
CHAPTER 1

Introduction

1.1 Language

Language is a system of communication through speech, and written language is an attempt to represent the spoken language by visual symbols. In English the correspondence between the written form and the spoken form is not consistently maintained. It is therefore necessary for Indian students to make a systematic study of the English sound system — the *phonetics* of English—and avoid any prejudices arising out of their study of written English.

1.2 The English Language

English is spoken over such a large part of the world that a number of slightly different accents are used by native speakers of the language — in the U.S.A., the U.K., Canada and Australia. English is also spoken by educated people all over the Commonwealth, and a number of 'foreign accents' have therefore come into existence, each showing certain features of the speakers' mother tongue.

1.3 Spoken English in India

English as spoken by educated people in India does not differ radically from native English in grammar and vocabulary, but in pronunciation it is different from both British and American English. Even within India there are a large number of regional varieties, each different from the other in certain ways, and retaining to some extent the phonetic patterns of the Indian language spoken in that particular region. These regional varieties of English are sometimes not even mutually intelligible.¹ In every region, however, there are people who have shaken off the gross features of regional accent and speak a more 'neutral' form of Indian English. It is also true that in every region there are good speakers of English and bad speakers of English, the terms 'good' and 'bad' referring

¹ Bansal, R.K., *The Intelligibility of Indian English*, University of London, Ph.D. Thesis, 1966, Vol. 1, pp. 38-39.

to the degrees of approximation to native English and Standard Indian English and also to qualities of clear, effective and intelligible speech. It would, however, be better to aim at international intelligibility.

1.4 Learning a Foreign Language

Language learning involves the reproduction by the learner of the sounds and patterns used by other human beings around him. In the learning of a second language, however, the habits already acquired in connection with one's first language stand in one's way. Each language has a different system, and in foreign language learning one tends to hear and speak on the basis of the system of one's own language. One has, therefore, to resist the pull of the mother tongue and reorganise one's habits of hearing and speech.