A COMPARATIVE POSSIBILITY ANALYSIS OF ENGLISH LANGUAGE REFORMS IN SPELLING AND PRONUNCIATION

A Comparative analysis with Urdu and American English

*Abdul Rauf Awan

ABSTRACT

In this paper the research scholar has tried to focus the irregularity in spellings and pronunciation of English language, which pose a lot of problems for the learners of this all around the world. A comparative analysis of Urdu and American English in the historical perspective has been presented to highlight discrepancies that pose serious hurdles for the new learners. Spelling reform in the realm of English language is the dire need of the hour. English language has been renewing itself by shedding off old forms in spelling and pronunciation over the last couple of centuries and adopting new ones. The fashionable idea of spelling reform is becoming a dominant tendency of the present age but efforts in this regard remain scattered. It is impossible to change spellings of words and even it is done it looks like an impossible project to implement it successfully.

Key Words: American English, Urdu, Comparative Analysis

Introduction

English language has been one of the fastest growing and progressing languages of the world over the passage of time. One of the interesting features of English language is that it contains in its fold a variety of spelling and pronunciation complicacies that are quite difficult for a layman to comprehend. This problem has been a common feature of so many languages of the world. Even in our part of the world we find so many words in Urdu language which pose a great difficulty in writing as it is different in pronunciation as compared to writing. In Persian and Urdu language we find a large variety of words which are difficult to pronounce than writing. So it requires a rigorous effort on the part of the learners to attain mastery over this skill. There have been intense efforts on the part of the linguists and lexicographers to come out with flying colours as the solvers of this problem at their credit but it is still a hard nut to crack. In the near future it may not be solved to the satisfaction of all the people. As a researcher I have taken a diachronic view of the problem to make it comprehendible and explain it properly and tried to trace the origin of the problem of spellings and pronunciation through the centuries with the examples of English, Urdu and American spellings to highlight the issue in critical perspective.

*Lecturer, Department of English, University of Sargodha.

Critical Analysis

English spelling and pronunciation have always been posing a serious problem to the learners of English language all around the world, particularly to the new beginners over the past centuries. The problem emerges to the forefront due to the fact that no idea can be formed about the pronunciation of a word from the way it is spelled in British English language. The inadequacies and weakness of alphabet can be said to be at the root of the problem of discrepancies that one encounters in spelling and pronunciation of many languages of the world.

Urdu which is one of the biggest languages of the world also furnishes numerous examples of the problem of spelling and pronunciation as the sub-continent faced the problem of mixture of a lot of cultures in the shape of foreign invaders which led to the serious influence of Turkish, Afghan, Persian and the British language. Besides this there has been mixture of regional languages which went a long way in changing the style of accent, diction, spellings and pronunciation. There are many words which are written differently from the way they are pronounced. For example the word pronounced as (KHUD) in Urdu language is entirely different from its form of pronunciation. The same is the case with Urdu word (KHUSH) in pronunciation. There are so many other such words of this kind as this language. Language is purely human and non instinctive method of communicating ideas, emotions and desires by means of a system of voluntarily produced symbols.

English language has also passed through many stages of evolution in its process of development just like Urdu language. Two major sources of borrowing have been Latin and French languages besides so many regional languages that merged into the fabric of English language due to different socio-political circumstances that English society faced over the years. These languages have greatly influenced the spellings and pronunciation of the words. Many original spellings were retained while pronunciation kept on changing over the passage of time. It is interesting to note that Latin borrowing came to English language directly in the pre Anglo-Saxon period. Later on in the era when the revival of learning was taking place many Latin words arrived via French influence of Anglo Normans during the Norman Conquest. Words came to be assimilated or nativitized in this period not only in English but also in other languages as is seen in OE (old English) *cycene* (kitchen) which was borrowed from the Latin word *coquina.* Phonetic changes have been occurring in the OE (old English) in the 17^{th} century and thereabouts. This change affected certain accented vowels and diphthongs. When they were followed in the next syllable by an I or j. Under such circumstances *ae* and *a* became e and o became ae while u became y. Nativitization of the borrowed is that when the loan word comes into a new language during the process of language use.

The second phase of contact with Latin begins somewhere around 10th century when Latin priests introduced Christianity. From about 10th century borrowings were smooth and easy and most of these retained their original form, though sound changes were taking place during renaissance period. New ideas of monastic living, church activities, bishops, priests and Christian symbolism had no active equivalent, therefore a large influx of terms relating to aspects of life arrived and stayed permanently as part of the language of the people. It is interesting to note that in the same pattern Urdu language got the influx of foreign words and expressions with the arrival of different invades firstly from central Asia and after wards European trade companies which established in our part of the world.

Revival of learning was soon to follow throwing open floodgates of knowledge, great humanistic culture and thinking. Discrepancy between spelling and pronunciation was becoming more and more noticeable. It is important to note that Modern alphabet comes from Romans. The Romans learned the script of alphabet from Greeks. Via Etruscan sailors who were mostly traders. The Greeks had borrowed words and expressions and writing script from Phoenician sailors. The twenty six letter alphabet is Germanic which was used on clay or wooden slabs. After the arrival of Roman monks and priests came the Latin letters too which were used in manuscripts and inscriptions.

By the time of Roman conquest the Latin form of writing was universally used in the literary circles. It is significant to note that though scribes followed a definite and clear method of recording sounds, the priests made willful changes in spellings to the convenience and in setting types and other printing accommodativeness. Among priests and publishers of books there was hardly any agreed spelling system. So the same words were spelled and pronounced quite differently. Writers wrote as they pleased as long as intelligibility was not affected.

Even Shakespeare wrote his name in different ways as the spellings were not fixed as yet. For a long time no scholar thought of paying any serious attention to determining a uniform system of spelling as we understand today. It is necessary to become used to capriciousness and vagaries of the writers in the matter of spelling in order to be able to read their work. Another interesting point is that the writers wrote their manuscripts as they pleased. The printers did not follow the spellings of the authors.

Simon Potter notes ‘the compositor’s hand went habitually to some compartments in this case in setting up particular words and had little time to devote to the spellings of his lines.’ The great Elizabethan writer Graham Greene in his pamphlet “A Notable Discovery of Coosnage” 1591 spells the word *Coney* in a multifarious ways i.e. cony, conny, conye, conie, Connie,coni,cunny and cunnie and *fellow*is

spelled fellow, feloewe, fallow, fallowe. Tongue was often spelled as any one pleased tong, tongue, toung and tung etc. So were all other words. The use of ch was also due to scribes. Middle English developed the convention of the use of the letter ch as a sound component. The French copyists also wrote the old English (y) for the sound of (u). So we get the (u) in church. The old English writers used U for both long (u:) and short (u).

The role of language seems only understanding of the readers. It helped the readers and publishers but standards of language were not working properly. It only added to the orthographical waywardness. The same trend is fashion of the day in terms of American English now-a-days. It is interesting to note that such liberties are frequently taken in the use of American English which is quite contrary to the British standards of vocal and written expressions. The introduction of the phoneme B in writing words as doubt was absolutely unnecessary as it was never pronounced. It actually resembled the French way of spelling and this reason was enough for writing in that way.

The early thinkers who felt the dire need for standardizing the spellings included John Checke. Thomas Smith wrote "Dialogue Concerning the Correct and Emended Writing of English Language", Richard Stanghurst translated Virgil in 1582. John Harte wrote "Orthographic." The famous teacher of Spenser Richard Mulcaster made custom and usages as basis for his suggestions for spelling reform. He felt the evolution of spelling system along the phonetic lines was not impossible. Thomas Smith on the other hand devised a thirty four letter alphabet and marked the long vowels. Sir John Checke also invented his own system in which he doubled long vowels and deleted the final e which was common in use during the Middle Ages and afterwards. Geoffrey Chaucer in his poetry also used e sound at the end of every word in his poetry. Thus he gave us *Taak, haat, maad* for the words take, hate and made. Richard Stranghurst wrote *thee* for *the* and *too* for *to* and *yeet* for *yet* etc. These systems were the result of personal efforts and differed from individual to individual. Yet in printing some kind of stability was perceptible as printers did not much differ from one another in spelling of the words.

The variability of English spelling was important part of instability, which people felt in the 16th century as compared to Latin. It seems that English spelling was still chaotic. It interestingly shows the formative stage of English language at that time. Languages grow just like the trees. Languages have seasons of growth and spread according to the socio-economic and cultural needs which keep on changing with the passage of time. Fixing of English proceeded rather slowly. The

16th century was a period of greater change in pronunciation and it exposed the need for spelling conventions.[1]

Dryden said in "Discourse Concerning Satire" in 1693 "we have yet no posada no so much as a tolerable dictionary or a grammar so that our language is in a manner barbarous". This was a period in history which placed very high premium on the social orderliness balance and discipline through external authority. High standards in everything were being sought, urged on by the desire and determination to improve the language. Grammarians set about formulating rules in accordance with the tendencies of the time. Throughout the 17th and 18th centuries intense efforts were made in the direction of standardizing the written conventions, spelling and grammatical rules so the idea of what is formally acceptable and unacceptable was taking shape.

Dr. Samuel Johnson's dictionary of English language (1755) raised the voice against the norms and tried to make a conscious effort to reform English language so as to diminish discrepancies in spelling and pronunciation. He paid due attention to language reform and became the arbiter of English usage and standard for English spelling". [2]

The journey of progress in language continued with borrowings and other word making processes and showing other forms of linguistic change at all levels. Fixing it was therefore was impossible. "For nearly four hundred years the English has struggled their spelling and pronunciation which seemed to confront the language in the time of Shakespeare and it seemed to be an issue throughout the 17th and to some extent 18th century".[3]

In the 19th century philological researchers inaugurated new areas and attitude for those crusading for spelling reforms. Some Americans felt that both England and America can devise a universally acceptable and definite spelling system, so a committee of select persons sat in London to consider this question. An international council for English was formed, so throughout these years' efforts to reform continued although these were all scattered endeavours for bringing uniformity in language. Noah Webster the great American linguist tried to forge a separate American Identity vis-a-vis English language through spelling reform. He suggested that all silent and superfluous letters ought to be deleted. He contributed in the formation of American English which is now quite distinct in shape and expression.

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[1] *Wren C. L The English Language Vikas Publishing House New Delhi 1983:95*
[2] *C L Wren.The English Language.Vikas Publishing House New Delhi 1983: 99*
[3] *A C Baugh History of English language 2nd Edition London Kegan Paul& New York Appleton-Century Crafts:359*

Spelling Reforms Association emerged both in America and England. By this time new spellings were started to be adopted and used. An organization especially devoted to it called Simplified Spelling Board (SSB) came into being in 1906 which published a list of new spellings and suggested new changes. It is interesting to note that it could not go the whole hog as all the discrepancies in spelling and pronunciation could not be finished.

Amid all these activities the support of conventional and conservative thinking came to look upon changes with suspicion. Change in their opinion was spoilage of language standards. De Quincy, Dean Alfred Henry Bradley Robert Bridges and Sir Walter Raleigh spearheaded the philosophy of perspective and authoritative announcement. Society for Pure (SPE) came into being.[4]

It is an interesting fact that English language remains a very complex language which is going through a long process of change and development and all over the world its users are increasing with the passage of time especially in the domains of knowledge; it is keeping its sway over other languages of the world. The efforts will continue to give English a polished, rational and permanent form. The researcher is of the opinion that American English is a variety of language diversity that has given new vigor and vitality to English language spread in the world.

CONCLUSION

The root of the fact is that it is nearly impossible to change the spellings of all the words in English language and if it is done it is equally impossible to implement it. The long history of English language points out that its users accept its waywardness easily in terms of varieties in spellings and many inconsistencies in grammatical practices. One feels much easier with this language as it is than its simplified design. Much has been made of American spelling changes. The changing world scenario has made everything desirable and fashionable if it is termed as American. Its users distort the pronunciation and call it American style of expression. It is all creeping in largely owing to American prestige and role in the world. The simplified spellings only tell half hearted unfinished attempt left off half

[4]*RajimwaleSharad Rama Brothers Educational Publishers New Delhi.1998:76.*

way. The changed spellings are not at all accepted as standard for formal use although in informal chatting and communication they are widely used by the language users for easy communication. The fact remains that English language users will keep on its independent use by defying norms of its usage.