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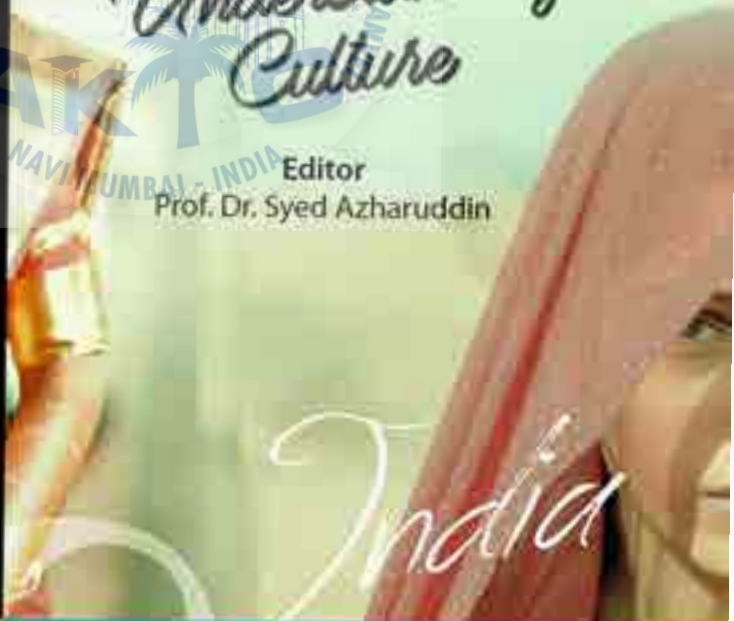
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PROCEEDINGS

2-4 February, 2017
 Aurangabad, INDIA

*Understanding
 Culture*

Editor
 Prof. Dr. Syed Azharuddin



India



**4th INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ASIAN LANGUAGES
AND LITERATURES**

UNDERSTANDING CULTURE

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(ADES-IV)

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**Dr. Babasaheb Ambedkar Marathwada University
Global Art Publications, Aurangabad**

**4th INTERNATIONAL SYMPOSIUM ON ASIAN LANGUAGES AND
LITERATURES: UNDERSTANDING CULTURE**

(ADES-IV)

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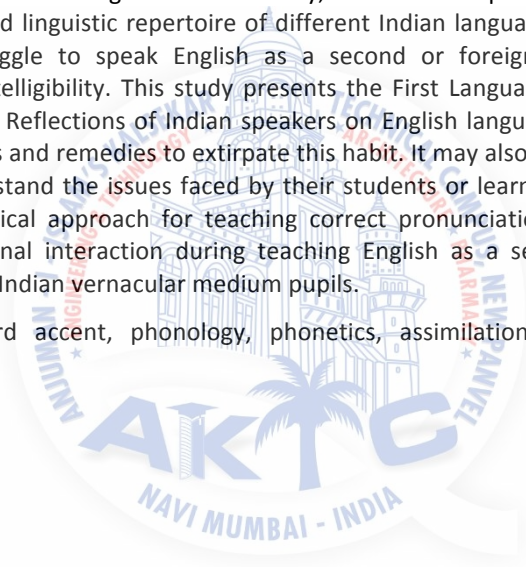
Indigenous suprasegmental reflections of non native Indian speakers of English**Taib Shahid Quraishi**

Mumbai University, Panvel – INDIA

Abstract

Being part of the multilingual Indian society, most Indian speakers achieve the native verbal and linguistic repertoire of different Indian languages. At the same time, they struggle to speak English as a second or foreign language with international intelligibility. This study presents the First Language Influence and Suprasegmental Reflections of Indian speakers on English language. It also deals with the reasons and remedies to extirpate this habit. It may also help the readers to better understand the issues faced by their students or learners of English to adopt an empirical approach for teaching correct pronunciation. This study is based on personal interaction during teaching English as a second or foreign language to the Indian vernacular medium pupils.

Keywords: Word accent, phonology, phonetics, assimilation, pronunciation, intelligibility



Introduction

This paper sheds light on the reasons and suggests remedies of Indigenous Suprasegmental (Prosody) Reflections or First Language Influence of Non-native Indian English Speakers. This will help as an aid for the trainers working in Business Process Outsourcing (BPO) or Call Centre industry (voice based process), trainers and teachers teaching English to the learners with heavy accent of their mother tongue and lay persons who are intrigued to acquaint themselves with the intricacies involved in teaching-learning any foreign/second language. The teachers and trainers must read few basic books on Linguistics cited and appended in this paper. They will have a broader knowledge of sound patterns of English absence of which causes learners to make mistakes. This may encourage the teachers/trainers to embrace different practical approaches to facilitate the learners. With these insights, the teachers/trainers may also be equipped with the prerequisite to be an effective and efficient coach for their trainees. Thus they can play a mentor's role too being a teacher or trainer.

I was taken aback after knowing, from my voice and accent trainer a US native speaker, that they are taught the sounds of English (phonetics and phonology) from third grade onward. Recently in India few curricula like ICSE, IB and CBSE (Primary schools) adopted the similar strategy for their students from the same level. English language teachers having M.A. English Literature/ M.A. Linguistics degree are well versed with these aspects of language. The people who do not have this information may benefit from the cursory information on phonetics and phonology provided in the following few paragraphs. This will help them to better understand the topic dealt in this paper.

This paper deals with the basic background information of Linguistics in the first part. The second part provides the details and reasons of the topic. The third and final part suggests methods to mitigating or eradicating the issues and facilitates the learners with an intelligible way of speaking English being a nonnative Indian English Speaker.

The primary function of the tongue is to taste and to speak. Here we will focus on speaking as we do not have any scope for eating. The human tongue is a tool to articulate different sounds into meaningful utterances. We use language for interaction with others. We achieve different goals through interaction like; to air our views, share knowledge, express feelings get answers etc. What is going to happen if the interaction does not yield any results! This communication breakdown will incur frustration in both the speaker and the listener.

The tongue is influenced by our mother (child's first institute of learning), or mother tongue. Our tongue gets acquainted with the sounds and champions to produce them. But it makes us vulnerable to struggle learning a second or foreign language. We could hardly produce appropriate sounds if it is a foreign language to make it intelligible to the audience. We not only have the influence of our First Language but also we try to speak a foreign language like ours, with our own accent pattern and suprasegmental effects.

Let's take the following humorous example of a forwarded text on *WhatsApp* Smartphone application;

One person boarded a plane. It was his first experience. Excited and amazed, he wanted to rush to his allotted seat. He asked the flight attendant where is *thartywandy*? The attendant could not understand him. She called her senior. Even she could not understand what *thartywandy* means. They thought he is asking about a toilet. They showed him a nearby toilet by opening its door. The passenger was frustrated. He then showed them his boarding pass. The flight attendants smiled after reading the card and ushered him to his seat Thirty One D.

First Part

“Focusing attention on one crucial ingredient in the acquisition of words, we can ask what kind of information a child must learn about the sounds of a word. What is required to be able merely to recognize a word? Well, one thing is that children must recognize pronunciations of a given word by different people as the same word, whether uttered by a woman or a man, a teenager or an octogenarian, a sniffer with a cold, or anyone else. To identify words – to understand language-- it is essential to disregard certain voice characteristics and certain particularities of volume, speed, and pitch.” (Edward Finegan)

Sounds of English

English has twenty-six letters but forty-four sounds. There are twenty-two **vowel** sounds and twenty-four **consonants**. This may be new information for many lay persons and even to less educated native speakers. We tend to take it for granted that language is just a medium to interact with Homo sapiens. This approach makes us complacent and we give up the enthusiasm to know more about our own language. Some people are gifted with more than one language. Few of them really think about it seriously and consider it an asset.

Vowel

Originally, in ancient accounts of Greek and Latin, of a minimal unit of speech that could be produced on its own and could, on its own, form a syllable, e.g. [i:] in Latin could form the one-syllable word i 'go' (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics P. H. Mathews)

1. One of a class of speech sounds in the articulation of which the oral part of the breath channel is not blocked and is not constricted enough to cause audible friction; broadly: the one most prominent sound in a syllable
2. A letter or other symbol representing a vowel —usually used in English of *a, e, i, o, u*, and sometimes *y* (Merriam-Webster)

Consonant

Defined originally as a sound that had to be accompanied by a vowel: hence the term (Latin *consonans* 'sounding with'). (Oxford Concise Dictionary of Linguistics P. H. Mathews)

In phonetic terms, most consonants are sounds in whose production the flow of air is obstructed at some point in the mouth, throat, or larynx, at least sufficiently to cause audible friction: i.e. they are produced with a degree of stricture greater than the open approximation.

one of a class of speech sounds (as $\backslash p \backslash$, $\backslash g \backslash$, $\backslash n \backslash$, $\backslash l \backslash$, $\backslash s \backslash$, $\backslash r \backslash$) characterized by constriction or closure at one or more points in the breath channel; also : a letter representing a consonant —usually used in English of any letter except *a, e, i, o*, and *u* (Merriam-Webster)

There are twenty-six letters but forty-four sounds (Phoneme: the smallest distinct sound unit in a given language: [tip in English realizes three successive phonemes represented in spelling by the letters t, i, and p. P. H. Mathews p.299] in the English language.

English Phonology permits limited combination of vowel and consonants hence setting it somewhat apart from other languages.

Let us see few examples. The vowel phonemes /e,æ / and consonant phonemes /h, j/ do not occur finally: long vowel phonemes and diphthongs do not occur before the phoneme /ŋ/: the types of consonant clusters permitted are subject to certain constraints, some of which are:

- 1- In the initial position, /tʃ, dʒ, ð, z/ do not combine with any consonant

2- /r, j, w/ can occur in clusters only as the final element

3- In the final position, consonant clusters such as /pf, td, lzd, ʒbd/ are not possible.

We see few consonant cluster examples of English language. These clusters, successive sequence of consonant phonemes are not permitted/present in many Indian languages.

E.g. Initial two and three Consonant clusters (CC-, CCC-)

Consonant Cluster	Examples
/sj-/	suicide, sewerage
/st-/	store, steal
/sk-/	school, skiing
/spl-/	splash, spleen, split
/spr-/	spring, sprain, spray
/spj-/	spurious
/str-/	string, strain, street
/skl-/	sclerosis
/skw-/	squash, square, quint

Final two and three-consonant clusters (-CC, -CCC)

/-pt/	stopped, wept
/-pθ/	depth
/-gz/	rouges, bags
/-tʃt/	watched, hatched
/-ft/	laughed, craft
/-pts/	adopts
/-tθs/	twelfths
/-sks/	asks

(J. Sethi P.V. Dhamija p.125)

There are more sequences that give a tough time to the English speakers of other languages.

English vowel sound has different variants, e.g. monophthong, diphthong, and triphthong

Diphthong: A vowel shows quality changes perceptibly in one direction within a single syllable: e.g. [aʊ] in house, whose articulation changes from relatively open to relatively close and back (position of the tongue). Diphthongs are falling or rising according to which phase is more prominent. (P H Mathews p.107)

It is a vowel containing two successive phonemes which form its quality.

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Triphthong A vowel whose quality changes in two successive directions within a single syllable: e.g. [ɪə] in many pronunciations of English tire, where the quality changes from relatively open to relatively close and front, and then from relatively front to central.

(P H Mathews p.414)

It is a vowel which has three successive phonemes either in a word or phrase.

Monophthong A vowel which is not part of diphthong or triphthong: e.g. [a] in cat [cat]

(P H Mathews p.250)

It is a single vowel which does not glide its quality.

A basic knowledge of word stress will help our readers to understand the way of English word pronunciation is established. It has an important role in the English language. The stress is put on a particular vowel in a word which forms a syllable and carries prominence.

A syllable is a combination of at least one vowel and/or one or more than one consonants which either forms a word or part of a word. E.g. the utterance, a tall boy has three syllables. The word computer has three syllables.

Syllable A phonological unit consisting of a vowel or other unit that can be produced in isolation, either alone or accompanied by one or more less sonorous units. E.g. [bʌn] and [tɪŋ] are successive syllables in bunting. The vowel or other central unit forms the nucleus. (P H Mathews p.393)

Stress Phonological feature by which a syllable is heard as more prominent than other. E.g. in below the second syllable is stressed [bɪ'ləʊ], in billow the first ['bɪl.əʊ]. (P H Mathews p.382)

“One branch of **phonology** (the study of the elementary speech sounds) is **Phonetics**, the physical description of the elementary speech sounds in all known languages and the way they are produced by the vocal apparatus. The “phonetic alphabet” is a standardized set of symbols for representing in written form all these speech sounds. Another branch is “phonemics” which deals with **phonemes**: the smallest units of speech sound, which within any one natural language, are functional-- that is, which cannot vary without changing the word of which they take part into a different word. Thus in the English word represented by the spelling “pin, “if we change only the initial speech sound, we get three different words, pin-tin-din; if we change only the medial sound, we get pin-pen-pun; if we change only the final sound, we get pin-pit-pill. From the matrix of such changes, we determine that each of the individual units represented by the

spelling p, t, d, i, e, u, and n, t, l function as differentiation phonemes within the English language. Each language has its own system of phonemes which both overlaps with and diverges from the phonemic system of any other language. The imperfect success that a native speaker of one language, such as German or French, manifests in adapting his habitual pronunciations to the phonemic system of a different language, such as English, is a major feature of what we identify as a “foreign accent.”

Even within a single language, however, a native speaker will vary the pronunciation of a single phonemic unit within different combinations of speech sounds, and will also vary the pronunciation from one utterance to another. Even greater phonetic differences are apparent between two native speakers, especially if they speak the **dialects** of diverse regions or of diverse social groups.” (M.H. Abrams and Geoffrey Galt Harpham)

Part 2

“The subconscious application of phonological rules of your native tongue to a foreign language contributes to a foreign accent and marks you as a non-native speaker.” (Edward Finegan)

Lengthening rule:

English has its own vowel lengthening rules. That governs the word stress too. Indian speakers hardly follow such rules while speaking. It is there in written forms in almost all Indian languages, though. We take few examples of our (Indian scenario) word stress, we tend to stress words based on the importance of a particular word in a specific environment e.g. if someone is not able to understand a particular sentence we tend to lengthen all the words in that sentence or few words of the sentence by violating the writing rules. This is not the case with English. We even find the English speakers follow the rules subconsciously while singing songs.

Most rural Indian speakers cannot discriminate the difference between long and short vowel sounds of English words. They easily replace one by the other which may not affect their language but in English, it can be completely another word by just replacing a short vowel sound by a long one.

E.g. Ship and Sheep, Deep and Dip

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If someone is very busy we pronounce BUSY as BEE-SY may be she/he wants to convey the intensity of business by stretching the vowel sound.

We can understand such utterances but this makes it unintelligible for native speakers.

Spelling and sound effect

The reason of pronouncing each letter of English word stems from the letter and sound correspondence of many indigenous languages. We make those sounds very distinct as the system of our Indian languages permit. Extending this rule with English makes it difficult for the native speakers to understand. This habit leads us in a peculiar nonnative way of sounding the word endings of multisyllabic words.

“The book Teaching Spelling to English Language Learners by Johanna Stirling (lulu.com, 2011) includes an interesting history and explanation of why our orthographic system seems peculiar and has ended up the way it has. Did you know, for instance, that current English is made of up 29% Latin, 29% French, 26% Germanic, 6% Greek and 10% other? I didn’t! And that the main influences over our current orthographic system consist of a mixture of Anglo-Saxon, Old Norse, Latin, Norman French, Printing Press, Dictionaries, Latin, French and Greek (18th century) and borrowings of other languages (Stirling, 32–33: 2011)? Of course, on top of this, as we are all aware, there are 44 sounds, yet only 26 letters, resulting in a complex sound-letter correspondence. As Stirling notes, phonologically speaking, English spelling is only 50% regular. Only 50% regular!!! With all of that in mind, it’s no wonder our students get confused.”

(Emily Curran Modern English Teacher, 25 4, October 2016)

Connected speech

When we use the anthropomorphic machine voice facility for reading text on a computer it sounds mechanical and at times it becomes very difficult to understand long sentences without any pauses. This experience draws our attention towards the difference between human speech and “mechanical speech”.

Rhythm

The notion of rhythm involves some noticeable event happening at regular intervals of time; one can detect the rhythm of a heartbeat, of a flashing light or of a piece of music. It has often been claimed that English speech is rhythmical and that the rhythms are detectable in the regular occurrence of stressed syllables. Of course, it is not suggested that the timing is as regular as a clock: the regularity of occurrence is only relative. The theory that English has **stress-timed rhythm** implies that stressed syllables will tend to occur at relatively regular intervals whether they are separated by unstressed syllables or not; this would not be the case in “mechanical speech.” (Peter Roach)

Assimilation

When two sound segments occur in sequence and some aspect of one segment is taken ‘copied’ by the other, the process is known as assimilation.

If we think of the physical production of speech, we realize that this regular process happens simply because it’s quicker, easier and more efficient for our articulators as they do their job. In isolation, we would typically pronounce [ɪ] and [æ] without any nasal quality at all. However, when we say words like pin and pan in everyday speech, the anticipation of forming the final nasal consonant will make it easier to go into the nasalized articulation in advance and consequently the vowel sounds in these words will be, in more precise transcription, [ɪ̃] and [æ̃]. This is a very regular feature of English speakers’ pronunciation. It is so regular, in fact, that a phonological rule can be stated in the following way: “Any vowel becomes nasal whenever it immediately precedes a nasal.”

This type of assimilation process occurs in a variety of different contexts. By itself, the word can may be pronounced as [kæn], but, when we say I can go, the influence of the following velar [g] will almost certainly make the preceding nasal sound come out as [ŋ] (the velar nasal). The most commonly observed conversational version of the phrase is [ajkæŋgo]. Notice that the vowel in can has also changed to schwa [ə] from the isolated word version [æ]. In many words spoken carefully, the vowel receives stress, but in the course of the ordinary everyday talk, that vowel may no longer receive any stress and naturally reduce to schwa. We may, for example, pronounce and as [ænd] by itself, but in the normal use of the phrase you and me, we usually say [ən], as in [yʌnmi]. (George Yule, p.48-49)

Elision

This phenomenon leads us to Elision. In the last example, the illustration of the normal pronunciation of you and me, the [d] sound of the word and was not included in the transcription. That's because it isn't usually pronounced in this phrase. In the environment of a preceding nasal [n] and following nasal [m], we simply don't devote speech energy to including the stop sound [d]. This isn't laziness, it's efficiency. There is also typically no [d] sound included in the everyday pronunciation of a word like friendship [frɛnʃɪp]. This process of not pronouncing a sound segment that might be present in the deliberately careful pronunciation of a word in isolation is described as elision. In consonant clusters, especially in coda position, /t/ is a common casualty in this process, as in the typical pronunciation [æspɛks] for aspects, or in [hɪməsbɪ] for the phrase he must be. We can, of course, slowly and deliberately pronounce each part of the phrase we asked him, but the process of elision in casual conversation is likely to produce [wɪæstəm]. Vowels also disappear, as in [ɛvri] for every, [ɪntrɪst] for interest, [kæbnət] for cabinet, and [spɔwz] for suppose. (George Yule p.49)

Linking

When we speak, we do not speak in a mechanical way like a machine. We connect words with each other while speaking. This is true with almost all the languages. But when we learn a foreign language, we try to speak each word separately. This is not the way the native speakers speak. Thus we fail to understand them and complain that we do not follow what they speak because of their accent. It is not the accent but the way how they produce any utterance during any formal or informal environment.

Here Linking will rescue us falling prey to such cases. We need to consider the relationship between one sound and the sounds that immediately precede and follow it.

Let's try to understand a technical term used in Linguistics; Juncture the degree of linkage between successive sounds in speech. Thus, in a stock example, the [t] and [r] of nitrate are in close juncture; hence, in many speakers, the [t] is released as an affricate with the onset of voicing delayed. But the [t] and [r] of night-rate, where there is a boundary between two members of a compound, are in open juncture. (P. H. Mathews)

Many ingenious minimal pairs have been invented to show the significance of juncture, a few of which are given below:

'Might rain' 'my train'
 'All that I'm after today' 'all the time after today'
 'Tray lending' 'trail ending'
 'Keep sticking' 'keeps ticking'

Suprasegmental or Prosody:

As we have established different segmental elements of phonology like phonemes, and stress now we will focus on how stress is related to syllables which have linguistic importance. Stress is applied to syllables and is, therefore, part of the suprasegmental phonology.

Supra: Above or beyond, *phonology*: the study of sounds in a particular language or in languages

Intonation: A distinctive pattern of tones over a stretch of speech in principle longer than a word. Thus there is a difference in intonation between e.g. That's 'IT (I'm finished) and That's 'IT? (Is that all?). One can learn the use of intonation of a language in an efficient way like a child acquires the intonation of its first language. An adult learner will take much time to learn the intonation of a second or foreign language. We do not teach a child how to get intonation but still, he/she acquires it through listening and having a conversation with adults. This may support Professor Noam Chomsky's Language Competency notion.

However, describing functions of intonation at length is beyond the scope of this paper, we will have a perfunctory look at intonation, its form, and function.

No English native speaker speaks common one-syllable utterances 'yes' and 'no' with a flat tone; pitch, rise, and fall of voice.

"The readers should know that tone sets apart tone languages from those which are not tone languages. Here we can take an example of Mandarin in which tone changes the meaning of a word. E.g. level tone *mā* means 'mother' rising tone *má* means 'hemp' falling tone *mǎ* means 'scold'." (Edward Finegan)

In this regard, most Indian languages share the similar feature of English language. We change our tone according to our strong emphatic emotions.

Subconsciously, we follow the rules of intonation of our first language while speaking English. This tremendously affects the length and articulation of many English sounds. This converts our utterance into heavily accented English.

Let's follow few examples of intonation.

A: Have you been to France?

B: May reply (rise) / yes, inviting A to continue with what she intended to say about France after confirming that B has been there. If B replies instead (fall) \ yes that means B does not want to continue with the discussion.

Provide Indian languages' examples...

Let us take a Hindi/Urdu example

Kya tum bazaar ja rahe ho?

What you market going are

Are you going to the market?

Every individual speaker of Hindi/Urdu will utter the above sentence with his/her own intonation. There is no certain high or low tone pattern observed. Some may ask the question with a flat tone. Others will have their own word to emphasize on.

This paper does not deal with Indian English verities but few examples will not be extraneous. Almost all Indian speakers of English utter the following sentences considering it accent or intonation. I call it Indian question tag.

It is very huge, isn't it?

They are very clever, isn't it?

You are very strong, isn't it?

Just one way of adding question tag!

Similarly, they add NO, as a stress marker, at the end of an English sentence if they want to accent it. This NO is a literal translation of Hindi/Urdu Na e.g. Tum bazaar gai the Na? (Have you been to the market?). At times this stress marker converts a simple declarative sentence into an interrogative sentence.

You have been to market No?

Are you coming No?

Fortunately I have never witnessed people saying I am coming, Yes No (literal translation of Ha Na).

Such utterances compel the Indian English speakers to influence their English. This is really tough for the native speakers to understand. This habit affects the other aspects of their spoken and written English making it ungrammatical and unintelligible for others.

Remedies

As per my opinion based on experience with my students, a speaker of English should learn or acquire intonation by interacting with people who are efficient

speakers. It is not necessary that they should be native speakers because everyone will not have the opportunity to be in that setup. You do not have to know the intricacies of pronunciation. Once you get the fluency and then you can focus on correcting your sounds. It is very easy and practical too. Even the native speakers do not know the difference between sounds unless trained on them. There is no point in articulating every utterance perfectly like a native accent but at the same time you struggle to frame correct sentences. Once you get the skill to speaking fluently then train yourself to acquire the neutral accent. Nowadays there are many avenues available to hone these skills like YouTube, Ted talks and other free online resources.

A very simple but effective way of improving and removing your First Language Influence is listening to either native speakers or efficient nonnative speakers and repeating it out loud. Follow it thirty minutes daily. This practice for couple of weeks will boost learners' confidence. People will notice and praise the change in their way of speaking. It will not take you more than three months to achieve a native like-accent when you open your mouth to speak any foreign or second language. There is, at the same time, no use of native accent if you are not interacting with the native speakers. Always use neutral accent to interact with the local people when it comes to speak the English language. Nowadays because of the availability of voice and accent training given to the BPO employees, they master the accent and try to impress nonnative speakers with that. In today's world language is used to express not to impress.

There is another effective technique to improve and learn rhythmic style like native speakers:

“Transcription involves listening to an audio recording and writing down every word. The fact that it is done from recordings means the students can replay the sections they have difficulty with as many times as they like, but the delivery is always the same. It can, therefore, provide excellent training in understanding features of connected speech, so long as natural-sounding texts are chosen. Transcription is not a whole-class activity led by the teacher: it is personal. In this way, it lends itself to being done at home because it is important to be able to spend as much time as you need.” (Marianne Pickles, Roger Hunt)

I recommend my students to watch, listen and repeat, the BBC six-minute English episodes on YouTube for British English and sozoexchange.com for American English. They enjoy doing transcription provided on these websites. They understand and improve intonation, accent and vocabulary after a few weeks rigorous training.

Conclusion

It is discouraging to say, but learners of English who are not able to talk regularly with native speakers of English, or who are not able to listen regularly to colloquial English, are not likely to learn English intonation, although they may learn very good pronunciation on the segments and use stress correctly.

A human being is a pleasure-seeking animal. It tastes pleasure in everything e.g. in eating and drinking, putting on fabulous attire, building a pristine home, travelling in luxury vehicles, partying earning fame and occupying key positions. Similarly, it enjoys speaking and listening to sophisticated language.

We can acquire intonation fairly quickly by listening and observing native speeches. It will take much time to learn it through theoretical books on this subject.

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