

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.18454/RULB.2021.28.4.31>**ПРОСОДИЧЕСКИЕ ОСОБЕННОСТИ ВАРИАНТА АНГЛИЙСКОГО ЯЗЫКА В ИНДИИ**

Научная статья

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Аннотация

В статье рассматривается ряд просодических особенностей английского языка в Индии, самого крупного по числу носителей представителя новых вариантов. Развившись на территории бывшей колонии Великобритании и испытывая воздействие языков коренного населения, данный вариант приобретает характерные лингвистические черты, способствующие выражению национальной идентичности говорящего. В наибольшей степени своеобразие варианта проявляется на фонетическом уровне, в частности на уровне просодии, одного из самых ярких маркеров национальной принадлежности в звучащей речи.

Просодия индийского варианта английского языка не является достаточно изученной областью лингвистических исследований. Кроме того, просодические особенности варианта, обусловленные несоответствием стандартному типу английского произношения, способны значительно затруднять процесс восприятия и понимания смысловой стороны высказывания в ходе межкультурного общения, что повышает риск коммуникативных неудач. В целях содействия решению лингвистических задач, а также снижения трудностей восприятия и понимания звучащей речи носителей исследуемого варианта в статье определяются его главные просодические особенности в области ритма, ударения и мелодики.

Ключевые слова: просодия, индийский вариант английского языка, новые варианты английского языка.

PROSODIC FEATURES OF INDIAN ENGLISH

Research article

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Abstract

This paper examines the most typical prosodic features of Indian English. By the number of second language (L2) speakers, it is the most spoken variety among New Englishes. It was born and developed in the former British colony, but as a result of long-time transfer effects from the speaker's first language, Indian English has acquired a number of distinguishable features, which have made it different from British English, as well as other English varieties; they have also formed a medium for transmitting the speaker's national identity. The most salient of them show at the phonetic level, namely at the level of prosody, which is one of the most significant markers of the speaker's national affiliation in spoken speech.

Indian English prosody is still understudied in linguistics. Apart from that, in cross-cultural communication, the prosodic features of the variety may cause speech perception and comprehension difficulties owing to deviations from Standard English pronunciation, which eventually may lead to communication breakdown. This article aims to contribute to the linguistic study of Indian English prosody, as well as the resolution of possible problems in perception and comprehension of Indian English speakers. To this end, the author singles out the major prosodic characteristics of Indian English in speech rhythm, accentuation and melody.

Keywords: prosody, Indian English, New Englishes.

Introduction

Since the early 1980s, the term *New Englishes* has gained a high profile in linguistic literature. It embodies new varieties of English, which emerged in the overseas dependent territories of the British Empire, and are now spoken by non-native speakers whose mother tongue is other than English.

Considering historical, political and social factors, it should be recalled that the arrival of English, which was imposed by the colonizers on indigenous populations, brought about bilingualism in those territories. Interestingly, after the colonies got their national independence, the English language did not disappear with the exodus of the colonizers. It stayed, became one of the official languages of a territory, and continues to play an important part in the life of local societies to the present day. Specifically, English has become an institutionalized language, having entered such discourse domains as education, administration, law, corporate business, mass media, science and technology.

What is more, the attitude of the indigenous population to English has changed. It is no longer perceived as the language of colonizers or identified with Anglo-Saxon culture. Nowadays, it is viewed as a tool to getting a good education and a high-paid job, and being successful. Speaking English is considered to be prestigious. Thus, having assimilated into a society, it has become an indispensable part of indigenous culture and, consequently, a medium for its expression [5].

From a linguistic perspective, English has been nativized by indigenous societies, having developed localized varieties in accordance with linguistic and cultural contexts [9]. Being in contact with indigenous cultures and languages, the localized varieties have gradually been deviating from standard British English, while acquiring specific linguistic features of their own. These linguistic features make them unique and distinguishable among the existing English varieties, and start to serve as a medium for expressing the speaker's national identity. Indian English (IE) is one of such varieties.

In India, English is a statutory national working language [2]. However, it is used not only in formal domains but also in informal situations cross-country as a lingua franca. Arguing the linguistic status of IE, many researchers agree that it is currently going through the stage of endonormative stabilization, i.e., it is on the way to evolving into an autonomous variety of English with its own linguistic norms, not coinciding with the norms of Standard English [6]. Specifically, German researcher Robert Fuchs, who examines the educated variety of IE in one of his works, provides evidence on *the emerging standard IE* [8].

A far-reaching effect of the establishment of IE as an independent variety is that its characteristic features can pose an obstacle to a successful cross-cultural communication, namely create speech perception and comprehension problems. It has to be emphasized that these problems are not really caused by the grammatical or lexical peculiarities of IE, but they are mostly caused by its phonetic characteristics, which are different from Standard English pronunciation.

The problems of perception and comprehension of non-native English speakers are acute issues today, especially in relation to IE speakers, who make up 265,260,000 users [7]. It means that IE is the largest New English variety, widely spoken in cross-cultural contacts, particularly in business, trade, tourism, medicine, science, education, mass media, etc. Moreover, the number of IE speakers is expected to be growing in coming years due to a high population growth rate in the country.

Nevertheless, despite its vast presence in international communication, this New English variety is still understudied in linguistics, especially at its suprasegmental level. The reason for the lack of the linguistic research of IE, in comparison with that of native English varieties, lies in the long-time linguistic approach which defined the unique features of IE as mistakes or deviations from the norms of Standard English.

The typical features of IE are also overlooked in teaching English as a foreign language, to be specific, in developing students' listening skills. It is common knowledge that listening comprehension activity in most cases is narrowed down to the development of students' ability to comprehend native varieties of English, especially its British and American standards, while New Englishes are often left out of the listening comprehension process. Yet, the development of English learners' skills to comprehend IE speakers in particular seems equally important.

English learners might fail to understand the information content conveyed in an utterance due to the specifics of IE at the phonetic level. A lack of awareness of the phonetic peculiarities of the variety, insufficient experience in its perception and comprehension, the acquired pronunciation norms of British or American Standard and their association with the pronunciation forms heard in IE, let along the complexity of the speech perception and comprehension process in general, are all among the factors which may seriously affect the act of communication and contribute to communication breakdowns. In other words, the problem of perception and comprehension of IE speakers could result in communicative failure in a real-life situation.

Obviously, the success of speech perception and comprehension depends to a large extent on the listener's awareness of the speaker's pronunciation type, as all the main components of the phonetic and phonological systems (segment, word and sentence stress, rhythm, and melody) have an impact on the way the listener perceives and comprehends spoken speech. That is why for the appropriate perception and comprehension of IE speakers it seems essential to single out those phonetic features of IE that distinguish it from other English varieties and constitute salient markers of the speaker's national identity.

In this respect, the study proceeds with a description of the most typical phonetic features of IE at the prosodic level, as prosody is one of the most conspicuous indicators of national affiliation in spoken language [10]. Besides, the prosodic level of the variety, especially its melodic component, is far from being extensively investigated. The existing studies of the IE variety on rhythm, word and sentence stress, as well as melody, are quite rare in phonetic literature and do not provide the whole and complete picture of the IE prosody. Therefore, the prosodic system of the IE variety still requires thorough research. Moreover, the emergence and development of many other new varieties of English requires not only systematic accounts of their prosodies but also increases the need to come up with prosodic typology of the varieties. These unresolved issues determined the subject matter of this study.

Methods and Materials

First and foremost, it is worth pointing out that IE is by no means homogeneous, which means that inside the variety there is a large degree of variability in pronunciation forms, resulting from substratum interference, the speaker's English proficiency level and other extralinguistic factors. For this reason, the prosodic features, discussed in this article and selected as the prosodic indicators of IE speakers' national identity, reflect general trends, discovered in the speech corpus of 20 IE subjects [1]. It also should be noted that the prosodic features of IE are described in comparison with British Standard – the variety from which IE evolved.

The subjects (10 men and 10 women) were selected as IE speakers on the basis of their linguistic background, educational level and social status, and make a relatively homogeneous group. They were all born and live in the so-called Hindi belt, speak Hindi as their mother tongue (the most spoken language in India), have a high English proficiency level, hold a high school or university degree, and come from the middle or upper-middle class. For comparative purposes, a speech corpus of 20 native British English (BE) speakers was compiled to form a reference group. The authentic interviews recorded on New Delhi Television and BBC Radio 4 served as a source of audio material and contained spontaneous speech [11], [3]. The corpus of the data selected for analysis consisted of the subjects' answers to an interviewer's questions, with the duration of approximately 5 minutes for each subject. The total duration of the IE corpus was 101 min 38 sec, and that of the BE corpus was 99 min 02 sec.

The research was based on a complex approach and comprised theoretical analysis, methods of sociophonetic analysis, proper phonetic methods (i.e. auditory / perceptual and instrumental analyses), comparative analysis, as well as methods of statistical analysis for data processing. Praat software (version 5.3.42) was applied as an acoustic analyzer of sound wave signals [4]. The phonetic analysis had the following major objectives: to study the rhythmic patterns in the subjects' spontaneous speech production; to determine the averaged pitch level and range used by the subjects; to estimate the fundamental frequency (F0) peak and its alignment with the syllable structure in an intonational phrase; to examine the

melodic contour in the head of an intonational phrase; to identify the inventory of nuclear tones and peculiarities of their phonetic realization.

In order to find out the rhythmic characteristics of the speech corpus in question, syllable duration, measured in milliseconds (ms), was selected for investigation. Measurements of syllable durations in stressed and unstressed positions were made in the small corpus of the IE and BE subjects (the first two minutes of the speech data of each speaker). The data were analyzed and compared, and the mean values for syllable durations in stressed and unstressed positions for the IE and BE groups were calculated. After that, the duration ratios of stressed to unstressed syllables were derived for each of the two groups. In order to achieve the other objectives of the study, the mean values for the pitch range (in semitones) and level (in Hertz) were calculated for each female and male speaker, as well as group; the F0 peak of an intonational phrase was located and measured, and the correlation between the F0, duration and intensity in nuclear tones was established in each utterance.

The complex approach to the study, representative dataset and sufficient size of the speech corpus provide for reliability and validity of the findings.

Results and Discussion

In speech rhythm, IE tends to be more syllable-timed than Standard British English, which is traditionally described as stress-timed. This means that IE users tend to show minimum or no vowel reduction in unstressed syllables, where BE speakers tend to have reduced vowel variants. In our study, the ratio value for the durations of stressed vs. unstressed syllables in the corpus of the IE subjects is 1.3:1, and in the corpus of the BE subjects it is 1.7:1 [1, P. 113]. It was found that the IE speakers demonstrated smaller differences in the syllable durations in stressed and unstressed positions by lengthening the duration of unstressed syllables. The difference between the two English varieties was identified as being statistically significant. The features of a syllable-timed rhythm in IE are a result of the possible transfer of rhythmic properties from Indian languages (Hindi in our case study), whose rhythm is said to be syllable-timed.

Another feature of the rhythmic organization in the speech of the IE subjects is a tendency to stress monosyllabic function words, such as personal and possessive pronouns, auxiliaries, prepositions, and conjunctions, even though they are not the focus of the utterance or rhythmically justified. In our study, the IE speakers made monosyllabic function words prominent in 12.8% of observations, despite the fact that they were not contrastive in any way [1, P. 116]. The BE speakers stressed monosyllabic function words in 8.9% of observations, and only due to rhythmical requirements. Moreover, prominence on monosyllabic function words in the utterances of the IE subjects was achieved not only through an increase in intensity and / or duration, but also through tonal changes.

Regarding the average pitch level, it has been found that the IE subjects speak at a higher pitch than the BE subjects. This difference is statistically significant and has been observed in both the female and male speech data. To illustrate the point, the means for the Indian female and male groups are 218.29 and 126.92 Hz respectively. The British subjects in our study spoke at a lower pitch, and their means accounted for 177.92 Hz for the British female group and 112.7 Hz for the British male group [1, P. 121-123]. As for the use of the pitch range, no significant difference has been established between the IE and BE subjects. The 60% range of the females and males in both the IE and BE data was from 3.0 to 3.2 semitones (ST) wide. The relatively narrow pitch range of the subjects may be attributed to the mostly neutral and unemphatic speech present in the interview style speech data.

The analysis of the F0 contour has indicated that one of the peculiarities of the IE melodic organization is a frequent alignment of the F0 peak of an intonational phrase with an unstressed syllable of the first foot. This melodic feature manifested itself in the speech of the Indian males and females in a relatively high percentage of observations – 23.8%. It was not typical of the speech of the British subjects though (only 8.3% of observations), in whose data the F0 peak of an intonational phrase aligned in most cases with the stressed syllable of the first foot [1, P. 128].

Furthermore, the head of an intonational phrase in the IE data was characterized by numerous enclitic feet, with unstressed syllables being realized at a higher pitch in relation to the preceding stressed one (39.8% of observations) [1, P. 131]. The tendency to raise the melodic contour on unstressed syllables following the stressed one showed in the speech of each IE subject. It was not typical of the BE subjects, in whose data the most frequent type of foot was the foot in which unstressed syllables remained at the same pitch level as the preceding stressed one (74.8% of observations). This difference between the IE and BE corpora proved to be statistically significant, and the tendency to align the F0 peak of the foot with an unstressed syllable can be considered as a specific feature of the IE variety. In our study, the pitch movement on unstressed syllables in the foot was on average by 2.9 ST upward in the corpus of the Indian women and by 3.3 ST up in the corpus of the Indian men. The rising pitch movement on unstressed syllables in the foot is frequently followed by a fall in F0, which creates a wavy melodic contour of different amplitude in the head of an intonational phrase and makes a characteristic feature of the IE melody. The subsequent falling pitch movement typically occurs on the next stressed syllable. In other words, in the head of an intonational phrase of the IE variety, the F0 tends to go down on stressed syllables and it goes up on unstressed ones. However, the F0 can also fall on the next unstressed syllable of the same foot, or on the unstressed syllable preceding the stressed one of the next foot. Below is the basic schematic representation of F0 movement in the head of an intonational phrase of the IE variety, where a line denotes a stressed syllable and a dot indicates an unstressed syllable (see figure 1):

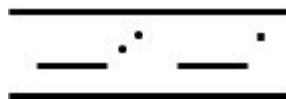


Fig. 1 – F0 movement in the head of an intonational phrase of the IE variety

The rising F0 contour on the unstressed syllables following the stressed ones in the utterance produced by an IE female speaker can be clearly observed in the graph below (see figure 2):

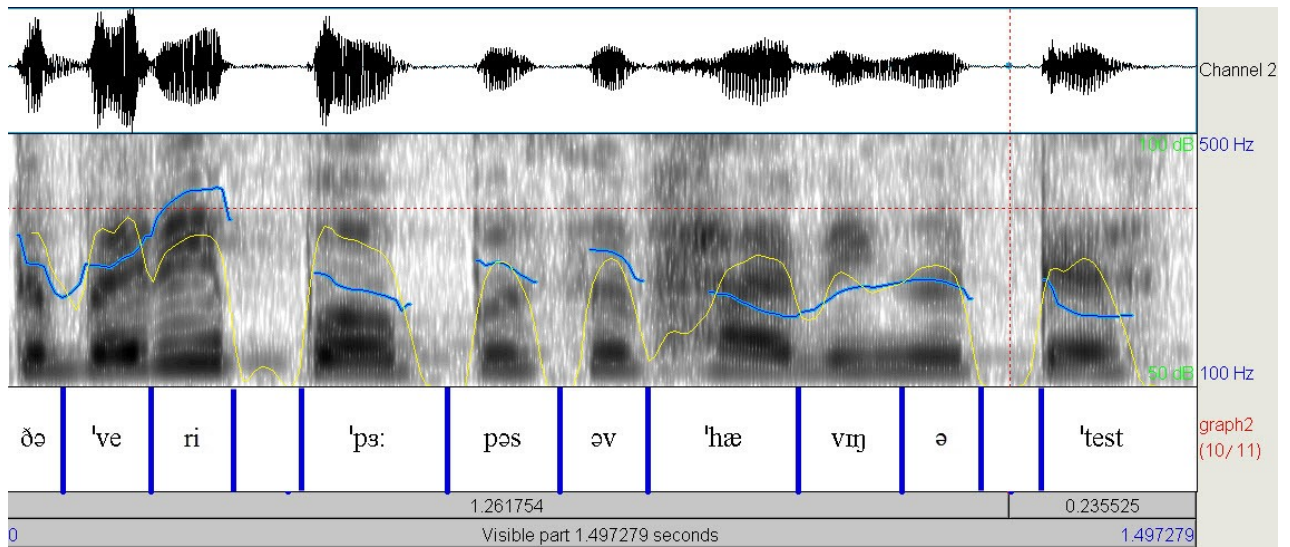


Fig. 2 – F0 contour in the utterance produced by an IE female speaker
 Notes: blue curve signifies F0; yellow curve signifies intensity

The paper proceeds now to the inventory of nuclear tones and their shapes in IE. One of the melodic features of the IE tone system is the presence of rise-falls conveying neutral attitudes. Numerous rise-falls of neutral meaning have been found in the corpora of both the Indian women and men. This makes IE different from BE, in which the Rise-Fall is emotionally coloured and attitudinally marked. Besides, in the IE rise-falls which cover polysyllabic words, the F0 peak tends to align with a post-stress syllable, unlike in the rise-falls of BE, where the F0 peak aligns as a rule with a stressed syllable. Also, the duration of the rising interval may exceed that of the falling interval which becomes incomplete, that is to say, the pitch level at which the falling interval ends may almost coincide with the pitch level at which the rising interval starts. This F0 contour shape of a widened or narrowed pitch range adds another special feature to the IE melody and makes it different from BE, in which the falling pitch movement of the Rise-Fall usually goes to the bottom of the speaker’s range. The typical configuration of the Rise-Fall in IE is illustrated by the graph below (see figure 3). In this graph, the rising-falling tone is implemented on the word *definitely*, pronounced by an IE speaker as [ˈdefnədlɪ]:

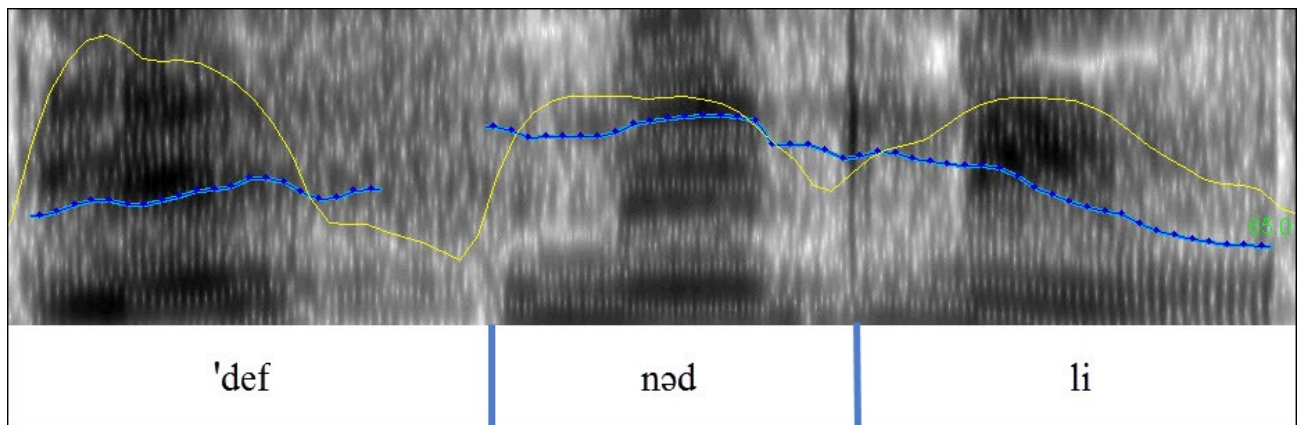


Fig. 3 – Configuration of the Rise-Fall in IE
 Notes: blue curve signifies F0; yellow curve signifies intensity

Another important feature of the IE tone system is the presence of the rising tones in which the rising pitch movement is preceded by a fall in F0, the latter being phonetically realized within the stressed syllable. In other words, this nuclear configuration is composed of two pitch movements: first, the F0 contour begins with a descending movement to its minimum point at which it abruptly changes its pitch direction into a steadily ascending contour. Compared to the falling tonal segment, the rising segment is more prominent in pitch height, slope, or length. If the tone is implemented on a disyllabic or polysyllabic word, the falling pitch movement spreads to the endpoint of the stressed syllable, while the rising pitch movement covers the following unstressed syllable(s). This F0 contour type of the Rise was relatively common in the corpora of the Indian men and women, and among all the rising nuclear configurations in the dataset, it was encountered in 21.4% of observations. Note that this type of Rise is quite rare in BE standard. The graph below displays a rising tone in IE across the polysyllabic word *intelligence* (see figure 4). The falling pitch movement can clearly be seen covering the stressed syllable, while the rising pitch movement covers the following unstressed syllables.

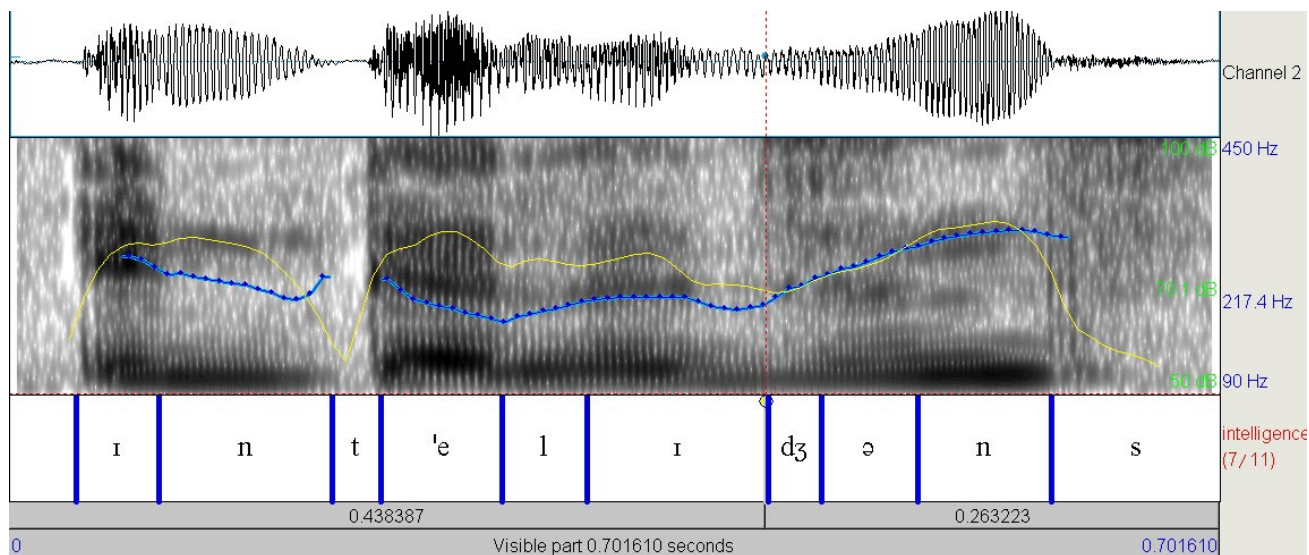


Fig. 4 – Configuration of the Rise produced by an IE female speaker

Notes: blue curve signifies F0; yellow curve signifies intensity

Among the falling tones which are characterized as falls beginning on the stressed syllable that carries the F0 peak, there are numerous delayed falls, with the F0 peak localized on an unstressed syllable (20.2% of observations). In this type of contours, the falling pitch movement occurs on unstressed syllables, while the stressed syllable is covered by a level tone. Besides, in IE, the falling pitch movement across polysyllabic words tends to continue through unstressed syllables, unlike in BE, where unstressed syllables tend to remain at the same pitch level as the ending of the fall, with the latter being realized within the stressed syllable.

F0 peak delay was also observed in falling-rising configurations, in which the falling-rising pitch movement is realized on unstressed syllables, while the stressed syllable is covered by a level or rising pitch movement (18.9% of observations). Falling-rising tones in IE were encountered not only in non-final but also in final intonational phrases.

The IE corpus also featured a relatively large number of level tones, found in both non-final and final intonational phrases (17.5% of observations). In non-final intonational phrases, a level tone covers mono- or polysyllabic feet, in which the last unstressed syllable is marked by the maximum duration, and the stressed syllable – by the maximum intensity. In final intonational phrases, level tones, characterized as a flat F0 contour, are perceived as falling tones due to an abrupt and rapid fall in intensity.

Conclusion

IE is a New English variety with its own distinct prosodic features, which make it different from other varieties of English. Prosody is an indispensable and significant element of speech. Awareness of the peculiarities of IE at the prosodic level will help overcome speech perception and comprehension problems in conversation with IE speakers and, as a result, will guarantee a successful cross-cultural communication. It will also increase the level of phonetic, linguistic and communicative competences of English learners, teachers, interpreters, future linguists, and other professionals.

Конфликт интересов

Не указан.

Conflict of Interest

None declared.

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