

IA *PHONETICS : REDUCTIONS, ADDITIONS AND MULTIFARIOUS NIA* PHONOLOGICAL SYSTEMS

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ABSTRACT

Search for the features of the phonetic bifurcations in any language family is a fascinating area. NIA poses one of such most challenging studies showing amazing reductions from and additions into IA phonetics. The moulding of various NIA phonologies stand as an indicator of the evolution of interesting phonetic distinctions. It is suggested that the diachronically developed phonetic processes are easier to understand and explain than those which are physiologically and socially marked and areally diffused. The paper proposes that these processes have to be studied especially from paralinguistic, ethological and semiotic angles.

1. INTRODUCTION

As is well known IA phonetics bifurcates from IE* phonetics by conspicuous addition of two features: retroflexion and aspiration. These features get modified differently in different NIA languages. Bloch (1965) and Masica (1991) have presented MIA and NIA sounds very precisely. Although there are many common phonetic features (Modi :1997) across the IA linguistic area, explainable as the diachronic phonetic processes resulting out of 'natural phonetics', there are quite a few other phonetic manifestations which are not explainable so easily and formulaically. But we cannot discard them as being linguistically insignificant because they are intricately involved in moulding of the various different phonologies (Modi : 1991). The paper tries to understand this and notes the extralinguistic foundations of phonologies (Donegan and Stamp: 1979) considering the fact that phonology is grounded in phonetics phonological forms are plans for phonetic behaviour (Linell:1982) which is a special case of intentional behaviour. A few such interesting phonetic manifestations are noted in figure 1.

2.DISCUSSION

As shown in the figure the phonetic manifestations are of two types : segmental or/and non-segmental.

2.1. The Segmental issues

2.1.1. Additions. Additions of four denti-alveolar affricates having aspiration and voicing differences in Marathi make the language distinct from the rest of the NIA languages which have only four palatal affricates with aspiration and voicing contrasts. The phonological status of denti-dveolar affricates in Marathi is not proved but they positively play an active role in Marathi phonology. They are likely to have entered from neighbouring dravidian sources (Kannada and Telugu) with which Maharashtra had a very close sociocultural and political ties. Their existence or to put it more simply their accommodation in Marathi without disturbing the Sanskrit vocabulary with palatal affricates baffles the phoneticians. Except for a few very rare contrasting pairs (not

necessarily nonculpable) between palatal and denti-alveolar affricates, the palatal affricates occur before high vowels and the denti-alveolar affricates occur before the rest of the vowels thus making them allophonic.

The feature of retroflexion - a phonetic habit - was added into IA and in that sense it is relatively a late comer into IA. As Allen (1953) has pointed out this articulatory process had prosodic function and it swayed over alveolar sounds i.e., nasal and lateral besides the stops (Mahulkar:1981). The retroflex lateral is found only in four NIA languages, out of which Konkani and Oriya are more partial to retroflex lateral than Marathi and Marathi is more partial to it than Gujarati. Konkani and Oriya have evolved retroflex prosody e.g., /m \schwa, retroflex lateral, retroflex lateral \ /e/ 'massaged', /p/ \schwa, retroflex nasal, retroflex lateral \ /i/ 'lamp', in Konkani and /mohi / \ retroflex lateral \ /a/ 'woman', /moi / \ retroflex lateral \ /a/ 'dirty', in Oriya. Sindhi, Kutchi and Hindi have retroflexed flap and no retroflex lateral. The retroflexion of lateral in the NIA languages is also due to the areal spread i.e., from dravidian source. However, the retroflexed flap cannot be attributed to dravidian source but it is derived from the middle Indian retroflexed voiced stop. Some tentative implications - predictions - can be extended with reference to retroflexion excepting the derived retroflexed flap.

A.1) If a language has a retroflex lateral it also has a retroflex nasal.

2) If there is a retroflex nasal in the language it also has retroflex stops.

B.1) If a dialect of the language with retroflex lateral and nasal retains lateral it will also retain the nasal but not vice versa.

2) If a language has only retroflex stops (and not the nasal and lateral) still will have the nasal retroflexed in 'NC' clusters where the consonant is retroflexed.

If any of the dialects of the languages with retroflex lateral loses it, it is considered as a sub standard dialect.

2.1.2 Reductions. Reverse to this we find removal of retroflexion in two cases : Assamese and Parsi Gujarati where the substratum language having no retroflexion brings denti-alveolar stops and ends up by removing retroflex dental contrast. As well known Assamese had late aryanization. The denti-alveolar stops of Assamese are the same as in one of the Tibeto-Burman languages called Sema. The community, however during the process of aryanization acquires aspiration (Sema lacks it) but not the retroflexion. For the similar reason of retaining the substratum phonology Parsi Gujarati has denti-alveolar stops from the close association with the Dubla tribe. It should be noted that Assamese further reduces four palatal affricates from IA phonetics. Sanskrit lexicon is maximally changed in this languages.

A live process of syllable reduction is in progress due to the deplorable lethargy prevalent in Hindi speaking belt. Post cluster

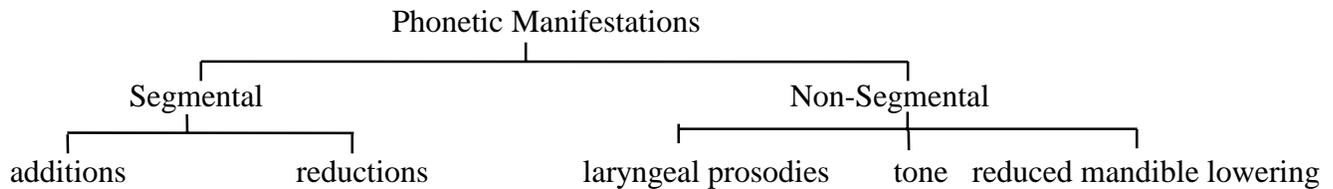


Figure 1.

final schwa deletion is surely the explainable loss but the speed at which the post cluster schwa deletion, weakening and as a result disappearing of the second consonant of the 'CC' clusters is taking place is alarming and makes one realize that this process actually causes unacceptable results. e.g., \palatal voiceless fricative\schwa\ /b d\ . schwa\ 'word' ---> \palatal voiceless fricative\schwa\bd/. But actually /d/ is non-audible and we get \palatal voiceless fricative\schwa\ /b/'dead body'! Hence one inevitably asks a question that how such drastic reduction is tolerated by the language sound system. This is a sociophonetic issue for which the answer is in a way outside the field of diachronic phonetics. I propose that the unbelievably diluted phonetic sense due to the mass media (cinema and TV) over and above the basic tendency of schwa deletion has hastened the process to such a deplorable point.

2.2 The non segmental issues

2.2.1 Laryngeal prosodies - The most important, conspicuous and responsible for the moulding of the different phonologies are the laryngeal features. Gujarati is marked by two such distinct phonation features: murmur and tight (Modi:1984). Although murmur in Gujarati produced by the lowered state of larynx is not a contrastive feature, it brings some significant changes such as denasalization of vowels and intervocalic spirantization of voiced stops due to its lenition effect. Contrary to this tight phonation brings fortition effect due to the physiological adjustment done by raising the larynx and this state of larynx is maintained all through the speech along with the tension of musculature (of vocal fold surface). Due to this state of larynx the said denasalization and spirantization are not possible in the tight phonation dialects. The laxing of murmur and tensing of tight phonation act like controlling factors on the 'normalization' process of Gujarati phonology. Tight phonation is spread in the areas starting from Sindh and reaching upto north Gujarat. Sindhi and Kutchi have developed implosives which are totally alien to IA phonetics. Due to tight phonation the contrasting movements of raising and lowering of larynx needed for the implosives are possible.

2.2.2 Tone. Punjabi on the other hand has developed tones to substitute voiced aspirated stops. Tones in Punjabi are not contrasting but are like another way of minusing breathy voice. It is suggested that though Punjabi has not got tight phonation similar to the other said languages, it certainly has a strong fortition process which prohibits breathy voice.

2.2.3 Mandibular setting. One of the most interesting cases of close jaw mandibular setting along with the tension of tongue musculature is that of Marathi language. This biasing tendency is specific of high class Brahmins of Pune who with the sterling scholarship of Vedas and Pratisakhya consciously and effortfully developed this phonetic habit and hence Marathi standard dialect out of all the NIA languages marks itself by maximally retaining Sanskrit phonotactics. The Brahmins set for themselves a phonetic setting which played a major semiotic role by becoming their identity mark and at the same time framed the phonological structure of standard Marathi.

3. CONCLUSION

From the above discussion one is tempted to tentatively conclude that

- 1) the phonetic habit of speaker community may be rooted in sociological strata (Marathi).
- 2) the phonation habit (laryngeal adjustments) might have been an alien feature swaying over the whole geographical belt.
- 3) the fortition due to the musculature tension is not favourable to voiced aspiration of IA.
- 4) the same fortition and tight phonation are suitable for the evolution of implosives which distance the said languages from the other NIA languages.
- 5) the additions of sounds (such as retroflex lateral and dental-alveolar affricates) have most comfortably found the phonological space in the said languages without disturbing IA phonetics.
- 6) the reduction of the whole retroflex series and palatal affricates, however, results into the sound system highly distanced from the other NIA languages.
- 7) the mass media and the attack of English has weakened the language consciousness which results into faulty lexicon.

The frame work in which these phonetic manifestations have to be understood includes ethological, sociological and areal angles. Universal phonetic potentialities include language specific potentialities but one must distinguish between the sociophonetic settings and the natural phonetics.

NOTES

IA* = Indo Aryan, NIA* = New Indo Aryan
IE* = Indo European

