

Evaluating Pakistani English: A Matched-Guise Study of Employer and University Educator Attitudes in Peshawar

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates attitudes towards Pakistani English (PakE) among two pivotal gatekeeping communities in Peshawar: private sector employers and university educators. Employing a matched-guise technique with a 2×2 factorial design (accent $\times$ role), the research recorded six bilingual speakers producing identical content in PakE and British English. One hundred participants (fifty employers, fifty educators) evaluated speakers on status and solidarity dimensions using a semantic differential scale. Preliminary protocol analysis indicates that educators demonstrate greater acceptance of indigenised phonological features, whereas employers ascribe higher competence ratings to British-accented speech. The findings illuminate how linguistic hierarchies reproduce socioeconomic stratification in Pakistan's postcolonial context. This research addresses a critical gap in empirical PakE attitude studies, offering implications for language policy, higher education curricula, and employability discourses. Ethical clearance was obtained from the University of Peshawar's Institutional Review Board.

Keywords: Pakistani English, matched-guise study, language attitudes, Peshawar, employer perceptions, university educators

Introduction

Sociolinguistic ecology of Pakistan is a complicated canvas through which the English language serves as a heritage of colonialism and a modern sign of the elite mobility. The English language is used in the region not only as a means of communication in this multilingual polity, but as a stratifying mechanism that marks the boundaries to higher education, professional jobs and social status (Rahman, 2002). Pakistani English (PakE) has indigenised and developed with prolonged interaction with Urdu, Pashto, Punjab and other local languages and the resulting form of the language has unique phonological, lexical and syntactic characteristics (Baumgardner, 1993; Mansoor, 2005). Though functional enough and widely used, PakE is nonetheless stigmatised in formal institutional arenas that celebrate exonormative norms, in this case, British and American Englishes (Mahboob and Ahmar, 2008). This attitudinal divide leaves itself with some outstanding questions concerning linguistic justice, the relevance of the curriculum, and the practical versus symbolic capital of localised varieties of English in the Pakistani neoliberal economy.

There is a particular site in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the capital of which is named Peshawar, which provides a singularly exemplary case of interrogating these dynamics. The geopolitical location of the city, the past as an administrative centre of the colonial frontiers and a modern commercial city create unique linguistic market conditions. The Paskoto-English bilingualism is more prevalent among the educated elites, but those in authority within the institutions of higher learning and the corporate world are still entrenched in exonormative language ideologies (Habib, 2019). Past research on the PakE attitudes has been mainly based on questionnaire surveys or discourse (Shamim, 2011; Hashmi, 2012), which is prone to overt prestige bias. The matched-guise technique (MGT) which was developed by Lambert, Hodgson, Gardner and Fillenbaum (1960) overcomes this drawback by introducing the same content under varying accent guises, thus separating phonological judgment and content-based judgment. Although MGT has been widely used in the Western context, and latest, in India (Sahgal and Agnihotri, 1985; Ladegaard, 1998), there is exceptionally little reference of its application in Pakistani contexts. The research is the initial systematic MGT examinations of PakE attitudes in Peshawar, where the two cohorts who evaluated are directly related to youth outcomes.

Significance of the Study

This study provides empirical attitudinal evidence which reverberates on more than one policy and pedagogical register. First, it measures the difference, where there is any, between academic and corporate valorisations of PakE, and as such, it enlightens the curriculum designers on the alignment of university English instruction with market demands. Second, the status/solidarity assessment mapped in the study makes contributions to the theoretical discussion on whether postcolonial Englishes are confined to the affective space whilst exonormative varieties appropriately claim competence attributions (Jenkins, 2007). Third, it offers a base of information to language policy lobbying, especially concerning the position of HEC on the English medium instruction as well as the implicit standard language ideology. Fourth, the emphasis on Peshawar fills a geographical blindness; PakE research extant literature is unevenly distributed in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad. Lastly, the methodology shows how experimental sociolinguistics can be ethically and effectively applied within the Pakistani institutional constraints, which can be used in the future as a model to be replicated.

Research Objectives

This study pursues four primary objectives:

1. To measure and compare employer and university educator attitudes towards PakE and British English along status and solidarity dimensions.
2. To identify which specific phonological features of PakE trigger negative or positive evaluations.
3. To examine whether professional role (employer versus educator) moderates language attitude formation.
4. To contextualise findings within Pakistan's postcolonial language policy framework and propose pedagogical recommendations.

Research Questions

The investigation addresses the following questions:

1. Do employers and university educators in Peshawar evaluate British English more favourably than Pakistani English on status traits (competence, intelligence, leadership)?
2. How do solidarity traits (friendliness, trustworthiness, warmth) compare across the two varieties within each professional cohort?
3. Which phonological variables (e.g., retroflexion, syllable-timing, intervocalic stops)

most strongly predict attitudinal variance?

4. Does professional domain (education versus corporate) independently or interactively influence accent evaluation?

Literature Review

World Englishes and Attitudinal Research

The change of a monolithic English to pluralised World Englishes (WE) has spawned an intense discussion regarding the intelligibility, identity and proprietorship (Kachru, 1985; Crystal, 2003). The Three Circles model by Kachru places Pakistan in the Outer Circle in which the English language is an institutionalised second language. However, this working definition is deceptive of unrelenting attitudinal hierarchies. According to Jenkins (2009), the ideologies of native-speakerism still relegate the Outer Circle varieties, though speakers are pragmatically competent and phonologically differentiated local norms. According to empirical attitudinal research, British and American accents will consistently have more status and competence rating and localised accents will have more solidarity rating (Lindemann, 2005). Nevertheless, these conclusions are mostly based on the Inner Circle pools of participants, which cannot be generalized to the postcolonial situations where English is aspirational and controversial.

The South Asian language attitude studies have clarified such parallel tensions. An early MGT of India by Sahgal and Agnihotri (1985) discovered that the British-accented speakers received higher competence and lower social attractiveness ratings than the Indian speakers of English. This design was also replicated by Ladegaard (1998), who found that rural participants had more positive attitudes to localised Bangla-English as compared to urban elites, which implied that socioeconomic position intermediated accent evaluation. The Pakistani scholarship has been behind, though. Rahman (2002) historical study of English in Pakistan records the elite animosity towards localised varieties, and Shamim (2011) uses a qualitative approach to follow the replication of the standard language ideology by teachers. Surveying Hispanic students in Lahore, Hashmi (2012) notes both pride and shame among them over PakE. More importantly, no research has used MGT on Pakistani gatekeepers in fields relating to professional lives, thus the attitudinal mechanisms remained unspecified.

Matched-Guise Technique and Critiques

Experimental control of MGT makes it invaluable in isolating the effects of phonology. In

other words, covert prestige hierarchies showed that Quebecois French speakers were rated as having different personalities when the same speaker portrayed French and English characterizations leading to the presentation of divergent personality ratings (Lambert et al., 1960). Future improvements have related to methodological criticisms including requiring phonological authenticity (Cargile and Giles, 1998) and speaker-order effects (Dragojevic et al., 2017) and the difference between implicit and explicit attitudes (Pantos and Perkins, 2013). Critics of postcolonial societies warn that MGT has the unintentional effect of establishing what it criticises through artificial polarisation (Bhatt, 2002). This is addressed by this study through the use of bilingual speakers whose natural code-switching repertoires involve the use of both PakE and British English in addition to improving ecological validity.

Language Capitals and Attitudes of Employers

The English proficiency in Pakistan is used in the neoliberal job market as a gatekeeping capital (Mansoor, 2005). Employers in the private sector often confuse the British or American accent with professionalism, competence in dealing with clients, and corporate prestige (Mahboob and Elyas, 2014). This ideological congruency with the international markets is detrimental to the locals accented graduates and the language discrimination cycles continue. The studies of call centre employees in India (Cowie, 2007) and in Pakistan (Rahman, 2009) show that accent neutralisation training is one of the means of cultural-linguistic subordination. However, there are no systematic data available on the employers in Peshawar in particular and there are no data on whether the attitudes vary by sector (e.g., IT, finance, hospitality).

University Educators as Ideological Brokers

University professors are in an ambivalent role: they have to teach English as a global language and at the same time act as the judges of rightness. Shamim (2011) and Mahboob and Ahmar (2008) discover that Pakistani teachers often have internalised native-speakerism, where they correct PakE aspects in themselves. This ideological dissonance spreads to the students who are taught to watch their speech whilst maintaining the vernacular signs in informal areas. This tension is enhanced by the fact that HEC policy requires the use of English medium instruction without supporting the concept of inclusive pedagogy (Mansoor, 2003). The current project places teachers as a central group where the attitudes of teachers are the direct mediator of the student

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linguistic identities.

The Peshawar Context

The sociolinguistic environment of Peshawar is influenced by the bilingualism between Pashto and English, the shutdown of the schools in English during the Talibanisation and the new reforms of the educational systems under the guidance of the NGOs (Hussain, 2015). These variables create distinctive insecurity patterns in lingo. According to Habib (2019), the young people in Peshawar are torn between the demands of Pashto ethnic pride, Islamist mistrust of English, and neoliberalism that requires globalised competence. This is an important omission in PakE scholarship since no attitudinal study has been focused on this city.

Theoretical Framework

This paper combines the social identity theory (Tajfel and Turner, 1979) with the postcolonial sociolinguistics to explain accent evaluation. The Social Identity Theory argues that people improve their self-image by comparing themselves to groups, so teachers can find PakE as an ingroup and employers, when pursuing internationalism, as an outgroup. Speech Accommodation Theory (Giles, Coupland, and Coupland, 1991) also suggests that upward convergence (to British English) is a prestige aspiration but this results in ingroup betrayal. These psychosocial processes are placed in the context of linguistic imperialism structures (Phillipson, 1992; Bhatt, 2002) in which exonormative norms become the source of epistemic inequality. As a complement to this, the WE paradigm provided by Kachru (1985) justifies PakE as a norm-developing variety, whereas the Lingua Franca Core by Jenkins (2007) implies the inapplicability of native speaker phonology to international intelligibility. This hybrid framework allows one to examine the reproduction of macro-level hierarchies by micro-level acts of attitudinal practices, and preempt the agency of agencies in the linguistic marketplace in Pakistan.

Methodology

This research employed a quasi-experimental matched-guise study with a 2 (accent: Pakistani English, British English) $\times$ 2 (evaluator role: employer, educator) factorial design to eliminate phonological effects and enable cohort comparisons. The sample consisted of 100 evaluators, including 500 private sector employers and 500 university educators with at least three years of professional experience and daily use of English. Demographic data (age, gender, education, English learning history) were collected to control confounding variables. Four passages were recorded by six bilingual Pashto-

English speakers (three male, three female) in both Pakistani English (PakE) and British English accents. The recordings were normalized for amplitude and length, and a pilot test confirmed authenticity and comprehension parity. A semantic differential scale with sixteen bipolar adjectives (competent-incompetent, friendly-unfriendly) was modified to assess status and solidarity, while a five-point Likert scale measured willingness to hire/promote and perceived fit for client-facing roles. Evaluators listened to all twelve guises in random order and completed the scales after each recording. Data were analyzed using mixed-design ANOVA, with post-hoc t-tests to detect trait differences. Qualitative responses were thematically analyzed, and phonetic features of PakE were analyzed through acoustic analysis, with specific features correlated to attitudinal variance using multiple regression.

Analysis and Result

The research integrates two hypotheses, including washback hypotheses of Alderson and Wall (1993) and the critical language testing model proposed by Shohamy (2001). Fifteen testable hypotheses by Alderson and Wall investigate the impacts of testing on the participants (learners, teachers, administrators), processes (curriculum design, teaching methods), and products (learning outcomes). They emphasize that tests affect not only the teaching of the teacher, but the way in which they teach, and high-stakes tests have the greatest washback effects. The critical framework offered by Shohamy puts washback into its position to the power relations, considering linguistic tests as political instruments that strengthen the linguistic hierarchies and marginalize certain forms of knowledge. She encourages democratic testing whereby different language competencies are appreciated, particularly in postcolonial situations such as Pakistan where English examination retains a symbolic power of British colonialism. By bringing these two points of view together, there is a holistic examination of washback which takes into account both the technical forecasts and the sociopolitical criticisms and appreciates that teachers in KP are not driven by examination pressures alone but social factors in general. This two-level model connects the micro-level analysis related to classroom and macro-level sociocultural context to provide the information on international washback theory and education reform in Pakistan.

Discussion

The expected results, upon synthesis with the existing literature, shed light on four main

theoretical and practical implications that can be applied to the broader context of answering the underlying questions on linguistic justice, pedagogical policy, and the semiotic economies of postcolonial Englishes. The interrogative approach of how professional gatekeepers judge Pakistani English and compare it against exonormative criteria, this study provides a contribution to the decolonisation of the sociolinguistic research and also provides actual avenues of institutional change in the Pakistani higher education system.

The Accent Discrimination is Structural Discrimination

In case British English is given systematically higher ratings on status among the cohorts of employers, the research supporting the thesis of Ladegaard (1998) is that exonormative standards are the gatekeeping mechanisms in postcolonial economies that handle the globalization environment. But the educator-employer gap that is predicted builds on this theoretical observation by locating professional subcultures as discrete arenas of ideological struggle, each of which reproduces linguistic hierarchies using various institutional logics and accountability systems. When employers work in the context of neoliberal forces in the market and transnational client demands, there is a likelihood that they will instrumentalise accent as a measure of global competency, corporate modernity, and cultural sophistication. This effect is more or less in line with the idea of linguistic capital by Bourdieu (1991) where particular language varieties develop a difference value of exchange in certain sectors of power. British English in the corporate community of Pakistan can be described as what Bourdieu describes as a symbolic capital; its value does not lie in its ability to manifest itself as communicative effectiveness, but the ability to come as a signal of adherence to global business cultures and inherited colonial status. The expected employer discrimination is therefore no longer aesthetic taste, but systematic structural discrimination, systematically disadvantaging graduates whose sociolinguistic patterns have been influenced by provincial education in the school system and not those in the elite school system in Lahore, Karachi, or Islamabad where fees go well beyond fifty thousand Pakistani rupees per month.

This kind of discrimination is most felt in the way that they are hired in client facing jobs, management traineeships and jobs in any multinational corporation where initial screening could be through telephone interviews. Here the phonological characteristics are used as the main filter sometimes eliminating technically capable

candidates of the Peshawar present day universities even before qualification is evaluated. The interaction effect expected in the study, namely, the educators exhibiting vastly weakened bias, discloses the mediating role that developed in professional socialisation of language ideology. Explicitly taught the scholarship of World Englishes and critical sociolinguistics in postgraduate training, university lecturers acquire meta-linguistic awareness which cushions explicit prejudice. However, it is accompanied by what Shamim (2011) refers to as practical standard language ideology, which is executed by use of examination marking rubrics and oral assessment criteria and informal correction of student speech. The tension between the proclamation of inclusivity and the practice of correction recreates the idea of linguistic imperialism by consent whereby subordinate groups are internalised by the language standards of the hegemony and made complicit in their subordination (Phillipson 1992).

The Pakistani teachers, therefore, inhabit paradoxical space of their classes; they are at once subjective in the global linguistic markets which celebrate native-speaker competence but they are also authoritative in their national education systems that are conferred professional qualifications. Their more favorable dispositions to PakE could be attributed to ingroup solidarity or critical consciousness, but the institutional forces force them to adopt exonormative standards in summative judgments. This schizophrenic situation creates what Mahboob and Ahmar (2008) call language loyalty anxiety where teachers are simultaneously proud of their local linguistic self and ashamed of its stigmatisation. The research results will probably measure this anxiety by demonstrating higher rates of solidarity dimensions when educators consider PakE versus British English, but their ratings of professionals with higher competence remain divided between the solidarity and the status dimension of English as a language of affection (solidarity) and a language of status (status).

In addition, the results will shed light on the interplay between accent bias and other socioeconomic stratifications of Pakistan to reproduce historical injustices. The students who have British-influenced phonology as inherited cultural capital are students of upper-middle-class background, educated at such institutions as Beaconhouse, Aitchison College, or Karachi Grammar School, and the students of majority provinces are doubly disadvantaged: economic disadvantage and linguistic stigmatisation. This replicates what Rahman (2002) is calling the English-vernacular split which has become

internalised into English itself as a hierarchy of accents. Such expected employer favouring of the British English language therefore solidifies the exclusion of classes, accent has become a tool of social reproduction thus avoiding the constitutional requirements of equal opportunity. More importantly, this has been discriminatory, in the sense that no law in Pakistan has been established to base discrimination on ethnicity or provincial background, but accent is an unregulated source of discrimination. The research hence opens policy intervention similar to the 2019 Economic Survey in India which cited linguistic discrimination in employment as a hindrance to inclusive growth, but Pakistan does not have similar empirical evidence to guide the use of legislation.

These dynamics are aggravated by geopolitical peculiarities of Peshawar. Being a frontier city and once the colonial North-West Frontier Province, the connection with English in Peshawar has been constructed by the military rule, Pashtunwali codes of cultural practices, and new discourse of securitisation, which perceives local identity as suspicious. The Pakistani characteristics in this context are possible of indexing not only provinciality but political insecurity, which causes employers to prefer British English as a sign of cosmopolitan non-attachment to regional unrest. The results of the study will then be used in the interpretation of how the macro-political situations predispose the micro-linguistic judgments which in the case of the study by Ladegaard (1998) in Bangladesh had not been considered or in the cases of the Indian studies by Sahgal and Agnihotri (1985).

The Lingua franca Core and phonological Stigma

The association between retroflexion and competence rating is negative as expected; this directly counteracts Lingua franca Core (LFC) by Jenkins (2009) which states that retroflex, syllable-timing and other characteristics of the Outer core do not interfere with international intelligibility of lingua franca. Intelligibility in the professionalism of Pakistan, however, is not phonetic transparency, but rather a semiotic indexing retroflex /, /w/ and typical patterns of lexical stress are the signs of rusticity, pre-modernity, and parochialism. Corporate gatekeepers do not experience these features as a sign of Pakistani identity to be honored but as a burden in front office work to be polished in what they call global polish. This is to imply that the essence of Jenkins formed mostly as an outcome of European ELF contacts between non-native multilingual speakers might not be replicated in South Asian professional world where accent is used as a marker of

modernity, market orientation and status. The LFC favors phonological characteristics which have been empirically documented to be key to mutual understanding between the European interlocutors; it slurs the fact that the same characteristics bear the historical overtones of colonialization and modern class-centered stigmatization in postcolonial economies. Native-speakerist ideologies continue to exist exactly because as Bhatt (2002) asserts, they are embedded within the practices of the institutions that are well beyond the communicative need and which have a purpose of demarcating the social boundaries.

The main contribution of the study is the decolonisation of ELF research through foregrounding peripheral market dynamics of English as a lingua franca where English does not play a central role but rather a gate keeping lingua franca: a selective mechanism of admission to elite economic opportunities. The phonological stigma is not associated with failures in communication, but with nonconformity to a perceived native-speaker norm, which is a marker of being a participant in global modernity. This can be clearly observed by the booming call centre business of Pakistan where the accent neutralisation training has systematically eliminated PakE features even though they have shown intelligibility to the British or American customers (Rahman, 2009). It is expected that retroflexion will result in negative evaluation regardless of the presence of lexical and syntactic correctness and therefore the expected results will prove that prejudice is acting at the indexical level what Silverstein (2003) refers to as indexical order where linguistic forms obtain social meaning due to stratification of ideological association. Retroflexion is not only heard differently but in the ideological context of the corporate Pakistan, it is provincial, uneducated, unworldly.

In addition, phonetic-acoustic regression analysis will also probably indicate that the feature of syllable-timed rhythm, which is typical of PakE, is more strongly correlated with low leaders ratings than any of the segmental features. This undermines the argument by the LFC which asserts that rhythm is peripheral to intelligibility, keying up rather that rhythm has strong social content in hierarchical organisations. Stress-timing, in British English, is an indication of cognitive agility, fast-thinking and responsiveness; in PakE, syllable-timing is perceived as slow-thinking, unsure and inappropriate in a fast-paced corporate decision-making process. These correlations are completely arbitrary yet ideologically very strong in the ways, in which phonological properties are registered with social persons, as a result of repetitive discursive acting (Agha, 2003). The Pakistani

context of the study therefore presents an important test case of theories of indexicality in the sense that it demonstrates how (semiotic) associations between accent and character that were acquired through colonization lived on despite formal independence and constitutional adherence to linguistic plurality.

These expected results will also shed some light on gendered aspects of phonological stigma. According to the previous studies, female speakers are more pressured to embrace exonormative norms because the speech of women is more highly policed to acquire the prestige features (Lindemann, 2005). Within the conservative corporate culture of Pakistan, women professionals already negotiate patriarchal demands; PakE-accented female candidates will experience twice the stigma, which their accent can be interpreted as an indicator of inadequate professionalism, and their gender can be taken into account as a different source of prejudice. In their turn, female teachers may be more solidarity-rating PakE, with accent loyalty as an instrument of resisting both colonial grammatical and masculine professional cultures. Although the factorial design of the study is not powered to fully analyse the intersectional view, it will produce preliminary information on these interactions between gender and accent, which is the way ahead in future studies.

Pedagogical Implications in Relation to HEC

The expected results will locate the HEC at the severe policy crossroads. The current state of English medium instruction, as reflected by the HEC Strategic Framework 2023-2028, implicitly encourages the native-speaker norms by judging the quality of an institution on the basis of graduate IELTS/TOEFL performance and faculty publication in Scopus-indexed journals that support the privileges of the standard English language. But the realities of the market force a pragmatism of intelligible PakE which would meet the needs of intranational professional situations - governmental bureaucracy, local trade, local media, local law - in which British phonology will be of no benefit, which even may be repelled by local constituencies. Such a divide is detrimental to about seventy per cent of learners in the universities of the public sector who are not able to have such elite education in English. The expected employer bias in the study measures the attitudinal cost of this policy misalignment and makes empirical justification of extensive curricular change beyond cosmetic syllabus changes.

The suggestion to adopt a bilingual-bidialectal approach by HEC has to be elaborated

substantively in terms of the logistics of implementation, capacity of teachers, and assessment reform. It would be taught by distinguishing PakE Formal, a codified form of English, which in professional Pakistani language is used, and Exonormative English, which is used in specific sectors, such as international finance, diplomacy or multinational corporations. PakE Formal would inherit essential syntactic and lexical characteristics of Pakistani educated PakE, but create register-specific vocabulary, rhetorical conventions, and genre conventions that would be authenticated in terms of corpus examination of successful Pakistani professionals working in domestic industries. Exonormative English teaching would be made optional, more advanced and clearly positioned as supplementary linguistic capital as opposed to remedial treatment. This strategic bifurcation is consistent with the Mahboob and Ahmar (2008) paradigm of the localised curriculum, but it gives it an extra empirical force by showing that pure native-speakerism has operationalised hiring costs on provincial graduates, thus having a detrimental impact on the development of human capital in the nation.

Multi-pronged intervention would be required to implement it. The HEC needs to have a PakE Formal grammar and pronunciation guide commissioned, firstly, based on the Pakistan component of the International Corpus of English (ICE-PAK) but with specific corpus data in professional fields. This resource would formalise features that are already standardised in educated PakE, e.g. particular lexical borrowings, discourse markers and syntactic preferences, and also provide stigmatised variants that must be aware of styles but not eschewed. Second, there would be the need to radically revise teacher training programmes in the country. Instead of eliminating PakE attributes, the instructors would be oriented to stylistic variation, where students would be trained to have their accent mobility, and that is the ability to switch between PakE Formal and exonormative standards depending on the situation at hand. This strategy is in line with the idea of shuttling between communities as proposed by Canagarajah (1999) and students are placed as active linguistic brokers and not brokers lacking native-speaker approximations.

Third, the accreditation standards of the Quality Assurance Agency of HEC in English departments should be changed to reward programmes that create critical language awareness as opposed to near-native phonology. At present, the accreditation requirements implicitly discriminate against universities that cater to regional populations

by rewarding the kind of IELTS-like proficiency measures. The updated requirements must identify programmes that prepare students with an ability to interpret the role of accent in the linguistic market in Pakistan, make strategic use of diverse repertoires, and promote linguistic justice in the workplace. The expected data on the educators, indicating the attenuated, yet still persistent, bias in spite of theorist training, points out that even the academic specialists need an obligatory in-service professional growth on World Englishes, language attitude development, and anti-bias training.

Economic effects are not isolated in terms of the individual employability to the development of the nation. Provided that the employers in the private sector engage in systematic undervaluation of PakE, the significant investment in the state-owned higher education will not contribute to the provincial graduates; instead, it will continue to drain brains to Karachi corporate sector or to emigrate to the Gulf states where PakE is accepted. On the other hand, the legitimisation of PakE Formal would lead to an increase in employability and a decrease in the excessive cultural capital premium enjoyed by elite private schools, which would encourage small-scale social mobility and a decrease in inter-provincial inequality. The paper, therefore, puts language policy as a socioeconomic policy, where HEC is encouraged to align its English language policy with the Pakistan Vision 2025 objective of inclusive development and the * constitutional pledge of eradicating exploitation.

Limitations and Future Directions

Although matched-guise technique has the best experimental control over phonological effects, its artificialness restricts ecological validity. Laboratory circumstances deny contextual information, office decoration, candidate resume, body language, turn taking behaviors, that mediates workplace appraisal in natural environments. These findings would be supplemented with the findings of naturalistic observations of workplaces where researchers shadow recruitment panels of HR departments or university promotion committees to understand how accent bias works in the context of other competing stimuli and institutional pressures. This kind of ethnographic research would show how accent would act as a first-order filtering process or an incidental mark that is put on once qualifications have been determined, and as such would clarify the temporal sequence of discrimination. Furthermore, the use of bilingual speakers who are able to competently reproduce both PakE and British English personas by MGT poses questions of typicality.

The six participants, being the representatives of educated Pashto-English bilinguals, might not be representative of the entire phonetic spectrum of PakE, by province, ethnicity, and level of proficiency. Future research must include speakers of Balochistan, Sindh, Gilgit-Baltistan, and Azar Kashmir to determine whether intranational variation is a stimulus of bias and create a more representative set of stimuli.

Although theoretically underpinned by the geopolitical importance of the city and the lack of research in this area, the Peshawar sample might not be applicable to the contexts of mercantile Karachi, cultural economy Lahore and bureaucratic milieu of Islamabad. The business community of Karachi with its historical experience of being exposed to international shipping, finance, and diaspora networks might have more tolerance of the accent or even secret admiration of some of the PakE features. On the other hand, publishing, media and entertainment sectors in Lahore may heroise localised English as a sign of authenticity that appeal to Punjabi-Urdu bilingual readers. Multi-city MGT studies should be compared in the future, with a nested design used to isolate regional effects whilst conditioning on sector, firm size, and evaluator demographics. Furthermore, the fact that the research was only limited to the private sector employers does not give due consideration to the presence of a private sector in the public sector bureaucracies and semi-government organisations in which PakE might have different indexical values. The design needs to be replicated in future studies on the civil service administrators, judiciary members, and military officers to chart the entire institutional terrain of linguistic gatekeeping.

The increasing status of the American language among the urban youth in Pakistan recorded by Hashmi (2012) and reflected in the IT start up culture requires the incorporation of an American English disguise in the future studies. The American media invasion through Netflix, YouTube, Hollywood, and the aura of Silicon Valley entrepreneurship has restructured the accent stratification, especially the sectors of technology where the US standards are predominant. Comparing PakE with British and American English in a 3-way comparison would provide insight into whether American English is a middle ground between modern and less so-colonially-burdened or whether it contributes to hierarchies by providing another exonormative standard on which PakE would fall short. Also, intersectional analysis of the moderation of gender and classes is essential. Pakistani women in the workplace already have to work within the context of

patriarchal work cultures; accent discrimination can further aggravate these issues, with female PakE speakers experiencing the stigma of two groups. Women teachers in their turn could be higher in solidarity ratings of PakE, through the loyalty to accents, to oppose not only the colonised linguistic norms but masculinist professional cultures. The factorial design of the research, which is not powered to produce full intersectional information, will produce baseline data regarding such gender-accent interactions.

The methodologically valid semantic differential scale of the study, however, can be further enhanced by the introduction of implicit association tests (IAT) to identify implicit biases that are not entirely measured in explicit ones. Pantos and Perkins (2013) show that implicit attitudes towards the speech with foreign accent tend not to be in line with self-reported ratings, especially among educated liberals who excessively overrate to show tolerance. A mixed-method design of IAT, MGT and the focus group discussion would provide a more detailed attitudinal picture where the unawareness of the prejudice and the prejudice that is handled in a discursive manner can be differentiated. To test whether the comparatively positive attitudes of educators are reflected in workplace resilience or ultimate submission to the pressure of corporate proper etiquette, longitudinal designs that follow student cohorts of university entrants through university exit (graduation) into employment could be used to test whether the relatively positive attitudes of educators are reflected in their workplace resilience or submission to the pressure of corporate etiquette.

Lastly, the research brings one to critical reflection over researcher positionality and ethical responsibility. My personal repertoire of accents, which can either attain British English to impress international conference audiences or PakE to please local audiences, is the same bilingual-bidialectalism as promoted in this work. This self-consciousness should guide interpretation, and they are aware that demands to legitimise PakE in this way are likely to romanticize insofar as they are not accompanied by any material alteration to hiring policies and economic forms. Studies cannot end up being another elite discourse that theorizes the merits of PakE in principle but leaves behind the discriminatory practices. Future research must therefore involve employer advocacy groups, chambers of commerce and HR professional bodies into collaborative research experiments, offering field experiments where hiring managers listen to blind CVs that are accompanied by PakE vs. British English audio recordings, and their real-world

behavioural results are evaluated as opposed to laboratory ratings. This type of translational research can fill the gap between scholarly critique and policy action, as well as meet the HEC requirement of socially relevant scholarship that can help to tackle the most urgent issues in education and economics facing Pakistan. It is only by means of such praxis that sociolinguistic studies can go beyond describing the sense of discrimination to actively breaking down the linguistic hierarchies that continue to support the injustice of colonial times in modern Pakistan.

Conclusion

Such a matched-guise study design provides a strong methodological framework on the stratification of accents in Peshawar. It deals directly with the agents of reproduction of linguistic hierarchies by focusing on employers and educators. It is expected that the acquired results will substantiate the hypothesis that the British English still holds the hegemonic position in the corporate sector of Pakistan, and teachers have their more sophisticated and WE-aware attitudes. This deviation promises on the one hand a leap forward, on the other hand a threat to the market, which punishes speech that is localised. The paper concludes by advocating a policy re-tuning to see PakE as professional capital and not a weakness to be addressed. This kind of recalibration is not only pedagogical but also ethical and criticizes the neocolonial residues, which equate global competency with phonological mimicry.

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