

The Impact of Mother Tongue Influence on Non-Native English Speakers: A Study

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Abstract

Language serves as a vital tool for communication, enabling individuals to express ideas, emotions, and thoughts. English, often adopted as a second language, is crucial as a global lingua franca. However, the influence of the mother tongue (MTI) significantly affects non-native speakers' ability to acquire and use English fluently. This paper explores the impact of mother tongue influence on English speaking skills, particularly among students, and outlines strategies to mitigate its effects. Mother tongue influence manifests in phonetic, syntactic, and lexical forms. The paper highlights specific examples of pronunciation difficulties encountered by speakers from various linguistic backgrounds, including North and South Indian accents. English has achieved global importance as a trade, travel, and education language. Proficiency in English enhances career opportunities and social mobility, making it imperative for students to overcome the challenges posed by MTI. Many students lack confidence in communicating in English, often reverting to their mother tongue due to fear of making mistakes. This hesitation impedes fluency and limits their ability to participate in academic and professional discussions.

The paper emphasizes the need for students to focus on pronunciation and practice extensively to overcome MTI. Effective strategies include listening to fluent English speakers, watching English news and movies, and engaging in conversations with proficient speakers. By immersing themselves in the language, students can gradually replace native phonetic patterns with standard English pronunciations. Moreover, adopting a mindset that prioritizes English thinking over translation from the mother tongue can significantly improve fluency. Addressing MTI in the educational context requires a structured approach. Schools should implement dedicated spoken English programs, emphasizing phonetic training and real-time feedback. The use of digital language labs, where students can listen to and practice with native-like pronunciations, has proven effective in reducing

MTI. Repetitive drills and targeted pronunciation exercises help learners internalize correct speech patterns. Additionally, introducing English as a medium of communication at an early age enhances the likelihood of developing a neutral accent.

Keywords: Mother Tongue Influence, English Language, Pronunciation Challenges, Practice, Second Language, Communication, Techniques

INTRODUCTION

Language is a means of communicating ideas, thoughts, messages, and desires through sounds for psychological and physiological survival. English serves as a second language, while the mother tongue serves as the primary language. Though it is not our mother tongue, it has become a lingua franca. However, the aim of teaching English as a second language is not to imitate native speakers or to develop British or American accents. The primary aim of this article is to discuss the impact and influence of the mother tongue in speaking English amongst the student community and discuss strategies as to how one can overcome the hindrances encountered by non-native speakers of English (Bray, M (2003))

As we begin to speak in English, the influence of the mother tongue is found in the sounds that we utter. Therefore, there is mother tongue influence (MTI) that can be found in every non-native speaker. This can be mitigated by listening to those fluent in the second language, practicing to speak yourself, and correcting mistakes. You will slowly learn to replace the sounds of your mother tongue with the original sounds of English. An example is the “z” sound, which is a common end to words in English but is not often found at the beginning of words. (Bray, M, & Kwo, O (2013))

English is considered, without a doubt, the actual universal language. It is the world's second-largest native language, the official language in 70 countries, and English-speaking countries are responsible for about 40% of the world's total GNP. English is very important in this modern world. Apart from our mother tongue, we need a common language that allows us to communicate with other parts of the world. English is the common language which is known to most of the people in the world. It is very important to have good English because effective communication can reach people better. The English words used should be simple so that they can reach the masses easily as well as be easily understood by everyone. Nowadays, English is being taught to children at the primary level, and students are strictly expected to speak in English when they are on college premises. Communicating in English has a big role to play in

everyday life. English is used in banks, railway stations, bus stations, airways, the educational sector, the medical sector, the private sector, etc. English is also used as a trade language with other countries. Many students fly abroad for educational purposes and in search of jobs. If the person chooses English as the mode of communication, they will be able to manage their communication with the local people.

Students are prime learners of English because if they want to build up a good career, they should have good English-speaking skills and the confidence to face people in interviews. Mother tongue can have the ability to disrupt the smoothness of communication. Students with a lack of confidence tend to use their mother tongue instead of proper English. (Bray, M (2003))

Many students from different native languages cannot pronounce words correctly. Some of them include words like “leisure”, “pleasure”, “seizure”, “rapport”, “develop”, “college”, “bus”, etc. English is an evolving Language. We can also slowly speak English without the influence of our mother tongue. It cannot be done overnight. For example, North Indians have the accent of pronouncing “Sh” as “Is”. This is called Mother tongue influence. While pronouncing “S” it is as “J”. For example, the word “Position” is pronounced as “Bojision”. If a south Indian and a north Indian suffer from this and are talking about making things “simple”, you might hear it as either “simbl” or “simal”. Or you could listen to “konstrukson” (construction), “bhaat” (what), “aadio” (audio), and brekphast (breakfast). These are the few symptoms of this “disease”. So, beware of “the disease”. In learning a second language, students must concentrate on pronunciation. English has been accepted as the language of travel and trade.

English is the language of commerce and higher learning. It helps the students to incur some social status. So, they have to speak continuously and regularly. Many students feel shy about communicating in English with others. They rarely endeavour to speak because of mother tongue influences. It is always good to think in English, leaving our mother tongue, which is the best way to control the mother tongue's influence. Tone and clarity will also be augmented. If you want to excel in the language of your choice, you must make it a habit to choose it as a target language. We must learn in each given opportunity. Learning the English language doesn't require you to have a high IQ but a high interest in it.

Most L-2 learners subconsciously transfer the language rules of L-1 to L-2, sound system or word order. Thus, heavy mother tongue influence happens because your native language sounds have not

yet been replaced with the second language sounds. The worst part of mother tongue influence (MTI) is that it kills our confidence. You, as a speaker, know you sound wrong and even funny. It makes you self-conscious and requires hard work for a long time to get over. Just as each language has different words, letters and script, so does each have different sounds. Thus, there are some sounds which are found in Hindi but not in English, and some sounds may be found in English but not in Tamil. For example, in the word “Treasure”, the second syllable is a sound not found in Hindi. It is not “Trezar” and it is not “Treshar” — it is the mix of sounds of “z” and “sh”. Thus, for native Hindi speakers with insufficient English-speaking exposure, pronouncing pleasure (or measure or leisure) correctly takes time and practice. Practicing speaking is one of the most fun and rewarding parts of learning English. Once you can speak even a little English, there are loads of ways to improve your skills quickly while having tons of fun.

Ten impactful measures to improve spoken English

Speak in the target language

Be confident and speak as often as possible to as many people as you can. Do not be shy to make mistakes. The more you practice, the better and more confident you will become in your pronunciation and vocabulary. Remember, speaking is a skill like learning a musical instrument or a new sport — the only way you can get good is to do it.

Use technology

A smartphone can be considered a powerful instrument for learning languages. It can be used to record yourself while speaking and then listen back to see how your English sounds to other people. Make the most of all your favourite productivity apps to organise your practice time and make a note of all the new words you learn.

Listen

Listen to news bulletins and songs in English to listen to the pronunciation of words. You can also learn new words and expressions this way. The more you listen, the better you learn. Try copying what you hear to practice your pronunciation and learn which words in a sentence are stressed.

Read out loud

Read something out loud to yourself. You could even find a short story or a movie script and act it out. This is a great way to practice pronunciation because you only need to concentrate on making sure your English sounds great and don't need to worry about sentence structure or grammar.

Learn a new word every day and watch films

Choose a word you would like to work on and practice it in different sentences. Use the word until you have learnt it and keep using it regularly. Watch movies in English and pay attention to new vocabulary and pronunciation. Imitate the actors and have fun with it.

Make friends

Make friends with English speakers or others learning to speak English and compare notes. Talk about things that you have learnt and exchange ideas.

Do interesting activities in English

Take a cooking course in English or join a book club. Anything you enjoy doing, make sure you do it and communicate it in English. Using English to talk about things you enjoy will make practicing a positive experience.

Have a debate

Debate all the topics that interest you with friends in English. Try to use as much vocabulary as you can to get your point across, and listen to the other arguments carefully so you can argue against them effectively.

Use a dictionary

Online dictionaries often have audio examples so you can check your pronunciation, and there are lots of great dictionary apps that you can take everywhere with you on your Smartphone. Make sure not to become too reliant on these tools. Have a go at saying the words first, then check afterwards to see if you were right (Desimone, LM, Smith, T, Baker, D, Ueno, K (2005)).

Measures to overcome mother tongue influence

- Communicating with our associates and peers in English makes others point out the errors.
- Listening to the English channels, principally news, will make us trounce MTI. Pay attention to English news and note down the unfamiliar word or the word which is influencing you. Then try with correct English pronunciation.
- Constant practice by uttering the words/ sentences in front of the mirror will not only enhance our pronunciation but also improve the confidence level of speaking without MTI.
- Reading books can also gradually help us get rid of Mother Tongue Influence and put into practice the use of some tongue-twisters regularly.
- Make a list of frequently used words and ask the one who speaks well to pronounce and

record it and listen leisurely. Recording one's voice can zenith our pronunciation and make to overcome MTI.

- Have spontaneity while speaking; don't use fillers like um, oh, ah, etc.

MOTHER TONGUE INFLUENCE AND ITS IMPACT ON SPOKEN ENGLISH

English is valued highly in Indian society, with a lot of prestige being attached to the language. A lot of time and energy is dedicated to teaching or learning English in Indian schools. Despite this, not much attention is given to enhancing speaking skills in the average Indian classroom. That the learner will pick up the skill from general classroom activities and instructions over some time is a false assumption. As a result, the learners are not able to develop this skill and hence lack confidence while conversing in English. To further this, though the articulation of individual sounds while teaching this language is addressed, teaching pronunciation is not given much importance either. In regular Indian classrooms, the importance of a native-like accent is not given due to stress. One strong reason that could be attributed to this could be that the number of dialects found is so large that it is practically impossible to address all the accents in a classroom. This is a serious challenge in Indian classrooms. The areas of sound relating to spoken English and pronunciation in the Indian context need to be consciously addressed to counter this challenge and to make native-like accents in Indian learners more plausible. The importance of pronunciation in communication cannot be denied. It is as important as grammar and vocabulary. Yet, the evidence of *mother tongue influence* on English is very obvious. This manifests in the form of incorrect pronunciation (Camburn, EM, & Han, SW, 2011).

Pronunciation errors may be due to many issues. Guesswork or vagueness of the correct form of a word or sentence, or a general ineptness of the language could be the reason for mispronunciation. The most common reason is transfer or interference from the mother tongue. Generally, errors made in pronunciation are due to differences in the sound system and spelling symbols between the mother tongue and English. As a regular practice, the teacher is seen as a model for correct speaking in class. The learners are expected to be introduced to the pronunciation of words in English by their teacher during day-to-day interaction. It is when the teacher herself/himself has a coloured pronunciation that the learners are unable to acquire correct skills in spoken English. The pronunciation samples they are exposed to in their classroom environment are inappropriate, the learners are most likely to adopt a similar

pronunciation skill. Added to this is the challenge of the fossilised sound system of the mother tongue of the learners that inhibits the acquisition of the pronunciation and sound system of the second language. It is understood that if the second language is introduced to the learners before puberty, the chances of attaining a native-like pronunciation skill are easier. This challenge can surely be met by using the mother tongue removal tool offered in a good *digital language lab*. *Words Worth English Language Lab* has an inbuilt facility to meet this requirement (Camburn, EM, & Han, SW, 2011).

To help reduce this problem in Indian schools, it is vital that while on one hand spoken English be encouraged and promoted, on the other hand, such sound patterns which are likely to be confused and faltered be identified and drilled. The learners should be able to practise these sound patterns over and over again using a model voice to emulate. It has been realised that such activities, when done in digital language labs, not only help eliminate the mother tongue influence but also hasten the acquisition of the target language. *Digital language labs* equipped with this facility allow learners to listen to the correct pronunciation of a word and check their learning during practice (Choi, N, & Chang, M (2011)).

Identifying Mother Tongue Influence

Every language affects English learners differently, so we can't simply list all the common mistakes; this post would be too long. If you're a complete newcomer to the country you're in, then it can be hard to identify at first. The longer you stay, the more often you'll notice the same mistakes occurring, which is likely a sign that the mother tongue is interfering. Pay attention to mistakes your students make, and when you come across the same ones over and over again, ask somebody who speaks the local language if it might be caused by that language. It's worth doing this because letting students know when they're being influenced by their mother tongue is a good way of stopping it from happening again (D'Agostino, J, 2000).

Equally, if you start learning the local language, you'll find yourself understanding your mother tongue influence a lot more, and will be able to correct it far more easily. This is a bonus of taking the plunge and learning the language. You can also use other people's research. There are plenty of "How [language] affects English learning" articles online, and many books have been written on the subject, too. All you need to do is find one that applies to the language(s) of the country you're

in, and you'll be set. Also, be aware that words have different connections in different languages, or words that have multiple meanings in English might not have the same (or any) alternate meanings in other languages. This means that you should take extra care when presenting new vocabulary, as sometimes there are ambiguities that you wouldn't have thought of (Darling-Hammond, L, & Youngs, P (2002)).

What Kind of Things Are Influenced by Mother Tongue?

As mentioned earlier, different languages affect English learning differently. For some, sentence word order can be a problem. You might hear sentences like "I for breakfast eat toast" or "I tomorrow will go to Japan". This is usually easy to rectify. You just need to remind students of the correct word order and practice, practice, practice. Most errors are fixed by just practicing more. In other languages, pronunciation might be a problem. The classic example is Germans pronouncing "W" as "V" and saying sentences like "Welcome to my home." French people not pronouncing the letter "H" is another well-known mother tongue influence. In many languages, speakers will have a "schwa". This is where they add a sound onto the end of words, such as saying Bird as "Birdda" or "Dogga" instead of Dog. This is usually caused by two things, the first being that they were taught phonics incorrectly or have let it slip. The other cause of a schwa is because their language has very distinct sounds and pronunciations, such as Chinese. When trying to cope with the softer sounds that English can have, it can be difficult. This is also the reason why some people struggle with correctly pronouncing different vowel sounds. We can't do away with mother tongue influence completely. To ease our pain, certain Indian peculiarities of pronunciation have become acceptable, and that's what a neutral Indian accent is. For us Indians, the target should be to reduce our mother tongue influence so much that from a Punjabi/Bhojpuri/Tamil/Marathi or Bengali English speaker, we become an Indian English speaker (Choi, N, & Chang, M (2011)).

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