LANGUAGE, MEDIA, AND IDENTITY: PAKISTANI STUDENTS' ATTITUDES TOWARD BRITISH AND AMERICAN ENGLISH IN A GLOBALIZED ERA

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Abstract:
The wide application of English language spans from schools and universities to social media and workspaces of Pakistan. British English has been traditionally taught in Pakistani classrooms because of the historical influence with British colonies in sub-continent. However, due to the extensive exposure to American media because of the dominant video media platforms like YouTube, Netflix, TikTok, and Instagram, may lead to incline students' preferences toward American English over time. In this era of global media, this research investigates the attitudes of Pakistani university students, particularly ESL students toward British and American English. With the help of Language Attitudes Theory, this study examines how students use these varieties of English in informal as well as academic setting, utilizing qualitative approach. Data were collected through semi-structured interviews and a quick short assessment was conducted at the end of each interview with 40 English major students of the University of Okara. Results were drawn on the base of thematic analysis, which highlights the dominant use of British English due to institutional favoritism. But an extensive influence to American media, students showed a mixture use of both the varieties of English that highlights their change in taste, specifically in pronunciation and lexis choice. The research documents a disparity between formal education and use, providing important data to language teachers as well as curriculum planners to make the teaching of English more closely related to the changing linguistic realities of the learners.
Keywords: British English, American English, Language attitudes, Media influence, Language preferences, Digital media

1. Introduction

English language has secured a significant position in Pakistan as a co-official language Many individuals are of the view that English can be a helping aid for them in one way or the other when they are in a foreign country as part of travelling or global communication (Khan & Khan, 2024).

It has been used widely in various areas of life i.e., as a medium of instruction in higher education, law, businesses, and government affairs. English dominates most probably in every field in Pakistan. It has regarded as a symbol of social mobility and academic success (Mahboob, 2009). English has hold greater importance as a mean of academic excellence in Pakistan.

A global language, English exists in various standardized forms including the two most prominent ones i.e., British English and American English. Crystal, 2003; Trudgill & Hannah, 2017 states that British English is a variety spoken or written in United Kingdom, and has its distinct spellings, pronunciation, and grammar patterns. On the other hand, American English is a variety used by people in United States, carrying simplified spelling rules and unique vocabulary, and is spread widely through global media and technology (Finegan, 2015; Yule, 2020). The key differences between these two lie between spelling (*colour* vs. *color*), pronunciation (non-rhotic vs. rhotic), vocabulary (*lorry* vs. *truck*), and grammatical tendencies.

After the Colonial reign, British English has traditionally been the preferred and taught variety of language in Pakistani schools, colleges, and universities. However, the increasing use of global digital media has widely introduced the younger generation of Pakistan to the American English more frequently than ever before. In recent years, after the COVID-19 pandemic, social media platforms like Instagram, TikTok, YouTube, and Netflix have become a greater source of language exposure for university students especially among English as a Second Language (ESL) learners. Due to the dominance of U.S. based creators and media industries, these social media platforms are saturated with American English content. As the social media consumer are majorly students, their language preferences and attitudes are most likely to shift due to the consumption of TV shows, short videos, and reels for both entertainment and education purpose. For example, the American TV series or influencers can make American vocabulary, slang, and pronunciation more accessible, trendy and more appealing to the ESL learners than the traditional British English being taught in the classrooms. This greater shift in media consumption has led to the potentially changing preferences of students to adopt American pronunciation, spellings, and slang potentially blurring the line between formal instruction and casual language acquisition. This highlights the tension between what students learn and what they actually use in everyday life. This change has particularly created a space, where both the American and British Languages compete in order to maintain prestige and acceptance for the everyday use in academic and social context (Mansoor, 2005).

In Pakistan, where British English has long been a standard in academic settings, the digital driven preferences of language use among university students is understudied. While a few studies have discussed the students' attitudes towards English in general, there is lack of research that focuses on the students specific preferences, especially in the current digital age. Furthermore, while students can say that they like one form over another, no one knows if these attitudes are reflected in actual use in writing, speaking, or study habits. This gap between practice and preference is the key flaw of the literature on language attitudes and media effect for Pakistani ESL learners.

This study is important because it looks at how media affects students' choice of English whether British or American. It focuses **on** Pakistani university students who are also ESL learners**.** The study will help teachers, researchers, and language planners understand how students are learning English from **outside the classroom**.

By knowing what kind of English students prefer and why, schools and universities can improve the way English is taught. The study also adds value to the field of language learning and teaching**,** especially in a world where media plays a big role in education.

1.1. Research Questions:

Collectively, this paper attempts to address these research questions:

1. What are the language preferences of Pakistani university students between British and American English, and what attitudes influence these preferences?
2. How do students' real-life usage patterns reflect their stated preference for a particular English variety?
3. To what extent are students able to distinguish between British and American spellings and vocabulary?
4. What factors shape students' attitudes toward British or American English (e.g., schooling, or global media)?

2. Literature Review

Many researchers have addressed how students learn and use English in non-native context. In Pakistan, British English has been taught in schools and universities due to its historical influence. Moreover, the rise of digital media has exposed students greatly to the American English through social media platforms like TikTok, Instagram, YouTube, and Netflix. This shift has raised questions about how digital media influences students' language preferences and use. The following review throw light on the key research about language attitudes, British and American language differences, and how social media influences the students' preferences of language especially among ESL learners.

According to Khan, Farooq, and Khan (2025), Gen Z students are generally more aware of international trends and seek educational experiences that prepare them for the digital economy. On the other hand, Aisy and Wahyudi (2024) stated that, across the globe, there are more than 160 English variations of accent. Their research highlights the Generation Z's attitudes towards these variations of English as a foreign language... This research adopted a qualitative approach by selecting only English Literature students. Findings reveal that the American English still dominates the preferences of the most participants. However, this study only addresses the educational, motivational, and habitual factors that influence their choices. So, the current study fills in the gap of global media impact on students' preferences.

Koceva, Kostadinova, and Tabutova (2023), conducted a research in the Republic of Bulgaria found the EFL learners preferences based on their knowledge and linguistic preferences between the two standardized English varities i.e., British and American. Findings suggest that the university students have shown the equal usage of both the American English and British English. The example mentioned was that the students have used 50% of the vocabulary from American English and 50% from the British, highlighting that the students are not able to set a clear difference between these two varieties. This study elaborates that in Pakistan students might not be able to differentiate whether they prefer AE or BE raising the greater question of research.

Hadji (2025) researched how American film viewing and social media influence English-learning students. The researcher discovered that most of the students enjoy American English because it is what they constantly hear in the media. This also makes them more inclined to learn the language. It was revealed from the study that media influences the attitude of students toward various varieties of English. However, the research does not consider how the students differentiate between British English and American English, something this study centers on, particularly for Pakistani students.

A study by Hansen Edwards (2016) in Hong Kong found that students often used American English sounds like rhoticity and flapping. Those who preferred the accent picked it up more from American media. Their way of speaking matched what they were exposed to on social media. This shows how media affects not only students' choices but also their use of language itself. Moreover, students are more likely to choose American English over British English due to the widespread influence of the U.S. through media and technology (Alberto, n.d.).

Meanwhile, a study conducted by Brdarević-Čeljo, Švraka, and Dubravac (2024) in Bosnia evaluated whether students are inclined toward British or American English and if they can differentiate between the language units of both varieties. The results highlighted that students can extensively tell the difference but are inconsistent in using these two varieties; still, they prefer the American variety for use.

Another study by Gul and Channa (2023) in Pakistan, using a mixed-method approach, revealed that Pakistani university students showed a positive attitude toward British English and a negative attitude toward American English. This study raised the question of whether Pakistani students use American or British English in their daily use, consciously or unconsciously, and what influences their language attitudes.

Futhermore, a study was taken into account by Ali, Ishtiaq, and Shahid (2020) conducted in Pakistan on the provincial level and the federal level. This study highlights that in Pakistani Schools and Universities there is no uniformity in using the two varieties of English. This study concludes that students are more likely to incline towards the variety they have more exposure to. The study by Akindele and Fabunmi (2019) explored how Nigerian university students use and prefer British and American English words and spellings. A quiz was given to 500 students from five universities. The results showed that students mostly used British English words like *holiday* and *university*, but also used some American words like *elevator* and *expressway*. In terms of spelling, British forms like *favour* and *programme* were preferred, but some students still used American spellings like *center* and *criticize*. These findings suggest that even though students are exposed to both varieties, British English is still the dominant choice. This is relevant to the current study as it shows how students in non-native English contexts, like Pakistan, may also be influenced by both formal education (favoring British English) and global media (promoting American English).

Briefly, numerous researchers have explored what British and American English is liked or disliked by students. Most researchers generally assume that school and media influence such attitudes. Yet little is understood as to how these attitudes actually affect speaking or writing. It is because that it is crucial to consider what students like, and how students actually apply English in practice. In response to this, this particualr research focuses on to investigate these questions.

3. Theoretical Framework:

This research uses Language Attitudes Theory as a base to investigate individuals' attitudes towards different language varieties and how these attitudes affect their behavior and language use. This theory was first established by Lambert and Giles during earlier research, and later extended by Baker(1992) and Garret (2010). According to the theory, language is not only a communication tool but also an identity indicator, status marker, and group member. These dispositions are formed through education, media use, culture, and daily life (Garrett, 2010; Baker, 1992).

Perhaps the most important element of the theory is the differentiation between status and solidarity dimensions (Ryan, Giles, & Sebastian, 1982). The status dimension is how people perceive a language in order to maintain power, reputation, and correctness. On the other hand, solidarity dimension refers to appear familiar and reflecting to sort of friendliness and connection associated to the language. Pakistani learners, for example, are able to identify British English with formal and academic glitz and American English as informal, contemporary, or media-influenced.

A preference for a language is also another key component of the theory that indicates how students acquire an affinity for a certain variety as a result of constant exposure and social pressure. Though British English is formally taught to the students, American English can be used by other learners because it is easy and commonly used in entertainment, social media, and online materials (Hansen Edwards, 2016). Jenkins (2009) further adds that the process of globalization and virtual interconnectedness has allowed learners to be contextually adaptable while shifting among varieties.

The theory is applicable to the present research because it enables one to explore not just students' attitude towards British and American English, but also how attitudes can shape their use of languages in class and in daily life. Language Attitudes Theory offers the right framework to explain students' choices or preferences in the Pakistani academic context where both varieties exist.

4. Methodology:

This section outlines the method and procedure used to conduct the research. It shed light on the research design, the participants who took part, the tools used for data collection, and the sampling techniques. The goal is to ensure the study is systematic, reliable, and aligned with the research questions.

4.1. Research Design

This research employed a qualitative exploratory design. A semi-structured interview was designed to investigate university students' preferences for British or American English in terms of pronunciation, vocabulary, spellings, and status. Moreover, a quick-short assessment was conducted during the interviews to draw absolute results. This design is suitable to explore opinions and patterns through open-ended responses and detailed analysis.

4.2. Population and Sample

50 participants were involved studying English Literature and English Linguistics in University of Okara. The study employed purposive sampling; a sample of 40 students was selected with equal gender distribution (20 males and 20 females), having same level of exposure to digital media plus British and American English.

4.3. Research Setting

The data was collected from the English Department of University of Okara, situated in Renala Khurd (tehsil of Okara District). Data collection took place during September 2025 in universities classrooms during free slots.

4.4. Data Collection Tools

The tool used for collecting data was semi-structured interviews. The interview questions were designed to explore students' attitudes towards British or American English, what do they prefer to use in their daily life, and why.

4.5. Tool Development and Adaptation

A semi-structured interview of 12 questions was developed to explore students' preferences for British or American English. Questions were adapted based on literature review but modified to the current research. To ensure the clarity and alignment of questions to the research, two experts reviewed them.

4.6. Validity and Reliability

The interview questions were reviewed by language experts to check validity. A pilot interview was conducted to check clarity and consistency of responses. Necessary adjustments were made to enhance the reliability of the tool.

4.7. Data Collection Procedure

The interviews were conducted after taking permissions from the head of the departments. Participants were informed in advance. Later, their consent was taken to record the interviews. Each interview spanned 10 minutes. The responses were later transcribed for analysis.

4.8. Ethical Consideration

Participants were informed about the purpose of the study. Their identities were kept confidential. Also the data was utilized only for research purpose. Participation was voluntary, and students could withdraw at any time without any pressure.

4.9. Data Analysis

After collecting the interview and assessment data, all responses were carefully transcribed and assessment results were concluded in percentages to check preferences, usage, and familiarity with the BrE and ArE. The transcripts were read multiple times to identify common themes, patterns, and differences in students' language preferences. A thematic analysis approach was used to make sense of the data and connect it to the research questions. This assisted in comprehending why and in what way students favor specific English varieties.

4.10. Delimitations

This research only involved students of the University of Okara from Pakistan only. It considered their attitudes and tendencies towards British and American English only on the grounds of exposure through media and did not include other forms of English.

4.11. Summary Line

In summary, this chapter has explained the research method employed to investigate in-depth how world media affects Pakistani students' attitudes and interests in American and British English.

5. Findings

This study aimed to explore the university students' preferences for the British and American English, their actual usage in daily life, their familiarity with each variety, and what influences these attitudes. During each Semi-structured interview, a short assessment consisting of 6 questions was conducted to triangulate the qualitative data and verify students' awareness, preference, and ability to differentiate between the two English varieties. Responses were collected from 40 participants out of the total 50 interviewees.

Quantitative Findings from the Assessment

The questions were designed to measure three main aspects:

Preference (which English students like more),

Usage (what they use in daily life), and

Recognition (how well they can differentiate between British and American English).

Assessment Question	Response Options	Frequency	Percentage	Purpose
1. What English do you prefer?	American English	15	37.5%	Preference
	British English	25	62.5%	
2. Which spelling do you use more often?	Color (AmE)	8	20%	Usage
	Colour (BrE)	32	80%	
3. What word do you prefer to say?	Flat (BrE)	24	60%	Usage
	Apartment (AmE)	16	40%	
4. Which one is an American spelling?	Color	33	82.5%	Recognition
	Colour	7	17.5%	
5. Which one is a British vocabulary word?	Flat	35	87.5%	Recognition
	Apartment	5	12.5%	
6. Which one is an American spelling?	Program (AmE)	26	65%	Recognition
	Programme (BrE)	14	35%	

Table 1.: Results of Assessment

These results indicate a clear inclination towards British English (62.5%) among Pakistani university students. This preference highlights students' educational background of Pakistan, where British English is used as the standard variety to teach in classrooms. But a significant inclination is observed as 37.5% preferred American English because of the extensive engagement of students with American media.

When asked about usage in speaking and writing, about 80% students preferred to use British spellings such as *colour* and 60% said they use British vocabulary such as *flat*. This shows students' mostly applies British English while speaking and writing. Students' has also reported high familiarity with the American variety of English language with over 80% majority. This shows that even after learning British English students are extensively consuming American English on internet and media.

Qualitative Insights from Interview Responses

Interview responses were studied through thematic analysis, which concluded three main results:

1. Educational Influence (Status Dimension)

Majority of the students favored British English because this version has always been taught to them in schools and universities. This shows that what the students are exposed to in institutes is what shape their idea of which

language is 'prestigious'. In reference to Language Attitudes Theory, this reflects to the status dimension, that is when a language gains respect due to institutional influence.

A student said: "I like British English because we were taught that variety in schools."

Another student replied with: "My teachers always corrected me using British spellings, so it stuck with me."

These answers show that students like British English not because out of habit but because they were taught to prefer it in school and they believe British variety to be more educated and respected.

2. Literary Familiarity (Cultural Connection)

Some students said they liked British English because the majority of the literature they have read, was written in that variety of English. This reflects to the cultural prestige of classic literature, because students think of British variety to be more prestigious and intellectually deep. This also highlights the influence of the British Colonial era on Pakistani student's preferences for that variety of language.

As one student stated: "I have read a lot of literature in British English, so it comes naturally to me."

One other said: "It sounds more formal and literary; I'm used to it from our literature courses."

This shows how culture has immersed in the literature and strengthens the attachment to the British English highlighting its symbolic status in academic context.

3. Media-Induced Flexibility (Solidarity Dimension)

Some students said they like to use both British and American English, depending on the situation. This shows that they can easily switch between the two styles because of their exposure to global media like YouTube, Netflix, and social platforms.

One said: "I prefer both Englishes because I use words from British as well as American English variety."

Other stated: "On social media, I sometimes switch to American spellingsbecause they are easy."

Fewer students claimed: "I think media has made us mix both English varieties."

This shows that students are becoming more flexible with language. The internet and media help them feel connected to both cultures, so they naturally mix British and American English in their everyday communication.
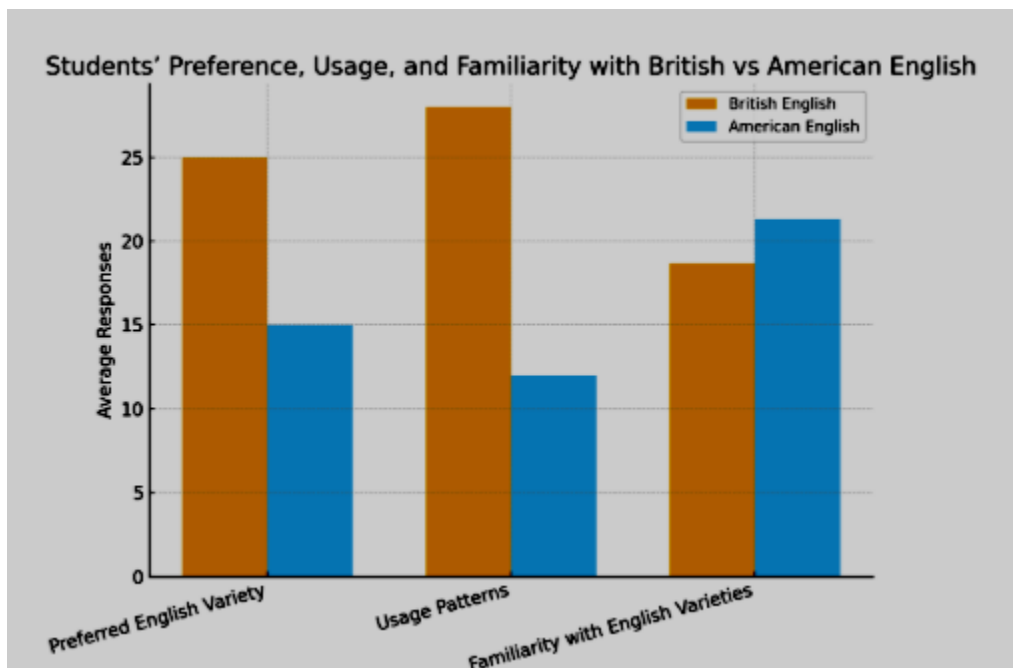
In short the result highlights:

Fig.1: Summary of Results

Fig.1 summarizes that:
Preference: Students favor **British English** more strongly.
Usage: British spellings and vocabulary dominate students' choices. But some reported a mixture use of both varieties.
Familiarity: Students showed equal awareness for British as well as American variety, but minority were confused, differentiating between both.

6. Discussion

The results show that Pakistani university students majorly (62%) chose to use British English . Schooling system is the main reason for this strong preference over American English. Almost all students said, they prefer British because they have learned it from schools and now studying that English variety in universities, so they feel sense of honour using it. This aligns with status and prestige dimensions of the Language Attitudes Theory.

But around 30-35% of students reported the influence of American English because of consuming American media and entertainment. Students stated, they feel American English is easy to remember and more casual to use. This supports the solidarity dimension of the Language Attitudes Theory.

Overall, British English holds educational and historical importance, while American English continues influencing students' daily use of language. Finding revealed that language attitudes are evolving in this world of social media.

7. Conclusion

This research explored Pakistani university students' preferences and their actual use of British and American English, and also what factors influences those choices. Findings show that British English remains dominant because it has been the educational-standard on Pakistani institutes, due to its excellence and intellectual

richness. However, students are gradually shifting towards American English due to the growing social media use, and students are adapting this variety of English using it in informal conversations and writing.

The results show that students prefer British English because it is linked with education, prestige and respect. This supports the status dimension of the Language Attitudes Theory. At the same time, the solidarity dimension is also trying to make place as students are influenced by American media, making them more adaptable in using both types of English.

Overall, the study shows that students are in a stage of change. They see British English as formal and academic, while American English feels more modern and casual. This mix shows that both media and education are shaping how Pakistani students think about English, helping them accept a more easier and modern way of learning and using the language.

Author Contribution Statement

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