

“An Investigative Study of Misunderstanding of Urdu Consonants Language among EFL Students”

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Abstract:

The investigative study on the misunderstanding of Urdu consonants among EFL students revealed that there are many elements aiding to this problem. One of the primary reasons is the difference in phonetic systems between Urdu and English.

Second, different regional dialects have a strong influence on Urdu. The study illustrates that students often struggle to differentiate between similar sounding consonants, such as 'ط, ت, and ظ, ز, or 'ک, ج, and 'ق, and 'ح or 'ه. Additionally, the lack of exposure to native Urdu speakers and the absence of proper pronunciation guidelines in EFL materials are determined as other major causes. A Research survey and questionnaire have been filled by EFL students in Government Graduate College for Women Burewala. 45 students have been selected as sample. They come from both Urdu and English medium Schools. These students have completed at least one semester of Urdu language studies. All students are taken from Government Graduate College for Women Burewala. The aim of the survey and questionnaire is to evaluate their knowledge and proficiency in the Urdu language. This study concludes that many students are unable to differentiate Urdu consonants and even they are unable to utter these words properly. It is because of poor educational background and lack of knowledge about pronunciation due to phonological and cultural differences and orthographical distinction. The research advocates that incorporating more reliable Urdu language resources and providing clear instruction on the pronunciation of Urdu consonants could help mitigate these misconceptions.

Introduction:

The national language of Pakistan is Urdu. In Pakistan, Urdu is also learned as first or sometimes S.L.(second language) (Ashraf 2014). It is the mother tongue of 8 percent (2 million)of the total population. Ashraf (2014) stated in her research study that Urdu is the ample language of literature, literacy, court, business, office & education. It is taught from primary to intermediate level as a mandatory subject and as an elective subject in degree classes. It is taught as an optional subject to advanced learners not only in Pakistan but also in foreign countries. Textbooks are written in Urdu for the convenience of students. Urdu is spoken all over the world due to its South Asian diaspora. (Akram 2016).

It was written from right to left in Nastaliq script. (Ghafoor 2019).Urdu is a consonant rich language while English is a vowel rich language. Language is a special kind of transcription and interpretation . Then linguistics is the scientific study of a language. In language, the study of structure (grammar), the study of meaning (semantic and pragmatics), the study of word (morphology), and the study of symbols and sounds (Phonetics and phonology) are delineated. (Hamka). In this research, the misunderstanding is discussed which is developed by inappropriate use of sounds and forms among the EFL students. If a word is not uttered properly, the listener will be confused in comprehension of the exact pronunciation of that word. In Pakistan people from different regions speak Urdu in their particular accent which

affects the language and ruins the pronunciation. People living in Punjab enunciate Urdu in their Punjabi dialect and mispronounce many words in Urdu which are now the part of their dialect and they consider these wrong words to be part of Urdu language. There are many factors like phonetic and phonological variation, allophonic differences and orthographic distinction which lead to perplexities among students. The lack of innovative teaching methods, poor educational approaches and phonological interference also contribute to the obstruction of learning. Many sociolinguistic elements and cognitive and psychological factors contribute to the misunderstanding of Urdu consonants among EFL students.

Statement of problem:

While Urdu is a basic language component for many English learners in EFL classrooms, resolute misconceptions regarding Urdu consonants hinder accurate pronunciation and language acquisition. Despite the occurrence of these misunderstandings, there is a gap in understanding the root causes and implications of such challenges, as well as effective pedagogical approaches to address them. This study aims to identify and analyse the misconceptions surrounding Urdu consonants among EFL learners and investigate potential strategies for improving pronunciation proficiency and overall language learning outcomes.

Objectives:

The objectives of an investigative study on the misunderstanding of Urdu consonants in English as a Foreign Language (EFL) classrooms are:

1. To identify general misconceptions regarding Urdu consonants among EFL learners.
2. To investigate the implications of mispronunciation of Urdu consonants on language learning and communication.
3. To propose pedagogical strategies and interventions aimed at improving the accurate pronunciation of Urdu consonants in EFL classrooms.

. Research Questions:

1. What are the general ambiguities regarding Urdu consonants among EFL learners?
2. How mispronunciation of Urdu consonants affects language learning and communication?
3. What are pedagogical strategies and interventions aimed at improving the accurate pronunciation of Urdu consonants in EFL classrooms.

Significance of the Study:

This study is important to highlight the problems faced by EFL learners in recognition of Urdu consonants. This investigation will also pave the way for introducing new pedagogical strategies for students. This analysis will focus on the language learning by organising seminars and workshops for instructors and this study will be useful for textbook designers and dictionary compilers to minimise the Urdu mistakes in textbooks and Urdu dictionaries.

Literature Review:

Former studies illustrated the hazards confronted by EFL learners in acquisition of Urdu consonants. A few studies have been conducted on this particular topic, which depict the significance of phonetic perception and articulation in second language learning. However, demonstrating a void in the present literature, this study highlights this grave issue of mispronunciation and misconception of consonants.

Brief History of Urdu:

Urdu is not the native language of the sub-continent. It is the language of Indo- Aryans. When they came into subcontinent, they have to talk with natives. So, they used this language as a “lingua franca” to communicate with native people. The 13th, 14th and 15th centuries were the period of constitution of Urdu. In 15th or 16th century, Mughals made the “Persian” the language of court & the official language of subcontinent. Actually it was the language of Muslims while “Sanskrit & Prakrat” were the language of Hindus. With the passage of time the Persian and Arabic words started to assimilate in Urdu. Other regional languages like Sanskrit and Prakrat also donated some vocabulary and grammar to Urdu. Punjabi words are also present in Urdu. Urdu language & literature flourished in Deccan for 300 years. That’s why under the influence of Deccan it is known as “Deccani”. In 16th to 18th Century, Urdu was developed in subcontinent and in the onset of 19th century, it is known as Hindi, Hindvi, Dehvi, Rekhta (shattered language), Hindustani, Deccani & Gujrati . In the reign of Shah Jahan, Urdu is known as “Urdu-e-Muala Shahjahan Abad Dehli”.(Ghafoor 2019).

All languages have their own patterns of linguistic system and the features of this system differ from one another. Due to this variety of patterns in linguistic system, when a learner deliberately starts the learning a second language, the discreteness of the second language in terms of its peculiarities with mother tongue of the speaker hinders the process of acquisition of the second language despite of consciousness of the basic differences between the two. This impedance compels the learners of the second language to try to modify the system of the target language in order to match it with their mother language. Goswin, A. 2020.

. This research also contributes to the comprehension of pronunciation difficulties faced by EFL learners.

Ladefoged and Maddieson (1996) highlights the complications of Urdu phonetics, epitomising that aspirated, voiced, and retro flexed consonants are found in Urdu but absent in English. These sounds create learning hindrance for EFL students. Because there are no direct phonetic similarities in their indigenous language. For example, the difference between aspirated and unaspirated stops (e.g., /t^h/ vs. /t/) is clear in Urdu but often imponderable to English speakers (Ali, 2011).

Urdu is written in Perso-Arabic script which is different from English orthography The alphabets and diacritical marks cause problems for English speakers who are unaware of these letters (Rahman, 2002). In Urdu there are many polysemous words (the words have the same shape and have different meanings) which develop complications for non native speakers. Different observations, facts, and figures prove that the use and popularity of the Urdu language have declined in the last few decades in Pakistan. Starting from the general observations, we mispronounce quite a lot of Urdu words in our daily usage for example ‘mitti’ (mud), ‘bohut’ (sufficient), ‘subah’ (dawn).(Noor ul Haya).

Urdish:

Noor ul Haya stated in her article that another very critical element that is playing a role in the decline of the Urdu language is our obsession with the English language. English is an international language and official language of Pakistan along with Urdu. This infatuation has given birth to a new style of

blending and mixing of Urdu and English and this blend is called Urdu+English= Urdish. People are likely to use both English and Urdu words in a sentence. It also causes confusion.

These misconceptions can be eradicated by introducing the holistic environment of learning for EFL students in classrooms.

Research Methodology:

A mixed methods study entails gathering or examining both quantitative and/or qualitative data within a single research endeavour. This data collection occurs either simultaneously or sequentially, with no one type of data taking precedence. The integration of these data occurs at various stages throughout the research process.

In this research, mixed methodology is utilised for data collection to investigate the misunderstanding of Urdu consonants among EFL students. The exploratory and descriptive study in which surveys and questionnaires are used as research tools to collect the data which are filled by the EFL students. A random sampling technique is applied to find 45 students from EFL class for research. A checklist of 20 words is used as a phonemic awareness test for data collection and analysis of consonants in Urdu language.

Data Collection and Analysis:

The current research intended to find the misunderstandings regarding Urdu consonants and challenges faced by EFL students in learning Urdu language. That's why a proficiency test and a phonemic assessment (multiple choice questions) were required to evaluate the competence to identify the Urdu consonants correctly. The survey was used to collect information about the background of students, their exposure to Urdu language and self assessment of their aptitude and dexterity. By amalgamation of qualitative and quantitative data, the reliability and validity are ensured in research. After having the essential information and facts, the researcher scrutinised the data and arranged the entries and details in the form of findings.

Finding, Result and Discussion:

Finding:

- The difference in dialects ruin proper utterance of words and spoil correct pronunciation.
- The accent has a great impact on the Urdu language, often leading to poor pronunciation.
- Many students are unable to differentiate between ز and ذ. They don't know "ذخیره" is started with ذ rather than ز.
- The articulation of certain words خ, ز, ص, ث which are not present in local Hindustani language and English language, is difficult for EFL students. The lack of proper attention to pronunciation in primary and secondary level's classrooms is one of the reasons for ambiguity in consonant production.
- Most students do not know the proper place of articulation which causes confusion in consonants recognition.
- Many polysemous words present in Urdu which make students perplexed. Like ملاپ, میل, گند, میل, فاصلہ, میل etc
- Improper use of diacritical marks causes complications of pronunciation.

- Urdu is not the mother tongue of all EFL students. They learn it as a second language, that's why they are not properly skilled.
- Many students came from poor educational backgrounds, due to this they have an improper Urdu accent.
- Many dictionaries available in the market do not use diacritical marks which produce obscurities.
- Many students came from English medium schools. They face more difficulties in understanding of Urdu consonants rather than Urdu medium students.
- Nowadays people have a tendency to learn English and do not pay heed to Urdu language which is the reason that students are unable to read and write Urdu accurately.
- In schools, there is no subject specialist for Urdu. Teachers have to teach more than three or four subjects. That's why proper pronunciation and dictation are compromised due to shortage of time and lengthy syllabus.
- There is no specific period for pronunciation, writing and dictation of Urdu in schools.
- Nowadays teachers do not have a pure and refined Urdu accent that's the reason they neglect the Urdu pronunciation and students in their class are unable to utter refined Urdu.
- In metrication and intermediate level, most subjects are in English that's why they don't pay heed to Urdu subjects.
- Dictionary compilers also added many English words rather than adding Urdu meanings.
- In the publication of textbooks many English words are used instead of using Urdu words.
- The names of dramas, movies, documentaries and art films are written in transliteration instead of Urdu. Moreover billboards and shop names also follow this pattern which decreases the importance of Urdu.
- Nowadays students use SMS (short message service) for communication which spoils their pronunciation. These students are unable to write a single correct sentence of Urdu.
- Many students do not know the alphabet “ژ” They confused this letter with “ز”.
- Some students have an Urdu reading problem. They are unable to recognise the right words.

Conclusion:

The misunderstanding of Urdu consonants among EFL students is a complex and multidimensional problem determined by phonetic differences, orthographic challenges, transfer from native languages, educational approaches, cognitive factors, and sociolinguistic contexts. The comprehensive and holistic strategies in which phonetic instructions and pronunciation training, exposure and interaction to native speakers, and a motivational learning environment are required to confront these obstacles.

Suggestion:

- Teachers should be qualified and trained at primary level and subject specialists should be hired for teaching Urdu.
- Focus on Urdu reading in classrooms.
- Teachers should pay attention to correct pronunciation of Urdu words while teaching. If a teacher utters the correct word before students, they will automatically learn factual pronunciation.
- In schools and colleges, extra curricular activities regarding Urdu pronunciation should be arranged.

- Seminars and conferences should be conducted at different levels for the promotion of Urdu.
- Book editors pay special attention to the pronunciation and diacritical marks while compiling Urdu text books.
- Promote Urdu as the national language of Pakistan as compared to other languages.
- National Urdu day should be celebrated in all institutions to advocate Urdu.
- Movies, dramas, art films with refined pronunciation of Urdu should be watched by students in school and colleges.
- Encourage the students to talk in Urdu with proper accent and pronunciation.
- Dictionary compilers should give the meaning of transliterated words in Urdu.
- The titles of documentaries, dramas and movies, names of books and billboards should be in Urdu.
- Due to wrong articulation, many students are unaware of “و” at the end of words.
- In the publication of Urdu textbooks, editors should make sure that all words are in Urdu language.
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