The problems encountered by Tertiary-Level English learners with special emphasis on Segmental and Supra-Segmental Levels.

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	English language learning has become an essential skill in today's globalized world, particularly for students who need to communicate, present, and participate in discussions. Regional learners of English as a second language face specific challenges due to the inherent differences between their native languages and English, compounded by mother tongue interference. The complexities of semantics, phonetics, phonemes, morphology, and syntax must be addressed to improve language proficiency. The paper explores the segmental and supra-segmental difficulties encountered by tertiary-level learners, particularly focusing on the challenges in pronunciation, stress patterns, intonation, and rhythm. By analyzing the obstacles at the segmental and supra-segmental levels, the paper offers insight into how these challenges can be overcome. The research highlights the importance of a comprehensive understanding of the phonological system in mastering English pronunciation, particularly for students whose first language differs significantly from English. Practical strategies are proposed for addressing these challenges, emphasizing the need for language teachers to integrate phonetic understanding and classroom drills. By enhancing students' pronunciation skills, this research aims to improve their overall linguistic proficiency and communication in English. **Keywords:** English Language Learning, Second Language Acquisition, Pronunciation Challenges, Phonetic System, Mother Tongue Interference.

Introduction

English language learning plays an important role in all walks of life, especially so, after globalization. Students often need to communicate, interact, make presentations, participate in group discussions and the like. As regional learners learning English as second language, face specific challenges, not only due to the inherent linguistic differences between the regional language and English but also, because of their mother tongue interference. Semantics, that relates to the meaning of words, phonetics, the science and study of speech sounds, phonemes, the smallest unit of sound that differentiates one sound from the other, morphology, the study about the morphemes of a language and the way in which they are joined together to form words, and syntax, the way words are arranged to frame phrases and sentences, have to be focussed upon, along with the segmental and supra-segmentals.

 Understanding the challenges at all levels is essential for learners to learn the language strategies and improve the overall English language proficiency. The primary objective of the paper is to analyse the problems encountered by learners of English, at the tertiary-level by identifying the specific segmental-level difficulties faced by learners. It also proposes to examine the challenges related to the supra-segmental aspects of English, such as stress, the inherent part of the English language, particularly of the whole articulatory and also the segmental and the supra segmental systems of the English language, intonation, plays an important role which definitely is decisive in linguistic communication in English and rhythm, the regular repeated patterns of

sounds, that pose a problem to learners and explore the impact of the segmental and supra-segmental challenges of non-native learners and address them.

The paper will shed light on the specific challenges that non-native learners of English encounter at the tertiary-level and offer perception into teaching English to speakers whose library language is English. The paper contributes valuable insights to not only language teaching but also to language learning, enhancing the linguistic proficiency of learners whose second language is English.

One of the greatest hurdles for part II students is that learning English as a foreign language is to have thorough mastery over the pronunciation system of the language. English language is totally different from the Dravidian languages or even any other Indian language, for that matter, in the sense that English is an accentuated language where the segmental phonemes and supra-segmental phonemes play a significant and key role in determining the clarity of communication for eg. in Tamil, Telugu, Kannada and Malayalam, *amma* is *amma;* there are a couple of syllables in each of the words, almost flat but the pattern does not need the segmental phonemes and supra-segmental phonemes to differentiate the meaning of one from the other. Let us see how the same linguistic form has two different syntactic or morphological or lexical realizations. Here are a few examples; the word 'conduct' in two different grammatical contexts as a noun and a verb in communication has the difference in meaning and it can be brought out only with the help of phonetic pattern that the English language normally employs.

Let us look into the following words -**con**duct and con-**duct**. If the primary stress falls on the first syllable the morphological item becomes a noun whereas if the primary stress is shifted to the second syllable the lexical item becomes a verb. A few more examples are given below:

The television crew was praised for the -**con**tent (n) they aired last Sunday.
The young professionals were not con-**tented** (v) with their remuneration.
Sulphur-dioxide is a -**com**pound (n) of sulphur and oxygen.
Interest is com-**pound**ed (v) in quarterly basis.
The office -**re**cord(n) has gone missing.
Why don't you re-**cord** (v)(video-graph) the event?
This quality linen is for -**ex**port (n) to Europe.
This company ex-**ports**(v) cotton in large quantities.
What is your -**add**ress(n).
The president ad-**dressed** (v)the public last month.

The -**ex**tract(n) of oranges was too sour.
They ex-**tract** (v)lemon juice with the help of a juicer.
The -**con**test(n) will be held on the fourteenth of next month.
He will con-**test** (v)the parliament election.
There is a price-hike on -**cem**ent (n)from last month.
Ce-**men**t (v)the cracked pot as early as you can.
The -**func**tion (n)is on Monday.
Does that company fun-**ction** (v)now?
He is no doubt a-**re**bel(n).

They re-**bel** (v)against the administration on and off.
This is taking the students even at the tertiary-level away from the normal grammar being taught in the classroom. Parts of speech, word clauses, form clauses, inflection, conjugation, concord, syntax patterns, sentence types, verb patterns,(Hornby)and the like grammar patterns, do not help a student in mastering the felicity of communication, with clarity of understanding. In other words, the entire phonological system of language demands that the target group learning English as a second language must be fully acquainted with the subtle nuances of the sound system and particularly with the segmental and the supra-segmental phonemes.

The following may be listed as some of the major obstacles in internalising a foreign sound pattern into the local phonological system. This paper seeks to present a comprehensive account of certain major areas of difficulty sometimes inherent challenges faced by the foreign learner. The paper for obvious reasons has been divided into two parts; the one dealing with segmental phonemes and the other dealing with the supra-segmental phonemes:
One difficulty of the second language learner with the phonological system is to get over the mother tongue interference. Language learning is facilitated only if the native system and the foreign system are synchronised at the phonetic level.

This is possible only in the case of cognate languages. And if non-cognate languages are involved, it only aggravates the learning process. Very often, instead of accelerating a total internalization of an alien system, possible inevitable differences between the systems help, only to retard and decelerate the learning process. This paper brings to limelight as to how the process of acceleration may be quickened with a sharp phonetic

realization of the segmental systems. For practical purposes, this paper takes into account Tamil, the mother tongue of the author.

The paper would therefore highlight only the major areas of difficulty encountered by students at the college and university levels in bridging the phonetic gap, between the source language and the target language. To start with segmental phonemes are pronounced,

ka as in cap and *ga* as in gap,

pa as in pat and *ba* as in bat,

sure as in measure and *jure* as in conjure and

s as in slope and the *sh* as in shop

Coming to the vowels there again we have

wa as in was and *va* as in vase and diphthongs like

here, there,

culture, nature,

 wherein we find the zeroing in of the final **r** sound.

The initial **r** is articulated as in run, rat ,ring, write, wrong and the like.

Next, we go to the supra-segmentals.

Accenting the last syllable

The ' *shin* ' in

Re-cog-ni-**tion**

Su-per-sti-**tion**

Ren-di-**tion**

Ig-ni-**tion**

Or-ga-ni-za-**tion**

The ' **ic** ' in the last but one syllable, for eg:

e-lec-**tric**-al

cy-**nic**-al

mus-**ic**-al

tech-**nic**-al

math-e-mat-**ic**-al

And, words where ' **l** 'is not articulated, for eg:

ca**l**m

Psa**l**m

pa**l**m

sa**l**mon

a**l**mond

a**l**ms

ba**l**m

Also, where the letter b is silent like:

 Bom**b**

 Com**b**

 lam**b**

There again for words beginning with schwa (the inverted 'e') we either substitute it with 'a' or the inverted 'v' and therefore, the stress falls on the second syllable, for eg.

atmosphere

Proper nouns such as **Ha**rold, **A**rnold, **Ro**nald, **Do**nald etc.

Intonation

One is being very calm and low

Second is Rising Intonation

 Hello Sir, Good Morning↗

Suppose a guest comes home, the right kind of classic British culture would be, "Would you mind a cup of tea, coffee or coco ↗?"

Unless the ears are well-tuned, in a phonetic pattern or stress pattern, one would be in soup exhibiting ignorance.

Remedies and Pattern practice teach of theory, like, Voiced and Voiceless.

The upper teeth ridge, also known as alveolar ridge, plays a crucial role in phonetics, particularly in the production of certain speech sounds.

 ttha as in throw and **tha** as in though,

ta as in ten and *da* as in den,

sh as in shawl and *zsh* as in leisure, treasure etc.

...involving the vocal organs, tongue, teeth, alveolar ridge ,hard palate and the soft palate.

All having said and done, the only thing that matters is the model that the students have. One problem in the Indian situation is that very unfortunately, in most of the rural and semi-urban colleges, teachers themselves are not able to articulate as models for students.

The second difficulty is that in most colleges and universities, the direct method is not applied; although the method is pretty good it should be supplemented by audio-lingual method and communicative methods. The third aspect is language-lab course connection, to change the direction and take them to the right destination, otherwise English would be **englis** and the students would go wrong in stress ,the nasal **na** and the glottal **ga** sounds. This is going to be very challenging to the teachers teaching at the tertiary-level. As it is often quoted, *'The battle of Waterloo was won on the playing-fields of Eton,'* phonetic discipline ought to be cultivated at the primary level or at the kinder-garten level and should not be taken to the tertiary-level.

In order to make the learner aware of the contextual application of various items phatic communion, could be used as linguistic *socializers*. Phatic communion is not only situation-oriented or context-sensitive, but a socio-cultural index as well. If by chance, a second language learner, wrongly uses such utterances in a context that is not appropriate, it will vitiate a whole spectrum of discourse, besides making the second language learner feel out of place like a fish out of water which indirectly would also affect the communicative style. But to be contextually appropriate will also involve various other dimensions of the spoken idiom which may range from interrogation to negation. The teacher can accordingly acquaint the learner with the other aspects of the spoken idioms. It centres, not just around Interrogation and Negation but brings together the attendant forms of expression that go with negation as well. It may therefore be said to be representative slices of all possible basic utterances in English involving the three major modes of expression like, declaration, negation and interrogation, not to forget imperatives.

To make the learners learn through repetition, classroom drill has been proved to be fruitful. Such drills help to reinforce learning by making the learners internalize, the possible expressions of phatic communion for eg.

A: Good morning! Mr. Raja.
B: Good morning to you! And how do you do?
A: I am doing great...and how about you?
B: Fine, thank you...looking forward to meeting you at the concert.

X:When do your exams start?
Y:On the 23rd of this month.
X:Have you prepared well?
Y:Oh yeah! I have covered almost all my lessons.
X:You seem to be working hard. I wish you good luck!

For obvious reasons, the classroom drill mainly intends familiarising the learners with the varying degrees of the expressions applying the structural and integrated approach. Even with isolated examples the structural approach would be of immense help to the second language learners. Not only that, classroom drill is devoted to conversations in a situational context in which the learners supply either the questions or the responses, as required. This would help the learners develop meaningful segments coherently, logically and cogently thus facilitating the learner to carry on a conversation independently. And learners would gain the confidence to produce original questions and answers in any specific context.

A pattern practice primarily intended to ascertain whether the learners are able to supply the missing links which is a clear proof to show that they have obtained sufficient mastery of the language can be expected from the learners. The teacher could give a loose rope to the students so that, they could be self-motivated and only when the situation demands the teacher may adopt corrective measures to find the appropriate responses.

A few examples:
I am not an artist. ----- I?
You are Rani's sister.---------- you?
You were watching a movie. -------- you?
Nandhini dances well.------- he?

Some question patterns expecting responses:
Have you ever visited Switzerland?
Does the bus come this way?
Was it cloudy yesterday?
Is that tall girl your daughter?
Are these mangoes sweet?
Did you notice the change in her behaviour?
And also,
Were you sick this morning?
What is going on there?
Where are the children?
Who is that lady?

When are you leaving for Dubai?
Which is your house?

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