Mother Tongue Interferences: A Contrastive Analysis
of English and Malayalam Diphthongs

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Abstract

English has the status of Second Language in India. It is quite natural to have mother tongue   interferences when we learn an additional language. When Malayalis speak English, it gets mixed up with the features of Malayalam. This paper attempts a close analysis of English diphthongs pronounced by Malayalis and replacements and simplifications made by them.

Key words: Mother tongue interferences- English diphthongs- Second Language Acquisition- Replacements

Article

Being an international language, English still occupies an important place in educational system and life of our country. In a multilingual country like India, English continues to be used as a link language. It is used as an official language and the language of instruction in higher institutions of learning. Though there are steps taken to switch over to regional languages in specific sectors where English is used, the importance of English is not lost. Moreover, as a result of IT boom English is given greater importance than ever before. Now a days, English is taught from standard I onwards in Kerala and the revised approach to teaching and learning the language is scientific ,i.e, importance is given to the basic skills : Listening, Speaking, Reading and Writing .

English is learned as a second language (L2) in India. A second language learner encounters certain problems. Learning L2 is an artificial process. It is not the same as the natural process by which a child learns his mother tongue. A child gets opportunities to acquire his mother tongue always, whereas his acquisition is restricted to specific surroundings only in the case of English. A child acquires some of the skills of his mother tongue (L1) before he starts learning English. Naturally, the habit of L1 carry over into the use of English. It is called Mother tongue Interference. Mother tongue is the language in which the learner has the best facilities and if some of the sounds or materials that constitute the speech or writing of the learners are not present in the target language, the possibility of transfer is very high. There are positive and negative transfers. A negative transfer causes impediment to the learning of English ,whereas a positive transfer propels fast learning. The two instances are still cases of interferences in language learning. The interferences occur in phonology, graphology, vocabulary, structure and supra segmental features. This paper attempts to analyse the MT interferences of English speaking Malayalis in the articulation of diphthongs in English.

When Malayalis speak English, it gets mixed up with the habits of Malayalam, which is called Malayalam English or Manglish. Their English becomes not so intelligible to non-native Malayalis . It is because of this communication handicap or poor English job aspirants from Kerala are marginalized and denied of many good chances.

When we compare the vowel sounds of standard Malayalam and RP , we can see that there are twelve vowels in Malayalam and twenty vowels in RP.

The vowel sounds of Malayalam and RP:

	Front pure vowels	Central pure vowels	Back pure vowels	Diphthongs
Malayalam	/ɪ/　/ iː/ / e/　/ eː/	/ʌ/	/ɑː/ / o/ /oː/ /ʊ/　/uː/	/aɪ/ / aʊ/
English	/ɪ/ / iː/ /e/　/æ/	/ʌ/　/ə/ /ɜː/	/ɑː/　/ɒ/　/ɔː/　/ʊ/ /uː/	/aɪ/ /aʊ/ /eɪ/ /əʊ/ /ɔɪ/ /eə/ /ɪə/ /ʊə/

From the table given above, we can see that there are ten pure vowels and two diphthongs in Malayalam, whereas in RP there are twelve pure vowels and eight diphthongs. The diphthongs that are there in the two sound systems are /aɪ/ and / aʊ/. So, error in pronunciation of these sounds does not occur normally. A Malayali English speaker finds it difficult to pronounce the rest of the diphthongs accurately, solely due to the absence of them in Malayalam. In the absence of analogues they tend to use the nearest equivalents or pure vowels in Malayalam. Thus he simplifies his task rather than taking effort to learn and use new sounds. By simplification and replacement they distort accuracy in pronunciation. It will be more clear when we analyse each diphthong in detail.

/ɔɪ/

When /ɔɪ/ occurs in the word final position the first element is lengthened and the second element is replaced by /j/.

Boy /boːj/ for /bɔɪ/

Toy /toːj/ for /tɔɪ/

Enjoy /endʒoːj/ for /indʒɔɪ/

When / ɔɪ/ occurs in the word initial or medial position, the first element is lengthened and /j/ is inserted in between the first and second elements.

Oil /oːjɪl/　for / ɔɪl/

Coil / koːjɪl/ for /kɔɪl/

Noise /noːjɪs/ for /nɔɪz/

Moist /moːjɪst/ for /mɔɪst/

/e ɪ /

/e ɪ / is often replaced by /eː /

Play /pleː / for /pleɪ /

Pray /preː / for /preɪ /

They /ðeː / for / ðeɪ /

Baby /beːbɪ / for /beɪbɪ /

Status /steːtʌs/ for /steɪtəs/

In certain positions the second element is replaced by /j/

Tailor /tejlʌr/ for /teɪlə/

May /mej/ for /meɪ /

Aim /ejm/ for /eɪm/

Age /ejdʒ / for /eɪdʒ /

/ əʊ /

/ əʊ / is replaced by /o:/

No /no:/ for /nəʊ /

So /so:/ for /səʊ /

Open / o:pen/ for / əʊpn/

Total /to:tʌl/ for /təʊtl/

/ ʊə /

In certain positions the second element is replaced by /v/ and /ʌ/

Poor /pʊvʌr/ for /pʊə /

Sure / ʃʊvʌr/ for / ʃʊə /

Here, monosyllabic words are changed into disyllabic words

In certain other positions the second element is replaced by /ʌ/

Cure /kjʊʌr/ for /kjʊə /

Pure /pjʊʌr/ for /pjʊə /

It is also pronounced by lengthening the first element and dropping the second element:

Tour /tu:r/ for /tʊə /

Jury / dʒu:rɪ/ for / dʒʊərɪ/

Rural /ru:rʌl/ for /rʊərəl/

/ ɪə / and / eə /

The second element is replaced by /j/ and /ʌ/. Thus adds one more syllable to the words.

Near /nɪjʌr/ for /nɪə /

Mere /mɪjʌr/ for /mɪə /

Steer /stɪjʌr/ for /stɪə /

Hair /hejʌr/ for /heə /

Chair / tʃejʌr/ for / tʃeə /

Aero plane /ejʌro:plejn/ for / eərəpleɪn/

In certain positions the first element is lengthened and the second element is dropped

Zero /zi:ro/ for /zɪərəʊ /

Hero /hi:ro/ for /hɪərəʊ /

Where /veːr/ for /weə /

There / ðeːr/ for / ðeə /

The analysis that we have done here shows that in the absence of analogues in Malayalam, the English diphthongs are replaced by the nearest equivalents in MT or by the introduction of certain consonants in order to make pronunciation convenient. By doing so, pronunciation becomes unintelligible to non –Malayais .MT interference is natural in the case of Second Language acquisition. Only through constant effort and practice we can overcome such pitfalls in pronunciation. And this has to be done at the initial stages of learning English.

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