

# A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context

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## Abstract

Pakistan has a multilingual environment and thus has a rich setting for the exploration of language attitudes. Despite the intense interest in this issue in the media and at both the governmental and community levels, there have been little systematic attempts at documenting this phenomenon. Keeping in view the status of English and its importance in Pakistan, this study has been designed to investigate attitudes towards different varieties of English and the importance of PE as a non native variety of English. Specifically, the researcher is interested in understanding English from the perspective of a Second Language Listeners" (ESL) perceptions of two different varieties of English – Standard English (SE) and Pakistani English (PE) The present study deals with the concept of language attitude, speakers' perceptions in different contexts of language use with a special focus on the perceptions of Pakistani ESL students in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Pakistani English, Standard English, Attitudes, Accent, ESL.

## Introduction

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It is widely accepted that English is now the primary lingua franca, that is, ‘the language used to communicate among speakers of different native languages throughout the world.’

The growing need and importance of English language at the present day has made the acquisition of this language as an important requirement for today’s student. As English is perceived as an indispensable tool in order to survive in the global economy, the demands for English language have grown.

English is the most widely taught learnt and spoken language in the world. It is used by over 300 million people as a first language in Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the UK and the USA and by over 700 million people as a second or additional language in the countries of Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America, and of the island nations of the world (Crystal, 1985a; B. Kachru, 1999). Recent years have observed changes and rapid emergence of many new Englishes..Efforts have been made on various levels to prove that new varieties of English are getting importance in specific areas.

The varieties of English which are commonly accepted and considered ‘legitimate’ for educational purposes all over the world are American and British English. The other varieties, Australian, Canadian and New Zealand English, are still trying to achieve legitimacy (Bell and Kuiper, 1999; Collins and Blair, 1989; Turner, 1997; Hundt, 1998). Thus, English made up of many varieties, all of these varieties are internationally recognized.

## **Literature Review**

### **English in Pakistan**

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Pakistani English (PE) is one of the widely used postcolonial varieties of World Englishes. Pakistani English is the variety of the language used in Pakistan which has its origins in Britain. This variety of English is heavily influenced by both Pakistani languages and indigenous cultures of Pakistan as well as American English brought in through media. It has developed its own grammatical and lexical features that are fairly different from those of Standard British English and Standard American English. The English which is spoken in Pakistan is different from that spoken in other regions of the world, and it is regarded as the unique variety which is called Pakistani English (PE). Rehman (1990) has categorized Pakistani variety of English into four sub-varieties i.e variety A (Anglicised English), variety B (acrolect), variety C (mesolect) and variety D (basilect).

Pakistan is one of those countries where English is fast spreading. According to Boltan (2008, as cited in Raza, 2008), 18million, constituting 11% of total population, speak it in Pakistan making it the third largest English using Asian country

English in Pakistan is used as an official and a second language. It is spoken and used by a relatively small but extremely influential portion of country's population in the domain of government administration, law, the military, the higher education, commerce and mass media (Baumgardner 1993:43).

According to Ghani (2003:105):

English in Pakistan serves as a gateway to success, to further education and to white collar jobs.

It is the language of higher education and wider education and not the home language of the population except in the upper strata of society where it is spoken as a status symbol. English is

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A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context

the language of power in comparison with Urdu, the national language, and other regional languages of Pakistan (Rassool and Mansoor 2009). (Fauzia Shamim).

English is the passport, it is the prestige, it is the profession and parent's wants their children to get on the boat and to stay there. In addition, Phillipson (1992) claimed that English performed a crucial role in periphery-English countries. He argued that English bore a social stratification function. A good proficiency in English is a necessity for upward mobility and privileged position in a society. The emblematic status of English, due to its historical association with the elite and proto-elite (Haque 1983, Rahman 1998, 2002), has helped in making it a prestigious language.

### **Attitudes toward Varieties or Speakers of English**

Attitudes toward varieties or speakers of English, among other languages, have been a concern of sociolinguists and social psychologists since the late 1950s and early 1960s. With the spread of English worldwide, the focus has shifted from attitudes held by native speakers first to the attitudes held by users of English in what Kachru (1988) has called the Outer Circle, and most recently to those in the Expanding Circle, including Continental Europe (Hyrkstedt & Kalaja 1998). Language attitudes are the feelings people have about their own language or the languages of others (Crystal 1992). Attitudes are crucial in language growth or decay, restoration or destruction: the status and importance of a language in society and within an individual derives largely from adopted or learnt attitudes.

An attitude is individualized, but it has origins in collective behavior. Attitude is something an individual has which defines or promotes certain behaviors. Although an attitude is a

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hypothetical psychological construct, it touches the reality of language life. Baker (1988) stresses the importance of attitudes in the discussion of bilingualism. Attitudes are learned predispositions, not inherited, and are likely to be relatively stable; they have a tendency to persist. However, attitudes are affected by experience; thus, attitude change is an important notion in bilingualism. Attitudes vary from favorability to unfavorability. Attitudes are complex constructs; e.g. there may be both positive and negative feelings attached to it, e.g. a language situation (Baker, 1988, pp. 112- 115).

### **Three Groups of English Speakers**

The speakers of English are commonly divided into three groups: English as a Native Language (ENL), English as a Second Language (ESL) and English as a Foreign Language (EFL). But these categorizations, as Jenkins (2003, 14) puts it, “have become fuzzy at the edges and...it is increasingly difficult to classify speakers of English as belonging purely to one of the three”.

The traditional ENL countries alone host an impressive amount of different dialects and accents, but combined with all ESL and EFL accents, there is now a massive amount of accents of English all around the world which are not only growing in number but also spreading everywhere through education, media, popular culture and the Internet. Furthermore, the accents are changing in unpredictable ways as new groups of non-native speakers adapt them and add their own touch to them. Thus English can be said to no longer be the property of any nation or state, but a true lingua franca.

Although there is a common linguistic core to all the different accents, the spoken versions of that core are so different from one another that two speakers of dissimilar accents may have serious problems with intelligibility – when speaking the same language. However, there are

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differences of opinion among scholars as to where exactly the border between a distant accent and a new language lies. It is a complicated matter altogether

English is no longer a monolithic entity and has been modified according to need and purpose. The primary purpose of such a thing could be ascribed to the need of simplicity. There are not just dialects now in English but idiolects, slang, vernacular, jargon and many more. All these emerge out of purpose, if some dialects are for the layman some are for the professional community. A number of changes are constantly being made to English grammar, syntax, vocabulary, spelling and pronunciation, making the changes in the language a continuous and dynamic process.

### **Preference for British English in Pakistan**

In Pakistan owing to history the natives speak more of British English than the American English. But the ushering in of the IT era and the concept of multinationals and immigration playing widely there is a lot of variety of English used in Pakistan now. Pakistani speakers precisely follow the Southern British dialect also called as the RP or the Received Pronunciation. Received suggests that the variety of English spoken is more social in context than regional.

The important point is that though at first the dialectical forms sound wrong if speakers are used to Standard English, they can be explained in linguistic terms in exactly the same way as Standard English forms. Different choices were made among the varied speech communities forming the speakers of English in the past. These choices are not conscious or deliberate, but pronunciation is always changing, and leads in time to changes in word forms. All the authenticated forms of English are accepted and acceptable.

## **New Dialects and New Accents**

Crystal (2003, 185-189) considers the future of English and predicts that as dialects and accents move further away from each other, people will adapt by extending their ability to speak more than one dialect to meet the new requirements – they would then speak their own dialect or accent at home, or in their home country, and use a new, global standard in international situations. Now, most accents are mutually intelligible, although it depends entirely on the speakers and their abilities. Some accents carry more prestige than others, although that prestige is not in the accent itself but in the mind of the listener.

Many studies have demonstrated that judgments of the quality and prestige of language varieties depend on the knowledge of the social connotations which they possess. Thus, for instance, the use of dialects and accents would be expressions of social preference, which reflect an awareness of the status and prestige accorded to the speakers of these varieties. A prestige standard form of a language has no inherent aesthetic or linguistic advantage over nonstandard varieties. The prestige is usually the product of culture-bound stereotypes passed on from one generation to the other (Edwards, 1982, p. 21).

## **Standard vs. Non-standard**

The distinction of standard/nonstandard reflects the relative social status or power of the groups of speakers, and the forces held responsible for vitality of a language can be contributed to the solidarity value of it. Another dimension, called in group solidarity or language loyalty, reflects the social pressures to maintain languages/language varieties, even one without social prestige

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(Edwards, 1982, p. 20). This research aims to address the following research questions by conducting a quantitative investigation to measure and explain language attitudes in Pakistan towards the different varieties of English spoken

1. What kind of attitudes do Pakistani speakers hold toward two different accents of spoken English i.e. SE and PE?

2 Do Pakistani speakers consider SE as somehow better or more desirable than PE?

3 What kind of attributes do the respondents associate the different accents with?

## **Methodology**

The present research is a case study of University of Education Lahore (UE). Case study, defined as “the intensive study of a single case” (Gerring, 2007, p. 20) is highly recommended by Robert Stake (as cited by Brog & Gall, 1983) as a valid tool for conducting educational research. The reason for choosing University of Education Lahore is convenience and access.

The participants of the study were selected from among the students of M.A. (English) of University of Education Lahore. Among 25 participants, 14 were male and 11 were female, all having the conceptual background of Sociolinguistics and World Englishes and comprised the age group of 18 – 25.

A close-ended questionnaire was designed, with 20 items focusing on the attitudes towards SE and PE and issues encountered by Pakistani speakers, for the respondents in order to collect update and quick data. The answers were recorded on 5 point Likert scale. The researcher

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personally visited the classrooms and distributed the questionnaires and next day recollected it in person.

## **Results and Discussion**

The test population consisted of 25 respondents of English learners. Their ages range between 18 and 25 years old. The male respondents outnumbered the female respondents.

In general, 80% of respondents reported that they enjoy speaking in English. Majority of respondents strongly agree and agree that Pakistani English is a new variety in addition half of the respondents considered it different from Standard English. However 90% of the respondents considered Standard English means Standard English accent. 70% are familiar with the concept of Standard English as they can distinguish between Standard English and Pakistani English. However, 76% of respondents wanted to sound like native speakers. When they answered the following question, ‘how would you feel if someone thought your accent was native speaker accent?’, the respondents answered they felt (very) happy/excited, and half of the respondents deliberately try to copy native speakers in their speech and 50% also said it meant they were successful in English language learning if people thought their accent sounds like native speaker. 64% students strongly agree that they feel inferiority complex when they converse in a foreign environment. 60% students strongly agree that speaking Standard English is prestigious. The element of standard and non standard affects the concept of prestige and status.

The responses to these items highlighted the fact that the issue of Standard is very much related to the issues of prestige, status, recognition and respect. It appeared that these students prefer to learn and use Standard English since they feel others will respect them less if they would use Pakistani English.

However 80% want to pay extra attention to learn standard accent. 70% students agree and 32% students disagree that there are societal pressure regarding accent. 60% students agree that Standard English accent is required for International comprehensibility, they are clearly aware that there is a social component related to accent that affects their interaction with others. In addition, 100% percent of respondents reported that they disagree or strongly disagree that to learn accent is most important than comprehension of a subject. 80% students disagree that accurate accent is important than learning structures since language is mainly used for communication.

To establish whether the respondents perceived accent to be a problem or not, they were asked the following question: ‘When you have problems communicating in English, it is more likely because of a grammar problem or a pronunciation problem 60% students disagree that accents are not problematic as long as they do not impede communication.

A shift in attitude is observed when respondents answered on a question whether they would like to have a Standard English Speaker as a teacher as compared to PE speaker.

60% respondents disagree that they like to have Standard English Speaker as a teacher as compared to PE speaker but 40% of them agree that they expect from their teachers to teach

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them with Standard English accent. The respondents in this study did not demonstrate an interest in retaining an accent as an indicator of identity 80 % Respondents disagree and strongly disagree that It is not essential to learn accents because it takes away one's identity and origin. Undoubtedly, accent and identity are related issues but as they have opportunities to communicate in their L1 to learn another one will not affect their identity

Simply speaking, whether male or female, they do not think that their first language identity will have a negative influence on learning their second language especially for language pronunciation.

### **Conclusion**

This study explores this fact that in Pakistan there is considerable awareness among ESL learners of UE about the fact that English has forged its own linguistic and cultural identity in Pakistan and thus exists as a separate variety of English called Pakistani English. They accepted that Pakistani English exists but were determined to learn Standard English as they considered it a means of prestige and success in globalised world. They think that Standard English accent is important for foreign relation and success opportunities but it is possible that these students have never come in contact with foreigners and have therefore taken a safe side by preferring Standard English since they had no idea how effective Pakistani English would be in the international arena.

Furthermore, it seems important that linguistics should undertake systematic study of the features of Pakistani English. Such a study would help us define Pakistani English and consequently

make Pakistanis more confident about their use of Pakistani English. The prestige value of Standard English appears to outweigh the communicative value of Pakistani English here. This study suggests that the Pakistani society is making them feel that they need to emulate Standard English to gain respect and prestige in society. Therefore, what is needed is to make learners feel confident in the use of Pakistani English which is only possible when the teachers and society will show respect towards Pakistani variety of English.

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A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context

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## **Appendix 1**

### **Questionnaire for the students**

#### **A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context**

Name \_\_\_\_\_

Level \_\_\_\_\_

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A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context

665

Gender \_\_\_\_\_

SA= Strongly Agree    A= Agree    U= uncertain    SD= strongly disagree

D= Disagree

Sr#	Statements	SA	A	U	D	SD
01	Do you enjoy speaking English?					
02	Do you think Pakistani English is a different variety					
03	Do you think Pakistani English is near to standard English					
04	When you talk about English accent you talk about standard English accent					
05	You can accurately recognize the difference between native accent and non native accent					
06	Do you feel good when someone thought your accent is like standard speaker accent.					
07	Occasionally, I deliberately try to sound like a native speaker.					
08	To learn standard accent is a sign that you have learnt English language					
09	Do you feel inferiority complex when you converse in a foreign environment					
10	Do you like to pay extra attention to learn standard accent					
11	Do you think there are societal pressures regarding accent					
12	Do you think Standard English accent is required for international comprehensibility					
13	Do you think to learn accent is most important than comprehension of a subject					

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A Study on Attitudes towards Varieties of Spoken English in Pakistani Context

14	Accurate accent is important than learning structures since language is mainly used for communication.					
15	When you have problems in communicating English it is more likely because of grammatical problems than to accent.					
16	Accents are not problematic as long as they do not impede communication.					
17	Do you like to have Standard English Speaker as a teacher as compared to PE speaker					
18	You expect from your teachers to teach you with standard English accent					
19	Speaking Standard English is prestigious					
20	It is not essential to learn accents because it takes away one's identity and origin.					

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