

## Enchanting English Accent: A Prerequisite skill For Indian Engineering Graduates to be placed in MNCs

M. D. Abdulla<sup>1</sup>, L. Zainab Khanam<sup>2</sup>, Dr. P. Kousar Basha<sup>3</sup>, Dr. S.Mahaboob Basha<sup>4</sup>, Dr. Imran Mahammad<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Assistant Professor in English, Ashoka Women's Engineering College, Kurnool, A.P, India,

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor in English, Ashoka Women's Engineering College, Kurnool, A.P, India,

<sup>3</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, RGM CET, Nandyal, A.P, India

<sup>4</sup>Assistant Professor, Department of English, YSR Engineering college of YV University Proddatur, A.P, India

<sup>5</sup>Associate Professor, Department of English, QIS College of Engineering & Technology, Ongole, Prakasham (D.T), AP

Corresponding Author: Dr. Imran Mahammad

### Abstract:

It is a well-known fact that soft skills are indispensable for Indian engineering graduates to get through in this cut-throat competitive world. Many Indian engineering graduates remain unemployed only because they lack soft skills which are of utmost importance in multi-national companies. One of the essential soft skills is fluent English communication skills which have become absolutely important for all the engineering graduates because of ever-increasing globalization. Fluent communication skills include good vocabulary, command over English grammar and neutral accent acceptable by native and non-native speakers. Improper Pronunciation has become a great barrier during the communication process among people. Engineering graduates are often falsely adjudicated by the employers when they fail to influence them of their skills and abilities due to lack of proper language and pronunciation skills. So as to communicate confidently and grab the attention of the employers it is very important for the engineering graduates to impart beautiful pronunciation skills. This paper focuses on the significance of pronunciation skills and remedial measures for improving the proper accent expected by MNCs.

**Key words:** Indian engineering graduates, English as a lingua Franca, Phonetics, Pronunciation skills, suggestions for better accent.

### Introduction

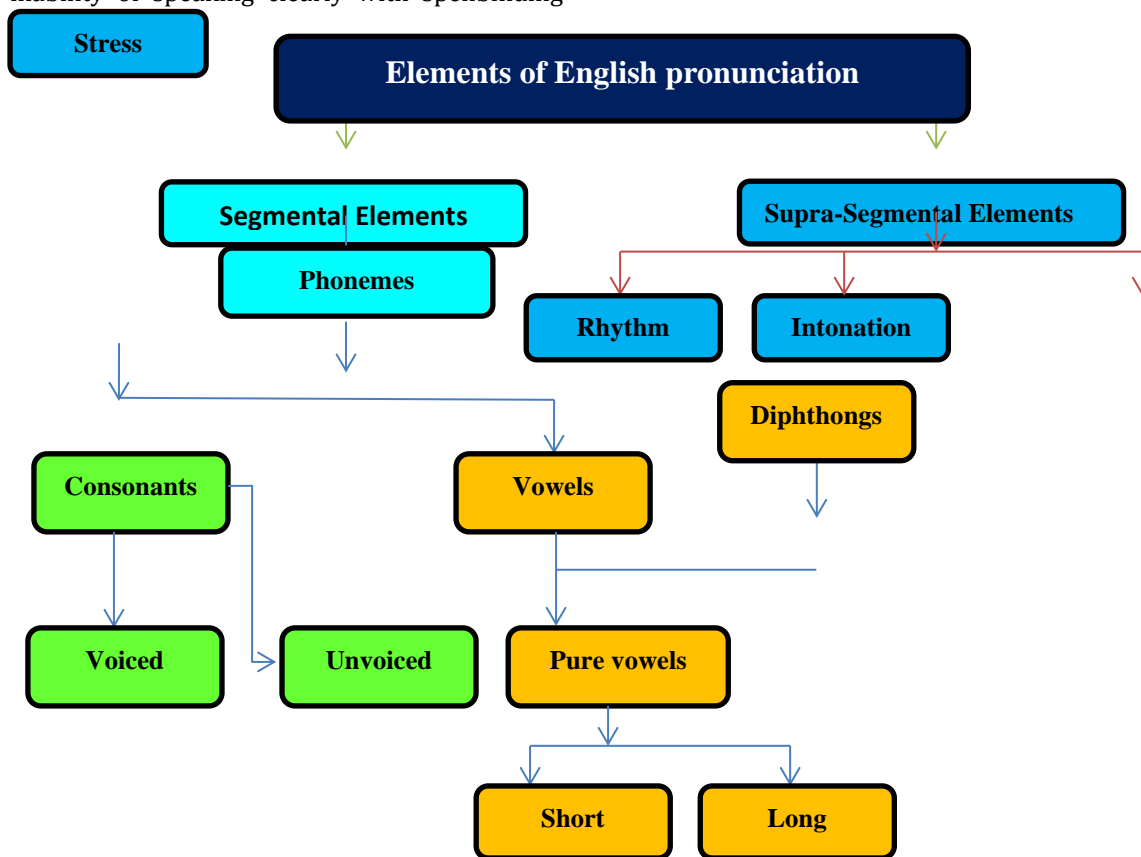
Many Indian engineering graduates have a problem with English pronunciation even after years of learning the same language. The Lack of proper pronunciation skills has become a great problem for them to get a job in MNCs. As English is the second language for Indian students during their academics since elementary level to post-graduation level, it has become mandatory for them to enhance their skills in this language. In order to meet the global standards of education and acquiring worldly knowledge, every educational institution in India has changed its medium of instruction from their regional language to English. When the students are introduced to English as a second language subject at their

school level, much focus is given on only a few aspects like vocabulary, spelling, meaning, grammar, and sentence structure by implementing constant writing and recitation drills. The practice continues up to the intermediate level. Even at graduation level, only the core language skills of English like writing and speaking grammatically correct are given much priority and the sub-skills like pronunciation are always neglected. This scenario continues throughout the graduation level even in professional courses like engineering. Though Indian universities have introduced pronunciation skill-based syllabus in their academic curricula, at this level also teaching and learning of this skill is overlooked by the students and teachers. English is considered only as of the subject by the students

but not as the language or the medium of communication. This inattention towards the English pronunciation skills throughout the professional course has made the engineering graduates poor in their accent. Hence the inability of speaking clearly with spellbinding

pronunciation has become a major drawback for them, which leads them to flunk during the job interview at MNC companies.

**Segmental & supra-segmental elements of phonology in pronunciation:**



Attaining command over the English accent in communication is purely based on the application of segmental and supra-segmental elements of phonology. According to Hebert, Julie, (1993) "Some teachers might feel that accuracy is important and therefore might be focused more on the segmental level; others might feel that the learner's overall intelligibility is more important than the correct articulation of particular phonemes". "With lower levels, the focus should be on improving the learner's intelligibility; that is to say, to focus primarily on the supra-segmental level. If a learner's intelligibility is affected because her volume is too low, then it doesn't matter how she articulates a particular phoneme".

**Consonant sounds:** English has 24 consonant sounds. These sounds help the speaker to speak clearly and intelligibly. Consonant sounds are

**Segmental elements:**

Every spoken language is a combination of sounds that help to form a speech. According to Richards, Platt & Platt, (1992); Ladefoged (2006) the term segment is "any discrete unit that can be identified, either physically or auditory, in the stream of speech. Vowels and consonants are considered as small segments of the speech, which together form a syllable and make the utterance. Therefore, segmental features are related to vowels and consonants".

Non-native speakers of English like Indians, need to concentrate much on the segmental elements of pronunciation to master the accent skills.

easy to learn than vowel sounds. Every consonant sound is produced distinctly. The lip moment, tongue and teeth positions are very

important in the production of consonant sounds.

**Vowel sounds:** There are 20 vowel sounds in English which are divided into 12 monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. The very problem with vowel sounds is, there is no standard way of pronouncing each vowel. One of the alphabets, letter 'a' is pronounced in 6 different ways, which becomes a challenging task for the learners to learn uttering vowel sounds. Articulation of the Vowel sounds makes the speech better or worse. Indian speakers always fail to articulate the vowel sounds that make their pronunciation an unusual one.

#### ***Supra-segmental elements:***

Supra-segmental is often called as the musical elements of speech. According to Neustein and Hemant A. Patil (2012), "Specific features that are superimposed on the utterance of the speech are known as supra-segmental features. Common supra-segmental features are the stress, tone, and duration in the syllable or word for a continuous speech sequence. Sometimes even harmony and nasalization are also included under this category. Supra-segmental or prosodic features are often used in the context of the speech to make it more meaningful and effective. Without supra-segmental features superimposed on the segmental features, a continuous speech can also convey meaning but often loses the effectiveness of the message being conveyed."

#### ***Word stress:***

English is called as a stressed language. Stressed languages are the languages which are spoken with different degree of emphasis on different syllables in a word. There are a few word stress rules in English that need to be learned by non-native speakers of English to make their speech clear and sensual. Improper use of stress during the speech leads to misunderstanding in communication.

#### ***Pitch/Intonation:***

Stress and intonation are closely related words that always go hand in hand. Intonation is nothing but 'how we say' the things rather than 'what we say'. It is known as 'the music of the

language'. The similarity in word stress and intonation is, words have stressed syllables and sentences have regular patterns of stressed words. Every speech is a combination of the rising and fall of the voice. Through the use of this rise and fall of tones, one can convey and understand the meaning and feelings like happiness, anger, excitement, surprise, boredom, interest and gratitude. Intonation expresses the mood of the speaker. There two types of intonation: rising intonation and falling intonation. The falling tone is used in statements, commands, WH-questions, and exclamations. The rising tone is used in making polite requests, yes/no questions and question tags.

#### ***Rhythm:***

English is a rhythmic language; speakers of the English language who maintain good rhythm in their speech always leave a good impression in the minds of the listeners. There are two main components of rhythm: sentence stress and other features of connected speech. Rhythm is formed with the combination of both stressed and unstressed syllables. It is the main characteristic of spoken English, which makes English a stress-timed language. Sentence stress is one of the factors of fluency, which includes both strong forms and weak forms of words. These strong and weak forms help the listeners to distinguish the difference between the meanings of the sentences.

Connected speech is another factor of fluency. When we speak so quickly, we use the number of words continuously without any pauses between the words. This continuous speaking changes the shape of the words. The unstressed words and much use of weak forms of words in a sentence deviates the intention of the speaker. The common feature of connected speech is contracted forms of words like don't, can't, I'm, he'd, couldn't, etc.

#### **Importance of Pronunciation skills for Indian engineering graduates:**

Fluent English communication skills are indispensable for Indian engineering graduates for getting a job and throughout their professional life in multi-national companies.

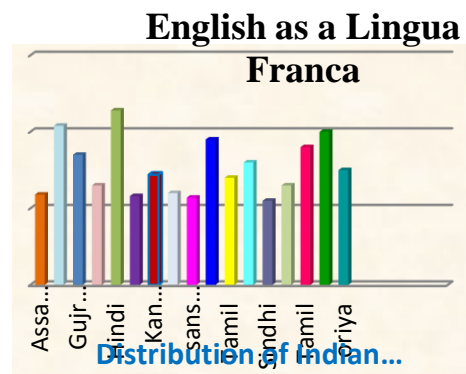
One of the important skills demanded by the MNC companies during the recruitment process is effortless communication skills with a beautiful accent. According to Allen (1960: 35), "pronunciation is one of the elements of the language that has a big contribution to better English speaking. That's very important to learn because, with good pronunciation, our English can more clearly and easily understand. Learning pronunciation is not a simple process of memorizing a number of items that can be mapped on to mother tongue. It is true that pronunciation has an important role in oral communication. If someone speaks inappropriate pronunciation, the listeners cannot understand what the speakers talking about or it may disturb others' understanding". Graduates who communicate their technical knowledge with a good accent always have more chances of creating a positive impression in the minds of recruiters than others during the job interview.

Grammatical mistakes done by the job aspirants during the interaction with the recruiters are unnoticed if their English accent is good. Fraser (2000a) states that "with good pronunciation, a speaker is intelligible despite other errors; with poor pronunciation, understanding a speaker will be very difficult, despite accuracy in other areas" (Fraser, 2000a, p. 7).

Being an employee of an MNC company, every engineering graduate has to communicate with one's colleagues, superiors, top-level management and company's customers and clients only in English. As MNC companies involved in global trading, they may have customers and clients throughout the world. When the Engineering graduates join these companies, they happen to communicate with native speakers of English too. The English accent of Indian employees impacts on communicating the business matters with foreign clients and customers. Due to a lack of proper accent skills, Indian engineering graduates fail in conveying and understanding the business information, which leads to great problems in their professional life and thwarts their professional growth.

### English as a lingua Franca in India:

India is a land of multi-cultures and multilingualism. India has 22 official languages along with English as per the 8th schedule of the Indian constitution. English had been considered as the lingua franca of England. After globalization it has become the common language of communication for world nations. India is one such country that adopted English as a lingua franca after British colonialism in India. English has mainly varieties in the world; those are British English, American English, African English, Australian English, Canadian English, and Indian English. After the independence in 1947, Indian constitution declared English as a second language of official communication. It has become a medium of communication in educational institutions, business, and governance. Along with the local languages, English is highly used and has become a lingua franca of India.



Source:

<http://languageinindia.com/nov2001/1991languages.html>

### Indian English pronunciation:

India is a country, where multi-languages are used for communication region-wise. Indian English pronunciation is the result of various regional languages' impact on English. The main problem with Indian English is, the way Indian people speak and use the sound patten in their mother tongue, the same kind of sound pattern is applied when they speak English. Most of the Indian languages are phonetic in nature with a lot of stress used on every syllable. Indians have adopted English from the British and have been using this language as an official language for communication nationally and internationally,

But RP (Received Pronunciation) is neglected and not followed during the communication.

Bansal (1969) says, "English spoken in India does not differ radically from native English in vocabulary and grammar, though there are some well-known differences. In pronunciation, a large number of people deviate from both British and American English in a number of ways." He further states, "As language is primarily a means of communication, we must ensure that we retain at least those features not only phonological and phonetic but also those related to clear, articulate speech in the absence of which mutual intelligibility is likely to be affected." According to Balasubramanian (1988, p. 131) "anyone using English should learn and acquire the supra-segmental features of native English.

#### **Tips to enhance pronunciation skills:**

##### **1. Listen to Native speakers of English.**

Listening to native speakers of English helps the engineering graduates to understand their speaking style and accent. Among the four language skills (LSRW), listening is an active skill that helps in improving the other four; it equally helps in adopting the accent skills too. Watching English movies, listening to international English news channels and audio conversations help much learning better.

##### **2. Learn the phonetic alphabet.**

There are 44 phonetic alphabets in the English language. Understanding the mechanism of uttering these speech sounds is very important to develop English accent skills. English has 20 vowel sounds whereas Indian languages have only a few. Most of the engineering graduates fail in uttering the pure vowel and diphthong sounds properly.

##### **3. Learn to divide the words into sounds.**

Every word is a combination of syllables like mono, di, tri, polysyllables. For example, the word **director** has three syllables: di-rec-tor. Breaking the words into syllables helps them easier to pronounce. Every syllable must have at

least one vowel sound in it. The syllabic division of the English words will help the learners understand the pronunciation clearly.

#### **4. Concentrate on the word stress.**

Word stress is an important part of speech. Every English word has its own stress or intonation. For example, the word "behind" has two syllables (be and hind), but only the second syllable is stressed. Improper word stress used may lead to a misunderstanding during the communication. As the engineering graduates communicate with the native speakers of English during their professional life it may create a bad impression sometimes even leads to miscommunication too.

- Native speakers of English depend on word stress to process information about what they hear and use it to identify words during communication.
- Word stress affects the utterance of vowels in English words.
- Appropriate use of word stress helps the learners build confidence in their communication.
- Miscommunication between Indian professionals and native speakers of English can be the result of improper word stress patterns used.
- Knowing word stress rules will help the students to pronounce new words that they come across.
- Syllabic division of word and application of stress in a word beautifies the accents of the learners.

#### **5. Understand the intonation and sentence stress.**

All the words in a sentence are pronounced in the same way. Generally, words like nouns and verbs are stressed in a sentence.

'Where's the 'book I 'gave you?

'Where's the 'English 'book I 'gave you?

Where's the 'English 'book I 'gave you  
'yesterday?

The unstressed words in the above sentences like "the", "you", "i" and "and", don't carry as much "weight" as the stressed words, very less stress is applied on these words.

Intonation is the fluctuation in a voice used during the speech. One must be aware of the purpose of using rising tone, falling tone and falling rising tone. As these tones are used for different purposes and in different situations, inappropriate use of tone may lead to misunderstanding in communication.

### **6. Learn to identify spelling patterns.**

It is very important to know the spelling pattern of the English language to learn the pronunciation of the word. As most of the words in English are derived from other languages like French, German, and Latin, etc., it is very difficult for non-native speakers of English to understand the pronunciation of the words. The main problem with the English language is, there is no correspondence between the spelling of the English words and their pronunciation. Moreover, language learners are always confused with the spelling and pronunciation of homophones, homonyms, and homographs.

For example, the words which end with the suffix "tion" is pronounced as "shun", while "sion" is pronounced "zhun". There are different ways to pronounce a particular spelling pattern in English, but it definitely helps the learners to know what the variations are. For example, the words which end with the suffix "ough" are pronounced in different ways like "uff" as in "tough" and "enough", as in "ought" and "bought".

### **7. Use pronunciation apps, podcasts, and videos:**

There are numbers of audio and video sources available online on pronunciation skills. One such source is '*the English language club*', which provides videos of different sounds and their pronunciation with a number of examples. '*Rachel's English*' has very useful videos of everyday conversations. The millennial learners may use various applications available on play store like

- a. Pronunroid IPA Pronunciation
- b. Forvo Pronunciation.
- c. Learn English Sounds Right.
- d. Sound Pronunciation App.
- e. English Pronunciation by Yobimi Group.
- f. Elsa Speak: English Accent Coach.
- g. English Pronunciation App by Kephem.
- h. Say it: English Pronunciation.

Podcasts are another source of pronunciation skills; '*Pronunciation*' has around 200 audio files that help the learners understand the usage of stress and pitch.

### **8. Practice speaking with a friend:**

As there is a saying 'Practice makes a man perfect', it definitely helps the learners when they practice speaking with each other. This pronunciation practice can be done either in person or with online communities like '*InterPals*' and '*Language exchange*'. Practice with a friend helps the learners to express themselves freely without any hesitation and gives the chance of getting feedback.

### **9. Recording one's own voice:**

One of the important and easy ways of learning pronunciation skills is recording one's own speaking English. It looks strange and uncomfortable in the beginning but it's the best and quick way of mastering pronunciation. A few reasons why learners need to record themselves are:

- It helps the learners to know what they sound like when they speak English.
- Learners use sounds from their mother tongue when they start speaking English. When they record and listen to their own voice, they will understand whether they are following the accent or not.
- It is very powerful to listen to their own recorded voice and identify their mistakes in pronunciation than to have someone to tell give them feedback.
- Self-evaluation helps a lot in realizing the impact of mother tongue on their voice and controls it better.

### Strategies to record oneself:

- Get a video or the recording of any native speaker of English, listen to it carefully and repeat it and record it.
- Practice uttering the sounds that you hear.
- Practice reading the pronunciation of English words and record them.
- Continue recording your voice until you find it good.

### 10. Don't rush while speaking:

While learning pronunciation, learners tend to speak too fast that leads them to mispronounce the words completely. Sometimes they mix up the words due to fast speaking. If they speak too slowly, it looks unnatural. They have practice speaking at a moderate speed so that they can make their voices clear and beautiful.

### Conclusion:

To conclude, excelling in pronunciation skills is one of the crucial factors that Indian engineering graduates have to concentrate on. As it is a well-known fact that one can create the best impression in the minds of the employers with one's spellbinding accent during the job interview, it is to be considered by every Indian engineering graduate as an important sub-skill of effective communication while learning the English language. During the English language learning, one must concentrate much on phonetic elements like speech sounds, stress, intonation, and rhythm. Once they understand the functions of these elements, it will help them to master their pronunciation skills.

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ABDULLA MD is working as an Assistant Professor in English, Department of Humanities & Sciences, Ashoka Women's Engineering College, Kurnool. He has more than 15 publications in International and National Journals. He has presented 18 research papers in international and national conferences. He is a dedicated and passionate engineering educator with good linguistic proficiency and communicative competence. He has been a part of the teaching fraternity since 2009 guiding graduate and Postgraduate Students in nurturing their English language and

communicative competence. His research interests are English language teaching & literature studies. He has obtained an IUCEE IIECP certificate with Distinction.



L. Zainab Khanam is a highly accomplished Assistant Professor in English at Ashoka Women's Engineering College. Her expertise extends beyond her teaching role, as she is also a distinguished researcher in the field of English literature. With numerous research projects and publications in renowned academic journals, Mrs. Zainab demonstrates her analytical thinking and ability to provide new perspectives to the field. Her commitment to staying updated with the latest advancements in English literature ensures that her students receive the most relevant and current knowledge. Additionally, her active participation in research conferences and symposiums allows her to establish connections and engage in meaningful discussions with fellow scholars. Overall, Mrs. Zainab's research contributions solidify her position as a respected professional, combining teaching excellence with a passion for expanding knowledge in her field.



Dr. P. Kousar Basha is an accomplished English Assistant Professor working in the Department of English, RGM CET, Nandyal, seamlessly weaves a passion for English language and literature with a commitment to academic excellence. He has 16 years of teaching experience, published more than 12 research articles in International and National Journals. He has presented 10 research papers in international and national conferences. With a PhD in ELT from JNTU Ananthapur, brings a wealth of knowledge and a fresh perspective to the classroom. Known for fostering a dynamic learning environment, he engages students with insightful discussions and encourages critical thinking. Driven by a love for language and a

dedication to nurturing the next generation of scholars, he is a valuable asset to both the academic community and the students fortunate enough to be under his guidance.



Dr. SYED MAHABOOB BASHA is working as Assistant Professor ( on Contract) in English Department of Humanities and Sciences in YSR Engineering College of Yogi Vemana University Proddatur, for 13 years. He published 11 journals ( Scopus, National & International). He presented paper presentations, attended in different workshops not only that participated in various webinars also. He started his teaching journey as a lecturer since 2004. He is interested to teach in English Language and Literature, trainup the study well in communication Skills.



#### **Corresponding Author**

Dr. IMRAN MAHAMMAD with his robust 18-year tenure as an Associate Professor of English brings a wealth of experience and passion to the realm of English Language Teaching (ELT). He has published more than 15 research papers in various international journals. His journey in academia has been marked by a commitment to fostering linguistic proficiency and a deep understanding of the intricacies of the English language. Through dynamic and innovative teaching methods, he strives to instil not just grammatical knowledge but also a profound appreciation for the beauty and nuances of language. His academic pursuits extend beyond the classroom, with contributions to research and publications aimed at advancing the field of ELT. Dedicated to creating an engaging and inclusive learning environment, He embraces the evolving landscape of language education with enthusiasm and a dedication to empowering students with the skills they need for effective communication in a globalized world.