

A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF SEMANTIC DISTINCTION BETWEEN PAKISTANI ENGLISH AND BRITISH ENGLISH

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Abstract

Semantics is a level of language that, like other levels, also changes. Semantic change can occur within a language or between languages. This paper examines the semantic changes in two language varieties resulting from the influence of local cultures. Pakistani English (PE) and British English (BE) have semantic distinctions in connotative meanings of various words. Onomasiological and semasiological mechanisms also support the extended and narrow changes in meaning. This is qualitative research, where data is collected from TV advertisements and Sunday magazines that discuss various aspects of life. The data is analyzed through the Pakistani corpus and the BNC (British National Corpus). The findings reveal that several words from British English have been adopted in Pakistani English, with generalized and extended meanings, and these new concepts are associated with words that reflect the local culture. The research is significant as it highlights the ways through which social contexts shape semantic change in Pakistani English

1. Introduction

Language is a systemic and changeable phenomenon. Language changes over time, incorporating new elements or discarding others. Language change is often considered a form of language variation. It can be observed at different stages, including phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic levels (Fried, 2010). Everything in the world is in a state of motion or change. As language changes over time, semantic change is also a common phenomenon across languages. Semantic change is the change in the meaning of a word. Change in meaning refers to the change of referent for a word. Another way of meaning variation is related to the context in which the word is used. Weinreich (1953) claims that the semantemes/lexical semantics of all languages are not always the same. There can be differences in British and indigenous Englishes. This paper highlights the semantic distinctions between Pakistani English and British English. Two types of meanings may cause distinction in lexical semantics. One type is denotative meaning, which conveys a fixed, dictionary-like meaning and remains consistent everywhere. Another type is related to the contextual meanings of a word. This type carries context-dependent meanings and is referred to as connotative meaning (Yule, 1996).

Crowley (1997) and Campbell (1998) classified the semantic change into various ways. The first type of semantic change deals with the extended meanings of words. It demonstrates that a single word can have multiple meanings in various contexts. Another type is the narrowing of meaning, which restricts the meaning of a word to a specific situation. Narrowing of meaning is called reduction. There are two additional types of change in meaning: elevation and degradation. Elevation of meaning is concerned with change or distinction in the metaphorical meaning of a word. The other type claims opposition to elevation. In his type, a word gets a more pejorative meaning. The meaning of a word in any language originates from the features within or outside the language, which are dependent on the context and culture of a language (Campbell, 2004). This cultural meaning's embedded nature is consistent with research on Muslim women's subjectivity in Pakistani fiction, which demonstrates how religious and secular dichotomies influence linguistic and identity behaviors (Safdar & Yasmin, 2021a). These factors lead to an unusual shift in the meaning of a word. Many scholars have anticipated different methods to classify these changes. Geeraerts (2009, as cited in Mohsin, 2009) provides a distinction between onomasiological and semasiological mechanisms. Semasiological mechanisms supply the existing word with new meaning, while

onomasiological mechanisms entail changes that enable a new word to articulate an existing concept. The novel meaning of a word can replace or coexist with the old meaning.

The current study aims to explore the various meanings of a word in the English language, with a focus on Pakistan. The paper also focuses on multiple meanings of a word in Pakistani English. The definitions of words and their usage in Pakistani English may differ from those in British English. It will also be taken into consideration whether these words have changed the sense. The aim is to explore the extension of meanings in Pakistani English. The study addresses the following research questions:

1. How do words from British English have different meanings when used in Pakistani English?
2. How do English words have distinctive meanings due to the influence of Pakistani Culture?
3. How are new concepts formed for the existing words to give new meanings in Pakistani English?
4. How are the extended and narrow meanings of a word generated differently in Pakistani and British English?

2. Literature Review

It is challenging to verify predictions of any language change, as there is always a possibility of generalization. The entire research on language change relies on suppositions. Advanced studies of language change have presented a vast number of examples that show exceptions. It is claimed that, after studies, it is unfeasible to make complete guesses or predictions. Linguistic change may occur at any level at any time. It can be observed from Old English to modern English. The study examines lexical semantic change in Pakistani and British English. English is not limited to just local native speakers; it is also used for communication purposes worldwide in all countries (Mair, 2006). When it is used among countries as a lingua franca, there may be distinctions in grammatical structures and semantics, as well as phonological and lexical differences. Semantic distinction may occur due to the extension of context; for example, the word "pool" is now used in various contexts for different purposes. In pragmatics, comparative cross-varietal differences have been noted, with politeness strategies varying between Pakistani and British English speakers. These differences are derived from cultural and gendered expectations (Saleem, Yasmin & Saleem, 2021).

Whenever a semantic change occurs, it can involve a shift in the understanding of existing words. Change occurs in the meanings of words and gives rise to a variety of languages (Cimino, 1996). The meanings of existing words can be changed, added to, or given new names to represent a concept. O'Grady et al. (1996, cited in Cook & Stevenson, 2010) illustrate that these changes follow some steps. In Semantic broadening/ expansion, a word is considered broader than its prior form. For example, the word 'aunt' was uttered for 'father's sister', in its old meaning, but in its new meanings, it is generally used to refer to both sisters of the mother and father. The same case applies to the masculine 'uncle,' which is used for brothers of both parents as well as for an unknown person. It is the distinction between the two varieties of English in terms of semantic features. It is articulated that retuning or reconditioning of the sense of a word is tricky in lexicography (Cook & Stevenson, 2010). However, interlocutors can identify these words and their sense in the particular context of their use. The meanings of compound words also vary in both languages.

There are numerous reasons for semantic changes, including linguistic, social, grammaticalization, historical, psychological, and borrowing (Rehman, 1990). Historically, words have been associated with both positive and negative connotations. In this domain, historical linguists discuss the addition of new terms and the removal of old words. Borrowing is another major cause of semantic shift because new words are borrowed from other cultures

and languages when a few culturally specific words are not available in one language (ibid). In the Pakistani context, words like 'mobile', 'glass', and 'plate' are borrowed from the English language due to the absence of these words in Urdu. Secondly, another rationale for borrowing is that when a single word does not convey an exact meaning, equivalent words are selected from other languages to fulfill the intended meaning. For instance, words like 'Masjid', 'namaz', and 'roza' in English are borrowed from Urdu, which may provide a more accurate understanding of their meanings. The translation of compound words also brings variation in meaning, as seen in the use of 'give examination' instead of 'take examination' (ibid). Comparable patterns of culturally grounded lexical usage have been noted in socio-religious texts such as Pakistani wedding invitations, where language reflects deep religious and socio-cultural influences (Yasmin, Naseem & Sohail, 2019).

Sperber & Wilson (1981) express that irony also conveys a different meaning from its utterance. Irony means speaking literally one thing and figuratively something else, with its meanings being distinguished. This figurative distinction alters the semantics of many words; writers also employ irony to create puns in their creative writing, and it is commonly used in daily communication. Rehman (1990) asserts that there are unique aspects of Pakistani culture that are observed by Weinreich (1953) and Kachru (1975) in Indian English; however, a similarity exists between the two varieties due to their shared cultural background. Some of these aspects are related to the word formation process, but their compounding and translation cause distinctions in Pakistani English and British English. Mohsin (2009) claims that these are the idiosyncrasies of Pakistani English that make it different from British English and other varieties of English. There are many particularities of Pakistani English and Culture, but the focal point of the paper is the semantic differences between the Pakistani variety of English and British English. It is the claim of Weinreich (1953) that the semantemes/lexical semantics of all languages are not always the same. There can be differences in British and indigenous Englishes. Though Rehman and Mohsin have done the same, their research was based on journalistic features of Pakistani English. Nihalani (1979) proposed work on pronunciation distinctions and usage differences between Indian and British English. This paper examines the semantic features in TV advertisements and Sunday magazines, which encompass a range of topics including fashion, food, gossip, politics, sports, and many more.

Pakistani English is a broad area for research because it is a less-investigated area of linguistics compared to others. This research is limited to the distinction of semantic features in both languages. The impact of this distinction is due to local cultures. These semantic differences are observed in just Sunday magazines at the lexical level, rather than at the morphological or sentence level.

3. Methodology

This research is based on the semantic features of two varieties of the English language. One of them is the British language, a standard language, and the other is the Pakistani variety, an indigenous variety. This is qualitative research. The data is collected from Sunday magazines of Pakistani variety, which cover a range of topics including fashion, food, gossip, politics, sports, and many others, as a medium to analyze semantic distinctions between Pakistani and British English. There are six magazines from 2010 and 2011. The language of television advertisements is also used for this research, along with magazines. There is variation in the number of magazines. The chosen words from magazines and TV ads are checked in the Pakistani Corpus, compiled by Anwar, and then in the BNC (British National Corpus). The analysis of the words/ examples will be based on the frequency of those words in both corpora, with reference to their context, not based on numbers.

4. Data analysis

The data is collected from Sunday magazines, and some examples are taken from media advertisements. There is a difference in vocabulary between Pakistani English and British English, highlighting distinct meanings. Some words, such as 'clever', are considered positive in the sense of British English but not in Pakistani English. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon

4.1. Generalized/ extended meaning

"Mind" is used in various contexts in PE. It is used as a noun and a verb in different contexts. In BE, the mind is used as an abstract noun, which is related to the brain, whereas in the Pakistani context, it has various settings for its use.

"Smart" is taken as a positive term in British English, referring to the quality of being intelligent. In Pakistani English, it has extended meanings related to a person's physical fitness. Smartness refers to the combination of a slim body and intelligence in PE.

In British Standard English, **"diet"** refers to food in a general sense, but in Pakistani discourse, it is often treated as a means to achieve a slim body.

Use of **"safety"** instead of razor: The word safety is used instead of razor in Pakistani English. Safety refers to the security of anything in Pakistani and British English, but it has a broader meaning when used in the context of a razor. In BNC, most occurrences of safety are related to the security and protection of people, property, and other assets.

"Tiffin" is used in extended meanings in Pakistan. It is also used for lunch boxes and storage pots.

"Family" is used in extended semantics in Pakistani English to refer to parents and children, as in British English. The extended meanings of this word refer to instances where male members of society use familial terms, such as "wife," "daughter," and "sister," for women. To hide the identity of any female from his family, the male calls her family.

"Cousin" is used in an extended sense in Pakistan to refer to all the male and female children of a parent's siblings, also known as the children of an uncle and aunt. There is no distinction in the usage of this word for the family of the father or the mother.

A **"Professor"** is referred to as a college lecturer in British English, and he is considered highly qualified. In one sense, Pakistani English shares the exact meaning of this word, but another way to extend its meaning is for a person who often forgets even small things. It is an ironic way to represent the meanings.

"Teasing", in the Pakistani context, is generalized to irritate and to harass someone, but in the BNC, it has only the meaning of irritating someone. Harassment is used separately as a term to convey its proper meaning.

A **"bottle"** has extended meanings in Pakistani English. In BE, it refers to a long, round (or any other shape) empty pot used to fill with water or another liquid. In PE, it has various meanings, as cold drinks are commonly referred to as bottles in Pakistan. It is relaxed to understand when asked for a bottle, which means some cold drinks.

"Sir and Madam" are used as titles for superior persons in British English. Other uses depend on the situation of being unusual. If uncle and aunt are not used to addressing some strangers, then these two words are uttered as vocative terms. The use of these words increases when referring to administrative personnel or teachers.

"Feel" is a verb used in British English, but in Pakistani English, it is related to a sense of something being wrong, as in British English. However, in Pakistani English, the extended meaning is to take something seriously, as in a heart-touching manner.

4.2. Narrowing of meanings

"Uncle and Aunt" are the vocative forms used to address an elder male and female. British English language speakers use these words to refer to any of their relatives, but in Pakistan, these words are also used to address strangers.

"Accident" in Old English refers to a sudden happening or event, but in Pakistani English, it specifically denotes a road accident. British English describes it as any sudden event that can bring positive and negative changes in one's life. On the other hand, in Pakistani English, it means a collision of vehicles that causes injuries.

"Relationship" is a term that is related to any contact and relation among people. In Pakistani stories featured in English magazines, relationships such as friendship, siblinghood, parent-child, etc., are often limited to husband-wife relationships or similar kinds of relations. This word is rarely used to refer to other relatives.

"Likeness" is used in the same way as the word "relationship" in Pakistani English. It conveys a meaning of love, depending on its use in various texts and stories. "Likeness" has different meanings from "love" in British English.

The **"educated class"** refers to the emerging middle class, which is more affluent than the lower working class.

4.3. Metaphorical meaning

"Sugar" is used in PE for diabetes: As a disease name is '*diabetes*' (in which the body produces less insulin than it requires) in BE, but in PE, it is often uttered as '*sugar*'. It is an edible material, but the disease is named after it because diabetes occurs due to the increased ratio of sugar in the blood. Whenever the word 'sugar' is used in a British context, it is considered a food material, but in Pakistan, it may depend on the context. New concepts are attached to the BE words that already exist.

Use of "lady finger" for okra: A few years ago, the compound word "lady finger" was used in spoken language as well as in course books for a vegetable. Later, due to the influence of English culture and a change in course books, okra is used as its name. However, there is also a typical usage of its previous name. This word is only used in the Pakistani corpus, but not in the BNC, not even once.

"Healthy" is articulated for fat: In the Pakistani context, a fat person is considered healthy. On the other hand, in British English, an overweight person is called fat. The word 'healthy' has a distinctive meaning because in BE, it is used to describe a person who is medically and physically well.

"Chips" refers to any type of potato crisp or finger chip. It is used in extended meanings.

"Prayer" is a word used in both languages in the same context, but the only difference is in the connotative meanings. Although the word has similar meanings, the difference arises due to religious connotations. In Pakistan, prayer is used for both 'Dua' and 'Namaz', whereas in Britain, it has some other religious associations.

5. Discussion and Conclusion

This paper highlights that a semantic distinction between PE and BSE emerges primarily due to cultural differences. The local Pakistani context indigenizes the English language, creating various semantic patterns (Kachru, 1992; Rahman, 2010). Various words from British English are used in Pakistani English with specialized and generalized meanings. This generalization in the meaning of English words is due to the influence of Pakistani culture. This process of semantic re-shaping parallels translation practices, where cross-cultural reconstruction negotiates sensitive issues such as harassment and feminist identity (Irshad & Yasmin, 2022; Irshad & Yasmin, 2023). New concepts are formed for words when meanings are generalized/extended. This paper provided a general overview of how semantic distinctions can occur between Pakistani English and British English. This research provides a foundation for future

researchers in the field of Pakistani English, a relatively under-researched area, which has considerable scope for in-depth work. Studies of Pakistani discourse similarly point to the role of power, identity, and socio-cultural positioning in shaping linguistic practices (Safdar & Yasmin, 2021b; Yasmin et al. 2019; Akram & Yasmin, 2024). Incorporating such perspectives reinforces how semantic distinctions are not merely linguistic but deeply ideological.

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