

FINAL THESIS

**ENGLISH PRONUNCIATION PROBLEMS
AS PERCEIVED BY PUNJABI SPEAKING
STUDENTS**

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ABSTRACT:

Education is a process of enlightenment and empowerment by which the individuals are able to secure a better quality of life. Today, education is global and a multipurpose social service, which reward human creativity, commitment and freedom.

Currently there is a language competition among the learners of our society that includes English as one of the major languages. It is set to trigger their passion towards learning English language. Since our future belongs to these young learners, therefore it becomes necessary to assist them in learning English language. Being a member of this family of learners, I find it obligatory to look for the difficulties that the learners may face in achieving the command over English language pronunciation.

The purpose of my thesis was to examine the possible reasons behind not achieving the desired level of English pronunciation by those who belong to Punjabi speaking families, and to eradicate the pronunciation errors by providing different solutions to their problems.

For this quantitative research, I used Survey Method and let the students who had Punjabi speaking background fill a questionnaire. The questionnaire was consisted of ten hypotheses, sum of which are as follow:

Punjabi background effects English pronunciation.

Punjabi speaking students often pronounce English words incorrectly.

Mass Media can be of vital importance in improving English pronunciation.

Pronunciation lends accuracy to the message conveyed.

This survey provided me several findings; it drew out that certain social factors influence the language itself. Being Punjabi speaking is not a fault, but the thing that is of more importance is the ability to recognize, remember and produce sounds of a language. Lack of vocabulary is also a problem that is debatable. The limited range of vocabulary does not allow them to develop their ideas and present these ideas confidently.

Keeping in mind the problems found, I suggested a few solutions. One should motivate oneself that they can learn quickly and affectively. They should decide on some goals. They should be sure to practice and practice without fear. Also, they should make it enjoyable.

English is considered to be the modern lingua franca, a language which most of the countries share in order to communicate. Therefore, the knowledge of English is necessary to keep with the latest development and a sound knowledge of English opens up prospects of progress at national and international levels.

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Chapter I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background

Pakistan is a developing country and we, Pakistanis, need to progress in various fields of human life. For this, we need enthusiastic youth with high motivations and desires to achieve higher summits in life.

Due to the impact of globalization, English language has become one of the most important means of communications along with some of the other widely spoken international languages like French and Spanish etc. Therefore in order to excel in our professional lives, we need to learn one of these major means of communications e-g English.

Since “English is the official language of Pakistan”, but often people in our country lack in satisfactory knowledge of spoken English. **(Hassan, Shamaila 2009)**

It is believed that in Punjab, most of the population belongs to Punjabi families. Hence in educational institutions more strength is of Punjabi speaking students. And it is assumed that Punjabi is a language that at times may leave a reflection upon the other languages that are spoken besides. Now in this diversified world where every moment we need to move forward with great confidence, language learners find themselves in such situations where jobs are tough to find and demand knowledge of English language. But our society has a number of students who have insufficient exposure to English language, which can result in speaking problems, so these problems need to be identified and solved accordingly.

Unfortunately, in Pakistan, literacy rate is considerably low. Due to this, where Pakistan is facing many challenges in its education system, English language is considered to be a hurdle in the way of progress. “Efficiency in spoken English is an essential characteristic of a successful educational career.” **(Ghani, 1999, p. 104)**

1.2 Purpose

The present research was conducted to investigate the problems of English pronunciation problems with Punjabi speaking students.

The study was focused on the following dimensions:

- i) To investigate whether Punjabi family background acts as an obstacle in accurate English pronunciation or not
- ii) To explore the importance of social and cultural background in identifying the problems shaped by Punjabi language
- iii) To discover the remedial sources for these pronunciation problems
- iv) To examine the impact of pronunciation on communication
- v) The purpose is specific because the outcome of this research will be used specifically by the teachers who are teaching or are intended to teach English pronunciation. It will be helpful in order to understand the approach of the learners.

1.3 Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1:

Punjabi background effects English pronunciation.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 1

Hypothesis 2:

Punjabi speaking students often pronounce English words incorrectly.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 2

Hypothesis 3:

English pronunciation should be taught in schools from the beginning.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 3

Hypothesis 4:

Practicing English outside the classroom also has an impact upon the level of proficiency attained in the pronunciation of English.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 4

Hypothesis 5:

Language learning centers can play important role in correcting pronunciation.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 5

Hypothesis 6:

Besides major subjects, pronunciation classes can be helpful for the correction of inaccurate pronunciation.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 6

Hypothesis 7:

Mass media can be of vital importance in improving pronunciation.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 7

Hypothesis 8:

Pronunciation lends accuracy to communication.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 8

Hypothesis 9:

Socio-cultural aspect is one of the reasons of incorrect pronunciation of Punjabi speakers.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 9

Hypothesis 10:

There are some psychological reasons (shyness, hesitation, lack of confidence etc) behind bad pronunciation.

There is no significant difference in the mean scores of I.Com and B.Com Punjabi speaking students regarding item # 10

1.4 Significance of the study

Education is, of course, an exceedingly important force in gaining confidence. Students of different backgrounds get education along with each other. They have to communicate or get their message conveyed by speaking English. Now, presentations are taken at college/university level throughout in English. Often, students having weak command over the language, become the victims of those who have a better

knowledge of the subject matter. Sometimes learners do have the knowledge but they lack accurate pronunciation of English words.

Some learners have the latter problem due to their wrong but strong development of basics. Some have incorrect or sometimes bad pronunciation due to their locale. Some find words difficult to speak due to the complexity of some sounds.

Whatever be the reason, it remains an extremely difficult task to correct in inaccurate English pronunciation.

People have recognized this huge dilemma; therefore they are engrossed to know the reasons and their remedies. IPA has established a basis for those who face such predicaments. It is of vital importance and much help in this regard. . It is meant to represent only those qualities of speech that are relevant to language itself, such as tongue position, manner of articulation and the separation and accentuation of words and syllables. Hence, helping the effected in various ways.

1.5 Justification

Accurate pronunciation plays a vital role in personality development of a learner. Therefore to investigate the root causes and to provide remedies for them with reference to different aspects of living has become very important.

From this research teachers of English pronunciation will get the major benefit. They will be able to know the sorts of problems Punjabi speaking students face, the possible reasons behind them, and the expected solutions for them.

Besides, learners of English language and language learning centers will also be benefited from this research.

1.6 Definition of key terms

1.6.1 Student

- A learner who is enrolled in an educational institution.
- A learned person; someone who by long study has gained mastery in one or more disciplines.
- An individual who is or has been enrolled in one component unit of an institution.

1.6.2 Pronunciation

- The way a word or a language is customarily spoken.

- The way a word or a language is usually spoken; the manner in which someone utters a word.
- The act or manner of pronouncing words; utterance of speech. A way of speaking a word, especially a way that is accepted or.

1.6.3 Problem

- A specific, unresolved question or situation.
- A difference between the perception (sensor) of and the will (purpose or goal) about a state being observed by a sentient entity.
- A state of difficulty that needs to be resolved.

1.7 Basic Assumptions

- I. Acquisition of mother tongue stands better and reflects its sign and culture upon the other language and it leads to great emotional and psychological difficulties. After all, a language is strongly linked with emotions, influence and individuality.
- II. To learn the complexities of a language or its pronunciation, one needs immense experience.
- III. Environment plays a crucial role in learning to speak; therefore, it has a strong cultural reflection upon every other language that is to be learnt.
- IV. Often, the more dominant language leaves profound manifestation upon the less governing or the weaker one. These reflections can be in terms of sounds, because sounds are alive.
- V. One can only develop conversational ability if they have someone to converse with.

Chapter II

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Pronunciation is a very important component of speaking skill. Without proper pronunciation, which should be somewhat similar to but not necessarily identical to native performance, second or foreign language users of English may feel difficulty in communicating accurately.

It is possible to communicate the information without elegant pronunciation. It is also possible to communicate one's intent without classy pronunciation. However, such communication would be inadequate or could even lead to miscommunication. Moreover, if we allow this to happen all the time and if we do not insist on certain standards of pronunciation, there is a danger that the students would be "*led to a permanent plateau of pidgin from which very few emerge*" (**Bowen et al. 1985**).

Punjab, a region in Northern India and the east side of Pakistan, has a long history and rich cultural heritage. The people of the Punjab are called Punjabis and they speak a language called Punjabi.

2.1 History

Punjabi is the most commonly spoken language in Punjab and is the mother tongue of the vast majority of its people.

It is spoken mainly in the three areas of the world, in east Punjab (India) where it is a state language, in West Punjab (Pakistan) where it is most widely spoken, and in the Diaspora, particularly Britain, North America, East Africa and Australia. No exact figures are available on the number of Punjabi speakers, either as a first or second language, but if the three Punjabis and the various dialects are taken into account, an approximation of 100 million would not be too far from the truth.

"Punjabi is derived from Sanskrit and belongs to the *Indo-European* language tree. It is widely believed that Punjabi evolved from the original Sanskrit but as developed was enriched by languages such as Persian and Arabic which have greatly influenced modern Punjabi vocabulary." (**Lal Handa, Rajendra 1968**)

It is the official language of Indian state of Punjab, in Pakistan, however, Urdu is the official language and Punjabi has no official status. Even in formal context, such as

government, newspapers, education, Pakistani Punjabi speakers tend to use Urdu or English, in which the indication of Punjabi language reflects widely.

Among the Indo-European languages, Punjabi is perhaps the oldest spoken language. This is likely due to the argument that Punjabi is closest to the original Vedic Sanskrit, the language of the Aryan tribes.

Modern Punjabi has borrowed many words extensively from other languages, like Hindi, Urdu, Persian and English, and it has a substantial number of loanwords.

2.2 Dialects

It has a number of regional **dialects**, which according to the ethnologies can be divided into the categories of *Western Punjabi* and *Eastern Punjabi*. As one moves towards the centre of Punjab the chain of dialects becomes closer.

The main Punjabi dialect is known as *Majhi* and is spoken in the Majha region (*This region includes the cities of Lahore, Sialkot, Gujaranwala, Gurdaspur and Amritsar*), which is the heartland of Punjab. Majhi is considered to be the purest and standard form of spoken Punjabi. It has several other dialects, which differ the most standard Punjabi.

2.3 Scripts

Another distinct feature of Punjabi is that it is written in two different **scripts**, *Gurmukhi* and *Shahmukhi*. It mainly depends upon the region and the dialect spoken. Sikhs and the other in the state of Punjab tend to use the Gurmukhi (from the mouth of Gurus) scripts, whereas, Muslims and Pakistani Punjabi speakers use a modified Arabic script called Shahmukhi (from the mouth of Kings).

English is an international language, spoken in many countries both as a native and as a second or foreign language. It is taught in the schools in almost every country on this earth. It is a living and vibrant language spoken by over 300 million people as their native language. Millions more speak it as an additional language.

Even in Pakistan, English is being taught from the early childhood. It is a must that every child, as a learner, should have a command over it. They are taught to perform using this significant language. As English is referred to as an international language, it is assumed that learning this language from early days helps learners a lot throughout their life.

Even parents put much emphasis on becoming skilled at this language. They want them to learn the language as competently as their first language or mother tongue. They want them to have command on English even if they become pathetic at their mother tongue.

But this is the case seen more where Urdu is spoken as their first language and Punjabi has no implication for them or it is not spoken by their parents/forefathers as often as Urdu/English. In such condition, children promptly learn to communicate through English and they face the language problem off and on.

Now in this diversified and multilingual world, more and more learners find themselves in an environment where more than one language is used. Similarly, with job changes that involve moving to different parts of the world, parents can feel overwhelmed by the linguistic demands on them and their children. But in our society, sadly, there are a number of students who have a less exposure to English language. Moreover, most of them come from Punjabi background, where they habitually converse in Punjabi.

Now these two languages are far different from each other, in term of scripts, tones, pitch, vocabulary, intonation, grammar etc.

In such situations, where learners who have a Punjabi background and lack an exposure to English, face a lot of speaking problems. It is claimed that the acquisition of the main language i-e Punjabi stands better and reflects its sign and culture upon the other one i-e English and it leads to great emotional and psychological difficulties. After all, a language is strongly linked with emotions, affect and identity.

Languages are very complex. To learn all their complexities, one needs experience. It may not take too long to learn how to carry on a simple conversation, but it takes a lot more time to be able to develop the skill of being native like speaker or to pronounce accurately. Since the environment plays a vital role in learning to speak, therefore, it has a strong cultural reflection upon every other language that is to be learnt.

It is a fact that languages mix in other languages with their own society and culture. They have a deep influence upon each other. Often, the more dominant language leaves profound reflection upon the less dominant or the weaker one. These reflections can be in terms of sounds, because sounds are alive. The Eastern and Western languages have many similar sounds. This is the case with a high up language of East i-e Punjabi and a ruling language of West i.e. English.

A person adopts a foreign culture and language in about ten years when he lives there. As soon as he finds a person of his native country, his manners get changed and he starts speaking his native language in their particular tone and accent. And it becomes easier when both the languages are frequently in use.

Students, generally, mix up their mother tongue with their second/foreign language, as in case with English and Punjabi.

Both the languages have their pronunciation patterns, to which one has to follow in order to speak accurately. English has a pattern to follow, some sounds, phonemes, phonetic symbols, diphthongs, triph thongs etc.

Similarly Punjabi has a number of diphthongs. The first member of a diphthong is always a short and the second one is a long vowel. Ia, Io, Ic, ei, ee, eu, ua are the diphthongs in Punjabi. But the learners who have Punjabi back ground mix these patterns when speaking these two languages side by side.

It is a common problem that is seen with such students that they remain unable to speak English language accurately due to their Punjabi accent. I am concerned with such issues and problems that why people speak “Taam” instead of “Time”. Why they can not pronounce “Brown” but “Bron”.

Following is the list of some of such problematic words, which students find difficult to speak accurately:

Accurate Word	Incorrectly Pronounced Word
Mess (mes)	Maas (mæ:s)
Coffee (kɒfi)	Kafi (ka:fi)
Strange (streɪndʒ)	Satrange (setreɪndʒ)
English (ɪŋɡlɪʃ)	Inglush (ɪŋɡlʌʃ)
What (wɒt)	Wut (wʌt)
Pronounce (prənaʊns)	Prononce (prənɒns)
Walk (wɒk)	Waak (wa:k)
On (ɒn)	Aan (a:n)
Loss (lɒs)	Lass (lɑ:s)
Cross (krɒs)	Crass (kra:s)
Park (pɑ:k)	Parak (pa:rək)
Ground (graʊnd)	Grond (grɒnd)
Profit (prɒfɪt)	Prafit (pra:fit)
Round (raʊnd)	Rond (rɒnd)
Salt (sɒlt)	Salt (sa:lt)
Split (splɪt)	Saplit (sepɪt)
Spring (sprɪŋɡ)	Sapring sepriŋɡ)
Purse (pɜ:s)	Paras (perʌs)
Form	Faram (fa:rəm)

Now the question arises is that why such problems occur? Why students remain unable to speak accurately?

Here we cannot ignore the fact of social context. Limited access can be the result of geographical distance from the speakers of the language you wish to learn. Or it can result from the fact that the students themselves are not very open to outsiders. In either case, it is a challenge to get enough conversational practice to become fluent and accurate in the language. In my view, one can only develop conversational ability if they have someone to converse with. Provided you have an effective strategy, through this, one can indeed develop basic conversational ability when they only have access to only one or two speakers. But in addition, one should want to aim to spend

some time in the homeland of the language one is learning. If one can only have occasional opportunities to spend time speaking the required language gaining the required pronunciation, it is urgent that you have a strategy for getting the most mileage possible out of your forays into speech communities.

Another social factor has to do with the culture and its degree of difference from your own culture. Language communities differ in the kinds of content or meaning which the community members express verbally. “I once tape-recorded a conversation between a Pakistani teenager and a Canadian teenager in which the Pakistani attempted to communicate with the Canadian using his limited English ability. When he tried to explain the political system of Pakistan it was hopeless, because he simply lacked the English expressions he needed. By contrast, when he was explaining the game of cricket his English appeared to become more fluent. However, I was still unable to understand him. Some British friends of mine who listened to the tape said that they could understand him easily. The difference?” **(Kachru, B.B.1982)**

The reason behind this is that the Pakistani teenager had an exposure to a limited set of vocabulary, which was related to cricket. That is why, he saw quite well at his speaking and pronunciation regarding the game. But when the matter came to politics, it reflected that he had not much exposure to that sort of vocabulary, and when he tried to reach that level, he lost his accuracy.

So, “cultural knowledge and language knowledge interact to make communication successful or unsuccessful.” **(Valdes, J.M. 1984)**

Another aspect that can be under consideration is the complexity of determining whether it is difficult for you to learn a language or the language itself. In this concern, no doubt the issue matters a lot whether that particular language is closely related to your daily routine or not, or you already have a familiarity with it. Languages can be related because of common ancestry, or because they have borrowed a lot from each other, or both.

Punjabi shares thousands of words, which are similar to English words in form and related in meaning. This might be the reason why people rarely take it into consideration what is to talk and how to talk.

Sometimes two languages are said to be of similar types. They may not be related through common origin, but they are similar in many ways. For example, in English, the order of words in a sentence is Subject-Verb-Object (as in *I-see -you*). Also, an English sentence is typically made up of a number of relatively short words. Swahili