

ENGLISH PROBLEMATIC CONSONANTS FOR PASHTO SPEAKERS**Ghani Rehman**University of Azad Jammu
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PAKISTANnhb67@hotmail.com**ABSTRACT**

The present study aims to look into the problems faced by Pashto speakers, while learning English. The study particularly focuses on the pronunciation of English consonants, which are not found in Pashto phonemic inventory. It further looks into the role of L1 in the pronunciation of the target English consonants. The study identifies that five English consonants namely, the labio-dental voiceless fricative /f/, the labiodentals voiced fricative /v/, the dental voiceless fricative /θ/, the dental voiced fricative /ð/ and the post-alveolar voiced fricative /ʒ/ are problematic for Pashto speakers. The study further shows that these consonants are replaced by L1 sounds: 1) English labio dental fricative /f, v/ are pronounced as bilabial voiceless stop /p/ and bilabial approximant /w/; 2) English dental fricatives /θ, ð/ are replaced by dental stops /t, d /; 3) palatal voiced fricative /ʒ/ is replaced by palato-alveolar voiced affricate /dʒ/. It is suggested that English language learners with Pashto background should be properly trained to acquire correct English pronunciation.

Keywords: acquisition, retroflex

INTRODUCTION

English language learning has been the main concern of so many studies, but most of the studies have not always taken into account the background knowledge of the mother tongue of L2 learners. Similarities among languages help the learners and differences hinder their L2 learning (Catherine and Long 2003). Although each language has subsystems (phonetics, phonology, morphology, syntax) where transfer from L1 may be realized, but the widespread transfer is conceded in phonetics and phonology in contrast to morphology and syntax (Dulay, Burt & Krashan 1982). Moreover, there are ways to measure the ease or difficulty that learners have with each system of language, which may be applied for L2 learning as a whole (Leather & James 1996, Odlin 1989). The similarities and differences between languages (the target language and any other language which one has acquired previously) influence the overall performance level of learners in learning the target language (Odlin 1989).

Pashto has about forty to fifty million speakers. It is spoken in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran as a native language. It is spoken in the Afghan portion of Afghanistan (Hallberg 1992, Penzle 1955). It is the official language of Afghanistan today besides Dari. It is the provincial language in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK) province of Pakistan. Pashto has the following five major dialects:

- (1) Norht-Eastern (Yusuzia) Dialect
- (2) Norht-Western (Central) Dialect
- (3) South-Eastern (Quetta) Dialect
- (4) South-Western (Kandahar) Dialect
- (5) Middle Tribal Dialect

LITERATURE REVIEW

Languages have different accents: they are pronounced differently, people from different geographical place, from different social classes, of different ages and different educational backgrounds (Roach, 2000).

Ur (2000) explains the following three pronunciation errors:

- A particular sound may not exist in the mother tongue, the learner tends to substitute it with the nearest equivalent he or she knows.
- A sound does exist in the mother tongue, but not as a separate phoneme: that is to say, the learner does not perceive it as a distinct sound that makes a difference to meaning.
- The learners have the actual sounds right, but have not learnt the stress patterns of the word or group of words, or they are using an intonation from their mother tongue which is inappropriate to the target language. The result is a foreign-sounding accent, and possibly misunderstanding.

In addition to above discussed factors, lacking of opportunity to practice English pronunciation is the main problem in learning correct English pronunciation. Haymes (2000) suggests that the success in learning and teaching English depends on students' ability and exposure. Biyaem (1997) discusses the following factors in pronunciation errors:

- Interference from the mother tongue particularly in pronunciation, syntax, and idiomatic usage.
- Lack of opportunity to use English in their daily lives.
- Unchallenging English lessons.
- Being passive learners
- Being too shy to speak English with classmates.
- Lack of responsibility for their own learning.

With regard to the influence of mother tongue, Moulton (1962) makes a contrastive study of English and German and classified the 12 segmental errors into four categories: Phonemic errors, phonetic errors, allophonic errors and distributional errors. Moulton errors taxonomy based on CA helped German teachers to understand not only how these pronunciation errors are made, but also why they were made.

Swan and Smith (2001) give a practical reference guide to teachers who have to deal with specific phonological problems of students from twenty three different language backgrounds. They expected that the comparison between English and the relevant features of the students own languages would help teachers to predict and understand the problems their students have. Nilsen and Nilsen (2002) also provide phonetic descriptions and list of predicted problems based on first languages in order to help to minimize difficulties to students from different backgrounds.

The knowledge of phonetics and phonology of English is necessary for all those who want to know the principles regarding the correct use of English speech sounds. It is important to learn English pronunciation in terms of phonemes rather than letters of the alphabet, because of the confusing nature of English spelling (Peter Roach 2000). The accent that is used as a model for foreign learners is Received Pronunciation (BBC Pronunciation). It is the accent that has been used as the basis for textbooks and pronunciation dictionaries and so is described in more detail than other accents of

English (Peter Roach 2000). Thus by English throughout this study, we mean Received Pronunciation or BBC English.

The following section gives the comparison of the consonantal system of two the languages.

English Consonants

There are twenty four English consonant phonemes in RP. Table 1 shows these consonant phonemes.

Table 1. English Consonant phonemes (adapted from Roach, 1983)

	Bilabial	Labio-dental	Dental	Alveolar	Plato-alveolar	Palatal	Velar	Glottal
Plosive	p b			t d			k g	
Fricative		f v	θ ð	s z	ʃ ʒ			h
Affricate					tʃ dʒ			
Nasal	m			n			ŋ	
Lateral				l				
Tap				r				
Approximant	w					j		

Pashto Consonants

Different authors on various dialects of Pashto have identified different number of consonant phonemes. The following table shows the consonant sounds identified in Yuzafzai dialect of Pashto.

Table 2. Pashto consonant phonemes of Yuzafzai dialect.

	bilabial	dental	alveolar	retroflex	Post-alveolar	palatal	velar	uvular	glottal
Plosives	p b	ʈ ɖ		ʈ ɖ			k g	q	
Fricative s			s z		ʃ		x ɣ		h
Affricate s					tʃ dʒ				
Nasals	m		n	ŋ			ŋ		
Lateral			l						
Trill			r						
Flap				ɽ					
Glides	w					j			

The comparison shows that five Pashto phonemes /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/, /ʒ/ are not found in Pashto. So the focus of the study is these English consonant phonemes, which are not found in Pashto language.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Subjects

Fifteen Pashto speakers participated in this study. They all were the native speakers of Pashto (Yusafzai dialect). Their age ranges from 17- 30 years. They were selected randomly from five different colleges of KPK. Three participants were chosen from each college. In all these institutions English was taught as a compulsory subject. They learnt English as a compulsory subject for ten years. Some of these participants had very sound background knowledge of English language. The sample represents nearly all the major areas of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa where Yusafzai dialect is spoken.

Stimuli

A list of words containing the five target English phonemes /f, v, θ, ð, ʒ/ word initially, medially and finally was prepared and given to subjects for recording. They words containing target sounds were given tom participants in carrier sentence. All the words were recorded in 'He _____ a book. The word having the target phoneme was preceded and followed by a vowel in order to help us determine the boundary of the word.

Data Collection and analysis procedure

The participants were given the list of words containing the target consonants. They pronounced the target words in carrier sentences thrice. They were recorded by using microphone on laptop by using PRAAT software. The microphone used had a frequency response of 50 Hz to 18 kHz. The data was analyzed acoustically with the help of spectrograms. The selected consonants were then observed through spectrograms and their manner of articulation was specified. The five problematic consonants were identified in words at initial, medial and final positions. Sixteen participants had to pronounce the five consonants at three positions of the word. So the recorded sounds for our observation are $5 \times 2 \times 3 \times 16 = 480$.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results show the correct occurrence of consonant sounds that Pashto learners pronounce at initial, medial and final position as follows:

Labio-dental fricatives /f, v/

The pronunciation of /f/

Table 3. Pronunciation of English consonant /f/at different positions of the word

Pronunciation of /f/	Number of occurrences by different speakers at different positions of the word.		
	Word initial position	Word medial position	Word final position
/p/	86	90	90

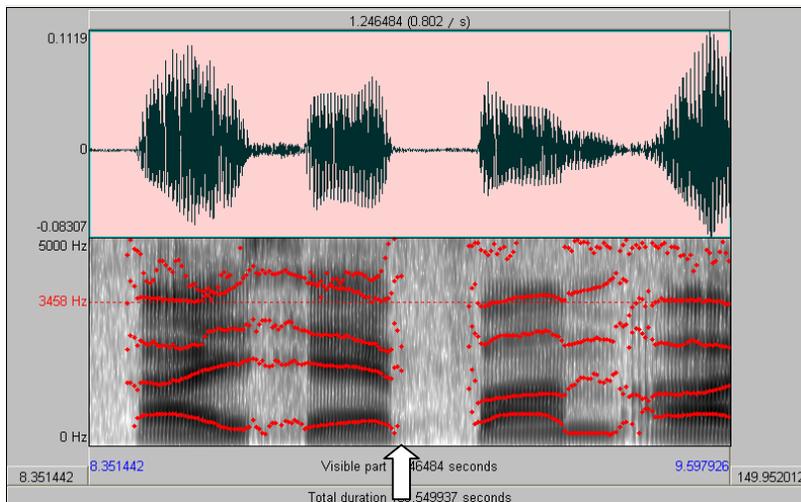


Figure 1: Pronunciation of English consonant /f/ as /p/.

The pronunciation of /v/

Table 4. Pronunciation of English consonant /v/ at different positions of the word

Pronunciation of /v/	Number of occurrences by different speakers at different positions of the word.		
	Word initial position	Word medial position	Word final position
/w/	85	90	90

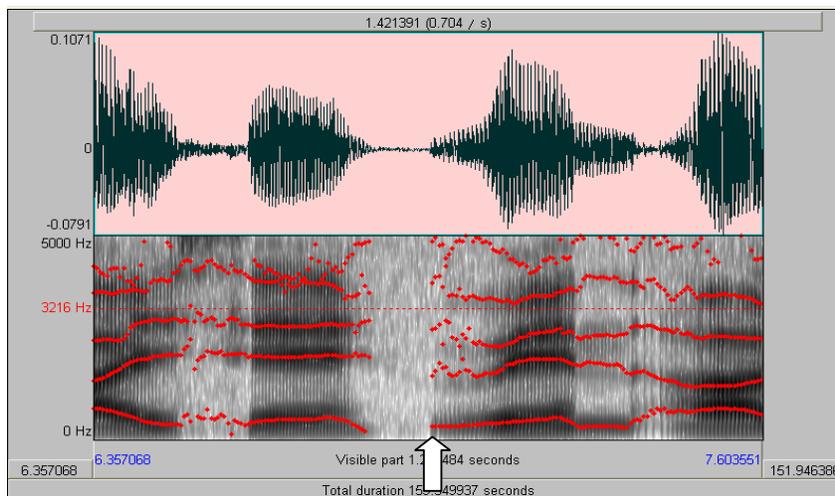


Figure 2: Pronunciation of English consonant /v/ as /w/.

The pronunciation of labio-dental voiceless fricative /f/ as bilabial voiceless stop /p/ by Pashto speakers shows that there is no labio-dental voiceless fricative in Pashto. Only one of the participants pronounced it as correct at the word initial positions, but pronounced it incorrect at medial and final positions. The same results were observed in the pronunciation of the labio-dental voiced fricative pronounced as glide /w/. Even this pronunciation as a glide was not like English glide, but the glide found in Pashto, where the lips are not rounded. Because of this the labio-dental voiced fricative seemed to a noisy bilabial /w/.

Dental fricatives /θ, ð/

The pronunciation of /θ/

Table 5. Pronunciation of English consonant /θ/at different positions of the word

Pronunciation of /θ/	Number of occurrences by different speakers at different positions of the word.		
	Word initial position	Word medial position	Word final position
/t/	90	90	90

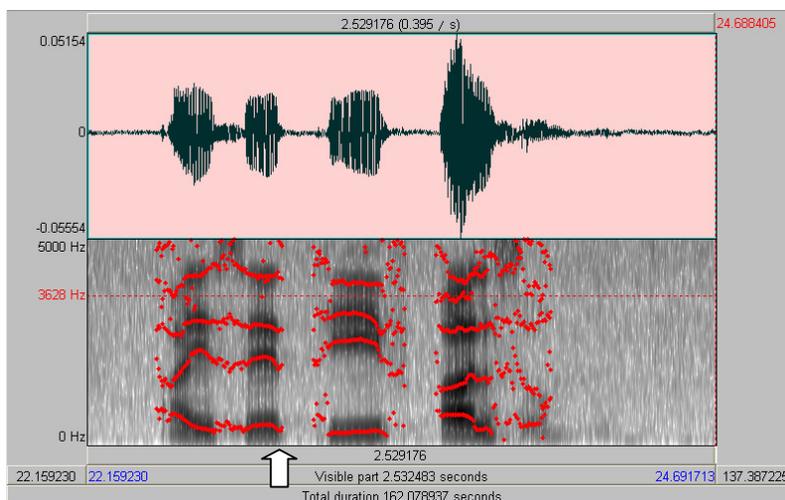


Figure 3: Pronunciation of English consonant /θ/ as /t/.

The pronunciation of /ð/

Table 6. Pronunciation of English consonant /ð/ at different positions of the word

Pronunciation of /ð/	Number of occurrences by different speakers at different positions of the word.		
	Word initial position	Word medial position	Word final position
/d/	90	90	90

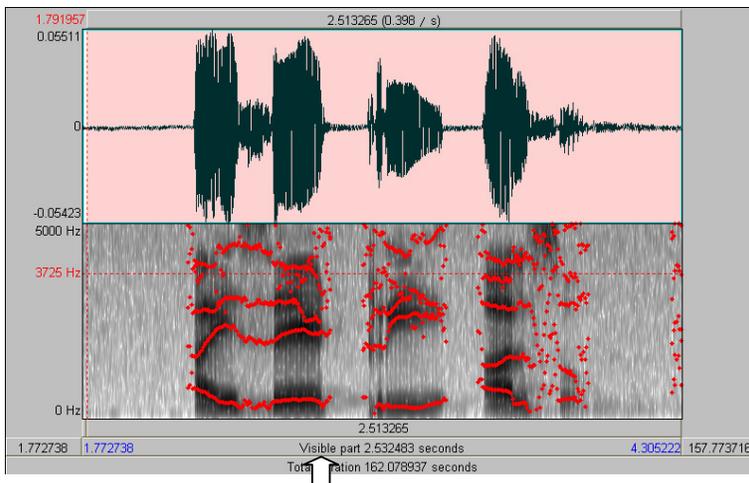


Figure 4: Pronunciation of English consonant /ð/ as /d/.

The pronunciation of the dental voiceless fricative was observed to be really the pronunciation of Pashto dental voiceless stop. Pashto has no labial and dental fricatives, as discussed above, so these sounds are pronounced like equivalent labial and dental stops found in Pashto similar to the dental stops found in Southern Irish English (Davenport and Hannahs 1998). Most probably Pashto speakers would hear these sounds as stops, but that needs further study to verify. The dental voiced fricative was pronounced as dental voiceless stop by some of the participants, because of the orthography of the sounds written with ‘th’ which they pronounced as dental voiceless stop if the words were not very familiar to them. But those who had more background knowledge of English pronounced it as dental voiced stop, but they too, did not pronounce it as dental voiced fricative

The pronunciation of /ʒ/

Table 7. Pronunciation of English consonant /ʒ/ at different positions of the word

Pronunciation of /ʒ/	Number of occurrences by different speakers at different positions of the word.		
	Word initial position	Word medial position	Word final position
/dʒ/	87	82	87

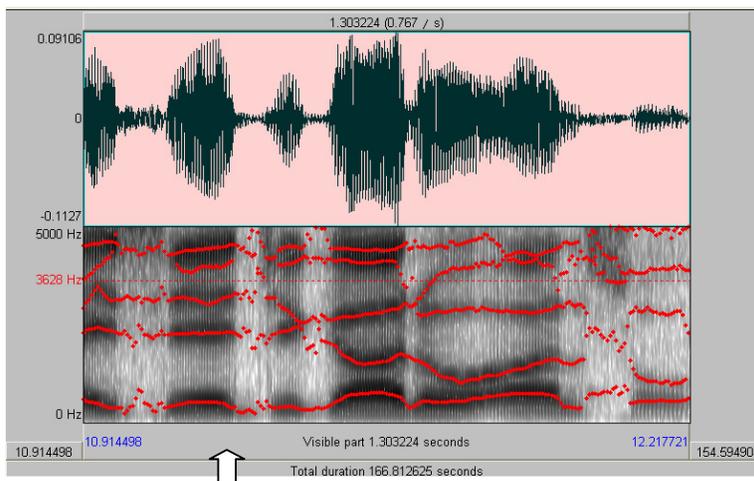


Figure 4: Pronunciation of English consonant /ʒ/ as /dʒ/.

The post-alveolar voiced fricative /w/ was pronounced like a post-alveolar voiced affricate of English. But the pronunciation of this consonant sound as velar voiced stop by some of the participant, because of the confusing spelling of the selected words along with unfamiliarity of these words for most of the participants. Only two of the participants were familiar with correct pronunciation, who pronounced the sounds correctly. If the L2 learners are familiar with correct L1 pronunciation, only then they can pronounce the sounds of the target language correctly.

Tables 8 and 9 below show the percentage of number of occurrences of the correct pronunciation at all the three positions and percentage of number of occurrences of the consonants as a whole respectively.

Table 8. Percentage (%) of number of the occurrences of correct pronunciation at initial, medial and final positions.

	ʒ	f	v	θ	ð
Initial	3.12%	6.25%	6.25%	0 %	0 %
Medial	9.37%	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %
Final	3.12%	0 %	0 %	0 %	0 %

The percentage of number of occurrences of the consonants as a whole

Table 9. Percentage of number of the occurrences of correct pronunciation

	ʒ	f	v	θ	ð
Percentage occurrences (%)	5.20	2.08	2.08	0	0

The above results illustrate that the English consonants sounds, which are not present in Pashto create problems for Pashto speakers. The study further shows that target sounds are replaced by the native Pashto sounds with same place of articulation, but with different manner of articulation. The whole discussion is summarized in table below:

Table 10: Findings of the present study

English Consonants	ʒ	f	v	θ	ð
Pronunciation by Pashto Speakers	↓ dʒ	↓ p	↓ w	↓ t	↓ d

The results of the present study indicate that Pashto speakers had problems while pronouncing the selected English consonants correctly. This difficulty is because of the phonological differences of

both the systems. That is why most of the participants have pronounced these English consonant sounds like Pashto consonant sounds.

CONCLUSION

It is evident from the above discussion that Pashto speakers mispronounce the five English consonants that are not found in Pashto and replace them with Pashto sounds.

- Labio-dental voiceless fricative /f/ is replaced by bilabial voiceless stop /p/
- Labio-dental voiced fricative /v/ is replaced by bilabial approximant /w/
- Dental voiceless fricative /θ/ is replaced by dental voiceless stop /t̪/.
- Dental voiced fricative /ð/ is replaced by dental voiced fricative /d̪/.
- Palatal voiced fricative /ʒ/ is replaced by palate-alveolar voiced affricate /dʒ/.

The acoustic analysis of the target sounds shows that English consonants that are not found in Pashto are replaced by the nearest consonants with same place of articulation irrespective of manners. The study overall concludes the English pronunciation of Pashto speakers is affected by the phonological gap between the two systems and they try to adjust target sounds according to their L1. The study suggests that the Pashto speakers of English should be properly trained in this area to acquire correct pronunciation.

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