Abstract

Globalization and liberalization have redefined the rules of the game called business, in India. In the changed scenario, the accent has been on improved and better communication. Given the entry of multinational companies (MNCs), the focus has been one's ability to communicate effectively using English. While it is obvious that these MNCs would recruit Indian management graduates, it is little known as to how far these graduates are intelligible to them; and what factors the foreigners consider as being important for intelligibility and effectiveness.

Using a phonetic framework, the current thesis, hence, endeavoured to study the features of English spoken by management graduates in India. Besides, it was aimed at establishing a correlation among features such as Pronunciation, Tempo and Voice quality as being important for Intelligibility and Effectiveness.

The study was conducted using the speech samples of 15 management graduates who were basically engineers. The speech samples were played to 100 listeners spanning across 18 countries (including India) representing about 25 languages. They were also fairly well distributed in terms of gender and age.
The initial chapter was dedicated to highlighting the importance and the need for effective oral communication skills. A review of the studies carried out earlier was presented to bring the need for the current study. After identifying the areas requiring academic attention, it was necessary to fix the aim and scope of current study. Chapter II details the same along with the choice of speakers, the uniqueness of the speaker group, the choice of listeners, the test material, the methods and tools employed to collect and analyze data.

The speech samples of the speakers are presented in Chapter III with a detailed description of segmental and supra-segmental features of all the 15 speakers. Subsequent to analysis of each of the speech samples, a generalization of the speech characteristics was attempted. All through the study, the transcription presented is phonemic.

The chapter highlights the following:

- The divergences were more concerning vowels than consonants
- Aspiration of voiceless plosives was unavailable.
- Voicing of word final 's' was by and large absent.
- Dropping of /r/ was noticed in almost all speech samples.
- Usage of strong and weak forms is not prevalent. So is the case of full and contracted forms. This renders the rhythm of English by Indian management graduates 'non-English' like.
• Word and Sentence stress were divergent.
• Tonality (compared to Received Pronunciation), as demonstrated by the speech samples, has been found to be largely distinguishing one speaker from the other.
• Unusual pauses and false starts characterized most of the speech samples.

Based on the listeners' feedback the 'Best' and the 'Worst' speakers were identified. Chapter IV was an effort to relate the presence or absence of certain segmental and supra-segmental features to the rating given to the 'Best' and the 'Worst' speakers. Thus a generalization as to which features render a speech the 'Best' or 'Worst' was attempted. Additionally, the chapter attempts to establish a correlation among the factors and shows which is the strongest. Given the multivariate data - i.e. Pronunciation, Tempo, Voice Quality, Intelligibility and Effectiveness - a linear regression analysis was carried out to find the strength of correlation between each of the features.

It was observed that
• Group-wise listener feedback (for instance, All Females, Indians: Females, Foreigners: Females) was varying.
• Erroneous stress placement was the reason for foreigners' rating one as less intelligible, while it mattered little with Indian listeners.
• Voice quality explained Effectiveness better than Intelligibility and other features while Pronunciation and Tempo explained Intelligibility.

On the whole, the study revealed that Intelligibility improves with

• Better use of segmental and supra-segmental features.
• Better use of strong and weak forms as also full and contracted forms.
• Less number of unusual pauses and false starts.

The study brought out the fact that

• Intelligibility was more important for foreign listener group than for the Indian group.

• The management graduates would do well to improve in the areas indicated in the earlier sections.

• Research studies in areas such as Tempo, Effectiveness, etc. could be of greater help for enhancing communication capabilities.

• The differences in the feedback, group-wise, indicate that a study across large sample groups could be more revealing.