

DIVERSITY AND VARIATION IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH

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Abstract

The present research has used 2.1 million words corpus of written Pakistani English to explore the trends of spellings in Pakistani English and to identify its conformity with British and American traditions of spellings. The spelling differences between British and American varieties of English communicate the social and cultural make up of the two varieties which has aroused a great confusion about English spellings to follow in Pakistan. Apparently there are no specific norms, and both the American and British spelling variants have been used by the Pakistani writers, but it is the time to decide whether or not there is any need for standardized spelling in Pakistani English. Statistical analysis, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been performed to assess the significance of difference between American and British spellings of different root families to address the issue of spelling in Pakistani English. Most of the American and British spellings have shown significant differences at $p < 0.05$ value. Keeping in view these differences, the research has emphasized to accept both varieties of spelling and that there is no need of standardization of the spelling of Pakistani English.

Background

Spelling and vocabulary are central to any study of standardization of a variety of language. Usually Post-colonial varieties of English tend to retain the British spellings but the ever-increasing influence and efforts to simplify spelling of American English have attracted different responses. Pakistani English is a typical manifestation of such trends. In orthography, spelling is the most striking feature to recognize or label a variety of English.

There is a general impression about Pakistani English that it has a tendency to use formal technical vocabulary. This is also due to the fact that Pakistani English, like other varieties of South Asian English, is acquired in formal educational settings through 'the study of text books and literary classics'. (Kachru, 1986, p.43, Hickey, 2004, p.547)

Some of the function words like 'Amid', 'Among', 'Till' and 'While' have some archaic and formal forms as well e.g. 'Amidst',

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‘Amongst’, ‘Until’ and ‘Whilst’. (Quirk et al 1985, Biber and Quirk, 1999, Sedlatschek, 2009, p.115)

English orthography is highly standardized. The standardization of the written language is easy to demonstrate with reference to orthography. Milroy and Milroy (199, p.67) are of the view that spelling is the most uniform level of language use; and contrasts in this respect with variability of its counterpart in speech – pronunciation ... Twentieth century English spellings are almost absolutely invariant.

Spelling is that bit of linguistic practice where issues of authority, control, conformity can be most sharply focused. Spelling is the domain for excellence – no matter how tiny it may seem – where the politics of conformity can be selected (Kress, 2000, p. X). According to Kress (2000, p. 1) orthography is knowing how to write words correctly. ‘Writing correctly’ is exactly what is implied by the term used for spelling in many languages like German and Greek. Spellings can be defined as writing of words of a language according to the norms or conventions of that language. (Sebba, 2007, p. 34)

Spelling is an issue among the linguistic community and also outside the world of linguistics. It is a general concern of English language learners’ community in the ‘outer’ or ‘expanding circles’. There is a general concern that ‘spelling standards’ should be upheld and not allowed to skip. According to McArthur (1992), “The most abrasive differences between present day American and British documents are their spellings” (p.970). Millward (1989) contends that proper spelling has become so culturally important that, ‘Thou shalt not spell incorrectly’ has almost attained the status of an “Eleventh Commandment”. People respond strongly to what they perceive to be incorrect spelling (p.270).

There is some acceptable variation in spellings within both American and British national systems, as reflected in their respective authoritative dictionaries. The widespread exchange of written materials among English speakers around the world, especially electronically, introduces different spellings and over time can become more acceptable in other locations.

It is also important to realise that in terms of standard usage, the spelling differences are minor but noticeable, but sometimes annoying and alienating (Crystal 1995). English is a living language and like all

living organisms it keeps on changing. It has almost attained the status of a world language. It is being used by people all over the world. About 2 billion people around the world speak English. Although they use the same language i.e. English, but if we closely analyse, there are many differences between the different varieties of English used in different societies. The differences are phonological, orthographic, syntactic as well as semantic and pragmatic.

Sebba (2007, p. 34) describes that one important feature of language is to communicate meanings which are culture, society, group or community specific. These meanings could not be conveyed by following the norms and codification standards of other cultures. This is also true about spellings. If complete standardization of spellings takes place, there would be invariant spelling, unable to convey social meaning, and on the other hand, if non-standard and freely varying spellings are being used they cannot convey the social meanings. It is largely context dependent that the writer makes one selection. In present day English there are two main varieties of English regarding spelling differences, i.e. American English and British English.

The differences in these two spelling systems are purposeful and families of words that illustrate spelling practices draw attention to differences between the American and British Spelling Systems. Americans tried and are still trying to simplify English and “Spellings, according to Kövecses (2000, p.166), is where this phenomenon can be observed the most”.

The renowned linguistic scholar Noah Webster and the other Americans consciously tried to change the spellings. The chief motives behind these changes are to:

- i. make English a phonographic language which has sound and spellings harmony
- ii. simplify and ease
- iii. make a conscious effort to differ and be distinct from the Britishers.

Spellings can be categorized from highly regulated and focused on standard to the least regulated and focused on anti standard depending upon the regime, text types, institutional order and readership.

Methodology

Pakistani English is a newly developing variety. It is in the process of endo-normative stabilization. In the educational set up of the country,

it is the British spellings which are strictly followed. Teachers, textbook writers and examiners all focus on the British spellings and all other deviations are discouraged.

The data for Pakistani English has been taken from PWE, a corpus of Pakistani Written English. The size of the corpus is 2 million words. The data in this corpus is taken from formal domains and basically from edited and published sources. The writers are all educated people. To study the frequency of these variant spellings in the British and American Englishes, Brown family corpora have been used. The British data has been taken from the Lancaster-Oslo-Bergen Corpus of British English (FLOB) corpora (henceforth LF) and the American data has been taken from Brown and Frown corpora (henceforth BF).

There are three strands of this research. At the first step, a list of words having different spellings in the American and the British Englishes has been selected and the frequency of the variant spellings in Pakistani English has been studied. In the second step, some of the function words having variant forms have been selected and their frequency in the British, American and Pakistani Englishes have been studied to find the level of difference among the three varieties. In the third step some of the verbs having different past participle forms have been selected for study.

Results and Discussion

The frequency of the variant spellings in the British and American Englishes in Pakistani Written English has been given in Table 1 below:

Table-1: Total Frequency of American vs British Spellings in PWE

Variety	Frequency
American	4358
British	7246

Table 1 shows that the American spellings of the words appeared 4358 times and the British spellings appeared 7246 times. So the ratio is 1:1.66. This shows that Pakistani variety is not specifically following the British variety. Table 2 given below explains the significant differences of the frequency of Br and Am English spellings in PWE.

Table-2:

Family	Am	Br	Probability *
a-e	21	46	P < 0.05
ae-e	1	1	P > 0.05
dg-dge	316	57	P < 0.05
e-ae	8	10	P < 0.05
ei-i	6	12	P < 0.05
eo-aeo	2	7	P < 0.05
er-or	53	26	P < 0.05
er-re	429	657	P < 0.05
eu-oeu	3	6	P < 0.05
f-ph	6	7	P > 0.05
g-gue	6	177	P < 0.05
i-igh	11	965	P < 0.05
ie-iae	26	1	P < 0.05
io-iou	82	262	P < 0.05
i-y	3	6	P < 0.05
k-c	9	20	P < 0.05
l-ll	177	220	P < 0.05
m-mme	318	759	P < 0.05
oe-oeo	3	13	P < 0.05
o-ou	92	377	P < 0.05
or-ore	3	3	P > 0.05
or-our	336	1414	P < 0.05
ow-ough	3	16	P < 0.05
se-ce	88	876	P < 0.05
u-iu	1	5	P < 0.05
u-ou	1	12	P < 0.05
Zs	2354	1291	P < 0.05
Total	4358	7246	P < 0.05

* $P < 0.05$ showed significant difference between American and British spelling whereas, $P > 0.05$ showed non-significant difference between American and British spellings.

Statistical analysis, one way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to analyze the significance of difference between American and British spellings of different family. There is significant difference ($P < 0.05$) between American and British spellings of most of the families. Non-significant difference ($P > 0.05$) between American and British spellings in only three families i.e. ae-e, f-ph and or-ore.

To explain it visually, it is further shown in Fig 1 below:

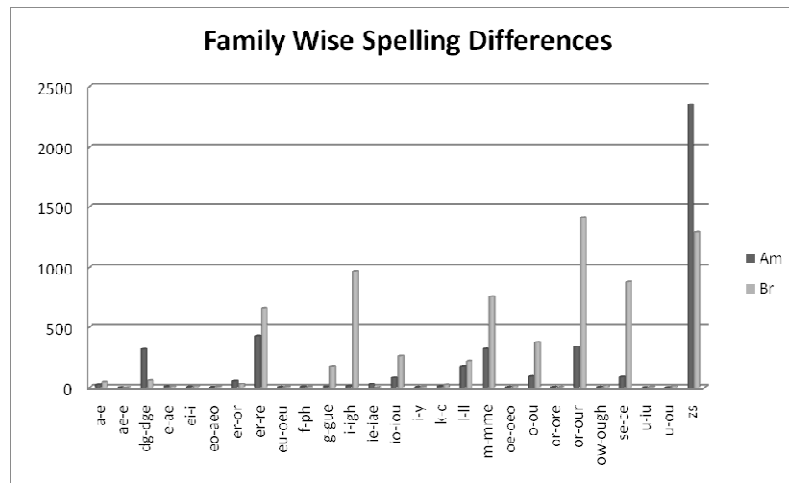


Figure-1

Table 3 below gives different 3 Variant Spellings of Function Words in PWE.

Table-3: Function Words with Different Spellings

Adjective	PWE	BF	LF
Amid	26 ^a	31 ^a	27 ^a
Amidst	18 ^c	5 ^a	13 ^b
Among	830 ^b	820 ^b	562 ^a
Amongst	176 ^c	5 ^a	96 ^b
While	1803 ^b	1353 ^a	1335 ^a
Whilst	14 ^a	0	120 ^b
Till	328 ^c	84 ^a	111 ^b
Until	300 ^a	841 ^b	943 ^c
Toward	80 ^b	744 ^c	25 ^a
Towards	893 ^c	81 ^a	610 ^b
Afterward	2 ^b	37 ^c	1 ^a
Afterwards	43 ^b	20 ^a	131 ^c

Different letter in superscript represented significant ($P < 0.05$) difference among PWE, BF and LF.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to investigate the significance of difference among PWE, BE, and LF. The significantly ($P < 0.05$) different values are marked with different superscript letters whereas, same superscript letters represent non-significant differences among PWE, BE and LF.

In British English both forms exist to varying degrees but the American English seems to prefer the modern forms and avoid the

archaic formal forms. These spelling related differences are considered to be marked indicators of formal style.

The results revealed that there is no significant difference in ‘Amid’ which has been used 31 times in BF and 27 times in LF and 26 times in PWE; ‘Amidst’ showed significant difference in its frequency which has been used 18 times in Pakistani English, 13 times in LF and only 5 times in BF. The data revealed that there is no difference of ‘Among’ in PWE and BF whereas ‘Amongst’ revealed a significant difference in its three varieties. Table 3 shows that except in a few words, all of the words give a significant difference in English spellings.

Table 3 is shown visually in Fig 2 for clarity.

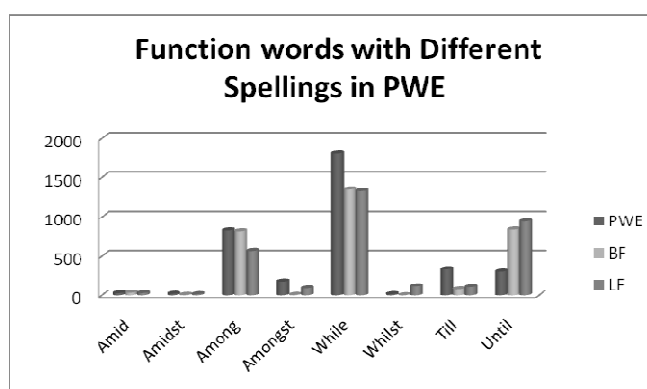


Figure-2

Verbs with Variant Spellings

Some of the verbs like burn, dream, wed, leap, smell, inquire and learn have orthographically variant past participle forms. The statistics collected from the three corpora reveal that in the case of the verb ‘burn’, ‘burned’ is a unambiguous American preference. Out of the 37 examples, 33 use ‘ed’ spellings in American corpora. The British and Pakistani corpora make roughly equal use of both ‘ed’ and ‘t’ spelling variants. In the case of verb ‘dream’, ‘dreamed’ is a clear cut preference both in British and American corpora whereas Pakistani data has also 5 occurrences of the form ‘dreamt’. The verbs in ‘wed’, ‘leap’, ‘smell’, ‘enquire’ have only rare occurrences in all the three corpora. In the case of the verb ‘learn’ the ‘ed’ form is a clearcut American and British choice whereas the Pakistani data shows a preference for the ‘t’ variant of spellings. It is given in Table 4 below to show the significance value.

Table-4: Verbs with Different Spelling in 3 Corpora

Verb	PWE	BF	LF
Burned	17 ^a	33 ^c	22 ^b
Burnt	20 ^c	4 ^a	15 ^b
Dreamed	8 ^a	20 ^b	9 ^a
Dreamt	5 ^b	2 ^a	1 ^a
Inquired	1 ^a	1 ^a	0
Enquired	2 ^a	0	3 ^a
Leaped	1 ^a	3 ^b	1 ^a
Leapt	1 ^a	1 ^a	1 ^a
Learned	38 ^a	119 ^c	73 ^b
Learnt	58 ^b	0	32 ^a
Smelled	0	5 ^b	1 ^a
Smelt	2 ^a	5 ^b	1 ^a
Wed	1 ^a	2 ^a	1 ^a
Wedded	2 ^a	2 ^a	3 ^a

Different letter in superscript represented significant ($P < 0.05$) difference among PWE, BF and LF.

Analysis of variance (ANOVA) was performed to investigate the significance of difference among PWE, BE, and LF. The significantly ($P < 0.05$) different values are marked with different superscript letters whereas, same superscript letters represent non-significant differences among PWE, BE and LF. The most of the verbs showed non-significant ($P > 0.05$) difference among PWE, BF and LF.

The orthographic conventions followed in Pakistani English data reject the common belief in the country that we are following the British spelling norms. The results reveal that we are torn between the orthographic norms and have not decided yet, which spelling system is to follow.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Although Pakistani English has linkage with the British variety, the results have shown that in the area of spellings it seems to have followed the American trend as well. Out of 317 items selected, only 17 items have no appearance in American spellings where as there are 4 items in which have no appearance in PWE. The research has revealed that systematic differences exist among the varieties. In some of the spelling families like 's' and 'z', it is because of the Internet and the default Microsoft word settings that people are over using the 'z' family of spellings. The four spelling families 'dg-dge', 'er-or', 'ie-iae', and 's-z'

in Pakistani data show that the American influence is more prominent. There are no fixed rules as to which spelling system should be used. Apparently there are no specific norms and both the American and British spelling variants are used by the Pakistanis. The differences in the spellings of some of the function words can also be attributed to the 'colonial lag', as these archaic forms were used in the colonial British English and are still being used in Pakistani English but are not frequently used in the present day British English.

The data have found highly significant differences between British and American spellings, therefore it is strongly suggested that Pakistani Written English spelling may be accepted in education and government sectors as they are to eradicate the spelling confusion. It is further recommended that British and American English may be considered as a source of modern technology despite the differences, and that it should not hinder our written English spellings.

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