INFLUENCE OF PASHTO PHONOLOGY ON ENGLISH VOWEL PRONUNCIATION: A STUDY OF SENIOR ENGLISH TEACHERS IN DISTRICT DIR LOWER

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Abstract

This study investigates the influence of Pashto phonology on the pronunciation of English vowels among senior English teachers in District Dir Lower, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan. Despite their extensive teaching experience, these teachers exhibit persistent pronunciation errors that hinder effective oral communication in English. Using a mixed-methods approach, data were collected through questionnaires and interviews from a randomly selected sample representing approximately ten percent of the population of senior English teachers in the district. The findings revealed systematic errors in the articulation of English long and short vowels, as well as diphthongs, primarily caused by negative transfer from Pashto, insufficient phonetic training, and limited exposure to native English input. Moreover, the study found that although most teachers recognized the importance of correct pronunciation, they lacked both theoretical knowledge of phonetics and practical pronunciation skills. The results underscore critical gaps in teacher education programs, particularly the absence of phonetics and phonology components in professional training. The study recommends the inclusion of pronunciation-focused modules in teacher education curricula, the use of authentic listening materials, and the adoption of computer-assisted pronunciation training (CAPT) tools to enhance intelligibility and communicative competence.

Keywords: Pronunciation, Pashto interference, Vowel errors, Teacher training, English phonology, Fossilization.

1. Introduction

For English teachers, the importance of correct pronunciation can hardly be overstated, as they serve as role-models to their students and the students' pronunciation largely depends on their pronunciation. Apart from other factors, successful oral communication depends on correct pronunciation. Since sounds play an important role in communication (especially oral communication), and the researchers agree with Morley (1991), who emphasizes the importance of explicit pronunciation teaching in ESL or EFL classroom, language teachers must, therefore, give due attention to teaching correct pronunciation in their classes, a fact which has hitherto received little attention from many English language teachers in our country.

A glance at the English language syllabi from the primary to the university level in Khybar Pakhtun Khwah reveals the fact that an English phonetics course does not form a part of the curriculum. Similarly, no training is given to the under-training teachers on pronunciation teaching at CT, PST, B.Ed and M.Ed levels. Neither of these teachers are taught any phonetic course during the course of their training.

The inability of our syllabus designers to realize the importance of pronunciation does not mean that pronunciation is not important. In fact, pronunciation is just as indispensable and integral part of language learning as are vocabulary, grammar and appropriate use, because Oral communication becomes very difficult and tiresome without correct pronunciation. Unless a learner has sufficient knowledge of the sounds and sound patterns of the target language, he can neither satisfactorily encode a message to anybody nor decode the message sent by another person. As Wong (1987) has pointed out that if the learners' pronunciation falls below a certain threshold level, they are unable to communicate effectively, even though their vocabulary and grammar are excellent. Wong (1993) also underscores the role played by correct pronunciation in listening comprehension. While examining the factors affecting listening comprehension, (Varonis and Gass, 1982) pointed out that native speakers often judge the intelligibility level of non-native speakers based on correct pronunciation. Hence, correct pronunciation is an important ingredient of overall communicative competence.

The researchers are cognisant of the fact that pronunciation is a wider phenomenon, encompassing not only individual speech segments, but also supra-segmental elements (stress, pitch, rhythm, length and intonation, etc.), but given the scope of the research, only the segmental mistakes committed by Senior English Teachers in District Dir Lower were investigated.

1.1 Statement of the Problem

The phonological systems of different languages vary, some to a greater degree, some slightly. English and Pashto, though descended from the same mother-language (Indo-European), have quite distinct phonological systems too. Similarly, Pashto and English employ two fundamentally different orthographies. The Pashto orthography, even though it violates one-letter-to-one-phoneme correspondence, is largely shallow or transparent, whereas the English orthographical system is deep or non-transparent, since it allows the same letter to represent two or more sounds, and two or more sounds can be represented by one letter. The Pashto orthographic system has a phonemic basis, i.e. the main function of the Pashto letters of the alphabet is to represent sounds, whereas the English orthography, on the other hand, is largely based on a morphophonemic principle. According to Carney (1994, p. 18): "The English writing system is not simply concerned with mapping phonemes on to letters. It largely tries to offer the reader a vowel spelling for a morpheme in spite of the varying pronunciation of the morpheme in different contexts." Studies done by Erdener & Burnham (2005) and Hayes-Harb (2007) suggest that languages with an opaque spelling system (where the sound is not represented in the orthography) are more difficult to acquire.

1.2 Objectives

1. The main objectives of this study are:
2. To identify the main segmental mistakes in the pronunciation of vowels of these teachers.
3. To identify the factors which hamper the learning of correct English vowels pronunciation by senior English teachers whose L1 is Pashto.
4. To offer suggestions for helping the senior English teacher to overcome their main vowels pronunciation mistakes.
5. To help the syllabus designers take vowels pronunciation (an area which has been hitherto largely ignored) into perspective while designing English language syllabus.

1.3 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that contribute to Senior English Teachers' incorrect vowels pronunciation?
2. What type of errors do these teachers commit while pronouncing vowels sounds?
3. Does Pashto (the mother-tongue of most teachers) interfere with the English pronunciation of vowels sounds Dir (lower)?
4. Does the lack of knowledge about English phonetics and phonology contribute to their incorrect vowels sounds pronunciation?

1.4 Hypothesis

The proposed research is intended to justify the hypothesis that senior English teachers at Higher and Higher Secondary schools in District Dir Lower make certain mistakes in the articulation of individual speech segments. It is also hypothesized that these mistakes result from their L1 (Pashto) influence and their lack of knowledge about the phonological system of the English Language.

1.5 Significance of the Study

Languages may vary from one another in terms of such linguistic aspects as phonetics, phonology, phonotactics, syntax and semantics. There has been research in each of these features in various languages of the world in relation to English. But no such research has ever been carried out on the linguistic relationship between Pashto and English, at least not in the case of what and how phonological features of the Pashto language influence the pronunciation of English teachers who have Pashto as their L1.

This study is an attempt to identify the pronunciation mistakes made by these teachers in individual phonemes and thus help them improve their English pronunciation. Since the teachers' pronunciation has direct and long-lasting impact on the student's pronunciation, it will be of great significance in bringing their pronunciation to a level of "comfortable intelligibility" too. Hence this study will enable the teachers, and subsequently their students too, to be proficient oral communicators. Thus, one of the major obstacles in the way of both direct and indirect oral interaction will be largely removed. Moreover, on the theoretical side, this research will contribute to a large body of linguistic knowledge accumulated so far, as it has attempted to explore, though on a limited scale, the hitherto largely unchartered phonological system of the Pashto language.

2. Literature Review

The aim of this section is to highlight the central areas in pronunciation to have an insight into the issues that pertain to the present study. Linguistics is generally defined as "the scientific study of language". But what exactly is language? Broadly speaking, the term "language" is defined as a "means of communication". But communication can also be done through other means, e.g. facial expressions, body gestures, music and through the symbolic use of flowers, colours and road-signals, etc. Can these mean of communication be called "human language"? According to Aitcheson (1977, p. 21), language is "the specialized sound signalling system which seems to be genetically programmed to develop in humans." Thus, she believes in the primacy of "sound signals" in human language, a view shared by the majority of linguists. But in general language teaching / learning contexts, however, the primacy of speech is hardly maintained, and thus by implication, little attention is given to correct pronunciation.

Focus on correct pronunciation, especially in EFL contexts, is a recent phenomenon among the language teaching circles. Till the nineteenth century, oral proficiency was not the goal of language teachers, as people had little chances of coming into direct contact with each other and using the

target language orally. People learnt the target language largely for the purposes of reading and writing in it. As Richards and Rogers (2001, p. 3) observes: "Changes in language teaching methods throughout history have reflected recognition of changes in the kind of proficiency learners need, such as a move toward oral proficiency rather than reading comprehension as the goal of language study; they have also reflected changes in theories of the nature of language and of language learning."

Before English became the world's most widely studied and learnt foreign language, Latin was the dominant language of education, commerce, religion, and government in the Western world and it was continued to be studied upto the nineteenth century, as it was believed to be helpful in enhancing intellectual faculties. "Children entering "grammar school" in the sixteenth, seventeenth, and eighteenth centuries in England were initially given a rigorous introduction to Latin grammar, which was taught through rote learning of grammar rules, study of declensions and conjugations, translation, and practice in writing sample sentences, sometimes with the use of parallel bilingual texts and dialogue" (Kelly, 1969); (Howatt, 1984) cited in (Richards and Rogers, 2001, p. 4).

As modern languages began to enter the curriculum of European schools in the eighteenth century, they were taught using the same basic procedures that were used for teaching Latin. According to Richards and Rodgers (2001, p. 4): textbooks consisted of statements of abstract grammar rules, lists of vocabulary, and sentences for translation. Speaking the foreign language was not the goal, and oral practice was limited to students reading aloud the sentences they had translated. These sentences were constructed to illustrate the grammatical system of the language and consequently bore no relation to the language of real communication.

The techniques used for teaching Latin (a dead language) began to be used for the teaching of other modern languages, e.g. English, French and German. This set of techniques came to be known as Grammar Translation Method, a method which dominated language teaching till the early twentieth century in Europe and is still widely used in our part of the world. In this method, according to Richards and Rogers (2001, p. 5), and Larson Freeman (1986, p. 8) "reading and writing are the major focus; little or no systematic attention is paid to speaking or listening".

However, as means of communication developed and opportunities for direct interaction increased, people felt the need for oral proficiency in the target language. "Educators recognized the need for speaking proficiency rather than reading comprehension, grammar, or literary appreciation as the goal for foreign language programs" (Richards and Rogers 2001, p. 9).

Developments in linguistics also led to the primacy of speech over the written form of language. The International Phonetic Association was founded in 1886, and its International Phonetic Alphabet (IPA) was designed to enable the sounds of any language to be accurately transcribed. One of the earliest goals of the association was to improve the teaching of modern languages. According to Richards and Rogers (2001, p. 9)," it advocated:

- The study of the spoken language
- Phonetic training to establish good pronunciation habits
- The use of conversation texts and dialogues to introduce conversational phrases and idioms
- An inductive approach to the teaching of grammar
- Teaching new meanings through establishing associations within the target language rather than by establishing associations with the native language.

Victor, Sweet, and others advocated reforms to the way languages were taught. In fact, the majority of methods and approaches, developed after the GTM, have oral proficiency as their primary goal. Most of them underscore the importance of correct pronunciation in achieving effective oral proficiency. The underlying principle, for example, of the Oral Approach and Situational Language Teaching (developed in the 1930s), is that "language teaching begins with the spoken language." Material is taught orally before it is presented in written form". (Richards and Rodgers, 2001, p. 39).

This was empirically verified by Jenkins (2000), who conducted research on the intelligibility level between speakers from the same L1 versus between speakers with different L1s background, as they interacted in L2 (English). Her study confirmed that interlocutors having the same L1 background manifested more phonological deviations as compared with those having different L1 backgrounds. This may be mainly because learners from the same L1 usually "forgive" many kinds of pronunciation problems. For EFL situations in Pakistan, then, where the language is mostly taught by Pakistani teachers of English, and where classroom interaction involves only Pakistani speakers, evaluating intelligibility is difficult for both teachers and students. This is because teachers and learners cannot use their intuition in judging intelligibility. This is further complicated by the fact that there is little agreement as to what phonological aspects threaten an L2 learner's intelligibility (Munro and Derwing, 1995) and therefore there is relatively little information that guides the teachers and students to decide what can cause unintelligibility.

Moyer's study aimed at measuring the attainment levels in L2 pronunciation of English L1 teaching assistants of German, all of whom were past the critical period, and whose period of exposure to the target language (German) ranged from several months to several years. She found that lower accuracy in pronunciation resulted from both higher age of onset of immersion and higher age of beginning of instruction, suggesting thereby that age is important in attaining accurate pronunciation. She also found that the accuracy levels in the pronunciation of those who had received both segmental and supra-segmental feedback on their pronunciation were far higher than those who received only type of pronunciation instruction. Moyer's finding suggests that instruction may have had some influence, but it may be argued that it was a conclusion drawn only from self-report in a questionnaire, not from direct empirical study, unlike that of Purcell and Suter discussed earlier.

Munro and Derwing (1995), on the other hand, conclude that foreign accent cannot be confused with low intelligibility. In fact, they found that learners with heavy accents are not always judged to have intelligibility problems. They concluded that "If comprehensibility and intelligibility are accepted as the most important goals of instruction in pronunciation, then the degree to which a particular speaker's speech is accented should be of minor concern, and instruction should not focus on global accent reduction, but only on those aspects of the learner's speech that appear to interfere with listener's understanding." (Munro and Derwing, 1995, p. 93)

The notion of fossilization has been interpreted differently by different scholars since it was proposed. For instance, there are terms like backsliding, stabilized errors, learning plateau, typical error, persistent non-target-like performance, de-acceleration of the learning process, ingrained errors, systematic use of erroneous forms, cessation of learning, structural persistence, ultimate attainment, long-lasting free variation, persistent difficulty, and inability to fully master target language features describing the similar meaning, which lead to confusion for quite a long time.

Fossilization may appear (1) at different language levels; (2) it may occur at different learning stages among age groups; (3) it may be either structure fossilization or competence fossilization;

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(4) it is usually manifested as the deviant forms from the TL norms; (5) there are soft and hard degrees of fossilization.

According to Selinker (1978), interlanguage fossilization falls into two categories, namely individual fossilization and group fossilization. The former is the persistence of individual learner's IL development, while the latter is the plateau in the diachronic development of a community language. Usually, individual fossilization consists of two types: error reappearance, and language competence fossilization. Error reappearance refers to the inappropriate interlanguage structures that are thought to have been corrected but continue to appear regularly. It can be found in IL of beginners or learners with low proficiency. Language competence fossilization refers to the plateau in the development of L2 learners' phonological, grammatical, lexical and pragmatic competence. It is found in L2 learners who have been learning TL for a long period of time and arrived at a relatively high level. In fact, repeated errors are often the demonstrations of competence fossilization. If fossilized language competence becomes pervasive in a community, group fossilization comes into being. Such pervasion often leads to a new dialect. Indian English and Singapore English are good cases in point.

Selinker also classified fossilization into temporary fossilization and permanent fossilization. Temporary fossilization, also called stabilization, indicates that fossilized interlanguage consists of learning plateaus, "where development of given TL features is simply 'arrested' or 'inhibited' for shorter or longer periods of time. (Sims, 1989). It has become one of the heated topics in the current fossilization studies. Permanent fossilization takes place as a result of social, psychological and interactive variables. It has also been referred to by Sims as soft fossilization or jellification.

However, the phenomena of fossilization can be counterbalanced using effective learning strategies and focus on both form and meaning. Corder (1978) pointed out that the native language of the learners offers various hypotheses concerning the target language, and only through abundant input of the target language can the negative transfer of the native language be lessened. Natural exposure to TL has similarly been proposed as a factor that promotes L2 learning and therefore helps learners overcome fossilization, either directly (staying for some time in the target language community), or indirectly.

3. Research Methodology

This research is a blend of qualitative and quantitative research, as the researchers have used some books on the sound system of both the languages, i.e. English and Pashto, for a sound theoretical background while the data has been collected and analysed empirically. The researchers know very little research has been done so far on the sound system of Pashto language and any systematic description of its phonology is hardly available. The phonology of English language, on the other hand, has been extensively described and huge data made available. The researcher has, therefore, relied mainly on the hitherto available rich descriptive analysis of the phonology of the English language. But the researchers, who speaks Pashto as his mother-tongue and who is a student of phonetics and phonology, has employed whatever knowledge he has in the analysis of Pashto language in relationship to English.

The population for the study was all the senior English teachers in the government high and higher secondary schools in district Dir Lower, which consisted of 359 male teachers and 146 female teachers. Since it was almost impossible for the researchers to have access to and collect data from all the senior English teachers in the above-mentioned schools, a sample of upto ten percent from these teachers was taken through random sampling technique.

The data was collected and analysed empirically, and the following research tools were used:

I. Interviews: The researchers had interviews with the teachers in order to find out, among other things: (a) in which of the forty-four English phonemes mistakes were made; (b) what type of mistakes were made; (c) whether these English teachers had knowledge about the phonology of English; (d) whether they were aware of their pronunciation short-comings; and (e) to check their intelligibility level. During the course of the interview, the teachers were asked to read aloud a list of minimal pairs and a reading passage taken from book II taught at the SSC level in schools in Khybar Pakhtunkhwah. All the interviews were recorded and then transcribed for the purposes of analysis.

II. Questionnaires: Questionnaires were carefully prepared and distributed among the teachers with the aim of obtaining the relevant data. Data about academic and professional qualification of the subjects, phonetic training, years of teaching experience, their attitude towards the importance of pronunciation and their awareness of the role and efficacy of modern technology in improving pronunciation was gathered through questionnaires.

All the collected, questionnaire and interviews data, were transcribed and data was coded. Since the questions asked in the interview were semi-structured in nature, the results were reported both statistically and descriptively.

4. Results and Analysis

The collected data, questionnaires and interviews have been presented and analyzed in relation to their original hypotheses in this section. This section consists of two parts. In the first part, data gathered through questionnaires is presented and analyzed, whereas in the second, data collected through interviews is put before the reader and analyzed. Data is presented in the form of tables, and its analysis is made on both the descriptive as well as inferential levels.

4.1 Analysis of Data Collected through Questionnaires

This part is sub-divided into two parts. Section 4.1 deals with the subjects' teaching experience, phonetic training and professional and academic qualification, whereas in section 4.2 information is presented about their attitude towards correct pronunciation, the use of dictionary when in doubt about the pronunciation of a particular word, listening to native speakers via radio, television and internet etc. and their listening comprehension of the native speakers.

4.1.1 Teaching experience and academic and professional qualification

Table 4.1

Years of Experience	Percentage	Phonetic Training
8 to 12 years	30 %	Nil
13 to 16 years	38 %	Nil
17 to 20 years	22 %	Nil
More than 20 years	10 %	Nil

Table 4.2

Academic qualification	Percentage	Phonetic Training
M.A in English	08 %	Nil
M.A in Islamic Studies	62 %	Nil
M.A in Urdu	16 %	Nil
M.A in other subjects	14 %	Nil

Table 4.3

Professional Qualification	Percentage	Phonetic Training
B.Ed	64 %	Nil
M.Ed	22 %	Nil
Both M.Ed and B.Ed	14 %	Nil

The above tables show that these teachers have been teaching English for a considerable period. Their teaching experience ranges from 08 to more than 20 years. Although they have been involved in teaching English for a considerable period, yet they seem to have paid little attention to their pronunciation, as has been shown in the subsequent parts of this chapter. Thus, there appears to be little correlation between the teaching experience and correct pronunciation of these teachers.

Most of the subjects have master's degrees in Islamic studies (62 %), followed by Urdu (16 %). Only eight percent of them studied English literature and linguistics at their masters' level. However, those with masters' degrees in English also committed the same mistakes in the pronunciation as the others. They might be better than the others in terms of other aspects of the English language (grammar and vocabulary), but in terms of pronunciation, they manifested the same level of proficiency.

All the subjects had good professional qualifications, as they did either B.Ed (bachelor's in education), or M.Ed (master's in education) or both. It may be noted that these degrees are mandatory for obtaining teaching jobs in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. All of them, however, had no training in phonetics. Thus, it is not surprising that the subjects made mistakes in the articulation of most English phonemes, as they had little knowledge about the role of articulators in the articulation of different speech segments, the places and manners of articulation of the different English phonemes, and so on.
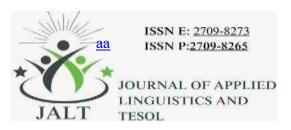
4.1.2 Attitude Towards Pronunciation

In table 4.4, information about the subjects' attitude towards the importance of correct pronunciation, the use of dictionary when in doubt about the pronunciation of a word and whether they listen to native speakers via radio, television or internet, is given. Analysis follows.

Table 4.4

Attitude	Percentage	Dictionary Use	Percentage	Listening to NS	Percentage
Not important	24 %	Seldom	64 %	No because I don't understand them	86 %
Important	56 %	Often	28 %	Yes but partially understand them	10 %
Very important	20%	Always	08 %	Can't understand them, but enjoy listening to them	4 %

The encouraging aspect about the subjects' attitude towards correct pronunciation is that many of them (56 %) consider it important and to some (20 %), it is very important. Only 24 percent consider it unimportant. Thus, most of the subjects have a positive attitude towards correct

pronunciation, and if given an opportunity to improve their pronunciation, they would eagerly work on it.

Most of the respondents (64 %), however, despite having positive attitude towards correct pronunciation, seldom consulted a dictionary when in doubt about the pronunciation of a particular word. The main reason for this, they themselves stated during the interviews, was their inability to associate sounds with the phonemic symbols. The rest of the subjects who often (28 %) and always (08 %) used a dictionary when in doubt about the pronunciation of a particular word also face the same problem of associating sounds with phonemic symbols, but it is their sheer determination and high motivation which force them to do so. Another important issue, which came to light during the interviews, is that most subjects use the indigenously produced, sub-standard English-into- Urdu dictionaries. The pronunciation of various entries, given in these dictionaries, is often not correct, as they do not follow the phonemic chart provided by the IPA (International Phonetics Association).

Most of the subjects (86 %) do not expose themselves to speech input from the native speakers owing to their lack of comprehension of them. The rest of them (10%) do listen to the native speakers from time to time but cannot fully understand them. One of the main reasons for their lack of comprehension of the native speakers is the subjects' incorrect pronunciation. As has been emphasized time and again, correct pronunciation is essential for listening comprehension. On the other hand, exposure to the speech of native speakers does improve the learners' pronunciation.

In sections 4.1 and 4.2, we presented and analyzed the data collected through questionnaires. The main aim of this part was to find out the major factors responsible for the subjects' incorrect pronunciation. The factors identified so far are:

I. The exclusion of any practical course on English phonetics and phonology from both the academic and professional syllabi.
II. The subjects' inability to know the sound values of various English phonemes and associate them with their respective phonemic symbols.
III. The subjects' lack of awareness and use of the standard English dictionaries; and
IV. The subjects' lack of exposure to native speakers' input

It may be noted, however, that these are not the only factors responsible for the respondents' incorrect pronunciation; there are other factors as well which have been identified in the next part, in which data collected through interviews is presented and analyzed.

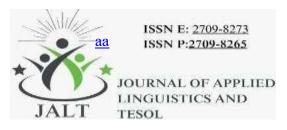**4.2 Qualitative Results from Interviews**

4.2.1 Errors in the Articulation of the English Pure Vowels

This section is further sub-divided into two parts. In section 4.2.2.1, mistakes in the articulation of the long vowels are presented, whereas section 4.2.2.2 deals with the mistakes made in the articulation of the short vowels.

4.2.2.1 Errors in the Articulation of the English Long Vowels

As table 4.5 shows, the subjects made several mistakes while articulating the long vowels. First, they could not get the length right. All the long vowels are fully long when in an open syllable, or when they ar followed by a voiced consonant; they are comparatively short when followed by an unvoiced consonant. The subjects articulated them with the same amount of length regardless of the context in which they occurred.

The long back low vowel /a:/ is spelled in many ways, including "ar". Whenever the subjects saw the letter "r" in spelling, they articulated it. Thus, they pronounced "sharp" as /ʃa:rp/, "art" as /a:rt/ and "hard" as /ha:rd/. The presence of the letter "r" in the spelling also compelled them to commit

the same mistake in the articulation of /ɔ:/ and /ɜ:/. Thus, they pronounced "hurt" as /hərt/, "turn" as /tərn/, "short" as /ʃa:rt/ and "warm" as /wa:rm/.

The subjects substituted the long back low vowel /ɔ:/ with /a:/. Thus, they pronounced "all" as /a:l/, "ball" as /ba:l/ and "saw" as /sa:/. The reason for this substitution can be that /a:/ forms a part of the Pashto inventory of sounds, whereas /ɔ:/ does not.

Table 4.5

The English Phoneme	Symbol	Mistakes
The long front high vowel	/I:/	Length
The long back low vowel	/a:/	Length The articulation of /r/ (usually the retroflex) whenever it is present in spelling
The long back low vowel	/ɔ:/	Length Substitution with /a:/ The articulation of /r/ whenever it is present in spelling
The long back high vowel	/ʊ:/	Length
The long mid vowel	/ɜ:/	Length The Articulation of /r/ as it part of the spelling

It may be noted that the long mid vowel /ɜ:/ does not occur in Pashto. The subjects, therefore, substituted this sound with another vowel sound, usually the schwa.

4.2.2.2 Errors in the Articulation of Short Vowels

As has been mentioned time and again, English spelling can be very misleading for the learners of English. One letter may represent several sounds. The letter "a", for example, may represent the long back low vowel /a:/ (e.g. last), the long back low vowel /ɔ:/ (e.g. hall), the short central vowel /ə/ (e.g. again) and the short front high vowel /I/ (e.g. private) etc. This opaque nature of the English orthography caused considerable problems for the subjects in the articulation of various speech segments, especially vowels. They substituted one phoneme with another.

When the short front high vowel /I/ was spelled with the letter "a", they substituted this sound with the short front low vowel /æ/ and pronounced "cottage" as /ka:tædʒ/, "image" as /imædʒ/ and "private" as /praivæt/. Similarly, they substituted the short mid vowel /ə/ with the front low vowel /æ/ when /ə/ was represented by the letter "a" in spelling.

Table 4.6

The English Phoneme	Symbol	Mistakes
The short front high vowel	/I/	Substitution with /æ/, especially when it is spelled with "a"
The short mid front vowel	/e/	Substitution with /I/
The short back low vowel	/ɒ/	Substitution with /a:/
The short mid vowel	/ə/	Substitution with /æ/, especially when spelled with the letter "a"

Moreover, the short mid front vowel /e/ was substituted with the short front high vowel /I/, as the former does not exist in the Pashto repertoire of sounds. Thus, they pronounced "get" as /git/, "beg" as /bIg/, "met" as /mIt/, "net" as /nIt/ and "test" as tIst/. Similarly, for the same reason, the

subjects substituted the short open back English vowel /ɒ/ with the long open back English vowel /a:/. Thus, they pronounced "got" as /ga:t/, "not" as /na:t/ and "hot" as /ha:t/.

4.2.3 Errors in the Articulation of the English Diphthongs

As may be noted in table 4.7, the subjects committed the following mistakes in the articulation of the English diphthongs: (1) getting the length right; (2) substitution of one diphthong with another; (3) substitution of a diphthong with a pure vowel; and (4) the articulation of /r/ whenever it was found in the spelling.

To begin with, they failed to get the length of all the diphthongs right. In terms of length, an English diphthong is just like a long vowel. It is fully long when followed by a voiced consonant and comparatively short when followed by an unvoiced one. The subjects articulated all the diphthongs with the same amount of length regardless of the context in which they occurred.

They substituted the diphthong /ɔ/ with the diphthong /ai/ and pronounced the words "joy" as /dʒai/, "choice" as /tʃais/, "noise" as naiz/ and "voice" as /wais/. (In the last example, it may be noted that the subjects not only substituted the diphthong but also replaced the labiodental fricative /v/ with the bilabial approximant /w/). Similarly, they substituted the centering diphthong /eə/ with the other centering diphthong /iə/ and pronounced the words "care" as kiər/, "air" as /iər/ and "hair" as /hiər/. The phonetic transcription in the preceding sentence shows that the subjects not only substitute one diphthong with another but also articulated /r/ as it appeared in the spelling of these words.

Table 4.7

The English Phoneme	Symbol	Mistakes
The closing English Diphthong	/ei/	Substitution with /æ/ Problem of Length
The closing English diphthong	/əʊ/	Substitution with /ɒ/ Problem of length
The closing English diphthong	/ai/	Problem of length
The closing English diphthong	/au/	Substitution of the 2ⁿᵈ element /u/ with the approximant /w/ Problem of length
The closing English diphthong	/ɔ/	Substitution with /ai/ Problem of length
The centering English diphthong	/iə/	The articulation of /r/ when it is present in spelling Problem of length
The centering English diphthong	/eə/	The articulation of /r/ when it is present in spelling Problem of length
The closing English diphthong	/ʊə/	Substitution with /iə/ The articulation of /r/ when it is present in spelling Problem of length

This mistake was committed in the case of the other closing diphthong /ʊə/. Hence, they pronounced the words "poor" as /pʊər/, "sure" as /ʃʊər/ and "truer" as /trʊər/. The subjects substituted the closing diphthong /ei/ with the pure mid front vowel /æ/. Thus, they pronounced "say" as /sæ/, "may" as /mæ/ and wait" as /wæt/. Similarly, they substituted the second element of

the closing diphthong /au/ with the bilabial approximate /w/, especially when this diphthong occurred in the word-final position. Hence, they pronounced "now" as /naw/, "how" as /haw/ and" allow" as /əlaw/.

The mistakes made in the articulation of the English diphthongs can be attributed to L1 transfer (as some diphthongs are not found in Pashto, the mother-tongue of the subjects), the opaque nature of the English orthography and the subjects' lack of knowledge about the phonology of the English language.

5. Discussion

The present study has revealed significant pronunciation difficulties among senior English teachers in District Dir Lower, particularly in the articulation of English vowel sounds. Despite extensive teaching experience, the participants demonstrated persistent segmental errors that can be traced primarily to negative L1 transfer from Pashto, lack of phonetic training, and insufficient exposure to native English input. These findings corroborate earlier research by Jenkins (2000), Munro and Derwing (1995), and Moyer (1999), who emphasize the centrality of explicit pronunciation instruction and phonetic awareness for intelligibility in second language contexts.

The most recurrent issues involved vowel length distinctions, incorrect articulation of /r/ due to orthographic interference, and substitution of English vowels and diphthongs with phonetically proximate Pashto sounds. For instance, the substitution of /ɔ:/ with /a:/ and of diphthongs such as /ɔɪ/ with /ai/ demonstrates the influence of the Pashto vowel inventory, which lacks direct equivalents for several English vowels. Such findings align with the theoretical position of Selinker (1978) on fossilization, suggesting that when learners receive limited corrective feedback and exposure to authentic L2 input, erroneous interlanguage forms may stabilize permanently.

The participants' professional profiles further illuminate the issue. Despite having advanced degrees and long teaching experience, none had received formal phonetic training. This finding underscores systemic gaps in teacher education programs across Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. The absence of practical phonetic components in English curricula at both academic and professional levels perpetuates pronunciation deficiencies, leading to intergenerational transmission of incorrect models to students. As Derwing and Munro (2005) argue, intelligible pronunciation is not an aesthetic goal but a communicative necessity, and teachers' pronunciation directly impacts learners' listening comprehension and oral production.

Another key finding concerns the teachers' limited use of pedagogical resources. Most participants seldom consulted phonemic dictionaries or digital pronunciation tools, primarily due to unfamiliarity with phonetic symbols. Additionally, 86% reported avoiding exposure to native speech (e.g., via media) because of difficulty in comprehension. This creates a cycle in which weak pronunciation leads to reduced comprehension, which in turn limits opportunities for improvement. As Gilbert (2010) notes, pronunciation instruction should be integrated with listening and speaking practice to foster both production and perception.

From a pedagogical perspective, the findings highlight the urgent need for reforms in English teacher education in Pakistan. Integrating phonetics and phonology courses into teacher training curricula, along with computer-assisted pronunciation tools (CAPT), could significantly enhance teachers' phonological competence. Furthermore, local teacher development workshops focusing on English vowels and diphthongs can provide targeted remediation. Curriculum planners should prioritize pronunciation instruction not as a peripheral skill but as a central component of communicative competence, echoing Morley's (1991) advocacy for explicit pronunciation pedagogy in EFL contexts.

6. Conclusion

This study concludes that Pashto-speaking senior English teachers in District Dir Lower exhibit systematic pronunciation errors primarily in English vowels and diphthongs. These errors stem from negative L1 transfer, lack of phonetic training, and limited exposure to authentic English input. While the teachers possess positive attitudes toward pronunciation improvement, structural deficiencies in teacher education hinder progress.

To enhance intelligibility and communication effectiveness in the EFL context of Pakistan, it is imperative that pronunciation be given due curricular importance. The inclusion of practical phonetics courses in both pre-service and in-service teacher education, the provision of pronunciation workshops, and the use of multimedia pronunciation software are recommended. By addressing these gaps, the linguistic fossilization observed among English teachers can be mitigated, leading to improved pronunciation models for future learners.

Ultimately, effective communication in English requires more than grammatical or lexical competence; it demands pronunciation that facilitates mutual intelligibility. Therefore, pronunciation teaching must be re-envisioned not as a supplementary skill but as an indispensable aspect of English language pedagogy in Pakistan.

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