

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 11 : 6 June 2011
ISSN 1930-2940

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**Understanding Problems in Learning English Vowels by
Manipuri Speakers**

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Abstract

This paper raises an important question why Manipuri speakers speaking English (MSSE) do not have appropriate English pronunciation. It is identified that a lack of adequate knowledge of English sounds, L1 interference and other related negative transfers while speaking contribute to this situation. This paper compares and investigates the differences between the RP (Received Pronunciation) English and Manipuri vowels in order to explain why it is difficult for Manipuri speakers to pronounce English vowels.

Manipuri has only 12 vowels (6 pure vowels and 6 diphthongs) whereas Standard British English (RP) has 20 vowels (12 pure vowels and 8 diphthongs). It has been found that English long and short vowel pairs /i:/ and /i / , /ɔ:/ and /ɔ / , /u:/ and /u/ are substituted by MSSE with their nearest available vowel sounds /i / , /o/ , /u / respectively.

Manipuri has no phonemic contrast between long and short vowels, so MSSE tends to under-differentiate the distinction between the English long and short vowel pairs. English diphthongs / ai , au , ɔi / are almost identical to Manipuri diphthongs / ai, au, oi/ respectively, and they are substituted with the available pure vowels in order to pronounce English diphthongs / ei , əu , uə , eə , iə /. It is observed that there are many vowels and diphthongs available in English but these are not found in Manipuri. Similarly, there are triphthongs in English but not in Manipuri. These contrastive features seem to be a great

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challenge to Manipuri speakers in their effort to acquire English vowels, diphthongs and triphthongs.

Key words: English vowels, Manipuri vowels, Manipuri speakers speaking English (MSSE), RP (Received Pronunciation), vowels.

Introduction

Learning a Second Language (L2) is a lifelong process and it is often a challenging experience for L2 learners. English as a second language has certain elements which hinder the learner's learning. One of these difficult factors, for instance, is English vowels. English vowel will be a problem because there are relatively few vowels in Manipuri and relatively many vowels in English. Since Manipuri has only 12 vowels (6 pure vowels and six diphthongs), each vowel covers more than one English vowel. So, Manipuri speakers speaking English (hereafter MSSE) often mispronounce English vowels by substituting them with Manipuri vowels.

The discussion in this paper follows the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) and Error Analysis framework, where two or more languages are compared in order to determine what needs to be learned and what should not be acquired in a second language learning situation. This analysis is based on a theory of second language acquisition that claims that the major source of error in learners' production and reception of a second language is the native language (Gass and Selinker.2001). The approach of Contrastive Analysis (CA) seeks to predict learner errors by identifying the linguistic differences between their Native Language and the Target Language.

Lado (1957) formulated the Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis (CAH) on the basis of this assumption:

...the student who comes into contact with a foreign language will find some features of it quite easy and others extremely difficult. Those elements that are similar to his Native Language will be simple for him, and those elements that are different will be difficult.

CAH suggests that difficulties in acquiring a new (second) language are derived from the differences between the new language and the native (first) language of a language learner. That is to say, identifying the differences would lead to a better understanding of the potential problems that a learner of the particular L2 would face. Structurally different areas of the two languages involved would result in interference.

The principal barrier to a second language acquisition is the interference of the learners first language system into the second language system, that is, interference or negative transfer takes place whenever the habits of the native language speakers differ from those of the speakers of the target language. Therefore, a scientific and structural comparison of the two languages in question, would enable people to predict, and analyse the problems.

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Although this might not be the only reason why learners make errors in their production, this article posits that Contrastive Analysis could reveal a part of the problems that Manipuri speakers have in pronouncing English vowels.

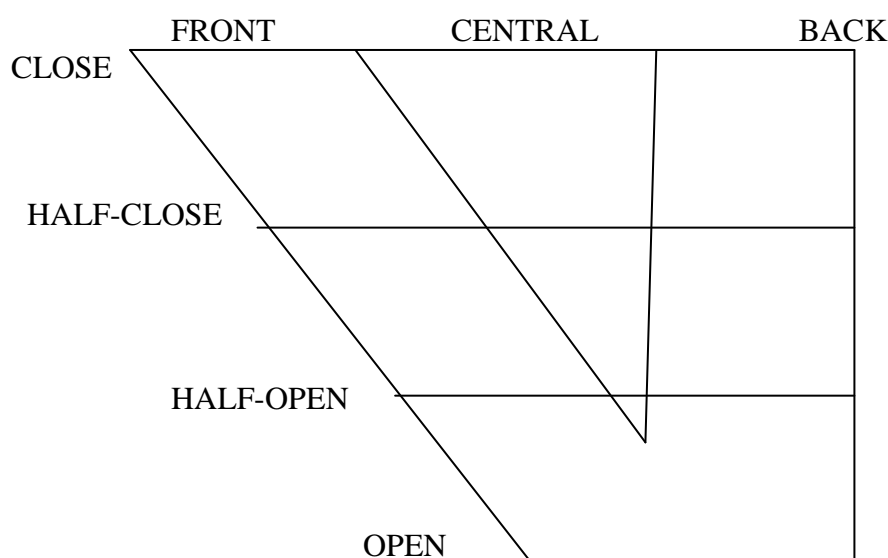
Background

It is usual to divide all speech sounds into two broad categories – vowels and consonants. In the production of vowels the air comes out freely through the mouth. There is no closure of the air –passage and no narrowing of the passage that would cause audible friction. All other sounds are called consonants. They are distinguished from each other by the way the vocal tract is modified by lips and tongue, which also modifies the sound produced. (Meyer 2005).

Linguists in general define a vowel as a speech sound produced without a constriction of the vocal tract sufficient to produce a closure or audible friction. (Keith et al. 2006). A vowel is a sound made when the impedance of the air through the vocal tract is minimal and the vocal tract is completely open (Tim 2007).

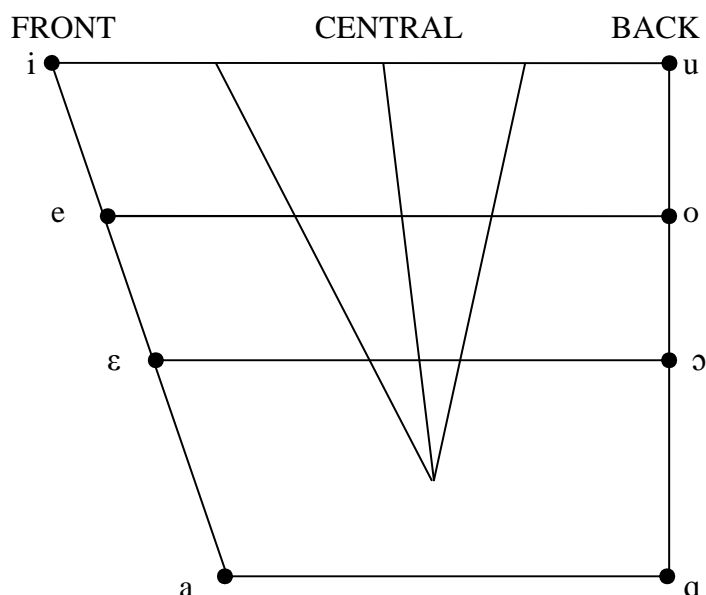
Vowels can be classified according to tongue height (that is, whether the body of the tongue is high or low), front or back vowels (that is, whether the front or the back of the tongue is raised) and the shape of the mouth (that is, whether the lips are rounded or spread) (Roach 1991:14).

- **Classification of tongue positions for vowels:-**



Cardinal vowels: One of a series of vowel sounds, not taken from any specific languages, having a characteristics tongue- position and well-defined acoustic qualities; to be used for comparison with vowels in different languages. (Jones, Daniel 2001). “Cardinal vowels (CVs) are not the vowels of any particular language, but are systematically established, language independent, universal reference vowels” (Catford 2001).

- **The tongue positions of the cardinal vowels**



English Vowels

English has 12 pure vowels or monophthongs and 8 diphthongs. (Aslam and Kak 2007). Monophthongs are pure vowels and diphthongs are gliding vowels. A vowel that does not change in quality may be called a monophthong and diphthongs are vowel sounds that combine two separate sounds into a single unbroken sound. Jones (2001) defines, ‘pure vowel’ as ‘a vowel (during which the organs of speech remain approximately stationary) in contradiction to a ‘diphthong’ (during which the organs of speech perform a clearly perceptible movement). There are twelve pure vowels which are of special importance for the foreign learners of English. They are:

/ i : , i , e , æ , ʌ : , ɔ , ɔ : , u , u : , ʌ , ə : , ə /

There are 20 vowel sounds in Standard British English (RP). Twelve of these are monophthongs, that is, pure vowel sound, and eight are diphthongs.(Bloomer et al., 2005).

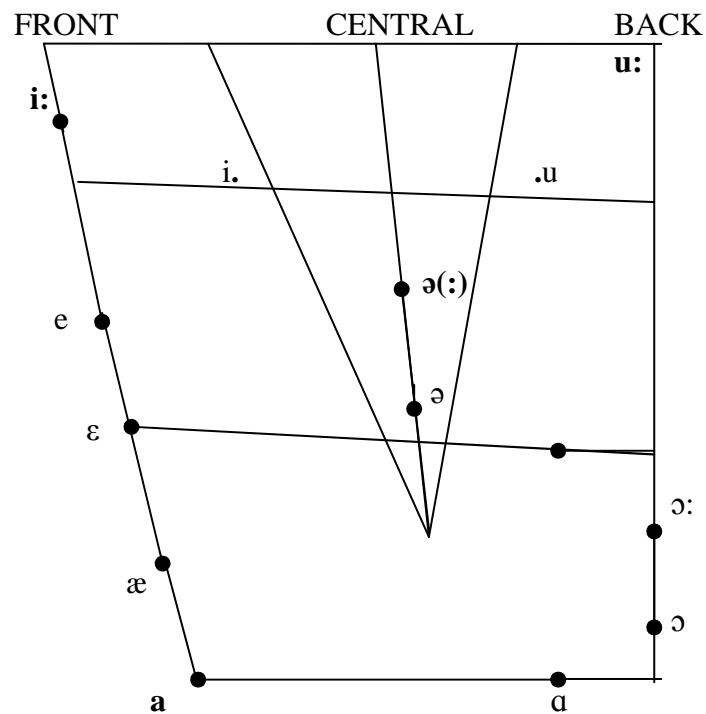
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The 12 ‘pure’ vowels are / i: , i , e , æ , ɑ: , ɔ , ɒ: , u , u: , ʌ , ə: , ə / and 8 diphthongs are /ei, ai, ɔi ,əu, au, iə , eə, uə) .The ‘pure’ vowels are further divided into 7 short vowel (i, e, æ, ɔ, u, ʌ, ə) and 5 long vowels (i: , ɑ: , ɒ: , u: , ə:)



Of the above-mentioned important vowel sounds eight (i: , i , e , æ , ɑ: , ʌ , ə: , ə) have spread or neutral lips, while four (ɔ , ɒ: , u , u:) have various degrees of lip- rounding.

We have discussed the vowels of Standard British English (RP) which has 20 basic vowel phonemes: 12 ‘pure’ vowels (/ i: , i , e , æ , ɑ: , ɔ , ɒ: , u , u: , ʌ , ə: , ə /) and 8 diphthongs (/ei, ai ,ɔi ,əu, au, iə , eə, uə)

Manipuri Vowels

Let us start by describing the general characteristics of Manipuri vowels. Manipuri makes use of twelve vowels in its sound system in which six are pure vowels. They are, / i, e, ə , a , o , u / and the six diphthongs are / ai , oi , ui , əi , au, əu /.

The chart 1 given below shows 6 pure vowels, / i , e , ə , a , o , u /.

High front, high back, mid front, central mid, mid back, low central. (Chelliah 1997; Yashwanta 2000)

Chart 1: Manipuri vowels

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Chelliah (1997); Yashawanta (2000)

	Front	Central	Back
High	i		U
Mid	e	ə	O
Low		a	

Whereas another (chart 2) given in D.N.S Bhatt and M.S. Ningomba (1997) shows 6 pure vowels. The position of / ə / is given in the high central position. Regarding this position of / ə / we would agree with Chelliah (1997) and Yashawanta (2000).

Chart 2: Manipuri vowels

D.N.S Bhatt and M.S. Ningomba (1997)

i	ə	u
e	a	o

Distribution of Manipuri Vowels

All the six Manipuri vowels can occur in the three positions that is, initially, medially and finally. Examples

Initial

	Manipuri	English
/i/	iroy	‘buffalo’
/e/	ensaŋ	‘curry’
/ə/	əni	‘two’
/a/	adə	‘there’
/o/	ok	‘pig’
/u/	u	‘tree’

Medial

/i/	hik	‘louse’
/e/	ucek	‘bird’
/ə/	lən	‘wealth’
/a/	hameŋ	‘goat’
/o/	kok	‘head’
/u/	nuŋ	‘stone’

Final

/i/	hi	‘boat’
/e/	ce	‘paper’

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/ə/	pibə	‘to give’
/a/	na	‘ear’
/o/	mo	‘cow’
/u/	hu	‘poison’

Comparison between English and Manipuri Vowels

English vowels / i , i: , e , æ , ɑ: , ɔ: , ɒ , u: , u , ʌ , ə: , ə /

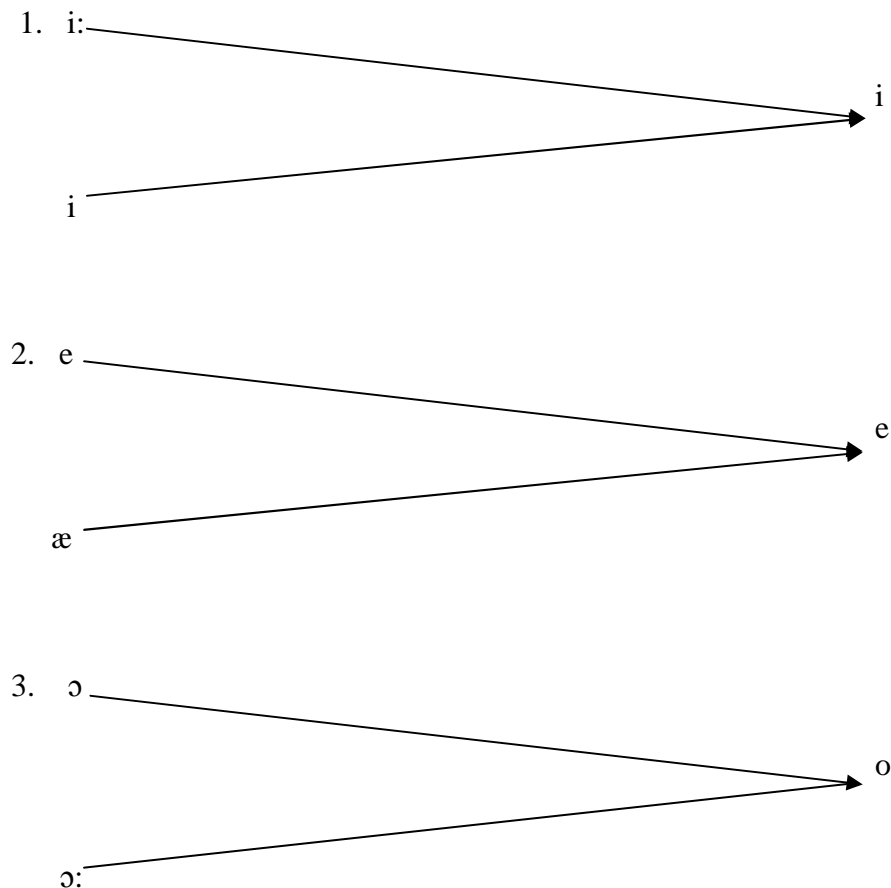
Manipuri vowels / i , e , ə , a , o , u /

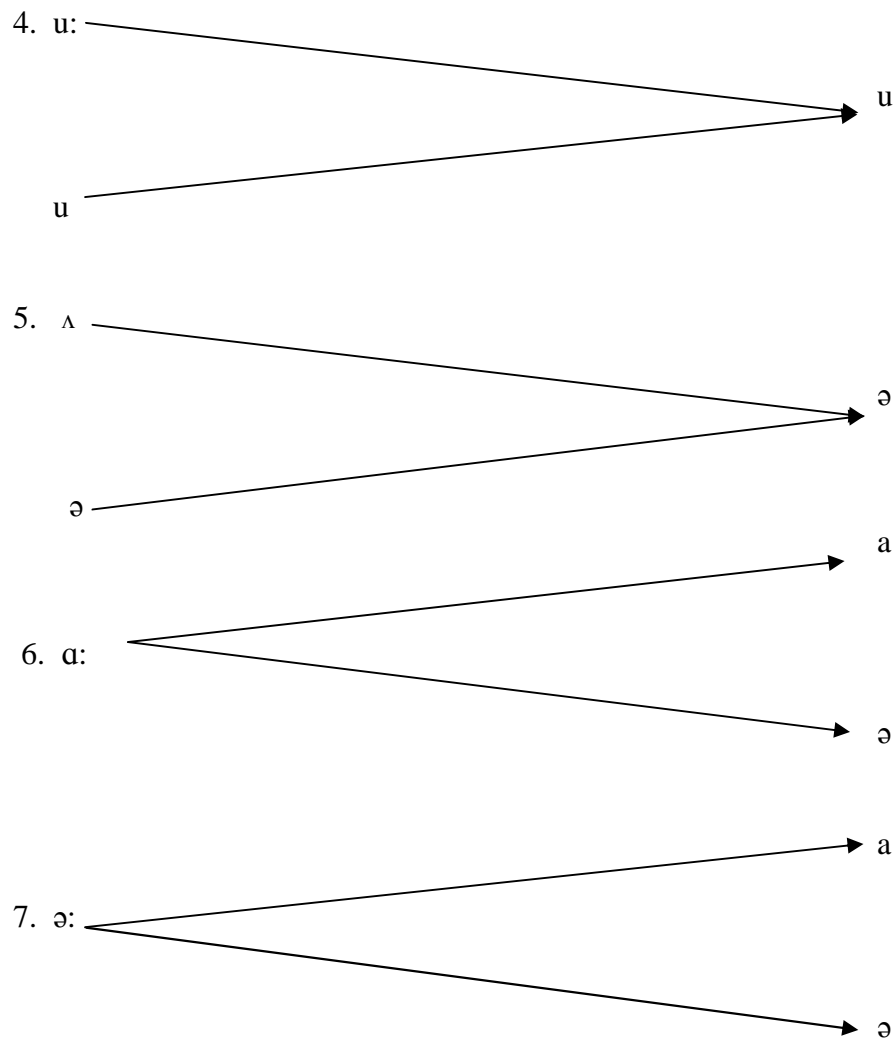
Vowel substitutions

Many English vowel sounds are narrowed and merged while some are split up to fit into the Manipuri vowel sounds. They are shown below:

English Vowels

Manipuri Vowels





We see from the above diagram that English long and short vowels /i:/ and /i/ ; /ɔ:/ and /ɔ/ ; /u:/ and /u/ are merged into the Manipuri phoneme /i/ ; /o/ ; /u/ respectively while pronouncing. And English vowels /ʌ/ and /ə/ are merged into single Manipuri vowel /ə/ while, English vowel /ɑ:/ and /ə:/ are split into Manipuri vowels /a/ and /ə/ in both the cases. From the comparison of vowel phonemes of English with their substituted forms by MSSE, it becomes clear that the vowel phonemes of English are accommodated by MSSE into the limited vowel sound system found in Manipuri.

The important differences between the vowel systems of English and Manipuri are:

- (1) Manipuri has only one phoneme /ə/ corresponding to English /ʌ/, /ə/
- (2) Manipuri has one phoneme /o/ corresponding to English /ɔ/, /ɔ:/
- (3) Manipuri has only one phoneme /i/ corresponding to English /i:/, /i/
- (4) Manipuri has only one phoneme /u/ corresponding to /u/ /u:/
- (5) Manipuri has two phonemes /ə/ and /a/ corresponding to English /ə:/

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(6) Manipuri has two phonemes /ə/ and /a/ corresponding to English /ɑ:/

(7) Manipuri speakers substitute English /æ/ with Manipuri /e/ because there is no /æ/ sound in Manipuri.

The substitution of English vowels with Manipuri vowels while pronouncing by the MSSE are illustrated in the following table along with examples:

Serial no.	English phonemes	Manipuri substitution	English words	English sound	Manipuri sounds
1.	i:	i	see	si:	si
	i		bit	bit	bit
2.	e	e	bed	bed	bed
	æ		cat	cæt	cet
3.	ɔ	o	dog	dɔg	dog
	ɔ:		organ	ɔ:gən	organ
4.	u	u	book	buk	buk
	u:		food	fu:d	fut
5.	ʌ	ə	cup	kʌp	kəp
	ə		earn	ə:n	ərn
6.	ɑ:	a ə	fast	fɑ:st	p ^h as
			after	ɑ:ftə(r)	əp ^h tər
7.	ə:	a ə	earn	ə:n	ərn/arn

Some Major Problems

Some of the more major vowel problems which MSSE have in acquiring a mastery of spoken English may be conveniently discussed in the remainder of this paper.

/æ/ > /e/

Many MSSE are unaware of the major difference between /æ/ and /e/. That is, the lips are more open for /æ/ than for /e/. Therefore, the English vowel /æ/ is substituted by Manipuri vowel /e/.

Replacement of the open vowel /æ/ by the Manipuri /e/ front vowel by MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

The following examples show the replacement of English vowel /æ/ by Manipuri /e/.

English words	RP	Manipuri
apple	æpl	eppəl
absent	æbsent	ebsen
atom	ætəm	etom
animal	æniməl	eniməl/n
active	æktiv	ektip

Language learners from Chinese, Japanese, Taiwanese, Croatian, Hungarian, German, Portuguese, Russian, Swedish, Dutch, and Persian also struggle in pronouncing the English vowel /æ/. They tend to use the sound available to them, /e / instead of /æ / in words like ‘man.’ /mæn / is pronounced as /men/. (www.binternet.com/~ted.power/l1all.html)

Replacement of the open vowel /æ / by the Manipuri front vowel /e / is also there, when the open vowel occurs in middle position. However, it is to be noted that the sound /æ/ does not occur finally.

English words	RP	Manipuri
sand	sænd	sen
lamp	læmp	lem
hang	hæŋ	heŋ
bag	bæg	bek
man	mæn	men

Replacement of English vowels /e / and /æ / by Manipuri mid-front vowel /e /:

In English /e/ is a front vowel (intermediate between half-close and half –open), and /æ/ is a front vowel (between half-open and open). These two vowels are substituted by Manipuri mid front vowel /e / while pronouncing. The contrastive sound between English vowels /e/ and /æ/ is a challenging for MSSE to distinguish these two English vowels both in comprehension Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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and production. Due to the lack of phonemic contrast between /ə/ and /æ/ vowels, MSSE tend to have difficulties distinguishing in some word pairs substituting with their nearest possible sound /e /.

Examples

English words	English sounds	Manipuri sounds	English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds
bet	bet	bet	bat	Bæt	bet
set	set	set	sat	Sæt	set
fed	fed	fed	fad	Fæd	fed
pen	pen	pen	pan	Pæn	pen
bend	bend	ben	band	Bænd	ben
men	men	men	man	Mæn	men
said	sed	sed	sad	Sæd	sed

/e/ versus /æ/ minimal pairs

bet	bat
set	sat
fed	fad
pen	pan
men	man
said	sad

/ə:/ > /a/ and /ə /

Many MSSE may pronounce the central vowel /ə:/ as /ə / and /a /. In Manipuri there is no vowel phoneme which has the same quality as English /ə:/. The Manipuri mid central vowel /ə / and low central vowel /a / are the nearest similar vowel to /ə:/ and may cause interference in learning /ə:/.

In their effort to approximate the articulation of English /ə:/, the MSSE are likely to transfer the nearest similar native vowel /ə / and /a / into English speech.

Replacement of the central vowel /ə:/ by /a / and /ə / when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
earn	ə:n	ərn /arn
earth	ə:θ	ərt /art

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Replacement of the central vowel /ə:/ by /a/ and /ə/ the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
work	wə:k	wark
girl	gə:l	gərl
shirt	ʃə:t	sərt
bird	bə:d	bərt
hurt	hə:t	hərt
germ	dʒə:m	zarm
heard	hə:d	hard

Replacement of the central vowel /ə:/ by /a/ and /ə/ the MSSE when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
fur	fə:	fər
her	hə:	har /hər
sir	sə:	sar/sər

MSSE mostly use /ə/ or /a/ in place of English /ə:/. But they tend to retain /ɪ/ sound for those words where /ə:/ occurs in final position.

/ʌ/ > /ə/

English phoneme /ʌ/ is a central vowel, between half-open and open; the lips are neutral. This vowel does not occur finally. MSSE substitute /ʌ/ mostly with mid central vowel /ə/ sound. Like the sound /æ/, the sound /ʌ/ does not occur in the final position in English.

Replacement of the central vowel /ʌ/ by the central vowel /ə/ by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
uncle	ʌŋkl	əŋkəl /-n
ugly	gli	əgli
unfit	ʌnfit	ənfit
other	ʌðə	ədər/adər

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Replacement of the central vowel /ʌ/ by the Manipuri central vowel /ə/ when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
cut	kʌt	kət
blood	blʌd	blət
country	kʌntri	kəntri
bus	bʌs	bəs
son	sʌn	sən
come	kʌm	kəm

But in some cases, /ʌ/ is also pronounced as /a/. For examples, words like, ‘other’ /ʌðə/ becomes /ədər/ or /ədər/, ‘mother’ /mʌðə/ becomes /madər/, ‘one’ /wʌn/ becomes /wan/ etc.

/ɑ: / > /ə/ or /a/

The English open back vowel, /ɑ: / is substituted with mid- central vowel /ə/ or with central /a/ by the MSSE while pronouncing it. In general, the English open back vowel /ɑ:/ and the Manipuri /ə/ are almost the same, though the quality and the length may be different. Some examples are given below:

Replacement of the open back vowel /ɑ: / by the central vowels /ə/ or /a / by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
after	ɑ:ftə(r)	əp ^h tər
argue	ɑ:gju:	ərgu
archive	ɑ:kaiv	ərkaip
artist	ɑ:tist	ərtis/ artis

Replacement of the open back vowel /ɑ: / by the central vowels /ə/ or /a / when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
garden	gɑ:dn	gərden /garden
fast	fɑ:st	phəs/p ^h as
class	klɑ:s	kləs/klas
pass	pɑ:s	pəs/pas

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Replacement of the open back vowel /ɑ: / by the central vowel /a / followed by the prominent /r/ sound along with it when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
zar	dʒɑ:(r)	zar
car	kɑ:(r)	kar
tar	tɑ:(r)	tar
bar	bɑ:(r)	bar

/ə/ > /e/ or /ə/

When /ə/ occurs in initial position MSSE tend to pronounce it either with their nearest possible sound mid-central /ə/ or mid-front /e/. But when /ə/ occurred in medial position they tend to substitute and pronounce with the mid-front vowel /e/ only, instead of English /ə/. When /ə/ occurs in final position, then MSSE tends to pronounce it as mid-central /ə/.

Replacement of the central vowel /ə/ by either /e / or /ə / by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
again	əgen	e/əgen
account	əkaunt	e/əkaun
alarm	əlɑ:m	e/əlm
alive	əlaiv	e/əlaip
attempt	ətempt	e/ətem

Replacement of the central vowel /ə / by /e / when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
canal	kənəl	kenen/-l
company	kʌmpəni	kəmpeni
tunnel	tʌnəl	tənen/l
final	fainəl	p ^h ainen/l

Replacement of the central vowel /ə / by /ə / when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
drama	dra:mə	drəmə
centre	sentə	sentər
collar	kələ	kolər
china	tʃainə	cəinə

Long and short vowel pairs

/i:/ and /i/ , /ɔ:/ and /ɒ/ , /u:/ and /ʊ/ are long and short vowel pairs in English. Where /i:/ , /i/ are front vowels ; /ɔ/ and /ɒ:/ and /u/ /u:/ are back vowels. Manipuri has no phonemic contrast between long and short vowels, so MSSE tend to under-differentiate the distinction between the long and short vowel pairs and tend to substitute with their nearest available vowel sounds.

Similarly, Macedonian does not differentiate between long and short vowels. (Natasha 2006)

/ i / > / i /

The English short vowel /i/ is almost the same with Manipuri front vowel/i/. Therefore, MSSE do not face any difficulty while pronouncing it.

Replacement of the long vowel /i / by the available Manipuri front vowel sound /i / when it occurs in initial position:

Examples :

English words	RP	Manipuri
igloo	iglu:	iglu
image	imidʒ	imez
electric	ilektrik	ilektrik
eleven	iliven	iləb ^h en

Replacement of the long vowel /i / by the available Manipuri front vowel sound /i / when it occurs in medial position:

English words	RP	Manipuri
fit	fɪt	fit
rich	ritʃ	ric
king	kiŋ	kiŋ
dish	dɪʃ	dis
village	vilidʒ	b ^h iles

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Replacement of the long vowel /i:/ by the available Manipuri front vowel /i/ when it occurs in final position:

English words	RP	Manipuri
sunday	sʌndi	sənde
pretty	pɹiti	pɹiti
heavy	hevi	hevi
city	siti	siti

/i:/ > /i/

There is no long vowel /i:/ in Manipuri as there is no phonemic contrast between long and short vowels pairs. Therefore, MSSE tend to substitute /i:/ with their available vowel /i/.
Examples:

Replacement of the long vowel /i:/ by the available Manipuri short vowel sound /i/ by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
east	i:st	ist
eat	i:t	it
easy	i:zi	izi
easter	i:stə/r	istər

Replacement of the long vowel /i:/ by the Manipuri short vowel sound /i/ when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
even	i:vn	ivən
people	pi:pl	pipəi/n
leaf	li:f	lip ^h
meet	mi:t	mit
heap	hi:p	hip

Replacement of the long vowel /i:/ by the Manipuri short vowel sound /i /when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
tree	tri:	tri
see	si:	si
key	ki:	ki
bee	bi:	bi

Due to the lack of phonemic contrast between long/i:/ and short/i/ vowels. MSSE tend to have difficulties distinguishing word pairs such as:

English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds	English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds
eat	i:t	it	it	it	it
feel	fi:l	fil	fill	fil	p ^h il
field	fi:ld	fil	filled	fild	p ^h il
sleep	sli:p	selip/islip	slip	slip	slip/islip
cheap	tʃi:p	cip	chip	tʃip	cip
bead	bi:d	bid	bid	bid	bit
heels	hi:lz	hils/hins	hills	hilz	hils
sheep	ʃi:p	sip	ship	ʃip	sip
keen	ki:n	kin	kin	kin	kin
seat	si:t	sit	sit	sit	sit

/i:/	/i/
eat	it
heels	hills
sheep	ship
keen	kin
seat	sit
feel	fill
field	filled

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sleep	slip
cheap	chip
bead	bid

In the same manner, some Assamese, Bengali, Bihari, Hindi, Gujarati, Marathi, and Oriya speakers in India do not always maintain the distinction between /i:/ and /i/. They replace /i:/ by /i/ (Bansal and Harrison 2003).

/u/ > /u/

Manipuri back vowel /u/ is similar to English short vowel /u/. Therefore MSSE do not face any difficulty while pronouncing. It occurs only in medial position. Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
book	buk	buk
put	put	put
wool	wud	wul/n
good	gud	gut
could	kud	kut
woman	wumən	wumen
push	puʃ	pus

/u:/ > /u/

There is no /u:/ long back vowel in Manipuri. Therefore, MSSE substitute it with their nearest /u/ sound while pronouncing it.

In similar way, some Bengali and Bihari Hindi speakers replace /u/ instead of /u:/ (Bansal, and Harrison 2003)

Replacement of the long back vowel /u:/ by the available Manipuri short vowel sound /u/ by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
ooze	u:z	uz

Replacement of the long back vowel /u:/ by the available Manipuri short vowel sound /u/ when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
cool	ku:l	kul
food	fu:d	p ^h ud

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noon
pool

nu:n
pu:l

nun
pul/n

Replacement of the long back vowel /u:/ by the available Manipuri short vowel /u / when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
zoo	zu:	zu
who	hu:	hu
blue	blu:	blu

Replacing long /u:/ with short /u/ sound leads to confusion in the MSSE. Some of the word pairs are as follows:

/u:/ /u/

foot foot
fool full
pool pull

English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds	English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds
food	fu:d	p ^h ut	foot	fut	p ^h ut
fool	fu:l	p ^h ul	full	ful	p ^h ul
pool	fu:l	p ^h ul	pull	pul	pul

/ɔ/ > /o/

Due to the lack of the exact counterpart for the mid back rounded vowel /ɔ/, MSSE replace /ɔ/ with their nearest sound /o/. Like the sound /æ/ and /ʌ/, /ɔ/ does not occur in the final position in English.

Replacement of the back rounded vowel /ɔ/, by the nearest Manipuri back vowel /o/ by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
often	ɔfn(ɔ:fn)	op ^h ən

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off ɔff(ɔ:f) ɒp

Replacement of the back rounded vowel /ɔ/, by the nearest Manipuri back vowel /o/ by the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
dog	dɔg	dog
long	lɔŋ	loŋ
solid	sɔlid	solit
shop	ʃɔp	sop

Similarly, Korean students have difficulty in pronouncing the vowel /ɔ/, as it does not exist in Korean. Korean speakers substitute the Korean /o/ for it. (Cho Byung-Eun 2004)

/ɔ:/ > /o/

Due to the lack of back long vowel /ɔ:/ MSSE substitute it with their /o/ sound while pronouncing.

Replacement of the back long vowel /ɔ:/, by the nearest Manipuri back vowel /o/ by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
all	ɔ:l	ol
ought	ɔ:t	ot
orphan	ɔ:fən	orpHan
organ	ɔ:gən	organ
order	ɔ:də(r)	odə(r)

Replacement of the back long vowel /ɔ:/, by the nearest Manipuri back vowel /o/ when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
short	ʃɔ:t	sort
lawn	lɔ:n	lon

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form

fɔ:m

phom

Replacement of the back long vowel /ɔ:/, by the nearest Manipuri back vowel /o/ when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
saw	sɔ:	so
floor	flɔ:	phlor
door	dɔ:	dor
raw	rɔ:	ro

Unavailability of long vowel /ɔ/ leads to confusion with some pairs of words like:

English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds	English word	English sounds	Manipuri sounds
caught	kɔ:t	Kot	Cot	kɔt	Kot

From all the above examples, we can say that MSSE is likely to transfer their own /i/ to replace both /i:/ and /i/, their own /o/ to replace both /ɔ:/ and /ɔ/, and their own /u/ to replace both /u:/ and /u/. In the same way they fail to make the necessary phonemic distinction between each set of long and short vowels when they hear spoken English.

This apparently helps us in explaining why MSSE find it hard to distinguish the long and short vowel contrasts in English. Depending on individual learners, some may use a short vowel for a long one; still others may pronounce a vowel sound which is somewhat in between the long and short vowels when pronouncing any of these sounds.

Diphthong

Diphthong is defined as “A union of two vowels pronounced in one syllable...” (Tim 2007). Diphthongs are “sounds which consists of a movement or glide from one vowel to another” (Roach 1991). Diphthongs in English, according to Ladefoeged (2001) are sounds that “have a change in vowel quality during the course of the syllable”, and are counted as single vowel units.

In RP, there are eight diphthongs. They are /ei, ai, ɔi, əu, au, iə, eə, uə/.

In Manipuri there are six diphthongs: / ai ,əi, oi , ui, əu, au, /.

Examples:

/ai /	mai	‘face’
/əi /	lài	‘flower’
/oi /	khôi	‘bee’

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/ui/	khuibə	‘wrinkle’
/əu /	məu	‘woman’
/au/	pau	‘news’

Based on the analysis of the data we have studied, it is found that there are six diphthongs in Manipuri. MSSE to substitute some of the English diphthongs with their vowel sounds. For example, English diphthongs /əu/ in words like, ‘flow’/fləu/ is replaced with Manipuri vowel /o/ and MSSE tend to pronounce it as /p^hlo /

Diphthong Substitution

English diphthongs	Manipuri pure vowels
ei	e
əu	o
uə	o(r)
eə	e
iə	i.ja
	Manipuri diphthongs
ai	ai
ɔi	oi
au	au

The substitution of English diphthongs done by the MSSE are illustrated in the following table with examples:

English phoneme	Manipuri substitution	English words	English sounds	Manipuri sounds
Ei	e	came	keim	kem
Ai	ai	night	nait	nait
ɔi	oi	boil	bɔil	boil
əu	o	flow	fləu	p ^h lo
Au	au	house	haus	haus
iə	iə	dear	diə	diyar
eə	ijar / e	air/aeroplane	eə/eərəplein	ijar/eropen
uə	o(r)	poor	puə	po(r)

/ei/ > /e/

Every English diphthong /ei/ is substituted with vowel /e/ sound by the MSSE as there is no /ei/ sound in their phonological system. In the same manner, the problem of substituting the pure vowel /e/ for the diphthong /ei/ is also faced by the Cantonese speakers. (Chan and David 2000).

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Replacement of the diphthong /ei/ by the front vowel /e / by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
age	eidʒ	es
agent	eidʒənt	egen(t)

Replacement of the diphthong /ei/, by the front vowel sound /e / by the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
came	keim	kem
great	greit	gret
table	teibl	tebəl/-n
game	geim	gem
late	leit	let
face	feis	p ^h es

Replacement of the diphthong /ei/, by the front vowel sound /e / by the MSSE when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
day	dei	de
play	plei	ple
clay	klei	kle

Similar problem is also found among Thai, Japanese, German, Swedish speakers. They pronounce /ei/ in words like 'late'/leit/ as /e/ in 'let'.

(www.binternet.com/~ted.power/l1all.html-)

/ai / > /ai /

Manipuri has /ai/ sound in their phonological structure. Thus, MSSE tend to substitute English diphthong / ai / with their nearest similar Manipuri diphthong /ai /. Therefore, MSSE do not face much difficulty while pronouncing those English words that have /ai/ sound.

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Replacement of the diphthong /ai /, by the Manipuri diphthong /ai / using the available similar sound by the MSSE, when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
eye	ai	ai
island	ailənd	ailen
ice	ais	ais
either	aiðə	aidə

Replacement of the diphthong /ai /, by the Manipuri diphthong /ai / sound when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
time	taim	taim
night	nait	nait
find	faind	p ^h ain
kind	kaind	kain
nice	nais	nais

Replacement of the diphthong /ai / by the Manipuri diphthong /ai / when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
fly	flai	p ^h lai
buy	bai	bai
shy	ʃai	sai
cry	krai	krai

/ɔi/ > /oi/

Manipuri has /oi/ sound in their phonological structure. Thus, they tend to substitute the English diphthong /ɔi/ with their available similar sound /oi/ while pronouncing.

Replacement of the diphthong /ɔi / by the Manipuri diphthong /oi / by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
oil	ɔil	oil
oilfield	ɔilfiəld	oilphil
oilseed	ɔilsi:d	oilsit

Replacement of the diphthong /ɔi /, by the Manipuri diphthong /oi / when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
point	pɔint	poin
coin	kɔin	koin
soil	sɔil	soil/-n
noise	nɔiz	nois
boil	bɔil	boil

But when this /oi/ sound occurs in the final position of the words, it changes into /oy/ sound.

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
boy	bɔi	boy
toy	tɔi	toy
coy	kɔi	koy
joy	dʒɔi	zoy

/əu/ > /o/

Due to the lack of English diphthong /əu / in Manipuri, MSSE substitute the /əu / sound with their available vowel /o/.

Replacement of the diphthong /əʊ / sound by the vowel /o/, the available nearest similar sound, by the MSSE when it occurs in the initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
old	əuld	old
over	əʊvə ^r	ob ^h ər
own	əun	on

Replacement of the diphthong /əʊ / sound by the vowel /o/, the available nearest similar sound, when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
boast	bəust	bos(t)
coat	kəut	kod(t)
coast	kəust	kos(t)

Replacement of the diphthong /əʊ / sound, by the vowel /o/, the available nearest similar sound, when it occurs in the final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
low	ləʊ	lo
slow	sləʊ	islo
flow	fləʊ	p ^h lo
go	gəʊ	go

/au / > /au /

MSSE tend to substitute English diphthong / au / with their nearest similar Manipuri diphthong /au /. Therefore, MSSE do not face much difficulty while pronouncing those English words that have /au / sound.

Replacement of the English diphthong /au /, by the Manipuri diphthong /au /, the available similar sound, by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
out	aut	aut

Replacement of the English diphthong /au /, by the Manipuri diphthong /au /, the available similar sound, when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
house	haus	haus
town	taun	taun
loud	laud	laut
shout	ʃaut	saut

Replacement of the English diphthong /au /, by the Manipuri diphthong /au /, the available similar sound, when it occurs in final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
now	nau	nau
how	hau	hau
cow	kau	kau

/iə / > /i.ja/

Manipuri lacks English diphthongs /iə/ sound, so they replace it with their sound /i -jar/ sound. While pronouncing English diphthong /iə/, the first vowel is front vowel /i/ and the second vowel is /ə/. In order to pronounce this English diphthongs /iə/, MSSE tend to substitute the first front vowel /i/ with their available similar vowel /i/ and then break the diphthong into a syllable,. After the syllable is produced, then the second vowel of the diphthong /ə /is replaced by the semi-vowel /y/ and followed by low central /a/ along with prominent /r/ sound when pronounce by the MSSE.

Replacement of the English diphthong / iə /, by the Manipuri sound /i –ja(r)/, the available similar sound by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
ear	iə(r)	i.jar

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earing

iərinŋ

i.jarinŋ

Replacement of the English diphthong / iə /, by the Manipuri sound /i.ya(r)/, the available similar sound by the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
beard	biəd	bi.jart
serious	siəriəs	seri.jas

Replacement of the English diphthong / iə / by the Manipuri sound /i.ja(r)/, the available similar sound, followed by the prominent /r/ sound by the MSSE when it occurs in the final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
dear	diə	di.jar
gear	giə	gi.jar
near	niə	ni.jar
beer	biə	bi.ar

/eə/ > /i.ja/ and /e/

Manipuri lacks English diphthongs /eə/ sound, so they replace these with their sound /i.yar/ and /e/ sound while pronouncing. In English diphthong /eə/, the first vowel is front vowel /e/ and the second vowel is /ə/. In order to pronounce the English diphthong /eə/, MSSE tend to substitute the first vowel /e/ with their vowel /i/ and then break the diphthong into syllable, and after the syllable is produced then the second vowel of the diphthong /ə/ is replaced by the semi-vowel /y/ and followed by low central /a/ along with prominent /r/ sound when pronounced by the MSSE.

Replacement of the diphthong /eə / sound, by the sound /i.yar/ or vowel /e/ the available similar sound by the MSSE when it occurs in initial position are:

English words	RP	Manipuri
air	eə	i.jar
airbag	eəbæg	i.jar.bek
airport	eəpɔ:t	i.jar.pot
aeroplane	eərəplein	e.ro.plen

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aerial

eərial

e.ri.jel/-n

But when /eə/ occurs in the initial position in some words, this tends to be pronounced as /e/ sound.

Examples:

‘aerial’ /eərial / as /erijel /; ‘aeroplane’ /eəɾəplein / as /eroplən / by the Manipuri learners due to their habit of pronouncing words according to pronunciation of the letters. This is a very prominent interference from L1.

Replacement of the diphthong /eə / sound, by the sound /i.jar /, the available similar sound, by the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

English words	RP	Manipuri
daring	dəəriŋ	di.jariŋ
caring	keəriŋ	ki.jariŋ
raring	reəriŋ	ri.jariŋ

Replacement of the diphthong /eə/ sound, by the sound /i.yar/, the available similar sound, followed by the prominent /r/ sound when it occurs in final position:

English words	RP	Manipuri
dare	dəə(r)	di.jar
care	keə(r)	ci.jar
share	ʃeə(r)	si.jar
rare	reə(r)	ri.jar

/uə/ > /o/

MSSE tend to substitute English diphthong /uə/ with their nearest vowel /o/ sound followed by the prominent /r/ sound. This diphthong /uə /, unlike the previous diphthongs, does not occur in initial position.

Replacement of the diphthong / uə / sound, by the pure vowel /o/ sound by the MSSE when it occurs in medial position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
gourd	guəd	go(r)d
surely	ʃuəli	sio(r)ly
poorly	puəli	po(r)ly

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Replacement of the diphthong / uə / sound, by the diphthong /or/ sound by the MSSE when it occurs in the final position:

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
cure	kjuə	kiyo(r)
poor	puə	po(r)
tour	tuə	to(r)
sure	ʃuə	sio(r)
your	juə	yo(r)

Triphthongs

Triphthong is defined as “A vowel perceived auditorily as a sequence of three segments in which there are two changes of quality and that functions as a single phoneme”; for example, [auə] in ‘shower’ in Received Pronunciation (Brown Keith et al., 2006) .

According to Varshney (2004) the diphthongs /ei/, /ai/, /ou/, /au/ may be followed by the vowel /ə/ within a word for example, ‘player’ /plerə^f/. These glides are called triphthongs.

Unlike English, Manipuri has no triphthongs. Therefore, MSSE tend to struggle with it while pronouncing those English words that have triphthongs in it.

If the second vowel of the triphthong is back vowel /u/, then this vowel of the vowel sequence of the triphthong is replaced by the semi-vowel /w/ and followed by /ə/ along with prominent /r/ sound in the pronunciation of the MSSE as evident in the following examples:

when /au/ followed by /ə/.

Examples are:

English words	RP	Manipuri
tower	tauə ^r	ta.wər
power	pauə ^r	pa.wər
shower	ʃauə ^r	sa.wər
lower	lauə ^r	la.wər
flower	flauə ^r	p ^h la.wər

when /əu/ followed by /ə/

English word	RP	Manipuri
slower	sləuə ^r	slo.wə ^r

If the second vowel of the triphthong is front vowel /i/, then this vowel of the vowel sequence of the triphthong is replaced by the semi-vowel /y/ and followed by /ə/ along with prominent /r/ sound while pronouncing by the MSSE as evident in the following examples:

/ai/ followed by /ə/

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
dryer	draiə ^r	dra.jə ^r
tyre	taɪə ^r	ta.jə ^r
wire	waiə ^r	wa.jə ^r
fire	faɪə ^r	pha.jə ^r
higher	haiə ^r	ha.jə ^r
hire	haɪə ^r	ha.jə ^r
tire	taɪə ^r	ta.jə ^r
desire	dizaɪə ^r	de.zjə ^r
admire	ədmaɪə ^r	ed.mi.jə ^r
buyer	baɪə ^r	ba.jə ^r

/ei/ followed by /ə/

Examples:

English words	RP	Manipuri
player	pleɪə ^r	ple.jə ^r
layer	leɪə ^r	la.jə ^r

/ɔɪ/ followed by /ə/

English word	RP	Manipuri
employer	implɔɪə ^r	em.plo.jə ^r

Since there are no triphthongs in Manipuri, MSSE tussle while pronouncing it. From the above given examples it is seen that in order to pronounce English triphthongs, they tend to break the words into syllables, and the sound that follows is pronounced as a semi-vowel either 'w' or 'j' and the unit ends up with the prominent 'r' sound while pronouncing.

Conclusion

In summary, we can conclude that the pronunciation mistakes arise from the sound differences and their distributional patterns in Manipuri and English. Many English vowels and diphthongs are narrowed, merged and also split up into two, to fit in the phonology of Manipuri. Since Manipuri has only 12 vowels (out of which 6 pure vowels), each pure vowel covers more than one English vowel. As a result MSSE often mispronounce English vowels by substituting them with Manipuri vowels. Unlike English, Manipuri lacks long and short vowel distinction and therefore all the long and short English vowel pairs /i, i:/, ɔ, ɔ:/, u, u:/ are substituted by Manipuri vowels /i/, /o/, /u/.

Manipuri mid front vowel /e/ substitutes English /e/, /æ/ and many other vowel substitutions take place. There are eight major diphthongs in English but only six of them are available in Manipuri. Therefore, MSSE have problems in articulating certain diphthongs and tend to replace them by nearest pure vowels. For instance, the pure vowel /e/ and /o/ substitute the English diphthongs /ei/ and /əu/ respectively. Similarly, central diphthongs /eə/ and /uə/ do not exist in Manipuri, so interestingly, the first diphthong /eə/ is separated into two syllables as /i.jə/ and /uə/ is replaced by /o/. Acquiring English triphthongs for MSSE is a demanding task as triphthongs are completely absent in Manipuri. All these suggest that it is a challenging task for MSSE to acquire those English vowels and diphthongs which are unavailable in Manipuri and even more so with triphthongs.

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