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Research paper

Bungled Pronunciation of English in Colleges of Punjab, Pakistan: A Survey Along with its Ramifications

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Abstract

The prime and predominant objective of this study is to investigate and analyze the botched pronunciation of English language words prevalent in public and private sector colleges of Punjab, Pakistan. We have discussed that, what are the key factors which are responsible for such botched and poor pronunciation. The paper has surfaced the bungled pronunciation got through an oral questionnaire. The paper has identified the major pitfalls embedded in English language pronunciation while pointing out why it is happening and where the problem lies. A comparative study regarding public colleges of those countries where English is secondary language viz. India, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Students of different subjects and teachers of different subjects having teaching experience of several level have been taken on board. Altogether 30 govt. in-service public sector college teachers and 40 teachers from private sector colleges responded to the questionnaire; and 117 students from private and public sector colleges tendered responses. The study has underpinned the English language skill of the teachers by pinpointing that what weightage pronunciations bears in English language skill.

Keywords: *Botched pronunciation, English language skills, public colleges, private colleges, poorly understood pronunciation*

1. Introduction

Pakistan being a non-English speaking country has struggled in improvisation of English language skills and especially English pronunciation; English language has turned out to be sine qua non for job seekers; simultaneously, it is also imperative for official tasks to use Urdu language, as it is envisaged in Article 251 of the constitution of Pakistan, which ordains Urdu as the official language but in actuality English is the de facto official language. The Honourable Chief Justice of Pakistan, Jawad S. Khawaja, laid down a judgement whereby ordering the civil bureaucracy and other departments to adopt Urdu as the official language but of no avail so far.

While in India which is a neighbouring country in east of Pakistan is much deeply rooted in English language as compared to Pakistan. In 2005, Supreme Court of India ruled that only English will be the court language, none other. India stands at 4th in rank in the list of 19 countries of Asia in terms of English proficiency Index. Philippines, Singapore and Malaysia are the top three countries.

Sri Lankans have slightly different pronunciation from Indian and Pakistani because of the intervention of their mother tongue, Sinhalese. Sinhalese has also impacted English language. English has borrowed certain words from Sinhalese like, Buddha, anaconda, betel, and rattan.

Now we again talk about Pakistan, myriads of reforms have been proposed, hammered out to improve the standard of English language teaching in both public and private colleges, but have not been implemented in letter and spirit since the focus is not well directed; and certain proposals also stand substantially flawed.

Young generation and their parents in Pakistan are preoccupied about English language learning but they don't know how to embark on that educational mantra. Poor and uneducated parents are resorting to corrupt practices to get their children educated and to edify their English language skills. Even in this highly craved pursuit, the parents instead of imparting stupendous English language skills to their children, adore them with poor language skills. The principal element which has immensely contributed to this bungled and poor pronunciation is the imparting of language skills by poorly equipped teachers, who themselves are unaware of the precise and exact pronunciation. Even most of English language teachers were unable to identify and differentiate between American, British and Australian English during the course of research.

It is also an irony that Punjab Government is harping on the mantra of quality education relating to English language but in actuality the level of English language is worsening owing to the fact that Government has failed to launch a clamp down against fake academies and institutions – the primary concern of these institutions is money minting rather than giving of a well-balanced and top quality education.

Since English is the International language, and is a language of science and technology, therefore, to jettison its usage is nearly impossible specifically under such circumstances when a nation is not doing enough in its own language and is entirely hinging on another language. Owing to code switching which is in vogue in Pakistan, the native speakers who speak Punjabi have their peculiar pronunciation of English words which is usually not understood by native English speaker. English has its unique style of speaking in comparison with Urdu or Punjabi language. English has outright impact of nativized pronunciation, it has native variety of Urdu (Mahmood etal, 2011; Shabbir etal, 2013), Pahari (Khan and Qadir, etal, 2012) and Pushto (Rehman etal, 2012) which has taken its roots with the spawning of substandard educational institutions across Pakistan.

Punjabi speakers use Punjabi by incorporating words of English in their own way which is often quite funny and ludicrous this is just having overwhelming effect of their own language. Pakistani English is unique in its own way, it differs in its pronunciation.

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(Rehman, 1990; Talat, 2002; Baumgardener, 1993; Talat, 2002;). 44 percent of Pakistani people hail from Punjab province and speak Punjabi language, therefore, impact of Punjabi-cized English is palpable (Akram and Yasmeen, 2011). Even well-educated people and officers speak English words in Punjabi-cized English pronunciation.

Punjabi language speakers have invented their own style of English pronunciation. They use language in such a way as suits their tongue and as they find it easy to speak. The Primary Schools teacher in Punjab used to teach spellings by splitting a word in different parts; and pronunciation was also taught by splitting the pronunciation of a word as they found it easy. Such splitting of pronunciation of words led to this bungled pronunciation.

The study does not aim at caricaturing or bringing into ridicule anybody.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

This study will address, in specific, the following research questions:

1. What are the causes which are working for the bungled English pronunciation?
2. How much difference lies in the pronunciation?
3. What will be the possible outcome of this botched and self-contrived pronunciation?

2. Longman pronunciation dictionary (lpd) survey:

J.C Wells has prepared a dictionary of English having a name: "The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary", Wells tried to supplement the dictionary with the words which have variety of pronunciation in England and in the United States. Wells was a native speaker of Received Pronunciation (RP) Style English but despite of the fact he observed the speech which people spoke around him. According to Peter Trudgill's estimate of 1974, he pinpointed that only 3 percent of British citizens are RP speakers but this rough estimate was challenged by J. Windsor Lewis, a British phonetician.

J. C Wells observed that there are myriads of words which have contentious and fluctuating pronunciation. He quotes an example of a word Zebra, it is pronounced as /ˈziːbrə/ but by some it is pronounced as /ˈzɛbrə/. But the survey which we are going to conduct is entirely different from LPD survey. If British citizens who live in an English language speaking ambience have deviated pronunciation as J.C Wells has put forward. Bearing in view the study of J. C Wells, it will not be anomalous to suggest that Punjab province of Pakistan has bungled pronunciation; the pronunciation of certain English words is at variance with The Longman Pronunciation Dictionary. This aberration in pronunciation only relates to few words. We are focusing on the bungled pronunciation of certain English words which are wrongly spoken in Punjab, Pakistan.

3. Methodology

1. Sample: Altogether 30 govt. in-service public sector college teachers and 40 teachers from private sector colleges responded to the oral questionnaire; and 117 students from private and public sector colleges tendered response; Only male students and teachers responded to the questionnaire, female teachers and students were not asked to respond. Most of the students hailed from first year and second year of Intermediate class. There were 16 students from third year class and fourth year class. Five students altogether from Master classes also participated in response, and they willfully and happily responded to the questionnaire.

The oral questionnaire included list of 40 words which the teachers and students were asked to read and pronounce repeatedly so that their exact pronunciation can be judged and ascertained, and that where the problem lied. It was also surfaced during the survey that certain teachers were hesitant in pronouncing the words because they were thinking that their pronunciation might be used for insulting purposes, and that their pronunciation is not up to the mark.

2. Questionnaire: Sociolinguists have expressed their views that informants are not able to give exact account of pronunciation as they utter. Labov has stated that "in the conscious report of their own usage……. New York respondents are very inaccurate, generally over reporting, i.e. claiming to use more prestigious variants than they really did." Trudgill in his survey has found that survey also face variations on the basis of sex. In Norwich, England, he found that men tend to under-report, but on the other hand women are prone to over-reporting.

The respondents were asked in the questionnaire to speak their actual pronunciation. The preferences of the respondents was sought with regard to the words given in the questionnaire. The questionnaire consisted of forty words, the students and teachers both were asked to pronounce all the words in their own way. The words were written in bold format so it got easy for each respondent to pronounce.

3. Data collection: Data regarding pronunciation of different words was collected during the month of February and April, 2017. Written questionnaire was distributed to the students and teachers with the assistance of graduates of the colleges who are school teachers, and running their own schools or academies. Even 3 respondents were reluctant for response because they felt that their wrong pronunciation might be highlighted so they preferred to keep mum.

The data collected from each student and teacher was separately collected. The data collected during the survey was noted and then arranged in an order. Certain respondents pronounced the words twice or thrice to make sure that one of the pronunciation is correct. Only the pronunciation which was uttered first or which was spontaneous was noted. Rest of the pronunciation which followed the first were ignored.

4. Data analysis: The data collected was penned down. Only 7% of the total number of teachers – not students – from whom the response was sought either pronounced the English words in American pronunciation or British Pronunciation with slight deviation, rest of the 93% teachers and 100% students wrongly pronounced words. They invented their self-styled pronunciation. The enlisted words given in questionnaire were pronounced in such way that they were misunderstood or likely to be misunderstood by the listeners. Few respondents pronounced the words in such way which might have made the native speaker to laugh.

Table 1: The second column of below table contains words which were given in questionnaire to the students and teachers. In the third column British pronunciation, and in the fourth column American pronunciation is given, the fifth column contains the pronunciation of the students and teachers as they were spoken by majority of them

Words which were asked to be pronounced	British pronunciation	American Pronunciation	Bungled pronunciation
Adequate	/ædɪkwɪt/	/ædəkwət/	/ædɪˈkweɪt/
Alleviate	/əˈliːvɪeɪt/	/əˈlivi˛eɪt/	/əliˈvɪeɪt/
Biscuit	/bɪskɪt/	/bɪskət/	/bɪskwət/
Convalescence	/kɒnvəˈlɛsns/	/kɑnvəˈlɛsəns/	/kɒnˈveɪlisəns/
Coup de grace	/kuː diː greɪs/	/ku di greɪs/	/kuːp di greɪs/
Derivative	/dɪˈrɪvətɪv/	/dɪˈrɪvətɪv/	/ˈdɑːriːˈvatɪv/
Détente	/deɪˈtɑːnt/	\ dā-ˈtänt \	/dɪˈtɒnteɪ/
Diner	/ˈdʌɪnə/	\ ˈdī-nər \	/ˈdɪnər/
Entente	/ɒnˈtɒnt/	\ än-ˈtänt \	/ənˈtɒnteɪ/
Exhibition	/ɛksɪˈbɪʃ(ə)n/	\ ˌek-sə-ˈbi-shən \	/ɛksˈhɪbishən/
Extempore	/ɪkˈstɛmp(ə)ri/	\ ik-ˈstem-pə-(ˌ)rē \	/ɛksˈtɛmpɔr/
Extravagant	/ɪkˈstravəg(ə)nt/	\ ik-ˈstra-vi-gənt \	/ˈɛkstrəˈveɪgənt/
Handsome	/ˈhans(ə)m/	\ ˈhan(t)-səm \	/hændˈsəm/
Indictment	/ɪnˈdʌɪtm(ə)nt/	\ in-ˈdīt-mənt \	/ɪnˈdɪktˈment/
Internecine	/ˌɪntəˈniːsʌɪn/	\ ˌin-tər-ˈne-	/ˌɪntɜːniːˈsaɪn/

		ˌsēn	
Lucrative	/ˈluːkrətɪv/	\ ˈlü-krə-tiv \	/ˈluːˈkreɪtɪv/
Magnificent	/magˈnɪfɪs(ə)nt/	\ -sənt \	/ˈmægnɪˈfiːsnt/
Mandatory	/ˈmandət(ə)ri/	\ ˈman-də-ˌtȯr-ē \	/mæn ˈfæktri/
Munificent	/mjʊˈnɪfɪs(ə)nt/	\ myü-ˈni-fə-sənt \	/mjuːnɪˈfiːsnt/
Necessary	/ˈnɛsəs(ə)ri/	\ ˈne-sə-ˌser-ē \	/nɪəˈsesəriː/
Novice	/ˈnɒvɪs/	\ ˈnä-vəs \	/noʊvaɪs/
Onion	/ˈʌnjən/	\ ˈən-yən \	/əʊniən/
Palpable	/ˈpalpəb(ə)l/	\ ˈpal-pə-bəl \	/ˈpalˈpeɪbəl/
Per se	/pəː ˈseɪ/	\ ˈpərs \	/ˈpər siː/
Pidgin	/ˈpɪdʒɪn/	\ ˈpi-jən \	/ˈpɪdgɪn/
Polygamy	/pəˈlɪgəmi/	\ pə-ˈli-gə-mē \	/ˈpəʊliˈgeɪmi/
Posthumous	/ˈpɒstjʊməs/	päst-ˈhyü-məs	/pəsˈθməs/
Prefer	/prɪˈfəː/	\ pri-ˈfər \	/prəˈfər/
Probably	/ˈprɒbəbli/	prä(b)-blē \	/prəʊˈbeɪbli/
Puisne	/ˈpjuːni/	\ ˈpyü-nē \	/pjuːzneɪ/
Purchase	/ˈpəːtʃɪs/	\ ˈpər-chəs \	/ˈpərˈtʃeɪz/
Rapprochement	/raˈprɒʃmɔ̃/	ra-ˈprōsh-ˌmäⁿ \	/rapˈrəʊtʃment/
Reciprocal	/rɪˈsɪprək(ə)l/	\ ri-ˈsi-prə-kəl \	/ˈresiˈprəʊkl/
Refer	/rɪˈfəː/	\ ri-ˈfər \	/ rəˈfər/
Sporadic	/spəˈradɪk/	\ spə-ˈra-dik \	/spəʊˈradɪk/
Suggestion	/səˈdʒɛstʃ(ə)n/	\ səg-ˈjes-chən	/səˈdʒeʃʌn/
Tentative	/ˈtɛntətɪv/	\ ˈten-tə-tiv \	/ˈtɛnˈteɪtɪv/
Ultimate	/ˈʌltɪmət/	\ ˈəl-tə-mət \	/ˈʌltɪmeɪt/
Vehicle	/ˈviːɪk(ə)l/	\ ˈvē-ə-kəl	/vəˈhɪkəl/
Vignette	/vɪˈnjɛt/	\ vin-ˈyet	/vɪdʒˈnɛt/

4. Findings

The students of both public and private sector colleges of Punjab spoke words having wrong and unintelligible pronunciation. Even there were certain students who kept on guessing the pronunciation and uttered different pronunciations. The meanings of all the words given in questionnaire was not known either by the teachers and students. 4 students from private sector colleges did not respond all the words; and 2 students from public sector colleges did not respond to all the words enlisted in the questionnaire.

The teachers of English language from private sector colleges – Superior College, Punjab College, Muhammadan Scholars' college, Hassan Scholar College and other private colleges – pronounced the words with assertion and vehemence as to suggest that they have pronounced the words with accuracy, but in that attempt, and in actuality they pronounced wrongly. It seemed that the English teachers of private sector colleges have contrived their own pronunciation by splitting the words in their own style and as they found it easy to utter. Only 1.3% of all the teachers from private sector colleges pronounced the words either in American pronunciation or British English or Australian English.

On the other hand English language teachers from public sector colleges – Govt. Inter colleges, Govt. Degree colleges and post graduate colleges – pronounced the words with slight accuracy in comparison with private sector colleges' teachers. 5.7% of all teachers from public sector teachers pronounced words given in questionnaire in an internationally recognized pronunciation rest of the teachers contrived the pronunciation according to their own manner and as they deemed it fit or proper.

5. Conclusion

The study claims that the pronunciation of teachers and students is alike, the pronunciation of educated masses is not different from ordinary people when there comes such words which are wrongly pronounced by most of Pakistani citizens. Teachers and students both have contributed towards the evolution of a new styled English pronunciation, which can be termed as Punjabi pronunciation of English. Such botched pronunciation has unhealthy repercussions on the students and teachers both. When either teachers or students take English language tests like International English Language Testing System (IELTS) conducted by Cambridge University or British Council, or Test of English as a Foreign Language (TOEFL) conducted by Educational Testing Service (ETS); these teachers and students either take exam of TOEFL or IELTS they fail to perform well in Speaking and Listening skills.

In order to secure admission in a top class universities of the world the students are required to secure 7 Bands in IELTS and 88 in TOEFL. One more problem which the students and teachers face who speak bungled pronunciation is that they cannot interact well with a native English speaker. In order to improvise the pronunciation sub-standard institutions and academies need to be shut off; in addition to that native English speakers need to be asked to teach in institutions of Pakistan like China and Japan are doing. China and Japan do not have English as their official or native language, therefore, they recruit British or American or Canadian or Australian citizens to teach English language in their schools and colleges. The students and teacher in Pakistan need to learn from native speakers. Instead of devising their own and self- styled pronunciation they have to adopt native speakers' pronunciation. The backward areas of Pakistan and slums of cities are facing acute shortage of competent English teachers which can teach good pronunciation to the students so in the same vein students are equipped with poor and bungled pronunciation. Pakistan need to establish an English teaching council at federal level and provincial level which can monitor and issue licenses to English language teaching aspirants.

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