

AN EXPLORATION OF DIFFICULT ENGLISH CONSONANTS FOR PASHTO L1 LEARNERS AT BS LEVEL IN COLLEGES OF DISTRICT BAJAUR, KP

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Abstract

This study examined the resemblances and differences between Pashto and English consonants and pointed out the difficulties faced by Pashto L1 learners in pronouncing certain English consonants at various word positions. This study also explained the acquisition of certain English consonants posed difficulty to Pashto L1 learners. The target population of the study was 75 male and 25 female BS students; their age ranged between 16-22 years from the Government Degree Colleges in District Bajour (Ex. FATA). A survey was conducted through a test and class room observation. Data was collected by applying a mixed-methods approach. The most difficult English consonants were identified and analyzed by using Praat software. It was found that Pashto speaking students have difficulties in the articulation of English aspirated sounds like ([ph], [th], and [kh]) and some fricatives like /f/, /v/, and dental like /θ/, /ð/. As Pashto language has retroflex, so some English sounds /d/, /t/ and /y/ were articulated with retroflex ending. It aimed to enhance the pronunciation skills of Pashto learners and address the challenges in pronouncing English consonants. Thus, the study provides insights into effective teaching approaches for improving the pronunciation skills of Pashto learners in order to articulate English consonants accurately.

Keywords: Pashto L1 learners, difficult English sounds, District Bajour, English aspirated sounds, retroflex.

INTRODUCTION

In the world of science and technology, the importance of English language as a means of international communication is enhanced. In this global world, English is being spoken and understood throughout the world. Thus Crystal (2000) says that more than 60 countries in the world use English as an official or quasi-official language. He further claims that above 400 million people use English as their mother-tongue and for more than four hundred million English as their second language and above five hundred million use it with some ability as a foreign language. English is used by international aviators and seafarer for inter-communication. In fact, English is the world language of books, newspaper, publications, science and technology, advertisement, pop music, and of computer information storage.

Moreover, English is the language which is used in our offices and the medium of instruction in many of the elite class educational institutions in our country. Furthermore, it is used for communication by a large section of the population in the country (Mahmood, 2013). Ahmed (1997) points out that the four specific areas in which English is used in

Pakistan are daily official correspondence, medium of instruction in many elite educational institutions, professional education and mean of communication in International trade and commerce. According to Ahmed it is assumed that Pashto speaking students have difficulties in the correct pronunciation of certain English consonants. Pashto is from the East Iranian group of languages. This research is focused on the middle Dialects of the Tribal area which is further limited to Utmanee and Tharkalani tribal dialects in District Bajour.

The Sociolinguistic Survey of Northern Pakistan states that Pashto has about fifty to sixty million speakers. Pashto is the native language in some areas in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. In August 1958 Pashtun scholars both from Afghanistan and Pakistan held their meeting in Kabul who agreed on some proposals for the standardizations of Pashto alphabets. Pashto has the following five major dialects i.e. Yousafzai Dialect (North-Eastern), Central Dialect (North-Western), Quetta Dialect (South-Eastern), Kandaharee Dialect (South-Western) and the Middle Tribal Dialect.

Problem Statement

Teaching English pronunciation is often neglected in our educational institution and a great number of our English language teachers often stress on syntax and vocabulary for language learning. As Harmer (2001) says that some English language teachers valued grammar and vocabulary and they stress on functional dialogues for practice, skill activities. While some make little endeavor to teach pronunciation. Various studies have been conducted about the difficult English consonants for Pashto speakers in various Pashtun regions. According to Rehman, Khan and Bukhari (2012) Pashto speakers mispronounce the following English fricatives and affricates, i.e., //f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/ and /ʒ/. These consonants are missing in Pashto and are consciously substituted with Pashto sounds (/p/, /w/, /t/, /d/, /dʒ/).

English and Pashto language have different phonemic representation. As a result in pronouncing these sounds Pashto speakers mixed these sounds and pronounce it according to their own manner and place of articulation. Rehman, Khan and Bukhari (2012) say that Pashto speaking students faces difficulties in the articulation of labial dental fricatives sound /f/ and /v/ which are pronounce as bi- labial as /p/ and /v/ and thus majority are unable to differentiate between labia-dental and bilabial. Pashto speaking students have problems in the articulation of dental sounds /θ/ and /ð/ and which are mispronounced as alveolar. The researcher has the teaching experience in different colleges in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa has personally observed the difficult English consonants for Pashto speakers. He has found that Pashto speaking students have some difficulties in the correct pronunciation aspirated /ph/, /th/, and /kh/ fricatives like /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/ and /d/, /t/, /r/, /j/ and /ŋ/.

LITERATURE REVIEW

All over the world, researchers and scholars of English linguistics have conducted numerous researchers in various regions regarding the difficulties related to the acquisition of English language consonants. They have suggested several solutions for the correct acquisition of English language consonants based on their researches and observations. After studying their researches, we have tried in this research to point out the issues related to the acquisition English language consonants by Pashto speaking students at BS level in the colleges of district Bajour Khyber Pakhtunkhwa.

English Language in Pakistan

Arabic, Persian and Sanskrit are colloquial languages used formally the British raj in the sub-continent. It was Lord Macaulay reforms in 1935 which replace these languages and thus undermined the function of colloquial languages at the cost of promoting English. Mansoor (1993) says that in 1854 English language was given more importance by making education in English compulsory for getting government jobs. In 1947 Quaid-e-Azam openly announced that that Urdu would be official language but at same time affirmed the

importance and usefulness of English language. Then time and again English language was esteemed in framing national policies and planning tile dates Anwar (2011). English language spread and flourishes with British colonization and reached too many parts of the world and developed itself as a global language (Askari, 2010). In Middle Eastern countries like Saudi Arabia and UAE English language is emerging as the official language and medium of instruction in many colleges, schools and universities. Prior to 1996 Algeria was a part of France and French was the language which is replaced by English as the medium of instruction in many schools. Crystal (2003) says that it is essential for a global language to be used by majority of people than any other common languages and English has acquired this status as a lingua franca throughout the world

First Language Acquisition

Language is a mean of communication through which individuals transfer their feelings, ideas and desires. Individual acquires language from the environment to which they are exposed (Ullah, Ali & Ali, 2020). The language acquired at an early stage during early age is the native tongue or L1 while second language is learned for a special purpose. In our society English is learned as a foreign language for attaining social status (Ullah, Ahmad & Ullah, 2023). There is always a close relationship between the native language and the foreign language. Various models regarding L2 learning show that First language interferes in the learning of the second language. The PAM (perceptual assimilation model) tries to examine the related relation between the native language sound systems in perception of the second language system. SLM (Speech learning model) is another model is about the function of the second language perception and its consequence on the sound system of accusation of two unlike sounds. According to (Berg,1967) childhood is the best age for learners to acquire linguistic proficiency because in later age the brain are not so effective and thus make mistakes in linguistic structures. He further comments that in childhood linguistic cues are perceived in the left hemisphere in the brain which in later age acts as the production of language.

Second Language Learning and Acquisition

First language is acquire while Foreign language is learned which is a special task to be achieved and mastered in a real sense. The Foreign language learners are having previously the knowledge of their native language. They try to learn the foreign language in the way they had acquired their mother tongue in the setting and the atmospheres. Thus they try to learn consciously. (Mackey, 1965) says that all learners apply almost the same method for learning of their first language but they use various methods and skills for learning a foreign language. Second language learning is predominantly affected by various environmental and social factors i.e. linguistics and Psychological. Psychological factors such as age, gender, motive, native language skills, intelligence, personality, mental fitness, personal interest. or willingness to learn, emotions and drives influences the process and progress of second language learning. (Lado.1971) is of the view that learning a foreign language a sequence of linguistic and psychological mechanisms is more difficult than learning a representation of it in which the method of speaking and listening is involved, as it is. (Lado, 1971) states that learning a foreign language is in fact acquiring the skills to use the syntax with the general vocabulary during conversation. (Ellis.2009) discovers that learners acquire a language when exposed to the second language setting in an open situation of communication. In this stage some children are passive and avoid speaking but only listen and this is the basic period for productivity. In the second stage they started speaking and try to formulate and fix their expression and thus speak some words skips the other and are unable to utter full sentence. . Ramzan et al. (2023a) empowered ESL students by harnessing the potential of social media for the enhancement of academic motivation and found social

media as an instrument to boast ESL students' engagement and performance. Ramzan et al. (2023b) explored the relationships between social media usage and academic performance and consider it as a source of academic improvement. Ramzan et al. (2023c) amplified classroom enjoyment and cultivated positive learning attitude among ESL learners and the study emphasized role of learners centered approach. Ramzan and Javaid (2023d) studied the psychological factors influencing Pashto speaking ESL students pronunciation of English vowels and it was concluded that some of the Monophthongs and especially diphthongs were very problematic for students. Nawaz et al. (2020) studied urdu speakers' use of stress patterns and found phonological variation from native speakers. Javaid et al. (2024) assessed stress causing factors and language related challenges among first year student in higher education institutions in Pakistan and the study offers insights into the multifaceted nature of stress experienced by first-year students and highlights the imperative of addressing these stressors to promote a nurturing learning environment conducive to academic success

English sound system

Phonetics and phonology is the branch linguistics and its knowledge is necessary for the correct use of English speech sounds. It is essential to learn English pronunciation because English phonemes are the basic unites of pronunciation which is different from letters used for writing Roach (2000). Received Pronunciation (RP) is the accent that is the accent of the well-educated elite class and BBC used as a model for foreign learners. It is the accent of textbooks, dictionaries and pronunciation and thus is labeled in detail (Roach, 2000). Roach (2009) discussed English sounds on the bases of their places and manners of articulation. These sounds are produced in eight places i.e., 1,bilabial, 2,labia-dental, 3, dental, 4,alveolar, 5, post alveolar, 6,palatal, 7,velar, and 8,glottal and are produced with manners i.e., plosive, fricative, affricative, nasal, lateral and approximant.

Table1.EnglishConsonants Roach (1983)

B	bilabial		Labia-dental		Dental		Alveolar	Palatal-Alveolar	Palatal	Velar
Glottal										
Plosive	p	b			t	d			k	g
Fricatives			f	v	θ	ð	s	z	ʃ	ʒ
Affricate							tʃ	dʒ		h
Nasal	m				n				ŋ	
Lateral					l					
Liquid					r					
Approximant	w							j		

Thus, in a study Anwar (2007) found that in Pakistan English learners faces difficulties in the articulation of English simple vowel, double and triple vowels and some consonant clusters.

Pashto Language Sounds

According to Hallberg (1992) and (Penzele, 1955) in a study find out that Pashto has about fifty to sixty million speakers. Pashto is the native language in some areas in Afghanistan, Pakistan and Iran. Pashto is the official language of Afghanistan and is spoken in the Pashtun areas of Afghanistan. It is the mother tongue of billions in Khyber

Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan. Pashto has the following five major dialects i.e. Yousafzai Dialect (North-Eastern), Central Dialect (North-Western), Quetta Dialect (South-Eastern), Kandaharee Dialect (South-Western) and the Middle Tribal Dialect.

(Roach, 2000) same language can be spoken with different pronunciation by people belong to different geographic areas, social classes, ages and educational backgrounds. In learning a foreign language the learner often commit three types of mistakes; a specific sound may be either missing in the native language which the learner will substitute it with a sound alike or a Second a sound may exist in the native language but not as a distinct sound.

Mother Tongue Influence

Mother tongue influence is a well-known fact which cannot be ignored. Language experts are of the view that the interference of native language cannot be completely removed but can be minimize by providing proper linguistic environment to the learners. The problem is that second language learners think in their own mother tongue and then translate the idea into the target language. The interference of Mother tongue can be reduced in the early age otherwise it will be difficult to acquire language like the native speaker. (Decherd,1983) and (Ellis,1997) say that the frequency of mistakes in the target language displays the difference in the structure of native language and target language.(Ellis,1997) says that the interference of Mother tongue on foreign language acquisition is mostly due to ignorance of the target language. Second language learning is difficult because learners have already have a set of language structure of a native language in their mind and thus distinction between the structure of native and second language resulted in confusion which affects the fluency and accuracy of the target language

Beards (1982) says that the difficulties for a non-native in learning a second language is mainly due to the different in structure, sound system and vocabulary of the mother tongue and the target language. Then there came two types of distanced situations when the differences are more the learner will face difficulties in learning but will get clear knowledge. If the similarities are more than the learning process will be easy but more confusion. (Dechert, 1983) says that learners often make errors when the Mother tongue and second language has similar structure because the learners will predict the rules on the basis of similarities.

Research Methodology

Research methodology deals with the methods of research apply by the researcher in order to collect and interpret data. It includes the whole research procedure as how the sample is selected, data collected and interpreted by the researcher. The research instruments and questions they carry in detail are discussed in research methodology.

Research Design

This study is a mixed a method approach for Data collection. Data collected was analyzed and the most difficult sounds were passed through Praat software as it requires a thorough and careful analysis.

Research Sampling

The participants were 100 students of BS first semester aged 16 to 22. The participants were taken randomly from the Male and female Government collages in districts Bajour.

Limitations

The study was limited to male and female students in Government Colleges and only the most difficult English consonants for Pashto speaking students were passed through Praat software for further identification.

Delimitations

In order to make the current study precise and simple, the researcher randomly selected 100 BS students 75 male and 25 female from the three male and one female government colleges in district Bajour.

Test

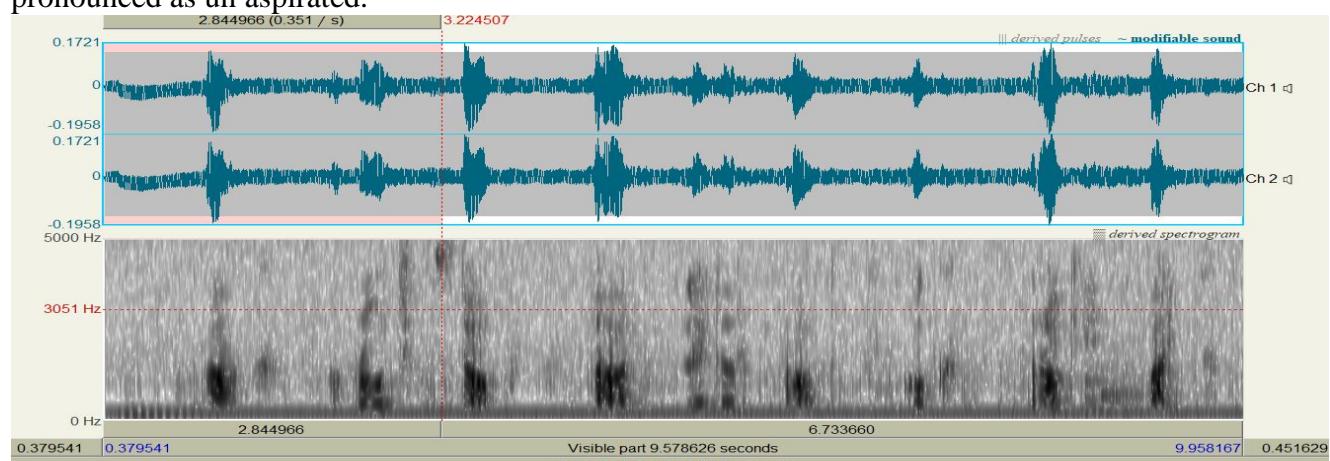
Primary data was gathered with the help of a questionnaire presented in the form of a test. The test designed for the applicants were consisted of 60 words represents each phonemic sound in different word positions. The applicants were divided into different groups and each group was tested on separate day. Descriptive and statistic method was adopted in this research to describe, organize, analyze, and clarify the data of the research. In the beginning the applicants were informed of the objectives of the research study and that their identities would be kept secret and will not be expose in the research report. Appropriate time was given to all the applicants for properly pronunciation. Whenever a participant mispronounced a word, he was allowed to restart the word again and correct the pronunciation by himself and his sounds were recorded. Then the recording of the most difficult sounds were passed through Praat soft wear for further clarification.

Results and Discussion

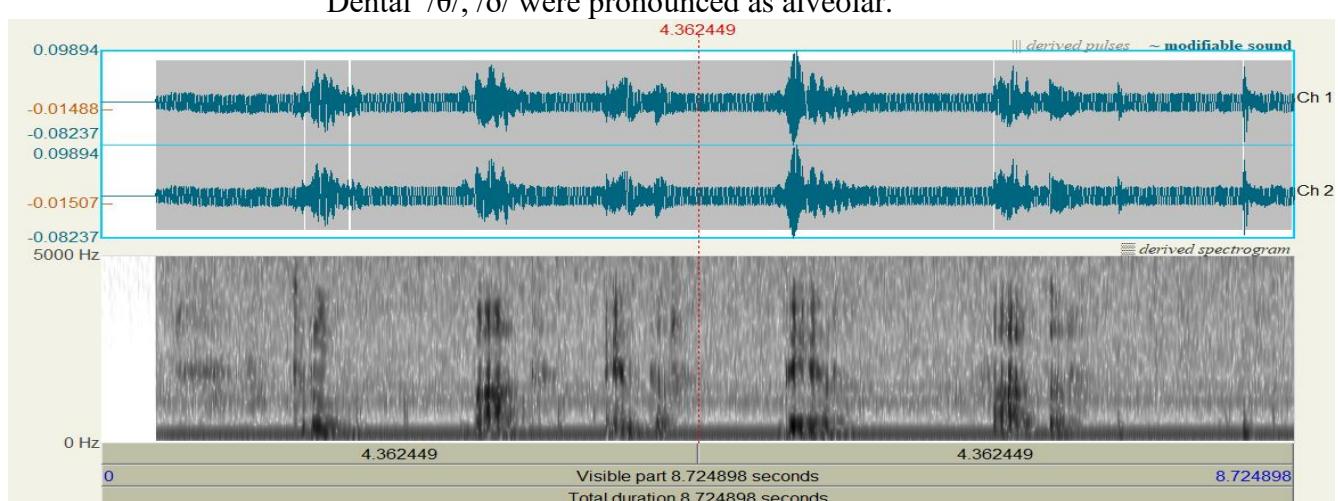
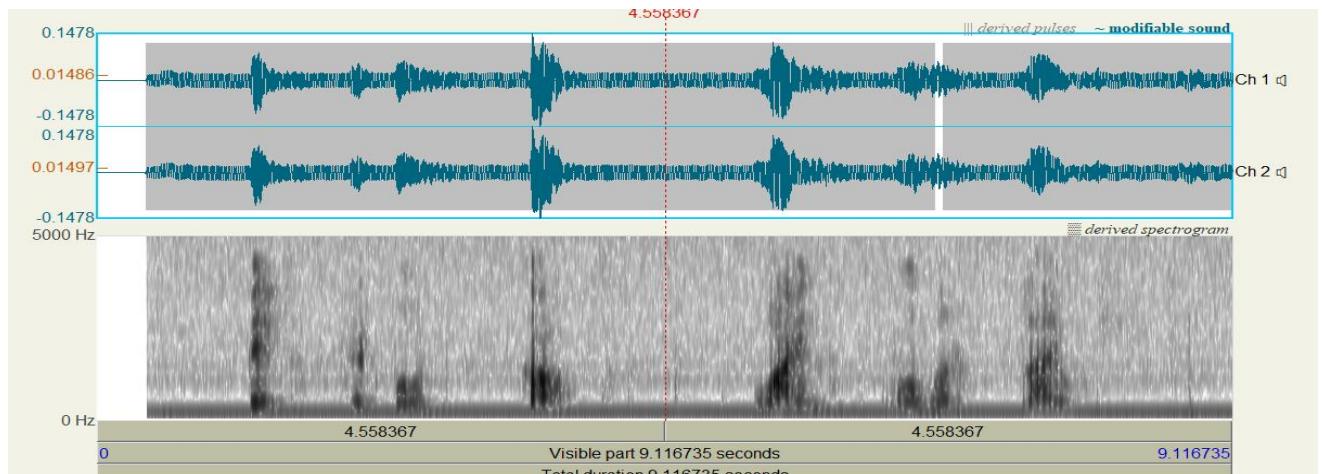
The traditional language teaching gives emphasis on grammar which creates problems for students in the correct pronunciation certain English consonants. Due to lack of exposure to English speaking environment outside the classroom English pronunciation has turn out to be the most thoughtful problem. A list of various simple words was given to the applicants for reading aloud. These words cover English consonants in different word positions.

It was found that Pashto speaking students have some difficulties in the articulation of some fricatives /f/, /v/, /θ/, /ð/. They have difficulties in the articulation of aspirated (ph), (th) and (kh) which they often pronounce it without aspiration. As Pashto language has retroflex, so some English sounds /d/, /t/ and /ŋ/ were articulated with retroflex ending. The most problematic sounds were passed through Praat software for conformation. The researcher has given the causes of inappropriate pronunciation and at the same time devised some possible means to overcome these shortcomings.

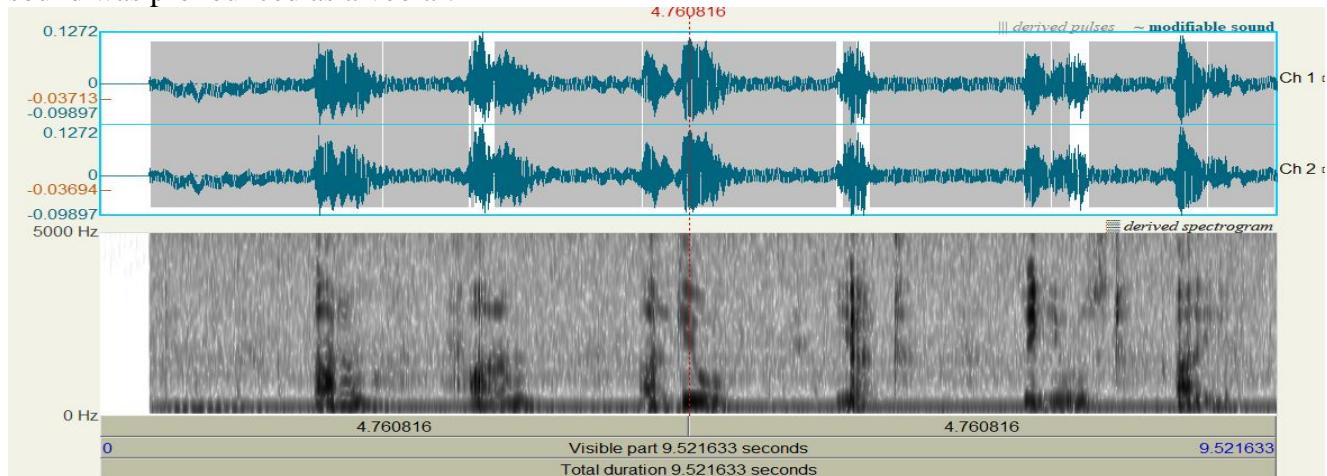
English /p/, /t/ and /k/ are aspirated when come in the start ([ph], [th], and [kh]) were pronounced as un aspirated.



English labiodental fricatives /f/, /v/ were pronounced as bi labial plosive



The sound /r/ followed by consonants is Silent but was pronounced and the approximate /j/ sound was pronounced as alveolar.



Suggestions and recommendation:

In modern world we have electronic means i.e. Cassette drives, Dick Videos Drives, British news channels on Television, radio, Internet, English Textbooks and other numerous teaching and learning Aids which can help learners to learn and practice and enhance their capabilities in learning and acquiring English. For Pashto L1 to learn English accurately depends on their motivation and positive attitude toward English learning. Teacher motivation and learner self-motivation is an important factor that can helps learners in

learning the target language. Some recommendations and strategies are given below which may assist students and teachers in reducing students difficulties in the articulation of certain English consonants. Phonetics and phonology should be made compulsory and be taught in their earlier stage of students of English language. Exercises and drills related to pronunciation may be included in the curriculum. Students be given proper time for reading aloud the text with the teacher's support with Special attention to the problematic English consonants. If the student commits errors in reading the teacher should correct it on spot. Students should be encouraged to watch authentic English programs on Television and other visual media, such as BBC English, CNN, and English language programmers and watching videos of prominent you tube English teachers etc.

CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the understanding of the specific challenges confronted by Pashto L1 learners in the acquisition of certain English consonants. The findings suggest that Pashto L1 learners in BS level at Government colleges in District Bajaur face serious difficulties in the acquisition of certain English consonants. These sounds are missing in Pashto language and are differently realized and produced. These difficulties can be overcome through maximum exposer to authentic English language media, books and connecting with native speaker through cultural and language programs. Proper training and refresher courses should be designed, regulated and assessed with regular interval for English language teachers and students. Passages and skilled oriented exercises with audio lingual aids and language soft wears should be including in the course books and syllabuses design for English language learning and acquisition.

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