

English Pronunciation for Limbu Natives

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Abstract:- This paper tries to answer the question- why is English pronunciation so much of a problem for non-native English learners? It also tries to point out and to account for some reasons of intricacies and suggests some particular strategies for coping with them. It has its pedagogical implications both for higher secondary as well as the beginners of the bachelor level students. With due consideration of the related books and basing on own teaching experience, the paper has come to be in this form.

Keywords:- Pedagogy, Alphabet, Sound, Pronunciation, Irregularity, Correlation.

I. INTRODUCTION

The widespread assumption is that speaking or reading would automatically follow the pronunciation. With this thinking, the children are often taught to speak or read but given no enough practice in pronunciation; it is felt that pronunciation will be picked up. In this regard, Crystal (1997) says “Recent research into pronunciation errors and slip of tongue has begun to show that matters are not so simple” (p. 215). Hence the pronunciation definitely poses much difficulty to every learner of nonnative English like Limbu. It is because the English words are not spelt the way that they are pronounced. In this regard, Law (2009) maintains the view that “English cannot easily have direct correspondence between sounds and letters” (p.45). The complexity is further added just because the English has heavily borrowed vocabulary from different languages of the world. De Boer (1982) states “A study of the language reveals that its vocabulary is a mixture of Anglo-Saxon, Roman, Norman-French and later Latin and Greek” (p.389). Along with extension of British colonial system, the process of borrowing increased far and wide. In this, Law (2009) comments: “words came into English from many other languages and many retained their original versions but changed their pronunciations” (p.45). For such complex historical reasons, English has evolved a system of pronunciation that is notorious. Referring to the speech context by the non native English, Dave et al.(1988) point out as “nothing offends an examiner so much as habitual bad pronunciation”(p.174). They further add that English pronunciation undoubtedly presents serious difficulty to the students who learn English as a foreign language. However, this does not necessarily mean that mastery over pronunciation is almost impossible task and it is obvious fact that there is no hard and fast rule regarding the English pronunciation.

II. OBJECTIVES

The objectives of this article are:

- To trace down the possible causes of difficulty an English learning Limbu finds in English pronunciation,
- Explain the reasons with references and instances and
- Suggest pedagogical implications

III. METHODOLOGY

This paper is dealing with the pronunciation system in English and Limbu languages. In order to find out the similarity and dissimilarity, it is trying to adopt the methodology of contrastive analysis basically in the sound level.

IV. INTERPRETATION AND ANALYSIS

No two languages are exactly the same in terms of sound, word meaning, word sequence in the sentence and so forth. There are certain causes which can cause pronunciation difficulty to the Limbu learner while learning English. The possible causes are presented as follows:

- Disparity in sound system between the two languages i.e. English and Limbu
- Even similar sounds (i.e. /f, v/) are articulated distinctly
- Multiple irregularities in English pronunciation system
- Pronunciation of inflectional ending '-s' of noun plural and third person singular present verb
- Pronunciation of verb past marker inflectional ending '-ed'
- Certain sound (phoneme) representing multiple letters or vice versa
- Change in pronunciation as the change in word class or meaning
- Silent letter/s in different positions i.e initial, middle and final
- Retention of spelling of borrowed vocabulary with change in pronunciation
- Aspirated sounds while occurring /p, t, k/ in the initial positions

V. DISCUSSION

To compare and contrast the sound system between the English and Limbu languages, the sounds of both languages have been presented in the following tables:

	Bilabial	Labiodental	Interdental	Alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
VI. stops	P			t		k	
Vd. stops	B			d		g	
VI.fricatives		f	θ	s	ʃ		h
Vd.fricatives		v	ð	z	ʒ		
VI.affricates					tʃ		
Vd.affricates					dʒ		
Nasals	M			n		ŋ	
Liquides				l	r		
Glides	W				J		

Table 1:- English Consonant Sounds
(Source: Trougott & Pratt 1980)

		Bilabial		Dental		Alveolar		Palatal		Velar		Glottal	
		VI.	Vd.	VI.	Vd.	VI.	Vd.	VI.	Vd.	VI.	Vd.	VI.	Vd.
Stops	Non-asp.	P	(b)	t̪	(d̪)					k	g	ʔ	
	Asp.	P ^h	(b ^h)	t̪ ^h	(d̪ ^h)					(k ^h)	(g ^h)		
Affricates	Non-asp.					t ^s	(d ^z)						
	Asp.					(t ^{sh})							
Fricatives				s									f
Nasals			m		n						ŋ		
Liquids					l		(r)						
Glides			w						j				

Table 2:- Limbu Consonant Sounds
(Source: Tambahang 2013 p. 113)

Note:- The sounds given in the brackets do not occur in the word's initial positions as a result they function as allophonic variants. VI. = voiceless; Vd. = voiced; non asp = non aspirated; asp = aspirated;

From the above given two tables of English and Limbu consonant sound system there are differences in terms of number, articulatory process and distribution.

Limbu has twenty five consonant sounds and English has twenty four. In the same way Limbu has only one dental fricative /s/ and one alveolar affricate /t^s/ whereas English has two alveolar fricatives /s, z/, two palatal fricatives /ʃ, ʒ/ and two palatal affricates /tʃ, dʒ/. Limbu has three more distinct consonant sounds (t̪ (t), k^h (v_ , ʔ - :j/oGq'dvL) and three allophonic sounds (g^h (3_ , t^{sh} (5), d̪^h - w_ than English.

English has one more /ʒ/ (z) and two more 'z^s /ʒ, dʒ, t - 6_ , d - 8_ / than Limbu consonant sounds. The consonant sounds those are more or lacking in comparison to Limbu language can cause significant difficulties to the English learning Limbu.

A. Even Similar Sounds (/f/ and /v/) Articulated Differently

Limbu /p^h (km)/ and /b^h (e)/ are bilabials which are articulated by joining two lips whereas English /f/ and /v/ are labidentals that means they are produced by touching the upper teeth with the lower lip. These sounds cause much difficulty to the Limbu learner to utter accurately because s/he is used to pronouncing /f/ and /v/ by joining

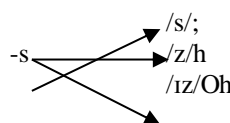
two lips. Again in Limbu, the sound /b^h (e)/ is allophonic variation of sound /p^h (km)/. When these sounds are produced in Limbu way, it can create confusion to the native speakers of English. They happen to hear 'smallpox' instead of 'small fox' and 'berry' instead of 'very'.

B. Multiple Irregularities in English Pronunciation

For the Limbu learners while learning English, it is really a hard job to assume correct pronunciation just by looking at the spelling of the words. This puzzling type of asymetry between spelling and pronunciation technique has pinched the renown linguist Francis Katamba (1995) and he raises the questions, "Should English be spelt as she is spoke? Is the English orthography mad?" (pp. 121-122). He does not see the reciprocal relationship or one to one correspondence between the English spelling and the pronunciation. The irregularities in English pronunciation are discussed as follows:

➤ Noun Plural and Third Person Singular Present Verb Marking Inflectional Ending '-s'

The plural or the third person singular present marker -s can be pronounced in three different ways depending on the final sound of noun or verb.



If the final sound of the noun's singular or the verb's infinitive is /p, t, k, f, θ -k, ʃ, s, km, y/, the ending '-s' is pronounced as /-s/. e.g.

- cap + -s = caps → /kæts/
- bath + -s = baths → /bɑ:θs/
- cook + -s = cooks → /koks/

If the final sound of the noun's singular or the verb's infinitive is **vowel** or /b, d, g, v, ð, m, n, ŋ, l -a, ʒ, u, e, b, d, g, a, n/, the ending '-s' is pronounced as /-z/. e.g.

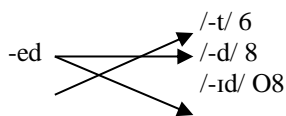
- city + -s = cities → /sɪtɪz/
- rub + -s = rubs → /rʌbz/
- ring + -s = rings → /rɪŋz/

If the final sound of the noun's singular or the verb's infinitive is /s, z, ʃ, ʒ, tʃ, dʒ -, h, z, hM, r, Hh/ the inflectional '-s' is pronounced as /ɪz/. e.g.

- Class + -s = classes → /kla:sɪz/
- Judge + -s = judges → /dʒʌdʒɪz/
- Wash + -s = washes → /wɒsɪz/

➤ *Verb Past Marker Inflectional Ending '-ed'*

The verb past or past participle marker -ed can be pronounced in three different ways depending on the the final sound of the verb infinitive:



If the final sound of the verb's infinitive is /p, k, f, θ, s, ʃ, tʃ -k, s, km, y, ʒ, z, r/, the past form or past participle marker -ed is pronounced as /t/.

- stop + -ed = stopped → /stɒpt/
- watch + -ed = watched → /wɒtʃt/
- book + -ed = booked → /bʊkt/

If the final sound of the verb's infinitive is a **vowel** or /b, g, v, ð, z, ʒ, dʒ, m, n, ŋ, l -a, u, e, b, h, hM, Hh, d, g, a, n/, the past form or past participle marker -ed is pronounced as /d/.e.g.

- judge + -ed = judged → /dʒʌdʒd
- hurry + -ed = hurried → /hʌrɪd/
- live + -ed = lived → /lɪvd/

If the final sound of the verb's infinitive is /t, d -6, ʒ, /, the past form or past participle marker -ed is pronounced as /ɪd/. e.g.

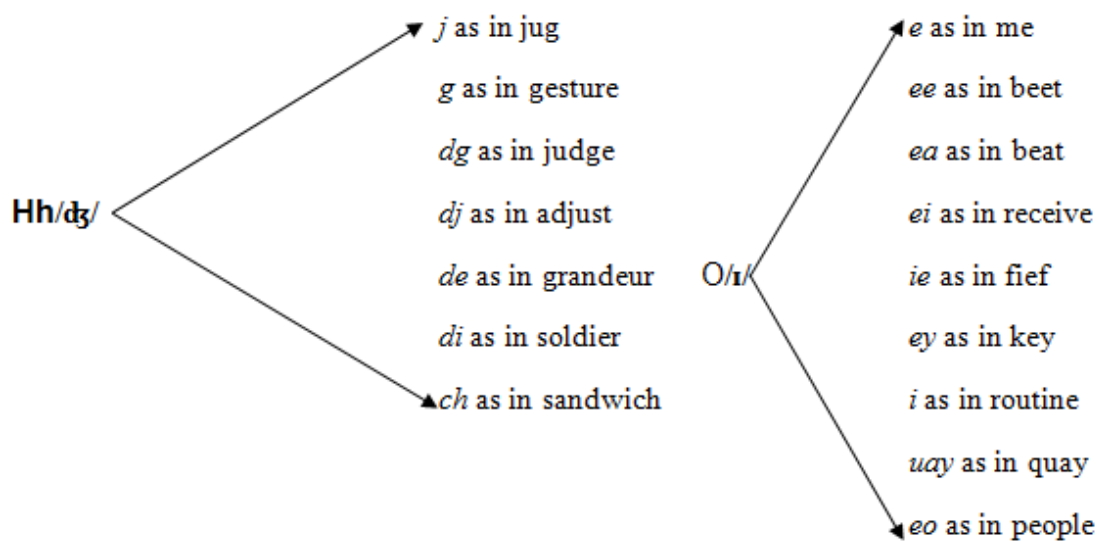
- want + -ed = wanted → /wɒntɪd/
- divide + -ed = divided → /dɪvaɪdɪd/

(Source: Oxford Advance Learners' Dictionary)

➤ *Certain Sound (Phoneme) Representing Multiple Letters (Spelling Patterns) or Vice Versa*

Limbu language has certain alphabets like twenty five consonants (sixteen distinctive and nine allophonic variants), fourteen vowel monophthongs (seven short and seven long ones) and lacking diphthongs. There is one to one correspondence between letters and sounds. As letters are arranged into the words, the pronunciation is also the same as they are articulated. Unlike this feature, English language has very different and difficult process for which Law (2009, p. 45) calls, "correspondence between the sounds and letters of English seems a daunting task." A non-native English most often finds a discouraging matter. Let us see the examples below:

The English sound /dʒ/ can be spelt in eight and sound /t/ in nine different ways:-



In the above example, it has been shown that certain sounds can represent multiple and different letters'

combinations or spellings, now we discuss the letters representing many different sounds. e.g.

banana	/bəʊnɑ:nə/	letter 'a' representing two different sounds as /ə/ and /ɑ:/
tomorrow	/təməʊrəʊ/	letter 'o' representing three different sounds as /ə, ɒ, əʊ/
semester	/sɪməstə(r)/	letter 'e' representing three different sounds as /ɪ, e, ə/
cancer	/kænsə(r)/	letter 'c' representing two sounds as /k/ and /s/

From the above examples, it is clear that a letter can represent different sounds as the position it happens to occur.

Along with the individual letter (alphabet), mainly the initial and final consonant clusters can also cause much difficulty for the nonnative English learner like Limbu. Let us take examples of initial as well as final consonant cluster 'ch' and 'gh' below:

church	/tʃɜ:tʃ/;	character	/kærəktə(r)/;	charade	/ʃərə:d/
stomach	/stʌmək/;	chivalry	/ʃɪvlrɪ/;		
ghée	/gi:/;	ghetto	/getəʊ/ ;	ghost	/gəʊst/;
		tough	/tʌf/;	through	/θru:/
rough	/rʌf/;	laughter	/lɑ:ftə(r)		

The given example above shows that consonant cluster 'ch' can have three different sounds either in the initial or final position as /tʃ, ʃ, k/. Likewise, cluster 'gh' represents only /g/ in the initial position and sound /f/ in the final position.

There are limited letters which can represent multiple sounds. e.g.

Letter	Sound representation	Letter	Sound representation
a	/æ, ə, ɑ, eɪ, ə, e/	c'	/k/, /s/ cancer
e	/ɪ, /e/, /ə/, /ju/semester	g	/g/, /z/, /ʒ/, /dʒ/ gadget
i	/aɪ, /ɪ/, /æ/, /ə/impass /æmpɑ:s/	o	/ɪ, /ə/, /ɒ/, /ɔ/, /ʌ/, /u/, /əʊ/, /w/,
s	/s/, /z/, /ʒ/	t	/ʃ/, /tʃ/, /t/ (neɪʃn, fju:tʃə(r))
u	/ʌ/, /u:/, /ɪ/, /ɜ:/, /e/ [bury /berɪ], /ju/ [use /ju:z]		

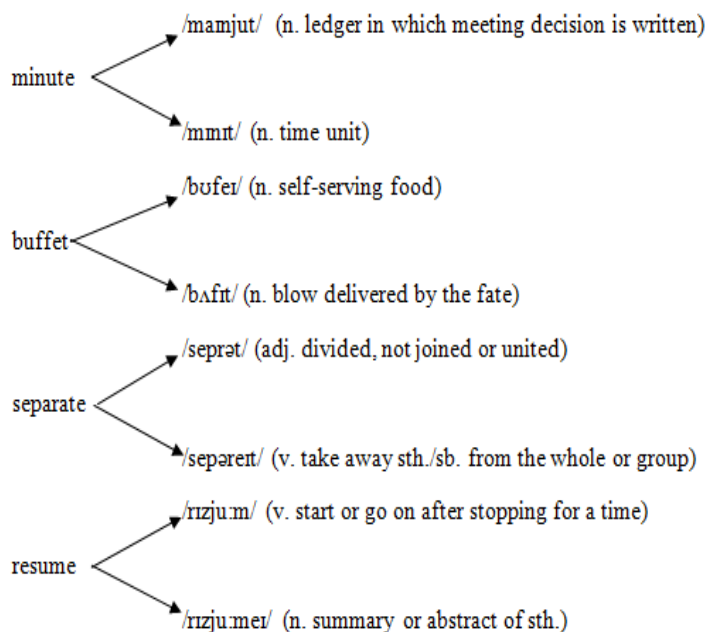
In the given example, it has been shown that out of twenty six English letters (alphabets) only nine letters can represent multiple sounds. The sound representation depends on the position of letter where it is occurring. For example the letter 'o' represents as the sound /ɪ/ in the word 'women' /wɪmɪn/ and the same letter 'o' represents the sound /u:/ in the word 'move' /mu:v/. Again referring to the given above example, there are five vowel and four consonant letters representing multiple sounds that is, a, e, i, o, u (vowel letters) and c, g, s, t (consonant letters).

Unlike the above example or quite contrary to the given example, there are some sounds which have multiple pattern of spellings. For instance, the sound /k/ can be articulated in multiple spelling patterns. e.g.

Sound	Spelling pattern	Example
/k/s	c	cat /kæt/
	cc	success /səkkses/
	ch	cholera /kɒləərə/
	ck	check /tʃek/
	qu	queen /kwi:n/
	x	fox /fɒks/

➤ *Change in Pronunciation as the Change in Word Class or Meaning*

The English language pronunciation style is always baffling because one may find it as chameleon like nature changing its feature at every newer context. The same word may be uttered differently depending on the type of word class or variation in the meaning. Let us some examples below:



In the above examples the first two words i.e. *minute* and *buffet* have two different pronunciations in terms of change in meaning whereas the last two words *separate* and *resume* have two different pronunciations in terms of word class variations.

➤ *Silent Letter/s in Different Positions i.e Initial, Middle and Final*

There are many words which are pronounced dropping some letter/s from the word. Such words most often create confusion on the process of uttering correct pronunciation. So they may stand as the stumbling block on the way to sorting out accurate ones. The silent letters can be found in three different positions i.e. initial, middle and final respectively. Following are the examples showing words with silent letters at the beginning, middle and final as well.

Silent letter in the word initial: e.g. Czar, gnaw, hour, honest, honor, know, knight knife, knot, knuckle, knowledge, pneumonia, psalm, pseudo, psychology, potomaine, tsunami, wrong, write, etc.

Silent letter in the word middle: e.g. carriage, marriage (*a* silent); plumber, doubt, debt (*b* silent); scientist, conscious, acquire, acquaint (*c* silent); judge, hedge, adjust adjourn (*d* silent); campaign, sign, (*g* silent); weight, height, taught (*gh* silent); character, rhyme, ache (*h* silent); could, would, salmon, half, calf, calm, chalk, talk, walk (*l* silent); government, environment (*n* silent); receipt (*p* silent); article, art, arthritis(*r* silent) island, isle (*s* silent); castle, listen, fetch, catch (*t* silent); guard, guarantee (*u* silent); sword, answer, shawl (*w* silent).

Silent letter in the word final: e.g. numb, lamb, tomb, comb, plumb, shown; axe, engine, love, move, joke, make, take, give; autumn, solemn; coup, etc. (Source: Choli and Nagaraj 2004)

➤ *Borrowed Vocabulary Retaining Original Spelling with Change in Pronunciation*

(*letters that were sounded in Anglo-Saxon became silent, e.g. *k* of *know* and *knight* or the final *e* in *stone*, *love*, etc. Crystal 1997, p.216)

With the extension of British colonialism, the English language has borrowed a great deal of words from the colonized native languages. Though the term borrowing refers to three different sources like dialectal, archaic and loan; here, at first the reference to the **loan** words is presented as follows:

dhoti, bhang, veranda, chutney, salad, ghee, etc.	(Hindi)
marmalade	(Portuguese)
ski, fjord	(Norwegian)
junta, macho, siesta	(Spanish)
hamburger, kindergarten, pretzel	(German)
algebra, sofa, zero, cipher, zenith, alcohol, alchemy, sherbet	(Arabic)
yacht, slum, boss,	(Dutch)
graffiti, paparazzi, ghetto, confetti, ballot, spaghetti, soprano, pizza, piano, psychology, pneumonia, phenomenon, catastrophe, drama	(Italian) (Greek)
cacti, fungi, stimuli, formulae, vertebrae	(Latin)
garage, bureau, cuisine, chateau, croissant, restaurant, menu, soup, etc.,	(French)
sauna	(Finland)
cosmonaut, vodka	(Russian)
tsunami, karate, tycoon	(Japanese)
chow-mein, yen, ketchup/catsup	(Chinese)
gong	(Javanese)
robot	(Czech)
lilac	(Persian)
zebra	(Bantu)
goulash	(Hungarian)
kiosk, coffee, yoghurt	(Turkish)
schmaltz	(Yiddish)
window	(Old Icelandic)
llama	(Quechua)
banshee	(ScotsGaelic)
tomato (a central American language and the language of the Aztecs)	(Nahuatl)
sago	(Malay)

(Source: Yule 1995, Crystal 1997, Varshney 1998, Radford et al. 2003, Choli and Nagaraj 2004)

➤ *Aspirated Sounds while Occurring /p, t, k/ in the Initial Positions*

English three plosive (stop) consonants /p,t,k -k,6,s_/ are aspirated sounds when they occur in the initial position

of the words. The words like 'pen' 'ten' 'king' can be pronounced as 'p^hen' 't^hen' 'k^hɪŋ' -k]mg, 7]g, lv^a_. Thus in English [p] and [p^h], [t] and [t^h], [k] and [k^h] are only the allophonic variations since they do not change the meaning. For instance in [kɪŋ] and k^hɪŋ], -ls^a÷lv^a_ there is no difference in meaning. But in the case of Limbu [p] and [p^h], [k] and [k^h] are distinctive sounds because they bring difference in meaning. e.g. [paŋ] and [p^haŋ] denoting 'home' and 'uncle' respectively. In Limbu, the sounds [t/6] and [t^h/7] are lacking.

VI. FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS

While comparing the Limbu and English sound and spelling systems the following facts have been found:

There are six Limbu consonant sounds /k^h, t̄, ʔ, g^h, t^{sh}, ɕ^h (□, t, ʔ, ʒ, 5, □)/ which are not found in English. Likewise, the English consonant sounds /t, d, ʃ, ʒ, ʒ, -6, 8, z, hM, Hh_ / are not found in Limbu.

The English sounds /f, v/ are quite differently pronounced than the Limbu /p^h, b^h/ because in English, these sounds are labiodentals while in Limbu they are bilabials.

The sounds /p, t, k/ are aspirated when they occur in the initial positions and the aspirated sounds are heard as the Limbu sounds /p^h, t^h, k^h /→ /□, □, □/ however they are allophonic variations of the sounds /p, t, k/. They do not change the meaning. But in the Limbu the sounds /p/ and /p^h/; /k/ and /k^h/ (/□, □, □, □/) are contrastive sounds because they bring the change in meaning wherever they may occur. The sounds /t/ and t^h / □, □, / are not found in Limbu.

There is poor correlation between letters and sounds in English. Because of this, Limbu learners of English find it very difficult to sort out the correct pronunciation. The obvious reason is that in Limbu, there is fully correlation or one-to-one correspondence between letters (alphabets) and with that of sounds (phonemes).

The morphophonemic rule of intervocalic and post nasal voicing causes the following change of: /p → b; p^h → b^h; t̄ → d̄; t̄^h → d̄^h; tʃ → dʒ; k → g; k^h → g^h k → a, km → e, t → b, r → h, s → u, v → ʒ ÷ Likewise syllable final dental stop /-t/ or dental nasal /-n/ followed by syllable initial /s-/ results in a [t^{sh} or tʃ^{sh}, 5 ÷ R5]

There is fuzzy rule about the sounds /l/ and /r/ interchangeability. These two allophonic variations occur in complementary distribution in all affixes and parts of speech except a few exceptions. /l/ changes into /r/ while occurring after vowel or glottal stop /ʔ/ and remains /l/ when it occurs after consonant except /ʔ/. In this way, Limbu has only sixteen distinctive consonant sounds and the rest nine are allophonic variants.

VII. PEDAGOGICAL SUGGESTIONS

Contrastive analysis of languages is very significant for the pedagogical point of view. The data drawn from the analysis can be applied to the successful language teaching. Basing on the above findings, the following pedagogical suggestions can be forwarded:

The teacher should teach the sounds first and leave the introduction of the letters (alphabets) to a later stage.

The teacher should raise the awareness of the differences between sounds and spellings in English by pointing to a number of words that illustrate the main differences.

The teacher should note down specific sounds which are known to cause problems to the Limbu learners of English. The teacher should point the sounds representing multiple spelling patterns and as well as letters representing multiple sounds.

The teacher should be well aware of the poor correlations between sounds and letters in English because the common source of pronunciation problems can be the teachers who are the products of non-English speaking schools.

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