



## Problems Faced by Pashto Speaking Community in the Articulation of English Fricative Consonants at Undergraduate Level in Swabi

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**Abstract:** The present research study aims at exploring the phonological errors with regard to the segmental features committed by the Pashtun ESL learners in Swabi (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In this research study, the researchers have used an audio recording as a tool to collect the data from the respondents. Both males and females were included in the data collection to fulfil the ethics of the research. The data was analysed and presented in a tabulated form. The results of the research show that Pashto speakers at Distt Swabi are significantly affected by the first language (Pashto) in the speaking of English, especially in terms of pronunciation. It is hoped that the findings of this research will present a set of general ideas to EFL teachers about the possible problems that the Pashto speakers of English in the area may face in pronunciation. Furthermore, English language teachers being aware of these problems of the students, like lack of familiarity with certain phonemes, and lack of concentration, can accommodate these problems by giving more time to focus on the phonemes that are creating a problem.

## Introduction

English is a world language. World language is a language that is used in different capacities in the world, i.e. as a mother tongue, target language, foreign language, national language and official language of a country, and English language enjoys almost all these statuses in different countries of world. In most European countries, it is used as a second language (Ellis 1992). In certain countries like Pakistan, it is used as the official language and the language of law and courts. Due to its wide circulation and immense importance, the English language has become the langue Franca of many countries around the globe. It is the medium of international communication, the language of information and technology, the code of the

press and media and a means of instruction in schools as well as court proceedings. It is the story of fifteen hundred years of the English language, which developed from the language of Anglo-Saxon tribes of Germanic origin into the world language.

Due to its wide circulation and expansion, different varieties have developed in the English language. Basically, English was the language of Angles and Saxon tribes who hailed from the Germanic origin and moved to England back in the 6th century A.D. But with the passage of time, the English language extended its boundaries and horizons across the political borders of the globe. It was adopted by other nations of the world as their first language. Thus

different varieties like British English, American English, Australian English, Scottish English and Indian English (Kachru, [1999](#)) etc. evolved out of it. These are the different varieties of the same British English (RP). They have slight differences in terms of vocabulary, pronunciation and sometimes basic grammar. These varieties were developed to the extent that they became their mark of national identity in their respective regions. They have been further codified and developed into a level of composing books and literature in it.

In Pakistan, the story of the English language enfolds many turns and twists in it. Before partition, in united India, unlike the Hindus, the majority of the Muslims were allergic to the English people and were strongly opposing their language and culture. As a result, Muslims couldn't get modern education and were unable to compete with the Hindus in the market of civil services and government jobs. Since then, that internal hatred and animosity still persist in the psyche of some of the people. However, English achieved the status of an official language of the country in 1973 and became the medium of instruction in educational institutions, business centres, press and publications, court proceedings and media. But still, it could not enjoy that much rapid growth and fame that it has exercised in the remaining world. Now the trends are changing, and people have realized the worth and value of the English language. English is considered a status symbol in society. Those who have greater competence and command over the English language are considered to be of high standing in society. It is a sign of a more educated and civilized people in the country now. Books are mostly published in the English language. Master's and PhD degrees are offered in English literature and English linguistics in most Pakistani universities.

Khyber Pakhtoonkhwa (KP) is a province of Pakistan which is mostly inhabited by Pashto speakers. Pakhtoons are famous throughout the

world for their idiosyncratic nature. They are very hard to change and staunch believers in their customs and traditions. At the same time, they are famous for their bravery, honesty, hospitality and honour, enshrined into the code of "Pakhtoonwali". They are very resilient and intrepid, as is stated above that the English language has received mixed treatment in our country. In KP, the English language is not commonly preferred for communication purposes in daily life. Even if someone educated tries to code-switch from Pashto into English in speech, s/he is laughed at. That is the reason that most, even educated people, are not good speakers of the English language (Wali, [2013](#)).

In the school system of KP, both Urdu and English mediums co-exist. The majority of the government schools/colleges are Urdu mediums, whereas Private/model schools/colleges are English mediums. The flow of people towards getting an education has been greatly determined by their social standing and financial status. Poor people are bound to be enrolled in government schools. On the other side, rich people make their way to the public/Private sector schools.

Communication is crucial in daily life for conveying one's thoughts and executing routine life activities. No one can live in perfect isolation from society in today's world. In the present time, advancement and growth are at the cost of effective verbal communication. Better pronunciation is an important aspect of effective verbal communication which renders it more attractive and intelligible. Therefore, the significance of pronunciation becomes highly desirable and worth consideration in the process of verbal communication. There are certain vital differences in the pronunciation of different languages. Therefore, when a learner speaks any foreign language, one has to face certain articulation difficulties.

## **Aims and Objectives of the Research**

This research study is aimed at finding out the specific areas; of articulation of fricative consonants where learners have difficulties and how they can overcome these problems. Furthermore, it investigates to which extent phonological characteristics of Pashto speakers of English in Swabi interfere with their intelligibility when they communicate in the target language. Many students from this area, who learn the English language in model schools/colleges or in government institutions, face difficulties in pronunciation which has a negative impact on their intelligibility when they switch to the target language for the purpose of communication. A major difficulty for almost any foreign language learner is the achievement of acceptable pronunciation, which enables him/her to be understood by L1 English speakers. Many researchers in the field of applied linguistics opine that second-language learners can achieve near-native competence in morphology and syntactical structures but fail to attain similar competence in terms of phonetics and phonology (Bassetti, 2009; Ellis 1994).

This study demarcates the areas where the problems really exist. Secondly, it tries to find out the basic reasons for the problems and finally suggests some remedial ways as to how these problems can be solved. It will be of paramount importance for both the teachers of linguistics and English language learners because it is an interesting but ever-neglected area. By noting the extent of these problems, the researchers decided to conduct research to identify the phonological errors by focusing on the 'segmental features' of Pashto speakers of English. It is hoped that the findings of this research present a set of general ideas to EFL teachers about the possible problems that the Pashto speakers of English in the area may encounter in the pronunciation of fricative sounds. Furthermore, being aware of the likely problems to be faced by the learners. EFL

teachers can accommodate these problems by allowing more time to focus on phonemes that are likely to cause problems. The researchers have been teaching Phonetics and Phonology to students at the Master's level and English pronunciation classes to English language students at Certificate and Diploma levels for several years at NUML Campus Peshawar. NUML Peshawar campus entertains a great number of students from the area of Swabi for various courses. The researcher's practical and first-hand experience with the learners is one of the motivating factors to launch his novel research work in the field.

## **Theoretical Framework for the Present Study**

The present research is based on Robert Lado's (1957, Rahimpour & Saadi 2011, Joyo 2011) study, which claims that the grammatical structure of the native language often affects the second language or foreign language acquisition and learning. According to his theory, the similarities between two languages will cause no difficulties (positive transfer), but the differences will, due to negative transfer will, create blockage in the learning process. The researchers tried here to see whether this phenomenon is applicable to the phonological aspect of the second language or not.

## **Research Questions**

1. What are the problems with fricative sounds in the English language for Pashto speakers (Swabi)?
2. Does the Pashto language (L1) affect the learning of English (L2) in KPK?
3. What are the ways to cope with the fricative sound problems of learners at Swabi?

## **Literature Review**

RP stands for Received Pronunciation, and in the general sense, it means the pronunciation used by the educated people of England. Most of the researchers are of the view that RP should be the

guiding principle of foreign learners of the English language. Roach says, "I have given up the use of the name of Received Pronunciation (RP) for the accent described in the book: it is a term which I have always disliked, and I have chosen to refer instead to BBC pronunciation" (vii). BBC pronunciation refers to all those newscasters and announcers working for the media channel. There is also a problem because all the officials of the BBC are not British. Many foreigners are working there. All of them have their own peculiar characteristics. It means that even BBC itself can not impose an 'official' accent. Only those who are typical native speakers constitute the standard accent (Roach, 2002). There are as wide varieties of English pronunciation as the number of speakers in the world. It is highly confusing for foreign learners to decide which one to follow. They may take any one of the varieties, having a native accent, as a model for them. (O'Connor, 1982).

It is suggested that distinctive feature analysis is relevant to the study of language learning and that pronunciation difficulties experienced by learners are better analyzed due to the need to master a particular feature or combination of features (Roach, 2002). "What sets man apart from the rest of the animal kingdom is his ability to speak; he is 'man the speaking animal' - homo loquens" (Palmer, 1984). A related research work addressing pronunciation problems faced by Farsi-speaking students is written. It says, "Faulty pronunciation of Farsi-speaking English learners interrupts their intelligibility" (Hall, 2007).

Rehman (2012) conducted his study with reference to problematic consonants for Pashto speakers. He selected fifteen students of the Yusufzai dialect from five different colleges of KPK. The participants were given lists of words containing the problematic consonants and were recorded as they pronounced these words. This work attributed these problems to the absence of certain phonemes in the L1 of speakers and hence their replacement by the

nearest corresponding sounds. It further asserts that "English pronunciation of Pashto speakers is affected by the phonological gap between the two systems, and they try to adjust target sounds according to their L1." The study makes a recommendation that Pashto speakers of English should be properly trained in this area to acquire correct pronunciation.

In a similar vein, Ghorbani (2011) attempted to investigate the difficulties encountered by Saudi students in the articulation of certain English consonants. In this work, speakers were selected from different areas of Saudi Arabia, and words were given to them containing the problematic consonants in the words' initial, medial and final positions. The results showed that the learners committed errors, particularly in those sounds which were missing or different from their L1. Wahab (2011) also confirmed the same results regarding the learners of English with Arabic as their L1.

Jones (1976) has suggested listening practice and drills for developing good pronunciation. "Pronunciation is a matter of 'ear-training' or, more accurately, cultivation of the auditory memory.' No one can hope to be a successful linguist unless he has a good ear. If his ear is un-sensitive by nature, it may be made more sensitive by training; and if the ear is good by nature, it can be made still better by training. To cultivate a good linguistic ear requires systematic practice in listening for training" (Jones, 1976).

"The teaching of pronunciation is not an optional luxury to be left to advance level studies of the languages at university, although, of course, this would be the place to deal with the theory just as the theory of grammar etc., is studied at this level. But just as a student reaches the university level with an active command of grammar structures and vocabulary (Shah, Abbasi & Ali, 2022), so he/she should arrive with an active command of pronunciation. In other words, pronunciation should be an integral part of an English teaching programme from the



early stages, just as the teaching of structures and vocabulary” (Hubbard, 1983). It is further suggested that teachers need to free themselves from a conviction that language should be soundly based instead of preoccupation with spelling. Furthermore, teachers have to understand that their students are greatly relying on the written form of language for its spoken form. Thus, in the classroom, they will often observe the effects of interference of the written form of the language in the pronunciation of their students (Parker & Graham, 2005).

According to O'Connor (1982), “the main problem of English pronunciation is to build a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English and to break down the arrangement of boxes which the habits of our native language have so strongly built up. We do this by establishing new ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, new speech habits” (p.3). Some research works from the Pakistani learners’ perspective are written in this field. Pure vowels, diphthongs, supra segmental features, i.e. intonation and stress patterns, consonant and consonant clusters etc., play a key role in Standard English pronunciation. These features are rarely practised in Pashto and Urdu. That is why the majority of our speakers make mistakes unconsciously in English pronunciation (Ghani, 2012). He has discussed the general problems of pronunciation related to Pashto-speaking English learners.

Muhammad (2009) is of the view that “in articulatory phonetics, the comparative study of Pashto consonant sounds with English consonants can improve better English pronunciations” (p. 43). Luchini (2005) and Tanveer (2007), however, argue that instead of exploring the errors, the focus should be given to the classroom environment. Still, the problems of pronunciation in the articulation of English Fricative consonants among the Pashto-speaking students in this area need to be explored.

The above literature review shows that there are a number of research studies conducted for the exploration of the problems faced by ESL learners, particularly in Pakistan. However, very little attention has been paid to the investigation of phonological errors in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. In addition, Raza (2008) and Younas, Pervaiz and Maqbool (2022) consider learning pronunciation more difficult than learning grammar and vocabulary. “Pronunciation as a whole is the most difficult aspect of L2 learning, which in turn, if not learned properly, causes miscommunication even if speakers are good at grammar and vocabulary”. As stated above, it is an important area, but little heed is paid to it. Numerous research works are carried out by renowned scholars for the purpose of ensuring better English pronunciation for foreign learners, but no such work has been done which facilitates the learning process of Pashto speakers in this region.

### **Research Methodology**

The present research study is descriptive in nature yet practical in application. “The major aim of descriptive research is a description of the state of affairs as it exists at present” (C R Kothari). In this research study, different research tools, i.e. interviews, discussions, recordings and observations, were employed. The researchers have based this research on selected recordings of the reading skills activities as a pilot study. Recordings not only offer an insight into the real aim of the research but also provide the required time and space for concrete analysis of the research problems. These recordings have to be referred to time and again for the purpose of clarity, confirmation, and enhancing the quality of research analysis. The recorded activities proved a very effective tool in focusing on and illustrating the research problem. Besides, research questionnaires were distributed among the target population as supplementary material. Research questionnaires also proved very effective in understanding and exploring the basic literature

of the study and finding the causes of the research problems.

The target population of the present research included EFL learners at the undergraduate level in Distt. Swabi. The randomly collected sample of the study consisted of eleven female respondents and seventeen male respondents from five educational instate of Distt. Swabi, including Govt Post Graduate College Swabi, Govt Degree College Lahore, Al-Faisal Memorial College, Govt Girls High School Lahore.

For the collection of the required data, a list of words consisting of all the Fricative sounds in the initial, middle and final position was designed. The list covered all the fricative consonants and their suprasegmental features. The students were given a list of words for reading loudly and clearly. The readings of the students were recorded electronically. The problematic sounds, which were mostly confused with other speech sounds, were highlighted. In addition, to find out the possible causes of these pronunciation problems, two questionnaires were prepared. The first one was directed towards the learners, asking different queries about their interest in the English language. The second questionnaire was for the EFL teachers in colleges, enquiring about the possible shortcomings of the learners and their approaches and methods of teaching the English language. The data collected from the questionnaires gave an insight into the basic problems and possible reasons or causes for these problems. It was field research, and data were collected with great care and tenacity to ensure the ingenuity and authenticity of the research.

## Interpretation of the Collected Data

### /f/ and /p/ confusion

Certain words were articulated where it was clear that they had confused the sounds with similar sounds in the same language or in their mother tongue. For example, the /f/ phoneme, which is a

labio-dental, fricative consonant, was confused with the /p/ phoneme, which is a bilabial plosive consonant in words like Phone, Cough, frying pan and paragraph. The researchers gave those words where the same phoneme was used in all three positions, i.e. initial, middle and final position, to avoid confusion because they had a problem basically with the place in the word or the same sound was problematic at any place. In most of the cases /f/ sound was confused with /p/, especially in words where the spelling [ph] was used, like Phone or Paragraph. As only a few students out of 28 pronounced it correctly, others had problems articulating the /f/ sound.

### /v/ and /w/ confusion

/V/ is basically a labio-dental, fricative consonant sound and /W/ is a bilabial approximant consonant sound and is pronounced with rounded lips. In words like Vase and Vast, both sounds were confused. The majority of the students couldn't make the difference between the two phonemes. This time spelling was not the reason because it was the [V] letter in the word spelling, but the students still couldn't pronounce it and replaced it with /p/ phoneme. It is possible that they did not properly drill the /w/ approximant sound.

### /s/ and /z/ confusion

/s/ and /z/ are both fricative alveolar consonant sounds. The only difference between them is that /s/ is a voiceless consonant, and /z/ is voiced.

As it is a fact that English is lacking one to one correspondence between its spelling and pronunciation, this liability of the English language is evident in most of the mispronounced words. Where /s/ was replaced by /z/ in words like the /z/ of the word seize was replaced by the /s/ phoneme. Similarly, the /z/ sound of the word husband was substituted by /s/. On the other hand /s/ sound in the word, Missile was substituted by the /z/ sound. It means that both phonemes were confused and

intersubstituted. In certain cases, students rely on the spelling for the pronunciation of words. For example, in the word Houses the /z/ sound was mispronounced as /s/ because, in the spelling, it's the [S] symbol, but the sound is /z/ and not /s/.

### **/θ/ and /ð/ confusion**

/θ/ and /ð/ are both fricative dental consonants. The only difference is that the first one is voiceless, and the second one is voiced. Both of them are produced from the tip of the tongue touching the upper teeth. But these two sounds are different phonetic realizations. Here in the recordings, the learners had confused both of them. They couldn't make the difference between the two. Mostly they confused /θ/ with /ð/ in words like Breath, Breathe, Health, Healthy and Trustworthy. The basic problem was that the learners relied on the spelling of the words for their pronunciation. [th] for them is always having the /θ/ sound, and they least bother about the /ð/ phoneme. They were unable to understand that whenever [th] at the end of the word is followed by a vowel sound like /ɪ/ in words Healthy and trustworthy, then it is pronounced as /ð/ not /θ/.

### **/ʃ/ and /ʒ/ Confusion**

/ʃ/ and /ʒ/ are both post alveolar/ palato-alveolar fricative consonant sounds. Both of them have the same place and manner of articulation and thus identical sounds, but they represent two different phonetic realizations. The learners had no such problem with the /ʃ/ sound pronunciation in the word Mission, rather most of them confused this sound in the word Partial, and they pronounced /ʃ/ as /ɪə/ diphthong. It doesn't mean that they couldn't pronounce the /ʃ/ sound but rather again relied upon spelling for the pronunciation.

They had great problems with the /ʒ/ sound in words like Measure, Pleasure and Treasure as all of them incorrectly pronounced it. Most of them confused the /ʒ/ sound with the /j/ sound.

The same /ʒ/ phoneme was substituted by the /dʒ/ sound, which is an affricate post alveolar consonant in words like Television, Massage and Garage. In the word Television, some of the learners replaced it with /z/ alveolar fricative consonant.

### **Problems with the /h/ sound**

/h/ is basically a glottal fricative consonant sound. The problem with this phoneme is that it remains silent in most cases in the initial and final positions. For example, /h/ is silent in words like Honest and Hour and most of the students could not pronounce it correctly, but it is vocal in the word Whole and Hockey. The learners articulated the /h/ sound almost everywhere.

The overall analysis showed confusion and intersubstitution between some sound sets. Firstly, the students had confusion about differentiating between the /p/ and /f/ sounds. Secondly, they were unable to pronounce the /v/ sound; instead, they pronounced it as /w/. Thirdly, the phonemes /s/ and /z/ were confused and intersubstituted. In certain cases, students rely on the spelling for the pronunciation of words. Similarly, the students had confused both the /θ/ and /ð/ phonemes. The basic problem was that the learners relied on the spelling of the words for their pronunciation. Lastly, they were confused in pronouncing /ʃ/ and /ʒ/ sounds due to the spelling of the words. In addition, the learners articulated the /h/ sound almost everywhere.

## **Findings and Discussions**

### **Problems of Articulation**

**Wrong Articulation of English Fricatives:** Pronunciation problems related to the English Fricative consonants are often observed in the spoken language of the learners in Swabi, but no serious attention is paid to them. It is evident from the recordings that all the students of Swabi incorrectly pronounced five fricative consonants as they do not have these sounds in

Pashto, like the /f/ sound is replaced by /p/ (4.1.1–4.1.5). Similarly, /v/ is replaced by /w/ as Lado's (1957) “contrastive phonology” concept that L1 affects L2.

**Confusing Sounds with One Another:** Foreign learners often confuse (Q no 1) the sounds with one another and can not make the difference among them. They pronounce one sound instead of another. The same is the case with the students of Swabi who always confuse fricative consonants with one another, particularly /f/ is confused with /p/ and vice versa. The recorded sounds of the various students in different colleges provide examples of the confusion of one sound to the other. So this problem in pronunciation is caused by different factors like the age of the learner, geographical location, social class and educational background. Sometimes they overgeneralize the rules in pronunciation.

**Wrong Articulation Leads to Poor Understanding:** Poor pronunciation not only hinders the flow of communication but also leads to misunderstanding. There are certain sounds in a language which are difficult for foreign learners to master and create problems for the new learners to become fluent and eloquent speakers of the target language. As in this study, the words like ‘pleasure measure leisure, husband, phone and vase’ were pronounced very incorrectly by the learners. The phonological characteristics of Pashto learners of the English language interrupt their articulation when they speak the English language, as the phone is pronounced /poun/ instead of /foun/.

### Causes of the Articulation Problems

**Faulty Logic:** Most of the pronunciation problems are due to the faulty logic about the English language. It is assumed that in the English language, there is no specific formula for word pronunciation. Due to borrowing from other languages, the speech conventions and habits of other languages interfere and have a

bearing on their English pronunciation. Some words are directly taken from other languages. So, they have totally different pronunciations. Very often, the words are not pronounced the way they are written and vice versa because there is no one-to-one correspondence between English spelling and pronunciation, as the word pleasure was pronounced as /pleasure/, and the same is the case with leisure and garage. Therefore, learners need to master and study each and every individual word in its own place. In this regard, the study of English Phonetics and phonology becomes inevitable.

It has been claimed that distinctive feature analysis is relevant to the study of language learning and that pronunciation difficulties experienced by learners are better seen due to the need to learn a particular feature or combination of features (Roach, 2002).

**Ignorance about the Phonetic Rules:** Phonetics and phonology play a key role in the correct pronunciation of foreign learners. Unfortunately, in our country, little or no heed is paid to this important skill of the language. Most learners are ignorant about the rules of pronunciation and thus can neither correct their pronunciation mistakes nor can properly understand others’. The proper study and application of phonological rules may lead the learners in the right direction for better pronunciation.

Here, in the given list, most of the pronunciation problems are illustrated as phonological problems. If the learners were aware of the phonetics rules, they would not have made such mistakes. For example, in this study, the participants could not make the difference between /v/ and /w/ and confused the one with the other and as well /f/ with /p/. The difference is in the place and manner of articulation which is the area of phonetics and phonology.

**Untrained Teachers, Especially in Phonetics and**



**Phonology:** The teaching of pronunciation is not an optional luxury to be left to advance studies of the languages at the university level. Although, of course, this would be the place to deal with the theory, just as the theory of grammar etc., that is studied at this level. The way students learn about the basic grammar rules in schools, in the same way, they need to learn and practice pronunciation rules before joining advanced-level classes. In other words, pronunciation should be an integral part of an English teaching programme from the early stages, just as the teaching of structures and vocabulary (Hubbard 1983). Teachers may play an important role in this regard. Unfortunately, most of our teachers at schools and colleges are not professionally trained in teaching pronunciation classes. It is observed that our school teachers themselves are not good speakers and cannot cope with pronunciation problems, as obvious from the questionnaires of teachers where only one answered positively when asked whether he has taken classes for pronunciation, the rest five candidates said no (figure 4.2.9). The poor pronunciation of some of them at schools badly affects the students' pronunciation.

Jones (1982) has suggested listening practice and drills for developing good pronunciation. Pronunciation is a matter of 'ear-training' or, more accurately 'cultivation of the auditory memory.' No one can hope to be a successful linguist unless he/she has a good ear. If the ear is un-sensitive by nature, it may be made more sensitive through training; and if the ear is good by nature, it can be made still better through further training. To cultivate a good linguistic ear requires systematic practice in listening for training (1976).

According to O'Connor, the main problem of English pronunciation is building a new set of boxes corresponding to the sounds of English and breaking down the arrangement of boxes that the habits of our native language have so strongly built up. We do this by establishing new

ways of hearing, new ways of using our speech organs, and new speech habits (1982).

**Spoken vs Written Language:** The clear-cut difference between written and spoken forms of language is of crucial importance for correct pronunciation. Both forms are not interdependent. There is no direct match between letters and speech sounds. "We are all accustomed to the idea that English is not pronounced as it is spelt" (Palmer, 1984). The learners look at the written language and try to speak accordingly. Sometimes, the letter is not present in the written form, but in the spoken, it is pronounced. For instance, in the given list, the word 'Garage' doesn't have the /ʒ/ letter, but it is spoken, and it was replaced almost everywhere by the students with the j sound. There are just 26 letters of the alphabet in the English language, but the speech sounds are 44. Therefore, the written script cannot be matched up with the spoken language. The results of this study show that the learners always use the most familiar and known sounds instead of unknown and difficult ones, as the word /hour/ is pronounced as /aur/, not like /aur/.

Teachers need to release themselves from conviction about the way language is 'supposed' to sound based on our preoccupation with spelling. They also need to recognize that many of our learners are similarly predisposed to believe what they see written down rather than the evidence of their own ears. Thus, in the classroom, they will frequently find themselves having to counter the effects of interference from the written form of the language in the pronunciation of their students (Parker & Graham, 2005).

**L1 Interference:** Languages have different morphological make-ups and syntactical patterns. Vowels, stress patterns, diphthongs, plosives and consonant clusters etc., have a great role in correct English pronunciation. In Pashto and Urdu, some of these features are rarely used. That is why the majority of our speakers of

English make mistakes unconsciously in English pronunciation (Ghani, 2008), as the Pashto speaker replaces /f/ with /p/ and /v/ with /w/ and /z/ with /dj/.

Even highly experienced second-language learners may produce pronunciation errors in the second language because of phonological interference from their first language (Chen & Gowsami, 2009).

Muhammad, (2009) is of the view that in articulatory phonetics, the comparative study of Pashto consonant sounds with English consonants can improve English pronunciation. There are certain differences between Pashto and the English language (43). For example, there are 26 letters of the alphabet representing 44 speech sounds in the English language, whereas there are 46 letters of the alphabet in the Pashto language. English language script is written from left to right, whereas Pashto script is written from right to left. It means that both languages are not similar in terms of writing and speaking. Whenever Pashto speakers speak English, their mother tongue interferes. This L1 interference gets stronger and deeper with the passage of time. In early childhood, this problem can easily be solved, but at the intermediate level, it becomes difficult to redeem. The same was observed during the recording from all 28 students, as they could not pronounce the words correctly because of the unavailability of the words in Pushto.

O' Conner (1982) says that a child learns the sounds of his native language through habit formation at the early stages of life, which grows stronger with the passage of time, and when he turns to speak a foreign language, he cannot give up easily old habits of L1 and follows the sound system of his mother tongue.

**Lack of Direct Correspondence Between Words and Their Pronunciation:** In English, there is no direct correspondence between the spelling of words and their pronunciation. Often words are difficult to pronounce on the basis of their

spellings, and we cannot spell the words on the basis of their pronunciation. Palmer says in this regard that English and French would be better languages if they reformed their writing to correspond with speech. The sounds of spoken English do not match up, a lot of the time, with letters of written English. We can spell the words Chef as SEAGH if we take the first sound of SURE, the middle sound of the word DEAD, and the final sound of the word LAUGH (Yule, 1999).

In some cases, the letter is present in a word, but it is not spoken. For example, in Psychology, Pseudo and knowledge etc., sometimes one letter gives a different sound. For example, in the word Genre /ʒɑ:nrə/ g letter is giving /ʒ/ sound. Similarly, in the word Xenophobia /zenəfəʊbiə/, the initial [X] letter is giving /z/ sound. Due to the lack of direct correspondence between words and their pronunciation, non-native learners of English often commit mistakes in their pronunciation.

#### **Replacement of One Sound by Another Sound:**

Certain sounds are very similar in listening and are identical in pitch. They are often replaced and are substituted in spoken language. For example, /w/ and /v/ are quite different from each other in the place and manner of articulation, but they are greatly identical in voice quality and pitch. Therefore, the learners tended to replace one with the other in pronouncing the given list of words. Similarly, /θ/ and /ð/ are two different phonemes in the English language. They have different realizations. But in the given list of words, the learners seemed to confuse both and inter substituted, i.e. breath and breathe, health and health and for both these sounds, they substituted it with the Urdu 'th' sound and d sound.

#### **The Representation of One Sound by Many Letters:**

In certain cases, sounds are inter-substituted and confused with one another. This is also because of the fact that the same speech sound is represented by different letters in different words and situations. For example /f/

sound is represented by [Ph] as in phone, by [gh] as in cough and tough and by [F] as in fan. Similarly, /ʒ/ sound is represented by [Su] in words like measure, treasure and pleasure. It is represented through [g] in words like garage and mirage. This is the confusion which creates problems for young learners in their learning process.

**The Same Combination of Letters Giving Different Sounds:** Another problem is that the same letters are used in different places, and words have different sounds. For example, [c] has the has/K/ sound in words like condition, curriculum and critic. But the same letter gives the sound of /s/ as in words like certain, civil and ceremony etc. This uncertainty between letters and their sounds in words creates a great deal of confusion for non-native learners of English.

**Problems with Acoustic Quality of Speech Sounds:** Speech sounds have different acoustic qualities, which in turn, get problematic for new learners of the target language. The ears of the new foreign language learners of English are not properly tuned up for the new language sounds carrying different acoustic qualities. They try to match the new sounds with the similar sounds of their first language; consequently, they develop wrong listening skills, which in turn badly affect their spoken language.

O' Conner (1982) says that the acquisition of pronunciation of a second language becomes very difficult after early adolescence because the sound system of the mother tongue does interfere. The reason is that the new foreign sounds are being filtered through L1.

**Difference Between American and British Pronunciation:** The English language enjoys worldwide popularity and fame. It is spoken and understood around the globe. It has become the langue Franca of many countries. It is the currency of international exchange. Due to its wide circulation, there are different varieties of the same language. These varieties are different

from one another in terms of pronunciation. One such pronunciation difference is between American and British English. There are differences in both the spellings of the words and their pronunciations in both varieties. Such kinds of variations become hurdles in the fluent, correct spoken language of foreign learners. Here is the given list of words. Two words, i.e. Garage and Massage, were very confusing for the majority of the participants in pronunciation. The confusion was due to the fact that both carry different pronunciations in American and British English, i.e. /gæɾɑ:ʒ/ /gæɾɪdʒ/ and /mæsa:ʒ/ /mæsa:dʒ/ respectively.

## **Suggestions and Recommendations**

### **Practising Listening Skills**

Out of the four skills of a language, i.e. listening, speaking, reading and writing, listening is of paramount significance. It is a ground reality that listening skill comes first in the sequence of acquiring language skills. Even in the case of first language acquisition, a child starts with listening skills first at the early stage of his life. Listening skill is followed by speaking skill at the age of six months. Listening is one of the receptive skills and is directly proportional to speaking skills. In our schools and colleges, we stress reading and writing, but little attention is paid to listening and speaking skills. Due attention and practice of listening skills will not only make them good listeners but, in turn, also good speakers. Those who visit and stay for some time among the native speakers of the English language learners acquire better language proficiency as compared to those who are learning language through classroom activities. The reason is that in the first case, they learn the language by listening to the native speakers and thus follow them in the same way. Listening skill is very important for better pronunciation.

In the English language, there is a great deal of confusion because of the fact that written and spoken forms of the language are poles apart. In

our educational institutes, we start with teaching letters of the alphabet for the purpose of making them read and write. No doubt that these symbols are very important for becoming good writers and efficient readers, but as far as the spoken form of language is concerned, it is based on speech sounds. Our learners need to learn the basic speech sounds to become eloquent and fluent speakers of the target language. Without detailed study and appropriate practice of speech sounds, spoken proficiency is difficult, if not impossible. Our teachers need to inculcate in the minds of the learners not to rely on written symbols for their spoken language. While given the symbols in writing, the teachers will use those symbols to practice them in pronunciation. It will help the learners to differentiate among the sounds of the English language that is given in writing.

**Teachers Training:** Teachers play a pivotal role in the teaching-learning process. The teachers turn the raw material into a useful product. As Ashby claims, a modern language teacher is expected to have sufficient knowledge of articulatory phonetics, a well-trained ear, and skills to analyze as well as remedy learners' articulatory errors (Nagamine, [2011](#))

The sorry state of the fact is that most of the teachers are not professionally trained to teach pronunciation classes, as evidenced by the teacher's questionnaire. The reason is that our teachers are the product of the same traditional school system where there is no concept of phonetics and phonology, which can make them good speakers as well as competent teachers of the target language. We need to train our teachers to teach pronunciation classes. The students think very highly of their teachers and get direct inspiration from them. The teachers are role models, and most of the learners try to copy their teacher's style in spoken language. Once the teachers are trained, the result will be good speakers in the classes.

**Exposure to the Native Speakers:** xposure and

interaction with native speakers play a key role in learning a language. It is a main problem with our learners that they get little opportunity to exposure to native speakers of the English language. This is one of the reasons for the poor pronunciation of EFL learners in this area.

Our teachers teach us English or speak in English at an unnaturally slow pace and style, making every effort to pronounce each and every word as clearly as possible. This is not the kind of English we hear when we interact in an English language environment. Native speakers do not speak at a slow speed and give unnecessary pauses and stress. Their way of speaking is natural. We need to provide EFL learners with some opportunities for this purpose. Obviously, they are difficult to visit any of the English-speaking countries, but they may be facilitated for this purpose in their classes. For example, the teacher may exploit any English program, i.e. drama, documentary, movie etc., in the class. This will make the task of a teacher easier and will give a chance to the learners to analyze, judge and learn language expression in a real-life situation. This will also give them an insight into the pronunciation of native speakers. They will be in the position to compare their own style of speaking with the native one. Learners will learn the practical application and usage of language expression for routine life communication. They will learn both the formal and informal language used in a complex set of situations. Thus, bringing native speakers into the class will facilitate the EFL learners in different ways for learning the language in general and pronunciation in particular.

**Place and Manner of Articulation Should be Taught:** In the whole story of correct pronunciation, the detailed study of speech sounds is very necessary. In the study of speech sounds, two important areas need to be covered. First is the place of articulation, and second is the manner of articulation. It means the production of phonemes from the exact place in the correct manner. Often learners are ignorant of both of



them. If they could learn these rules, they would not only correct their own mistakes but will also make a comparative study of the correct and incorrect pronunciation. It does not mean that whatever they speak is incorrect. There are certain speech sounds which are difficult for them to pronounce, and thus create pronunciation problems. They will be in a position to identify and correct them.

**Courses in Pronunciation:** If we could have a look at our school/college syllabi, there is nothing about spoken language in general and pronunciation in particular. The whole focus is on reading and writing. There is a dearth of pronunciation courses for both EFL teachers and learners. Such courses can be part of their syllabi, or they might be conducted in occasional sessions separately. If that is inserted in the syllabi, then it must be included for exams also. Such courses will enable the EFL practitioners to learn and communicate in the target language with ease with almost native-like competency.

**Practice in Minimal Pairs:** There are often slight differences in the speech sounds in terms of articulation. When two words are different only in a single speech sound is known as minimal pair. For example, bat and pat are identical except for a contrast of a single phoneme. The learners need to practise for the minimal pairs.

“Speech is a habit, and the aim is to produce automatic rather than “thought-out” sounds. Habit formation implies practice and repetition, so some opportunity for drills should be created” (Hassan, [2004](#)).

A set of minimal pairs is often given for analyzing the ability of foreign learners. The drills of such pairs not only give extensive practice to the learners but will also give an insight into English pronunciation.

“Where pronunciation problems are concerned, it is not always necessary to teach only those sounds produced by a speaker of the standard form of the target language. It is only

important that the sounds taught should be sufficiently differentiated from each other not to cause confusion. Learners need to learn as wide a variety as possible of different native speakers’ voices and accents” (Norris 62).

**Motivation:** Both intrinsic and extrinsic motivations are quite important for foreign learners. Motivation encourages learners to do hard work. It also keeps learners’ interest alive in the learning process. Basic motivation is the prerequisite of a successful teaching-learning process.

Integrative motivation relates to the learner’s willingness to identify with the culture, perceived personality and habits of the speakers of the language. The instrumental motivation is seen in the learner who wishes not so much to integrate in any way with the speakers of the language but rather to use the language for a specific purpose, say, for study or business reasons. More phonological errors are likely to be found in a class whose motivation is primarily the second type. (Norris 18).

**Exposure to Different Accents Should be Given:** The English language has grown and expanded beyond geographical boundaries. There are that much different varieties of English in the world today, as is its number of speakers. There are different accents spoken in different countries. It is always confusing for foreign learners to follow which accent. Which one is the recommended and standard accent? The modern researchers are of the view that new learners should be given exposure to the different accents of the English language. It will give them an opportunity to make a comparison of these different accents and pinpoint the possible differences and pronunciation variations.

“In many countries where English is used as an official language, and perhaps as a Lingua Franca, the varieties of English, i.e. British, American, Australian, Scottish etc., heard outside the classroom may be very different from

the standard variety which is the target inside". (Norris 37).

**Accuracy vs Fluency:** Accuracy and fluency are both important and desirable for learners. Some of the EFL learners are looking for accuracy. They are greatly concerned with the correct pronunciation of their target language. They are looking for perfection. The reality is that fluency is given high credit as compared to accuracy. ESL teachers should encourage the learners for fluent in the target language.

**Encourage the Learners a Participatory Role:** The teacher needs to encourage his learners to play a participatory role in language activities. The learners should be motivated to speak with ease and listen with care in class. No doubt that it is difficult to encourage the naturally quiet and shy learner to speak and take part in the oral activities in the class, but there are a number of different exercises and practices that can help stimulate the desire to take part and share ideas and give opinions.

"Do not make your students too self-conscious. Do encourage. Do not, do not, do not criticize. Never, never, never ridicule. Speech is a sensitive thing. Control the class but do not become its despot." (Hassan, 2004).

By doing this practice, a teacher may cover a great distance to prove that errors in spoken language do not immediately disconnect the communication channel. The EFL learners should feel pleasure and enjoyment in communicating in the target language. After the initial pushes of encouragement, students will develop 'WE' feelings which will help in their intrinsic as well as extrinsic motivation.

**Direct Method Application:** We are living in a multilingual society, where people speak three or four languages at the same time. Often time the words and expressions of the foreign/ target language are used in the context of the local native language. In this process of mixing up the

expressions of the foreign language with the native language, the biggest problem is coming in the pronunciation of words. They are taking more local colours of pronunciation. There are many English words which are used by the local people with a free hand in their discussion. Even the illiterate and uneducated use English words in their discussion. These words are that much often used that, at times, it becomes difficult to decide whether they are English words or Pashto words. What is needed is that whenever English words are spoken in common day-to-day communication, they must be pronounced in the correct manner.

Hassan (2004) is of the view that a possible answer to the problem of pronunciation is to approach English speech directly and not from an Urdu, Punjabi etc., frame of reference(43). We have already seen that this is very difficult in our society where so much English is used, misused and nativized. However, there is something to be said for making the English classroom into a "linguistic island" where nothing but English is heard by the students and where no English words are transliterated in the Urdu writing system. A considerable overhauling of our attitudes and methods as teachers is implied (2004).

## Conclusion

The aim of this study was to find out the difficulty faced by Pashto speakers residing in Swabi in the production of fricative consonants and suggests certain remedies in order to overcome pronunciation problems. Being an English language teacher is the researchers' observation, and the results of the present study showed that students have problems with pronunciation due to the unavailability of resources and trained teachers.

For this purpose, some students from various schools and colleges were chosen and did practice on the given list of particular words, all having fricative consonants in them. After they pronounced the list of the words, the

researchers came to the conclusion that the students of this particular area need to concentrate more on listening in order to acquaint their ears with the fricative consonants spoken by the natives. Further, the students should also get some training from well-versed teachers in the field of phonetics and phonology if access to native is not possible. The finding clarifies that Pashto speakers faced troubles in the fricative sounds because these sounds are affected by the sounds of L1 that is Pashto. This interference creates a confused state for the learners and makes them hesitant to pronounce them properly with conjoining the proper place and manner of these sounds.

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