

PalArch's Journal of Archaeology of Egypt / Egyptology

PHONOLOGICAL STRESS ERRORS IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH AND ITS REMEDIES IN THE LIGHT OF NATIVE PROFICIENCIES

Syeda Bushra Rizvi¹, Aqsa Sarwar², Amna Rehman³,

¹PhD Scholar Applied Linguistics, Universiti Utara Malaysia. Email.

²M Phil English Literature, Visiting Lecturer English Department, Government Sadiq College
Women University Bahawalpur.

³M Phil English Linguistics, the Islamia University of Bahawalpur.

Corresponding Email: bushra_rizvi29@yahoo.com

Syeda Bushra Rizvi, Aqsa Sarwar, Amna Rehman. Phonological Stress Errors In Pakistani English And Its Remedies In The Light Of Native Proficiencies-- Palarch's Journal Of Archaeology Of Egypt/Egyptology 19(3), 1518-1524. ISSN 1567-214x

ABSTRACT:

Using the paradigm of supra-segmental phonology, this paper aims at exploring stress patterns of English and Urdu and the resulting difficulties faced by teachers and learners in our class rooms particularly at secondary school level in learning English stress. On the basis of phonological differences between the two languages, the researcher believes that stress patterns of English used in Pakistani class rooms are quite different from those of the native speakers. It carries a tangible impact of Urdu stress pattern with almost equal stress on all the syllables which is quite problematic both for teachers and learners of English whether it is ESL or EFL. Findings of the research provide useful pedagogical insights in the perspectives of English language teaching with particular emphasis on spoken proficiency.

INTRODUCTION:

Stress in English means an additional force of the chest pulse or extra energy applied on a syllable (Roach 1983). According to Finch (1998), stress pattern in English is part of meaning or more strictly the force of the utterance. Jones (1976) opines that stress is the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. The researcher observes that the teaching of stress pattern to Urdu speakers has been one of the most neglected fields in Pakistani institutions. There has been a sustained struggle to extend rigorous training to teachers and students in the lexical, syntactic and morphological spheres with scanty attention on phonological aspects or the teaching of pronunciation of the language. In this study, the researcher makes a contrastive analysis of both the

languages i.e. Urdu and English on phonological level with special emphasis on placement of stress, shortening of unstressed syllables before and after the stressed syllable and the problems faced by the teachers and learners. The analysis of the issue then leads to devise strategies and means to resolve the issue for facilitation of both teachers and students.

According to Encyclopedic Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1999), a contrastive analysis describes the structural differences and similarities of two or more languages. As an area of enquiry, contrastive analysis is concerned with the principles and uses of such descriptions (Johnson, K. & Johnson, Helen, 1999:203). Crystal (1992) has defined contrastive analysis or contrastive Linguistics as the identification of points of structural similarity and difference between two languages (Crystal, 1992:83).

When the child learns his native language, he develops his native language behaviour. Gradually, this becomes stronger and stronger. In learning the second language, the learner is influenced very much by his native language behaviour. Where the structure of two languages is the same, no difficulty is encountered. In case the structure of the second language differs from that of the native language, both the teachers and learners face difficulties in teaching and learning the target language.

Learning a second language then is tantamount to learning a process to overcome habits associated with L1. In other words, learning a second language means changing one's native language behaviour. In such a situation, contrastive analysis is very useful. It can discover the differences between languages and predict the difficulties that the learner may come across. Structural differences between languages, in this context, are of utmost significance.

In Pakistan, teachers and students have shown great zeal in conducting research on lexical, morphological and syntactic level interference of L1 into the target language. But scanty attention has been paid to the phonological aspect of this interference with special emphasis on stress. The advent of audio-lingual method has, however, witnessed a change in this regard and the teachers are increasingly becoming aware of the vital role of the teaching of pronunciation.

BACKGROUND:

Stress is traditionally associated with an increase in respiratory activity which causes any one syllable of a word to sound louder than the others. Jones (1976, p.245) defines stress as the degree of force with which a sound or syllable is uttered. Phoneticians are almost unanimous in putting languages in two main categories as far as the concept of stress is concerned i.e. syllable timed and stress timed languages. Ball and Rahilly (1990, p.120) include English in the latter category and opine that in such a language, stressed syllables occur at regular time intervals.

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY:

Traditionally, the teaching of English pronunciation is considered the same as the teaching of English sounds: vowels and consonants. Most of the learners of English language unwittingly believe that just a command on individual English sounds guarantees them good pronunciation of the language but it may be kept in mind that only learning of these sounds does not guarantee good pronunciation.

Though the concept of correct pronunciation is pretty controversial, as Rajimwale (2006) suggests, yet it carries great importance for the students as well as the teachers. To avoid this controversy, the best advice for a teacher is to try his best to sound as natural as possible. So a teacher who is well-versed with the rules of Phonetics can help his students not only differentiate between problematic sounds but also between stressed and unstressed syllables.

The importance of stress in the teaching and learning of English language can hardly be overemphasized. Varshney (2007) laments that most Asian speakers of English put stress on wrong syllables because of which their pronunciation becomes unintelligible to the native listeners of English.

Stress is so important in English that accenting the wrong syllable often leads to a change of meanings. This is particularly true of homographs (words having same spelling but different meanings).e.g.

conduct (n), **conduct** (v),
increase (n), **increase** (v),
object(n),**object**(v)
 (Daniel Jones)

In Urdu, every syllable is pronounced with almost same stress although the syllables may be having different lengths depending upon the nature of vowels involved. A most conspicuous difference between stress patterns of English and Urdu is as follows. Contrary to English, stress in an Urdu word hardly involves the concept of unstressed syllable. In English, a stressed syllable is most often preceded by or followed by an unstressed syllable.

Most of our English teachers are not phonetically trained and ultimately the concept of correct pronunciation is quite alien to them. It is a common observation that even if some teachers make genuine efforts to learn and teach correct pronunciation, they can hardly step beyond aspirating /p/ and /t/ sounds, let alone teaching how to stress the exact syllable.

The hypothesis based on the above premise is that the main reason behind this issue is the existence of `phonetic construct` of Urdu in which, though syllables sometimes seem stressed, there is hardly involved any concept of unstressed syllables. As L1 interferes with the teaching/learning of the target language at lexical and morphological levels, its interference in the learning of pronunciation (particularly the word stress) is no exception. Here L1

interference is as frequent as in other aspects of language teaching. As a result, English speech of our students sounds almost exactly like their speech in Urdu language. In other words, they speak English with almost equal stress on each syllable. Rather, they sound more artificial while speaking English because Urdu vowels show greater variation in length than their counterparts in English. The researcher is concerned over the miserable plight of Pakistani students/teachers who despite years of hard work remain unaware of the right use of word-stress, not to speak of the learning of intonation pattern of English. Starting from nursery classes to masters, the teachers and ultimately the students have been oblivious to this extremely important aspect of language. As a result, their speech in L2 is not comprehensible to the native speakers of the language and vice versa, although they may not face such problems in their own settings. A lot needs to be done on this front because stress patterns of Urdu are quite different from that of English. As mentioned earlier, Urdu and English are usually known to be syllable-timed and stress-timed languages respectively. We need to evolve a pedagogical framework for teaching word-stress of English to Urdu speakers who are totally unaware of the concept of weak stress or contraction of unstressed syllables after a syllable has been stressed. And this is where the problem lies.

My experience as a teacher has convinced me that teaching of supra-segmental features of pronunciation such as stress is utmost important because despite having learnt segmental phonology, the pronunciation of our students still remains below the mark and they sound unnatural. It results in the improper English rhythm. What is stress in English? Why is it difficult for Pakistani students? What are the most common types of errors that Pakistani students make in English stress? What techniques and tools are useful in the teaching of word-stress in English?

To explore satisfactory answers for these questions, this paper attempts to identify the features of word-stress in English vis-a-vis the use of word-stress in Urdu and suggest a number of techniques for helping students speak English with stress on the right syllable of a word, let alone speak English with correct rhythm because that is beyond the scope of this paper. The focus of the discussion will be on: (1) the differences between English word-stress and stress in an Urdu word. In order to provide background knowledge of English word-stress, a brief comparison between English word-stress and Urdu word-stress is introduced. In the second and third parts, some common problems of Pakistani students in learning word stress are analyzed.

LITERATURE REVIEW:

Most of the previous studies and related research are mainly focused on attitudes of students towards non-native accents of English, factors influencing foreign accent of non-native speakers, the ways of examining perceptions of non-native accents of languages other than English and the ways of minimizing foreign accent. The number of studies dealing with foreign accents of non-native students and teachers in their own settings is very limited. These studies, Rajimwale (2006) frankly admits, are based on the accent problem of immigrant students and teachers and reactions to their accented speech by the

native speakers. According to him, the teaching of pronunciation has never been the preference in educational institutions of Asia. He believes, though he does not suggest, that a controlled introduction to the supra-segmental features is very useful for developing speech skills among foreigners. Robins (1971) identifies two levels of word stress namely strong stress and weak stress but he hardly touches upon the tenuous issue relating to its learning by foreigners. Jones (1975) has done a pioneering work in this regard and probably for the first time highlighted the significance of stress on syllables or a syllable of the word. His treatise on pronunciation definitely provides spadework for the successive generations of philologists. The discussion about word-stress finds its full expression in Roach (1983) who deals with word stress of English in detail interspersed with several useful examples. One of the most challenging tasks for those who learn English as L2, as Vishney(1985) suggests, is to understand the shifting of word stress in Coulthard (Underhill(1994) complains that the teaching of intonation has never been a favourite task for the syllabus designers and teachers which, according to him, has caused uncertainty among learners of English. This brings the issue close to its analysis because majority of our teachers and students are not familiar with this change.

In countries like Pakistan, where English is taught as a second language, foreign accent issue emerges naturally among the learners and teachers of English. Despite this fact, unfortunately, the research on this issue is very limited in Pakistan. The existing studies focus on the subject in terms of identity and foreign accent, pronunciation problems, disadvantageous of being a non-native teacher, and reactions to teachers' bad pronunciation.

A major feature of communication, supra-segmental (prosodic) features of speech have usually been avoided in the design of syllabuses for teaching English, partly due to the unduly little importance attached to the teaching of them, and partly due to the unavailability of a concise, salient, practical, and workable framework (Underhill, 1994:47). There are some attempts, of course, to come up with a scheme that is practical. However, they usually concentrate on certain areas of intonation rather than embracing the whole phenomenon of intonation (Coulthard, 1977) for instance, falls short of providing a coherent scheme which foreign language teachers can utilize in their syllabuses for improving oral skills; it studies, , intonational features such as word stress, and placement of primary on the right syllable. Wali(2011) makes a genuine effort in determining the writing-pronunciation contrast in Urdu, conspicuous by its absence in his dissertation is the exploration of phonological dissimilarities of English and Urdu. Nayyar(2011) talks about syllable stress in Urdu and provides a proper framework for ascertainment of word stress in Urdu. However, we do not find in her the implications of her findings for teaching of English with accurate stress.

To shed light on the current issue, this research paper aims to fill the gap in the literature by particularly exploring the similarities and contrasts between phonological features of Urdu and English and suggesting remedies for the learners as well as the teachers.

METHODOLOGY:

The researcher mainly falls back upon his own teaching experience for collection of the requisite data. Other sources are Oxford Advanced Learners' English Dictionary, Standard Twentieth Century Dictionary: Urdu in to English. A qualitative cum quantitative mode of enquiry has been adopted for analysis of stress-related phonetic differences of Urdu and English. Qualitative because most of the inferences have been derived through interpretation of the differences of stress patterns of these two languages and quantitative because an exact number (40) of words have been taken from the standard dictionaries and the same number was later used to be pronounced by a student of secondary school. To delimit the topic within the scope of the present research paper, the researcher has selected only a few cardinal words having more than one syllable so that common mistakes in placing the stress on the right syllable may be detected and analysed for the benefit of the students as well as teachers.

ANALYSIS:

For the purpose of phonological analysis and to find out contrasts in the stress patterns of English speakers and Urdu speakers of English, fifty words were selected from Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary. These words were then made to be pronounced by a student of the secondary class.

Description of Stress Patterns and their justification towards Semantic Errors

Serial	English Words	Mispronunciation of Urdu Speakers	Semantic Errors
1	Accurate	Accurrate	Meaning is not changed
2	Agency	Aggency	Meaning is not changed
3	Chance	Channass	Meaning is not changed
4	College	Callege	Meaning is not changed
5	Cycle	Sacyle	Meaning is not changed
6	Course	Corus	Meaning changed
7	Diamond	Dammond	Meaning is not changed
8	Form	Farm	Meaning changed
9	Heart	Hart	Meaning changed
10	Light	Late	Meaning changed
11	Park	Parrak	Meaning is not changed
12	Shopping	Shopping	Meaning is not changed

13	Time	Tame	Meaning changed
14	School	Aschool	Meaning is not changed
15	Water	Watterr	Meaning is not changed

The above list shows the wrong placement of word stress by Urdu speakers, invariably, they either place the stress on the syllable preceding the actual syllable or following it. The confusion is multiplied when the same lexical item assumes different grammatical form as is the case of ‘photograph and photography’. Moreover, the study shows that lack of information about the unstressed syllable is the major stumbling block for Urdu speaking community who try to speak English.

Implications of the study:

The results derived from the above data clearly indicate that English teachers in our institutions badly need rigorous training in phonetics with a view to training their students in actual English stress. For this purpose, they ought to be aware of the fact that stress patterns of Urdu are quite different from that of English and the one cannot be imposed upon the other. This is not to suggest that they should forget or ignore their native language that is Urdu; rather, they need to dissociate phonetic constructs of Urdu from the teaching of English speech to acquire an optimum level of spoken English easily comprehensible to the natives, though their speech may or may not sound exactly like the speech of the native speakers.

REFERENCES

- Crystal, D.(1992) A Dictionary of Linguistics and Phonetics. Cambridge: Blackwell.
- Coulthard, M.(1977) An introduction to Discourse Analysis. Harlow (Essex):Longman.
- Jones, D. (1975) An Outline of English Phonetics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press
- Nayyar. S (2011) Syllable Stress in Urdu: Centre for Research in Urdu, Lhr.
- Robins, R. H. (1971) General Linguistics, An Introductory survey. London: Longman.
- Roach, P. (1983) English Phonetics and Phonology. Cambridge: University of Cambridge Press.
- Rajimwale, S.(2006) Elements of General Linguistics. Jodhpur: Rama Brothers.
- Varshney, L.(1985) An introductory Text Book of Linguistics and Phonetics. Jodhpur: Rama Brothers.
- Underhill, A.(1994) Sound Foundation, Living Phonology. Oxford: Heineman. OUP.
- O’Connor,J.B.(1980) Better English Pronunciation. Cambridge University Press.