract:**

English letters and their combinations with varying sound values are a significant challenge for Malayali learners of English because of the phonological difference between Malayalam and English. English, with its inconsistent letter-sound correspondence and irregular phonetic rules, contrasts sharply with the more phonetic nature of Malayalam. This phonetic nature of Malayalam leads Malayali learners to pronounce English letters the same way they pronounce Malayalam letters, which affects their speech intelligibility. This article reflects on the challenges Malayali learners encounter with English letters and their combinations with varying sound values, analyses the linguistic and educational factors influencing their pronunciation, and proposes teaching strategies to help them mitigate the difficulties. These strategies enable students to pronounce more effectively and express themselves in English. Recommendations for further research are also proposed to address these challenges effectively.

**Keywords:** Consonant Cluster, Digraph, Grapheme, Intelligibility, International Phonetic Alphabet, Minimal Pairs, Phoneme, Suffix, Voiced Sounds, Voiceless Sounds.

## Introduction

English letters and their combinations with varying sound values are a significant challenge for non-native speakers, especially those whose first language (L1) has different phonological rules. Malayalam, the first language of Malayalis, generally corresponds its spelling with pronunciation. Malayali is the demonym for a native of Kerala, India. The phonetic nature of Malayalam contrasts with the unphonetic nature of English, where an English letter can be represented in many ways. Malayali learners of English often mispronounce English words because they pronounce every English letter the same way they do in their first language. Unlike Malayalam, which has a relatively straightforward phonetic system, English uses its 26 letters to represent 44 distinct sounds which leads to confusion and mispronunciations. Different sound values of English letters prevent the natural flow and rhythm of communicative English, affecting clarity and understanding. The difficulty with English letters and their combinations with varying sound values is further worsened by limited exposure to native pronunciation models and instructional practices without focusing on them. Learners may continue to apply more straightforward pronunciation rules of Malayalam to English without proper instruction. Over time, it reinforces inaccurate sound patterns in Malayali learners. This article reflects on the challenges Malayali learners encounter with English letters and their combinations with varying sound values, analyses the linguistic and educational factors influencing their pronunciation, and proposes teaching strategies to help them mitigate the difficulties. These strategies enable students to pronounce more effectively and express themselves in English.

## Understanding the Problem

The primary difficulty arises from the lack of one-to-one correspondence between English letters (graphemes) and their sounds (phonemes). Unlike Malayalam, where each letter has a predictable pronunciation, English letters can represent multiple sounds depending on their position in a word, the surrounding letters, and historical linguistic influences. For instance,

The letter 'A' can be represented as /e/ in words like Says /sez/ and Thames /temz/, /æ/ in Amity /'æməti/ and Bat /bæt/, /ɑ:/ in Task /tɑ:sk and Karate /kə'ra:ti/, /eɪ/ in Apex /'eɪpeks/, Amoral /,eɪ'mɒrəl/, Say /seɪ/ and Bass /beɪs/, /ɔ:/ in Dawn /dɔ:n/, Towards /tə'wɔ:dz/, War /wɔ:(r)/, /ɒ/ in Watch /wɒtʃ/, /ʌ/ in Furnace /'fɜ:nɪs/, /i/ in Karaoke /,kæri'əʊki/ and Karate /kə'ra:ti/, /ʌ/ in Amma /'ʌmə:/ and Sati /'sʌti:/, /eə/ in Ware /weə(r)/ and Garish /'geərɪʃ/, and /ə/ in Ability /ə'bɪləti/, Abode /ə'bɔ:d/, About /ə'baʊt/, Above /ə'bʌv/, Abound /ə'baʊnd/, Abut /ə'bʌt/, Across /ə'krɒs/, Ago /ə'gəʊ/, Agree /ə'gri:/, Ahead /ə'hed/, Allow /ə'laʊ/, Alone /ə'ləʊn/, Along /ə'lɒŋ/, Aloud /ə'laʊ/, Amid /ə'mɪd/, Amiss /ə'mɪs/ Among /ə'mʌŋ/, Amount /ə'maʊnt/, Account /ə'kaʊnt/, Around /ə'raʊnd/ Asparagus /ə'spærəgəs/, Adjust /ə'dʒʌst/, Attack /ə'tæk/ Attach /ə'tætʃ/, Attend /ə'tend/, Attempt /ə'tempt/, Acetylene /ə'setəli:n/, Adjourn /ə'dʒɜ:n/ and Alas /ə'læs/.

The letter 'E' can be represented as /e/ in words like Any /eni/, Many /meni/, Met /met/, /ə/ in Gutter /'gʌtə(r)/, /ɪ/ in Be /bi/, English /'ɪŋɡlɪʃ/, Women /'wɪmɪn/, and College /'kɒlɪdʒ/, /i/ in Anemone /ə'neməni/, Bona fide /,bəʊnə 'faɪdi/, finale /fi'nɑ:li/, Epitome /ɪ'pɪtəmi/, He /hi/, Hyperbole /haɪ'pɜ:bəli/, Karaoke /,kæri'əʊki/, Karate /kə'ra:ti/, Lethe /'li:θi/, Recipe /'resəpi/, Sesame /'sesəmi/, Systole /'sɪstəli/, Syncope /'sɪŋkəpi/, /i:/ in Compete /kəm'pi:t/, Complete /kəm'pli:t/, Gene /dʒi:n/, Mneme /'ni:mi:/, Venial /'vi:niəl/, Venus /'vi:nəs/ and Veto /'vi:təʊ/, /ɑ:/ in Sergeant /'sɑ:dʒənt/, /ɒ/ in Ensemble /ɒn'sɒmbl/, /u:/ in Steward /'stju:əd/, sewer /'su:ə(r)/ and

Sewage /'su:ɪdʒ/, /ɜ:/ in Herb /hɜ:b/ and Transferal /'trænsfɜ:rəl/, /eɪ/ in Café /'kæfeɪ/, Forte /'fɔ:teɪ/, Metis /meɪ'ti:/, Resume /'rezju:meɪ/ and Segue /'segweɪ/ and /eə/ in Where /weə(r)/ and Care /keə(r)/, and /ɪə/ in Hero /hɪərəʊ/ and Mere /mɪə(r)/.

The letter 'I' can be represented as /ɜ:/ in words like Fir /fɜ:(r)/ and Sir /sɜ:(r)/, /ə/ in Politics /'pɒlətiks/, /ɪ/ in In /ɪn/, If /ɪf/, Pin /pɪn/, Vitamin /'vɪtəmin/ and Wind /wind/ (Noun), /i/ in Mini /'mini/, Taxi /tæksi/, Anti /ænti/ and Semi /semi/, /i:/ in Marine /mə'ri:n/, Pizza /'pi:tsə/, Ski /ski:/ Velum /vi:ləm/ and Visa /vi:zə/, /aɪ/ in Angina /æn'dʒaɪnə/, Cider /'saɪdə(r)/, Ice /aɪs/, Gemini /'dʒemɪnaɪ/, Gigantic /dʒaɪ'gæntɪk/, Silent /'saɪlənt/, Time /taɪm/, Titanic /taɪ'tænɪk/, Vice /vaɪs/, Wipe /waɪp/ and Wind /waɪnd/ (Verb), /æ/ in Impase /'æmpɑ:s/ and Gratin /'grætæn/, and /j/ in Union /'ju:njən/, Opinion /ə'pɪnjən/, Senior /'si:njə(r)/, Brilliant /'brɪljənt/, Civilian /sə'vɪljən/, Junior /'dʒu:njə(r)/, Onion /'ʌn jən/, Million /'mɪljən/, Spaniel /'spænjəl/, Stallion /'stæljən/ and Savior /'seɪvjə(r)/.

The letter 'O' can be represented as /ɒ/ in words like Hot /hɒt/, /ɪ/ in Women /'wɪmɪn/, /ʌ/ in None /nʌn/, Onion /'ʌnjən/, One /wʌn/ and Once /wʌns/, /ʊ/ in Woman /'wʊmən/, /w/ in Choir /'kwaɪə(r)/, Croissant /'krwæsəʊ/, Memoir /'memwɑ:/, Moi /mwa:/, Moire /mwa:(r)/, Bourgeois /'buəʒwɑ:/ or /,buə'ʒwɑ:/, Reservoir /'rezəvwɑ:(r)/, Savior faire /,seɪvwɑ:feə(r)/, Ouija board /'wi:dʒə bɔ:d/, /u:/ in Do /du:/ and Womb /wu:m/, /ɔ:/ in Porosity /pɔ:'rɒsəti/ and Snore, /ɜ:/ in Colonel /'kɜ:nl/ and Work /wɜ:k/, /ə/ in Information /,ɪnfə'meɪʃn/, Occur /ə'kɜ:(r)/, Official /ə'fɪʃl/, Oppose /ə'pəʊs/, Opinion /ə'pɪnjən/ and Peon /pi:ən/, /aʊ/ in Now /naʊ/ and Out /aʊt/, and /əʊ/ in Home /həʊm/, Bowl /bəʊl/ and Stove /stəʊv/.

The letter 'U' can be represented as /e/ in words like Bury /'beri/, /ɪ/ in Busy /'bɪzi/ and Lettuce /'letɪs/, /ʊ/ in Pull /pʊl/, /ʌ/ in Bun /bʌn/, /ə/ in Suggestion /sə'dʒestʃən/, /w/ in Segue /'segweɪ/, Banquet /'bæŋkwɪt/, Liquid /'lɪkwɪd/, Quiet /'kwaɪət/, Quick /kwɪk/, Queen /kwi:n/,

Quill /kwɪl/, Quilt /kwɪlt/, Quiz /kwɪz/, Cuisine /kwɪ'zi:n/, Suite /swi:t/, Suave /swɑ:v/, Language /'læŋgwɪdʒ/ and Penguin /'penŋwɪn/, /u:/ in Chute /ʃu:t/ and Suit /'su:t/, /ɜ:/ in Church /tʃɜ:tʃ/, Fur /fɜ:(r)/, Furnis /'fɜ:nɪs/, Furniture /'fɜ:nɪtʃə(r)/ and Purchase /'pɜ:tʃəs/, /jʊə/ in Pure /pjʊə(r)/, /ju:/ in Huge /hju:dʒ/, Student /'stju:dnt/ and Utopia /ju:'təʊpiə/, and /jə/ in Accurate /'ækjərət/, Accuracy /'ækjərəsi/, Ambulance /'æmbjələns/, Calculus /'kælkjələs/, Communist /'kɒmjənɪst/, Consecutive /kən'sekjətɪv/, Consular /'kɒnsjələ(r)/, Contributory /kən'trɪbjətəri/, Curriculum /kə'rikjələm/, Diminutive /dɪ'mɪnjətɪv/, Dracula /'drækjələ/, Executive /ɪg'zekjətɪv/, Formula /'fɔ:mjələ/, Masculine /'mæskjəlɪn/, Mercury /'mɜ:kjəri/, Modular /'mɒdjələ(r)/, Particular /pə'tɪkjələ(r)/, Popular /'pɒpjələ(r)/, Regular /'regjələ(r)/, Regularly /'regjələli/, Regulatory /'regjələtəri/, Secular /'sekjələ(r)/, Security /sɪ'kjərəti/ and Vocabulary /və'kæbjələri/.

The sound /j/ is added before 'u' in words like Calculate /'kælkjuleɪt/, Calculator /'kælkjuleɪtə(r)/, Calculation /kælkju'leɪʃn/, Calculus /'kælkjələs/, Cognac /'kɒnjæk/, Constituency /kən'stɪtjʊənsi/, Cucumber /'kju:kʌmbə(r)/, Diminution /dɪmɪ'nju:ʃən/, Document /'dɒkjumənt/, Documentary /dɒkju'mentri/, Cupola /'kju:əplə/, Formulate /'fɔ:mjuleɪt/, Gratitude /'grætɪtju:d/, Modulate /'mɒdjuleɪt/, Manipulate /mə'nɪpjuleɪt/, Nuisance /'nju:sns/, Populate /'pɒpjuleɪt/, Population /pɒpju'leɪʃn/, Popular /'pɒpjələ(r)/, Popularity /pɒpju'lærəti/, Ovule /'ɒvju:l/, Regular /'regjələ(r)/, Regulation /regju'leɪʃn/, Regulate /'regjuleɪt/, Regulatory /'regjələtəri/, Regulator /'regjuleɪtə(r)/, Student /'stju:dnt/, Studious /'stju:diəs/, Studio /'stju:diəʊ/ and Tenure /'tenjə(r)/.

The letter 'C' can be represented as /k/ in words like Car /kɑ:(r)/, /s/ in City /sɪti/, /ʃ/ in Associate /ə'səʊʃɪət/, Ocean /'əʊʃn/, Official /ə'fɪʃl/ and Financial /fə'næɪʃl/, and /tʃ/ in Cello /tʃeləʊ/. 'C' is silent in words such as Czar /zɑ:(r)/, Indict /ɪn'daɪt/, Indictable /ɪn'daɪtəbl/, Indictment /ɪn'daɪtmənt/, Victualler /'vɪtlə(r)/, Victuals /'vɪtlz/ and Yacht /jɒt/.

The letter ‘D’ can be represented as /d/ in words like Dog /dɒg/, /t/ in Baked /beɪkt/, Brushed /brʌʃt/, Cooked /kʊkt/, Cracked /krækt/, Crashed /kræʃt/, Danced /dɑːnst/, Dressed /drest/, Dropped /drɒpt/, Escaped /ɪ'skeɪpt/, Finished /'fɪnɪʃt/, Fixed /fɪkst/, Guessed /gest/, Helped /helpt/, Hiked /haɪkt/, Hoped /hɒpt/, Joked /dʒəʊkt/, Jumped /dʒʌmpt/, Kissed /kɪst/, knocked /nɒkt/, Laughed /lɑːft/ Locked /lɒkt/, Looked /lʊkt/, Matched /mætʃt/, Missed /mɪst/, Mixed /mɪkst/, Packed /pækt/, Passed /pɑːst/, Picked /pɪkt/, Pressed /prest/, Pronounced /prə'naʊnst/, Pushed /puʃt/, Relaxed /rɪ'lækst/, Shopped /ʃɒpt/, Slipped /slipt/, Smoked /sməʊkt/, Stopped /stɒpt/, Talked /tɔːkt/, Typed /taɪpt/, Walked /wɔːkt/, Washed /wɒʃt/, Worked /wɜːkt/ and Watched /wɔːtʃt/, and /dʒ/ in Graduate /'grædʒʊət/ and Soldier /'səʊldʒə(r)/. ‘D’ is silent in words such as Adjust /ə'dʒʌst/, Adjourn /ə'dʒɜːn/, Adjudicate /ə'dʒuːdɪkeɪt/, Badge /bædʒ/, Bridge /brɪdʒ/, Budge /bʌdʒ/, Budget /'bʌdʒɪt/, Dodge /dɒdʒ/, Dredge /dredʒ/, Edge /edʒ/, Fridge /frɪdʒ/, Gadget /'gædʒɪt/, Ledger /'ledʒə(r)/, Wedge /wedʒ/, Hedge /hedʒ/ and Judge /dʒʌdʒ/.

The letter ‘G’ can be represented as /g/ in words like Game /geɪm/, /ʒ/ in Barrage /'bæərəːʒ/, Beige /beɪʒ/, Collage /'kɒləːʒ/, Garage /'gærəːʒ/, Gilet /'ʒɪleɪ/, Genre /'ʒɒnrə/, Massage /'mæsəːʒ/ and Rouge /ruːʒ/, and /dʒ/ in Gesture /'dʒɛstʃə(r)/ and Loggia /'ləʊdʒə/. ‘G’ is silent in words such as Bologna /bə'ləʊnjə/, Champagne /ʃæm'peɪn/, Cognac /'kɒnjæk/, Cologne /kə'ləʊn/, Ensign /'ensən/, Lasagna /lə'zænjə/, Paradigm /'pærədaim/, Phlegm /flem/, Poignant /'pɔɪnjənt/, Soignee /'swɑːnjeɪ/ and Vignette /'vɪn'jət/.

The letter ‘F’ can be represented as /f/ in words like Fan /fæn/ and /v/ in the weak form of the preposition ‘Of’ /əv/.

The letter ‘S’ can be represented as /s/ in words like Celsius /'selsiəs/ and Gymnasium /dʒɪm'neɪziəm/, /z/ in Anesthesia /,ænəs'thiːziə/ and Euthanasia /,juːθə'neɪziə/, /ʒ/ in Confusion

/kən'fju:ʒn/, Conclusion /kən'klau:ʒn/, Pleasure /'pleʒə(r)/ and Vision /'vɪʒən/, and /ʃ/ in Sure /ʃʊ:(r)/ and Sugar /'ʃʊgə(r)/. 'S' is silent in words like Apropos /,æprə'pəʊ/, Bourgeois /'buəʒwɑ:/ or /,bʊə'ʒwɑ:/, Chassis /'ʃæsi/, Corps /kɔ:(r)/, Debris /'deɪbri:/ or /'debri:/, Demesne /də'mem/, Faux pas /,fəʊ'pɑ:/, Metis /meɪ'ti:/, Precis /'preɪsi:/, Rendezvous /'rɒndɪvu:/, Vis-à-vis /,vi:s ə:vi:/ and Viscount /'vaɪkaʊnt/.

The letter 'T' can be represented as /t/ in words like Sit /sɪt/, Cut /kʌt/ and Put /pʊt/, /ʃ/ in Satiety /'seɪʃiəti/, Palatial /pə'leɪʃl/ and Minutiae /maɪ'nju:ʃi:/, and /tʃ/ in Christen /'krɪstən/, Statutory /'stætʃətəri/, Combustion /kəm'bʌstʃən/, Congestion /kən'dʒestʃən/, Digestion /daɪ'dʒestʃən/, Ingestion /ɪn'dʒestʃən/, Question /'kwɛstʃən/, Suggestion /sə'dʒestʃən/ and Situation /,sɪtʃu'eɪʃn/. 'T' is silent in words like Ballet /'bæleɪ/, Bouquet /bu'keɪ/, Buffet /'bʊfeɪ/ or /'bʌfeɪ/, Cabaret /'kæbəreɪ/, Christen /'krɪsn/, Christmas /'krɪsməs/, Depot /'depəʊ/, Debut /'deɪbju:/ or /'debju:/, Denouement /,deɪ'nu:mənt/ and Rapport /ræ'pɔ:(r)/.

The letter 'X' can be represented as /k/ in words like Excite /ɪk'saɪt/, Exceed /ɪk'si:d/, Excellent /'eksələnt/, Except /ɪk'sept/, and Excuse /ɪk'skju:s/, /ks/ in Extra /'ekstrə/, /gz/ in Exam /ɪg'zæm/, Example /ɪg'zɑ:mpl/, Exempt /ɪg'zempt/ and Exist /ɪg'zɪst/, /ks/ or /gz/ in Exit /'eksɪt/ or /'egsɪt/, /z/ in Xylophone /'zaɪləfəʊn/, Anxiety /æŋ'zaɪəti/, Xylem /'zaɪləm/ and Xerox /'ziərɒks/, and /kʃ/ in Luxury /'lʌkʃəri/ and Anxious /'æŋkʃəs/. 'X' is silent in words such as Roux /ru:/, Faux /fəʊ/, Faux pas /,fəʊ'pɑ:/ and Sioux /su:/.

The letter 'V' can be represented as /v/ in words like Van /væn/ and 'Have' /hæv/, and /f/ in Stokvel /'stɒkfel/.



The letter combination ‘PH’ can be represented as /f/ in words like Graph /græf/, Morphology /mɔːˈfɒlədʒi/, Phone /fəʊn/ and Photo /ˈfəʊtəʊ/, and /v/ in Nephew /ˈnevʊː/ and the name Stephan /ˈstiːvən/.

The letter combination ‘CH’ can be represented as /k/ in words like Ache /eɪk/, Chorus /ˈkɔːrəs/ and Choir /ˈkwaɪə(r)/, /ʃ/ in Champagne /ʃæmˈpeɪn/, Chauvinism /ˈʃəʊvɪnɪzəm/, Chef /ʃef/, Chauffeur /ˈʃəʊfə(r)/, Gauche /gəʊʃ/ and Parachute /ˈpærəʃuːt/, /tʃ/ in Chubby /ˈtʃʌbi/ and Church /tʃɜːtʃ/, and /ks/ in Loch /lɒks/. The combination is silent in words like Yacht /jɒt/.

The letter combination ‘CK’ can be represented as /k/ in words like Back /bæk/, Lick /lɪk/, Neck /nek/, Knock /nɒk/, Pack /pæk/, Pick /pɪk/ and Sack /sæk/. ‘C’ is always silent in the consonant cluster “ck”.

The digraph ‘TH’ can be represented as /ð/ in words like That /ðæt/ and Those /ðəʊz/, /θ/ in Thin /θɪn/ and Thick /θɪk/, and /t/ in Thames /temz/ and Thyme /taɪm/.

‘GH’ combination can be represented as /g/ in words like Ghee /giː/ and Ghost /gəʊst/, and /f/ in Cough /kɒf/ and Draught /draːft/. ‘Gh’ is silent in Daughter /ˈdɔːtə(r)/ and Drought /draʊt/.

The digraph ‘WH’ can be represented as /w/ in words like When /wen/ and What /wɒt/, and /f/ in Whew /fjuː/.

‘CC’ combination can be represented as /ks/ in words like Success /səkˈses/, /k/ in Account /əˈkaʊnt/ and /tʃ/ in Cappuccino /ˌkæpuˈtʃɪːnəʊ/.

‘GN’ combination can be represented as /n/ in words like Sign /saɪn/ and /gn/ as in Recognize /rekəɡnaɪz/.

‘NG’ combination can be represented as /ŋ/ in words like Sing /sɪŋ/, Wing /wɪŋ/ and Ring /rɪŋ/, /ŋg/ in Anger /'æŋgə(r)/, Angle /'æŋgl/, English /'ɪŋɡlɪʃ/, Longer /'lɒŋɡə(r)/, Linger /'lɪŋɡə(r)/ and Mango /'mæŋɡəʊ/, and /dʒ/ in Danger /'deɪndʒə(r)/ and Manger /'meɪndʒə(r)/.

‘QU’ combination can be represented as /kw/ as in Quick /kwɪk/ and Queen /kwi:n/, /kj/ as in Queue /kju:/, and /k/ as in Unique /ju'ni:k/.

‘AU’ combination can be represented as /ɑ:/ in words like Aunt /ɑ:nt/ and Laugh /lɑ:f/, /ɔ:/ in Audit /'ɔ:dɪt/, August /'ɔ:gəst/, Author /'ɔ:θə(r)/, Gauze /gɔ:z/ and Taught /tɔ:t/, /ɒ/ or /ə/ in Because /bɪ'kɒz/ or /bɪ'kəz/, /eɪ/ in Gauge /geɪdʒ/, and /əʊ/ in Gauche /gəʊʃ/.

‘EA’ combination can be represented as /i:/ in words like Breach /bri:tʃ/ and Read /ri:d/ (Present Tense), /e/ in Bread /bred/ and Read /red/ (Past Tense), /eɪ/ in Break /breɪk/ and Steak /steɪk/, /eə/ in Wear /weə(r)/ and Bear /weə(r)/, /ɪə/ in Dear /dɪə(r)/ and Hear /hɪə(r)/, and /ɜ:/ in Hears /hɜ:s/.

‘EY’ blend can be represented as /i/ in words like Valley /'væli/, Money /'mʌni/ and Monkey /'mʌŋki/, /i:/ in Key /'ki:/, and /eɪ/ in Obey /ə'beɪ/, Hey /heɪ/, Grey /greɪ/, Prey /preɪ/, They /ðeɪ/ and Whey /weɪ/.

‘EI’ blend can be represented as /ɪ/ in words like Counterfeit /'kəʊntəfɪt/ and Counterfeiter /'kəʊntəfɪtə(r)/, /i:/ in Deceive /dɪ'si:v/, Receive /rɪ'si:v/ and Receipt /rɪ'si:t/, /ə/ in Foreign /'fɒrən/, /e/ in Leisure /'leɪzə(r)/ and Heifer /'hefə(r)/, and /aɪ/ Height /haɪt/.

‘EW’ can be represented as /ju:/ in Few /fju:/, New /nju:/ and Stew /stju:/, and /u:/ in Grew /gru:/, Crew /kru:/, Blew /blu:/, Flew /flu:/, Drew /dru:/ and Screw /skru:/.

‘IE’ can be represented as /i:/ in Achieve /ə'tʃi:v/, Belief /bɪ'li:f/, Piece /pi:s/ and Relieve /rɪ'li:v/, /aɪ/ in Lie /laɪ/, Pie /paɪ/, Tie /taɪ/, Die /daɪ/, Tried /traɪd/, Cried /kraɪd/, Fried /fraɪd/ and

Dried /daɪd/, and /ɪ/ in Mischief /'mɪʃɪf/ and Handkerchief /'hæŋkətʃɪf/.

‘OO’ can be represented as /u:/ in Food /fu:d/, Room /ru:m/, Soon /su:n/, Too/tu:/, Tool /tu:l/ and Zoo /zu:/, /ʊ/ as in Book /bʊk/, Good /gʊd/, Look /lʊk/, Stood /stʊd/ and Took /tʊk/, /ʌ/ in Flood /flʌd/ and Blood /blʌd/, /əʊ/ in Brooch /brəʊtʃ/, and /ɔ:/ in Floor /flɔ:(r)/

‘OA’ can be represented as /əʊ/ in Goad /gəʊd/, Goal /gəʊl/, Goat /gəʊt/ and Road /rəʊd/ and /ɔ:/ in broad /brɔ:d/.

‘OU’ can be represented as /aʊ/ in About /ə'baʊt/, Amount /ə'maʊnt/, Account /ə'kaʊnt/, Doubt /daʊt/ and Drought /draʊt/, /aʊə/ in Sour /saʊə/, /ɒ/ in Cough /kɒf/, /ɔ:/ in Bought /bɔ:t/, Fought /fɔ:t/ and Ought /ɔ:t/, /əʊ/ in Dough /dəʊ/, Soul /səʊl/ and Though /ðəʊ/, /ʌ/ in Country /'kʌntri/, Cousin /'kʌzn/ and Double /'dʌbl/, /u:/ in Group /gru:p/, Soup /su:p/ and You /ju:/, /ʊə/ in Tourist /'tʊərɪst/, /ʊ/ in Could /kʊd/, Should /ʃʊd/ and Would /wʊd/, /ə/ in Borough /'bʌrə/, Famous /'feɪməs/ and Nervous /'nɜ:vəs/, and /w/ in Ouija board /'wi:dʒə bɔ:d/. ‘OW’ can be represented as /aʊ/ in Brown /braʊn/, Cow /kaʊ/, Down /daʊn/, How /haʊ/, Now /naʊ/ and Town /taʊn/, /əʊ/ in Blow /bləʊ/, Grow /grəʊ/, Know /nəʊ/, Low /ləʊ/, Own /əʊn/, and /ɒ/ in Knowledge /'nɒlɪdʒ/.

‘OI’ can be pronounced as /ɔɪ/ in Boil /bɔɪl/, Coin /kɔɪn/ and Noice /nɔɪz/, and /wɑ:/ in words like Bourgeois /'bʊəʒwɑ:/, Foie gras /,fwɑ: 'grɑ:/, Memoir /'memwɑ:(r)/, Reservoir /'rezəvwɑ:(r)/ and Soiree /'swɑ:reɪ/.

‘UI’ can be represented as /uɪ/ in Fruit /fru:t/, /ɪ/ in Build /bɪld/, /wi:/ in Suite /swi:t/, and /aɪ/ in Guide /gaɪd/.

Also, the vowel-consonant combination ‘ough’ can be pronounced as /əʊ/ in Though /ðəʊ/,

/u:/ in Through /θru:/, /ɔ:/ in Bought /bɔ:t/, /aʊ/ in Drought /draʊt/, /ə/ in Borough /'bʌrə/, and /ɒf/ in cough /kɒf/.

## Key Challenges

Malayali learners of English often struggle with the varied sounds of English letters since these differences are unfamiliar to them. Since they rely on the phonological patterns of their native language, they may find it challenging to adapt to English pronunciation rules. This transfer from Malayalam to English phonetics results in systematic errors that hinder accurate pronunciation. One major issue is the inconsistent letter-sound mapping, as seen in words like *pleasure* and *sure*, where the letter 's' represents /ʒ/ and /ʃ/ respectively, and *ache*, *chef*, *chair*, and *loch*, where the letter combination 'ch' represents entirely different sounds such as /k/, /ʃ/, /tʃ/ and /ks/. Letter combinations and their different sounds also create difficulties since they are absent in Malayalam.

## Implications

The pronunciation challenges can affect communication like anything, which makes it more difficult for Malayali learners to be understood, especially by native English speakers. Mispronunciations may lead to misunderstandings. Additionally, such difficulties can lower learners' confidence, making them reluctant to speak English. It underscores the need to address these phonetic issues to help them develop clear and effective communication skills.

## Strategies to Address the Challenge

Explain that English has borrowed considerably from Latin, French, Greek, Old Norse, and other languages, which resulted in multiple pronunciations for the same letter or letter

combination. It creates inconsistencies in spelling and pronunciation. To help students grasp this concept, start by demonstrating how a single letter or letter combination can be pronounced in multiple ways. For instance, the letter ‘C’ is pronounced as /k/ in *cat*, /s/ in *ceiling*, and is silent in *Indict*. Similarly, ‘G’ sounds like /g/ in *go*, /dʒ/ in *giant*, /ʒ/ in *collage*, and is silent in *sign*. The ‘gh’ combination can be represented as /f/ in *laugh* and *tough*, /g/ in *aghast*, *ghee*, and *ghost*, and is silent in *high* and *night*. The ‘ph’ combination is usually pronounced as /f/ in *phone* and *physics*, but in some cases, like *nephew* and *Stephan*, it is pronounced /v/. This variation comes from Greek, where ‘ph’ is naturally pronounced as /v/, and this pronunciation was carried over when the name *Stephan* was borrowed into English. Encourage students to practice these concepts by providing them with a list of examples. Then, ask them to search the dictionary for words in which letters and letter combinations are pronounced differently. Recognizing letters, letter combinations, and their different pronunciations can make learning English spelling and pronunciation more manageable.

Familiarize students with IPA (International Phonetic Alphabet) symbols for English sounds. Then, have the students use phonetic dictionaries to check the pronunciation of the English letters, combinations, and their multiple sounds. Visual aids can significantly improve their understanding of English letters and their combinations with multiple sounds. Visual aids such as flashcards with phonetic transcriptions, highlighting the target sounds, can reinforce accurate pronunciation.

Teach phonetic patterns with simple rules. It helps students recognize when letters change sounds. Write two words on the board (e.g., *cat* and *cite* for ‘C’). Ask students to pronounce both words aloud and listen for differences. Guide them to notice that ‘C’ in the word *cat* sounds like /k/ while in the word *city* ‘C’ sounds like /s/. The letter ‘C’ is soft when it comes before E, I, or Y.

Or else, ‘C’ sounds hard /k/. Provide the students with a list of words with /s/ and /k/ sounds of the letter ‘C’ and ask them to sort ‘Hard C’ and ‘Soft C’. The letter ‘S’ in English can be pronounced as either soft ‘s’ /s/ or hard ‘s’ /z/, depending on its position in a word, surrounding sounds, and etymology. ‘S’ is pronounced as /s/ at the beginning of words like *sun*, *sin*, *sit*, *send*, *see* and *smile*, or before voiceless consonants (/p/, /t/ and /k/) like *ask*, *crisp*, *stop*, and *task*, or at the end of most plural nouns after voiceless sounds (/p/, /t/, /k/, /f/, and /θ/) such as *cats* /kæts/, *books* /bʊks/, *cliffs* /klɪfs/, and *myths* /mɪθs/, or in borrowed words from Latin and Greek such as *symphony*, *psychology*, *syntax* and *philosophy*. ‘S’ is pronounced as hard ‘s’ /z/ between two vowel sounds such as *nose* /nəʊz/, *rose* /rəʊz/, *wise* /waɪz/ and *easy* /iːzi/, or at the end of plural nouns after voiced sounds (/b/, /d/, /g/, /v/, /m/, /n/, /l/, /r/, and vowel sounds) like *dogs* /dɔːgz/, *pens* /penz/, *leaves* /liːvz/, and *cars* /kɑːrz/, or in some verb forms ending in ‘s’ like *goes* /gəʊz/, *loves* /lʌvz/, *runs* /rʌnz/ and *plays* /pleɪz/, or in some function words like *is* /ɪz/, *has* /hæz/ and *was* /wɒz/. The letter ‘G’ in English can be pronounced as either hard /g/ or soft /dʒ/. ‘G’ is pronounced as /g/ before the vowels A, O, and U like *gap*, *game*, *goat*, *gold*, *gun*, and *gut*, or before consonants (except ‘E’ and ‘I’ in some cases) like *glad*, *grow*, *grass*, *grand*, and *ground*, or at the end of words like *dog*, *big*, *rug*, and *leg*, or in words of Germanic origin like *give*, *get*, *girl*, and *good*, or before ‘E’ or ‘I’ in certain words (exceptions to soft ‘G’ rule) like *get*, *gear*, *give*, *girl*, and *gill*. ‘G’ is pronounced as /dʒ/ before the vowels E, I, or Y (in many words) like *giraffe*, *giant*, *gentle*, *gem*, and *gym*, or in words of French or Latin origin like *genre*, *gesture*, *genius*, and *engine*, or in some suffixes like ‘-ge’ or ‘-gi-’ when followed by vowels like *courage*, *fragile*, *average*, and *apology*.

Demonstrate how minimal pairs, pairs of words that differ by only a single sound (phoneme) but have different meanings, are pronounced. Provide students with a list of minimal pairs and have them practice minimal pairs. For example, provide both /θ/ and /ð/ sounds and have

them practice these pairs, highlighting the importance of phonetic distinctions. The phonetic differences can change the meaning of words. It will help the students distinguish between these sounds. Here is a list of minimal pairs contrasting the /θ/ and /ð/ sounds:

Bath /bɑ:θ/	Bathe /beɪð/
Breath /brəθ/	Breathe /bri:ð/
Sheath /ʃi:θ/	Sheathe /ʃi:ð/
Wreath /ri:θ/	Wreathe /ri:ð/
Teeth /ti:θ/	Teethe /ti:ð/
Loath /ləʊθ/	Loathe /ləʊð/
Ether /i:θə(r)/	Either /i:ðə(r)/
Thigh /θaɪ/	Thy / ðaɪ/

Have them practice the sounds first, then use the sounds in various words and sentences to integrate the sounds into their natural speech patterns. Select texts or passages that contain words with /θ/ and /ð/ sounds and ask students to read them aloud. Reading exercises help reinforce correct pronunciation and increase familiarity with these sounds. Encourage repeated practice to reinforce the correct pronunciation.

Providing immediate and constructive feedback is essential for helping learners identify and correct errors. Positive reinforcement and clear guidance build learner confidence and motivate continuous improvement. These strategies, when applied consistently, can address the

specific challenges faced by Malayali learners of English, ultimately enhancing their intelligibility and communicative competence.

## **Conclusion**

The irregularity of English spelling creates a challenge for Malayali learners of English, whose native language follows a more consistent and predictable phonetic system. Identifying the root causes of these difficulties allows educators to develop targeted interventions that improve pronunciation. Addressing these issues is essential not only for enhancing intelligibility but also for boosting learners' confidence in speaking English.

## **Recommendations for Further Research**

Further research is needed to better understand how proper pronunciation instruction affects speech intelligibility among Malayali learners of English. Studies should explore factors like the influence of native language interference, exposure to native pronunciation, and the impact of writing systems across languages. Additionally, research into the sociolinguistic factors influencing pronunciation learning in Kerala could provide deeper insights into how to support learners in overcoming their challenges.

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