

## SEMANTIC AND PRONUNCIATION DEVIATIONS IN THE SPEAKING PRACTICES OF THE BALTI ENGLISH SPEAKERS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALTISTAN, SKARDU

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### **Abstract**

The current study aimed at investigating the phonological and semantic variations between Balti English and standard British English. It further pinpoints the specific lexical and semantic features that characterize Balti English and investigates into the reasons behind the semantic and phonological effects. The current study employed qualitative research design to explore, investigate and identify the assumptions on the basis of the research questions. The data was collected through informal conversation, then the conversation between different people was documented and carefully listened over and over to detect the linguistic variation from Standard English. The researcher found that phonological deviations containing ungrammatical abnormalities in the pronunciation of different speakers, and variations in the meaning termed as semantic deviation were in common lingual practices among the Balti English speakers. There were ambiguity in words, sentences and phrases preferred by the Balti English speakers. It has been noticed that the speakers of English in Baltistan have established their own stereotypical English pronunciation due to their native phonological habits and have also follow their own semantic practices due to their native language semantic choices. The researcher recommends Balti English language as a variety of English for its phonological and semantic variations being practiced and understood in communication by the Balti English speakers in Baltistan.

Keywords: Semantic, pronunciation, deviation, Balti English speaker, phonological, variation .

### **INTRODUCTION**

Balti language is spoken in Baltistan, the Northern region of Pakistan. It holds 0.5 million speakers in Kharmang, Shigar, Skardu and Ghanche districts in Baltistan, Pakistan. Urdu is the national language which is spoken by the people as a secondary language whereas, Arabic and Persian also leave impacts on the vocabulary and pronunciation of Balti English speakers. These local, national and other languages leave strong impacts on the semantic and phonological standards of the British English.

Balti language has its distinctive phonological as well as semantic features which varies from English language both phonologically as well as semantically. Balti language belongs to the Sino-Tibetan language which is phonologically closer to Tibetan languages. After the advent of Islam and amalgamation of Gilgit Baltistan with Pakistan Balti language has been strongly influenced by Arabic, Persian and Urdu languages semantically and phonologically. Balti English learners and speakers face numerous phonological issues while pronouncing English words due to the strong impacts of the native language, Urdu, Arabic and Persian languages. Most of the learners mispronounce English words which create the sense of some other words instead of the intended English words such as Balti speakers pronounce the word /man/ as /men/ which gives a plural sense. Balti speakers tend to use maximum short vowel sounds and less long vowels which create phonological variations. Balti English speakers and learners

have limited semantic knowledge and misuse English words and synonyms which sometimes creates semantic variations such as /I eat at a hotel/. In this sentence the word /hotel/ creates semantic variation as instead of restaurant the word /hotel/ has been used.

Semantic deviation refers to a phenomenon where the meaning of a word, phrase, or sentence deviates from its usual or expected interpretation. It occurs when there is a departure from the conventional or literal meaning of the language used, leading to a different or altered interpretation.

Semantic deviation can be deliberate or unintentional, and it often serves a rhetorical or stylistic purpose in communication. It is commonly used in literary and poetic contexts to create imagery, evoke emotions, or convey abstract concepts. By deviating from the ordinary use of language, writers and speakers can generate a sense of surprise, ambiguity, or emphasis.

For example, consider the phrase "the sun smiled upon us." In its literal sense, the sun cannot smile since it is an inanimate object. However, this phrase uses semantic deviation to attribute human-like qualities (smiling) to the sun. This deviation from the literal meaning adds a poetic or metaphorical element to the sentence, conveying a positive and warm atmosphere. Certain practices and their linguistic consequences have been adopted by English dictionaries as part of their lexicons.

Semantic deviation can also occur through the use of metaphors, similes, irony, sarcasm, hyperbole, or other figures of speech. These devices intentionally deviate from literal meanings to convey a deeper or more nuanced understanding.

Shaban Rafi, (2018) elucidates that semantic deviation involves using language in a way that diverges from its ordinary or expected meaning. It is a tool employed by writers and speakers to create impact, evoke emotions, or convey abstract ideas, often through the use of metaphors, similes, or other figures of speech.

The current study focuses on two important aspects of Balti English i.e., phonological deviation and use of different linguistic characteristics of the language. This paper aims to address the question of how Balti English speakers deviate from Standard English in terms of phonology and how they distinctly use different words/phrases. Balti English speakers have a distinct accent that deviates from the Standard English accent. The accent is majorly influenced by the phonology of the first language of the speaker. In this case, the Balti language has a significant influence on the way Balti English speakers pronounce certain English words. The study highlights some of the phonological deviations that were observed in the conversation among the research participants.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- How do Balti English language speakers pronounce English words which deviates Standard British English?
- What are the Semantic deviations being used by the Balti English speakers at University of Baltistan Skardu?

#### **RESEARCH OBJECTIVES**

The current study aims to:

- Investigate the phonological deviations produced by Balti English language speakers which deviates Standard British English.
- Identify the Semantic deviations being created by Balti English speakers at University of Baltistan Skardu.

#### **SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY**

The current study plays a bridging role between English language and English as second language learners at University of Baltistan, Skardu. It explores the phonological variations and its impact on the semantics of English language being spoken by the Balti English language speakers. It also investigates the semantic adjustments and tendencies of the Balti English speakers while speaking English. The current study is an inter-lingual and inter-linguistic inquiry in comparison between Standard British English and English language being spoken by the Balti English language speakers. This study provides the way forward to establish Balti English as a variety or sub-standard English language due to its culture, geography, language and phonological identity of the speakers.

#### **LIMITATIONS**

No or less research work is available on Balti language especially linguistics. Therefore, the researcher could not get relevant literature regarding Balti language. However, in order to validate the status of the current study, the researcher has studied papers published on Sindhi and other languages related to semantic and phonological variations.

#### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Oldin, 1989 justifies that phonological and semantic deviations occur due to the intervention between first

## **SEMANTIC AND PRONUNCIATION DEVIATIONS IN THE SPEAKING PRACTICES OF THE BALTI ENGLISH SPEAKERS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALTISTAN, SKARDU**

language and English language. Odlin (1989) provides a theory for the interference of the first language while learning a second language. And Lado (1957) provides contrastive analysis theory to define that while learning a second language, the influence of the first language can cause a positive or negative transfer of language.

English spoken in Pakistan, as an indigenous and regularized diversity of English, includes various linguistic features and cultural influences. To realize a thorough understanding of Pakistani English, familiarity with both Urdu and Islamic culture is necessary (Baumgardner, 1987). This distinct variety further divides into four sub-varieties, each with its unique characteristics and usage.

The first sub-variety is known as Anglicized English, which is like the British Standard and is typically spoken by upper class who have been appreciated to Received Pronunciation for a long time. These individuals possess a pure command of the language, incorporating British linguistic norms and expressions.

Rehman, (1990) explains that the second sub-variety of Pakistani English is, called Acrolect. The acrolect speakers have received their education in prestigious schools. Although they may have limited exposure to the British Standard, their English reveals slight variations in terms of phonology compared to Anglicized English. Acrolect speakers maintain a high level of proficiency and stick to certain linguistic patterns unique to their educational backgrounds.

Rehman (1990) further justifies that the third sub-variety, known as Mesolect, is the most widely used form of Pakistani English and encompasses the language spoken by most of the population. Mesolect speakers deviate from the British Standard in various aspects, including grammar, vocabulary, and pronunciation. This sub-variety is predominantly used by the middle-class segment of society, characterized by individuals who have not been extensively exposed to the native English-speaking environment.

The fourth and final sub-variety is referred to as Basilect, used by proletarian members and have limited educational opportunities. Basilect speakers possess minimal exposure to formal English education, resulting in a more simplified and basic form of Pakistani English (Rehman, 1990). Their usage may display further deviations from the British Standard and other sub-varieties.

Rehman, (1990) emphasizes that it is crucial to recognize that English speakers from Pakistan has established own setoff principles, making unique and acceptable variety of the English language. This recognition encourages the acceptance and appreciation of Pakistani English as a legal form of communication, fostering inclusivity and recognizing linguistic diversity within the English-speaking world.

Akhter, (2013) explains that one of the most apparent phonological deviations was the replacement of "v" sound with "w" sound. For example, the word "very" was pronounced as "wery" and "value" were pronounced as "wally". This deviation is because the Sindhi language does not have the "v" sound. Another deviation that was observed was the confusion between "b" and "p" sounds. The research participants pronounced "patience" as "batiencie" and "best" as "pest". This was because, in the Sindhi language, the distinction between "b" and "p" sounds is not significant.

Rehman, (1990) justifies that one of the lexical deviations that were observed was the usage of the word "uncle" to refer to any elder male relative. In Standard English, "uncle" is only used to refer to the brother of one's parent. The research subjects used the word "uncle" to refer to their father's male cousins as well. This usage is common in Pakistani culture and reflects the respect for the elder male relatives.

Rehman (1990) further says that another unique feature of Pakistani English is the usage of "yaar" which is a word from the Urdu language. The word is used to refer to a friend and is often used in informal conversations between friends. The research subjects used the word "yaar" multiple times during their conversation, which reflects the influence of the Urdu language in their English speech.

Rehman (1990) elaborates that the research subjects, whose first language is Sindhi, exhibited various phonological deviations while speaking English. Moreover, they used different words/phrases that are not commonly used in Standard English. This study highlights the impact of first language on the acquiring second language and the unique features that are developed as a result. The study aims to serve as a reference for future research on Pakistani English and to provide language teachers with a greater understanding of the distinct features of the language, which can help them in teaching English to Baltistani students.

Rafi (2021) investigates the phonological and linguistic variations observed in Pakistani English compared to the Standard British English. The research question guiding this study are: 1) types of linguistic deviation possessed by English spoken in Pakistan. This study sheds light on the phonological and lexical and semantic variations in English spoken in different cities of Pakistan compared with Standard British English. The findings

emphasize the importance of recognizing and understanding these variations to facilitate effective communication. The study focused on the phonological and lexico-semantic variations present in Pakistani English compared to Standard British English. The findings shed light on the unique features and deviations observed in the pronunciation and usage of words in Pakistani English.

Rehman, (1990) elucidates that regarding phonological variations, it was evident that Pakistani English speakers deviate from standard pronunciation due to the influence of their first language, such as Sindhi in the case of the research subjects. Substitutions of certain sounds, such as replacing "o" with "w" and confusion between "b" and "p," were notable phonological deviations observed. These deviations reflect the influence of the phonology of the first language on the pronunciation of English words.

Additionally, the study identified several lexico-semantic variations in Pakistani English. The usage of specific words and phrases that are unique to Pakistani culture and influenced by the Urdu language was observed. The usage of "uncle" to refer to any elder male relative and the incorporation of "yaar" to mean "friend" exemplify such lexico-semantic variations. These variations reflect the cultural and contextual factors that shape the usage and meanings of words in Pakistani English, Rehman, (1990).

Rafi, (2021) validates that English is gaining great importance and spreading rapidly around the world. It is almost spoken in all the countries of the world especially in the developing countries like Pakistan, Bangladesh, and India etc. It is widely used in different fields such as media, education and judiciary. As it is spoken all over the world so it has got many varieties due to the influence of the local languages or cultural/ religious norms. In Pakistan, English is spoken as official language and also used as a way of teaching in educational institutions so the variety of English that is spoken has many semantic difference from British English. These semantic variations are due to the impact of cultural or religious values.

## **RESEARCH DESIGN**

The research has devised qualitative research paradigm to collect and analyze the data for the current study.

## **THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

The researcher has employed a hybrid theory to study the phonological and semantic variations that researchers often rely on theoretical frameworks that provide a systematic approach to understanding and analyzing these phenomena. Two prominent frameworks in linguistics that are commonly used in this context are Optimality Theory (OT) for phonological variation and Cognitive Linguistics for semantic variation.

## **OPTIMALITY THEORY (OT) FOR PHONOLOGICAL VARIATION**

Optimality Theory is a framework within phonology that aims to explain variation and constraints in language. It assumes that phonological patterns arise from the interaction of a set of universal constraints, which are ranked in a hierarchical order. These constraints represent different aspects of language structure and preferences.

In the context of phonological variation, OT provides a framework to analyze how different phonological forms (variations) are chosen in different contexts. For example, dialectal variations or pronunciation differences between individuals can be analyzed by examining the rankings of constraints that lead to the preferred forms in a given context. The differences in phonological patterns between speakers or dialects can be attributed to variations in the ranking of constraints.

## **Cognitive Linguistics for Semantic Variation**

Cognitive Linguistics is a theoretical framework that focuses on the relationship between language, cognition, and meaning. It assumes that language is intricately linked to human cognitive processes, and meaning is not solely determined by formal rules but also by conceptual systems and experiential factors.

In the study of semantic variation, Cognitive Linguistics provides a useful framework for analyzing how meaning varies across different contexts, speakers, or dialects. It emphasizes the role of cognitive processes, cultural factors, and embodied experiences in shaping meaning. Semantic variations can be examined by considering conceptual mappings, metaphorical extensions, prototype effects, and cultural influences on the interpretation of linguistic expressions.

## **POPULATION**

The Balti English speakers at University of Baltistan Skardu have been employed as the population of this study as the students enrolled in the university belong to different districts of Baltistan.

## **SAMPLE**

The researcher has selected only fifteen educated individuals (Balti English speakers) as participants whose first language was Balti. The data was collected by recording their informal conversation in English. It provides unique features of native English and how it differs from Standard English.

## **RESEARCH TOOLS**

The researcher has used Mobile Phone Recorder to record the conversations of the selected participants to

## **SEMANTIC AND PRONUNCIATION DEVIATIONS IN THE SPEAKING PRACTICES OF THE BALTI ENGLISH SPEAKERS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALTISTAN, SKARDU**

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collect data in audio form.

### **NATURE AND SOURCE OF DATA**

The data has been collected through interactive conversations of Balti English speakers at University of Baltistan, Skardu. The researcher first recorded the conversations and later listened critically as per the research questions and objectives of the study. The researcher has selected the required sentences containing semantic and phonological deviations found in their conversations.

### **DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS PROCEDURE**

The researcher has collected data from a group of fifteen Balti English speakers. Firstly, the conversations were recorded then selected the required sentences containing semantic and phonological deviations. Lastly, each sentence was analyzed through the lenses of the theoretical framework of the current study. The researcher has presented the actual sentences first and then compared each sentence with the British English.

### **RESEARCH GAPS AND GUIDELINES**

Semantics and phonology are two broad areas in linguistics. The researcher could collect and analyze the data as per the demands of the research questions but the future researchers can also work on phonetic, morphological, and sociocultural factors of deviations.

### **DATA ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSIONS**

This chapter includes the data collection, analysis and discussions of the findings and results against the research questions designed to conduct the current study.

### **SEMANTIC VARIATIONS IN BALTISTANI ENGLISH**

According to different researches the main factors which result in semantic variation in Baltistani English are influence of native language, Islamic values, cultural influence, semantic translation or hybridity.

#### **1- Nikahfied:**

" Alhamdulillah got Nikahfied today."

In Baltistan, Balti speakers of English language use this word " Nikahfied" due to the Islamic values. This word is not used by the native speakers as they have the alternative word " got engaged or tied the knot".

#### **2- Male students - female students:**

"Classes will be started from first January for both 'male and female students'".

Due to the influence of native languages in which gender is assigned to every entity, speakers of Baltistani English use the words male students and female students. In British English the native speakers just use the word students for both the genders.

#### **3- Zakh rally:**

" Next year there will be "Zakh rally" in Skardu"

This word used by Baltistani English speakers in conversation due to the cultural impact of the word zakh. In standard English the speakers use the word "boat" while Baltistani English speakers use the word 'Zakh' for word 'boat' due to the cultural association of the word zakh.

#### **4- Mixed Achaar:**

"This 'Mixed Achaar' is really good"

In the above word the process which is involved is called 'hybrid', which means forming new word after combination of two languages. The word 'Achaar' belongs to Baltistani culture and 'mixed' belongs to British. So Baltistani English speakers uses mixed Achaar in place of the word mixed pickle.

#### **5- Electricity has not come:**

The participant might have thought in either Urdu or Balti which tend to state the sense of to come but English expression is different i.e. there is black out or the power failed or the electricity is not available. This is due to the semantic parametric differences between English and Balti.

#### **6- Pant-Shirt**

Pant- shirt is a good way of dressing.

A person looks good in a pant-shirt. The words "pant-shirt" is a combination of two different words to elucidate a special kind of dressing. It gets its roots from the traditional way of dressing known as "Gonmo Treno" and it is used in other varieties of English language

#### **7- Hotel**

Hotel is the best place to go with colleagues. We will have lunch at a Shahi Darbar hotel.

The term hotel is used for different meanings in the local language. It is used for a building that supplies food and used as a rest house but in Balti English the term "hotel" is used for a restaurant in which people eat food. But Balti

English speakers were found using the word 'hotel' for all such as restaurant, motel, café, and resort.

#### **8- Wheel-Jam strike**

Today there is a wheel- jam-strike in the country against inflation. The word "wheel jam strike" draws its inspiration from the Urdu phrase "paiya - jam- hartal. This type of term is used as a standard form of English in Pakistan. There should be background information to get the meaning.

#### **9- Samosa**

In Baltistani term "samosa" is used for a savory pastry and the ingredients which mixed in it are potatoes, peas and meat. However in British English the same thing is called pasty that has different ingredients like vegetables, meat or cheese etc.

#### **10- Shadi Hall**

The term "shadi hal" is a combination of two words of different languages: Shadi and Hall. The word Shadi means marriage in Urdu but "Hall" is an English word for room. However the word Shadi hall is used for "hall for marriage" .and it is a process of semantics known as hybridity.

#### **11- The birds are chirping on/at the tree.**

The participants used the prepositions on/at instead of in/ due to parametric differences between the two languages as English follows preposition and Balti follows post-position. Further instances found were; I am in the library instead of I am at the library.

The differences in pronunciation and semantic usage between Baltistani English and British English includes distinctive linguistic, cultural influences and more specifically the religious values found in Baltistan region of Pakistan. Moreover, the lexical and semantic aspects of Baltistani English differs from British English in terms of word usage. The lexicon of Baltistani English is heavily influenced by Islamic rules, native language and Baltistani culture. After the detailed analysis and observation it is clear that most Baltistani English speakers show Lexico-semantic variations. Islamic and Baltistani culture play an important role in formation of the lexicon of Baltistani English. Some factors behind such semantic differences are semantic translation, hybridity, influence of native language or Islamic values.

### **PRONUNCIATION VARIATIONS**

Balti language being a phonologically different language contains many unique sounds and there are many English sounds in English language which are not same but similar to Balti sounds. When Balti speakers produce English words, they misproduce certain sounds resulting to put the words into another lexical categories.

1. Car: /kar/ and Park: /pa:rk/

The car outside the park.

In Baltistani English the /r/ sound is pronounced prominently as compared to British. The /r/ is pronounced with the tongue's slight roll or slap in Baltistani English while the British /r/ is non-rhotic.

2. Pizza: /pi:tsə/

Ali is eating pizza in the balcony of his house.

The word Pizza /pi:tsə/ is commonly mispronounced by Balti English speakers as /pi:zza/. The Baltistani English speaker mostly misses the /t/ and pronounce /z/ instead of /s/ while speaking the word Pizza.

3. Study: /stadi/

His study is getting distributed due to the closure of schools.

There is deviations in the pronunciation of words like "study" and "school, " in the Baltistani English where an unnecessary addition of the /ɪ/ or /e/ sounds at the beginning can be observed, resulting in pronunciations like /ɪstadi/. Also there is the lack of aspiration in the /k/ sound.

4. Boundary: /baøndri/ Climb: /klam/

The hikers reached the boundary of the national park and began their challenging climb up the steep mountain trail. The participants of Baltistani English mispronounced the word boundary as /bøndri/ deviating from Standard English. Similarly the word climb is pronounced with the addition of /b/ sound as /klaimb/ which is basically salient in British English.

5. Finger: /fɪŋgəe/

My little brother accidentally got her finger stuck in the door.

The word finger is frequently used but often mispronounced by the majority of Baltistani English speakers. Instead of the correct pronunciation /fɪŋgər/, it is commonly pronounced as /fɪŋgəe/. The nasal velar sound /ŋ/ is replaced by the standard /n/ sound. Additionally, there is a variation in the pronunciation of the phoneme /r/. While it is typically pronounced in a rhotic manner, it is not pronounced after the schwa sound /ə/.

6. Man and Men

## SEMANTIC AND PRONUNCIATION DEVIATIONS IN THE SPEAKING PRACTICES OF THE BALTI ENGLISH SPEAKERS AT UNIVERSITY OF BALTISTAN, SKARDU

*He is a man of action.*

### RESEARCHER'S SUGGESTIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

*The Balti English speakers were found mispronouncing the word /man/ as /men/ due to first language phonological interference creating a phonological as well as semantic deviation.*

*The researcher is of the view that Balti English language creates enormous phonological and semantic deviations, understood and practiced by the Balti English speakers but the native English language users may face issues in receiving the pronunciation and grasping the semantic variations. Hence, Balti English can be considered as a variety of language as Indian and Australian English keeping in view the understandability, intelligibility and comprehensibility of Balti English at local level i.e. Skardu Gilgit Baltistan, the Northern Pakistan.*



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