
Teaching Phonetics to the Rural Students in Interesting Ways-Result- Driven Approach**Dr.B.Thirukumaran.M.A.,Ph.D.**Associate Professor of English,Smt.N.P.Savithamma Govt College for Women
(A),Chittoor- Andhra Pradesh**Abstract:**

The English language has emerged as the lingua franca of the 21st-century globalized world, and its influence has become pervasive across nations and cultures. In multilingual countries such as India, intelligible pronunciation holds particular significance, both in effective communication and in the process of language acquisition. However, teaching pronunciation and phonetics to first-generation learners of English often poses considerable challenges. For teachers, this endeavor may appear almost Herculean, as students struggle to comprehend and internalize unfamiliar sounds and symbols. Indian students frequently encounter various obstacles. The successful acquisition of English phonology presents significant linguistic and pedagogical difficulties for a large proportion of students in South India, even with extensive exposure to the language in academic, media, and instructional contexts. The region's linguistic tapestry, encompassing diverse Dravidian languages such as Tamil, Telugu, Kannada, and Malayalam, exhibits distinct structural differences from English regarding phonetic inventories, articulatory mechanisms, and prosodic rules. Consequently, students frequently struggle with achieving target-like pronunciation, accurate word stress, appropriate intonation patterns, and reliable phonemic distinction. A detailed understanding of these specific linguistic impediments is crucial for educators and learners alike to develop and implement effective, evidence-based instructional methodologies for phonetics.

A major source of these difficulties is the pronounced phenomenon of L1 transfer, where the sound system rules of the native language are mapped onto the target language, English. The phoneme set of each South Indian language is unique, and many sounds lack direct counterparts in English. For instance, the English dental fricatives, both voiceless θ (as in 'think') and voiced \eth (as in 'this'), are not typically found in these languages. Learners often substitute these sounds with the closest alveolar stops, t and d , resulting in realizations like "tink" or "dis." Similarly, among speakers of languages like Tamil, a consistent differentiation between v and w is

challenging because the native language does not enforce this clear separation, potentially leading to the merging of words like “vine” and “wine” into near-homophones.

Further complexities arise in mastering the suprasegmental or prosody features of English, particularly its characteristic stress and rhythm. South Indian languages predominantly feature a syllable-timed rhythm, meaning that syllables tend to be perceived as equal in length and carry similar emphasis. English, conversely, employs a stress-timed rhythm, where certain syllables are rhythmically prominent, while others are significantly reduced or weakened. This fundamental rhythmic divergence makes it difficult for students to correctly place stress in polysyllabic words or to maintain a fluent, natural speech tempo. Inaccurate stress placement, such as pronouncing *com-MIT-tee* instead of *COM-mit-tee*, can substantially reduce spoken clarity. Additionally, learners find it challenging to utilize weak forms and the ubiquitous schwa vowel $\text{\textit{ə}}$, which are essential features of authentic, connected English speech.

The complex structure of the English vowel system, featuring a wide array of monophthongs (short and long) and diphthongs, poses a considerable obstacle compared to the generally simpler and smaller vowel inventories of many South Indian languages. This often leads to difficulties in acoustically distinguishing minimal vowel pairs, such as the contrast between the short vowel in “ship” and the long vowel in “sheep,” or between “bat” and “but.” Learners often replace unfamiliar English vowels with the closest acoustic equivalent from their native language. For instance, speakers of Telugu and Kannada might use the long $\text{\textit{i}}$ in place of the short $\text{\textit{I}}$, inadvertently pronouncing “beet” when intending “bit.” The relative absence of central vowels like $\text{\textit{ə}}$ and $\text{\textit{ʌ}}$ in their L1 contributes to a more uniform, less nuanced vowel articulation, which can diminish overall speech distinctiveness.

Difficulties also extend to consonant clusters due to phonotactic constraints, particularly when these clusters appear at the beginning or end of words. South Indian languages generally favour a simple Consonant-Vowel (CV) syllable structure and avoid complicated consonant sequences. As a result, learners often engage in vowel epenthesis (vowel insertion) to simplify the sequence, leading to pronunciations such as “eschool” for “school” or “filim” for “film” in certain contexts. Since English frequently uses complex clusters (e.g., $\text{\textit{str}}$, $\text{\textit{spl}}$, $\text{\textit{mp}}$), targeted practice is necessary to prevent misarticulation or the omission of sounds within these groups.

These intrinsic linguistic challenges are frequently compounded by systemic barriers in educational provision. English instruction in many South Indian schools historically prioritizes literacy—reading comprehension and composition—at the expense of developing oral fluency and accurate pronunciation. Consequently, systematic

instruction in phonetic symbols (IPA), articulation drills, and focused listening discrimination exercises are often neglected. Compounding this issue is the limited formal phonetics training available to many English teachers, which can allow non-standard pronunciation habits to become firmly established at early stages, making subsequent correction much harder. Sociolinguistic factors also play a role; interactions often occur among individuals sharing similar regional accents, creating a comfortable yet restricted linguistic environment. Moreover, some learners hesitate to adopt a more standardized pronunciation due to social apprehension (e.g., fear of being perceived as artificial), limiting their willingness to experiment with new phonological forms. While digital tools are becoming more widespread, consistent access to high-quality audio resources, speech labs, and instructors specializing in remedial phonetics remains uneven.

The students from South India confront a complex array of hurdles in acquiring English phonetics, arising from the structural disparities between their native and the target language's sound systems, coupled with insufficient pedagogical emphasis and sociolinguistic limitations. Addressing these persistent issues requires a fundamental shift towards phonology-centric instruction. The necessary path to improved proficiency involves: explicit phonetic awareness (using the IPA for sound-symbol mapping), focused, intentional practice (implementing contrastive analysis, listening tasks, minimal pair drills, and interactive articulation exercises), and the strategic integration of high-quality resources. By adopting these evidence-based, supportive instructional strategies and encouraging learners to actively monitor their own speech against diverse English audio models, the systematic achievement of phonetic mastery and enhanced communication skills is highly attainable. Some of the commonly and the mostly faced problems by the students are

1. **Influence of Mother Tongue:** The native languages of students can greatly affect their English pronunciation, resulting in the misarticulation of certain sounds. For instance, the "th" sound in "this" and "that" poses difficulties for speakers of numerous Indian languages.
2. **Insufficient Exposure:** A lack of exposure to native English speakers and genuine English resources can impede students' capacity to cultivate accurate pronunciation.
3. **Irregular Spelling and Pronunciation:** English words frequently exhibit inconsistent spellings and pronunciations, which can perplex learners.
4. **Syllable Stress:** English vocabulary often features distinct stress patterns, and improper stress can change the meaning of words.

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5. **Vowel Sounds:** The vowel sounds in English can present challenges for non-native speakers, especially the distinctions between short and long vowel sounds (e.g., "bit" versus "beat").
 6. **Consonant Clusters:** Clusters such as "str" in "street" or "spl" in "splash" can be hard to articulate.
 7. **Teaching Approaches:** Conventional teaching methods typically emphasize grammar and reading comprehension, leaving little time for pronunciation practice.
 8. **Limited Opportunities for Practice:** Students may not have sufficient chances to engage in speaking and listening exercises within a nurturing environment.

As an English language instructor in government undergraduate institutions in Andhra Pradesh, I have experimented with several conventional pedagogical methods. These included introducing the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) on the board, providing multiple examples, engaging students in repetition, and employing audio-visual materials to familiarize them with phonetic symbols and sounds. First, I introduced the subject properly with definition as...

Phonetics is the study of the sounds of spoken language. It examines how sounds are produced, transmitted, and perceived.

Pronunciation refers to the way words are spoken, focusing on the sounds, stress, and intonation used when speaking.

In phonetics, pronunciation is often represented using the International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA), which provides a standardized way to transcribe the sounds of spoken languages. For example, the word "phonetics" can be transcribed as /fə'netɪks/ in the IPA.

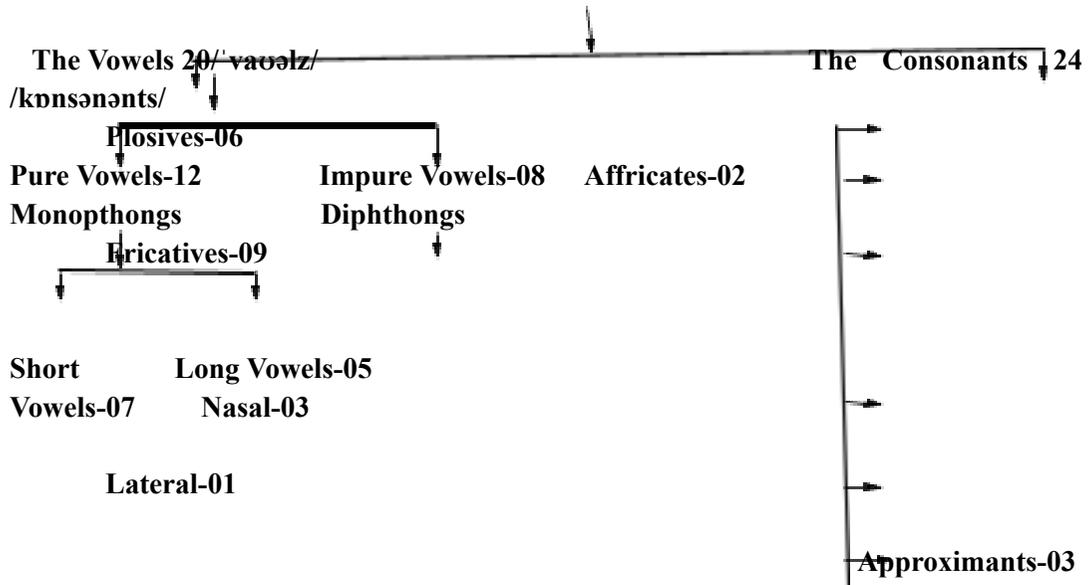
Letters are the written symbols used to represent sounds in a language. **Sounds**, on the other hand, are the actual phonetic representations of those letters when spoken. In English, there are 26 letters, but there are more than 44 distinct sounds (phonemes). They are

Introduction-Phonetics /fə'netɪks/

Definition: Phonetics is a scientific study of pronunciation or Phonetics is the branch of linguistics that deals with the study of the sounds of language and how we produce and perceive speech sounds.

English Alphabet has 26 letters but they have 44 Sounds.

Classification of 44 English Speech Sounds



The Vowel Sound - A speech sound made when the mouth is open and the tongue does not touch the top of the mouth and the teeth.

The Vowel sound is produced when there is no obstruction and there is free flow of air in the mouth.

The Consonant Sound - A speech sound made by completely or partly stopping the air in the mouth.

The Consonant sound is produced when there is some obstruction or the narrowing of the air in the mouth.

Vowels

1. **i**:- meet /mi:t/ see /si:/ bee /bi:/
2. **ɪ** - sit /sɪt/ hit /hɪt/ kit, /kɪt/
3. **e**- bet /bet/ pet /pet/ met, , /met/
4. **æ** - cat /kæt/ bat /bæt/ hat, /hæt/
5. **ɑ:** - car /kɑ:r/ far /fɑ:r/ star /stɑ:r/
6. **ɒ** - hot /hɒt/ pot, /pɒt/ dot /dɒt/
7. **ɔ:** - law /lɔ:/ saw/sɔ:/ raw /rɔ:/
8. **u:** - boot /bu:t/ new, /nu:/ shoe /ʃu:/
9. **ʊ** - book /bʊk/ look, /lʊk/ hook /hʊk/

10. **ʌ** - but /bʌt/ cut /kʌt/ nut /nʌt/

11. **ɜ:** - bird /bɜ:d/ word /wɜ:d/ third /θɜ:d/

12. **ə** - about /əbaʊt/ banana / bə'nɑ:nə/

Diphthongs

1. **/eɪ/** - play/pleɪ/ say /seɪ/ way /weɪ/

2. **/aɪ/** - Price/prɑɪs/ buy /baɪ/ fly /flaɪ/

3. **/ɔɪ/** - boy/bɔɪ/ toy /tɔɪ/ enjoy /ɛn'dʒɔɪ/

4. **/aʊ/** - House /haʊs/ mouse /maʊs/ loud/laʊd/

5. **/əʊ/** - Go /gəʊ No /nəʊ/ Home /həʊm/

6. **/ɪə/** - Here /hɪə/ Near /nɪə/

7. **/eə/** - hair/heə/care/keə/

8. **/ʊə/-tour** /tʊə/ **pure** /pjʊə/

Consonants

1. **/p/** - pat/pæt/ pet, /pet/ pop /pɒp/

2. **/b/** - bat/bæt/ bed /bed/ bob /bɒb/

3. **/t/** - tap /tæp/ tot /tɒt/ pat/pæt/

4. **/d/** - dog/dɒg/ dad /dæd/ did /dɪd/

5. **/k/** - cat/kæt/ kid/kɪd/ kick /kɪk/

6. **/g/** - go/goʊ/ get /get/ dog /dɒg/

7. **/m/** - mat /mæt/ mom /mɒm/ ham /hæm/

8. **/n/** - nut /nʌt/ net /net/ pin /pɪn/

9. **/ŋ/** - sing/sɪŋ/ ring /rɪŋ/ king /kɪŋ/

10. **/f/** - fat/fæt/ fun /fʌn/ off /ɒf/

11. **/v/** - vat /væt/ vet /vet/ love /lʌv/

12. **/θ/** - think/θɪŋk/ thin /θɪn/ both /boʊθ/

13. **/ð/** - this/ðɪs/ that /ðæt/ the /ði:/

14. **/s/** - sat/sæt/ bus /bʌs/ yes /jes/

15. **/z/** - zoo/zu:/ buzz /bʌz/ zip /zɪp/

16. **/ʃ/** - shoe /ʃu:/ fish /fɪʃ/ dish /dɪʃ/

17. **/ʒ/** - measure /'meɪʒər/ pleasure /'pleɪʒər/

18. **/h/** - hat/hæt/ house /haʊs/ hit /hɪt/

19. **/j/** - yes/jes/ you /ju:/ yogurt/'jɒgərət/

20. **/w/** - wet/wet/ win /wɪn/ wow /waʊ/

21. **/r/** - red/red/ rat /ræt/ car /kɑ:r/

22. **/l/** - let/let/ bell /bel/ lamp /læmp/

23. **/tʃ/** - chat/tʃæt/ church /tʃɜ:tʃ/ match /mætʃ/

24. /dʒ/- judge /dʒʌdʒ/ gem /dʒem/ edge /ɛdʒ/

Despite these efforts, I observed limited progress; neither I nor my learners achieved the desired level of confidence and comfort with phonetics.

Through a process of experimentation and reflection, I eventually developed a more effective, context-based approach. Teaching in a women's college, I utilized the students' own names as pedagogical tools to introduce phonemic symbols and their proper pronunciation and it is as follows

Vowels

1. /i:/- Deepa /di:pə/
2. /ɪ/- Indu /ɪndʊ/
3. /e/- Eswari /eɪswɑ:ri/
4. /æ/- Asha /æʃə/
5. /ɑ:/- Aarthi /ɑ:rθi/
6. /ʊ/- Aakarsha /ɑ:kərʃɑ:/
7. /ɔ:/- Oorvasi /ɔ:rʋəsi/
8. /u:/- Uma /u:mə/
9. /ʊ/- Usha /ʊʃə/
10. /ʌ/- Anu /ʌnu/
11. /ɜ:/- Percy /pɜ:si/
12. /ə/- Kavya /kəvjə/

Diphthongs

1. /eɪ/- Jaya- /dʒeɪjə/
2. /aɪ/- Priya - /'praɪə/
3. /ɔɪ/- Joy-/dʒɔɪ/
4. /aʊ/- Kaushalya - /kaʊʃəljə:/
5. /əʊ/- Soumya - /səʊmjə/
6. /ɪə/- Iesha/'ɪʃə/
7. /eə/-Eashwari /'eəʃvəri:/
8. /ʊə/- Ueparna/ʊə'pər.nɑ:/

Consonants

1. /p/- Pavithra /pəvɪθrə/
2. /b/- Bhagyalakshmi /bʰɑ:gjələkʃmi/
3. /t/- Thara /tərə/
4. /d/- Dhivya /dʒɪvjə/
5. /k/- Kalyani /kəljəni/
6. /g/- Gayathri /gəjəθri/

7. /m/ -Madhu /məd^hu/
8. /n/ - Nalini /nəli:ni/
9. /ŋ/ - Sangeeta /səŋgi:tə:/.
10. /f/ - Fathima /fɑ:θimɑ:/
11. /v/ -Vani /vəni/
12. /θ/ -Thulasi /θʊləsi/
13. /ð/ -Dhivya" /ðivjɑ/
14. /s/ - Sowmya /soʊm.jə/
15. /z/ - Zareena - /zə'ri:nə/
16. /ʃ/ - Sharmila /ʃərmilə/
17. /ʒ/ -Shobha/ʒoʊbɑ:/
 18. /h/ -Hema /he:mə/
 19. /j/ Yamini /jə'mini/
 20. /w/ -Waseema /wɑ:'si:mɑ:/
 21. /r/ - Rekha" /'reikɑ:/
 22. /l/ - Lakshmi /ləkʃmi/
 23. /tʃ/ - Chitra /tʃitrɑ:/
 24. /dʒ/ -Jaya /dʒɑ:jɑ:/

Understanding the vital importance of phonetics in mastering English, it is crucial for the Indian government to embed phonetics education within school and higher education programs. To ensure effective delivery, this should be supported by extensive training initiatives for teachers, allowing them to confidently teach phonetics. Additionally, employing advanced technologies, such as pronunciation-enhancing digital tools, can greatly enrich the learning process. Studying examples of phonetics instruction in Indian academic institutions can offer valuable guidance on successful approaches and assist in formulating policies for widespread implementation across the country. By connecting abstract phonetic symbols with familiar personal names, students were able to understand the concept easily and quickly recall the sounds more effectively. This personalized strategy not only enhanced their understanding of phonetics but also fostered enthusiasm and confidence in learning. Ultimately, the integration of learners' cultural and personal identities into instruction proved to be a practical and innovative method for teaching English phonetics in a challenging educational context.

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