

PAKISTANI UNIVERSITY STUDENT'S ATTITUDES TOWARD BRITISH, AMERICAN, AND PAKISTANI ENGLISH ACCENTS: EVIDENCE FROM A VERBAL-GUISE STUDY

Iram Hussain

MPhil scholar, University of education

Gmail iramhussain156@gmail.com

Miss Sidra Bukhari

Lecturer, University of Education Bank Road Campus

Gmail sidra.bukhari@ue.edu.pk

Tayabba Yasmin

Associate Professor, University of Education Bank Road Campus

Gmail tayyaba.yasmin@ue.edu.pk

Syeda Ayesha Siddiqua

Forman Christian College (A Chartered University)

Gmail syedaayeshasiddiqua91@gmail.com

Abstract

This study seeks to investigate the attitudes of Pakistani university students toward the British English (Received Pronunciation), American English (General American), and Pakistani English accents. This study examines how speakers of these three accents are evaluated in terms of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, likability, and to explore the acceptability of Pakistani English as a legitimate variety. Data were collected from 100 Pakistani university students through the Verbal-Guise Technique (VGT). These students listened to speech samples of the three accent varieties and filled a structured questionnaire. The validity of the instrument was confirmed through expert review, pilot testing and analysis of the data. The data were analyzed descriptively in Jamovi to explore differences in participants' ratings. Overall, it was found that all three accents were rated positively. American English received the highest ratings for competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. Pakistani English received positive evaluations especially regarding competence and trustworthiness; British English received good ratings across all dimensions. The finding shows native English accents still command overt prestige but Pakistani English as a competent, trustworthy and socially acceptable variety is increasingly gaining recognition. According to the research of language attitudes and World Englishes generally held in Pakistan, the study shows a gradual shift away from exclusive reliance on native-speaker norms toward increased acceptance of localized varieties of English in the context of Pakistan.

Keywords: Pakistani English, British English, American English, Verbal-Guise Technique, World Englishes, Language attitudes, University students.

Introduction

English is important for global communication. It finds extensive use in education, research, technology, diplomacy and international trade. The use of English is increasing worldwide and its spread has led to the creation of variational forms in different parts of the world based on the socio-political, historical and cultural contexts there (Jenkins, 2022; Kirkpatrick, 2021). English is now seen as a pluricentric language with many legitimate varieties, and not only one based on norms of native-speaker norms (Crystal, 2019; Graddol, 2020).

Even with the recognition of having many languages in our communities, there exists an accent hierarchy. British Received Pronunciation (RP) and General American (GA) English are often viewed as the models of accuracy and fluency while accented or non-native varieties are commonly associated with lower authority, intelligence and professionalism (Tsang, 2024). According to Lippi-Green (2012), and Preston (2019), accent is one of the most important markers of social evaluation and interpersonal communication. For instance, the accent can influence perceptions of personality, education, competence as well as social status. Assessments of 'grammar' of one language against another reflect social ideologies rather than purely linguistic consideration.

In Pakistan, higher education, government, and the legal system principally use the English language. After independence, Urdu was accepted as a national language of the country but English retained its institutional power and still serves as an important instrument of power as well as social mobility (Mahboob, 2021; Rahman, 2020). In higher education, students' English proficiency impacts their academic identities and opportunities. In many cases, an accent is used as an indicator of intelligence, competence, and social background of a person with whom one interacts. According to (Dragojevic & Giles, 2021), this serves as an important consideration in educational institutions. Even when varieties of English are used locally, learner ambitions and perceptions of legitimacy remain influenced by native-speaker norms.

The World Englishes framework recognizes Pakistani English as a valid Outer Circle variety developed through prolonged institutional use and contact with local languages (Kachru, 1992). Pakistani English serves the communication purposes of the professional, administrative, educational and media functions as a stable and functional variety (Fareed & Bibi, 2025). However, attitudes towards Pakistani English are influenced by British and American comparison, hence regularly regarded its social and linguistic value (Shakeel & Rauf, 2024).

Previous research on language attitudes demonstrates that listeners often form attitudes to speakers along various social and psychological dimensions. Competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability are among the most frequently examined dimensions. These dimensions have been commonly applied in language attitude research to analyze how listeners evaluate speakers of different language varieties and accents. Together, these dimensions provide a comprehensive framework for examining accent-based social evaluations. Furthermore, most existing studies focus on a limited number of evaluative dimensions or examine only native and non-native accent contrasts. Consequently, there remains limited evidence regarding how Pakistani university students evaluate British, American, and Pakistani English accents across the dimensions of competence, prestige, trustworthiness and likability.

In order to address this gap, the present study investigates Pakistani university students' perceptions of British, American and Pakistani English accents using the Verbal-Guise technique (VGT). Specifically, the study examines how Pakistani university students evaluate these accent varieties across the dimensions of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. By comparing native English accents with a localized English variety within a single research design, the study contributes to ongoing discussion on language attitudes research and the field of World Englishes.

Research Objectives

1. To investigate Pakistani university students' attitudes towards British (Received Pronunciation), American (General American), and Pakistani English.
2. To compare students' evaluations of these three accents in terms of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability.

Research Questions

1. What are Pakistani university students' attitudes towards British (RP), American (GA), and Pakistani English?
2. How do Pakistani university students evaluate these three English accents in terms of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability?

Literature review

English spread internationally and, as a consequence, many regional varieties emerged due to sociocultural contexts. Each of these varieties is closely linked to the history and culture identity of the community in which it is in use. The different traits and characteristics of Indian English, as suggested by the author Judy Kwok, are considered legitimate languages on their own and not mere variations of English. As per the study (Mahboob, 2021; Shahid et al., 2024), English is linguistically complex in Pakistan. It works as a top-tier lingua franca linked to advanced education, employment, and social stratification. Further, it is localized through interactions with Urdu and other native languages.

World Englishes and Pakistani English

English serves as a source for education, migration, and identity in the world. Historically, English spread through colonialism. However, now it is used in creative and purposeful ways by varying societies. As noted earlier by scholars of World Englishes (Jenkins, 2020; Kachru, 2021), English is no longer property of its native speakers today, but instead forms a plural dynamic of variants deeply influenced by the sociocultural contexts of particular regions.

This shift has prompted researchers to investigate the development of localized varieties like Indian English or Pakistani English in response to the communicative needs of their users.

The term “World Englishes” has gained increasing prominence over the last few decades as academics have claimed the English variety spoken in Asia, Africa and other parts of the world are as genuine as British or American English and represent correct linguistic systems reflecting local identities rather than deficient versions of the former two (Schneider, 2020; Jenkins, 2020). A significant amount of work was done between 2020 and 2024 to support this. Local Englishes have phonological, lexical and syntactic patterns consistent (i.e. all three levels work in concert) which reflect social reality, Jenkin (2020). In a similar way, However, notwithstanding this scholarly shift, quite a few educational systems including that of Pakistan continue to model curriculum, pronunciation norms and teacher training programs on inner circle standards in spite of scholarly movement (Mehboob, 2021; Hameed, 2023). This gap between theory and practice is strongly reflected in how Pakistani students perceive their own accent.

Pakistani English (PakE) is now recognized as a legitimate variety of English within the growing group of World Englishes. Many people who study languages have written about Pakistani English in the last few years. According to recent research by Mahboob (2021), Pakistani English is a stable and developing variety influenced by the history of Pakistan, local goals and the Urdu phonology. Rasul and Akhtar (2022) argue that Pakistani English has developed distinctive phonological, lexical and rhythmic features, which is connected to the culture of Pakistan. In the meantime, Shamim (2023) contends that English is used by Pakistanis as a symbol of contemporary identity in addition to academic and professional contexts.

Yet, despite this academic support, Pakistani speakers often internalize the idea that their accent is inferior or “less correct” compared to British and American English (Ali & Perveen, 2023). This internal conflict forms both linguistic insecurity and accent preferences, which are central issues of the Present research.

Native-Speakerism and Accent Prestige

In many Asian nations, including Pakistan, native-speakerism is an ideology that positions native English speakers as the ideal linguistic model, and remains prevalent (Park & Sung, 2022). Teaching resources, assessment methods and programs to prepare teachers that maintain inner circle norms all serve to confirm this way of thinking. Various studies conducted between 2020 and 2024 have confirmed this claim that learners’ self-esteem, identity, and linguistic behavior are significantly influenced by native-speakerism . Recent studies indicate that native-speaker ideology continues to shape learners’ perceptions of linguistic competence and prestige despite growing recognition of World Englishes (Halliday, 2020; Wang, 2022; Shahid et al., 2024).

Accent prestige is an important concept in sociolinguistics research and is essential to understanding how speakers assess different English firms. Labov’s (1966, 1972) fundamental distinction between overt and covert prestige. The concepts of overt and covert prestige remain central to language attitude research. Overt prestige refers to the socially recognized value associated with ‘standard’ or native accents, which are generally regarded as more competent, trustworthy, and professional. The research often rates British and American English accents (Gulzar at al., 2021; Kang, 2021) more favorably in these respects. On the other hand, covert prestige relates to the hidden value of one’s identity, solidarity, or culture. Although students may publicly pretend to prefer native accents, research in Pakistan found that Pakistani English is also considerably valued by students as representative of local identity and belonging (Ali & Perveen, 2023; Hallo et al., 2024).

Accents frequently serve as important social cues and attitudes towards accents have been widely researched. They can provide information about a speakers' background, identity, degree of education, and even perceived character. Although the world is becoming increasingly interconnected, recent sociolinguistics research (2020-2024) from Asia, Europe and Africa frequently shows that accents continue to carry strong social meanings. Various studies highlight that in several contexts native English accents continued to be the most positively evaluated varieties. Studies conducted in Japan, China, and Korea indicate that British and American English accents continue to enjoy higher prestige, while acceptance of localized English varieties is gradually increasing.

Previous Studies on Accent Evaluations

Accent Ideologies in South Asia

These findings are consistent with the result of previous research in South Asia that British and American English accents are associated with competence, accuracy, professionalism, and global mobility, whereas local varieties are appreciated for cultural identity and authenticity (Bhatt, 2022; Fernando, 2023).

Accent Attitudes in Pakistan

Perception of Pakistani English and native accents has been examined by several scholars in recent years; a complicated and frequently contradicting picture has emerged. Recent studies have also repeatedly demonstrated that many Pakistani learners still view American and British accents as having greater prestige: University students showed a strong preference for native accents (Gulzar et al., 2021). According to Shahid et al. (2024) students thought their own Pakistani English dialect was 'less' prestigious, even if they claimed to use it on a daily basis. These findings reveal a tension between international prestige and local linguistic identity among Pakistan learners.

Methodological Approaches in Accent Attitude Research

In research on accent attitudes, researchers usually examined listeners' attitudes towards various speech varieties. Two approaches have been utilized in the interval from 2020 and 2024, namely Verbal-guise Technique and Matched-guise Technique.

Matched-guise Technique:

The matched-guise technique was originally developed by Lambert et al. (1960). With this approach, the same speaker reads the identical text in different accents, and the listeners are then asked to evaluate each "guise" of the text without realizing that the speaker is the same. Although it provides experimental control, concerns have been raised regarding authenticity and speaker performance effects (Lambert et al., 1960; Dragojevic & Giles 2016). However, because of the above-mentioned problems, the majority of research has moved away from matched-guise throughout the years.

Verbal-Guise Technique

Verbal-guise technique is a technique of using several real speakers, each in his or her own real accent. VGT has been widely adopted in recent language attitude research because it uses authentic speakers and produces more natural evaluations. This technique is adopted in the present study, which includes three authentic recordings (Pakistani English, British RP, and American GA).

Utilizing Questionnaires and Rating scales

Recent studies commonly employ Likert-scale questionnaires to measure dimensions such competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. Rating scales can be used to lessen bias, which makes it possible to employ statistical methods like factor analysis or reliability test (McKenzie & Gilmore, 2021; Fermamdo, 2023).

Research Gap

Despite growing recognition of World Englishes and languages attitudes, several gaps remain. First, although Pakistani English has gained recognition as a legitimate variety, relatively few studies systematically compared attitudes of Pakistani English, American English and British English within a single research design. Second, while language attitude research has increasingly adopted more authentic methods of data collection, the use of Verbal-Guise Technique (VGT) remains limited in the Pakistani context. Many earlier studies has relied primarily on surveys and the matched-guise approaches, which may not fully capture listeners' real-time evaluations of natural occurring speech.

Third, existing Pakistani studies have often examined only selected aspects of accent evaluations, such as prestige or preference. There is limited empirical evidence regarding how Pakistani university students simultaneously evaluate British English, American English, and Pakistani English across multiple social dimensions, including competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. To address these gaps, the present study employs the Verbal-Guise Technique (VGT) to investigate Pakistani university students' attitudes toward British English, American English, and Pakistani English. By examining evaluations across the dimensions of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likeability, the study contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of accent attitudes within the framework of World Englishes.

Methodology

Research Design and Approach

This study uses a quantitative survey-experimental research design and the Verbal-Guise Technique (VGT) to examine the attitudes of Pakistani university students towards different English accents. Quantitative methods are particularly suitable for language-attitude research because attitudes can be measured, compared, and statistically analyzed by means of a set of standardized instruments (McKenzie & Gilmore, 2021; Li & Wei, 2022). The verbal-guise technique enables the researcher to separate accent as the major variable. This method is frequently applied in sociolinguistics and World Englishes research to analyze perception of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and social solidarity associated with different varieties of English (Dragojevic & Giles, 2016; Telo, Speelman, & Geeraerts, 2024).

Participants and Population

The study is conducted on a target population which includes public and private Pakistani universities students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The students of the university were selected because they are frequent users of English in academic, professional, and social domains and are therefore highly relevant to research on accent attitudes and identity formation studies (Rahman, 2020; Khan, 2021).

Materials and Instruments

Three sets of audio recordings, each representing a different variety of English, were presented to participants: British English (Received Pronunciation), American English (General American) were produced by using the Natural Reader test-to-speech (TTS) in order to achieve the same pronunciation and delivery of speech. A senior university student who recorded the Pakistani English that is commonly heard in academic situations. The same script was used in all recordings to minimize lexical and grammatical variation. Although the British and American English recordings were generated using a test-to-speech system and the Pakistani English recording was produced by a human speaker, all recordings employed the same script and a comparable speech rate to minimize variation unrelated to accent. This approach was adopted to enhance consistency across stimuli while ensuring accessibility and representativeness of the selected accent varieties.

Sampling Technique and sample size

A stratified random sampling technique was used to ensure representation across key demographic variables, including gender, level of study (undergraduate/postgraduate), academic background and socioeconomic background. The sampling technique has been used in previous research to ensure balanced representation across key demographic variables (e.g., gender, educational level, and socioeconomic background) in survey-based studies of attitudes and perceptions (Daraz, A., et al., 2025). A sample size of 100 participants was considered adequate for descriptive and comparative statistical analysis in language attitude research and is comparable to verbal-guise and matched-guise studies in similar contexts.

Instrument Validation and Pilot study

To ensure the accuracy, reliability, and validity of the research instrument, a systematic multi-step validation process was executed, following established guidelines for questionnaire development (Dörnyei, 20007; Taherdoost, 2016). This process included expert review by linguistics teachers, pilot testing with a small group of university students, and refinement of items based on feedback, ensuring

that the questionnaire effectively captured participant's attitudes towards British, American, and Pakistani English accents.

Before the pilot testing of the questionnaire, expert faculty members from related departments completed a content validity check to access all items included in the research instrument. Three experts in the fields of applied, sociolinguistics, language education or research methodology were selected. Each expert has experience related to construction of questions and validation of questionnaire or research related to language attitudes and accents. The content validation rating form was developed and sent to the experts, where they have to rate each item through a four-point relevance scale-1=not relevant, 2=somewhat relevant, 3=quite relevant, and 4=highly relevant. Open-ended sections for qualitative feedback and suggestions were also included.

To assure the clarity, reliability, and functionality of the research instrument, a pilot survey was conducted. A sample size of 20-30 Pakistani university students, matching the target population, was used in the pilot sample. The procedure included exposure of the subjects to three audio clips representing British, American and Pakistani English accents. After that, they were given a questionnaire that tried to measure these feelings of perceived competence, trustworthiness, prestige, likability. On the bases of following pilot testing, based on participant feedback and statistical analyses (including reliability using Cronbach's alpha), modification was applied to improve item wording and clarity. The revised instrument was then just used in the main study.

Reliability Analysis

After the pilot study in making sure that the research instrument is accurate and consistent the researchers went ahead to examine their reliability. Internal consistency was assessed using Cronbach's alpha. The reliability coefficient indicated strong internal consistency of all four constructs: competence ($\alpha=0.902$), trustworthiness ($\alpha=0.811$), prestige ($\alpha=0.857$), and likability ($\alpha=0.852$). These values exceed the recommended 0.70 values, indicating satisfactory reliability of the instrument (Taber, 2018). Because the study relied on self-reported ratings collected in a single session, inter-rater reliability and test-retest reliability were not applicable.

Table 1

Reliability Statistics of Questionnaire Constructs

Construct	Number of Items	Cronbach's alpha
Competence	3	0.902
Trustworthiness	3	0.811
Prestige	3	0.857
Likability	3	0.852

Construct Validity

Construct validity was examined through Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) using principle factoring with Varimax rotation in Jamovi. The Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin test of sampling adequacy ($KMO=0.708$) and Bartlett's Test of Sphericity ($\chi^2 = 504$, $df = 153$, $p < 0.001$) were used to evaluate the sampling. From the analysis two factors with eigenvalues greater than 1 were obtained representing 63.3% of the total variance. Most questionnaire items demonstrated substantial factor loadings above 0.60, indicating satisfactory construct validity. These findings indicate that the instrument was able to capture the intended dimensions of accent attitudes fairly well.

Table 2
Exploratory Factor Analysis Results

Indicator	Value
KMO Measure of Sampling Adequacy	0.708
Bartlett's Test χ^2	504
Df	153
p-value	$p < 0.001$
Extraction Method	Principle Axis factoring
Rotation Method	Varimax
Number of Factors Retained	2
Variance Explained (Factor 1)	42.1%
Variance Explained (Factor 2)	21.2%
Total Variance Explained	63.3%

Ethical Considerations

This research follows the accepted ethical standards in order to ensure that the research is conducted with respect, transparency, confidentiality, and protection of participants' rights during the research process. All of the participants were explained about the purpose of the research, the listening tasks, questionnaire format, estimated time required and their right to withdraw at any stage without penalty. Secondly, we gave the highest level of confidentiality and anonymity. The participants were not requested to give their names, registration number, or institutional identities. Third, the development and the utilization of audio stimuli to the use of verbal Guise experiment were accorded special ethical attention. The recording of British and American English accents was done on a Natural Reader tool. The Pakistani English recording was provided by a volunteer university student who consented to the use of recording for research purposes. Finally, data analysis and reporting were done in an ethically responsible manner. Ethical responsibility of the results reporting is not biased or selective reporting of data. The findings are presented in a way that is not biased or selective, and represents the truth in an accurate and objective way.

Data Collection Procedure

Data was collected from 100 Pakistani university students enrolled in undergraduate and postgraduate programs. The participants were recruited with the help of university contacts and explained by objectives of the study before participation. The participants listened to three audio recordings that represented British English (Received Pronunciation), American English (General American) and Pakistani English. Lexical and grammatical variation was controlled by using the same script for all recordings. Upon hearing each recording, participants filled out a questionnaire regarding competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. After gathering all responses, each response was sorted and coded carefully to enable the preparation of statistical analyses of the responses. The Jamovi software was employed here with only complete responses included in the analyses.

Data Analysis

Data was analyzed using Jamovi statistical software. Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviation, were calculated to summarize participant's evaluations of the three accent varieties across the dimensions of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability. The reliability of the questionnaire was assessed using Cronbach's alpha coefficients. Construct validity was examined through Exploratory factor Analysis (EFA), including the Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin (KMO) measure of sampling adequacy and Bartlett's test of Sphericity.

Results and Discussion

Demographic Information of Participants

In the study, 100 university students from Pakistan participated. Undergraduate and postgraduate students from diverse streams and socioeconomic status were the participants. A larger proportion of the respondents were female than male. The average age of the participants were over 22 years but students aged 19-20 years were also well represented. There was a slightly higher proportion of undergraduate students as compared to postgraduate students. As far as academic background, participants were from Arts and Humanities, Social Sciences, Science and Engineering, and Business-related disciplines. The biggest group was composed of Arts and Humanities students, followed by Social Sciences. The majority of the respondents were from public-sector universities, and a smaller percentage were from private sector universities. Most of the participants belong to middle socioeconomic status.

Table 3

Demographic Information of Participants (N=100)

Variable	Category	Percentage %
Gender	Female	91%
	Male	8%
	Prefer not to say	1%
Age	19-20 years	45%
	Above 22 years	54%
Academic Level	Undergraduate	44%
	Postgraduate	56%
University Type	Public	85%
	Private	15%
Socioeconomic Background	Lower	5%
	Middle	95%

Evaluation of English Accents

Participants evaluated British English, American English, and Pakistani English in terms of four dimensions: competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability.

Table 4

Mean scores of Accent Evaluation

Accent	Competence	Prestige	Trustworthiness	Likability
British English (RP)	3.72	3.60	3.66	3.52
American English	3.77	3.68	3.72	3.64
Pakistani English	3.75	3.47	3.70	3.55

British English Accent

The results show that British English receives positive evaluations across all four dimensions. Participants generally perceived British English as competent, trustworthy, prestigious,

and likable. Overall, British English was the university students' preferred form of English in terms of social evaluation, which in Pakistan remained positive, with high mean scores for competence ($M=3.72$) and prestige ($M=3.60$). The findings are consistent with research suggesting that due to historical association with the education system, government institutions, colonial past, British English has a symbolic role in Pakistan (Mahboob, 2021; Gulzar et al. 2021). British English is still perceived as an academically respected variety, indicated by its relatively high ratings. The results, however, showed that British English was not the most-rated variant out of the three accents, suggesting that the participants' attitudes towards English might be evolving as they have been exposed to more than one English variety.

American English Accent

American English was also evaluated highly positively across all four dimensions. It scored the highest mean scores for competence ($M=3.77$), prestige ($M=3.68$), trustworthiness ($M=3.72$), and likability ($M=3.64$). This result indicates that there is high acceptance of American English by the students of the university in Pakistan. This could be due to the growing impact of globalization and digital media. American English is often introduced to students through movies, television, YouTube, social media, online education systems, and foreign environments. This exposure has probably led to greater knowledge of American English and to more positive attitudes towards it. The results also show that the participants felt American English was socially appealing and professionally useful. The data presented here indicate that American English might be as prestigious or perhaps more prestigious among young university students in Pakistan, as the earlier results confirmed that British English has more prestige among the Pakistanis.

Pakistani English Accent

Pakistani English also received generally positive evaluations. Participants rated Pakistani English highly in competence ($M=3.70$), indicating that they regarded it as an effective and reliable means of communication. Likewise, Pakistani English received a positive rating for likability ($M=3.55$). However, it received comparatively low ratings in prestige ($M=3.47$). The results indicate that even though participants knew that they could understand, trust and believe Pakistani English speakers, they still felt that native English varieties had higher social status.

This is a typical pattern that refers to the difference between overt and covert prestige. Native varieties are still perceived as educational success and career advancement while Pakistani English is seen as familiarity, having local communication. The results of this research are congruent with the World Englishes framework which acknowledges the presence of localized varieties of English as legitimate varieties of English, although the presence of native-speaker ideology in social evaluation is still recognized.

Accent Recognition Analysis

Participants were also asked to identify the accent variety represented in each audio recording.

Table 5

Accent Recognition Accuracy

Accent Variety	Correct Identification
British English	39%
American English	36%
Pakistani English	75%

The findings indicate that participants generally demonstrated a good overall understanding of English accents. Many participants, however, had problems in between British English and American English. The high level of exposure to both varieties through media, entertainment, and education, may be a contributing factor to this confusion.

The phonological similarities between the two native varieties may make accurate differentiation challenging for listeners. These findings suggest a moderate level of accent awareness, whereby

participants are capable of understanding different English varieties but may not always recognize subtle phonetic distinctions among native-speaker accents.

Discussion

Pakistani university students feel positively towards British English, American English and Pakistani English, according to the findings. American English achieved the highest mean scores on the variables examined while British English received high marks on competence and prestige evaluations. The results show that the Pakistani learners still highly accept these two native English varieties.

The increased exposure to American English through media, technology, digital learning and entertainment may explain the perceived positive evaluation. Students seem to have become more acquainted with American English and have started to love it.

British English has preserved a prestigious place due to its association with Pakistan's education system, state communications, and colonial inheritance. The aforementioned finding shows that British English is still an indicator of academic success and professional expertise.

The importance of Pakistani English as a legitimate way of communication is increasing through the assessment of competence, trustworthiness, and likability. Nevertheless, a relatively low prestige rating indicates that there are still some perceptions of social status and occupational achievement that are rooted in the norms of native speakers. The main focus of this pattern is the difference between overt prestige and covert prestige. Overt prestige is associated with conventional native varieties while covert prestige is associated with some localized forms of English.

The results of the accent recognition support these findings. Pakistani English was identified more easily by the participants as compared to British and American Versions indicating greater locality. The confusion between British and American English, which occurs on such a frequent basis, means that learners might perceive these varieties as similar native varieties, quite generally, despite phonological differences.

All in all, the findings reinforce the World Englishes perspective, as Pakistani English is gaining acceptance. However, the native-speaker ideology still shapes the language attitudes of Pakistani university students.

Conclusion

This study examines attitudes of university students towards Received Pronunciation (RP), American English (GA) and Pakistani English in terms of Verbal-Guise Techniques (VGT) and structured questionnaires. The findings fill the gaps by offering empirical evidence of the evaluation of different varieties of English in the context of higher education in Pakistan. Overall, the findings showed positive attitudes towards the three varieties of English. American English was the highest rated for its connotations of academic as far as the dimension of competence, prestige, trustworthiness, and likability are concerned which shows that it has a good social and educational appeal among Pakistani university students. British English was also positively judged and maintained its connotations of academic legitimacy and professionalism. The competence of Pakistani English was found to be rated favorably in all aspects except for prestige where it was rated comparatively lower, while it was rated favorably in terms of its trustworthiness and likability. The results indicate that although native English varieties retain higher social status, the status of Pakistani English is growing and is increasingly regarded as a legitimate and effective means of communication. The accent recognition task also found that participants were more successful in recognizing the Pakistani English accent than the two native accents (British and American English). The results of the study overall confirm the increasing recognition of the Pakistani variety of English in a world English context and also highlight the fact that native English varieties are still associated with high prestige by the learners. The study adds to the knowledge of accent attitudes in Pakistan and offers important implications for English language teaching, curriculum development and future research on the English language variation in multilingual settings.

Implications

The findings of this study have theoretical, pedagogical and practical implications in the context of English language education in Pakistan. In theory, positive evaluation of Pakistani English aligns with

the World Englishes framework which views outer circle varieties of English with their communicative functions. Meanwhile, the relatively high ratings for American English suggest that globalization, digital media, and international communication still have an impact on how learners perceive English varieties. The results also confirm the notion of English as Lingua Franca, one that is based on intelligibility and communication rather than on the native speaker's pronunciation norms.

In terms of pedagogy, the results indicate that the importance of developing the language teaching skills of English communicative competence, intelligibility and fluency should be emphasized, rather than native imitation. From the results of the study, it can be concluded that Pakistani English is positively evaluated in terms of different parameters and so should be recognized as a legitimate variety of the English language in the classroom instruction.

Furthermore, teacher training courses need to bring concepts into focus that address issues of World Englishes and accent diversity to reduce accent bias and to raise awareness of diversity of accents. English language teaching materials should provide learners with access to a variety of English such as Pakistani English, British English and American English as a means to develop listening skills and intercultural communicative competence.

From a practical perspective, the implications of the findings are that there needs to be an increased appreciation of the Pakistani English at university level and as a result of this, English language education should be more inclusive in considering the recognition of Pakistani English and the learner's continued exposure to internationally recognized varieties of English. Language assessment should focus on communicative effectiveness, clarity and intelligibility rather than native-like pronunciation.

Limitations:

Despite its contributions, this study has several limitations that should be acknowledged. First, the study was conducted with a sample of 100 university students from selected public and private universities in Pakistan. Therefore, the findings may not be fully generalizable to all higher education institutions or other educational contexts in the country. In addition, the quantitative research design of the study used the Verbal-Guise Technique and a questionnaire. This was helpful because it gave a measure of participants' attitudes towards different English accents; however, it did not provide explanations for these attitudes. However, a qualitative approach (e.g. interviews or focus group discussions) might produce more depth for the understanding of the views and perceptions of learners. In addition, the study looked at attitudes towards only three varieties of English accents: British English (Received Pronunciation), American English (General American) and Pakistani English. As a result, the results cannot be taken to be applicable to other varieties. The British and American English stimuli were generated using a high-quality TTS system to ensure similar pronunciation and speech rate. However, the Pakistani English stimulus was produced by a human speaker. Despite using the same script and comparable speech rate across all recordings, differences between synthetic and natural speech may have influenced participants' evaluations. Future studies may consider using either professionally recorded human voices for all accent varieties or high-quality AI-generated voices for all recordings to enhance methodological consistency.

Recommendations for Future Research

- Future research can adopt qualitative methods, including the semi-structured interviews, or the focus group discussion, to obtain deeper insights into the concept of the perception and attitude of the learners to the various accents of English.
- The study that should be conducted in the future is the review of attitudes of teachers towards various English accents and varieties of English especially Pakistani, British, and American English.
- Longitudinal research can be used to examine the development of the accent attitudes of learners as time passes, particularly in connection to the growing exposure of learners to the global media, online communication, and international academic settings.

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