Chapter Three: The Issue of Intelligibility

3.1. Preliminaries

The global spread and the resultant nativization of English have had manifold effects on the language. One such result is the issue of intelligibility. Nativization of English is primarily based on the culture and the first language of the community in which it is nativized. As cultures and languages vary from one community to another, cross-cultural communication is at times affected adversely. This poses a great challenge, especially, in the present day context where the need and the importance of communication across cultures and nations have increased rapidly. Failure in communication can, not only result in misunderstandings and loss of deals but also in animosity. Even while English stays on the world stage as a link among cultures, the situation is not devoid of certain anxieties. One oft-expressed fear about English is whether it would diversify into mutually unintelligible varieties in the future.

Globalization in its wake has broken down the barriers among nations. The market today is open. There is intense competition in all the fields especially in business and technology. Even internationally reputed firms compete among themselves. Proper communication plays a key role in this competition. It is impossible today either for an individual or for an organization to succeed without effective communication. All the employers expect excellent command of English from their employees, especially if it is a high wage job. Knowledge alone is not enough. One should also be able to communicate properly and effectively. Effective communication envisages intelligibility. In addition to many others, accent variations among speakers of English are easily noticeable. This is true, in the case of non-native speakers of English as well as native speakers. This naturally indicates that there can
be intelligibility problems. This can happen to any language that spreads so extensively like English.

This chapter will elaborate on the issue of intelligibility. There is an attempt made to explore the various factors such as the phonological, lexical, grammatical and pragmatic deviations, which may hamper the intelligibility of the new varieties. It also looks at the changes in the notion of intelligibility in the context of the global diffusion of English.

It is befitting to start with a discussion of what is meant by intelligibility.

3.2. The General Notion of Intelligibility

The term intelligibility comes from the Latin word *intellegere*, which means to understand or to perceive. Intelligibility is the quality of any communication that makes it understandable. Put the other way, if something is intelligible it is communicated properly. According to the Oxford Advanced Learners Dictionary what is intelligible is something ‘that can be easily understood’ (1996, p.621). The Shorter Oxford Dictionary defines ‘intelligibility’ as ‘capable of understanding, capable of being understood, comprehensible’ (1996, p.1089). As is evident from these two definitions, ‘intelligibility’ involves at least two people- the one who communicates and the one to whom something is communicated. They can be the speaker and the listener or the writer and the reader. It can also be seen that understanding and comprehension are parts of intelligibility.

The issue of intelligibility has been a subject of debate for long. As pointed out earlier English is becoming the choice of more and more communities. This has widened the scope
for greater communication and exchange of ideas among the peoples of the world. This complicates a proper definition of intelligibility because, as Maruthikumari (2007) points out, it raises questions such as ‘intelligibility to whom?’, ‘should intelligibility factor be restricted to speakers of one variety or should it be viewed globally?’, ‘If global intelligibility is to be aimed at, what are the features of spoken or written English that would help us in achieving our objective?’, etc. Some other hot questions of debate are: ‘should one native variety be taken as the model?’ ‘If yes, which should be that variety?’, ‘How should the non-native varieties be viewed?’, ‘Is the concept of comfortable intelligibility acceptable?’, etc. (pp.1-9)

Linguists have often differed in their views on intelligibility. Linguists such as Bansal (1986) and Upendra (1980) considered an utterance intelligible if the listener could recognize and repeat the speech unit. Both of them focused on the phonetic features of Indian English that hindered intelligibility. Hence, all the speakers in their test were Indians. They kept a record of all the words the listener was not able to repeat and the substitute words he had made. This was their method of measuring intelligibility. The main drawback of their method, as pointed out by Sita (1990), was that they ignored the understanding of the listener. They equated intelligibility with the ability to perceive and repeat a word, which according to Nelson (1982), as quoted by Sita (1990) was an easy task for any trained linguistic field worker. They were criticized for interpreting the term intelligibility as something different from comprehension (pp.21-4).

As Jenkins (2000) observes, recent researches on intelligibility have shifted the focus from the speaker to the listener. She cites Bamgbose’s (1998) view on intelligibility as an example for this. According to Bamgbose, intelligibility is a complex of factors comprising
recognition of an expression, knowing its meaning, and knowing what that meaning signifies in the socio-cultural context (p.69). He approaches the issue from the listener’s standpoint as well as covering a range of speaker listener factors. His concern is how an utterance or a word is recognized, understood and interpreted by the listener in a given socio cultural context.

Bamgbose’s (1998) approach to intelligibility closely corresponds to that of Smith and Nelson (1985). They use three key terms in their attempt to explain the issue of intelligibility. They are ‘intelligibility’, ‘comprehensibility’, and ‘interpretability’. These components, as Kachru and Nelson (2006) explain, form a continuum of complexity within which intelligibility involves the fewest variable and interpretability the most (p.67). They reserve the term ‘intelligibility’ to refer to word and utterance recognition, and ‘comprehensibility’ to refer to word and utterance meaning. For them, ‘interpretability’ has to do with the illocutionary force or the listener’s grasp of the speakers intention in producing the utterance (Patil, 2008, p.32)

In Smith and Nelson’s (1985) scheme, ‘intelligibility’ has to do with words and utterances. If the listener is able to make out that the word he/she hears or reads is an English word, intelligibility is achieved. “That is, an intelligible English word is one that sounds like English-just that” (Kachru and Nelson, 2006, p.67). If the listener cannot catch a word or an expression in a conversation or if it sounds unfamiliar to him/her, then, there is an issue of intelligibility. In such a context, the listener may opt for many strategies such as confirmation, requesting for an explanation or repetition or even just letting it pass in the hope of catching it later in the conversation. There is no total breaking down of
communication here. The listener only misses some part of the communication. It is to be noted that there is some kind of compartmentalization in this approach. Writers, as Kachru and Nelson say, do not look at ‘intelligibility in this limited, technical sense of merely recognizing the word or utterance as one in English. Rather it is an umbrella term covering all the aspects of a successful communication. ‘Comprehensibility’, on the other hand, is the listener’s ability to understand the meaning of the word or the utterance. ‘Interpretability’ means the listener can understand the intentions behind a word or an utterance. It refers to the effectiveness of the communication. ‘Interpretability’ enables the interlocutors to respond to each other appropriately and make the communication effective. As Jenkins (2000) opines, what becomes clear in all these arguments, despite the terminological confusion is the relative importance of meaning. Simply put, the listener should get what the speaker intended. There should be a one to one correspondence between the interlocutors (p.71).

McKay (2002) exemplifies this in the following way. According to her, if a listener recognizes that the word ‘salt’ is an English word rather than a Spanish word, English is intelligible to him/her. If the listener knows what the word ‘salt’ means, then it is comprehensible to him/her. If the listener, in addition, can understand that the question ‘do you have any salt?’ is not intended to be a question but a request for salt, then he/she can interpret the language (p.52). Mackay is trying to highlight the importance of culture and context in cross-cultural communication. Even if the listener recognizes an utterance to be in English and understands its literal meaning, he or she may not grasp the intentions of the speaker if he/she is ignorant of the speaker’s cultural context. Communication fails if the listener takes the above example merely as an enquiry and not as an indirect request for salt.
Bamgbose (1988), Smith and Nelson (1985) and McKay (2002) approach the issue from the listener’s perspective.

Jenkins (2000) has no dispute with Smith and Nelson in that the term ‘intelligibility’ should be standardized. She also does not question their restricting the term only to the recognition of the form. However, unlike them, she refuses to accept the higher prominence given to both ‘comprehensibility’ and ‘interpretation’ in the continuum. She does not believe that “the most serious misunderstandings occur at the level of comprehensibility and interpretability” (p.78). She also does not underestimate the role of comprehensibility and interpretability in communication. However, she observes that phonological problems have a higher rate of occurrence as compared to higher-level misunderstandings. Thus, she stands closer to Bansal (1969). To put it in her own words:

My own use of the term intelligibility is thus unashamedly, that of Smith and Nelson (1985), but it is approached more in the spirit of Bansal and Ufomata. It concerns the production and recognition of the formal properties of words and utterances and in particular, the ability to produce and receive phonological form, but regards the latter as a prerequisite (though not a guarantee) of ILT success at the locutionary and illocutionary level (p.78).

Catford (1950) argued in terms of “effectiveness”. According to him, a speech can be said to be intelligible only when it is both intelligible and effective. That is to say, the listener should respond to the verbal action of the speaker appropriately to his purpose in speaking (as cited in Maruthikumari, 2007, pp.1-9). Questions regarding the appropriateness of the listeners’ response complicate this approach. Can one always get the response that he/she expects from
an utterance? Are not the ways of men varied? Cannot a listener refuse to respond appropriately to an utterance even when it is intelligible to him/her? The definition of Catford shows the difficulties involved in pinning down the term intelligibility.

What comes out of all these discussions is that there has been no consensus on the concept of ‘intelligibility’. Some approach it from the listeners’ perspective and some others from the speaker’s perspective. Some give prominence to shared socio cultural background and some to features of phonology. Arguments of these types extend the issue of intelligibility to other areas such as top down processing and bottom up processing. It also raises questions with regard to how far varieties can deviate from each other. Should there be a native model to approximate, or is it time to legitimize the non-native varieties?

The shift in power centres and the growth and spread of democratic views have ignited questioning all kinds of imperialistic attitudes. Intelligibility, thus, has become the responsibility of both the interlocutors. Before looking into those aspects, it is befitting to look at the long cherished one-sided perspective on intelligibility briefly.

3.3. One Sided Perspective on Intelligibility

Prior to the extensive globalization of English, English was viewed as the sole property of native speakers. It was their right and privilege to adapt, to change, to accept or to reject anything related to English. It was their language. They were the sole proprietors, and theirs was the final verdict. They decided the right and wrong of English. In such a scenario, ‘intelligibility’ meant intelligibility to the native speaker. It was a time of hegemony.
The non-native speakers were merely the users of the language with a consumer status. Production and distribution were always on the other side. Non-native speakers depended on norms provided by natives. Notions of democracy and heterogeneity were not much encouraged. The native speaker was the lord to be pleased. On the altar of intelligibility, the non-native speaker had to sacrifice all the non-native features in his speech. It was his job to make himself understood by the native speaker. It was again his fault, if he could not understand the native speaker. The native masqueraded among the applauding crowd of non-natives who were supposed to bear all the brunt of intelligibility.

Thus, any earlier discussion on intelligibility was with reference to the native speaker because he was considered the sole owner of English. The native was the model, and it was the responsibility of the non-native speaker to emulate him. English had to sound like English both in articulation and in culture. It was the one time tenable view, which ignored both the non-native speaker’s perspective and the role of the listener. As far as the international intelligibility of English is considered, the view, which once prevailed among applied linguists and ELT professionals, was a one sided one. Bamgbose (1998) looks at this as “a one way process in which non-native speakers are striving to make themselves understood by the native speakers whose prerogative it was to decide what is intelligible and what is not” (as cited in Jenkins, 2000, p.69). In the words of Nihalini (2000), “The typical approach in this tradition is to use the native accent selected for comparison as a template, juxtapose it against a non-native accent, and identify the features that do not fit the template” (p.108). This approach to intelligibility places the native speaker in a highly privileged position as he is exempted from all responsibilities with regard to intelligibility. The non-native becomes the underprivileged. Because he speaks a deviant variety, intelligibility becomes his obligation.
Scholars such as Bansal (1969) had this one sided perspective on intelligibility. For them, *standard* English meant either British English or American English. The non-native varieties enjoyed no prestige. They were viewed as deficient and unintelligible and hence to be modified as per the requirements of the native speakers. As Bansal (1969) says, “most speakers of L2 are quite satisfied if they can manage to make themselves intelligible to the native speakers” (1969, p.4). The satisfaction was dependent on the native speaker. The intelligibility of the native speaker to the non-native was not a matter of consideration.

Another strong voice that vehemently stood in favour of this one sided perspective was Quirk (1990). He took a very rigid stand, which would not allow any deviation from native speaker standard. He argued that a single standard, based on either British or American English, should be consistently applied in all non-native contexts (as cited in Pickering, p.1).

Gimson (1978) believed that unrestricted development in pronunciation would lead to mutual unintelligibility (as cited in Bansal, 1969, p. 18). He argued for a harnessing of the non-native varieties. However, there is no guarantee that this kind of restriction will assure international intelligibility. This will only be a conniving at the sociolinguistic and cultural realities of the day. English, like the prodigal son, has gone out of the fold to which it may not return. It cannot be a monolith, and it never was.

The earlier tests in intelligibility focused on testing intelligibility in speaking a foreign language. That is to say, the tested was always the non-native speaker. According to Lado (1961), language tests contrasted the phonemic sound and units of the foreign language.
including intonation, stress and rhythm and the sound segments with those of the foreign speaker. He disapproves of vague scoring scales, which measured intelligibility based on approximation to the native speaker. Lado (1963) suggested identifying specific problems by making the speaker read aloud the material prepared for the test. However, his tests also revolved only the non-native speaker. The psycholinguistic study of Carrol (1963) tested the intelligibility of foreigners speaking in English to native listeners. Harlan lane (1963) attempted to find out how a foreign accent could distort the speech. Black (1965) experimented on the speech and oral comprehension of foreign students (as cited in Bansal, 1969, pp.19-20). The subjects in all the above-mentioned experiments were speakers for whom English was either a second language or a foreign language.

As Jenkins (2000) observes, the earlier intelligibility tests involved interactions between L1 speakers or those between L1 speakers and L2 speakers (p.73). There were not many studies from the perspective of the L2 listener. Interactions between L2 speakers of English could not find a place in debates on intelligibility. In this regard, Kachru (1986) rightly questions the self-assumed legitimacy of the native speaker in determining the intelligibility of non-native speech acts that have international functions.

The issue of intelligibility targeted on the non-native speaker for long. However, the emergence of non-native varieties and the increasing use of English as an international language have brought in a paradigm shift in this one-sided perspective on intelligibility. As Nelson (1995) reiterates, “native speaker is becoming a rare sight in international interactions in English”. Moreover, the non-native speaker who, according to him, might have never had the dubious good fortune of even meeting a native speaker is reigning on the stage (as cited in
Pickering, p. 1). This asserting presence of the non-native speaker has compelled even the strongest supporters of the native standard to rethink of this one-sidedness in intelligibility.

It would be now apt to look at this move from the one sided perspective to the two sided perspective on intelligibility.

3.4. Two sided Perspective on Intelligibility

The recent approaches to intelligibility are far from being a one sided one. The extensive use of English as a foreign or a second language has made indelible marks on the overall socio linguistic scenario. The non-native speaker has risen in his/her status and is not a factor to be pushed aside. The dependence of the onetime technologically advanced native speaker countries on the non-native countries has made successful communication imperative on both the sides. There can be losses of deals and business in case of a communication failure. This loss affects both sides equally. Thus recent researches on intelligibility also take into account the intelligibility of the native speaker’s speech. It has now become a two sided approach. As Potter (1996) observes of languages in general, “effective language is always two way. It is first of all an instrument of communication. It consists of an arbitrary system of pattern of speech sounds by means of which man imparts to others, and shares with others, his thoughts, emotions and desires” (p.10). Therefore, it is hearing and imparting and is always a two way process. Everyone needs to be aware of world Englishes or non-native varieties considering the sociolinguistic realities. The inner, the outer and the expanding circles share the responsibility equally (Kilickaya, 2000, p.35). It is a revolutionary change that questions all practices that favour and support only native speaker models. From mere ‘intelligibility’, the discussion has now moved on to ‘mutual intelligibility’. In any act of speech communication,
both the speaker and the listener are equally important. It is a process that demands the involvement of both. It is a give and take affair not a one sided one. As Tiffen (1974) says the listener and the speaker must be “tuned in” to each other, if real communication is to take place (as cited in Atechi, n.d., p.46). There has to be accommodation, acceptance and compromises.

These demands on successful communication are more imperative if the interlocutors speak different varieties of English - both native and non-native. This is because they differ in not only accent but also their socio cultural experiences. As Gretchen, an American teacher working in Oman testifies she had difficulty in understanding many of her colleagues, especially some individuals from India and England. Some Indian and British lecturers were relatively easy to understand while she found it difficult to understand those with strong regional accents and intonation. As a native speaker of English, she feels that they should adapt their speech to suit the circumstances in which they find themselves and to enable their message to be easily understood by those to whom they are speaking. According to her, the goal of speech is to convey message. Clear enunciation, medium speed and use of standard English help those from different countries understand each other. She also speaks of how she could overcome these difficulties over time. She thinks it must be a matter of becoming accustomed to these differences, with exposure to them, which accounts for her better understanding of other varieties (personal communication, July 5, 2011). Gretchen’s views are a clear indication of the paradigm shift. It is also another approval of Kachru’s observation that the intelligibility of Indian English by native speakers forms a cline (1983, p.84). Native speakers also have come to realize the need to adapt and accommodate. Communication is a two way process.
Shared socio cultural background and a proper understanding of the context may make up for the many lapses in communication. It facilitates top down processing and enables them to track down lapses in pronunciations. Jenkins (2000) gives the example of how she could properly interpret her daughter’s wrong pronunciation of the word ‘drama’. What she said sounded like ‘drummer’ to Jenkins. However, she could easily locate the word ‘drama’ from her mental lexicon, as she knew that British schools, especially girls’ schools, do not have drummer complexes. Moreover, she also knew her daughter’s interest in acting (p.76). What aided successful communication here was, their shared British socio cultural background and Jenkins’ awareness of the context - her daughter’s interest in acting. However, this can happen only when the interlocutors speak the same variety and belong to the same socio cultural background. Others need to negotiate and accommodate.

This kind of negotiation and accommodation had existed before the varieties claimed prestige and identity. For example, the British colonizers spoke to their Indian servants not in their glorified accent. They also avoided obfuscation and the use of bombastic words. Yuel and Burnell (1968) point out that this was one of the oddest characteristics of Butler English. Both the masters and the servants spoke to each other in butler English (as cited in Hosali, 1997, p.1). The master had no hesitation in using the broken English of his native servants. He had to get his things done and as always, successful communication was a must for that. It did not matter what accent he spoke.

The present scenario of the spread and diversification of English has intensified this need for mutual acceptance. Intelligibility is neither speaker centred nor listener centred. Communication is a matter of interaction where native speaker advantages hold no water.
There should be mutual intelligibility, lest it should lead to disasters. In this context, Patil (2008) cites the example of the midair collision between a Saudi Arabian airliner jet and a Kuzhakstan cargo plane, caused by a pilot’s poor understanding of English (p.32). To avoid such disasters in future, the civil aviation authorities of India have made it mandatory for all expatriate pilots to pass a test in spoken English to ensure that the Indian air traffic controllers can understand them (Times of India, February 10, 2006).

What is evident here is that mutual intelligibility is far more important than retaining identity. The development of hybrid varieties and local norms can be encouraged but in international communication, intelligibility should not be at stake. If English breaks up into mutually unintelligible varieties, it will naturally lose its role and status as an international language. The communicative responsibility is on both the sides. Rigid demarcations between native-speakers and non-native speakers do not exist anymore. As Patil (2008) says, “With the diversification of English, we are talking about training the native speaker to develop sensitivity towards intercultural communication” (p.33). Kenworthy (1950) also opines that the goal for the majority of the learners of English today should be comfortable intelligibility (as cited in Maruthikumari, 2007, p.9).

The concept of comfortable intelligibility has shifted the focus from native speaker emulation to retaining one’s identity without damaging intelligibility. The term was coined by Abercrombie in 1956. His answer to the question, whether learners of English need to acquire native speaker like accent, was the following:

Intending secret agents and intending teachers have to, of course, but most other language learners need more than a comfortably intelligible
pronunciation (and by comfortably intelligible, I mean a pronunciation which can be understood with little or no conscious effort on the part of the listener).

I believe that pronunciation teaching should have, not a goal which must of necessity be normally an unrealized ideal, but a limited purpose which will be completely fulfilled: the attainment of intelligibility (as cited in Brown, 1989, p.4).

This kind of intelligibility has now become the goal for most learners in most parts of the world. Blind imitation of native speaker accent is considered unrealistic and inappropriate. However, as is implied in Abercrombie’s answer, retaining national identity should not lead to intelligibility failure on international platforms.

To conclude, the deviation from the one sided perspective on intelligibility is clear. It is a process of give-and-take, and both the interlocutors need to feel comfortable in the process. In the past, the onus of intelligibility was on the shoulders of the non native speaker. As a result, it was the responsibility of the non-native speaker to approximate the native speaker English in terms of vocabulary, grammar and accent. However, this one sided view of intelligibility is gradually being replaced by a reciprocal perspective on intelligibility. Hence, the onus of understanding non-native varieties is equally with the native speaker. In other words, intelligibility is a common pursuit cherished by the native as well as the non native speaker. As Jenkins (2000) puts it, speakers need to “compensate for listeners’ linguistic and extra linguistic inadequacies” (p.77) and listeners, as Bamgbose (1988) suggests, “are as responsible as speakers and part of a listener’s contribution to intelligibility is in the making of allowances for an interlocutor’s accent” (as cited in Jenkins, 2000, p.79).
The following section discusses the various features that affect intelligibility in English communication, the first being the phonological aspect.

3.5. Phonological Aspect of Intelligibility

Proper pronunciation is a requisite for any successful communication. Inaccurate pronunciation can not only turn the conversation into mere gibberish but may also create embarrassing situations. It is a major source of intelligibility problems on international platforms. As Jenkins (2000) observes, pronunciation is possibly the greatest single barrier to successful communication (p.83).

Interactions usually go smooth when it is between interlocutors with the same L1 background. Native speakers of English, though from different countries, have many core features in common. They also do not face many contextual processing difficulties. However, this is not the situation in EIL where most interlocutors belong to varying cultural and linguistic backgrounds. The L1 interferences mar their pronunciation. Thus, problems are bound to arise when two interlocutors from different L1 backgrounds try to converge on each other’s pronunciation. Segmental and supra segmental features of the nativized varieties contribute to unintelligibility. Inaccurate pronunciation can be condoned only as long as it does not affect intelligibility. As Offner (1995) suggests, any pronunciation that cannot be understood should be mended since it is a violation of the fundamental rule of communication.

Many linguists such as Jenner (1989), Bamgbose (1988), Crystal (1997), Gimson (1978) and Jenkins (2000) have made their own proposals for solving the intelligibility problems of EIL.
All of them (as cited in Jenkins, 2000, pp.125-34) have a core approach to this issue. All of them, though with differences, suggest a lingua franca core to minimize the transfer of phonological features from L1 to EIL. They believe in, as Jenkins (2000) puts it, “not fussing over every inconsequential details of pronunciation” but on those essential features that affect intelligibility (p.126). Intelligibility cannot be achieved only through correct pronunciation. However, the absence of correct pronunciation can lead to unintelligibility.

The varying approaches to establishing a phonological core for EIL have been the following; the external approach, the constructed approach, and one based on what is mutually intelligible among the users of the L1 dialects of English. As the names suggest, the external approach stands for an amalgam of the features of the nativized varieties from all over the world. The constructed approach argues for the invention of a new core for EIL. The last one focuses only on the native speaker varieties. The American linguist Hockett (1958) was the first one to suggest this approach. He was vehemently supported by Bell (1976) who believed that the high degree of mutual intelligibility among the mother tongue varieties of English was a sign to the existence of some underlying shared system (as cited in Jenkins, 2000, p.125).

Jenner (1987) initially had an approach very similar to that of Hockett’s. He advocated focussing on the common phonological features of native varieties of English that enable the native speakers to communicate effectively with speakers of other native varieties. He identified eleven such phonological features and emphasized the need to focus on them to guarantee intelligibility. However, in the later years, he made a substantial move away from his earlier one. He turned against training the learners to be native like. Instead, he argued for
a certain minimum level which would render the L2 speaker of English intelligible and acceptable (as cited in Jenkins, 2000, pp.125-56).

Jenkins (2000) classifies the trouble making phonological features in English into core features and non-core features. She does not include features harmless to intelligibility in her lingua franca core. She regards divergences in the areas of vowel quality, assimilation, stress and weak forms from the native speaker realization as non-core features. They are L2 sociolinguistic variations and should be accepted. Aspirated or unaspirated phonetic realization of /p/ in ‘pen’ does not affect intelligibility. Thus, she regards such features as non-core features. Jenkins, as Walker (2001) observes, takes into account the international status of English as a lingua franca. Her core features are the product of her meticulous research into intelligibility problems between native speakers and non-native speakers. They are a target for those seeking international intelligibility. They can be summarized as vowel quantity, consonant substitutions, devoicing of consonants, phonetic realizations, consonant cluster simplifications and nuclear stress.

Patil (2008) gives a few interesting examples of how the core features affect intelligibility:

- ‘mug’ pronounced as ‘muck’ (devoicing of consonant)
- ‘six’ pronounced as ‘sick’ (omission from consonant clusters)
- ‘ship’ pronounced as ‘sheep’ (confusion between short and long vowel)
- ‘bird’ pronounced as ‘bard’ (vowel substitution)
- ‘TB’ pronounced as ‘TV’ (consonant substitution) (p.35).

The above features account for intelligibility issues in EIL. Ellis (1997) and Thakur (2004) have made some interesting observations on L1 transfer in the case of Arab learners of
English. As there is no /p/ sound in Arabic, most Arab learners of English tend to replace /p/ by /b/ sound that shares the same place of articulation. This leads to embarrassing situations at times. For example, utterances such as “I am going to bray” instead of ‘I am going to pray” and “I am going to bark” instead of “I am going to park” can evoke laughter. Arabic has only one letter in the /g/-/dz/ area and most Arabic speakers of English pronounce it as /g/. The word ‘engaged’ is often phonetically realized as /engeiɡd/. Another area of intelligibility issue among Arab learners is vowel quantity. As Swan and Smith (2002) observe, the three short vowels in Arabic have very little significance: they are almost allophonic. They are not even written in the script. The consonants and long vowels and diphthongs give meaning. Arabic learners tend, therefore, to gloss over and confuse English short vowels. Thus, they may pronounce ‘chip’ as ‘cheap’ or ‘ship’ as ‘sheep’.

Patil (2008) talks of some of his experiences with Vietnamese and Japanese learners of English to highlight how poor articulation of words can affect intelligibility. Most of them do not articulate words clearly. Vietnamese learners have a tendency to drop word final sounds. He gives an example of such an omission and shows how baffling it can be to the listener. In the following sentence the word final sounds of the italicized words are omitted and they sound as if they are homophones;

“Mr. Nguyen, why (wai) doesn’t your wife (wai) try white (wai) wine (wai)?” Sentences like this cause immense intelligibility problems. Just as Arab learners replace / p / with / b /, Japanese learners of English tend to replace / r / with / l / and / f / with / h /. Thus, “This is a grass house” will sound like “This is a glass house” (p.36).
Patil (2008) summarily illustrates the pronunciation problems of the above three groups with the help of the following example:

‘I am going to dine with six friends. We’ll have a pot of fried rice each’.

An Arab learner will probably say:

“I am going to dine with sikis friends. We’ll have a boat of fried rice each”. The first is an example of inserting an extra sound and the second is that of replacing /p/ with /b/.

A Vietnamese learner will likely say:

“I am going to die with sick friends. We’ll have a pot of fried rice each”. Both are examples of omissions of the word final sounds.

A Japanese learner will tend to say:

“I am going to dine with six hriends. We’ll have a pot of flied rice each”. In the former case /ʃ/ is replaced with /h/ and in the latter /r/ with /l/ (p.36).

Yet another area of pronunciation affecting intelligibility is reduced pronunciation. This makes some native speakers unintelligible to non-native speakers. Most of the researcher’s advanced level learners in Oman could not understand the following reduced pronunciations in the listening class.

1. I’am gonna go ta Bear Mountain.
2. How bouchu?
3. I donwanna go.
4. Dya wanna gonna?
5. Nice to meetcha (adapted for Tanka and Most, 2009, p.27).
Mufwene (1997), in his attempt to prove that an identifiable ancestor is no guarantee to intelligibility, gives a list of extracts taken from variety of Engishes spoken both in the native and in the non native countries. One example is the following:

Owar ya?Ts goota meecha mai ‘tee. Naluk. Djaram membah dabrah nai dul?

Jennifer (2003) translates it the following way:

How are you? It’s good to meet you, matey. Now look. Do you remember the brown idol? Tintin’s looking for it. Can you help him? The brown idol? - It is like I told you. The tribe gave the brown idol to Walker. He was a nice guy. But his fellows took our precious jewel. And if the Arumbayas catch him, they’ll have his garters. No messing! (p.69).

An analysis of the original and the translation shows how reduced pronunciation, among other features, contributes to loss of intelligibility.

Nuclear stress in sentences can twist the meaning and seriously affect communication. Jenkins (2000) does not include word stress and accent in the lingua franca core of EIL. However, she stresses on nuclear stress. She gives the following sentence as an example to show how nuclear stress can change the meaning:

Did you buy a tennis racket at the sports centre this morning, or
Was it a squash racket?
Did you buy it yesterday?
Did you only borrow one?
Was it your girl friend who bought it?
At the tennis club?

As we can see, the second part determines the stress pattern of the first part. As the nuclear stress changes, the meaning also changes (pp.153-4).

Phonic similarities of English with other languages can also affect intelligibility adversely. Faber (2007) talks of the unpleasant experience Coca-Cola had in China due to this reason. In China, the name of the drink was initially translated as Ke-Kou-Ke-la, which meant, “bite the wax tadpole” or “mare stuffed with wax”. The tragedy was that the company came to know of this only after thousands of ads and signs were printed. They had to study nearly 40,000 Chinese ideograms to come up with a new phonetic equivalent. The successful result was the phonetic equivalent “Ko-Kou-Ko-Le” which meant happiness in the mouth (pp.26-7).

To conclude, segmental and supra segmental features can contribute to loss of intelligibility. As Brown (1989) observes, the intelligibility of a person’s speech depends not only on the listener and the situation but also on the speaker’s actual pronunciation (p.10). A consideration of all the above-mentioned phonological aspects is necessary for achieving international intelligibility.

Having discussed the phonological aspect of intelligibility, the next is the role of lexis in intelligibility.
3.6. Lexical Aspect of Intelligibility

The lexical aspect has to do with the vocabulary used in any linguistic act of communication. If a word used in any such act, is unknown or strange to the listener there can be serious communication breakdown. It can also not be taken for granted that one interlocutor uses a word in the same meaning that the other interlocutor attaches to it. Lack of sufficient vocabulary can also be a hindrance in putting one’s thoughts across clearly.

The global spread of English, as discussed before, has moulded English in various ways. It has brought many new words into the varieties of English. Moreover, many already existing words in English are used in different nuances in different varieties. In the given situation of EIL, these may affect intelligibility adversely and can result in communication failure.

Patil (2002) gives a few examples of lexical variations in Vietnamese English. Vietnamese learners of English use the words ‘come’ and ‘go’ in a topsy-turvy manner. In standard British English, ‘come’ means to move towards a place where the speaker or the writer is, or to a place being referred to by him/her. “Go’ has the opposite meaning. It refers to a movement away from the place of the speaker or the writer. For example, a student who wants to get into the class may ask for permission by saying ‘May I come in, sir?’ Similarly, a student who wants to move out of the class may say; “Sir, may I go home now?” However, Vietnamese learners of English reverse the use of these words. They usually say; “Sir, may I come back home now?” (for moving out of the class) and “Sir, I can not go to school tomorrow” (to mean moving into the class) (pp.14-6). Patil (2008) observes that Japanese students also tend to commit this mistake (p.36).
Another example of semantic reversal is, in the case of ‘take’ and ‘bring’. In British English, ‘bring’ means to come with something and ‘take’ means to go with something from one place to another. Thus, a teacher may say to his students; “Please bring your text books everyday to the class” or “Please take these handouts with you, when you go home”. However, Vietnamese learners, as in the case of ‘come’ and ‘go’ reverse the use of these words. Patil (2008) says, as a teacher in Vietnam he often heard his students say the following: “Excuse me, teacher, I don’t have this book at home, can I bring it for a week, please?” and “I am sorry, teacher, I forgot to take the book that I brought from you last week. I’ll take it tomorrow”. Patil talks about how this created many problems in the reading classes as the learners interpreted these words in a typical Vietnamese way (p.36).

As discussed in chapter two, the new contexts to which English was transplanted necessitated lexical innovations. Now, as McKay (2002) points out, it has become difficult to ascertain the status of a particular word (p.60). It is so because the transformed status of English does not leave this decision to native speakers alone. As Butler (1999) opines, considering the constantly changing nature of the language, the opinion of the native speaker alone is not enough to determine the acceptability of a lexical item (p.189). It has become a question of majority use and minority use, and in the present day context, native speakers are a minority.

Non-native lexical variations have become a factor that cannot be disregarded. There were attempts from the part of the lexicographers to codify the generally accepted unique lexical items of various countries. Butler (1999) made one such attempt. In his The Macquarie Dictionary, he included lexical items that were commonly used in South East Asian
countries. The editors gathered such words from fiction, nonfiction and newspapers in English. Butler classified these corpora of lexis into the following five categories:

- words describing daily life;
- words describing housing;
- words referring to food items;
- words referring to social institutions; and
- words expressing national identity.

He presented these lexical items in contexts. Listed below are the contexts for some of the words taken from various sources.

*Outstation:* (Singapore and Malaysian English)

‘Hullo, is the head in?’ ‘He’s outstation. Who is calling?’ ‘Ya, conference, in Hawaii, Who’s calling?”

*Clansman:* (Hong Kong English)

Besides, Chinese weddings are dear. Banquets for the entertaining of clansmen can cost up to tens of thousands of dollars....

*Minor wife:* (Thai English)

Montana asked no questions, and was given enough to keep her happy. She invested not only in chit funds but also, more sensibly, in jewels. She was not prepared to be an impoverished first wife if Saiyud took a mistress or a minor wife in the local parlance (pp.352-3).

The purpose of giving the context was to make the word intelligible. In the absence of such contexts, readers from other cultures would find it extremely difficult to understand such expressions unless they are familiar with them.
There are cases where listeners or readers recognize the words as belonging to English. However, they fail to comprehend them because of the cultural alienation. Kachru (1996) gives an example of this. It is taken from an Indian newspaper matrimonial advertisement: “correspondence invited, preferably for mutual alliance....” (p.311). As mentioned on page eighty-three of chapter two ‘Mutual alliance’, here, actually refers to an Indian system practised in some communities. Readers not familiar with the Indian ways may interpret ‘mutual alliance’ as a kind of agreement between two collaborating companies. A stranger to the Indian ways of life, as Kachru and Nelson (2006) mention, will have to depend on a knowledgeable informant to get the full meaning of the usage. In the absence of such an informant, the outsider will have to rely on contextual and discoursal clues (p.68).

Another example on similar lines is the expression ‘honour killing’. It becomes difficult to comprehend and interpret it properly unless one has heard about this inhuman system before. However, contextual clues can be of help here too. Suleiman, a teacher of English from Oman, said that they were English words but could not explain what they meant. However after reading the newspaper report on a case of honour killing (The Hindu, online edition, June 19, 2011), he was able to interpret it as killing someone who played with a family’s reputation. However, he could not link it to the caste system or its equivalents in many countries (email interview). On the other hand, Devassia, a teacher of English from the south of India interpreted this expression as attempting to destroy someone’s honour through words or deeds. According to him, this expression refers to talking ill of others (email interview). However, he altered his opinion after reading the report. He rightly interpreted it as killing one’s own children for marrying from another caste. He attributed the intelligibility problem
to diversity in culture. This practice being completely alien to his culture, he had never heard of this before and hence the misinterpretation.

Another lexical feature affecting intelligibility is how meaning is assigned to utterances. Kachru and Nelson (2006) give an example of how the word ‘table’ varies in its meaning in the following sentences:

- Please put the package on the table.
- Invite guest of committee to the table.
- Table a motion.
- Insert data into cells in a table.

If the listener knows only one meaning of the word ‘table’, there is sure to be comprehensibility problem (p.68). The same idea is highlighted in R.K.Lakshman’s cartoon in which the candidate at an interview draws the picture of a chair on the floor when he is asked to draw a chair and sit down (as cited in Thakur and Rocha, 2007, p.119).

Inadequate vocabulary can also result in unsuccessful communication. Catford (1950) illustrates this with the following example:

The context is that of a foreign guest at an English party. On the table, there are two kinds of baked sweet meat - cakes and tarts. The guest is partial to the combination of jam and pastry and wants to obtain a tart. However, his vocabulary is limited and he knows only one word for baked sweet meat. With the intention of obtaining a tart, he asks for a cake. His request is perfectly intelligible to the hostess. She responds by passing the plates of cake to him. Nevertheless, the guest is confused and disappointed because his hostess’s
response is not appropriate to his purpose in speaking. Put the other way, his utterance is intelligible but ineffective. The communication fails because he lacks the proper vocabulary to put his message across appropriately (as cited in Brown, 1989, p.5).

These differences are to be seen not only in non-native varieties. Native varieties also have significant semantic variations in lexis. A very common example is that in the USA ‘first floor’ means the ground floor. But in England ground floor is not considered as first floor. Hence, a foreign learner of English, who has been acquainted only with the British variety of English, will get totally confused when he is in the USA, making queries about someone staying in a hotel room. However, these differences can be ironed out with a little effort. But the pestering question is why we cannot agree up on a common word for the same thing especially when there is no natural correspondence between a word and a thing, as the deconstructionists maintain.

The use of acronyms and abbreviations also lead to loss of intelligibility. Abbreviations are used for various reasons. One is the desire to achieve linguistic economy. It is a world of rush and hurry where succinctness and precision are highly valued. Abbreviations can contribute greatly to precision. However, abbreviations such as PDQ (perfectly damn quick), GT (gone to Texas) and LL (liver loafers) can affect intelligibility unless one is familiar with them (Crystal, 1994, p.120). Yet some other usages on similar lines are FYI (for your information), WYSIWYG (what you see is what you get), ASAP (as early as possible), etc.
In conclusion, there are significant lexical variations among the varieties of English. As English spreads further, these variations will also increase. They, in fact, reflect the inadequacy of the so called ‘standard’ English to represent all the cultures. When English is used in new cultures, such variations are inevitable. The further the variation, the greater will be the loss of intelligibility.

Grammatical variations also can affect intelligibility to some extent. The next part is a discussion of how grammar affects intelligibility.

3.7. Grammatical Aspect of Intelligibility

As in the case of phonology and lexis, there are deviations in grammar also. The main cause of such deviations is the mother tongue interference. However, there are also intentional deviations to suit the cultural need of the land. Most deviations do not affect intelligibility even when they are not acceptable and appropriate. Nevertheless, some of them do cause confusion and result in loss of intelligibility.

Studies on grammatical variations in nativized varieties, as McKay (2002) says, are based on an analysis of the written corpus of the particular variety under examination (p.62). Then, their frequency of use is matched against the native varieties and the standard nativized variety. Acceptability by both native speakers and speakers of the variety is important in deciding the status of such variations.

Shastri (1996) did a study on the grammatical variations in Indian English. His purpose was to challenge the argument that there is deterioration in new varieties. He focused on
complementation in Indian English. His study proved that the argument was false as the frequency of deviant usages was very low except for the verb *suggest* (p.81). The following are examples of some of the deviant uses that Shastri collected:

External courses are meant for those persons who are *interested to enrich* (instead of *in enriching*) their knowledge.

But when he wanted to celebrate Quarvana in the morning they *prevented him to do so* (instead of *from doing so*).

David Copperfield’s stepfather, Murdstone had forbidden David Copperfield’s mother *from speaking* to David Copperfield (instead of *to speak*) (pp.75-80).

The most noteworthy point here is that such deviations from the native standard varieties do not affect intelligibility. Moreover, users of the standard variety of Indian English do not consider them acceptable.

Shastri (1996) used corpora from published texts. But, Parashar (1994) based his study on unpublished texts- eighty five letters of bank managers, administrators and scientists. He identified certain grammatical variations in the cases of nominals, modifiers and determiners, syntax, verb patterns, auxiliaries, tense and aspect, prepositions and clause connectors and clause structure. The acceptability of the deviant uses was judged by a team of two native speakers of British English, two native speakers of American English and two Indian teachers at the university level. Based on his findings, Parashar arrived at the conclusion that there were very few violations of the major rules of grammar in Indian English. Moreover, there was no dispute among the judges in rejecting such ungrammatical expressions as
unacceptable (p.163). It is to be noted that there were no intelligibility problems in the examples given by Parashar.

Sridhar (1996) analyzed twelve essays on Indian women written by college students in the city of Bangalore, in the south Indian state of Karnataka. His study manifested many deviations from standard British English. They included invariant reflexive pronouns for emphasis, improper use of ‘as’, subject verb disagreement, etc. They were all found to be interferences from Kannada i.e., the mother tongue of the students. Nevertheless, those deviations do not have much to do with intelligibility. For example, “He was appointed as the manager” or “He was appointed the manager” does not make any change in the meaning (pp.59-65).

Patil (2008) talks of some mother tongue interferences in the case of Arab, Vietnamese and Japanese learners of English. Arab learners tend to omit the use of copula verbs, as there are no copula verbs in Arabic. Thus, they may produce utterances such as “I a student of Sultan Qaboos University”. Vietnamese does not have relative pronouns. Applying the Vietnamese structure to English, Vietnamese learners may say, “There are many children don’t go to school”. Japanese interference comes mostly in word order. Japanese syntax is subject+object+verb and nouns have only singular form. As a result, they often say sentences such as, “I some vegetable bought” instead of “I have bought some vegetables” (p.37).

From the communication point of view, grammatical variations are often not so important. As Patil (2008) comments, It does not matter whether a foreign learner says “I TV watch” or “I watch TV”; “I have two book” or “I have two books”; “This is a girl beautiful” or “This girl
is beautiful” (p.37). Such errors do not affect communication seriously. This is not to say, they are acceptable, but certainly, they are intelligible.

On the other hand, there are deviations that can result in communication failure. For example, the Australian use of the affixes ‘ie’ makes words appear strange to users of other varieties. It is difficult to guess that ‘rellies’ means relatives or relations. Again, the Australian ‘o’ in words such as ‘garbo’ or ‘journo’ for garbage collector and journalist respectively are not usages familiar to users of other varieties. Such deviations have intranational intelligibility but not international (Bauer, 2002, p.48). Similarly, ‘Go jump in a lake’ and “Go and jump in a lake” are not the same in Australian English. The latter usage with ‘and’ is used only when it has an abusive function (Taylor, 1989 as cited in Bauer, 2002, p.51).

Another example is the South African sentence initial ‘no’. It is used in order to contradict the assumptions made in the earlier part of the dialogue. For example, the sentence initial ‘no’ in the following dialogue does not make the reply a negative one.

‘Can you deliver it?’
‘No, sure, we’ll send it this morning.’ The attempt here is to nullify the fear that it will not be delivered (Branford, 1994, and Trudgill and Hanna 1994 as cited in Bauer, 2002, p.51).

Literal word-by-word translations from English to another target language upset the syntax and take away intelligibility. They also often use inappropriate words and take away the essence of the message. That is what happens to Google translations done on computer. A notice stuck on garbage boxes in Oman reads the following: “Throwing The garbage Postpones In Its specified Places”. The message it wants to convey is simply not to throw the
garbage carelessly into the garbage box but to deposit it carefully. In addition to the wrong use of capital letters, the use of inappropriate words makes the sentence almost unintelligible. Here is another notice displayed on the notice board of Sohar University in Oman; “Please all of the students who have Discount 20% (discount brother and sister) go to the Department of Finance for fill up the form”. “Discount brother and sister” if taken away from the sentence is misleading, though the context here explains the meaning.

Omani learners of English have a tendency to repeat in their answers the same pronoun used in the question. Thus, if asked, “Where is your wife?” they may answer “Your wife is in my house.” Again, the context comes to assist proper intelligibility here.

One thing about grammatical variations is that they do not affect intelligibility as much as phonological and lexical features do. As Quirk et al. (1985) observe, regional variations in grammar are not as predominant as those in phonology and lexis are. They are less extensive and certainly less obtrusive (p.17). Moreover, most of the variations are not acceptable to the standard use of the varieties. The tolerance extended to the innovative variations in the other aspects of the language is not to be found in the case of grammar. Hence, they are to be viewed only as some of the common errors committed by the learners or the mesolect users.

Yet another major area of deviation is discourse. As in the other aspects, the performance of communicative actions such as greeting, apologizing, blessing, leave taking etc. vary from culture to culture. The next section considers how the pragmatic aspects of the language can affect intelligibility.
3.8. Pragmatic Aspect of Intelligibility

The dynamics of communication is not the same in all the communities. That is why language is said to have both communicative and communal values. Verbal and nonverbal communications vary from culture to culture. What is accepted and appropriate in one culture can be highly offensive in another. The adoption of English by the various world communities has resulted in a lot of sociolinguistic and pragmatic transfers to English. That is to say, the rules and styles of the mother tongue of a speech community are also applied to English. It is not always an unconscious activity. Some transfers are intentional. They are attempts to make English suitable to the new socio cultural context to which it has been transplanted. Such experiments, as Patil (2008) maintains, are necessary because the culture specific speech acts of different linguistic communities cannot be explained adequately using the framework of monolithic English pragmatics (pp. 37-8). In fact, pragmatics varies even among the inner circle countries. Unawareness of the pragmatics of both verbal and nonverbal communications can lead to misunderstandings.

Sharma (2011) illustrates this by citing a very unpleasant experience George bush senior, the former president of America, had during one of his visits to Australia in 1992. After boasting of his expertise in hand gestures, he gave the ‘V for victory sign’ and drove off in his limousine in Canberra. The enraged spectators gave back the same signal to the president. Bush came to know only later that in Australia the ‘V signal’ has the same vulgar meaning as the middle finger gesture in America. He had to apologize for his blunder though it was committed unknowingly (pp.3-4).
Gestures form a large part of nonverbal communication. There are cross-cultural differences in the meanings of gestures. In addition, the way of sitting, eye contact, the space between the interlocutors, the posture and the body movements can suggest a lot. The problem, when it comes to international and sometimes even intranational communication is that all the above-mentioned nonverbal aspects of communication have different meanings in different communities.

Morries et al. (1979) give another example of pressing the forefinger against the cheek and then rotating it as if screwing something into ones face. This gesture is used in many countries such as Greece, Spain and Germany. However, it conveys different meanings in those countries. In Italy, it is a sign of appreciation, especially of food. In southern Spain, it is used to signal that someone is effeminate in a derogatory sense. In Germany, it means, “you are crazy”. Not all Europeans, let alone Africans and Asians know these meanings (as cited in Brown, 1989). Thus, this gesture is eminently misinterpretable or uninterpretable.

Eye movements mean a lot in many cultures. Looking into someone’s eye is considered rude in America whereas looking away from the other’s face is a sign of insincerity in India. Indians expect people to look at the face and talk. Maintaining a longer eye contact is taken as a sign of superiority. A direct and open stare elicits a feeling of trust in India (Sharma, 2011). There are hundreds of such nonverbal acts in every community. In the present day context of international mingling in the various arenas of life, an awareness of the different ways of nonverbal communication is necessary for successful communication.
There are also marked differences in verbal communications due to the sociolinguistic and pragmatic transfers mentioned above. Verbal communications do not always involve words. There are non-lexical paralinguistic aspects such as inflections, pacing, intensity, tone etc. All these features can add meanings to words as they determine how words are used in communication. The truth in every communication is that how something is uttered is more important than what is said. For example, the use of the word ‘please’ in ‘Please get out of here’ usually does not make it a request. The variations in the above-mentioned paralinguistic aspects have different connotations in different cultures. When those cultural nuances are transferred to English and used in inter-communal communications, there can be misinterpretations.

A study, done by Gumperz (1982), manifests this clearly. His study was initiated by the many complaints of the airport staff at Heathrow airport. Their complaint was that the Indian and Pakistani employees at the cafeteria were rude in their behaviour to the customers. To know what exactly was going on, Gumperz taped their talk on the job. He found that the misunderstanding was caused by the tiny difference in intonation. When a British lady requested for meat, the Asian server wanted to know whether she wanted gravy on it. The British lady asked ‘Gravy?’ and the Asian server repeated ‘Gravy’ with a falling intonation instead of rising. Later when the tape was played to Asians and British, the Asian listeners could not find anything odd in the conversation. However, the British listeners found it rude. To the British, ‘Gravy?’ with a question intonation means ‘would you like gravy?’ But, the same word if spoken with a falling intonation, as in the case of the Asian server, means ‘This is gravy. Take it or leave it’ (as cited in Tannen, 1984, p.192). Certainly, the East is East and the West is West. Even intonational differences can lead to miscommunication. Gumperz also
pointed out another difference between the Indian speakers and the British speakers. The 
Indian speaker emphasizes the sentence preceding the main point and says the main point in a 
low voice to achieve some dramatic effect. However, the British speaker emphasizes the 
main point itself. The danger here is that the British listener might take the emphasized 
sentence as the main point (as cited in Tannen, 1984, p.194). In addition, Indians speak 
loudly to get the attention of the listener or to win the floor. Speaking loudly can be 
interpreted as a sign of anger in the western culture.

Similarly, there are important differences in the way speech acts are performed in different 
cultures. For example, greetings in Arabic consist of a long list of questions after the initial 
‘aslamu aleikum’. The questions range from enquiries about one’s personal well being to the 
well being of the members of the family including the domestic animals at times. However, 
all these are not transferred to English though they cannot avoid asking about one’s health 
and the health of the members of the family. A voluntary offer of help for anything is also a 
part of the greeting. Kaplan (1996) points out a specific feature of argumentation in Arabic. 
Arab learners do not develop an argument as the Americans do. They argue by accretion and 
repetition. They highlight and repeat the main point instead of building up to it. To the 
Americans that is not an argument at all (as cited in Tannen, 1984, p.194). Another deviation 
at the speech act level is in complementing. As in Indian English, Arab learners of English 
tend to minimize self-praise and maximize the praise of the other. They exchange multiple 
versions of certain speech acts such as that of congratulating in ‘elf mabrook’ (thousand 
congratulations), wishing good health/safety in ‘elf salamaat’ (thousand safeties), etc., as they 
do in Arabic. These are deviant discourse features of Arab variety of English, which may 
cause cross-cultural pragmatic errors in communication.
There are many stylistic deviations in the nativized varieties. They mainly aim at cultural suitability. Parashar (1994) has listed a few such examples from Indian English.

Kindly advise me please.

I respectfully submit the following few lines for favour of your kind consideration.

With due respect I beg to inform you.

I have the honour to invite a reference to your letter.

I need some esteemed help.

These stylistic deviations from the native speaker norms are acceptable and appropriate in the Indian variety of English. However, the native speaker groups involved in Parashar’s study found them to be over polite (p.163).

Patil (2008) and Tannen (1994) talk of some deviations in the Japanese variety. In the Japanese culture, complimenting involves several exchanges of praise and ritual denials. Japanese cannot accept a compliment merely by saying ‘Thank you’. He has to deny all the praises showered on him and return bouquets of praises to the complimenter. This may cause confusion and embarrassment to westerners who are known for their straightness and brevity. The western brevity and the Japanese prolixity are at the two extremes. Similarly, Japanese culture values group harmony, and thus, Japanese people avoid disagreements. Their over politeness does not allow them to say ‘no’. One must understand the meaning of their ‘yes’ from the way they say it. If the Japanese have only the positive response ‘yes’, Indians have both ‘yes’ and ‘no’. But they have their own meanings of these words. Ma (1996) makes an interesting observation. A General Motors manager was confused and frustrated over a conversation with his Asian clients. He is reported to have said; “I don’t understand you
Asians. You say ‘no’ when you are supposed to say ‘yes’, and ‘yes’ when you are supposed to say ‘no’ (as cited in Patil, 2008, p.38).

Sanyal’s (2006) study on Indian English brings out many obfuscating stylistic features of Indian English writing. She finds that Indians still have a tendency to cling to literary Victorian English, which later Victorians rejected. Instead of being direct and simple, many writers write to impress rather than to inform. She calls this ‘the whirligig of circumlocution’ (p. 14). She finds fault with ill arranged parenthetical clauses and many other devices that make things incomprehensible or at least difficult to comprehend. The following is one of her examples:

In this day and age, it is unheard that a civilized country should target a city with a population of 650,000 and little in the way of military installations, with three major sorties involving 800 planes which sent down hundreds of tons of incendiary bombs that killed 35,000 people, largely civilians, and caused Dresden, a most beautiful city, to burn for seven days and seven nights (p.11).

She breaks up the same text in the following manner to show how foggy and obfuscating the original text was:

It is barbaric that a country should seek to destroy a city with few military installations and 650,000 people. After three sorties by 800 planes had rained hundreds of tons of incendiary bombs, beautiful Dresden burnt for seven days and seven nights. The death toll was 35,000- mostly civilians (p.11).
As Bhargava (2011) criticizes, “…the trouble arises when our people strive after effect while using English. The desire to impress is the bane of the writing/speaking of many of us” (p.4). The message is often lost in such pompous attempts. Simplicity is mistaken as inefficiency in language.

Idiomatic expressions are also a threat to intelligibility. To give a simple example, in some parts of England, during an informal conversation a man may ask his friend, “How is your strife and struggle?” Even for many native speakers of English this is all Greek. It is unintelligible. The real meaning is “How is your wife?” (Richard, personal communication, September 28, 2013).

To conclude, language is not used the same way in all the communities. As Patil (2008) maintains, different cultures have different ways of doing things with words (pp.37-8). When such socio linguistic features, which are typical of one culture, are transferred to the nativized varieties of the second language, intelligibility is at stake unless the interlocutors are familiar with them.

3.9. Conclusion

Intelligibility, as we have discussed, is not a very simple affair. It cannot be limited to mere recognition at the word level. How one comprehends and interprets an utterance is the quintessence of intelligibility. Many aspects of communication affect intelligibility. They include phonology, lexis, grammar and pragmatics. Intelligibility issues would not have been there at all if all the users of a language had used it the same way. However, the
sociolinguistic reality about English is that it varies in use even among the inner circle countries where it is the first language.

Notions of dominance are not appreciated today. Thus, the users of the nativized varieties of English tend to resist native like models. As McKay (2002) puts it, “most speech communities view native like articulation or the tendency to achieve native like competence as distasteful, pedantic, and affected or even snobbish” (pp.39-40). Notions of democracy urge people for convergence. As the native speakers of English are being steadily outnumbered by non-native speakers, theories of convergence receive an added value. The global context demands that both the native and the non-native speakers of English strive for a global accent, which will facilitate intelligibility.

Pronunciation alone does not guarantee intelligibility, though it is the greatest factor affecting it. Grammar does not pose many threats. Where grammar is concerned, there is a global uniformity with a few exceptions. But this is not the same with lexis and pragmatics.

English is used today for cross-cultural communications as well as for wider communications within one country. When English gets renationalized in the outer circle countries, it is accompanied by lexical, structural and phonological innovations in the varieties of English used in these countries. As an international language, English is used both in a global sense for international communication among different countries and in a local sense as a language for wider communication within multicultural societies. Hence, it is important that certain minimum standard of intelligibility is established and maintained at all levels.
As mentioned earlier, the emergence of varieties of English has also brought in concepts such as heterogeneity, liberation linguistics etc. Standards are questioned, and as in many other areas of life, there have been shifts in paradigms in English also. It is interesting to look at some of those paradigm shifts.