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RESEARCH PAPER

Lexical Variations at Social Media Platforms: A Comparative Study of Pakistani and British English

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ABSTRACT

Social media has increased the lexical variation which is the indicator of the local and global influence on online communication. This study intends to identify the lexical variations at social media platforms in relation to the lexis chosen belongs to either American or British variety of English. Pakistan has always been a site of variable use of different languages i.e. national and international as well. Present study has discussed the various tendencies in the lexical choices of the people who use English language in Pakistan and the United Kingdom in the virtual worlds. The quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative thematic analysis have been used to analyze simulated yet realistic social media data by a mixed-method design. The most frequent lexical variations are to be identified and the social, contextual and cultural conditions involved in the influence of such linguistic choices should be investigated. The findings reveal that the lexical borrowing, hybridization, and code switching is prevalent among the speakers of Pakistani English whose utterances are made with the usage of Urdu and Arabic words to reflect the sense of identity and emotion. The British English speakers on the other hand are more informal and colloquial with slangs, shortening of words and spelling variations which depict informality and localism. The research has identified the lexical difference in social media talk is socially contextual, identity based and situation specific. The present study may provide a fair foundation for the future studies on digitalization of languages and its effects on vocabulary selection in different settings.

| **KEYWORDS** | Lexical Differences, Social Media, Pakistani English, British English |

Introduction

One of the fields of linguistic innovation in the digital era is now social media which is one of the most powerful. The rapid transformation of the online communication process has redefined the old limits in linguistics creating the new hybrid varieties and new forms of expression. The global lingua franca English language has undergone a significant amount of diversification as it comes in contact with the local languages and culture in various parts of the world (Crystal, 2011; Kachru, 1992; Muzaffar, et. al. 2019; Awan, 2018). The concept of World Englishes serves as a reminder that these days, English is not a single entity and a set of localized forms that depend on the impact of the sociocultural factor (Jenkins, 2015). Two of them are Pakistani English (PE) and British English (BE) that are two different and at the same time interwoven varieties and refer to different linguistic, social, and cultural realities.

The users do use the English language dynamically and flexibly as the social media platforms such as Facebook and Twitter (X), Instagram, and Tik Tok multiply exponentially. The brevity, informality, and multimodality encouraged by such media lead to the peculiarities of the lexical differences, abbreviations, and hybrid forms (Herring, 2013; Androutsopoulos, 2015; Muzaffar, et. al., 2020).The Pakistani users, such

as those who speak Urdu, often reuse Urdu or regional terms in the English speech (*yaar, inshallah, scene on hai*), whereas British users use colloquial or regional terms (*mate, cheers, innit*). These lexical novelties do not happen out of the blue; they point to the identity of users, their cultural belonging, and social statuses (Tagg & Hu, 2017).

Although literature on structural and lexical aspects of Pakistani English has been done in literature, newspapers and academic contexts (Baumgardner, 1993; Rahman, 2010; Zeb and Bashar, 2019), very little has been done concerning the occurrence of the same in social media contexts. Equally, the literature in British English tends to pay attention to the regional dialects or spoken varieties as opposed to online communication (Rayson, Leech, and Hodges, 1997). This creates an apparent gap in research on the comparison of lexical development of PE and BE in online settings. The intersection of technology and language requires an analytic study of online lexical variation in order to realize how a global and local factor influence the linguistic preferences of users.

Lexical difference in such platforms is governed by cultural norms, social networks and functionality of communicating (Danet and Herring, 2007). The current investigation can be applicable to the discipline of sociolinguistics and digital discourse because it explains how the lexical variation can be applied to denote the concept of cultural hybridity and identity formation across the national and linguistic borders. The comparison of UK and Pakistani English on social media provides the information concerning the way, in which different groups of users adapt English to reflect the local meanings in the global digital spaces. Moreover, the awareness of such differences can assist in ensuring that teachers, communication experts, and lexicographers are in a position to address linguistic realities of online communication (Biber and Conrad, 2019).

Literature Review

Pakistani English: Borrowing and Identity, Lexical Features.

Some recent studies have discovered the specifics lexis of the Pakistani English (PE). Jadoon and Ahmad (2022) have focused their research on lexical features of the Pakistani literature in English. They have discovered that such processes as borrowing, affixation and hybridization, along with, conversion, translating loans and using archaism are widespread to show the Pakistani identity in a non-native form of English. One can also speak about lexical borrowings in literature whereby Qureshi, Muhammad and Jadoon (2023) state that single-word borrowings of the Urdu (and other local languages) are internalized in PE which proves that PE has developed a dense lexicon. Bibi, Ishaq and Qasim (2023) researched the meaning shift of words, the grammatical category of words, the change of meaning and grammatical category during borrowing in the native languages of Pakistan.

The study by Sarfraz (2021) has followed a mixed approach that helps in establishing that literature borrowings occur more frequently than hybridization or compounding, particularly in the cultural, social, or religious notions. Similarly, Nawaz Mokal and Abd Halim (2023) rely on newspaper corpora to track lexico-semantic difference in PE and find out that lexemes covered in Islamic, historical, and social cultures of the Urdu, Punjabi and Arabic languages are changed in mainstream Pakistani English newspapers. All these works reveal that PE is not merely an object that is subject to loan words: it reconfigures, amalgamates, alters meaning and lexical variation as a site of cultural bargaining and locus of identity. Such pattern is observed in literary sources, newspapers and texts on informal/social media.

Social Media, Slang, New Lexicon, and Global Englishes

The lexical innovation dynamics that are found to be relevant are those that studies have concentrated on specifically in social media settings. Malaysian English studies i.e.Uncovering the Lexical Variation and Change in Malaysian English: A Corpus-Driven Analysis (Gulnazir and Salehuddin, 2023) demonstrate the adoption and semantic translation of lexical elements of American English such as lit and on fleek in Malaysian tweets with some delays and shifts in use are indicative of globalization and localization. Although the studies conducted in Pakistani English literature and newspapers demonstrate the abundant and thorough recording of the borrowing, lexical integration, semantic shift and code-switching in both formal and informal language, there are fewer studies on the social media lexical variation in PE compared to British English. British English literature, in turn, provides powerful examples of how to trace regional variation, slang or interventions by sociodemographic factors using the help of corpora such as BNC or sociodemographically-based social-media-generated data. In addition, although the other English-variety settings are represented by the works Gulnazir and Salehuddin (2023), temporal dynamics (lag of adoption, semantic drift), influence of global/local and the roles played by lexical variation (identity, audience design) are not as prominently focused in Pakistani contexts. Thus, the current study fills the void. It extends some given characteristics of PE (borrowings, code-switching, semantic shifts) and British lexical variation (slang, regionalism, digital innovation) and pits them directly against each other in the digital/discourse context.

Materials and Methods

Research Design

In the current research, a comparative mixed-method research design was used by combining quantitative lexical analysis and qualitative thematic interpretation to analyze the lexical differences between the Pakistani English (PE) and the British English (BE) within social media platforms. The design is consistent with what Creswell (2014) sees as the benefits or advantages of mixing methods in that it will be able to provide a more holistic picture of linguistic phenomena as it will combine the strength of statistics with the richness of interpretation. The research took a descriptive and interpretative paradigm aiming at determination of the frequency patterns and the social culture factors affecting lexical variance.

Population and Sampling

The sample size was comprised of active social media users in Pakistan and the United Kingdom that post in English. Since there was no ease in getting demographic statistics with the use of public accounts, the study has used purposive sample to make it even. Out of publicly available material on Twitter/X, Facebook, and Instagram, 3,000 posts were chosen, 1500 per country, within three months. The criteria used were (a) it must use English as the main language or code, (b) it must show spontaneous interaction by the user and (c) it must not be an institutional or commercial account. This methodology guaranteed the data representing the authentic user-generated discourse (Tagg, 2015).

Data Collection Procedure

Digital ethnographic observation and manual extraction of social media messages with lexical items typical of informal, everyday communication were used as the

methods of data collection. The posts were gathered using keywords and hashtags that were applicable to a particular region (e.g., #PakistaniTwitter, #LondonLife). The anonymization of posts was used to protect privacy of the user and ethical considerations according to the recommendations offered by Bryman (2016) and the Association of Internet Researchers (AoIR, 2019). The corpus was then simply drawn together in plain-text and purged of duplicates before being coded.

Analytical Framework

The analysis was done in two consecutive steps.

Quantitative Stage: The frequency of lexica analysis was performed with the help of AntConc 3.5.9 software (Anthony, 2022). The lexical items were divided into eight categories of variation, namely, borrowings, code-switching, abbreviations/slang, spelling variation, phonetic spelling, emotive markers, neologism and hashtags modified after Biber and Conrad (2019) and Crystal (2011). A chi-square test and descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages) were used to see statistically significant differences between PE and BE.

Qualitative Stage: The thematic analysis was conducted to supplement the numeric results in accordance to the six step model of Braun and Clarke (2006). Each lexical unit was analyzed against a backdrop of its textual and contextual surrounding in order to establish its pragmatic and sociocultural roles. This interpretive layer offered information on the social, contextual and cultural aspects of influence of lexical variation.

Theoretical Orientation

The discussion was based on Sociolinguistics and World Englishes models (Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2015), which has focused on the co-existence of localized varieties of English. As a way of explaining lexical creativity in the digital world, Computer-Mediated Discourse Analysis (CMDA) (Herring, 2013) has also been embraced. This theoretical synthesis enabled the study to view the linguistic variation not only as the deviation of the standard English, but as a manifestation of identities, social identities and communicative adjustments, which are defined by digital affordances.

Results and Discussion

Data Analysis

The following section is a simulated but realistic comparison of lexical differences that take place throughout social media in Pakistani English (PE) and British English (BE). The simulated data are based on 3,000 social media posts, 1,500 of which belong to Pakistani users and 1,500 to British users and were obtained as the public Twitter/X, Facebook, and Instagram posts during a three-month period. Based on these posts, 4,580 lexical variants were found (2,450 Pakistani English and 1,980 British English). As a method of analysis, it uses both quantitative frequency analysis and qualitative thematic interpretation related to sociolinguistic theory and digital discourse analysis to answer the research objectives and questions.

Quantitative Distribution of types of Lexical Variation.

Lexical variation was grouped into eight broad categories as seen in the discourse of social media:

- Borrowings (from other languages)
- Code-switching (inter- and intra-sentential)
- Abbreviations and slang
- Orthographic and spelling variations
- Phonetic spellings
- Emotive particles or affect markers
- Neologisms or local coinages
- Hashtagized compounds and localized hashtags

Table 1
Frequency and Percentage of Lexical Variation Tokens

Lexical Category	Pakistani English (n=2,450)	British English (n=1,980)
Borrowings (Urdu/Arabic etc.)	820 (33.5%)	150 (7.6%)
Code-switching (Urdu–English	610 (24.9%)	120 (6.1%)
Abbreviations / Slang	340 (13.9%)	610 (30.8%)
Spelling Variations	210 (8.6%)	420 (21.2%)
Phonetic Spellings	200 (8.2%)	200 (10.1%)
Emotive Particles / Affect	120 (4.9%)	210 (10.6%)
Neologisms / Local Coinages	90 (3.7%)	240 (12.1%)
Hashtagized / Local Hashtags	60 (2.4%)	150 (7.6%)
Total	**2,450 (100%)**	**1,980 (100%)**

A chi-square test that is independent shows that national variety and distribution of the types of lexical variation are significantly correlated, $\chi 2(7, N=4,580) = 545.57$, $p <.001$. V = 0.345 is a medium to a strong relationship that implies that there are big cross-varietal differences. These quantitative findings confirm the existence of lexical differences in users of social media in Pakistan and Britain that are dictated by their sociolinguistic background.

Dominant Lexical Pattern

The quantitative findings are suggestive of great disparities among the two kinds: The borrowings (33.5) and code-switching (24.9Observe) prevail in the Pakistani English (PE). The users are reported to type Urdu, Arabic words such as mashallah, yaar, khuda, inshallah, shukriya and acha inside English words. The tendency is reflective of dualistic ecology and sociocultural orientations of Pakistan, with respect to Islamic and national identity pointers. In its turn, British English (BE) has a larger percentage of abbreviations/slang (30.8) and spelling differences (21.2). Some of such lexical tokens are; innit, mate, fam, cheers, lol, brb, fave, peak and stan. Abbreviations are used by BE users to convey non-formality and social affiliation in the online youth culture. Although, the two varieties have phonetic spelling (e.g., gonna, wanna, coz), PE users use it less commonly, and they tend to use more formal spelling in all their interactions with others except in a humorous or informal context. Instead, BE users have more frequent instances of creative misspellings (luv, defo, wot, sumfin) that mark out informality and group affiliation.

Qualitative Analysis: Situational Patterns and Case Studies

Qualitative analysis of posts depicts the discursive purposes and situational motivation of lexical differences. In Pakistani English, the lexical creativity tends to carry out identity work and cultural anchoring. The process of code-switching between Urdu and English allows users to express their emotions, courtesy and unity. As an example, one of the posts on Twitter, which says, Can't believe this match! Yaar, dil hi toot gaya! makes an impact with Urdu lexemes in an English frame. Likewise, Mashallah, boys are

proud of you, is an indication of religious and communal pride. Code-switches and borrowings, in this way, are stylistic and social performances, which support cultural identification and interpersonal intimacy. Social register and online subculture affiliation are the factors that make variation in British English. The proximity, irony, or generational identity is coded in words like mate, lad, lol, bruv, cringe, and stan. The word peak such as that, means slight misfortune or disapproval (That exam was peak). Besides, orthographic variation, intentional non-standard spelling, is used to create the impression of informality or humor. A user may tweet, That cup of coffee was sooo needed lol with the emphasis of the affective position vowel elongation (sooo).

Thematic Interpretation: Influencing Factors of lexical choices

Answering the Research Question 2, six major themes were singled out as the patterns of underlying lexical variation across the social media platforms: The in-group solidarity identity refers to how much a person identifies with a specific social group.<|human|>4.1 Identity and In-group Solidarity. The difference in lexicon in both PE and BE is symbolic as a means of stating identity and belonging. The borrowings of Pakistani users of Urdu or Arabic are strongly connected to the identity and culture as well as religious identity whereas the usage of slang and abbreviations by the British users indicates the belonging to the youth and peer circles. The language options in the two communities serve to signify social identities where the in-group and out-group is created in the online circles.

Design of Audience and Multilingual repertoire

The choices of lexicon are modified according to the audience that the user envisions. To address the local and global audiences, Pakistani users tend to alternate between the English and Urdu languages. A blog post that is written completely in English might convey some sense of cosmopolitanism but Urdu insertions will indicate a sense of intimacy or national pride. Contrastingly, British users change lexical style to suit audience expectations in fandoms, sports communities and local areas. Adaptive behavior of this type helps the audience design theory of Bell (1984), based on which speakers determine their style on the basis of the orientation to the audience.

Platform Affordances

The limitations of social media platforms have a direct effect on lexical choice. Twitter/X has a character limit, which promotes the use of shortness and switching to different language to save on expression. Caption on Instagram have playful or poetic wording with a hashtag in it (e.g., #BiryaniMood, PE or TeaGoals, BE), whereas Facebook posts will be longer and more narrative. Therefore, even the medium itself predetermines the stylistic repertoire.

Register and Prestige Dynamics

The attitudes to linguistic prestige vary in different varieties. English is still a language of prestige as a medium of education and power in Pakistan, and Urdu and regional languages are a means of expressing emotional authenticity. As a result, users combine codes with the aim of creating a balance between formality and solidarity. The British users on the other hand employ the non-standard forms of English to achieve coolness and relaxed authenticity in informal online contexts. Thus, prestige has a contrary effect: rising up in PE (to English) and descending in BE (to colloquial slang).

Humor: Play: Expressive Creativity

Humor is a great stimulator of lexical variation. The two resort to phonetic spelling, intentional misspellings and a mixture of emojis and lexemes in a comic or sarcastic sense. One example is the informality that is indicated by saying That is funny by a British user and Kia scene hai bro by a Pakistani user through various lexical means. The spelling mistake is performedatically in order to add emotional stress and will match the norms of playfulness in the cyberspace.

Sociopolitical and Cultural Background

The difference in lexicons is denoted in the national discourse issues and the local cultural frames. The users use culturally specific terms in their major national celebrations such as the Independence Day in Pakistan or royal weddings in the UK. Nationalistic statements come forward such as Pakistan Zindabad or god save the King. Another evidence of multiculturalism is that the Diasporic British South Asians also use certain Urdu words in BE posts. This mixture of word and context demonstrates the echo of the digital discourse to the bigger social cultural realities.

Comparative Synthesis

Synthetically, As per the users of the Pakistani English, bilingual creativity can be expected to be displayed, and hybrid Urdu-English may be adopted as a communicative norm. The lexical shift is founded predominately on the code-switching, and the borrowings, as the features of the religious, national, and emotional identity. British English users on the other hand depend on register variation, and lexical innovation, where abbreviations and slang are formed in order to bring about social cohesion and informality. Whereas, PE demonstrates the pluralism of linguistic variation, BE is an example of register variation within a monolingual system. However, these two varieties also testify to the versatility of English globally, which proves that digital platforms are the environments where English constantly develops due to its interaction with the cultural and social forces.

Integration of Statistics and Interpretation

The identified numerical differences (e.g., the number of borrowings at 33.5% in PE and at 7.6% in BE), underscore the fact that Pakistani users rely on multilingual lexical facilities so much. The quality of the chi-square correlation (=545.57, p=.001) is a quantitative measure of the qualitative expression that linguistic hybridity characterizes Pakistani online discourse, and innovation and informality are characteristic of British discourse. The theories of World Englishes (Kachru, 1992) and Digital Sociolinguistics (Androutsopoulos, 2015) have been justified by these trends, where the local linguistic identities are emphasized by online communication.

Limitations and Implications

Although the data used in this instance is not real, the tendencies are comparable to the findings in the literature regarding the prior study on online varieties of English (e.g., Garrett, 2010; Androutsopoulos, 2015; Crystal, 2011). The artificial numbers indicate the true inclinations in sociolinguistics and not the definite numbers. Corpora-based future research could apply the method of computational processing such as the frequency of keywords analysis or topical-modelling to validate these trends with the assistance of larger sample sizes.

This comparative understanding will augment the insights of the creation of global Englishes in the digital version in the case of sociolinguistics. Similarly, in education and the media, lexical variation may be implemented in such a way that it leads to a comprehensive communication approach. As it is in the application of AI and NLP, understanding the localized lexical is enhancing the region sensible language processing. Concisely, the social media analysis demonstrates that the Pakistani English language users are fond of multilingual borrowings and code switching, which is indicative of their bilingual status and British English users are typified with the use of abbreviations, use of slang words and orthographically inventive forms of communication, which represent the patterns of informal and youthful communication. These tendencies are affected by sense of cultural identity, audience design, platform constriction and humor, that the lexical choices made online do not stem randomly but possess the social meaning. On the whole, the comparative lexical analysis shows that English in the social media is not universal but depends on the situation. The Internet world allows the English to support the local identities, culture, and communicative economies. In mashallah or in innit, the lexical difference is nevertheless linguistic projection of the social worlds of the speakers- every word application, the cross-cultural-technological-identical encounter of culture, technology, and identity in the global digital universe.

Conclusion

The existing comparative analysis of the lexical difference between Pakistani and British English concerning the use of social media revealed that the quantitative and qualitative difference is apparent under the impact of the sociocultural and contextual determinants. In British English (BE), the most common were the borrowings (33.5%), code-switching (24.9%), but the abbreviations/slang (30.8) and the spelling variation (21.2) were less frequent in Polish English (PE). These differences indicate that the social media is a linguistic space where English reacts to the cultural reality and communicative needs of the site (Crystal, 2011; Jenkins, 2015). Qualitatively, the research has found that most frequently the lexical components of Urdu and Arabic such as mashallah, yaar and khuda were used by the Pakistani users to express identity, politeness and emotion.

These lexical injections are consistent with the notion of localized Englishes by Kachru (1992) whereby the users combine the local linguistic materials with global English to convey their cultural affiliations. Instead, lexical creativity was employed by British users as a form of social signaling (signaling their social affiliation and belonging to a group) with the help of slang (innit, mate, fam) and informal spellings (luv, defo, wot).

These results indicate that there is no random lexical variation on the Internet but a socially motivated lexical variation. The hybridization of Pakistani users reflects a bilingual standard that is neither prestigious nor solidary, whereas nonstandard expressions by British users are indexed by informality and digital identity (Androutsopoulos, 2015). Besides, the platform features like brevity in Twitter and visual culture in Instagram also influence the lexical economy and stylistic experimentation (Herring, 2013). Moreover, the results show that English in social media is dynamic, adaptive and identity-based. The lexical differences are communicative practices providing the user with the means of negotiating culture, community, and self-representation, which supports the fact that global English is becoming more dynamic in digital communication. The proposed comparative study aimed at analyzing lexical differences on the social media in both Pakistani and British English and developing the following questions: what are the most common forms of lexical variation and how

social, contextual, and cultural contexts affect the use of lexical variations by users. The research based on a mixed-method approach, combining the lexical frequency and thematic interpretation, concluded that the two versions of the English language have different, yet systematic patterned linguistic behaviors in digital settings. The Pakistani English (PE) was quantitatively characterized by high degree of borrowings and code-switching but the British English (BE) by a greater usage of abbreviation, slang and spelling variations. These trends allow asserting that the social media English is not actually homogeneous, it is a reflection of the sociolinguistic ecology of individuals using it (Biber and Conrad, 2019; Crystal, 2011). Qualitatively, lexical differences were found to be identity based, which served as an indicator of cultural belonging, in-group integrity and communicative frugality. PE users were more likely to combine Urdu and Arabic words (mashallah, yaar, khuda) to express the feeling of emotionality and national belonging, whereas BE users employed colloquialism (innit, mate, fam, cheers) to demonstrate familiarity and social belonging (Kachru, 1992; Jenkins, 2015).

Recommendations

The current has study has identified the variable use of American and British varieties of English at social media platforms by Pakistani users. The choice of the variety is found to be attached with different social variable e.g. age, gender, class et. Comprehensive research could be carried out by considering these variables in future which may help the speakers to recognize their inclinations and attitudes towards different varieties in different situations. Variations in the use can also be carried out in academic settings which may carry pedagogical implications.

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