Speech Training through Interactive Web: Say it Right: Teaching Prosodic Features

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Abstract--An average learner of English in India acquires speaking skills through exposure to different varieties of English used in their surroundings. Almost all varieties of Spoken English (SE) carry slight to heavy influence of vernacular dialects or languages. Such influences cause varied degrees of unintelligibility among speakers, amidst which global intelligibility becomes a distant dream. Speech, largely resulting from habit formation, is difficult to change. However, learners' proficiency in SE can be enhanced with intervention made using technology. Technology provides effective learning tools in a variety of formats. Those using it will be able to interact with model speech samples. Technology has an inherent quality of inducing interest value in learning programs thereby triggering motivation in learners who then begin to participate proactively in learning. The present research focuses on teaching prosodic features of English to teacher trainees who develop motivation to learn their use due to inclusion of technological tools by participating in a specifically designed course.

Keywords--Case study, Global Intelligibility, India, Speech training, Spoken English.

I BACKGROUND

The English for Specific Purposes (ESP) course is designed for a group of forty-five male and female postgraduate secondary/senior secondary government teacher trainees of English in the age group of twenty-five to fifty-five years from Jammu & Kashmir, Punjab, Haryana, Himachal Pradesh and Union Territory of Chandigarh. The course focuses on correcting wrong habits formed in the use of prosodic features of English in their speech. The trainees' proficiency in the skills of speaking English varies from average to below average. They betray influences of Mother Tongue (MT) and local vernacular language(s) in their SE. The trainees carry the experience of using English spread over 15-35 years and have already internalized the rules of prosodic features, even if erroneously. The motivation level of the trainees on an average is just fair and in only a few cases is it truly high. The main reason for somewhat lower level of motivation has personal reasons to account for, i.e. dislocation, even if temporary, lack of monetary incentives and also the question mark on the applicability of new methods in large classes which rarely have any technology.

II THE ISSUE

As mentioned above, a majority of the trainees transfer connected speech habits of their respective MTs to SE. This phenomenon can be better understood by the theory of Interlanguage. Typically, in such a case, the learner will not have attained the expected level of proficiency in the Target Language (TL), and is found to be retaining habits of the First Language learnt. The learner may also overgeneralize the rules of the TL. If such

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characteristics persist, the learners are said to have reached the stage of fossilization post which ridding themselves of wrong language habits becomes difficult. Though Interlanguage is seen as a language by itself as it shows patterns, views differ. Deviations in TL may be regarded as performance errors which learners can overcome. This study too considers such patterns as performance errors rather than Interlanguage and attempts to provide corrective measures through technology.

The issue of transferring of MT habits is illustrated here by focusing on Hindi used as a MT/local language. Learners impose syllable-timed rhythm, typical of the Hindi language, on SE which follows stress-timed rhythm. Rhythm is a part of prosodic features where trainees tend to falter. Prosody has three main features: stress, rhythm and intonation, their application is realized as power, pace and pitch. While volume is determined by the amount of breath force transmitted by the lungs, pitch is determined by the length and thickness of the vocal cords and their capacity to vibrate. This happens when breath passes from the larynx to the pharynx, the mouth and the nose and the resonance of the voice effected. Prosodic features occupy a vital role in connected speech as they superimpose meaning or provide further meaning value to words and sentences, conveying emotions and attitudes otherwise hidden. Therefore, they are also referred to as supra-segmental features. As Wilson and Wharton put it (Maria G Busa, 2008):

> Prosodic features such as stress and intonation contribute
> an essential part of the linguistic interpretation of an utterance
> as they provide overt and, especially, covert information on the
> message transmitted, and/or the emotions and attitudes
> conveyed with it.

Speech is difficult to analyse as it is subject to variation arising due to regional, social and personal factors which interplay with every language. There can be as many variations, big or small, to utterances as there are speakers. Given its ephemeral nature, speech analysis becomes elusive and this is where the role of new speech technology becomes crucial. Automatic Speech Recognition (ASR) equipment proves to be a great resource as it can first play the speech recorded in native accent or any other model accent, allowing learners to listen to it, emulate it then record it for making comparisons. Their recorded voice has a visual display. This study utilizes such software.

Most learning materials aimed at providing speech practice to learners on prosodic features are rooted in the method of mechanical repetition of de-contextualized texts which demotivates learners. Learners look for meaningful activities which require use of critical thinking skills. Lessons the researcher provided for the trainees were interactive and rooted in meaning to motivate them to learn through class activities as well as self-access techniques. The effort was made to make them proactive learners. New technology was used for the study assuming that in order to acquire prosodic features; the trainees will work on certain activities using technology as a medium. Tools of technology with their inbuilt challenge, interest value, novelty and variety motivated them to seek learning opportunities thereby raising proficiency too. The activities located in contexts expected them to work in groups which achieved better results in learning. The researcher selected model samples in SE to sensitize them to TL, to provide ear training in it, to sharpen a discerning ear and to ensure emulation of model

speech by them. Since most of the equipment or the combination of different ones had not been used by the researcher or the trainees, the study became challenging and therefore more enjoyable.

III INITIAL SOLUTION AND EXPECTED RESPONSE

At the outset, the Prosody Lab in the Institute's thirty-one computer Multimedia Lang Lab was set up by adding new technology like a Speech Analysis System (SPS). The studio's video camera was also moved to the Lang Lab. Speaking is a challenging act and involves cognitive functions, psychomotor skills, and equally importantly, affective factors. Tools of technology should be sensitive to the three collectively. Technology can generate a variety of activities with cognitive appeal, while also making room for the organs of speech to rehearse speech production enthusiastically. SE can get rather tricky to teach in a non-native setting as (i) determining a specific accent of English to serve as model speech is difficult and (ii) there is no equipment available in most institutions to measure the accuracy of speech produced.

For the study the IE accent was selected as the model speech to encourage trainees to converge towards. The samples of speech selected comprised of Pan-Indian variety of English; the kind spoken by English-Educated Metropolitan Indians (EEMI). Parashar (1991) conducted a survey asking three hundred and fifty subjects to evaluate their own variety of English. 76.5 percent of them called it, "the kind of English spoken by educated Indians". It was essential to select a local variety enjoying local prestige. Savingnon 1997 (in World Englishes, 22 (1), 2003) says, "Language is inseparable from individual identity and social behaviour. Language define(s) a community; a community in turn defines the forms and uses of language." Therefore the sample speech the trainees were given was not Standard American English (SAE) or Standard British English (SBE) but IE.

SE samples produced by Siddhartha Mallya, Amitabh Bachchan and P Chidambaram, all well-known personalities, the last one proposed by the trainees, were selected. The three of them are EEMI displaying practically no trace of any distinct vernaculars and their SE manifests a uniform pan-Indian accent. Since they are public figures, there is ample audio-video material available of their public performances of interviews and speeches on websites like /www.youtube.com/. Each audio-video version was transcribed into texts, not exceeding 350-400 words.

A group of 45 teacher trainees were selected as subjects for the study. After some trial and error, much introspection and serious preparation, the researcher began the study with the following assumption:

Not high on motivation the class of 45 teacher trainees with MT

habits of prosodic features in their SE, after consistent exposure

to 350 word audio-video-print speech versions of English-educated metropolitan

Indians' model speech, will be able to use appropriate voice modulation

matching the sample speech(es) as a result of raised motivation level.

The research study was divided into three stages:

(i)   Analysis of Needs

(ii)   Lessons

(iii) Assessment and Evaluation.

(i) Analysis of Needs: A paper-based Survey of Profiling of the trainees was done to prepare a demographic profile of the trainees, carrying information on age, gender, qualifications, languages known and also their

awareness of prosodic features of SE (Ann 1). The survey revealed that even though the trainees were teachers of English, expected to serve as Master Trainers, 65% of them were not aware of prosodic features. For a teacher to use SE correctly and to teach their learners the same, they needed to understand supra-segmental features and the functioning of its sound system.

Two one-hour sessions were devoted to generating Awareness of Prosodic Features among them through viewing of and listening to film star Amitabh Bachchan's *India Poised Anthem* on /www.youtube.com/. Blessed with a baritone voice, a clear speech and rich diction, Bachchan possesses global intelligibility levels in SE. P Chidambaram's speech, delivered at India Today Conclave 2010 /www.youtube.com/, was also used for the trainees' ear training. The trainees voted in favour of Amitabh Bachchan. They highlighted that though the second model used pauses more effectively, Bachchan's delivery was more effortless and therefore more natural.

 Identification of accent distinction among SAE, IE and regional English accents was taken up the next. This activity captivated their attention and involvement further, as does application of all new technologies of direct relevance. The trainees were made to use the demonstration model of Video Voice, a Speech Training System, downloaded for a free trial. Each one listened to the phrase 'United States' spoken in SAE and recorded their version of it. The program generated a visual copy of their voiced text, indicating the difference from the SAE version. They felt educated on the differences between SAE and their varieties of SE and were fascinated by the tool, despite its brief and limited scope. Each one had had to repeat the phrase 3-5 times to get it right. They fumbled not just at the level of pitch variation but also at the level of volume. The visual graphs of the speech of some of the trainees which indicated the differences fascinated them. Until then the researcher had just given repetition practice to the trainees, making them repeat different rhythmic patterns. That activity used to become monotonous quite quickly. On the other hand, technology had started to impress upon them that the purpose of the project was to elicit greater enthusiasm from them. They were convinced about the value of the rules of connected speech as well as the effectiveness of the tool used. Software for Automatic Speech Recognition & instant visual feedback can prove to be a very useful learning tool in speech training.

Lessons: The first session of Lessons used a paper-based worksheet. The Link between Prosodic Features and Emotions and Attitude was established by referring to Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions (Ann 2). The idea behind the activity was to use these features for effective speech. Through Think-Pair-Share activity they completed the worksheet feeling enlightened. Their understanding was reinforced with Jennifer Lebedev's ESL lessons /www.youtube.com/. The trainees expressed the view that a world of resources had suddenly been flung open before them. They asked for extra hours in the Lab and began to practise with Jennifer's ESL Lab, without the teacher. The session had proved to be very rewarding. Lang Lab is believed to inspire learners but learning had never been so structured yet open ended for them. A world of internet resources had been flung open before them and they had become proactive learners of prosodic features.

In the following session using headphones, they watched the Bachchan video several times on individual computers. They mumbled and repeated what Bachchan spoke as they marked pause groups, sentence stress and the pitch signs on the Worksheet on Marking Text (Ann 3). Later they worked in pairs interpreting the Rubrics for Oral Presentation (Ann 4). The rubrics on /rubistar.4teachers.org/2073037/ had been modified by me and the ruberics were guiding them.

In another session, the trainees were divided into 8 groups of 5-6 trainees each. They rehearsed the speech before each other and learnt to assess each other's performance as per the adapted rubrics on a scale of 4-1; 4/ 3/ 2/ 1/, high to low scores, assessing Pace, Pause, Pitch, Power and Preparedness. Soon after, working in groups of six, each one video-recorded their speech while the others scored their performance individually. Next, they discussed each one's score as a group of six and arrived at a consensus. This act of collaborating further helped them fine-tune their understanding of prosodic features. Post this, they were once again asked to watch the film star's video and compare with their own for self-assessment. They observed how self-perception of one's SE could be so different from the group's observation. At least 85% trainees were found to be much kinder to themselves, having raised their scores by more than 25%. The trainees decided to continue working on their own by listening to Bachchan and Jennifer to polish their SE.

Assessment of Intervention: In the last session, through another survey they assessed the 10-Session Technological Intervention on three aspects, on a four point scale of Excellent, Good, Fair and Poor. The aspects pertained to Use of Technology and Motivation, Learning Outcome in Respect to Prosodic Features, and Motivation and Application Value of Learning. The trainees expressed their excitement on having learnt the use of sophisticated technology within 2 weeks. They worked enthusiastically over the following 12 weeks, fascinated not just by learning prosodic features but with technology, too.

IV RESPONSE AND REFLECTION

Responding to what was being done and reflecting over it was an ongoing process. The sessions where the theory of Prosodic Features was discussed with the LCD projector, followed by the trainees viewing the video clip on /www.youtube.com/, /www.youtube.com/ had worked like magic. Due to paucity of time no more than two clips could be played. Software for Automatic Speech Recognition was a great hit among them as they felt they could use it in their schools for accent neutralization for their students. Once trained such students could find employment with sectors where a trained voice is held at a premium. The trainees expressed the desire to obtain rubrics for various skill areas of SE. Technology had taken over, more or less completely. Rubrics from /www.rubistar.org/ had won the challenge hands down. An average teacher never fails to take a note of useful teaching/learning tools. My former trainees used to find our methods and materials alien not applicable in their context, but this group was ready to transplant all technological tools used with them. Technology had transformed them into keen learners.

The trainees responded positively to the preparation demonstrated on video clips, web links, surveys and worksheets, the flow of teacher energy, which 'infected' them positively too. They were full of questions, which needed realigning of the lesson plans and their sequence and also the class organization and the venues.
Timeline has already been discussed (Ann 5 Syllabus and Timeline).

V CHANGES MADE

One of the main tools used, the Video Voice, part of the new speech training devices being a free demonstration model, was very limited in its range. For a proper study and for future training programs its

purchase will be unavoidable. Its capacity to give model speech, help learners practise SE and give instant feedback on accuracy of the learners by providing audio and visual data proved to be a matchless tool. The following tools have also been recommended to widen their choice: /www.praat.com/, /ww.phon.ucl.ac.uk/wasp.htm, /www.kayelemetrics.com/ visi-pitch/.

Another important aspect of the research was the selection of models for IE speech which was very conservative. At least two male and two female voices can be added as exposure to a variety of voices, male and female and from different national level regional/ social dialects, improves the ability to discern different models and converge towards the desirable one. The idea is that exposure to a variety of acceptable alternatives allows a learner to extrapolate the critical parameters of an acceptable sound. "Intonation variation between males and females might be enough in its own right to merit having at least one model speaker from both genders. An ideal might be to have two models from each gender, or four speakers. Of course, this adds immensely to the time needed in materials development, but it can be a long term goal.

All paper-based surveys and worksheets used in the study will be replaced with computer-based or web-based technology. The attempt has already been initiated by creating the following forums on the Internet:

https://sites.google.com/site/pgctekaushik/

    To carry out surveys and use worksheets.

http://www.nicenet.org/class/

    For class administration, course content and discussions.

http://www.google.com/sidewiki/entry/

    To work in consonance with class activities of the Lessons.

http://95pgcteriechd-kaushik.blogspot.com/

    To be used by the trainees to reflect on the research at various stages.

Activities from esl-lab.com/ Randall's ESL Cyber Listening Lab and /www.bbc.co.uk/ can also be used to learn Prosodic Features. For further practice in stress and intonation, the trainees can supplement CDs like *Great Speeches in History read by Rodway*, et al and from Kanter's *Speak like a CEO* which the trainees will find meaningful and challenging. Amitabh *Bachchan joins Riz Khan* 22 March 2010 /http://www.youtube.com/watch/AlJazeeraEnglishcan also be added.

VI CONCLUSION

The most significant observation to be made here is that the trainees, who batch after batch, used to be demotivated about learning new things due to the non/near non-transferability of various approaches became highly motivated to practise new methods and utilize new speech learning technology. Changing speech habits takes a long time. What was notable was that the process had begun. The main achievement collectively was the enthusiasm, the involvement they felt with the topic and the methodology that they practised. They can act as Master Trainers in training teachers for their state governments to provide similar support of technology.

The study observes how the use of technology can raise the motivation level of adult learners, i.e. and help them achieve desirable goals when learning the use of prosodic features. Different websites, digital equipment

and software can be used on a regular basis to teach phonetics and phonology. The web links recommended here can be used widely.

VII   RESOURCES/ REFERENCES

/http//www.youtube.com/Amitabha Bachchan Recites India Poised Anthem/

/http//.www.youtube.com/Simi Garewal India's Most Desirable Sidhartha Mallya/

/http//www.youtube.com/P Chidambaram at india today Conclave/

/http//www.openstarts.units.it/

/http//www.elthillside.com/

/http://www.edfac.unimelb.edu.au/research/

http://www.soton.ac.uk/ml/profiles/jenkins.html)

http://web.tamu.commerce.edu/academics/

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Annexures:

Ann.1: Survey of Profiling

Ann.2: Prosodic Features and Emotions and Attitudes

Ann.3: Worksheet for Marking Text

Ann.4: Rubrics for Oral Presentation

Ann.5: Syllabus

Ann.1: Survey of Profiling

Name: _____ State: _____ Highest Qualification:_____

Answer the following questions:

S. No. _____	Question	Reply _____
1	Had you ever studied Phonetics and Phonology before joining PGCTE Course at RIE? If yes, during which degree course?	
2	What is your Mother Tongue?	
3	Which other languages can you Speak fluently?	
4	What was your medium of instruction in class X?	
5	What was your medium of instruction in class XII?	
6	Have you ever used a tape recorder/ radio or TV to learn pronunciation of English? If yes, say which equipment and for how many months or years.	
7	Use of contractions: Do you use 'can't' for 'cannot', 'haven't for 'have not' when you speak in routine?	
8	Use of Weak Forms: Do you use 'I'll' for 'I will', 'she's' for 'she is'	

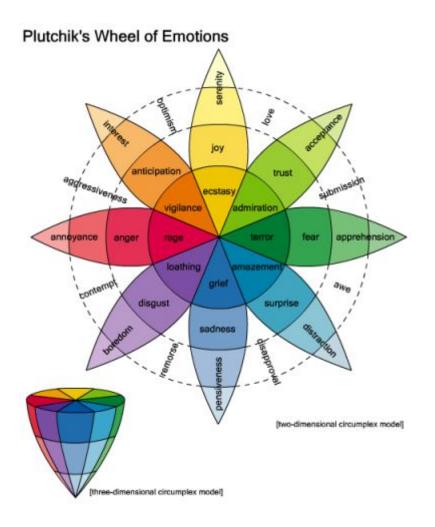|		
	when you speak in routine?	
9	Use of Sentence Stress: Do you put more stress or power on only one or two words in a sentence or do you put the same type of stress on all the words in a sentence?	
10	Do you know what the 'Schwa' Sound is? Do you use it in words like has, at, because, and, are, etc.?	
11	Do we use the same 'Pace' all the time when we speak in different situations or do we change the Pace of speaking all the time?	
12	Do you use different level of 'Volume (Power)' to express different emotions or do you use the same volume all the time?	
13	When you speak, do you find it necessary to 'Pause' after a short sentence or midway in a long sentence?	
14	Do you use 'Pitch' variation, i.e. changing the tone of your voice to express different emotions?	
15	How important is it to have the correct speech habits of English? Why?	

Ann.2: Prosodic Features and Emotions and Attitudes

Given below is the spectrum of human emotions. Robert Plutchik states that in all human beings experience eight emotions to which the ninth one, i.e. 'happiness', as joy is not an appropriate substitute for happiness. Refer to the Chart: Wheels of Emotion. Against each emotion, there are four columns and in each box there are two choices. For each emotion choose any two columns and put a √ mark against one of the two choices in each relevant box. The first one has been done for you.

S. No.	Emotion	Pause…	Pace…	Power…	Pitch… (Tone)
1	Anger	More Fewer	Fast Slow	√ More Less	√ Raise Lower
2	Fear	More Fewer	Fast Slow	More Less	Raise Lower

3	Curiosity Or Interest	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
4	Disgust	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
5	Sadness	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
6	Surprise	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
7	Joy	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
8	Happiness	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower
9	Acceptance	More	Fast	More	Raise
		Fewer	Slow	Less	Lower

Ann.3: Worksheet for Marking Text

Prosodic Features Indian Model Accent of English (Speech by Amitabh Bachchan)

Mark Pause Groups, Sentence Stress and Pitch by regularly listening to the speech. Follow the symbols given and use them.

Pause Group: e.g. /during summers/ students take a vacation/

Sentence Stress: Underline Word(s) e.g. during the summersstudentstake a vacation

Pitch: On top of Word √: e.g. during the √summers students take a vacation

Final worksheet will look like this:/ during the √summers / studentstake a vacation/

there are two India's in this country one India is straining at the leash eager to spring forth and live up to all the adjectives that the world has been recently showering upon us the other India is the leash one India says give me a chance and I'll prove myself the other India says prove yourself first and maybe then you'll have a chance one India lives in the optimism of our hearts the other India lurks in the skepticism of our minds one India wants the other India hopes one India leads the other India follows these conversions are on the rise with each passing day more and more people from the other India are coming over to this side and quietly while the world is not looking a pulsating dynamic new India is emerging an India whose faith in success is far greater than its fear of failure an India that no longer boycotts foreign made goods but buys out the companies that make them instead history they say is a bad motorist it rarely ever signals its intentions when its taking a turn this is that rarely ever moment

history is turning a page for over half a century our nation has sprung stumbled run fallen rolled over got up and dusted herself and cantered sometimes lurched on but now in our sixtieth year as a free nation the ride has brought us at the edge has brought us to the edge of time's precipice and one India a tiny little voice at the back of our head is looking down at the bottom of the ravine and hesitating the other India is looking up at the sky and saying its time to fly

Ann. 4: Rubrics for Oral presentation

CATEGORY	4	3	2	1
Pitch	Pitch was often used and it conveyed emotions appropriately.	Pitch was often used but the emotion it conveyed sometimes did not fit the content.	Pitch was rarely used OR the emotion it conveyed often did not fit the content.	Pitch was not used to convey emotion.
Pauses	Pauses were effectively used 2 or more times to improve meaning and/or dramatic impact.	Pauses were effectively used once to improve meaning and/or dramatic impact.	Pauses were intentionally used but were not effective in improving meaning or dramatic impact.	Pauses were not intentionally used.
Preparedness	Student is completely prepared and has obviously rehearsed.	Student seems pretty prepared but might have needed a couple more rehearsals.	The student is somewhat prepared, but it is clear that rehearsal was lacking.	Student does not seem at all prepared to present.
Volume	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members throughout the presentation.	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 90% of the time.	Volume is loud enough to be heard by all audience members at least 80% of the time.	Volume often too soft to be heard by all audience members.

Ann 5: Syllabus

Session 1: Survey: Demographic Profiling of Learners: age, gender, qualifications, languages
          known   Awareness and Application of Prosodic Features

Session 2: Effective Speech in Indian Accent: Pan Indian Model Speech
        Amitabh Bachchan's Speech: India Poised Anthem /www.youtube.com/
        P Chidambaram's Speech: India Today Conclave 2010 /www.youtube.com/
        Siddhartha Mallya Simi selects India's Most Desirable /www.youtube.com/

Session 3: Accent Distinction: SAE, Indian English, Regional English Accent (s)
        /www.videovoice.com/ Video Voice (Speech Training System)

Session 4: Emotions and Attitude Robert Plutchik's Wheel of Emotions
        (& Attitude): Prosodic Features for Effective Speech

Session 5: Understanding Prosodic Features by Using Web Resources:
            English with Jennifer Lebedev /www.youtube.com/Jennifer ESL

Session 6: Marking the Script for Reading/ Speaking

Session 7: Oral Presentation Rubrics: Listening /Rubistar.4teachers.org/2073037/

Session 8: Speech Presentation on Video: Assessment in Collaboration

Session 9: Analyzing Oral Presentations

Session 10: Survey: Building Motivation through Use of Technology, Learning
        Outcomes of Prosodic Features, Application Value and Collaborative
        Learning
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