

Standard accent or Intelligibility: Desiderata for International Communication in English as a Foreign Language with special reference to the situation in Pakistan

Prof. Dr. Zafar Iqbal
UMT, Lahore (Pakistan)
drziqbl@gmail.com

Abstract: The main objective of learning a foreign language these days is to acquire communicative competence in such a language in real life situations. Being the most important lingua franca, English is the most sought-after foreign language in the contemporary world. There are, of course, two main options in pursuing this goal in countries like Pakistan. The so-called elite class of the society which always tends to set itself apart from the general masses and in some ways still wants to promote the colonial legacy wants to adopt the standard accent of English in their communications which means either 'general American' or British 'RP'. The general public perforce resorts to 'Pnglish' due to many social constraints and pursues the criteria of mutual intelligibility, as a benchmark in speaking English as a foreign language. The aim of this paper is to highlight the significance of 'Pnglish' as a model to be followed in the country uniformly in its entire system of education.

Key Words : Comfortable Intelligibility, Accent, Pnglish, The Lingua Franca Core, RP

INTRODUCTION

Like so many other countries where the English language was transplanted from Britain in the process of colonization of such countries, Pakistan too inherited it as a colonial legacy but chose to retain it as the most important international language in the world purely for pragmatic reasons, although initially there was a strong reaction to this approach by those who perceived the English language as an undesirable reminder of the British colonial rule in the subcontinent. Thus, over a period a long time the original model of the English language transformed into what is now generally proclaimed as 'Pnglish' or Pakistani variety of English characterized by various indigenous linguistic and sociolinguistic factors which have impinged heavily on the form and function of the prototype model of English. As corollary of all this, we have now two different models of English being pursued in different educational institutions of the country. The so-called English medium institutions claim to follow the original model of English, while the Urdu-medium institutions follow the Pakistani model of English in all their linguistic pursuits. Given the social ethos of Pakistan, because of their British or American accents students qualified from English medium institutions have an edge on students taught in the Urdu-medium institutions. Ideally, the system of education in Pakistan should follow a uniform policy of adopting one and the same model of English as a foreign language to avoid any social divisiveness or discrimination. But in reality, it has not been the case. However, for national considerations we need to revise our attitudes towards the Pakistani model of English presumed by some people to be inferior, and rethink our priorities which of course demands to give equal recognition to the Pakistani model of English at all levels education and in all contexts of social situations. Our financial resources do not permit us to follow the British or American models exclusively in our educational institutions. As far as the 'RP' is concerned, experts have started questioning its validity. (Kannedy 2008; Macaulay 1988; Crystal 1995). It has also been investigated that not more than three percent of the UK population uses 'RP'. 'RP' is a difficult model to acquire holistically for Pakistani learners of English in the kind of social and educational contexts in which they learn the English language. Kenworthy (1987) recommends pursuing what she terms comfortable-intelligibility in all international communications instead of 'RP' or 'GA'. This kind of attitude is already noticeable in the pronunciations books of many writers (Celc-murcia, Briton & Godwin, 1966; Kenworthy, 1987; Tench 1987). According to Walker (2001) there are now more exchanges between non native speakers of English than between non native speakers and native speakers and this situation is not going to change in favour of the native speakers. Some writers (Kenworthy 1987; Jenner 1989) have advocated for the 'lingua franca core' identifying seven areas to be taken care for improving speaker pronunciation and facilitating mutual intelligibility amongst the native and non native speakers of English at international levels.

Conclusion

In the light of the above facts and empirical studies, it is reasonable in typical Pakistani situation to follow a realistic and viable policy in its system of education with particular reference to adopting a model of English which suits its needs nationally as well as internationally. It is essential that we come out of the accent syndrome and concentrate our attention on the benchmark of international intelligibility as suggested by Kenworthy and Jenner. This is expected to help the learners shun their anxiety in communication and improve their communication at international level.

References

- Brinton, D. (1995) Integrating Pronunciation in the Language Syllabus, *Speak Out* 16, IATEFL.
- Celce-Murcia, M, et al. (1996), *Teaching Pronunciation: A Reference for Teachers of English to Speakers of other Languages*. New York: Cambridge University.
- Crystal, D. (1995), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of the English Language*. Cambridge Univ. Press
- Jenner, B. (1989), *Teaching Pronunciation: The Common core*, *Speak Out!* 4, IATEFL
- Jenkins, J. (2000), *The phonology of English as an international Language*. Cambridge Univ. Press
- Kenworthy, J. (1987), *Teaching English Pronunciation*, Longman
- Kennedy, S. (2008), *Intelligibility Comprehensibility Accentedness of L2 Speech: The role of Listener Experience and Semantic Context*
The Canadian Modern Language Review 64, 3
- Macaulay, R. (1988), *RP RIP*, *Applied Linguistics* Volume. 9 No. 2
- Tench, P. (1981), *Pronunciations Skill*. London: McMillan.
- Walker, R (2001) *Pronunciation for International Intelligibility: English Teaching Professna*, Issue 21