

PROBLEMATIC ENGLISH VOWEL PHONEMES FOR GOJRI LEARNERS OF ENGLISH

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ABSTRACT

This paper tries to investigate the problems of Gojri speakers in pronouncing English vowels and explores the differences of vowel phonemes in both the languages. The participants were given a list of words to pronounce and the words were recorded. The results indicate that the Gojri speakers replace English /æ/, /ɜ:/, /ɒ/, /ɔ:/ and /ʌ/ with /E/, /a/ and /aa/ respectively. Gojri speakers face difficulties while pronouncing English vowels due to mother tongue interference, absence of some vowel phonemes in Gojri language and lack of practice in spite of having knowledge of pronouncing English vowels accurately.

Keywords: English vowel phonemes, Gojri vowel phonemes, replacement of vowels

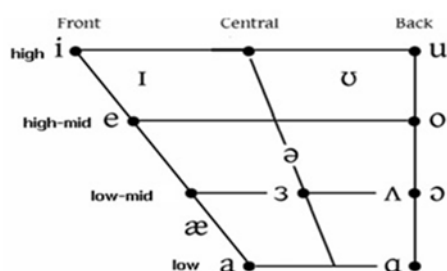
INTRODUCTION

Grimes (2000) states that Gojri is the language of Gujjars inhabiting in the hilly regions of Pakistan, Afghanistan and India. Sharma (2002) claims that Gujjars are nomadic and had inhabited in Rajasthan at some time in the past. Masica (1991) asserts that Gojri shares its features with Rajsthani and Mewati and these languages are classified as the Indo-Aryan languages.

Although English and Gojri languages belong to the same language family namely (Indo-European language (family) but they have developed different sound system. This difference of sound system among these languages causes difficulty for the Gojri speakers in speaking English. This research aims at tracing out the problems faced by the Gojri speakers while pronouncing English vowels and also investigating the causes of these problems.

LITERATURE REVIEW

A vowel is a sound made by vocal cords. Vowels are made different by changing the shape of the mouth and the position of the tongue. Vowels are always voiced sounds. According to the Longman Dictionary of Applied Linguistics (1985:309) 'A speech sound in which the air stream from the lungs is not blocked in any way in the mouth or throat; and which is usually pronounced with vibration of vocal cords. The vowels sounds are made differently by different shapes of the mouth. Gimson (1991) in An Introduction to the Pronunciation of English assumed a diagram for the description of English vowels. This diagram is given below:



Daniel J. (1918,p.23) writes, ‘a vowel is defined as a voiced sound in which the air issues in a continuous stream through the pharynx and mouth, there being no obstruction and no narrowing such a sound would cause audible friction.’

There are many vowel sounds, which are common in different language. However certain vowel sounds are peculiar. Vowels are the most important in the pronunciation of any language.

Keller (1984) states that the first language influences the second language learning. When a person acquires his first language his muscles required for the articulation of the sounds of the mother tongue are developed and strengthened. It is difficult for the learners to use those muscles in order to articulate those sounds or combination of sounds which are new to them in the target languages. Therefore, the absence of certain sounds of the target language in the native language, poses a great difficulty in pronouncing the sounds of target languages.

So, while speaking English, the replacement of English vowels by other language speakers, is the most important factor, while speaking, those sounds are usually replaced which are not common in both languages. This replacement occurs due to the closest positions of the vowels of both languages. Sharma (2002) employing the traditional concept of vowels proposed the following vowel chart of Gojri language:

Table 1. The traditional concept of vowels proposed vowel chart of Gojri language

	Front	Central	Back
High	ii		uu
Lower High	i		u
Higher Mid	e		o
Lower Mid	E	a	O
Low		aa	

HYPOTHESIS

Gojri speakers cannot pronounce those vowels of English language which do not exist in Gojri language and replace original English vowel phonemes by Gojri vowel phonemes.

METHODOLOGY

For collecting data, some English words were selected comprising mono-thongs of English language. Recording was used as a tool to judge the pronunciation of English words spoken by Gojri speakers. The sample of the research involved five English language learners of rural secondary school in Muzaffarabad Azad Kashmir. These speakers were secondary school students where English is taught as a foreign language. List of the words pronounced by Gojri speakers is given in the following table:

Table 2. List of the words pronounced by Gojri speakers

English Words	English Pronunciation	Gojri Speaker 1	Gojri Speaker 2	Gojri Speaker 3	Gojri Speaker 4	Gojri speaker 5
Cheap	/tʃi:p/	/tʃiip/	/tʃiip/	/tʃiip/	/tʃiip/	/tʃiip/
Sit	/SIt/	/SIt/	/SIt/	/SIt/	/SIt/	/SIt/

Let	/let/	/let/	/let/	/let/	/let/	/let/
Bag	/bæg/	/bEg/	/bEg/	/bEg/	/bEg/	/bEg/
Cat	/kæt/	/kEt/	/kEt/	/kEt/	/kEt/	/kEt/
Girl	/g3:l/	/garl/	/garl/	/garl/	/garl/	/garl/
Cut	/kʌt/	/kat/	/kat/	/kat/	/kat/	/kat/
Ball	/bɒl/	/baal/	/baal/	/baal/	/baal/	/baal/
All	/ɔ:l/	/aal/	/aal/	/aal/	/aal/	/aal/
Too	/tu:/	/tuu/	/tuu/	/tuu/	/tuu/	/tuu/
Look	/lʊk/	/lɔk/	/lɔk/	/lɔk/	/lɔk/	/lɔk/
Agenda	/ədʒəndə/	/adʒanda/	/adʒanda/	/adʒanda/	/adʒanda/	/adʒanda/

RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The vowel /i:/ is found in Gojri language. Gojri speakers pronounce it easily, as ‘cheap’ /tʃi:p / in English and /liir/ (small piece of cloth) in Gojri. /l/ is not problematic for Gojri speakers as it also exists in Gojri. e.g. ‘sit’ /SIt/ in English /bis/ (moisture in Gojri). The front vowel /e/ is easily pronounced because it also occurs in Gojri language, as /let/ in English and / tʃhel/ (to peel) in Gojri. Gojri speakers replace /æ/ by /E/. /æ/ is not found in Gojri language as ‘bag’ /bæg/ in English and /bEg / in Gojri and ‘cat’ /kæt/ in English and /kEt/ in Gojri.

The vowel /ə/ is present in Gojri language and is easily pronounced by the Goji speakers. As ‘agenda’ /ədʒəndə/ in English and /sa/(breath) in Gojri. The vowel /ɜ:/ is not present in Gojri language and is replaced by /a/ ,as ‘girl’ /g3:l/ in English and /garl/ in Gojri. / ʌ / is replaced by

/a/,as ‘cut’ /kʌt/ in English and /kat/ in Gojri language.

The back vowel /ɒ/ is not present in Gojri language and is replaced by /aa/. e.g. ‘ball’ /bɒl/ in English and /baal/ in Gojri language. The vowel /ɔ:/ is also a problematic sound for Gojri speakers and is replaced by / aa / ,as ‘all’ /ɔ:l/ in English and /aal/ in Gojri language.

/ u: / vowel is common in English and Gojri language and is easily pronounced by Gojri speakers, as ‘too’ /tu:/ in English and /k^huu/ (well) in Gojri.

/ʊ/ is also not a problematic vowel phoneme for Gojri speakers and is easily pronounced, as ‘look’ /lʊk/ in English and /ʊt/ (there) in Gojri.

The overall replacement of the English vowel phonemes by the Gojri vowel phonemes can be summarized as:

/æ/ ——— /E/

/ɜ:/ ——— /a/, /aa/

/ʌ/ ——— /a/

/ɒ/ ——— /aa/

/ɔ:/ ——— /aa/

CONCLUSION

This study explores the problems faced by Gojri speakers in pronouncing English vowels. These problems are mostly caused by the mother tongue influences which are due to the phonological difference of Gojri and English language.

This research shows that vowels which are common in Gojri and English do not create problems for Gojri learners of English but the vowels which do not exist in Gojri language create problems for Gojri speakers. For example, English / æ/ , / ɜ:/ , / ɒ/ , / ɔ:/ and / ʌ/ sounds do not exist in Gojri language and are replaced by /E/, /a/ and /aa/ respectively.

The problems faced by Gojri speakers in pronouncing English vowels can only be overcome with more and more practice, listening to English speakers and exposure to good English.

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