An Attitudinal Study of Pakistani English

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Abstract
Defining the status of non-native variety of English depends more on sociolinguistic, political, geographical and economic factors than merely on linguistic grounds. Hence intra-national and international attitudes towards the variety are considered major factors in defining the status of a language and its varieties. The status of Pakistani English has been discussed by many researchers, Kachru (1982, 1985, 1986, 1987), Rahman (2002), Baumgardner (1993), Crystal (1988, 1997, 2004), Baker (1988, 1992) etc. There are a number of studies on attitudes towards English but there is almost no research on attitudes of English language users in Pakistan. The present research focuses on the attitudes of English language learners towards the status of Pakistani English. A questionnaire survey of 100 participants was conducted focusing on their attitude towards English as a lingua franca and the empowerment of non-native speakers. The results of the survey indicate that Pakistanis have both positive and negative attitudes about the usage of English in Pakistan which shows that English language in Pakistan has progressed beyond the EFL status.

Keywords: ELT, attitudes, EFL/ESL status, non-native varieties, Pakistani English
1. Introduction

An attitude is a way of acting, feeling or thinking. Attitudes often are the product of dominant ideology, concepts and opinions and may be divided along the positive-negative continuum. Investigating language attitudes is a systematic and critical method of exploring the variety of ways in which people behave towards a language. The behaviourists and mentalists have studied and discussed attitudes from different angles. Fishman (as cited in Hohenthal, 1998) describes the behaviourist view about attitude as socially observable phenomenon. Whereas mentalists claim that attitudes may only be deduced as they are mental constructs which are unobservable. Baker (1988) has identified a number of variables in the study of language attitudes. He thinks that gender, age, language and cultural background play a major role to determine people’s attitudes. Language attitudes may also change due to personal introspection or exposure to varying social influences. Thus we see that the study of attitudes is multi-faceted and may be approached through various perspectives.

2. Literature Review

Attitude towards English language has been researched internationally over recent decades. When we talk about the users’ attitude towards English language, we see that the attitudes have shifted along with the role and importance of English in a particular society. Crystal (2004) explains that the role of English has been modified due to a series of subsequent but coincidental processes. He is of the view that English plays a leading role in the world because it was the language of British Empire and the language of colonial expansion between 17th and 19th centuries. But attitudes towards English have changed with the passage of time. Often these changes have strong political dimensions. These attitudinal changes may be a result of gradual language shift and critical consciousness for positive transformations. They have also changed due to sudden religious or ideological conversion. The Urdu Movement in the Indo-Pak sub-continent before partition is an example.

The users’ attitudes towards a language have interested and intrigued many scholars over the decades. The attitudes have been studied from the vantage point of different variables such as age (Stables & Wikeleyt, 1999), gender (Kobayashi, 2002), identity (Kim, Siong, Fei & Ya’acob, 2010), socio-political views (Dewaele, 2005; Wiebesiek, Rudwick & Zeller, 2011), socio-psychological orientation (Chalak & Kassaian, 2010), aspects of solidarity and status (El-Dash & Busnardo, 2001), the role of context where English is used (Al-Tamimi & Shuib, 2009), the native vs. non-native models (Tsui & Bunton, 2000) as well as social status
and the role of English language in a particular community (De Kadt, 1993). Crismore, Ngeow, and Soo (1996) have studies the attitude of teachers whereas Mastuda (2000) has analyzed the opinions of students towards English as a foreign language. All these studies indicate that there is a wide gulf in the nature of different communities’ responses to English which range from resentment to partial tolerance in certain contexts.

For many countries, English has been the language of rulers, imposed by foreign colonial masters and accepted by their local allies. Those countries have shown varied reactions to English after the departure of the British rulers. Some have accepted and nativized English or alternatively the local languages have been ‘englishized’. In some other countries like Papua New Guinea and Jamaica, the use of English has led to the evolution of new language varieties such as Tok Pisin and Jamaican Creole respectively. Whereas some other countries have reacted strongly against the use of English and Tanzania and Malaysia are prominent examples. Same is the case with Nigeria, Singapore and many other countries where English is not a native language yet enjoys the status of a widely used language. Pakistan also fits in this category. These different attitudes have resulted in various varieties of English which are a reflection of either nativized English or englishized local languages. According to Mufwene (2001), every language consists of a large ‘pool’ of features and linguistic options. He claims that every language offers choices in vocabulary, pronunciation, word forms and syntactic structures. However, when these choices may be called to form a separate variety is a debatable issue.

Since 1980s, the role of English has been discussed under the widely used albeit controversial term of ‘World Englishes’. Kachru and others introduced and popularized the term ‘World Englishes’. Bolton (2004) has differentiated between ‘World English, global English and international English’ (p. 367) as representing different facets of English as an international language. Bolton has provided a through survey and critical evaluation of approaches to this new discipline. He has discussed four main approaches namely the English studies, sociology of language, Applied Linguistics approach and the lexicographical approach. The most prominent among them is the one concerned with Kachruvian studies as it touches a number of relevant issues discussed under the paradigm of World Englishes.

Kachru’s landmark contribution to World Englishes is the categorization of English –using countries in three circles. He proposed a model comprising of three inner, outer and expanding circles. These three circles are proposed and divided on the basis of the status of English as a native, second or foreign language. Jenkins
(2003) has discussed a number of models of English citing McArthur (1987), Kachru (1983) and Gorlach (1988). The main similarity between them is that they have proposed “circle models” of English usage.

English has proffered a challenge to policy makers and educators. The question whether English should be used as a medium of instruction and the implications of this decision have haunted the pedagogical world and the policy makers for decades now. While talking about the nature of attitudes, certain variables such as assimilation, dominance, motivation, congruence, size and exposure to language should be considered as well.

The status of the English language and its users determines the nature of a society’s attitude towards the language itself. The rift between East and West Pakistan was mainly rooted in linguistic grounds. Language riots are by no means a rare or unheard of phenomenon. The recent strife in Karachi in July, 2011 provides an example. So the issue of attitudes to a language, especially a so-called global and international language acquires huge significance.

In Pakistan, English exists in a love-hate relationship, propagated by many yet condemned by others. Kachru had categorised Pakistan as a member of inner circle yet the attitude of Pakistanis towards English makes it a foreign language for most of the population. English, widely used for the official purposes in government, judiciary, education and technical fields, is still a minority language in Pakistan. It is taught as a subject from kindergarten to tertiary level. English in Pakistan is seen as a status symbol, as a marker of education and sometimes as a means of economic exploitation dominance. As only the elite have access to English as a medium of education it also serves as a means of preserving status quo. Moreover, as Pennycook (1994) points out English has been seen as a form of threat to Islamic way of life. However English has also been a source of power and exploitation. As Rahman (2002) asserts it is a source of gaining means of gratification as it provides access to power and financial means. English also provides access to better paying jobs in Pakistan. In Pakistani society where 72 languages are spoken (Ethnologue, 2009) attitude towards English gains vital importance. Despite this mind boggling linguistic diversity, English continues to occupy a central position as the country’s official language. After the Independence, English was allowed to be the official language for a limited period of time and the government announced to support and expand Urdu language so that it could be used for official purposes (Kalique, 2006). But the practice was different from the theory and English was used as the sole official language regardless of what the Constitution had said (Rahman, 2002). During the Zia regime, English was displaced from its position briefly but the subsequent governments continued using English language as the official medium of communication. Currently it is being used by a relatively small yet influential part of population (Baumgardner, 1993) who continue to use it as a means of
exerting power and controlling resources. On the basis of this, Ghani (2003) declares that English cannot simply be a foreign language in Pakistan. Its status is much more complex. Most of the bilingual speakers use English as a complementary language in company with the regional languages and Urdu.

English in Pakistan serves in various socio-cultural contexts to perform roles relevant and appropriate to the social and educational network of Pakistan. The impact of English is increasing rapidly. So it is pertinent that the attitude of Pakistani users towards English language be explored to find out how the educated class behave towards the ever growing use of English in different contexts in Pakistan. So the present study aims to explore the nature of Pakistanis’ attitude towards English language in a systematic manner. We hypothesise that Pakistanis have negative and positive attitudes towards the use of English language in Pakistan.

3. Methodology

In order to find the validity of our research hypothesis, we have designed a questionnaire. Baker (1988) has raised certain issues about the validity of a questionnaire in obtaining respondents’ opinions. So we have tried to eliminate the margin of error by dividing the questionnaire into two parts. We have also used both the qualitative and quantitative questions to elicit responses so that the responses could be counter checked for validity. The first part educes personal information about the respondents. The second part comprises different statements pertaining to various aspects of attitude towards English. The respondents were asked about the language they preferred to use in different contexts, whether the use of English was a status symbol, marker of education and sophistication, a source of securing better paying jobs, a means to attain social, political or financial power and their acceptance of Pakistani English or a native model etc.

The respondents were then requested to justify their responses and rationalise why they preferred one response over the other. Thus a degree of reliability and validity was achieved by counter checking all the responses.

3.1 Population

The respondents were the students at school, college and university level. One hundred participants took part in the survey. Among those participants, 50 were the university students. 25 of them were students in the English department and the rest belonged to other departments. 25 participants represented the college population and 25 respondents were selected from English medium schools. The selection was random and the only criterion was their student status. All the participants were multilingual and used English, Urdu and Punjabi language with differing proficiency levels. They all belonged to district Faisalabad.
4. Results

The results of the study indicate that Pakistanis’ attitude towards English language follows a certain pattern. When asked if they liked to speak English, 69% respondents agreed and 31% disagreed with the statement. Among those who liked to speak English, 27% claimed that they used it because it was a source of power and the demand of the present day world. 17% respondents said that they liked to use English because of its international status. And among those who disliked English, 13% declared that they were more proficient in Urdu and their mother tongue. So they felt at ease while using local languages. They also thought that English had been imposed on them and it was difficult for them to understand and use English in different contexts.

When the respondents were asked whether the knowledge of English was beneficial for them, 71% responded in the affirmative while 29% negated the statement. Among those who gave positive answers, 27% thought that the knowledge of English could help them secure better paying jobs. Moreover, it was seen as a marker of education. 10% respondents claimed that English was advantageous because of its international status. Those who disagreed with the advantages of learning English argued that the local languages were being sacrificed at the altar of English and it was not possible for everyone to learn English due to lack of exposure and the fact that English was taught formally in the classroom ensured that only a limited class of privileged people had access to it. Since the literacy rate in Pakistan is merely 22% (Ethnologue, 2009), and only 2% can make to the higher education institutes, the situation is exacerbated.

Another interesting discovery is Pakistanis’ preference for the Pakistani accent. 20% respondents prefer to adopt American accent, 24% like the British accent whereas 56% participants favour Pakistani accent. Those who prefer American style claim to like it for the so-called freedom it gives to the language users. Here it is important to mention that a huge majority of language users in Pakistan believe that American English is easier to learn than its British counterpart because ostensibly American English follows no rules of grammar or pronunciation. Those who like the British model do so because they think that the British own English language so their variety of language is the most authentic. Among those who prefer the Pakistani style, 14% respondents give nationalistic reasons. They argue that giving a native colour to English language is a marker of their identity. They further point that the British and the American have adopted distinct styles of speech, why should Pakistanis follow their example and not stick to the individuality and variety that they bring to the English language.
When the respondents were asked if English was a source of enhancing social prestige, 59 % of them agree with the statement and 49 % disagree with this point of view. Among the former, 19 % believe that the use of English attracts more respect and is a potent source of impressing people. 12 % respondents opine that English is the language of the colonizers. That is why it is seen as a prestige marker.

Moreover, 85 % respondents view English language as a marker of education whereas 15 % argue the case in favour of local languages. They claim that Urdu and Punjabi also need to be owned and respected like English.

When it comes to the utility of English in Pakistan, 78 % respondents believe that it is not possible to secure a job without proficiency in English language. While 22 % think that the knowledge of Urdu is equally important to get a job.

39 % respondents opine that the use of English is a status marker. 33 % think that only sometimes English is seen as a status symbol whereas 28 % respondents disagree with the idea. Those who see it as a status symbol argue that it is the language of the elite in Pakistan and a dominant ‘fashion’ in the educated elite. Using English gives a sense of pride and style. But 12 % respondents disagree with the statement and claim that it is just a reflection of Pakistanis’ colonized mentality.

When the reason for the use of English was explored, 85 % respondents came up with the idea that learning and using English is important because it is an international language. 12 % of them state that they use English for academic purposes and to access latest research in their respective fields. The other 15 % respondents think that English is used in Pakistan not because of its international status but only because it is there as a British legacy.

One important question raised here is if the use of English denotes a lack of patriotic sentiment among Pakistanis. Interestingly, 30 % respondents agree with the statement and 70 % claim that the use of English is in no way an indicator of one’s patriotism. English is used merely due to practical reasons and it has nothing to do with sentiments, patriotic or not.

The respondents’ opinions regarding the status of Pakistani English were also sought. 78 % respondents agree that Pakistani English is a separate variety while 22 % disagree with this point of view. Among those who think of Pakistani English as a variety, 21 % argue that it is different in pronunciation, accent, culture and its emphasis on over correct use of grammar, hence a separate variety in its own right.

The counter question to the previous one asks the respondents about the degree of similarity between Pakistani and the Standard English language. Here the standard as in British or American has not been
specified. 44% respondents think that Pakistani English is less than 50 percent similar to the standard variety, 33% believe that it is about 50 percent similar whereas only 9 percent claim that it is 70 percent similar and 14% think that Pakistani English is more than 70 percent similar with the standard variety of English language. The implications of these findings are discussed in the following section.

5. Findings

The results show that Pakistanis’ attitude towards English is dispersed along the positive-negative continuum. Overall results indicate that 40% respondents favour the use of English in all contexts and domains such as family, friends, educational institutions and offices. While the rest of the 60% respondents do not like the widespread use of English they are forced to accept it as a necessary evil. They tolerate it only because of its significance at international level. These respondents advocate the cause of local languages and assert that English should not be promoted at the cost of native languages. They feel that English clashes with their national identity which is best reflected through the local languages. Still they view it as indispensable and argue that English should be restricted to the official use only and the local languages should be promoted in all other contexts. The survey indicates that the majority of Pakistanis accept English as a language of opportunities, a status symbol and marker of education as well as necessary for survival in international community.

An overwhelming majority also thinks that Pakistani English is a separate variety best suited for expression and creativity. Moreover, since most of the Pakistanis do not come into contact with the foreigners and do not have to travel abroad, Pakistani English can best fulfil their needs of intra-cultural communication. However, Crystal (1988) has raised an interesting issue in this regard. He claims that the English speaking communities do acknowledge that a language should reflect their own experiences. Yet many of them are of the view that there should be one universally intelligible model of English which is accepted as standard by one and all. The term World English is based on the same idea.

6. Conclusion

In the light of these findings, it is clear that Pakistanis acknowledge the international status of English. They believe that English is a means to access power and maintain status quo in society. It is also a symbol of prestige and a language aggressively promoted in society. The majority of the respondents also think that English is mandatory to secure desirable jobs. Their attitudes towards English range from tolerated to highly promoted language. The identification of these attitudes is highly significant as it has pedagogical
implications and is also helpful for policy makers. The identification and acknowledgment of Pakistani English as a variety will help teachers and learners to come to terms with the locally used forms of English. It has far reaching implications ranging from curriculum planning to syllabus designing and covering the evaluation criteria as well. It will also help the linguistic community decide whether English in Pakistan enjoys the status of second or foreign language. As Baker (1988) points out the shift in attitude towards a language marks a shift in the social status of that language, it is important for us to determine the status of English in Pakistan as it may help us propose strategies and formulate pedagogical plans as well as select appropriate language teaching methodologies.


