A Survey Study of Vowel Sounds in Pakistani English

Language and Literature

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Abstract

This paper studies the use of vowel sounds in Pakistani English. The study is conducted in Air University and uses the data obtained from engineering students. The study follows the work of Ahmar Mehboob who conducted a research on Pakistani English in Karachi, Pakistan. This research tests the conclusion of his research and applies it to the sample defined above. Further, this research also discusses the phonemic inventory of vowels used in Pakistani English and discusses their differences with the Received Pronunciation. The research uses a passage that contains the words that are usually uttered differently by Pakistani speakers. This passage is read by the participants and the resulting data is presented in a tabular form. Unlike other studies on Pakistani English, this study's participants hail from Rawalpindi and Wah. The data is analysed on the basis of phonemic differences but the analysis is especially delimited to vowels. The research also has possible implications for future researches in the same field but with different samples. The findings of this research can be helpful for the future researches for comparison. The research also explains the reasons for differences in the use of vowels in Pakistani English.

Keywords: Pakistani English, vowel sounds, Received Pronunciation

Vowel Sounds in Pakistani English

English has a wide variety of variations. It is an international language that is spoken all over the world but the way it is spoken is not exactly the same as in England. The Received Pronunciation (henceforth RP) of English undergoes many changes when it is used by people who do not use English as their first language. Same is the case with Pakistani speakers of English. The

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influence of their mother tongues is identifiable in most of the cases. This is why the English used in Pakistan is known as Pakistani English (henceforth PakE). The basic differences between RP and PakE are due to differences in the phonemic inventories. Pure vowels form an integral part of phonemic inventory of any language. This paper focuses on the differences in use of pure vowels in PakE.

English was first introduced in the Indian subcontinent by the British in the 16th century. It received official recognition with the passing of Macaulay's minutes of 1835. Throughout the British era, English kept gaining political and social status. By 1947, when Pakistan and India gained their independence from the British, the English language had become so entrenched in the socio-political fabric of the region that it was retained as an official language in both countries (see Ali 1993). English in British India initially spread because of economic and social mobility associated with the language. People learned English either by contact or through formal schooling. However, since there were not enough native English-speaking teachers to meet the demand, most English teachers were Indians. Thus, the input that English language learners received in South Asia was non-native and local. There was relatively little contact with native varieties of English in India, and after independence, this contact was further reduced. These factors have contributed to the institutionalization and evolution of South Asian English as a distinct variety.

Literature Review

At present, there are no detailed studies of the phonology of PakE. Mahboob & Ahmar (2004, p.1006) endeavor to present a preliminary description of PakE phonology grounded on data collected in Karachi in 2002. Their research is based on six educated Pakistanis between the ages of 22 and 37. Their Language samples were elicited using the Sheffield word-list and then the "North Wind "reading passage.

Table 1. Phonology of PakE (Mahboob & Ahmar: 2004, p. 1007)

Monophthongs   Diphthongs

KIT ai	ɪ	ɪ	PRICE	ai
HAPPY ɔɪ	ɪ	ɪ	CHOICE	ɔɪ
THOUGHT aʊ	ɔː	ɔː	MOUTH	aʊ
NORTH	ɔː	ɔː		
PALM	ɑː	ɔː		

Table 2. Phonology of PakE (Mahboob & Ahmar: 2004, p.1008)

Lexical item	PakE	RP
HorsES	ɪ	ə
LettER	ʌ	ə
CommA	ʌ	ə
NURSE	ʌ	ɜː
LOT	ɔː	ɔ

Mahboob & Ahmar (2004), in their study divided the vowels into two main groups. The first group contains invariant vowel realizations. These vowels were spoken without variation by the Pakistani speakers, and some of them are similar to RP (Received Pronunciation). The second group consists of vowels that vary in their realization as spoken by different speakers.

One of the major aspects of phonological features of new English varieties is the restructuring of vowels. There is a strong tendency in non-native varieties to restructure the sounds of native English to suit their purpose. Consonants exhibit less restructuring as compared to vowels. Platt et al (1984) give the following general tendencies which are shared by some or all of the new varieties:

A tendency to shorten vowel sounds as in words like 'purse', the /ɜ/ is sometimes replaced by /ʌ/.

A lack of distinction between long and short vowels e.g. .in 'genetic', the /e/ is substituted by /æ/.

A tendency to replace the central vowels with either front or back vowels as in 'vehicle', the /ə/ is replaced by /i/.

A tendency to shorten diphthongs and to leave out the second element in a diphthong e.g. in 'gate', /eɪ/ is pronounced as a Monophthongs, /e:/.

Such restructuring of vowels can also be found in the Pakistani variety. /e/ is pronounced as /æ/.as in 'education', /ædʒukeɪʃən/. The schwa is made longer e.g. 'sofa' is not pronounced with a schwa in the final position but with an /ɑ/. The 'bird' vowel, /ɜ/ is substituted by /ʌr/.

Mahboob & Ahmar (2004, p.1012) attempt to explain some phonological features but state that the exact distribution of these features and the contexts in which they operate need to be scrutinized. PakE has the tendency to use *spelling as a guide to pronunciation*, for example, "immediately"[ɪmmɪdʒɜtlɪ]. They observed /ə/ only in connected speech and explained this non-reduction of unstressed vowels in terms of spelling pronunciation of PakE. Kachru (1983) states that it is the non-segmental features of South Asian English (SAsE) such as stress and rhythm, rather than segmental features that mark its uniqueness. Pickering and Wiltshire

(2000), in their research, looked at SAsE spoken by native speakers of Hindi/Urdu, Bengali and Tamil and found that there was no significant difference in the lexical stress pattern in the English spoken by speakers of these three languages. SAsE , including PakE, is described as a syllable-timed variety (Nelson, 1982; Kachru, 1983). Syllables in PakE occur at regular intervals. This is different from RP which is stress-timed with variation in the length of syllables. Quite interestingly, Pickering & Wiltshire (2000, p.177) label South-Asian English as a "pitch-accent" language and found that accented syllables were marked by a lower frequency as compared to unaccented syllables in speakers of Indian English, including those of Hindi/Urdu.

The only instances of /ə/ observed by Mahboob & Ahmer (2004) were in connected speech. In their analysis of the passage, as read by the six speakers, there were certain words in which an unstressed vowel was systematically reduced to a schwa. Examples of these words include: (a) the indefinite article *a*; (b) the definite article *the*; (c) the past singular BE form *was*; and (d) words with initial *a* like attempt. These words were predictably pronounced as [ə], [d̪ə], [wəz] and [əttemp(t)] respectively. Based on the language samples, it appears that vowel reduction in PakE is limited to certain (grammatical) words and environments in fast speech, rather than being a correlate of unstressed syllables.

It is possible to explain this non-reduction of unstressed vowels in terms of spelling pronunciation of PakE. A good example of this is the pronunciation of *of*. RP speakers realize this word as [əv] by reducing the vowel in this word to a schwa and voicing the labiodentals fricative. However, in PakE this word is realized as [ɔf], based on the way it is spelt.
One of the most predictable contexts where epenthesis was observed was in a consonant cluster where the first consonant was a voiceless sibilant and the second consonant was a stop. Thus, for example, "stronger" [ɪstrɔ:ŋgʌr] and "start" [ɪstɑ:rt]. The epenthetic realization of word "blue".

Rahman (1990, p.31) observed that Punjabi speakers break the consonant cluster by inserting a short vowel/ə/ between the sibilant and the stop. He gives the examples of "speak" [səpi:k] and "stall" [sətɑ:l]. On the other hand, he asserts that Pushto speakers do not have any problems with this consonant cluster because Pushto permits these clusters. Finally, Pakistani speakers do not aspirate stops in word initial position when they occur before a vowel, thus the word "kit" was realized as[kɪt].

Discussion

     This research uses the sound samples obtained from 12 students of Air University from the disciplines of engineering and commerce. These students mostly belonged to Rawalpindi and Wah regions of Pakistan. The students were asked to read a passage which was designed to highlight certain differences in the use of vowel sounds in PakE. The speakers had differences in their pronunciations from each other since they had different educational and ethnic backgrounds. However, certain utterances recurred more than others. These discrepancies are shown in the following table.

Table 1

Focused words	Received Pronunciation	Observed Pronunciations
Atmosphere	ǀˈætməsfɪəǀ	ǀˈætmɒsfɪərǀ
Effects	ǀɪˈfektsǀ	ǀəˈfektsǀ
Stronger	ǀˈstrɒŋgəǀ	ǀˈstrɒŋgərǀ
Government	ǀˈgʌvənməntǀ	ǀˈgəʊvərnəmentǀ
Deliberately	ǀdɪˈlɪbərətliǀ	ǀdelɪˈbere:tliǀ
Stops	ǀstɒpsǀ	ǀstɒpsǀ
Start	ǀstɑːtǀ	ǀstɑːrtǀ
Republicans	ǀrɪˈpʌblɪkənzǀ	ǀrɪˈpʌblɪkænzǀ
Purse	ǀpɜːsǀ	ǀpərsǀ
Climate	ǀˈklaɪmətǀ	ǀˈklaɪme:tǀ
Peculiar	ǀpɪˈkjuːlɪəǀ	ǀpɪˈkuːlɪərǀ
Posterity	ǀpɒˈsterɪtiǀ	ǀposˈterɪtiǀ
Engineers	ǀˌendʒɪˈnɪəzǀ	ǀˌinˈdʒɪnɪərzǀ
Particular	ǀpəˈtɪkjʊləǀ	ǀpaːˈtɪkulərǀ
Engines	ǀˈendʒɪnzǀ	ǀˈɪndʒənzǀ
Vehicles	ǀˈviːɪkl̩zǀ	ǀˈviːhi:kəl̩zǀ
Genetic	ǀdʒɪˈnetɪkǀ	ǀˈdʒenetɪkǀ
Gated	ǀˈgeɪtɪdǀ	ǀˈge:tɪdǀ
Sofa	ǀˈsəʊfəǀ	ǀˈsəʊfaːǀ
Private	ǀˈpraɪvɪtǀ	ǀˈpraɪve:tǀ
Agree	ǀəˈgriːǀ	ǀˈægriːǀ
Lack	ǀlækǀ	ǀlækǀ
Registered	ǀˈredʒɪstədǀ	ǀrɪˈdʒɪstərdǀ
Character	ǀˈkærəktəǀ	ǀˈkarækterǀ
Blue	ǀbluːǀ	ǀblɪuǀ

Some Notable Variations

The following table shows the proportion of speakers that pronounced certain words in certain manner.

Deliberately	
|delɪˈbere:tli|	23.1%
|delɪˈberaetli|	76.9%
Government	
|ˈgʌvənmənt|	38.5%
|ˈgəʊvərnəment|	61.5%
Particular	
|pəˈtɪkjʊlə|	46.2%
|pa:ˈtɪkulər|	38.5%
Character	
|ˈkærəktə|	23.1%
|ˈkarækter|	76.9%
Private	
|ˈpraɪvɪt|	46.1%
|ˈpraɪve:t|	53.9%

It has been observed in the samples that the shifting of stress in certain words also causes a change in the use of vowel sounds. For instance, in 'deliberately', PakE speakers tend to shift the stress on /b/ sound hence pronouncing the words as |delɪˈberaetli|. Further, the observation by Rahman (1990) regarding the word 'sofa' has been confirmed as the speakers did replace the schwa sound at the end by the long vowel /a:/. Other observations include:

The vowel /e:/

The speakers used the vowel /e:/ instead of the diphthong /eɪ/ in various words. For instance, 'gated' was pronounced as |ˈge:tɪd| instead of |ˈgeɪtɪd|. Also, /e:/ was found to replaced the /ə/ sound in certain words. For example, 'deliberately' was pronounced as |delɪˈbere:tli| instead of |delɪˈberətli|. A similar occurrence was experienced in the pronunciation of the word 'climate' which was pronounced |ˈklaɪme:t| instead of |ˈklaɪmət|. The long vowel also replaced the /ɪ/ sound in 'private' which was pronounced |ˈpraɪve:t| instead of |ˈpraɪvɪt|. The long vowel /e:/ was only novel sound that was found to be used

in the samples but is not used in RP. Also, it is not that it only replaces the diphthong /eɪ/ but it also replaces the short vowels like /ə/ and /ɪ/ in certain words.

Place of articulation: /e:/ is a close-mid and a front vowel that is produced with a free and unobstructed passage of air. The position of tongue is almost neutral in the production of this vowel so the distinctive feature [-back] is attributed to it.

Distribution of vowel sounds

Barring the exception of the long vowel /e:/, other vowel sounds used by the speakers in this research are also found in RP. However, these vowel sounds were not used in the same places. In Table1, many such instances are found. For instance, in 'agree', the vowel sound /æ/ is used instead of /ə/ in the beginning as the word was pronounced |ˈægri:| instead of |əˈgri:|. An interesting example is that of the word 'character' which is pronounced |ˈkarækter| instead of |ˈkærəktə|. /æ/ again replaces /ə/ but this time in the middle position. Also, the /æ/ sound in the RP is replaced by /a/.

In the pronunciation of 'atmosphere', almost all the speakers replaced the /ə/ sound with /ɒ/ as they pronounced the word |ˈætmɒsfɪər| instead of |ˈætməsfɪə|. The pronunciation of the word 'blue' was also very interesting as the speakers added a diphthong instead of a vowel: the word was pronounced |blɪu| as opposed to |blu:| in RP. This is the reverse of what was experienced in the pronunciation of the word 'gated'.

These replacements seem to be very arbitrary and it is almost impossible to establish rules that govern these replacements. There is no formula that can generate a Pakistani pronunciation of a certain tricky word. However, these replacements can be explained independently on case by case basis. This can be done by making a comparison with Urdu. For instance, the replacement of the /ə/ sound by /ɒ/ in 'atmosphere' is done because Pakistani speakers deem the alphabet 'o' equal to 'وٗ' in Urdu. As the place of /ə/ sound is represented by 'o' in 'atmosphere', it is replaced by /ɒ/. Pakistani speaker often picture how the English words would be written in Urdu and then pronounce the same. They make a connection between the English and Urdu alphabets. The alphabets in Urdu almost never sound different in different places and this is why Pakistani speakers often struggle in making the right English sounds in different words. Over-generalisation of certain rules also creates a problem.

Shifting of stress

It has also been noticed in the sample that the use of different vowels made them shift the stress in certain words. Especially, in cases where they

replaced short vowels with long ones, the stress was shifted. For instance, in the word 'agree' the short vowel /ə/ was replaced with /æ/ in the initial position as the speakers pronounced the word as |ˈægriː| instead of |əˈgriː|. This replacement caused them to shift the stress from /griː/ to /æg/. It is, therefore, natural that the word gets broken into different syllables as a result. Shifting of stress due to vowel replacement can also be found in the pronunciation of the word 'register' which was pronounced |rɪˈdʒɪstərd| instead of |ˈredʒɪstəd|. This is the reverse of the earlier case i.e. a long vowel is replaced by a short vowel. The replacement of /e/ with /ɪ/ causes the stress to be shifted from /redʒ/ to /dʒɪs/ (notice the creation of different syllables in this case as well).

Epenthesis

The additional vowel sound in words like 'start' and 'stop' was not observed in the sample used for research. However, almost all the speakers added another vowel in the word 'government' after /n/ sound. It was probably done because consonant sounds are almost always connected by a vowel sound in Urdu. The speakers felt a need to connect /n/ and /m/ with a vowel and ended up pronouncing the word as |ˈgəʊvərnəment|. This was also observed during the pronunciation of the word 'from' where the speakers often connected /f/ and /r/ with a vowel.

Conclusion

The research at hand was focused on the realizations of Pure Vowels in Pakistani English and how they differ from Received Pronunciation (RP). Most of the target words from the given passage (Appendix A) were realized differently as expected and recorded in previous studies. The notable deviation that did not figure in the study was the epenthetic vowel or the Schwa in clusters i.e. /s/ followed by /p/ /t/ /k/ ("stall" and "stops" in the current study) as recorded in earlier studies (Rahman T. 1990 and Mahboob, A. & Ahmar N. 2004). However, there were also some confirmations such as the case of the word 'sofa' in which the schwa sound at the end was replaced by the long vowel /aː/. The selected sample was diverse to a certain degree which is why there were some variations in their pronunciations. The variations existed even at the individual level i.e. a speaker that pronounced a certain word according to the RP was not consistent as they did not pronounce all the words according to the RP. The pie charts would have shown similar proportions of variations for all the words if the speakers were consistent with the RP. Almost all the speakers had the same level of education but the aptitude and exposure to the language also matter significantly. This has been manifested by the variations found in this research. The common pronunciations showed a certain kind of

pattern that can be explained by the interference of Urdu. Urdu, hence, is the key factor in different pronunciations in Pakistani English.

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Appendix A

Passage used for Reading
The problem of carbon in the atmosphere is getting serious with time. The effects of carbon are becoming stronger. A solution has been presented in the shape of carbon caps wherein the Government deliberately stops the manufacturers from emitting carbon above a certain level. It is but just a start. The Republicans often purse their lips regarding the issue. It is quite peculiar that the great problem of climate change is not being taken seriously at the highest level. Scientists and engineers have acknowledged that global warming is a great threat to our posterity. Yet the engines continue to rave and vehicles are still emitting poison in the atmosphere. The Republicans seem to have a genetic problem when it comes to global warming. They assess global warming according to their own temperatures. They would stay in a gated community; sit on a sofa and say, "I'm feeling cold. There is no global warming. The birds and animals are in no danger." It is like saying that the world hunger is over since a politician has had a healthy dinner. It is not a private matter. Politicians need to agree with and accept the fact that climate change is a public matter. These statements seem to stem from a lack of education and awareness. Environmentalists have often registered their protests putting the accent on carbon emissions by the manufacturing industry in particular. But they seem to have failed as the latter has very deep pockets; so deep that they have reached the politicians as well. There are two or three companies that have access to politicians and it would take a man of great character to stop them. These companies back one another when it comes to carbon emission. This is the actual reason why politicians often do not speak against global warming. If this issue continues to stall, the sky would no longer be blue. This has also been experienced by the "smog" problem in China.