Chapter V

Conclusion

5.0 A Bird's Eye View:

The Chapters III and IV dealt with the analyses of the phonetic features and the rating of the speakers with respect to the five features - P, T, V, I and E - using statistical tools. The findings are presented

(A) With specific reference to the fifteen speakers

(B) Generalizing the results

(C) With respect to the listener groups (classified on the basis of nationality and gender).

The analysis of the data vis-à-vis the responses of the listeners points to the following:

5.1 With specific reference to the fifteen speakers:

- **Consonants:** The speech samples indicate the absence of voiceless and voiced dental fricatives - /θ/ and /ð/ respectively. The same were substituted by dental stops - /t/ and /d/. Voiced labio-dental fricative - /v/ - was replaced by a voiced labio-dental frictionless continuant - /w/. The distinction between /v/ and /w/ was absent.

- **Aspiration of /p, t, k/:** This feature was totally unavailable in the speech samples of the speakers.
• *Dropping of /r/:* The speakers were divided on this rule. Some of them dropped it while other were erratic or unpredictable.

• *Plurals and present tense form for third person singulars:* This pattern as found in R.P. was absent in all speech samples except for Speaker 3.

• *Past and past participle forms:* A majority of the speakers (11) exhibited this feature. It may be safely inferred that this feature is by and large existent in the speech of management graduates. It is highly probable that the speakers were unaware of the rules of morpho-phonemic realizations and hence followed spelling pronunciation.

• *Vowels:* The phonemic inventory of vowels for the speakers indicates the absence of /ɔ:/ among monophthongs and /æ/, /ə/, /u/ and /e/ among diphthongs.

• Normally in case of the missing monophthong shown above, /ʊ/ compensates for the same while in case of diphthongs, /eɪ/ and /eɪ/ were compensated for by /e:/ while /ʊ/ and /u/ were substituted by /o:/ and /u:/ respectively.

• Spelling pronunciation interfered with appropriate use of vowel phonemes notwithstanding their existence in the speakers’ phonemic inventory. For instance, /ɛ/ was used in place of vowel
/t/ in the word 'development' in the first syllable and in the second syllable where /e/ should occur it was elided or used as a schwa.

• The occurrence of schwa, /ə/, was highly erratic; and there were instances of its use in stressed syllables – a divergence from RP.

• **Stress - At word and sentence levels:** The speakers’ tendency was to put stress more often than not on the first syllable even when the situation demanded it elsewhere. The general trend was that all these speakers were prone to stressing only the first syllable. With occasional instances of stress location on the second syllable, location of stress on a syllable beyond the second one seems a near impossibility.

In case of sentence stress, most of the form words, which in isolation would not be stressed (unless the context demands), were stressed.

• **Weak Forms and Contracted Forms:** It was noticed that, with the exception of a few speakers, they used full forms in place of contracted forms. For example ‘She has’ was used instead of ‘She’s’; and ‘you have’ in place of ‘you’ve’.

Similarly words like ‘an’ are normally pronounced as /ən/; however, most of the times speaker used the strong form /æn/. 
• **Tonality, Tonicity and Tone**: By and large tonality and tone were found to be in conformity with the RP pattern while tonicity was divergent.

• **Pauses, Repetitions and False Starts**: A majority of the speakers, though not all of them, had considerable number of pauses. There have been a significant number of false starts though not repetitions. A good number of phonemes in the inventory, good tempo and voice quality would do little good if there are repetitions and unnecessary pauses.

• **Tempo**: By and large all the speakers seemed to fall into the range of 2.5 to 3.6 syllables per second.

5.2 **Generalizing the results**

• **Phonetic Features of the ‘Best’ and the ‘Worst’ Speakers**: The phonetic features of the speech samples of the three ‘Best’ rated speakers facilitate the drawing of the following inferences with regard to the features of the possible ‘Best’ speech:

  a) Maintaining a maximum number of RP phonemes, both vowels and consonants.

  b) Dropping of /r/ occurring before a consonant and in the word final position.
c) Following the morphophonemic principles. For instance, realization of 's' as /z/ following a voiced consonant in the plural forms, and in present tense verb forms in case of third person singular. Realization of suffix -ed as /t/ in past tense and participle forms when following a voiceless phoneme.

d) Use of weak forms of words. For instance, using schwa in unstressed positions, in words like /wəz/ and /ðə/ as in the sentence 'whether she thought taking all these supplies was okay with the company' instead of using strong forms.

e) Avoiding spelling pronunciation.

f) Higher levels of conformity with the stress patterns as followed in RP.

g) Stressing the content words in connected speech and avoiding the same with form words in connected speech unless the context demands.

h) Use of contracted forms rather than the full forms in unstressed positions to maintain rhythm.

i) Conforming to intonation patterns with respect to tonality, tonicity and tone as used in RP and as the context demands.

j) No unusual or unnecessary pauses.

k) No false starts and repetitions.
Divergences from the above mentioned (while there could be more) would render one's speech 'worst'. It is worth mentioning that even Speakers 3, 6 and 14, who were rated as the 'Best', did not receive significantly high ratings. Hence were not the ideal speakers.

5.3 With respect to the listener groups

The analysis carried out using statistical analysis indicates the following:

- All listeners by and large agreed upon what is unacceptable (the same set of speakers emerging as the 'Worst' explains it.) However, there are significant differences in perceptions about what is 'Best'.

- All speakers are significant, i.e. the speakers are heterogeneous. It has been identified using ANOVA (Analysis of Variance).

- Impact of nationality (foreign and Indian) on perceptions about Intelligibility is significant.

- Stress was observed to be of great significance for Intelligibility and Effectiveness to foreign listeners, while it was not the case with the Indian listeners.

- The more frequent the occurrence of incorrect stress the higher is the probability of getting a lower rating.

- Good Pronunciation alone does not aid better effectiveness. Tempo, voice quality and other factors like pauses (including
those at breath group boundaries) aid better intelligibility and in turn effectiveness.

- The factors aiding intelligibility and effectiveness in case of Indians are different as compared to those in case of Foreigners.

- Effectiveness for all Foreigners is best explained by Intelligibility while in case of All Indians it is Pronunciation and Voice Quality. In case of Indians as a group intelligibility has little to contribute to judging Effectiveness as compared to Pronunciation and Voice Quality. It is worth noting that in case of Foreigners intelligibility is the single most factor for judging Effectiveness.

- Effectiveness and Pronunciation better explain Intelligibility in case of foreigners while in case of All Indians it is Tempo and Voice Quality, which explain Intelligibility. This means that for Indian listeners as a group pronunciation is not as much important as tempo and voice quality while judging intelligibility while for Foreigners it is important.

- Even within the broad groups, i.e. among sub-groups there are differences in perceptions regarding Intelligibility and Effectiveness. For instance, factors aiding Intelligibility in case of Indian Male listeners are different from those in case of Indian
Females as also Foreign Male listeners. Similarly there are differences within the Foreign listeners' groups based on gender.

5.4 Epilogue:

If we were to consider the degrees of speech performance on a continuum, it may be said that more proximity to RP would be better appreciated. In this connection it may be said while the speech of the 'Best' speaker was closer to RP, that of the 'Worst' ones was far removed from RP on a speech continuum.

It is worth noting that while all speakers were of similar background in terms of academic qualifications are concerned, all were unable to impress upon the listeners as being good speakers. As the listeners (a majority of them belonging to the corporate circles) feel that some of the speakers were unintelligible and ineffective, it is suggested that proper stress may be laid on training the speech characteristics of management graduates all over the country leading to better communicative competence. They may be encouraged to acquaint themselves with the listeners' expectations about good communicators and work in that direction.

5.5 Limitations:

The study was conducted under the following limitations:

(a) The speakers under question belonged to a cohort of MBA and were all males. Female graduates were unavailable in the class. Since the
choice of speakers was exclusive, i.e. budding management graduates with a basic engineering degree, little could be done to include speakers from outside the cohort. Hence, the absence of females in the test group was more a chance than a choice.

(b) The freedom available in choosing Indian listeners from wide-ranging fields was unavailable in case of foreign listeners. Given the limitations of time and availability, the study was carried out with about 35 foreigners representing about 17 different nations. Hence maintaining certain balance among the listeners based on gender and nationality was beyond control.

(c) The listening sessions could be arranged based on the availability and convenience of the listeners. Logistics forced certain changes in the arrangement of listening sessions.

5.6 The Road Ahead:

During the course of this study, which endeavored to establish the features (other than the segmental features) that aid intelligibility and effectiveness, it was noticed that there was a marked difference in the perceptions of Indian and foreign listeners. In this context, the following deserve serious attempts from researchers:

(a) In the current study it was noticed that good pronunciation meant more than having maximum number of distinctive phonemes, acceptable stress and intonation patterns, etc. It emerged that
unusual pauses and repetitions could contribute adversely to intelligibility and effectiveness. Hence, it would be interesting to carry out exclusive studies on measurable impact of pauses and repetitions, voice modulation, etc. on aiding intelligibility and effectiveness.

(b) An exclusive study of impact of tempo on intelligibility could be interesting.

(c) Effectiveness by itself could be a subject of greater interest.

(d) It would be interesting if it can be proved that training in phonetic features alone could largely impact the effectiveness of one's speech.

(e) Teachers of communication would do well to introduce their students to the nuances of phonetic features, not really getting very technical.

(f) With increasing thrust on communication and interpersonal skills, the role of communication specialists is sure to be predominant in the industry.