Negative/Positive Transfer: A Study of the Aberrant Use of English Diphthongs in the Speech Patterns of Pakistani Pashto Speakers

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ABSTRACT

This article aims to explore the way/s English diphthongs are produced by the Yousafzai Pashto speakers of Pakistan. Horizontal (regional) and vertical (social) change of language is a familiar phenomenon implying that people are linguistically different from one another, case to case. In addition to region and social class, one's mother tongue has a significant role in the production of the sounds of the target language. If there is conformity between the first and the second/foreign language, it entails a carryover in the form of a positive transfer of L1 speech habits into the L2; whereas in a situation otherwise, the transfer is negative. In other words, similarity between any two languages becomes an asset (facility) and dissimilarity a liability (hurdle) for a learner. English is taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan and, due to the presence of multiple regional languages, spoken as mother tongues by different people, it seems that there emerge multiple sub-varieties of the kind of English spoken in the country. In this study, a total of fifty university graduates pronounced a wordlist containing the English diphthongs which was recorded and transcribed to markany deviations. Tocarry outdata analysis, I have relied mainly on the weak version of CAH (Contrastive Analysis Hypothesis) reflected in the approach given by Adam Brown (1989). It is, therefore, principally concerned with identification, description, and interpretation of the influence of Yousafzai dialect of Pashto on the diphthongs of English.

Key Words: *Diphthong, first/second/foreign language, target language, negative/positive transfer, lingua franca*

Introduction

This article examines the English language spoken by the Pashto speaking people of Pakistan. We have a variety of seventy-three languages spoken in our country. Urdu is our national language and is used as a lingua franca by the people of Pakistan because generally they cannot communicate in each other's language/s. There are several (minor) languages in the country in addition to the four major regional

ones i.e. Balochi, Pashto, Punjabi and Sindhi. We often observethatwhen the speakers of different regional languages of the country speak English, it is in a markedly different form from that of others' in many respects implying thereby that their language has a tinge of their first language (mother tongue). One could claim that it is not English but Englishesthatare spoken in our country. Pakistani English, therefore, does not seem to be a single uniform variety but a collection of several sub-varieties. The language seems to have its own grammar, vocabulary and distinct phonetics and phonology. English language spoken by Pakistanis in different regions seems to be affected by their respective mother tongues. Sincelanguage depends largely on one's socio-economic condition, we seem to have got different varieties of the language at vertical level also, which we technically refer to as*sociolects*. In this way we get multiple varieties of English regionally as well as socially. Horizontal (regional) and vertical (social) varieties of English language are likely to be interesting phenomena which the researcher would have liked to explore but, all this, could not be covered in a single study. Therefore, in this work, the researcher has tried to critically study the specific variety of Pakistani English spoken by the Pashtuns of Yousafzai dialect. To make the research focused and doable, only the diphthongs of the English language have been selected for exploration.

Literature Review

Pakistan is a part of the Indian Sub-Continent and the region had been a British colony before partition in 1947. Work on this part of the English language dates back to the beginning of twentieth century. Works such as Whitworth's (1907) *Indian English: An Examination of the Errors of Idiom Made by Indians in Writing English* and Kindersley's (1938) *Notes on the Indian Idiom of English: Style, Syntax, and Vocabulary*are some of the names in case. They viewed the differences as errors and mistakes in the speech of the colonized. Non-native researchers from this region started work on the local form of the English language in the second half of the 20th century. Kachru (1965, 1966) is one of the scholars who had a leading role in this regard as he gathered data on the indigenous form of

the language. Baumgardner (1987, 1993 and 1998) gets credit for working valuably on Pakistani English. His main focus, however, has been the structure and vocabulary of the language which clearly reflects in his research works. Rahman (1990) took the discussion even further through his works on the phonology of Pakistani English in addition to vocabulary and grammar. He brought forth multiple sub-varieties of the language on the basis of the kind of English different people speak as per their region and social class in the country. His research shows that there are different varieties spoken in the country depending on the degree of exposure to the English language. He names them as Anglicized English, Acrolectal English, Mesolectal English and Basilectal English. The varieties have to do more with the social background of the speakers as exposure to the English language is much dependent on it. The present article is a modest but different effort in this regard in which one of the sub-varieties of Pakistani English has been viewed in relation to the Yousafzai Pashto as it was the mother tongue of the subjects who participated in this study. Since there are different regional languages spoken in the country, there emerge multiple Englishes as each individual speaks it in the context and effect of their own mother tongue.

Theoretical Framework

Brown (1989) suggests as does Wardaugh (1970) that CAH has a weak version (related to EA – Error Analysis) that focuses not on *a priori* prediction of linguistic difficulties but on *a posteriori* explanation of the sources of errors in language learning. Brown suggests in this regard that many errors can be due to the negative transfer of L1 as it is quite common to guess from the foreign accent that where the learner comes from.

The current study traces its ground to the references made by all the major studies (e.g. Lado, 1957; Corder, 1971; Whitman, 1970; Brown, 1989; etc) conducted in this area, to the appearance of L1 features on L2 performance for its undertaking and the process followed. This study makes mainly use of Brown's approach of CAH i.e. to find *a posteriori*

explanation of the deviations instead of *a priori* prediction of the problems. Since this study is concerned with establishing the English spoken by Pakistani Pashto speaking people having Yousafzai dialect as their L1 to be a sub-variety of Pakistani English, its concern naturally remains limited to the performance features of the English used by the population of this study. Therefore, the concept of a posteriori explanation of L2 features under the influence of L1 provides theoretical basis to this venture. On the other hand, the technique followed to analyze the data can be broken down into two stages, each following the approach propounded by a particular scholar. The first stage involved the four steps given by Whitman (1970) while the second involved the three types of transfer as conceptualized by Brown (1989). He viewed three different ways of looking at L1 influence (transfer) on L2 following CAH. They were categorized as positive, negative and zero transfer. The first according to him takes place where the L1 features align with those of the L2, second where they conflict with those of the L2 and the third where there exists neither of the two conditions. In the next part the adaptation made from the theoretical underpinnings (given above) has been discussed.

The framework of this study has been conceptualized in the light of the approaches to CAH, discussed in the studies mentioned above. For this study the reliance was mainly on the weak version of CAH reflected in the approach given by Brown (1989). The reason for it was the relevance of this approach to the aim of the current study. It was to be highlighted as to how Pashto speakers differ from the natives for which CAH was found appropriate. In keeping with the objectives of the study, synchronic analyses were to be made. It stood distinguished from the long term diachronic concern to avoid tracing the incorporation of L1 features into L2 in the evolutionary course of the development of the L2 among the learners of the L2. This is how this study distinguishes itself from the version of CAH given by Weinreich (1953) and Haugen(1956). This provides a theoretical justification to this undertaking. Adaptation of the four-step approach by Whitman for CA and three types of transfer by Stockwell et al.(1965) follows hereafter.

Step 1) i) Selection of the inventory of the English phonemes ii) Data selected from the recordings.

Step 2) Pick (identify) sounds that mark deviation

Step 3) Find the ways the selected/picked forms mutually contrast

Step 4) Pinpoint density and systematicity to establish the point (critical discussion)

The 4th point involved critical discussion on all what was achieved from performing the first three steps. At this stage the three types of transfer idea of Stockwell (1965) was incorporated. The possible reasons for any kind of transfer i.e. positive, negative or zero were traced to the L1 features. It was specified how far the deviations stood systematic and regular.

Research Methodology

All the Yousafzai Pashto speaking university graduates constitute the population of this research. A sample of fifty university students took part in the study. To carry out this research, first of all, a suitable research instrument (a wordlist) was designed in order to get the desired data. Along with the instrument, the participants were given a history form to fill in so that their biodata could be taken to be used to analyze the data in its backdrop. The details were helpful in determining whether the deviations recorded were due to the mother tongue influence or some other reason. The instrument was a wordlist containing all the double vowels of the English language. Words were read aloud by the participants and recorded for examining their phonology. This study was concerned with the identification, description and interpretation of the influence of Yousafzai dialect of Pashto (as L1) on the features of English (as L2).

Data Presentation, Description and Analysis

The data was described in words as well as in numbers and for the sake of the convenience of readers and beneficiaries of the present work; I have presented it through tabulation. There are two rows in each table; the upper one for the headings and the lower one for the results acquired from the data and five columns for the category, deviation/s, correct pronunciation, deviation frequency, and the deviation percentage. Along with that, the possible reasons of the deviations have also been given where it was possible for the researcher to pinpoint them.

Analysis of the Diphthongs

The detailed analysis of the diphthongs is given in the following discussion.

1. The Diphthong /eɪ/

The diphthong /eɪ/ was given in the word list to be pronounced by fifty participants. The important fact is that all the participants pronounced it correctly as is done by the natives showing no deviation. The sound is not hard for Pashto speaking people owing to its presence in the Pashto language. The data has been given in the table below to make it more clear and easy to understand.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/eɪ/	No Deviation	50	0	0

Table 1

In the Pashto language four vowels have been identified i.e. /ey/, /ay/, /oy/ and /aw/. The English diphthong /eɪ/ is found in Pashto words

like*deir*(much) and *meiz* (table) spoken in Peshawer. Thus a positive transfer was expected owing to the similarity discovered through contrastive analysis. Therefore, the situation produces an interesting case where the English spoken by the Pashto speakers resembles the RP in this particular feature.

2. The Diphthong /aɪ/

The diphthong /aɪ/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The important fact is that all the participants pronounced it correctly, as is done by the natives showing no deviation. The sound is not difficult for Pashto speaking people owing to its presence in the Pashto language in words like *pai* (milk) and *dodai* (bread). The data has been given in the table below for better clarity and understanding.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/aɪ/	No Deviation	50	0	0

Table 2

The case of the present sound is very similar to the one discussed earlier. Here again a positive transfer was likely owing to the similarity of the diphthongs of Pashto and English. In Pashto, a diphthong exists corresponding to the one under discussion. It has been found evident in the zero deviation in the statistical results of the data. The successful production of the diphthong by the Pashto speaking converges their variety of English with the RP. Thus the feature in point can be considered as a distinctive one with regard to the Pashto speaking variety of Pakistani English.

3. The Diphthong /ɔɪ/

The Diphthong /ɔɪ/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The significant point is that only sixteen participants pronounced it the way it is done by the natives; the other thirty-four participants changed it to become a different diphthong (as given below) showing a very significant trend of deviation. The phoneme was not properly pronounced by a majority because of a lack of proper training and practice otherwise it is not difficult for Pashto speaking people to produce this sound because of its presence in their language in words like *lowi* (big/large) and *oi*(used when calling someone). The data has been presented numerically in the table below to make itapparent and simple to recognize.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/ɔɪ/	Changed to /aɪ/ inserting /w/ before it	16	34	68

Table 3

As regards this diphthong, it mostly tends to be influenced by the written form of the language as in our country language is taught by using only written material and there is hardly any attention paid to the verbal aspect. Since the diphthong under discussion gets its representation by the symbols 'oy' in the written form, the individual sound of the letter 'y' takes /w/ sound which gets uttered as it is at the word level also. In other words it is not something to be blamed on the learners' lack of capacity to do this sound as the problem lies elsewhere i.e. the way they have been told and trained by their language instructors who by and large are the product of the same system. Anyway the deviation percentage and frequency is high enough to be regarded as a feature of the variety of the English language spoken by the Yousafzai Pashto speakers.

4. The Diphthong /aʊ/

The diphthong /aʊ/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The key finding is that all the participants pronounced it correctly like the natives showing no deviation. The sound is not difficult for Pashto speaking people owing to its presence in the Pashto language in words like *tauw* (turn) and *au* (yes). The data has been given in the table below to make obvious and simple to realize.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/aʊ/	No Deviation	50	0	0

Table 4

A diphthong in Pashto resembles the sound under discussion. Therefore, naturally a positive transfer has been observed, as expected, in the statistical results of the data. Zero deviation clearly proves that the sound in point does not supply a basis to make it a distinctive feature of the English spoken by the Pashto speakers. Thus there can be seen a convergence of English spoken by the Pashto speaking with the RP.

5. The Diphthong /əʊ/

The Diphthong /əʊ/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The main discovery is that forty participants pronounced it properly like the natives do; the other ten participants changed it to become different sounds (as given below) showing a trend of deviation. The phoneme was not properly pronounced by a few because of lack of proper training and practice otherwise it is not difficult for Pashto speakers to produce this sound as it just requires a mild glide to produce the sound. The data has been presented numerically in the table below to make the data more clear and easy to understand.

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Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
əʊ	Change to 'o' (9) and /u:/ (1)	40	10	20

Table 5

This diphthong does not have a corresponding diphthong in the Pashto language which starts as a glide from the central position with the height of the tongue at the middle position. Therefore, a negative transfer was expected which however has been diluted due to the resemblance of the diphthong of Pashto corresponding to /əʊ/. This would definitely have helped the participants in learning articulation of this diphthong but the deviation still stands to be significant. It provides data to conclude contrast although it does not go far to prove the divergence of the English spoken by the Pashto speakers from the RP.

6. The Diphthong /ɪə/

The Diphthong /ɪə/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The essential discovery is that forty-three participants pronounced it correctly as is done by the natives; the other ten participants changed it to become a different diphthong (as given below) showing a mild trend of deviation. The phoneme was not properly pronounced by a few participants because of lack of proper training and practice otherwise it is not difficult for Pashto speaking people to produce this sound. The difficulty seems to be a mild difference between /ɪə/ and /eə/.The data has been presented numerically in the table below to make it understandable easily.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/ɪə/	Changed to /eə/	43	7	14

Table 6

Though no corresponding sounds with the diphthongal status can be found in the inventory of Pashto but still certain combinations of pure vowels resemble this diphthong of the English language. The word*biya* (then) can be considered as an example in case. Thus there may not be a hundred percent positive transfer but still a support or facilitation is obviously possible in case of the production of this sound both by the Pashto speakers as well as the Urdu ones. The statistical results speak of the fact. The phenomenon here does not go any far to establish English of the Pashto speakers as a separate variety.

7. The Diphthong /eə/

The diphthong /eə/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The important fact is that forty-two participants pronounced it correctly as is done by the natives; the other eight participants changed it to become a different diphthong and surprisingly a triphthong also (as given below) showing a mild trend of deviation. The phoneme was not properly pronounced by a few participants because of lack of proper training and practice otherwise it is not difficult for Pashto speaking people to produce this sound. The data has been presented numerically in the table below to make it clear and simple.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/ eə/	Changed to /ɪə/ (7) and triphthong /aɪə/ (1)	42	8	16

Table 7

The case of this vowel resembles that of the previous one. No corresponding sound is found in Pashto but it was not problematic for research participants of the study because a good exposure to the English

language. Thus, despite lack of positive transfer, supportive tendency was expected which is obvious in the statistical results with only eighteen percent deviation. In the light of all this the features of this diphthong as produced by the Pashto speakers do not contribute to render it a separate variety of Pakistani English.

8. The Diphthong/ʊə/

The diphthong /ʊə/ was pronounced by fifty participants. The important point is that all the participants pronounced it correctly as is done by the natives showing no deviation. The sound is not difficult for Pashto speaking people owing to exposure to English. The data has been given in the table below to make clear and easy.

Phoneme	Deviation/s	Pronounced Correctly	Deviated	Deviation Percentage
/ʊə/	No Deviation	50	0	0

Table 8

Here, again, the vowel in question does not correspond to any diphthong in Pashto. So absence of a positive transfer but facilitation, due to exposure, was expected in this case. The percentage of deviation is zero which shows no divergence from the RP. Also, in case of Urdu similar results have been produced in studies due to the supporting factor of resembling combinations of the pure vowels. So the articulation of this diphthong does not supply the reason to consider the English of the Pashto speakers as a separate variety of Pakistani English.

Conclusion and Recommendations

It is a common observation that every individual's speech sounds to be different from that of others'. We are linguistically different from others in our mother tongue. The term*idiolect*is used for the same purpose.

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Different idiolects combine to make a dialect of a community. At individual level, our individual speech is our identity and, at collective plane, we are recognized by the collective ways of speech of the particular community we belong to. If an L1 may vary from case to case, it is more likely to have diversity in ways of speech when we talk with regards to an L2 because there are some additional factors that seem to operate in the backdrop which bring about variation. Change and variation are a customary phenomenon when we talk of language. As regards an L2, we need to consider a number of other factors, not significant from the point of view of an L1. In this study, I have made an effort to the same end. The deviations with respect to diphthongs marked and shown in the data lead to the finding that some of the features identified in the speech habits of the Yousafzai Pashto speaking people represent a separate variety of language in its own right, whereas others point to the fact that it shares features both with Pakistani English (in general) and with the RP as well. However, I have been able to find that every deviation cannot be considered to be a feature of the Yousafzai English; it is rather a mistaken concept that needs to be scrutinized and duly addressed by improving our language training methods and techniques.

As the present work has been done on English language which is used as an L2 in Pakistan, it needs to be acknowledged, no matter how conversant a person may be with an L2, still they cannot be a good competition with the natives. However, it can be improved notably if one is aware of the negative/positive transfer in a given language and if the environment needed to teach and learn a language is a favorable one. Moreover, we need tomake conscious effort to conform to the recognized standard so that our language does not stray too far from it.Improperteaching, therefore, needs tobe abandoned to check needless and haphazard deviations. The present study shows that all the aberrations noted cannot be ascribed to a negative transferaltogether; they seem to be a product of faulty teaching or a lack of exposure.It is therefore recommended that language teaching be focused and all four skills of language i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing be equally

emphasized. Deviations despite that will be a result of the mother tongue influence/negative transfer and that is the focal point of the present study.

Acknowledgements

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