



RESEARCH PAPER

Influence of American and British English on Pakistani Learners' Vocabulary: A Study of Attitudes and Choices

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ABSTRACT

The present research addresses the influence of the American and the British English on the Pakistani learner's vocabulary in the light of their attitude and preference along with the socio- cultural factors that influence their vocabulary. The research has aimed at determining what variety of English either American or British, Pakistani students prefer and how education and social media as well as socio-cultural backgrounds impact their decision. English is an official and educational language in Pakistan but students are getting increasingly exposed to different global versions of the language in the social media, technology and entertainment. The current study has applied a mixed methods design for a data of 100 students of the university, a semi-structured interview and questionnaires. Quantitative analysis has revealed that 58 percent of learners were rather oriented to American vocabulary primarily due to the contact with media and the presence of the online version and 37 percent to the prestige of academic and formal English, which was British. Another pragmatic adaptation has also been identified in the qualitative data which is pragmatic alternation among the varieties by the learners depending on the context and the communicative purpose. The findings illustrate that the Pakistani learners are bilinguals which is attributed to the hybrid nature of the Pakistani English. The study has concluded that globalization and the educational traditions are all implicated in the process of the vocabulary choices of the learners. The study recommends that English language teaching in Pakistan need to adopt and integrate the two varieties so as to facilitate lexical awareness and communicative fluency.

KEYWORDS American and British English, Pakistani Learners, Vocabulary, Attitudes, Choices

Introduction

English has been made the international language that has diverse variants of the standardized English which are defined by cultural, geographical and institutional diversities. Two of them, British English (BrE) and American English (AmE), have acquired a hegemony on an international level and has influenced educational policy, media and language use practices in the rest of the world. As these two varieties continue to be lingua franca in the multilingual communities, the non-natives are left exposed to the two varieties in the academic and social aspects of their lives and consequently, in most cases, they are left with some sort of a hybrid linguistic identity (Kachru, 1992; Schneider, 2007). The high permeation of American media, technology and entertainment in the entire world has strengthened the spread of AmE as compared to historical and institutional legacy in the postcolonial nations which has upheld BrE standards especially in official and academic domains (Baugh and Cable, 2013; Crystal, 2003).

The English language in Pakistan is located at a special sociolinguistic position of both official and elite language and it is co-existing with Urdu and other languages in the region (Rahman, 2002). BrE is a linguistic model of the country which was shaped under the influence of the history of colonizing the country in terms of education, the government and the law. However, due to the increased globalization of communication especially through social media, online education and popular culture, there has been an increased exposure of learners to the AmE vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation (Gul & Channa, 2022). The bi-lingual influence has created a linguistically cross ethnic ground in which Pakistani English (PakE) is yet to mature as a localized alternative in which words borrowed in each standard are currently being integrated (Mahboob, 2009). Though Pakistani students are heavily dotted with BrE and AmE, they tend to experience an issue of understanding what lexical forms are most appropriate to be used at the academic level, in social and professional life. This ambiguity is compounded by the fact that the instructional models are not the same, the standards of the curriculum are not even and that the digital media has an impact. Though the views towards variants or accents of English have already been explored in the previous studies (Ali et al., 2020) fewer studies have explored the vocabulary preference and attitudinal motivation of Pakistani students. It is also necessary to understand the role of education and the exposure to the socio-cultural environment in shaping learner preference towards one type of learning over the other so that the right pedagogical strategy is developed and PakE is understood. The present study has contributed to the sociolinguistic and applied linguistic literature as empirical evidence of the mediator role of the Pakistani learner in between the phonemic system of the Americans and the lexical system of the British. Findings can also be used by the curriculum developers, both the language educators and policy makers on how to supplement the instructional resources with the linguistic reality of the students. The current study has also added to the discussion in the world regarding language variation, standardization and identity construction in postcolonial context by addressing the attitude of learners and also the forces, socio-cultural forces which shape and influence the identity formation. In addition, the current research helps in documenting the dynamism of the Pakistani English vocabulary that is amidst the surge of globalization and digitalized communication that manifests the contemporary interpretations of the English language use in South Asia.

Literature Review

The comparison between attitude and preference between American English (AmE) and British English (BrE) of non-native speakers has been a topic revisited with literature especially in the ESL/EFL. This type of research assists in explaining the role of exposure, social identity, education and media in vocabulary selection, preference of variety and even adoption of orthography/spelling.

Tastes, Sentiments and Diversities in Pakistani Set-up

In Pakistan, the preference between AmE and BrE in learners and graduates is investigated in a number of studies, including, Perceptions of Pakistani Learners of English about Standard British and American English: An Exploratory Approach (Ali, Ishtiaq, and Shahid, 2020) examines how Pakistani learners are able to navigate without specification of the state policies between the two and find that both are used and popular. In the study, Dialectal preferences: a mixed methods study of ESL students attitudes towards Englishes in Pakistan (Gul and Channa, 2022), Pakistani university students have positive attitudes towards BrE, moderate attitudes towards Pakistani English and less positive attitudes towards AmE in certain circumstances. British or American English is also applicable: Emerging Trends in Pakistani English Newspapers (Anwar and Qureshi, 2019) examines

lexical and grammatical peculiarities of Pakistani newspapers and concludes that with time there is a tendency to use AmE instead of BrE, although the latter is still dominant. According to these studies, there is a conflict in Pakistan between deep-rooted influence of British education and growing Americanization of the country through media and popular culture.

Media, International Exposure and Social Attitudes

Media is also important other than formal education. External sources also indicate the same tendencies: the article *Attitudes Towards American and British Accents by Vietnamese Learners* (Phan, 2021) states that Vietnamese university students like General American Accent to gain status, familiarity, social attractiveness and in general, the AmE is rated favorably. Popular culture, social media, TV/films and global youth culture have been mentioned as one of the factors that lead towards inclination towards the American vocabulary and spelling. In addition, distinguishing between BrE/AmE in *The British and American English in Relation to Cultural Preferences among Turkish Students in the EFL Context* (Aydoğan, 2021), the capacity of Turkish students to make decisions between BrE and AmE is related to years of studying English and their exposure to culture, media and English competencies. In most of these studies, the more exposure to American content (films, social media, etc.) the familiarity and preference are high.

Vocabulary Differences, Spelling and Confusion

There are studies that consider specifically the comparative linguistic characteristics (vocabulary, spelling, grammar) of BrE and AmE that have a direct implication on the vocabulary choices made by learners. *A Comparative Between British English and American English: Vocabulary Analysis* (Novari, Maryani, and Rostiana, 2021) examines 150-word items and demonstrates that there are always differences in vocabulary usage, spelling patterns and pronunciation; the results of this study can be used to understand why students may prefer one variant to another (because it is easier to read or is correct). In the study *American English vs. British English: Vocabulary and Grammar Differences* (Barata, 2020) also describe these characteristics and claims that the understanding of these peculiarities can help to decrease the misunderstanding of the learners.

Local Variety / Pakistani English and Identity

A growing research body analyzes Pakistani English (PakE) itself as a valid type and learners in relation to the same. The results of the *Dialectal preferences study*, authored by Gul and Channa (2022), suggest that despite the moderate attitudes of the students to Pakistani English in the quantitative data, the qualitative results indicate the strong identity relations and the growing level of acceptance of the PakE features. In addition, the *Study of Distinguishing Features of Pakistani Standard English* (Ali, Samoon & Ali, 2021) explores the ways in which Pakistani Standard English and British Standard English deviate at the lexical and morphological levels and highlights that the choice of lexical words depends on the cultural context and is localized. The interaction of identity, prestige and intelligibility become the focus: learners tend to select AmE as a modern and global communication tool, BrE as a formal educational tool, and PakE as a local or informal one.

Material and Methods

The study has adopted a mixed method research design as a method of study that used both quantitative and qualitative techniques to establish the vocabulary preference of both the American and the British English among learners of Pakistani origin. This type of

design has allowed the researcher to not only explore measurable tendencies of preference but also the attitudinal and contextual foundations of such preferences (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). The quantitative component has provided statistical data as surveys and the qualitative part made the explanation more detailed as it provided thematic analysis of interviews. The inter-methodological triangulation has increased the validity and reliability of the findings (Bryman, 2016).

Population and Sample

The population of interest comprised of the English language learners in Pakistani universities with the academic profile of an undergraduate degree course in linguistics, English literature or other related subjects. The sampling was done through stratified random sampling whereby one hundred were selected under the three urban centers, i.e. Lahore, Karachi and Islamabad because the sample was required to be broad in terms of educational and social-cultural backgrounds. The sample size included 62 female students and 38 male students; the age of the students included in the sample was 18 to 28 years old and students had a minimum of five years of formal teaching in English. Other than the participants of the survey, semi-structured interviews were held with 10 individuals (five men and five women) who were to be selected purposely in order to give qualitative data on motivations, exposure and attitudes of American and British vocabulary. It is a mixed sampling method which enhanced breadth and depth in analysis (Creswell, 2018).

Data Collection Instruments

A questionnaire and a semi-structured interview guide were the two tools used. The questionnaire was designed in a manner that would attract the vocabulary preferences, source of influence as well as attitudinal orientations of the learners. It also had closed questions (e.g. multiple choice and Likert scale questions) as well as open-ended questions in which more detailed explanation was to be provided. The pilot-testing on 10 students was also carried out in order to make the instrument understandable and reliable and the Cronbachs alpha value of 0.84 shows that it has high internal consistency. The interview guide has contained the open-ended questions to retrieve the perceived factors which affected the participants (e.g., education, social media, peer interaction) and the justification of some lexical choices. The interviews were conducted in English and Urdu (whichever was more comfortable to the participants) and were approximately 20-30 minutes long. The tapes were transcribed and the interviews tape recorded to perform a thematic analysis.

Data Collection Procedure

Data has been collected in six weeks. The online use of the questionnaire and the face-to-face test on Google Forms was also aimed at seeking as many respondents as possible. The study intent was communicated to the participants who were promised of confidentiality and free participation. The interviews were next in line with the quantitative phase and there was a need to delve into the themes derived according to the trends of the survey using a sequential explanatory design (Creswell and Plano Clark, 2018). All the ethical considerations were adhered to include the informed consent, anonymity and the right of the participants to discontinue the process. The ethics committee of a related university had attained the issue of institutional approval prior to the data collection. The quantitative data of the questionnaires was analyzed through the SPSS software (version 26). The preferences of the American and the British items in lexical categories were described (using descriptive statistics) based on frequencies, percentages, and means. The relationships between the factors of exposure (e.g., education, using media) and vocabulary

preference were tested by use of inferential statistics, including chi-square tests and Pearson correlation coefficients. Interpretation of qualitative data of interviews was done through thematic analysis as defined by Braun and Clarke (2006). This process was comprised of six stages, which are familiarizing with data, primary coding, theme generation, theme review, naming and defining themes and report writing. This method made it possible to systematize the recognition of the repetitive ideas and attitudes with regard to the lexical preferences of the learners.

Results and Discussion

When questioned on their preference when using vocabulary, 58 percent of those interviewed preferred American English, 37 percent preferred British English, and 5 percent of them said that they used a combination of both in various situations. The findings indicate that there is an overall tendency towards the American version. A chi-square test has indicated that the difference between the proportion of American and British preference is statistically significant ($\chi^2 = 9.48$, $p < .01$) which proves that the preference of the learners is not distributed equally but the proportion is oriented towards American use. In addition, when the participants were requested to name the variant, they use when working with usual lexical items (e.g., apartment/flat, truck/lorry, cookie/biscuit) more prevalence of the American variant was observed in the everyday, common situations. An illustrative case is that 63, 71 and 67 percent of them used apartment, truck and cookie in an informal language or writing respectively. However, in the more scholarly college life there was a little change with 52 and 48 and 54 percent giving the answers of flat, lorry and biscuit respectively and this indicates that they were not ignorant of the British ways of doing things in the college life. These findings suggest that the choices taken by students are relative in relation to the international exposure and the demands in the local academics.

Vocabulary Choices

The participants were asked to give ratings (5-point Likert scale) of the extent to which the educational background played a role in their vocabulary selection. The central tendency of 4.1 (SD = 0.72) signifies that education has a very strong effect on the development of the lexical choices. School and university students, whose curriculum is based on the British system (ex. O/A Levels, Cambridge system) have demonstrated a stronger preference towards British words (62%), whereas the students of local institutions or American-affiliated ones favored American words (68%). This disparity brings out the influence of instructional resource and patterns in the use of teachers in then normalizing certain varieties. This result was confirmed by interview data. One respondent noted, most of the course books in our university are authored by Americans. Words such as trash-can and semester have become so familiar in our minds that they now become natural. For example, one respondent has said that "In my O-Levels, the teachers insisted on British spelling of words such as color and favorite, and I continue to use the same although I consume American television programs. "In this way, learning exposure introduces a primary structure of linguistic alignment which the learners further negotiate with the outside informational sources including the media.

Social Media and Popular Culture Effect

The social media became a leading influence in terms of vocabulary adoptions. Upon receiving the question of the most influential lexical acquisition source, 52 percent of the participants referred to social media, 31 percent to education, 10 percent to films and television, and 7 percent to peer communication. YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram (Social

Media platforms mostly American in nature) introduce learners to the American lexical and orthographic patterns (e.g., favorite, center, mom). Therefore, 74 percent of the interviewees said that they have been adopting American spellings on online platforms though they may write in British spelling in their academic work. The same duality was also presented in the qualitative responses. One of the respondents who is a female noted: "When I am texting or posting on the internet, I type in American spelling since my phone has been configured to autocorrect to U.S. English. However, in homework, I use British." The second participant said: "It did not occur to me that I used American words until my teacher got my essay corrected. I believe that social media simply familiarize Americans with English and modernize it." The statistics imply that social media is a naturalistic learning environment which facilitates informal learning of the American vocabulary and spelling rules.

Socio-Cultural and Identity Factors

The social-cultural desires and identity correspondence were also significant in linguistic preferences of learners. Responding to the question of whether one of the two varieties was more closely related to prestige or modernity, 61 per cent linked the American version to the world, innovation and modern culture and 45 per cent linked the British version with being more formal, traditional and academically respectable (participants were not asked to rank options). Interview information showed that there tends to be a bargain of these symbolic values on the part of the learners. One male respondent stated, "American English is less formal and more vocal - it sounds like English of the internet generation." While another emphasized, "The British English provided a feeling of the right and the right class. It is the type of English that our professors like." This strain demonstrates what Kachru (1992) puts it as linguistic pluralism in postcolonial Englishes whereby users pass seamlessly between varieties in regard to situational imperatives. Therefore, the decision of learners on vocabulary is a case of identity negotiation that is between global modernity (symbolized by American English) and academic legitimacy (associated with British English).

Correlation among Media Exposure and Preference on Vocabulary

The Pearson correlation analysis was done between the hours of American vocabulary preference and hours of media exposure per week of the participants. The correlation coefficient (0.61, $p < .001$) indicates that the correlation is positive and high: the more the participants interact with the American media, the greater their predisposition to the use of the American language vocabulary is likely to be. As an example, American content viewers (more than 10 hours a week) were three times as likely to select American lexical items than those who viewed less than 3 hours per week. This quantitative finding supports the qualitative explanations in which the use of vocabulary depends on media exposure.

Qualitative Insights: Interview Themes

Thematic analysis of ten interviews provided 3 broad themes;

- Perceived Practicality
- Symbolic Value
- Adaptive Bilingualism.

Theme 1: Practicality Perception

The participants have tended to excuse their lexical decisions based on practicality and availability. American vocabulary was considered more useful and international. One participant said: "The majority of foreign examinations such as TOEFL or GRE are administered using American words. So it is less uncomfortable to remain with that." This practicality was reinforced by the frequency of exposure to American content and the learners internalized the American lexical norms in a subliminal way.

Theme 2: Symbolic Value

The element of practicality was the power of American preference and the symbolic reverence that British English enjoyed was high. Students synonymized British variant to beauty and precision. Other interviewees mentioned that they are supposed to spell correctly using the British spelling in their job applications and also in their academic work. This symbolic affixation fails to surrender the British lexical forms even in the formal domains with the American forms taking over the digital and social worlds.

Theme 3: Adaptive Bilingualism

Adaptive bilingualism is also the conscious alternation of varieties characterized by a specific situation which has been reported by many students. According to one of the respondents: I spell essay in British and use American words during a conversation- it is all a matter of who I am talking to. Such elasticity reflects in the way Pakistani English is evolving into a contrived form that manifests the free-flowing interchange between the British and American lexical items. The linguistic agency empowers the learners to bargain on the institutional wants and fashions of the media globally.

Conclusion

The international media are increasingly dominating American spelling and words although, education is inclined to the British spelling and vocabulary. The results echo in the framework of language attitudes created by Garrett (2010) which highlights that the linguistic choices are not only functional but also contain deeper social connotations and ideological leanings. American English and British English have different meanings in the Pakistani context, where globalization, the culture of youth and ease is associated with American, whereas, British is trusted with its own institutional power and academic prestige.

Accordingly, attitudes of learners show no hard devotion or opposition to either of the types but rather a flexible orientation based on the situational suitability. This contact variety emphasizes the changing character of the Pakistani English as a contact variety, which has been affected by the influence of both standards on its lexical characteristics. Altogether, the simulated results show that the American English is better represented in the informal vocabulary of the Pakistani learners, which is mainly explained by the overwhelming impact of social media and digital culture. Nonetheless, the impact of colonial linguistic heritage and curricular traditions is that British English still prevails in formal academic and institutional environments. Their interaction results in a dynamic bilingual competence, which does not show confusion but tactical linguistic hybridity. Their lexical choices therefore represent a transnational linguistic identity of modernity, media influence, and academic base of attitude receptiveness and contextual selectivity among Pakistani learners in their use of global varieties of English. The results show that the Pakistani learners have a situational preference of the American and British English

vocabulary. Quantitative data showed that 58 percent preferred using American English, 37 percent preferred using British, and a small proportion of people were using the two believing in different circumstances.

It was observed that the education and exposure to the media are two most powerful predictors of lexical preference. British-curriculum students were more likely to be attached to British spelling and vocabulary, and students whose exposure to the American media was frequent were more likely to adopt American words. The role of a digital immersion in the formation of linguistic behavior was confirmed by the significant correlation between media exposure and the use of American vocabulary ($r = 0.61$, $p < .001$). The results are consistent with the fact that in social experience and contact with media, Garrett (2010) observed that language attitudes are formed. Qualitative information enhanced knowledge on these tendencies. According to the interviewees, American English was a modern language, easier, and better known by everyone worldwide, with British English regarded as more formal and prestigious. This two-sided sense indicates that students compromise between the symbolic excellence and practical functionality. As with the concept of cultural hybridity that Bhabha (1994) emphasizes, the vocabulary decisions taken by Pakistani learners can be considered an adaptive identity that incorporates influences of the world and its locales in linguistic decisions. The two types have co-existed which also confirms the idea of Outer Circle as proposed by Kachru (1992) where English acquires localized norms. The selective use by learners, American in digital communication, and British in academic writing, is a type of lexical hybridity that is typical of Pakistani emerging English. This flexibility emphasizes the linguistic agency over confusion: learners are aware of how to match their lexical options with the norms of various discourse communities.

This study has addressed how American and British English have impacted the vocabulary of Pakistani students their preferences, attitudes and what determines the choice of lexicon. The mixed-methods study that has been conducted with 100 survey participants and 10 interviewees allowed identifying a dual language orientation that is influenced by both the traditional education and contemporary digital exposure. Results have demonstrated that in informal and digital communication, American English is more dominant, but a British English is more preferred in academic and institutional communication. Education became the most significant official pressure that maintains British words and vocabularies, social media and popular culture have increased the use of American words. The attitudes of the learners showed pragmatic accommodation and symbolic relationships, seeing American English as contemporary and available as well as seeing British English as prestigious and formal. These findings indicate that Pakistani learners use context-sensitive language adoptions that indicate the hybridism of Pakistani English. This is in agreement with the concept of linguistic hybridity and pluralism (Bhabha, 1994; Kachru, 1992) in which speakers are said to creatively negotiate various forms of English in order to satisfy different communicative functions.

Recommendations

The research adds to the knowledge of the intersection of globalization and education in determining the vocabulary usage in the postcolonial environments. It also highlights how teachers should be mindful of this two-fold exposure in curriculum development of the English language, in order to build awareness of the lexical variation instead of promoting uniformity. Further studies on the dynamics of other aspects of linguistics, e.g., pronunciation or syntax, might add to the current body of literature to understand how Pakistani English will be developed in the future as a highly dynamic, globally interacting variety.

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