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### **Consonants in R.P. and G.I.E.: A Study in Contrastive Phonology**

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#### **Abstract**

The present paper aims at the contrastive study of consonants in Received Pronunciation (R.P., the standard variety of English spoken by educated people in Britain) and General Indian English (G.I.E). The hypothesis is that it will help the Indian users of English to improve their pronunciation and try to overcome the errors made unconsciously or because of mother tongue (L1) interference.

**Keywords-** Articulation, Consonants, Soft-palate, Hard-palate, Voiced, Voiceless, Tip of the tongue

#### **Introduction**

##### **1. Consonants in R.P.**

There are twenty-four consonantal phonemes in R.P. English which is articulated with an air-stream from the lungs moving outwards. According to Balasubramaniam (1981)<sup>1</sup>, “A consonant is usually described, taking into account whether it is voiceless or voiced, its place of articulation and its manner of articulation” (P-26). Among the twenty- four English consonants, six are plosives, two are affricates, nine are fricatives, three are nasals, one is lateral and three are approximants or semi-vowels which are classified below with the help of the consonants chart:

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Place of Articulation→ Manner of Articulation ↓	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
<b>Plosive</b>	p, b			t, d				k, g	
<b>Affricate</b>						tʃ, dʒ			
<b>Fricative</b>		f, v	θ, ð	s, z		ʃ, ʒ			h
<b>Nasal</b>	M			n				ŋ	
<b>Lateral</b>				l					
<b>Semi Vowel or Approximants</b>	W				r		j		

**R.P. consonant chart**

## 1.1 Plosives: /p, b, t, d, k, g/

### a. Bilabial plosives: /p,b/

/p, b/ are bilabial plosives during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the complete closure is made by the upper and the lower lips. /p/ is voiceless and /b/ is voiced.

For example: Put /pʊt/, /bed/ /bed/ etc.

### b. Alveolar plosives: / t, d/

/t, d/ are alveolar plosives during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and makes a complete closure by the tip of the tongue and side teeth. /t/ is voiceless and /d/ is voiced.

For example: ten /ten/, doom /du:m/etc.

### c. Velar plosives: /k,g/

/k, g/ are velar plosives in the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and a complete closure is made by the back of the tongue against the soft-palate. /k/ is voiceless and / g / is voiced.

For example: cool/ku:l/, green/gri:n /etc.

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### **1.2 Affricates: / tʃ, dʒ /**

/ tʃ, dʒ /are palato- alveolar affricates in the production of which the soft-palate is raised for the first element and a closure is made by the tip of the tongue, blade and side rims against the alveolar ridge and side teeth. At the same time, the front of the tongue is raised in the direction of the hard-palate for the fricative release. / tʃ / is voiceless and / dʒ / is voiced.

For example: cheat /tʃi:t/, june /dʒu:n/ etc.

### **1.3 Fricatives: / f, v, θ, ð, s, z, ʃ, ʒ, h /**

#### **a. Labio-dental fricatives: /f, v/**

/f, v/, According to Gimson (1980)<sup>2</sup>, /f,v/ are labio-dental fricatives during the articulation of which the soft- palate is raised and the lower lip makes a light contact with the edge of the upper teeth. /f/ is voiceless and /v/ is voiced.

For example: fool /fu:l/, very /verɪ/ etc.

#### **b. Dental fricatives: /θ, ð/**

/θ, ð/ are dental fricatives in the production of which the soft-palate is raised and the tip of the tongue and side rims make a light contact with the edge and inner surface of the upper incisors, and a firmer contact with upper teeth./θ/ is voiceless and /ð/ is voiced.

For example: thief / θi:f/, them /ðem/ etc.

#### **c. Alveolar fricatives: /s, z/**

/s, z/ are alveolar fricatives during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tip and blade of the tongue make a light contact with the alveolar ridge, and the side rims makes a close contact with upper side teeth. The air-stream escapes through the narrow gap with audible friction. /s/ is voiceless and /z/ is voiced.

For example: see /si:/, zeal /zi:l/ etc.

#### **d. Palato-alveolar fricatives: / ʃ, ʒ /**

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/ʃ, ʒ/ are palato-alveolar fricatives in the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tongue tip and blade make a light contact with the alveolar ridge while at the same time the front of the tongue is raised in the direction of the hard-palate and the side rims put in contact with upper side teeth. /ʃ/ is voiceless and /ʒ/ is voiced.

For example: shame /ʃem/, treasure /tri:ʒə/ etc.

### **e. Glottal fricative: /h/**

/h/ is a glottal fricative during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the air from the lungs passes through a narrow glottis with audible friction. /h/ is voiced.

For example: heat /hi:t/, hen/hen/ etc.

## **1.4 Nasals: /m, n, ŋ/**

### **a. Bilabial nasal: /m/**

/m/ is a bilabial nasal in the articulation of which the soft-palate is lowered and the upper and lower lips make a complete closure with each other. /m/ is voiced.

For example: moon/mu:n/, meak/mi:k/ etc.

### **b. Alveolar nasal: /n/**

/n/ is an alveolar nasal in the articulation of which the soft-palate is lowered and the tongue tip and side rims make a firm contact against the alveolar ridge and upper side teeth. /n/ is voiced.

For example: neat /ni:t/, nest /nest/ etc.

### **c. Velar nasal: /ŋ/**

/ŋ/ is a velar nasal during the articulation of which the soft-palate is lowered and the back of the tongue makes a firm contact with the soft-palate and forms the voiced closure. /ŋ/ is voiced.

For example: ring /rɪŋ/, sing /sɪŋ/ etc.

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### **1.5 Lateral:/l/**

/l/ is an alveolar lateral during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tongue tip makes a firm contact with the centre of alveolar ridge and the air escapes along the sides of the tongue without any friction. /l/ is voiced.

For example: leap /li:p/, loot /lu:t/ etc.

### **1.6 Semi-Vowels or Approximants: /w,r,j /**

#### **a. Bilabial approximants: /w/**

/w/ is bilabial approximants during the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tongue is in the position of a close-back vowel. The lips are rounded and the degree of lip-rounding depends upon the lip-position of the following vowel. /w/ is voiced.

For example: well/wel/, weak/wi:k/ etc.

#### **b. Post-alveolar approximant: /r/**

/r/ is the post- alveolar approximant or semi-vowel in the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tip of the tongue held close to the back of the alveolar ridge. The back rims touch the upper molars and the centre part of the tongue is lowered. /r/ is voiced.

For example: rule/ru:l/, room/ru:m/ etc.

#### **c. Palatal semi-vowel: /j/**

/j/ is a palatal semi-vowel in the articulation of which the soft-palate is raised and the tongue is in the position of front- close vowel. The lips are spread but it may be rounded if vowel/j/ is followed by a rounded vowel. /j/ is voiced.

For example: yet/jet/, yak /ja:k/ etc.

## **2. Consonants in G.I.E.**

According to Balasubramaniam (1981)<sup>3</sup>, “G.I.E. is a certain variety of English spoken by educated Indians”(P-124). G.I.E. consonant system is different from the R.P. consonant system in the following ways:

[a] In G.I.E. /t/, /d/ are retroflex plosives but in English R.P. /t/, /d/ are alveolar plosives.

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- [b] In G.I.E. / tʃ / and / dʒ / are palatal affricates but in R.P. English / tʃ / and / dʒ / are palato-alveolar affricates.
- [c] In G.I.E. there is only / dʒ / sound. General Indians usually replace alveolar fricative / z / by palato-alveolar affricate / dʒ /. They do not have palato-alveolar fricative / ʒ / sound.
- [d] In G.I.E. /f/ is a bilabial fricative but in English /f/ is a labio-dental fricative.
- [e] In G.I.E. there is one bilabial fricative /v/ for English bilabial approximant /w/ and labio-dental fricative /v/. Therefore, many Indians do not differentiate between the pronunciation of words like wine and vine, and west and vest.
- [f] In G.I.E. /θ, ð/ are labio-dental fricatives but in R.P. English / θ, ð/ are dental fricatives.
- [g] Indians usually replace English palato- alveolar fricative / ʃ / and / ʒ / with alveolar fricative / s /.
- [h] Alveolar lateral / l/, bilabial nasal /m/ and alveolar nasal /n/ are usually same in G.I.E.
- [I ] In G.I.E. word final / ŋ / is represented by the letters ng. Indian speakers usually add a /g / after / n / like: ring, king, sing, etc. are pronounced with a final/ng /.
- [j]According to Bansal (1972)<sup>4</sup>, “There is only one (un-velarized) allophone /l/ in G.I.E.” (P-4).
- [k] English /r/ is post-alveolar approximant or we can say it is rolled or trilled. Most Indians usually pronounce /r/ in all positions.
- [l] In G.I.E. the voiceless plosives /p, t, k/ are un-aspirated in all positions but in R.P. they are aspirated when they occur initially in stressed syllables.

There are more features of G.I.E. but since they do not adversely affect the intelligibility and acceptability, they are not mentioned here.

### **Conclusion**

The study above shows that the Indian speakers of English tend to replace the R.P. consonants like f /, / v /, / θ /, / ð /, / z /, / ʃ /, / ʒ /, / w / and /r/with the phonemes in their regional languages. Once the speakers of Indian English or the regional varieties like Tamil English, Marathi English or Bihari English are aware of the unconscious errors they make in the

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pronunciation of the English sounds, the process of unlearning will automatically start and they would definitely be able to pronounce the consonants of English with care and comfort.

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