



Original Article

Explanatory study of Phonological Idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English

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ABSTRACT

The current research paper investigates the phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English, that makes this variety of English a distinct variety from other varieties shaped by socio-linguistic and socio-cultural context of Pakistan. The nature of the study is descriptive. The study uses the Optimality based linguistic analysis and field observations, the study finds the system deviations of phonemic idiosyncrasies compared to Standard British English. The key features include substitution of /ɪ/ and /i:/, the conflation of /v/ and /w/, and the use of retroflex and dental consonants influenced by native languages like Urdu, Punjabi, and Sindhi. The data shows that in Pakistani English, syllable-timed rhythm is different from British Standard English with stress variation and diphthong realization. These phonemic features show the relation between Pakistani English and linguistic system of the Standard English. These phonological features contribute to the unique variety of Pakistani English.

Introduction

English is a global language, it has many localized varieties influenced by social, linguistic and cultural contexts of the speakers around the world. Pakistani English (PE) is one of the varieties that show multilingual and multicultural landscapes of Pakistan, where languages like Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, shape the way English is perceived and spoken by the Pakistani English speakers. Phonological idiosyncrasies or phonemic deviations in pronunciation are very frequent in Pakistani English, arising from the interaction between English and native languages of the speakers.

Pakistani English has got attention because of unique phonological features and researchers are working on the language variety to document and establish its legitimacy as a distinct variety of English. These features include vowel articulation and consonant articulation and deviations in Pakistani English and influence of native varieties on Pakistani English. In

Pakistani English speakers merge /v/ and /w/ sounds due to the influence of native languages spoken by the speakers of Pakistani English.

The understanding of these phonological idiosyncrasies is important for practical application of language teaching and cross-cultural communication and analyzing the Pakistani English from sociolinguistic perspectives. The current research work provides a comprehensive overview of the phonological features of Pakistani English, highlighting the phonemic deviations that Pakistani English speakers manifest during the speaking and oral communication. The investigation of these features will contribute to the growing research on World Englishes, emphasizing the adaptability and diversity of English in multilingual societies such as Pakistani society.

The research work is organized into several sections like discussion on the previous works done in the area especially in the context Pakistani English, describing the phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English supported with examples and theoretical descriptions, and discussion on the implications of the research for further linguistic and pedagogical perspectives in Pakistani context.

Literature Review

In Pakistani English, Phonemic idiosyncrasies are due to the interaction between Pakistani multi-cultural environment and English influenced by languages like Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto. Khan (2012) considers Pakistani English as legitimate variety of English accepted by other linguists and cited in their works. Baumgardner (1993) discusses the differences between Pakistani English and standard British English. Kachru (1992), Talaat (2003) and Mahboob (2004) consider Pakistani English as distinct from other varieties of English because of some unique phonological features shaped by native languages. He discusses the phonological features like /t/ and /d/ sound variations in Pakistani English compared to British English. Mahboob (2004) describes that in Pakistani English vowel reduction is not found, and Rahman (1990) discusses the sociolinguistic variations in Pakistani English.

Mahboob (2004) states that vowel substitution is another phonological feature found in Pakistani English. Yasir et al. (2021) explore the vowel reduction phenomenon in Pakistani English. Yasir et al. (2021) state that diphthongs such as /əʊ/ in *boat* and /eɪ/ in *day*, are reduced in Pakistani English like /o/ & /e/ by the speakers due to the influence of native languages like Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto and Urdu. Vowel reduction feature shows that diphthongs are absent in Pakistani English.

Ahmed (2022) further explores the vowel lengthening phenomenon in Pakistani English and describes that Pakistani speakers extend the vowel length in stressed syllables due to the influence of native languages. Mahboob et.al (2004) state that in Pakistani English, consonants like /v/ and /w/ show idiosyncrasies and speakers pronounce these consonants interchangeably. This is due the fact that in the L1 of the speakers like in Urdu language these sounds lack phonemic distinction. Syed (2017) states that /p/ and /ph/, /t/ and /th/ is a recurring pattern in Pakistani English and the substitution of aspirated and unaspirated counterparts is influenced by the influence of native phonological system in Pakistani English.

Yasir et. al (2021) state that Pakistani English shows a preference of /l/ over dark /l/ e.g., in the word ‘goal’ , /l/ is pronounced without velar articulation typical of SBE and this is due to the influence of Urdu phonetic structure, whereas /l/ remains non-velar in all other contexts. Mir and Afsar (2024) state that in Pakistani English, the prevalence of rhoticity /r/ is pronounced even in postvocalic positions e.g., /ka:r/ unlike SBE, aligning it more with American English. Moreover, Mir and Afsar (2024) discuss the stress and intonation patterns in Pakistani English and state that Pakistani English is heavily influenced by the syllable timed rhythm of native languages spoken in Pakistan. They state that Pakistani English often distributes stress equally across syllables unlike stress-timed rhythm of SBE and this leads to flat intonation in Pakistani English. Furthermore, Afsar & Kamran (2011) states that Pakistani English speakers misplace the stress on the syllables unlike SBE. Mir and Afsar (2024) further discusses that schwa /ə/ in unstressed syllables is absent, and this lacks in Pakistani English makes the rhythmic variation more generalized in Pakistani English.

The intonation in declarative sentences in Pakistani English often due to the rising tone unlike SBE where it is falling tone. Mir (2024) states that it is due to the influence of Urdu language which employ the rising tone for declarative sentences. Moreover, Mir (2024) further describe that this feature gives rise to mispronunciation in Pakistani English. Mir and Afsar (2024) discuss that Pakistani English speakers pronounce the syllable final consonants with epenthesis to make the pronunciation easier.

Yasir et.al. (2021) discuss the influence of social media and globalization on Pakistani English and they state that younger speakers are adopting American English such as flapped /t/ in words like butter. They state that it is due to the dynamic and evolving nature of Pakistani English interacting with global varieties of English. Phonemic idiosyncrasies are deeply rooted in the linguistic and cultural context of Pakistan. These features ranging from consonantal substitutions to stress patterns. The current study aims to fill this gap and describe the phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English.

Research Methodology

The current research work investigates the phonemic idiosyncrasies of Pakistani English through a descriptive and qualitative research design. The methodology focuses on identifying and describing the phonemic variations across different speakers of Pakistani English with unique phonological features. The study collects the data through fieldwork from the Pakistani English speakers.

Data Collection

The data was collected through recordings of 30 English teachers with diverse linguistic backgrounds including Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Balochi, Sindhi. Participants were stratified by age, gender, education to capture the variability in phonemic patterns. Participants were asked to read the stimulus list of the words followed by a short talk to elicit the natural speech. This approached ensured a range of phonemic variation for the analysis.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was guided by comparative phonological approach of Pakistani English with standard British English (SBE). Phonological features were analyzed using Praat software for acoustic phonetic measurements. Specific attention was given to the phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English. Moreover, Optimality theory was used for identifying the markedness constraints on the phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained from all the participants through informed consent, however, topic was not told before the data collection to avoid influenced on the problem under investigation. Confidentiality was maintained by anonymizing the data of the participants. These measures were taken to safeguard the integrity and welfare of the participants.

Data Analysis

The data analysis was conducted based on the data collected from the 30 participants representing diverse linguistic backgrounds. The purpose of the data analysis was to identify the phonological idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English, particularly deviations from British English. Optimality theory was used to identify the markedness constraints and to provide a theoretical explanation for the observed patterns in Pakistani English.

Table 1: Vowel Substitutions in Pakistani English

The phonemic idiosyncrasies of vowel substitution are very frequent in Pakistani English as shown in the table 1:

Word	PE Pronunciation	SBE Pronunciation	Feature	Reason
Fate	/fe:t/	/fet/	Diphthong is substituted with monophthong	L1 influence
Day	/de/	/dei/	Diphthong is substituted with monophthong	L1 influence
Police	/po'li:s/	/pə'li:s/	Back vowel substitution	L1 Influence
Law	/lɑː/	/lɔ:/	Back vowel substitution	L1 influence

Vowel substitution is a phonological process in which Pakistani English speakers replace the diphthongs with short vowels. The above table 1 shows that Pakistani English replaces diphthongs with monophthongs and vowel substitution is very frequent in Pakistani English. The substitution of vowels in Pakistani English is due to the influence of native languages like Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi which lacks diphthongs which create problems to Pakistani

English speakers while pronouncing the English words having diphthongs. The data shows that these vowel idiosyncrasies arise due to the differences in phonotactic constraints between Pakistani native languages and English e.g., the word ‘law’ has back vowel /ɔ:/ in SBE, but in Pakistani English speakers pronounce the word with short vowel /ɪə/. The following spectrogram shows that in the pronunciation of the word ‘law’ speakers use the short /ə/:

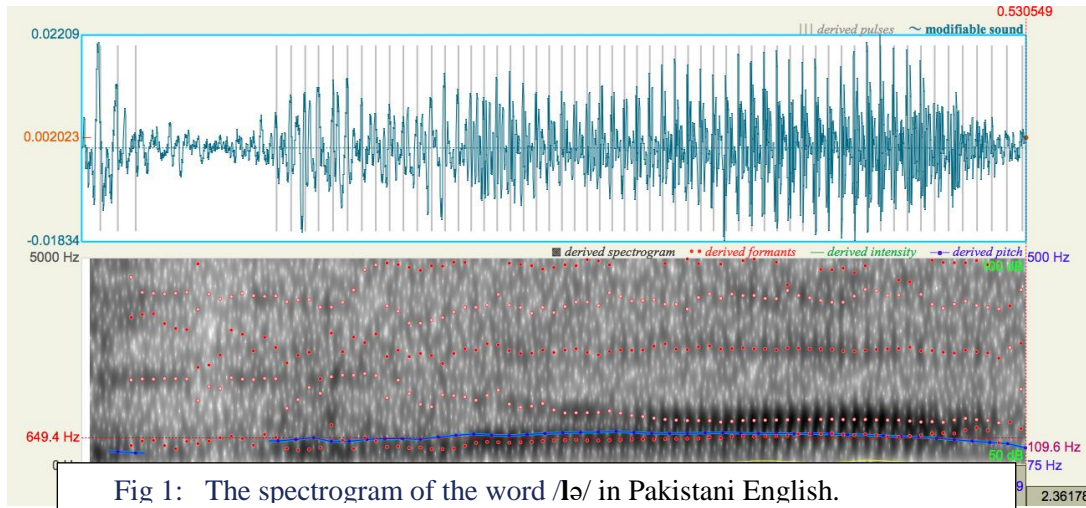


Fig 1: The spectrogram of the word /ɪə/ in Pakistani English.

The optimality analysis of the vowel substitution is shown in the tableaux 2:

1. *Diphthong: Avoid diphthongs.
2. DEP-IO (V): Faithfully preserve vowel identity from input to output.

Tableaux 2:

/fɛɪt/	*Diphthong	DEP-IO
/fet/		*
/fɛɪt/	*!	
/fɑɪt/	*!	

In Pakistani English, the constraint ranking will be:

$$*Diphthong > DEP-IO$$

The phonemic idiosyncrasies of consonantal substitution are also found in Pakistani English as shown in the table 3:

Table 3: Consonantal Substitutions in Pakistani English

Word	PE Pronunciation	SBE Pronunciation	Feature	Reason
Vessel	/ˈvez.əl/	/ˈves.əl/	/s/ is substituted with /z/	L1 influence
Very	/ˈwer.i/	/ˈver.i/	/v/ is substituted with /r/	L1 influence

			/w/	
Pat	/pæt/	/p ^h æt/	/ph is substituted with p/	L1 Influence
Measure	/'meɟ.əɾ/	/'meʒ.əɾ/	/ʒ/ is substituted with /j/	L1 influence

Consonant substitution is a phonological process in which Pakistani English speakers replace the consonants like /v, ph, ʒ and s/ with other consonants having different place of articulation, aspiration, manner and voicing. The above table 2 shows that Pakistani English replaces consonants and consonant substitution is very frequent in Pakistani English due to the influence of L1 phonemic constraints. The substitution of consonants in Pakistani English is due to the influence of native languages like Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi which lacks encourages the pronunciation of consonants like /z/ in place of /s/ when it occurs in VCV context, which create problems to Pakistani English speakers while pronouncing the English words having /s/ in VCV context. The data shows that these consonantal idiosyncrasies arise due to the differences in phonotactic constraints between Pakistani native languages and English e.g., the word ‘pat’ has back aspiration as in SBE, but in Pakistani English speakers pronounce the word without aspiration. The following spectrogram shows that in the pronunciation of the word ‘pat’, speakers do not aspirate /p/ at the word beginning:

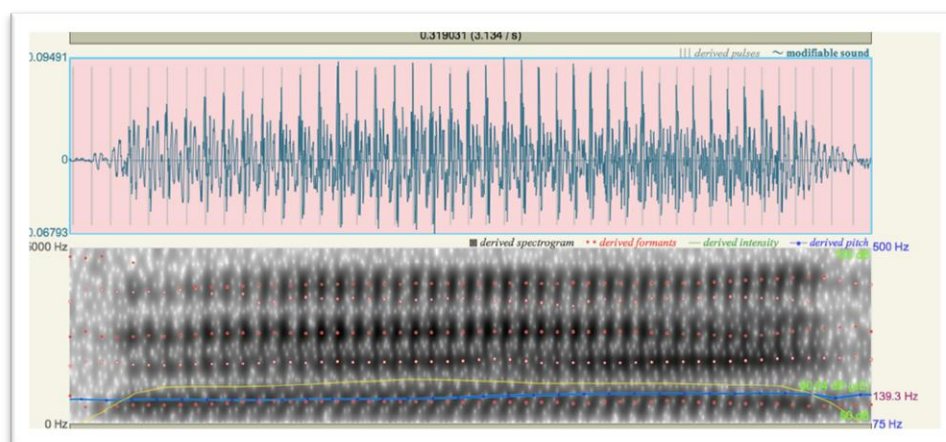


Fig 2: The spectrogram of the unaspirated /p/ in Pakistani English.

The phonemic idiosyncrasies of stress patterns are also found in Pakistani English as shown in the table 3:

Table 3: Stress Patterns in Pakistani English

Word	PE Pronunciation	SBE Pronunciation	Feature	Reason
Contribution	/,kɒn. 'tri.bju:ʃən/	/,kɒn.tri'bjʊ:ʃən/	Penultimate stress is shifted to anti-penultimate syllable	Due to vowel lengthening

Distraction	/ˈdɪs.træk.fən/	/dɪˈstræk.fən/	Penultimate stress is shifted to anti-penultimate syllable	Due to CCC cluster break at the word medial position
Absolutely	/ˌæb.ˈso.lu:t.li/	/ˌæb.səˈlu:t.li/	Penultimate stress is shifted to anti-penultimate syllable	Due to vowel substitution
Educational	/ˌe.ˈdʒu.keɪ.fə.nəl/	/ˌedʒ.ʊˈkeɪ.fən.əl/	AntiPenultimate stress is shifted to Postanti-penultimate syllable	Due to vowel substitution and re-syllabification.

Stress shift is a phonological idiosyncrasies process in which Pakistani English speakers shift the stress from the penultimate syllable to anti-penultimate and post anti-penultimate syllables as shown in the above table 3. The above table 3 shows that Pakistani English shifts the stress due to the influence of L1 phonemic constraints. The shift of stress in Pakistani English is due to the influence of native languages like Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi which lack the vowel and certain syllable structures. The data shows that these stress idiosyncrasies arise due to the differences in the stress phonotactic constraints between Pakistani native languages and English e.g., the word ‘educational’ speakers re-syllabify the word as V.CCV.CV.V.CVC unlike SBE in which it is VCC.V.CVV.CVC.VC, but in Pakistani English speakers pronounce the word and shift the stress to the postantipenultimate syllable. The following spectrogram shows that in the pronunciation of the word ‘educational’, speakers do not follow the stress patterns of SBE:

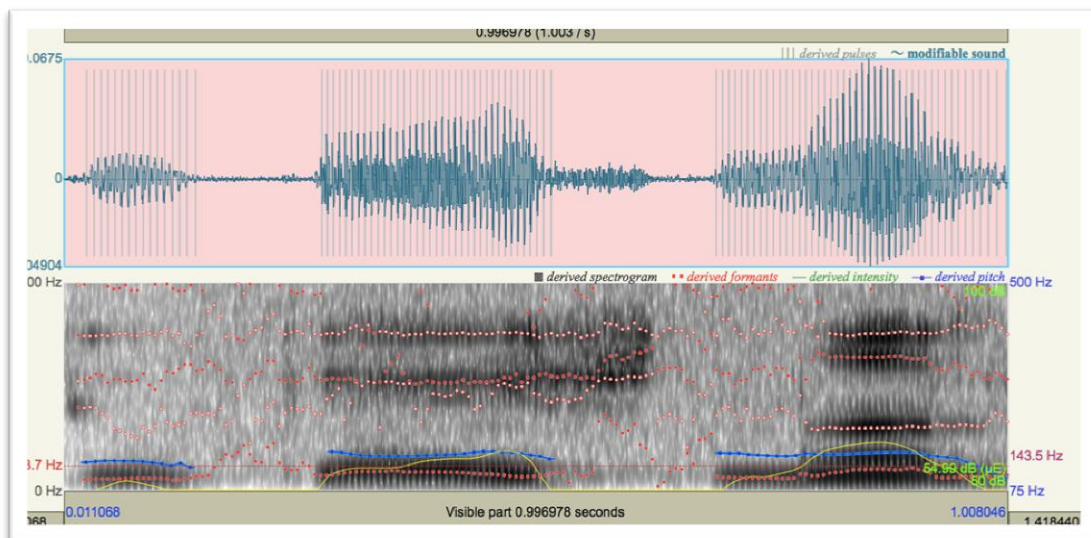


Fig 3: The spectrogram of the word ‘educational’ in Pakistani English.

The following difference is observed in syllabification between PE and SBE

PE \longrightarrow /,e.'dʒu.keɪ.ʃə.nəl/ \longrightarrow V.CCV.CVV.CV.CVC

SBE \longrightarrow /,edʒ.ʊ.'keɪ.ʃən.əl/ \longrightarrow V.CCV.CVV.CV.CVC

The above patterns show that Pakistani speakers not only re-syllabified the word but also brought changes in the vowel length and shifted the stress in the output.

Table 4: Rhoticity in Pakistani English

The phonemic idiosyncrasies of rhoticity are also found in Pakistani English as shown in the table 4:

Word	PE Pronunciation	SBE Pronunciation	Feature	Reason
Car	/ka:r/	/ka:/	Rhoticity	American English/L1 influence
Mart	/ma:rt/	/ma:t/	Rhoticity	American English/L1 influence
Bark	/ba:rk/	/ba:k/	Rhoticity	American English/L1 influence
Dark	/da:rk/	/da:k/	Rhoticity	American English/L1 influence

Rhoticity in Pakistani English refers to the pronunciation of the /r/ sound in all the contexts, including vocalic-post-vocalic positions like in the words ‘car’, ‘far’, ‘mother’ unlike standard British English, which is non-rhotic and omits the /r/ in such positions. The above data given in the table 4 shows that Pakistani English shows generally rhotic tendency and this feature is due to the influence of American English and prevailing local languages like Urdu, Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto, which are rhotic, and consistently pronounce the sound /r/ regardless of their position in a word. This is a distinctive characteristic of Pakistani English unlike standard British English. The data shows that /r/ pronunciation in Pakistani English depends on regional language influences as well. In many cases, it is retroflex [ɻ], a trill [r], or a tap [ɾ], reflecting the phonetic features of local languages. The above phenomenon not only reflects the linguistic transfer of native languages but also influence of American English on Pakistani English pronunciation. Rhoticity in Pakistani English serves as an example of local languages on global language, making it integral part of the linguistic identity of Pakistani English speakers. The following spectrogram highlights the rhoticity in Pakistani English:

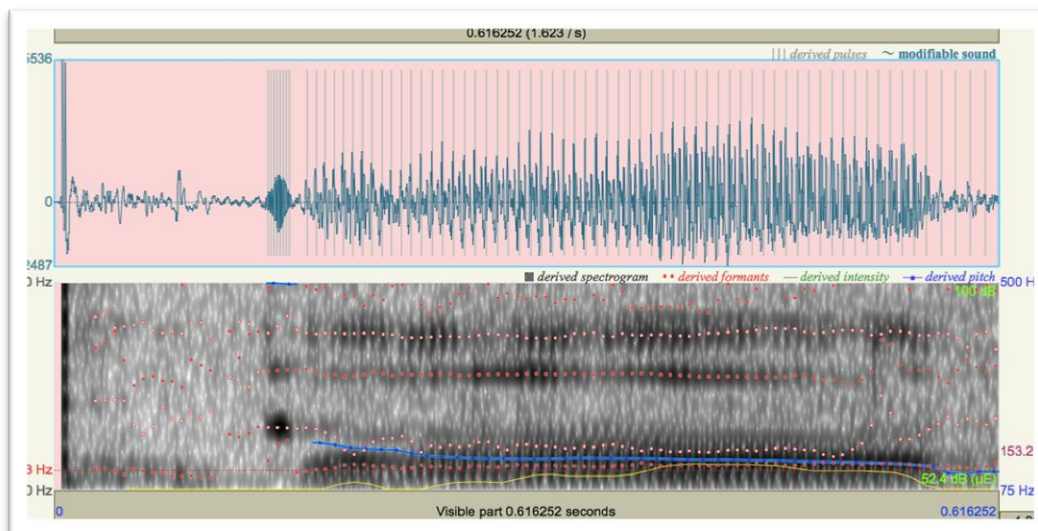


Fig 4: The spectrogram of the word ‘car’ showing rhoticity in Pakistani English.

Conclusion

In conclusion, phonemic idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English are very frequently found due to the diversity in linguistic landscape of the region, where languages like Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi, shape and influence the pronunciation of the speakers. The study finds that in Pakistani English idiosyncrasies include vowel substitution, consonant substitution, stress shift and rhoticity that distinguish Pakistani English from standard British English. Data shows that Pakistani English speakers often do not comply with diphthongs in the output due to the influence of native languages e.g., in the words like ‘make, take, boat etc.

Furthermore, data shows that in Pakistani English consonantal substitution is very frequent e.g., Pakistani English speakers substitute the consonants like /v/, /w/, /s/ and /z/ due to the influence of the languages like Urdu and Hindko. Additionally, data shows that retroflex articulation and de-aspiration of consonants are common idiosyncrasies in Pakistani English, stemming from the native languages as discussed by Mahboob et. al (2004).

The study concludes that Pakistani English exhibits a distinctive stress pattern in which speakers shift the stress from penultimate to antepenultimate syllables and from antepenultimate to post antepenultimate syllables unlike SBE e.g., in the words like educational and developmental. The study supports the claim of Mahboob et. al (2004) that this feature is common in many other South Asian languages and it affects the pronunciation of Pakistani English speakers.

The study shows that in Pakistani English, rhoticity aligns with American English in its pronunciation of postvocalic /r/, as seen in the words like ‘car’ and ‘far’. Rhotic tendency is not common in SBE, where /r/ is often dropped after the vowel sounds. The rhoticity in Pakistani English is due to the influence of American media and the phonological features of native languages, which maintain the /r/ sound in postvocalic positions.

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