



Phonology, morphology and syntax (teaching English phonology to Panjabi learners)

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ABSTRACT

The English pronunciation of the Panjabi learners is highly aggressive giving rise to defective pattern of speech in English. For example they don't use labio-dental sounds or they are unaware of silent sounds in English words like /m/ in tomb. The present paper aims to analyze the phonetic and phonological patterns of English and Panjabi as taught by teachers in some schools. The structural approach is preferred over other approaches in this paper. This approach suits to English and Panjabi as the phonological structures of both the languages is of contrastive nature rather than identical or similar one. Both the languages are spoken and used in teaching. The structure is taken as an arrangement and combination of phonological units, not in the sense that of as grammarians use like word structure, noun formation, morphological constructions, etc. Veritably, Panjabi is written as it is spoken, whereas English is not spoken, as it is written, thereby causing doubts in the minds of the learners.

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Introduction

In Punjab, English is taught as the target language and Panjabi speakers find it difficult to master the phonology of English. The phonology of both the languages has nothing in common at the structural level and as such the structural approach is adopted. English language is the most successful export ever achieved. It was possible as English is flexible, adaptive and assimilative. There are said to be about 8-10 thousand English lone words in spoken Panjabi and number of Indian words in English is quite enormous.

At the phonetic and the phonemic level, English has its own distinctive features. This is the only language taught in north India with 3 types of alphabet letters, i.e. - small, capital, different letters for reading and writing. Moreover, there is no one to one correspondence between letters and pronunciation. This language is rich in allophone and has many a number of vowels, and diphthongs. In alphabet only, five letters are prescribed for all the 12 vowels and 8 diphthongs. This is the reason why such a target language has been selected for the Panjabi speakers. The more the complicated phonological structure of the language like English, the more it will have interesting teaching problems. It has all the qualities to be treated as a target language.

A comparison of the sounds of English and Panjabi forms an important part of the study. It is done to discover the nature and extent of the divergences from the letters and also to find out the causes. This will help to predict the general problems of pronunciation faced by the teachers and to put further suggestions which could be helpful to the teachers as well as the learners of English. The thrust will be on contrasting phonology of the two languages – Panjabi and English – and by teaching phonology by structural approach.

The structural approach has become an accepted reality emerging out more plus points. First our structural approach is limited to phonology. Second is for pedagogical purposes. Third

it is with reference to Panjabi phonology and Panjabi speakers who have to learn English as target language

In order to understand properly, we have to differentiate system and structure. It will totality of the context to the dimensions of teaching English phonology to the Panjabi speakers. The totality and the contexts will pave the way for teaching phones, allophones and phonemes of Panjabi speakers in relation to arrangement and distribution, etc. Thus, our structural approach centres around the concept of systems and structures, differences, totality of phonological units, conceptuality of phones, allophones and phonemes, etc.

Concept of Structure and System

The concept of structure and system is a major theory of phonological analysis. But it can be extended to other levels – morphology, syntax, etc. The phonological unit, i.e. - phonemes are sounds of a language grouped together to form the various system and they are arranged into larger units to form syllables, feed, tone group and sentences that form the structure of that language. In English, syllabic structure is based on 2 kinds of element – consonant and vowel. The traditional discussion on structure treats system and structure almost as one and the same thing and confuses structure and system instead of making a clear cut distinction between the structure and the system. In this regard, D. Abercrombie observes:

“The concept of system deals with the units themselves and the concept structure deals with this arrangement.” He further explains that “the concept of structure deals with syntagmatic relations between units --- The concept of system deals with paradigmatic relations between units.”

Professor SK Verma, a renowned scholar, in the study of linguistics clarifies the point by quoting from Haliday et. al, *“The category of structure --- is the category that accounts for the various ways in which the occurrence of one unit may be made out of the occurrence of the units next below --- whenever we can show that at a given place in structure, the language allows a choice among a small fixed set of possibilities, we have*

a system such sets of possibility are called the Terms in the system."

In my study, system means simply the number of units in phonology, say – 24 consonant phonemes in English and 29 consonant phonemes in Punjabi or 12 vowel phonemes in English and Punjabi (appendix one attached).

System is not at all significant for us; rather it is a structure which is the focus point for a structural approach in teaching English phonology to Punjabi students. So we have nothing to do with the number of units. Unit arrangements, their relations, oppositions, their distribution to establish allophones, count much in pedagogical problems.

English Phonology

English phonology refers to the aspects to the study of sound system of the given language and their functions within the sound system of that language. It studies phonological contrasts and restrictions on occurrences of certain sounds.

"The phonology of every language is peculiar to that language and different from that of every other language." (Abercrombie, 70)

In the light of the statement, the comparison between the phonology of English and Punjabi has been attempted for pedagogical purposes. For the study of English, English phonology, it is made clear in the appendix one.

Punjabi Phonology

The description of the sounds of a language falls into two parts: segmental and supra segmental. The segmental consists of the consonants and the vowels. The supra segmental of Punjabi will cover tones, accentual patterns and intonation which are relevant for studying and comparing the phonology of English with a pedagogical aim. As it is made clear in the appendix one, Punjabi has 29 consonant phonemes out of which 15 belong to plosive / stop series. They show contrast between voicing / non voicing and aspiration. This feature, it shares with other Indo – Aryan languages which it belongs. The voiced, aspirated plosives changed into 3 way tonal system. This is the distinguishing character of the Punjabi language. As Punjabi is highly vowelized language; people can easily understand the vowel phoneme of English language. Other it is difficult to follow vowels clearly. Punjabi is particularly rich in having a large number of CVC type syllables. This feature is identical in English language.

Geminating

On Phonological level, gemination refers to the lengthening of the consonants. It is phonemic in Punjabi. Almost all the consonants geminate. In the case of aspirated plosives, only the plosives get geminated. In final position, the geminates are preceded by peripheral vowels. In medial positions, they may be preceded by any vowel but they are always followed by a centralised vowel. They show contrast in many cases and the following minimal pairs illustrate the point:

1. /sukka/ 'dry', /suka/ 'make it dry'
2. /sukha/ 'a name', /sukha/ 'dry it'

As such the Punjabi speakers learning English transfer geminate formation habit to English when they see double consonants. This phenomenon of existence of two same consonants together is known as doubling and does not affect pronunciation at all. The double consonant is released as the single one. Example – cattle, bigger, fully, curry.

Punjabi diphthongs have no comparison with English which are well established and give a distinctive character to it. The diphthongs pose a real pedagogical difficulty for the Punjabi speakers which have various forms like ascending, descending and centring diphthongs.

Nasalisation

Nasalisation is a quality given to speech sound. In Punjabi Nasalisation may be meaningless or meaningful, but the meaningless nasalisation is just a Punjabi accent whereas meaningful nasalisation is important with grammatical forms. Peripheral vowels have heavier nasalisation than centralised vowels. Opposition between the non- nasalised and the nasalised vowels is clear from the following examples.

Non Nasalised	Nasalised
/god/ 'lap'	/go~d/ 'gum'
/sag/ 'vegetable'	/sa~g/ 'imitate'

The Punjabi students carry the habit of nasalisation to their English pronunciation creating humorous sounds. The teacher should clearly tell that nasalisation is very rare in English. But the fact remains that they learn easily the nasalisation of sounds.

Punjabi Tones

Punjabi is a language with tonal system. Doctor Balbir Singh Sandhu quotes:

"The tonal system is the phonetic feature of the Punjabi language which distinguishes it from other new Indo – Aryan languages such as Hindi, Bengali, Gujarati, etc."

According to Professor J Sethi - "Punjabi is a tone language: there are a fair number of minimal pairs and triplets of words distinguished only by tone." Example -

Rising and Falling tone	Falling tone
/ti/ 'daughter'	/ti/ 'thirst'
Rising Falling tone	Level Tone
/pa/ 'rate'	/pa/ 'put'

Regarding the origin of tones in Punjabi, Doctor Baldev Raj Gupta says:

"Some of the studies made previously expound the tonal variation and structural approach to Punjabi tones." There are three significant tonal contours used in Punjabi – low tone, level tone, high tone. When Punjabi speakers learn the tones and intonation in Punjabi by birth, they easily learn the tones and intonation in English language.

Neutralisation in Punjabi

In Punjabi the phenomenon of three tones, diphthongs, nasalisation, frequency of fricatives, etc may lead to neutralisation. It is well established feature of the Punjabi language and treated as a zero feature in English. The following examples illustrate neutralisation. e.g. – opposition between central and peripheral vowels is neutralised in all syllables of Punjabi. –

/mil/ 'meet', -- /mil/ 'mile'. The opposition between high / u/ and mid vowels /o/ is neutralised in favour of mid vowels. Example - /phul/ 'flower' -- /phul/ 'search'.

Difficult areas in teaching English phonology to Punjabi speakers

English phonology is contrastively harder for the Punjabi speakers. The differences between the phonology of Punjabi and English languages are directly proportional to the difficulties experienced by the learners. In this context, Lado remarks,

"Those elements that are similar to his native language will be simple for him and those elements which are different will be difficult."

In case of English and Punjabi too, phonological structure of English (sentences) being quite different from Punjabi and creates pedagogical difficulties. For this relationship between differences and difficulties, we have now a new scale of difficulties. Stockbell and Bowen proposed "a new scale of

difficulty for teaching phonology.” This scale is based on relationship existing between the comparable rules of L1 and L2.

1. L1 (Punjabi) has a rule and L2 (English) has an equivalent one.
2. L1 has a rule but L2 has no equivalent.
3. L2 has a rule not matched by L1.

In learning English phonology, the early years should be used for ear training. Phonemes of Panjabi find their way in speech production and such phonological replacements cause serious difficulties in learning English. The Panjabi speaker with his Panjabi background experiences genuine difficulty in mastering English sounds, example – labiodental sounds - /f/, /v/.

Since English structure is different from that of Punjabi, the learner also experiences genuine difficulty in understanding the concept of plurality. Example –’s’ or ‘es’ changes into ‘z’ or ‘iz’. And then Panjabi speakers face difficulty in present and past participle of verbs where ‘-ed’ is pronounced as ‘-t’ due to the environment. These derivational difficulties create phonological problems. These difficulties can be removed by providing understanding about the rules of plurality and others.

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Appendix 1

English Vowels	Punjabi Vowels
1. i in pin 'pin'	1. I Itt brick
2. u in fut 'foot'	2. i id 'festival'
3. ə in ə'bov 'above'	3. e eḍa 'this much'
4. e in pen 'pen'	4. E Eḍḍi 'heel'
5. æ in pæn 'pan'	5. ə əjj 'today'
6. ʌ in fən 'fun'	6. a apa 'we'
7. ɔ pot 'pot'	7. ɔ ɔḍ 'dry weather'
8. i: in fi:d 'feed'	8. o sog 'grief'
9. a: in fa:ðə 'father'	9. u unṯ 'camel'
10. ɔ: po:t 'port'	10. U Ucca 'high'
11. u: in fu:d 'food'	
12. ə: bə:d 'bird'	
English Consonants	Punjabi consonants
1. p as in pin 'pin'	1. p as in par 'across'
2. b as in bin 'bin'	2. t as in tar 'swim'
3. t as in tin 'tin'	3. ṯ as in ṯola 'party'
4. d as in din 'din'	4. c as in cukk 'ocary'
5. k as in kin 'kin'	5. k as in kol 'near'

6. g as in bi'gin 'bigin'	6 b as in bar'door'
7. tʃ as in t in 'chin'	7. d əs in dab 'pressure'
8. dʒ as in dʒin 'gin'	8. ɖ as in ɖol 'water bucket'
9. f as in seif 'safe'	9 j as in jar 'friend'
10. v as in seiv 'save'	10.g as in gal 'abuse'
11. θ as in θin 'thin'	11.Ph. as in Phal 'part of plough'
12. ð as in en 'then'	12.th as in Tha 'place'
13. s as in sins 'since'	13.ṯh as in ṯhok 'penetrate'
14. z as in sinz 'sins'	14.ch as in chatti '36'
15. ʃ as in me 'mesh'	15.kh as in khara 'satisfy'
16. ʒ in meʒə 'measure'	16. s as in sal 'year'
17. l as in l n 'lung'	17. ʃ as in ʃer 'lion'
18. r as in sorl 'sorry'	18. h as in hal 'condition'
19. m as in sam 'sum'	19. m as in mama 'uncle'
20. n as in san 'sun'	20. n as in nacc 'dance'
21. ŋ as in saŋ 'sung'	21. ɳ as in puɳi 'filter'
22. h as in hæ t 'hat'	22. ɳ̄ as in ɳ̄ana 'child'
23. w as in wu: 'woo'	23. ʌ as in ʌg 'part'
24. j as in ju: 'you'	24. l in kali 'Black'
	25. l̄ as in Kalī 'hurry'
	26. r as in marna 'to die'
	27. r̄ as in pharna 'to catch'
	28. v as in varha 'year'
	29. y as in darya 'river'

Appendix 2

Guideline for the phonetic transcription of Gurmukhī script

VOWELS

ਅ	ਆ	ਇ	ਈ	ਉ	ਊ
a	ā	i	ī	u	ū
ਏ	ਐ	ਓ	ਔ	ਐ	ਐ
e	ai	o	au	an/am*	ā**

CONSONANTS

ਕ	ਖ	ਗ	ਘ	ਙ
k	kh	g	gh*	g
ਚ	ਛ	ਜ	ਝ	ਞ
ch/c	chh/ch	j	jh*	ñ
ਟ	ਠ	ਡ	ਢ	ਣ
t	th	d	dh*	ṅ
ਤ	ਥ	ਦ	ਢ	ਨ
ਟ	ਠ	ਡ	ਢ	ਨ
ਪ	ਫ	ਬ	ਭ	ਮ
p	ph	b	bh*	m
ਯ	ਰ	ਲ	ਲ	ਲ
y	r	l	v/w	l
ਸ	ਹ	ਸ਼	ਖ਼	ਜ਼
s	h	s/sh	kh	z

* an/am symbol stands for a homorganic nasal consonant, i.e. the nasal consonant will take the articulation shape of the following consonant.
 g before velar consonants, ḡ before palatal consonants, ṅ before retroflex consonants, ṁ before alveolar consonants and ṁ before labial consonants.
 ** ā - sign over a vowel indicates a nasalized vowel.
 † The voiced aspirated stops gh, jh, dh, dh and bh are generally articulated as kh, ch, ṯh, ṯh and ph with a voiceless aspirate, respectively, in the word initial position.
 Note: A single graphemic consonant like ੜ is phonetically pronounced as ṯh.