Pronunciation difficulties in the English of Khowar speakers

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ABSTRACT: Due to the first language influence and phonological traits the English as second language (ESL) learners of English face problems. This study investigated the impact of Khowar languages on ESL learners' pronunciation of consonant sounds in Pakistan. The process of data collection was based on reading six English consonants (/ð/ /θ/ w/ v/ /t/ /d/) inserted in words such as 'Either' 'Ether' 'Vine' 'Wine' 'Seat' and 'Seed' along with the distracters. For this purpose, a totalof15participants of Khowar took part in this study. The productions were analyzed acoustically through the Praat program. The results showed that English dental fricatives (/ð/ /θ/) with dental stop and /v/ /w/ sounds produced as /v/ and /t/ and /d/ sounds produced as dental stop. The analysis of the findings exhibited the target sounds which are absent in Khowar language but present in the English language, therefore, they appear to be difficult for Khowar speakers to produce.

Key words: *Khowar, pronunciation, consonants, Praat, second language*

1. Introduction

The use of the English language brought changes in the pronunciation of the learners (Jenkins, 1998). However, due to the rise of variety in the English language the non- native learners around the world were confused with which English (pronunciation) to follow (Rahman, 1990). In this aspect MacArthur (2001) put forth his opinion that it was easy to make an idea that Received Pronunciation (RP) is the standard one to follow in the 1900s because it was the only era of Queen's English. It was the time of British supremacy alone in the world and the non-native speakers had the only one option to adopt British English. After the emergence of America as a super power, it challenged to follow British English. The rise of America which influenced the entire world due to its power, subsequently American English also became inevitable to learn. Macarthur (2011) further narrated that the sign of Received Pronunciation is the variety used in the media, news, dictionaries and grammar. Standard variety is also taught in schools to the non-native speakers. He further stated that RP and American English carry a dominant era and people around the world have had the influence from both varieties therefore, RP and American English (pronunciation) go parallel in demand of the learners.

English is the dominant language throughout the world, therefore, bilingual and monolingual speakers, in their daily conversation, frequently use English words. Pakistan is a multilingual country and languages from three different families; Indo-Aryan, Iranian and Dravidian, are spoken in Pakistan. Among the other languages Khowar language is spoken in the northern part of Pakistan Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. English is used as a second language

(ESL) in Pakistan. This study aims to investigate the pronunciation difficulties of English consonant sounds by Pakistani speakers whose first language (L1) is Khowar. In this regard, the RP will be compared with the Khowar speakers to reveal the similarities and differences within their productions.

To be able to reach the aim this study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What are the pronunciation difficulties of English as a second language of Khowar learners in the production of six English consonant sounds?

2. Literature Review

With the name of trade English people had started ruling on technology, education culture and administration of the India and it is a fact that the people were not willing to accept anything from the English people being the invaders in the country (India) but gradually they came to know the importance of the English language which had become a lingua franca in India. According to Seidlhofer (2005) "English as a lingua franca emerged as way of referring to communication in English between the speakers with different languages" (p. 61). The English language was first introduced by the merchants of an East Indian Company in India to boost trade between the two countries of India and the United Kingdom in the 16th century (Rahman, 2009).

The people of Pakistan were compelled to learn English (RP) because it became the language of the elite class of the society and speaking English was impertinent to access white-color jobs after the partition from India in 1947. Therefore, the dwellers of the sub-continent realized the socio-economic and political importance of the English language. Rahman (1990) further claimed that English is very much in demand by Pakistani students and their parents and employers.

It was not surprising that English is the marker of elitist social status and the most desired skill for lucrative employment in Pakistan (Rahman, 2007). English is the official language of Pakistan since the inception whereas Urdu is the national language of Pakistan. However, it is a fact that English enjoys more privileges then Urdu because educational and official correspondence are mostly in English therefore, the waves of importance drifted more towards English than Urdu. The central government of Pakistan, the most provincial

government, and institutions of higher education use English (Rahman 2007). English is the medium of instruction in all major institutions such as schools, courts, and higher education institutions. Since then English has been given the status of the official language of the country. English has been given another shape in the form of Pakistani English. It is because non-native teachers and learners do not access to the native-like accent and the same non-native accent on the part of the teachers, transferred to the new generation (Rahman, 1990). Pakistani English has developed as a variety of English like other varieties, i.e., Indian English, South Asian English and so on. These are known as varieties because these are different from the British and American English in terms of lexical, grammatical and phonological features (Crystal, 2004). Due to the influence of the regional languages dialect of Pakistani English was also formed. Variation in the language occurs very often nowadays in languages. Therefore, such changes in the system go towards the creation of a new variety like Pakistani variety (Shabir, Rafiq, Bila, &Rafiq, 2013).

Because of its wide spreading eminence, Kachru (1982) had divided English into three circles, inner circles, outer circles and expanding circles. The inner circle includes native speaking countries of English such as the United States of America (USA), the United Kingdom (UK), New Zealand, Canada and Australia. The outer circle includes the colonized countries like India and Pakistan where English was implemented as a second language (ESL) (Anbreen, 2015). In the expending circle countries like China and Turkey take place where English is used as a foreign language (EFL). All these circles are explained under one umbrella term, i.e., 'world Englishes.' The status of English from English to world Englishes, was declared because of the emergence of its new varieties. For example, south Asian English includes varieties of English of Pakistan, India, Bangladesh, and south Asian countries. These circles explain the spreading and adaptation of English in different cultural context. In these circles, English is used as a foreign, native and second language. Due to the status of English as foreign and second language, the speaker of other languages frequently uses its vocabulary in their daily lives in code-switching (Jenkins, 2003). In other words, using their first language with their second language and /or third forth language in the same discourse (Auer, 2013).

When the English ruler left the sub-continent in 1947, there were no native speakers left for Pakistani learners of English to follow. However, they still had to write and read English for

the transaction of official business and for educational purposes because the language of education and official correspondence was English. Therefore, the English as a second language (ESL) learner were completely dependent on the language taught by Pakistani teachers who were non-native speakers of English (Mahboob, 2008). As a result, a specific type of English developed in the country which is currently called Pakistani English, (PE). PE has specific phonological features which is a variety of world Englishes (Rahman, 2014).

2.1 Theories Regarding Pakistani English

There are many theories related to the problem of acquisition of the second language by ESL learners in Pakistan. These theories explain the different aspects of phonological variations in Pakistani ESL learners of English.

The acquisition of L2 phonology indicates the different linguistic factors such as the position of the target sounds, situation the way specific sound produced, the influence of the L1 and marketness (Syed, 2013). There are also some non-linguistic features like age of acquisition, leaning environment, input and motivation. Because such situations language learners face difficulties in the acquisition of the target sounds. Syed (2013) has the view that the difference between L1 and L2 causes errors in acquiring the second language. He considers it the main sources of obstacle to acquire the second language. Eckman (2004) states that relatively less marked elements between L1 and L2 are easier to acquire than the marked. Brown (2000) expresses his idea that exposure does not count if the distinct features of the needed sounds are present in the L1. Flege (1995) maneuvers the same idea that if the target sound is blocked in corresponding to the L2 sound then less chances of improvement is expected. Syed (2013) claimed that context plays an important role in L2 acquisition when specific consonant sound occurs in the L2. In addition, Archibald (1998) put forth atL2sounds are easier to learn in onset (initial) position than coda (final) as coda position is considering more marked. This idea further substantiates that the sound in the word can be learnt easier in onset position than coda. The position of a word does not create a problem in acquisition but the context also matters in acquiring the sound. The level of accuracy in production may differ the way the sound is produced in sentences (Syed, 2013)

Syed (2013) asserted that “dental stops exists most indigenous Pakistani languages” (p.

59) Which was further discussed by Garesh (2006) that the fricatives /ð/, /θ/ are replaced by stop /th/, and /d/ and /dh/ by Indian learners (2006). Likewise, the results of this study of fricatives /ð/ and /θ/ indicated that Khowar speakers produced it as dental-stop. However, RP speakers produced it as dental-fricative. According to Nasir (2013) "It is an important to point out an interesting fact that the letters for dental fricative consonants (/ð/ /θ/) exist but the sounds themselves do not exist. This is because of the Pakistani languages got their script from Arabic and the sounds (/ð/ /θ/) do exist in Arabic" (p. 62). Syed (2013) further claimed that the space between two vowels did not show any fricative noise which confirms that the target sound was produced as a stop not fricative.

The existing literature pertaining to the voiced and voiceless dental fricative sounds indicated that in the major languages (Sindhi, Panjabi, Urdu, Balochi and Pashto) also mentioned above, the same problems occur in Pakistan.

The aspiration contrast in RP stop is neutralized in English produced by Pakistani speakers. Thus, plosives are produced unaspirated (Mahboob&Ahmar, 2004). For example, /p/ is produced as unaspirated (p) in the words 'peak' as well as 'speak' in PE whereas native English speakers produce words like 'peak' with an aspirated stop (p^h) and 'speak' with unaspirated stop (p). Alveolar stop /t/ and /d/ are retroflex and dental fricatives /ð/ /θ/ is dental stop in PE (ibid). The voiceless dental fricatives of English /θ/ are produced with aspiration in PE. The difference between /v/ and /w/ is not maintained in PE (Mahboob&Ahmar, 2004; Rahman, (1990/1991). Rahman, (2007) mentioned that the Panjabi, Sindhi, Urdu and Saraiki speakers produced the /v/ and /w/ sound as one sound /w/ is which mentioned in the phonemic inventory of Panjabi language. In the phonemic inventory of Khowar the sound /v/ exists and sound /w/ is absent. Therefore, the approximant /w/ is produced as labio dental fricative /v/.

The existing literature on the acquisition of a second language gave us evidence that the position of sounds, context, input and environment play a key role in acquiring a language.

3. Methodology

3.1 Research Design and Procedures

This study considers the pronunciation difficulties of English of Khowar speakers employing a survey design. As it was pointed out previously, the main purpose of this research was to

investigate the pronunciation difficulties in English of Khowar speakers. To be able to reach the aim, this study employed a quantitative method. According to Shuttleworth (2008) this method is the best way of approving and disapproving hypothesis. This kind of method is used mostly in social sciences for this reason a quantitative method was employed to effectively answer the research questions of this study. To be able to distinguish the pronunciation problems a table of words containing the target sounds was distributed to the participants to read the words and their voices were recordedwhilereadingthegivenwords.

The current study focuses on finding out how these sounds are produced by Khowar speakers. For this purpose six consonants were selected for recording (see Table 1). The consonants inserted words along with other distracters presented for the participants to read.

Table 1
Target Sounds with Sound-Carrying Words

Sound	**Word**
/ð/	Either
/θ/	Ether
/t/	Seat
/d/	Seed
/v/	Vine
/w/	Wine

3.2 Participants and Sampling

The population of the study was comprised of Khowar speakers. The total number of the students who took part in this study are 15 students' of Khowar speakers. Their average age was between 20 to 25 years.

3.3 Data Collection

A list containing words called stimuli were employed to collect the related data. The words carrying the target consonants were presented to the participants in words on an A4 sheet of paper written on the computer. The participants were asked to read the stimuli one by one and they were asked to read louder to get their voices recorded. The total Khowar participants were 15 who repeated each word three times that means that each word was produced 45 times by the total number of participants. An Iphone 6 was used to record the sounds of the participants and

each recording lasted for about two minutes each, in total 60 minutes. Iphone 6 carries an advanced recording used in m-learning for pedagogical purposes.

3.4 Data Analysis

Praat is a free software program which is used to analyze the speech sounds acoustically. It can be downloaded from the website www.fon.hum.uva.nl.praat. Basically, the Praat program was designed and developed by Boersma and Weenink (1995) to be used to generate the waveform on a spectrogram. It is also used to make recordings, editing of sounds and to the extract the recorded sounds for further needful analysis. It provides the information of pulses, formants, intensity and pitch of the sounds. The program consists of the following properties (Boersma&Heuven, 2001).

However, this study only employed the F3 formant. Praat software was employed to note the required formant value (F3) the formants values of six consonants were taken from Khowar participants. The significant differences between the formant values of English with Khowar speakers were determined through the major number of participants and with percentage. The average value out of the three production sounds of each word was taken to note to determine the values of each participant.

After collecting the data, it was analyzed through Praat to be able to determine the differences between the production of Khowar. The recorded sounds of both languages (Khowar) were put into Praat which analyzed the productions of each sounds produced by each participant.

3.5 Ethical Consideration

Keeping into consideration the research ethics, written consent from the Faculty of the languages and literature was obtained. They were informed about the nature of the research and the purposes of the recordings were briefly explained before data collection. The participants were also informed verbally about the aim of the recordings and their names would be kept anonymized and would not be used for any other purposes except his research.

4. Findings and Discussion

4.1 RP Production of ‘either’ (ð).

The frequency of the sound of RP of the voiced dental fricative sound /ð/ given in the word *either* is given below (see Table 2). The frequencies show the production pattern of the RP

speakers.

Table 2

F3 Frequencies of RP for 'Either'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Either	/ð/	2745

The sound /ð/ which is given in the word *either* was analyzed three times on the Praatprogram the Table 2reveals the frequencies of F3 that shows the production frequency was 2745. The mentioned frequencies for the word *either* were compared with the production frequencies of Khowar speakers. The analysis for the word *either* revealed that the there was no space between the production of the vowels and the sound is produced as stop in RP. If the spectrogram shows no space between thee vowels then it meant that RP speakers produced the word with friction if the space was created in the spectrogram then the word would have been produced as stop.

4.2 RP Production of 'ether' (θ)

In order to see how the RP is produced the voiceless dental fricative sound /θ/ given in the word *ether*. The frequency of the given sound was compared with frequencies with the production frequencies of Khowar speakers. The production frequencies of the word ether produced in RP is illustrated in Table 3

Table 3

F3 Frequencies of RP for 'Ether'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Ether	/θ/	2774

Table 3 demonstrates the three production frequencies of the voiceless dental fricative sound /θ/ used in the word *ether* where the production frequency is 2774. The spectrogramshows the production of the word *ether* as dental fricative as demonstrated in the picture of the spectrogram results reveal no burst between the vowels. This indicated that means that the RP the sound /θ/ given in the word *ether* as voiceless dental fricative.

4.3 RP Production of 'vine' (v)

The sound /v/ is produced as labio dental fricative by the RP. It is also produced with lip-rounding. The production frequency of the word *Vine* is presented in Table 4 which is as under:

Table 4

F3 Frequencies of RP for 'Vine'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Either	/v/	2502

The word *vine* produced by RP shows that the production frequency is 2502.

4.4 RP Production of 'wine' (w)

The sound /w/ given in the word *Wine* is labio dental fricative in RP English. In order to analyze the production of RP the word was presented to the Praat program. Table 5 reveals the results of the analysis of the word *wine* produced by the RP speakers.

Table 5

F3 Frequencies of RP for 'Wine'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Wine	/w/	2974

The results of the production of the word Wine which were set into the program presented to the program. The results revealed that the frequency measurement was 2974. The mentioned frequency indicates that the RP speakers produce the sound /w/ given in the word *Wine* as labio dental fricative.

4.5 RP Production of 'seat' (t)

The sound /t/ given in the word *Seat* produced as alveolar stop by RP. For further clarification, the word was put to analysis through the Praat program. Table 6 reveals the production frequencies of the word *Seat.*

Table 6

F3 Frequency of RP for 'Seat'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Seat	/t/	3285

Table 6 shows the production frequency of the word Seat. It was revealed that the frequency of the production of RP speakers is 3285.

4.6 RP Production of 'seed' (d)

The RP produce the sound mentioned in the word *Seed* as alveolar stop. The high frequencies of the production of the word *Seed* confirm the word produced as alveolar stop.

Table 7

F3 Frequency of RP for 'Seed'		
Word	Sound	Frequency
Seed	/d/	3707

Table 7 shows the consistency in the production of the word *Seed* by RP. The frequency of RP speakers was 3707.

All the aforementioned analysis of the target sounds of the RP speaker was presented here in order to compare the same frequencies with Khowar speakers' production frequencies.

5. Conclusion

When the sounds are absent in the phonemic inventory of the first language (L1) then it becomes difficult to produce them. Brown (2000) in the opinion that experience and exposure do not count in the acquisition of the target sound if the distinct feature is active in the L1. There are some obstacles in the way of acquiring the Received Pronunciation (RP) sounds. One of the prime factors was the influence of the L1. The articulatory system of tongue is trained in such a way that it takes time to give shape for a new sound. Secondly, phonemic inventory of Khowar is different from English. The manner of articulation of sounds varies from language to another language. Therefore, such difficulties occurred for Khowar ESL learners of English.

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