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A Metalinguistic Judgmental Analysis of Pakistani English Phonology by Odki Native Speakers

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ABSTRACT

The study aims to explore the metalinguistic judgments of English syllable structures and lexical stress patterns perceived by Odki English as a Second Language (ESL) adult learners. The paper lays emphasis on phonological adjustments in Pakistan English spoken by the native Odki speakers and especially in their word stress and syllabification. The study examines syllables and stress perception and production by Odki speakers, which are attributed to their first language. The samples were gathered from six Odki-speaking undergraduate students in Karachi. The quantitative method was employed to analyse the frequency of syllable and stress variations. Stress and syllable division were analysed using a set of 100 English words that have different syllable counts. The identification of syllables and stress placement of English words was inconsistent, and some respondents identified these variables correctly, exhibiting partial adaptation. The results are intended to enhance cross-cultural communication and contribute to teaching the English language in Pakistan. The paper also revisits the previous studies regarding the phonological differences of Pakistan English, focusing on the impact of first languages such as Odki on the pronunciation of English. It further argues the role of other local languages such as the Pashto, Punjabi and Sindhi in English speech in Pakistan. The pronunciation of English in Pakistani English is also not given much attention in Pakistani education systems, thus causing a problem of fluency and accuracy.

Keywords: Metalinguistic Study; Phonological Differences; Pakistani English; Odki Speakers; ESL Learners

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1. Introduction

English has established itself as a global lingua franca and is extensively used as a second language (L2) in Pakistan, in both educational institutions and workplaces. It plays a role in education, global communication, and mobility, thus affecting non-native speakers. In Pakistan, English serves as a language of instruction in universities and creates obstacles for job opportunities, social standing, and access to international knowledge[1]. As a result, mastery of English, especially in oral communication, has become important for students and professionals alike.

Although this linguistic element is central, English pronunciation has usually been a neglected aspect in ESL education in Pakistan, where the focus has predominantly been on grammar and reading comprehension. In numerous Pakistani classrooms, teaching methods predominantly rely on the Grammar Translation Method, emphasizing written accuracy over spoken clarity[2]. As a result, pronunciation, stress, and rhythm are often viewed as somewhat less important skills, receiving minimal instructional time and limited systematic evaluation. This educational disparity has faced significant criticism in applied linguistics research, as it is considered that oral comprehensibility together with communicative ability includes pronunciation as an integral part[3].

The Odki community is a less-researched linguistic group in Pakistan that exhibits unique pronunciation patterns when they speak English. Odki speakers are an integral part of the rich multilingual culture of Pakistan, and little attention has been paid by scholars to the linguistic features of the Odki. Like other regional varieties of Pakistani English, Odki speakers' English is influenced by phonological and prosodic features of their mother tongue. Linguistic studies of Pakistani English focus on the big role that regional languages play in determining English pronunciation and producing recognizably different sub-varieties of the language across provinces and speech communities[4]

Previous research on regional ESL speakers has shown that native language interference plays an important role in the segmentation of syllables and the lexical stress in the English language. Their research on Punjabi ESL learners indicated a general inconsistency in the determination of syllable boundaries and the placement of primary stress that points to partial adaptation to English phonological norms. Findings indicate comparable outcomes in Urdu, Sindhi, and Pashto speakers, as learners frequently transfer L1 stress and syllable rules into their English pronunciation[5]. These phonological distinctions can influence comprehension and fluency, highlighting the importance of examining the restricted pronunciation patterns of underrepresented linguistic groups such as Odki speakers.

Challenges in pronunciation linked to stress and syllabification problems extend beyond linguistics, carrying social and educational consequences. Incorrect syllable stress and improper division can hinder clarity and create negative perceptions of a speaker's language among listeners, particularly in formal or intercultural communication settings. In Pakistan, individuals with pronounced regional accents might experience reduced confidence and limited involvement in academic discussions and professional environments[6]. Thus, examining Odki ESL pronunciation should not only serve a purpose in linguistic documentation but also be relevant to wider matters of equity and inclusion in language education.

Although this topic is significant, there is scant research on Odki English. The majority of current contributors concentrate on several widely spoken languages in Pakistan, such as Punjabi, Sindhi, and Urdu; however, Odki ESL learners are not well represented in phonological research[7]. Although these studies have offered valuable information about the English spoken in Pakistan, aspects such as the country's linguistic diversity have been overlooked. Consequently, ESL teaching often relies on broad assumptions and may not sufficiently cater to smaller linguistic groups.

An understanding of the specifics of stress patterns and syllabification among Odki speakers might provide important insights into the dynamics of language transfer and help identify the significant challenges faced by ESL learners in Pakistan. The contrastive analysis theory suggests that when L1 and L2 share similarities, it will facilitate learning for students, whereas differences often result in ongoing mistakes[8]. This research identifies where Odki phonological patterns differ from English, which helps clarify the common pronunciation issues and mistakes made by Odki learners. These insights are essential for creating focused instructional strategies rather than leading us to claim that all teaching should be uniform.

Additionally, this study can guide teaching methods, as it can assist instructors in creating resources and interventions for pronunciation that reflect the phonological traits of Odki learners. Scholars claim that good instruction in pronunciation needs to be context-sensitive and based on the linguistic backgrounds of learners. For Pakistan ESL classrooms, this means not ignoring the variation that exists across regions but instead taking it as an asset rather than a deficiency and using it as a starting point for teaching. Incorporating understanding of the Odki phonology into the teaching of ESL can help to benefit learner outcomes and create more inclusive educational practices.

This study, therefore, aims to discuss the phonological variations produced by Odki ESL speakers from a perceptual point of view. A perceptual approach is of special relevance as it shows the way learners model in their minds the syllable structure and the stress pattern, which might differ from their production on the one hand, and a standard dictionary form on the other hand. By looking at both the placement of stress and the positioning of syllables, the research aims to record how the Odki speakers perceive and produce the sounds in English, as well as identify patterns of interference with their first language.

The findings will add to the growing body of literature on South Asian Englishes and help improve the ESL teaching strategies in Pakistan. For instance, by documenting the existence of Odki English as a new and understudied variety, this study is aligned with current perspectives that regard World Englishes as valid systems of language affected by local sociolinguistic realities. Ultimately, the aim of the study is to bridge the gap between language theory and teaching practice by addressing the study with some empirical information about Odki ESL pronunciation.

1.1. Problem Statement

Although English is a global lingua franca and an important instrument of academic and career achievement in Pakistan, phonological skills of learners of ESL language are generally underestimated in the education industry where grammar and reading take precedence over oral competency. Existing studies of phonological variation among Pakistani ESL speakers have been mostly done on the large linguistic groups including Punjabi, Sindh, Urdu and Pashto, with only a limited number of studies on minority languages such as the Odki. The speakers of the Odki language with syllable-timed L1 can also have serious difficulties with the production of stress-timed English, which results in the systematic deviation of syllabification and lexical stress. Not only do such deviations impair intelligibility, but they can also affect confidence and academic and professional discourse engagement of learners. The lack of empirical studies on Odki ESL learners results in a gap in understanding how their L1 phonological characteristics influence English, limiting theoretical insights into regional varieties of Pakistani English and hindering the development of effective, context-sensitive teaching methods. Consequently, examining the phonological characteristics of Odki ESL speakers is crucial for documenting this overlooked variety, understanding the influence of L1 on L2 speech production, and informing targeted instructional strategies to improve intelligibility and overall language education

1.2. Significance

The aim of this study is to analyze the stress patterns and syllabification processes of Odki ESL speakers, contributing both theoretically and practically. In theory, it broadens the literature on regional forms of Pakistani English and phonological transfer phenomenon. In practice, it will give ESL teachers, curriculum designers, and linguists the empirical information to create specific pronunciation programs materials and instructions that will meet the needs of Odki students. The presence of these phonological differences also helps Odki speakers to communicate better with the native English interlocutors, which in turn improves the intelligibility and confidence in the use of L2.

1.3. Objectives

1. To explore the intuition of Odki ESL learners as to how they syllabify English words.
2. To investigate the primary stress placement of Odki ESL speakers in English words.

1.4. Research Questions

1. How do the Odki native speakers syllabify English words?
2. How do Odki ESL learners place primary stress in English words?

2. Literature Review

Phonological variation in English as a Second Language (ESL) context has been widely discussed in contexts of the applied linguistics and second language learning, notably in relation to the influence of learners' first language (L1) on second language (L2) pronunciation. Pronunciation is an important component of communicative competence, as it directly influences intelligibility, comprehensibility and perception by listeners. Despite its importance, pronunciation is one of the most difficult areas of L2 learning, particularly for learners whose native languages differ primarily from English in terms of phonological structure and rhythm.

English has 44 different phonemes, of which 24 are consonants and the remaining 20 are vowels, which are peculiar to the English language. However, the number of sounds varies in South Asian languages. Due to these phonemic differences, ESL learners and especially those with syllable-timed language backgrounds, have a lot of challenges in learning English with accuracy[9]. Vowel length contrasts, reduced vowels, consonant clusters and placement of stress are all essential aspects of English phonology and learners often have difficulty learning these[10]. When learners do not learn to implement these features correctly, their speech can be comprehensible at a basic level but does not have a rhythm and clarity of native speech.

The syllable structure of South Asian languages is relatively simple, and they have regular patterns of stress, unlike English, whose syllable structure is complicated. Due to this, ESL students in this area tend to over-syllabify words excessively or do not de-syllabize words with unstressed syllables, causing their pronunciations to deviate and not conform to standard pronunciation patterns. These are systematic deviations, not accidental ones, and they are grounded in the phonological principles of the learners' native languages. Research on English studies in Pakistan has highlighted the impact of this regional language on English pronunciation. Pakistani English accent is currently accepted as a valid form of English in the system of World Englishes, with a set of systematically structured phonological, lexical and syntactic forms under the impact of local languages[11]. Research has reported differences in vowel quality, consonant realization, stress placement and intonation in different in Pakistani English.

Punjabi ESL speakers exhibit observable discrepancies in the syllable count and the stress placement as a result of Punjabi phonological influence[12]. Punjabi does not have vowel reduction and relatively stable stress patterns, which are transferred into English by the learner. Equivalent tendencies can be observed with Urdu speakers, whose accent on the English language is due to syllable-timed urgency and restricted consonant groups of Urdu. Other phonological features common among Sindhi and Pashto speakers include replacing English sounds with the nearest native words and displacing the lexical stress[13]. The aggregate result of these findings is that Pakistani English is regionally diverse, not a single variety. This kind of evidence highlights the importance of localized research in pronunciation as opposed to generalized models of ESL teaching. Unaware of these regional factors, teaching pronunciation will result in the failure to consider the needs and difficulties of learners.

A very notable aspect of English phonology is lexical stress, from which another example of this kind of stress is the relative prominence of a single syllable over another one in a word[14, 15]. Properly placed stress is also helpful in word recognition and intelligibility, whereas misplaced stress can result in misunderstanding or higher processing cost by the listeners, native speakers in particular. Stress patterns in English tend to be random and should be acquired on an individual basis, posing a challenge to ESL students. The students often make transfer of stress rules to English that lead to systematic stress errors. Most South Asian languages use stress that is fixed or weakly contrastive, contrary to the variable and contrastive stress of English lexicon. This means that ESL learners might be unable to adequately perceive the difference in stress or interpret the same word form differently using stress[16, 17].

The mutualism of native syllable structure and English stress rules is bound to create peculiar phonological correlate in the case of Odki speakers. Nevertheless, Odki has not been properly researched in the context of English pronunciation, as opposed to Punjabi or Urdu. Such empirical under-documentation causes the challenge of predicting how Odki learners perceive and assign stress to English words and presents an apparent gap in the available literature.

Another major area influenced by L1 transfer is syllabification, which is the splitting of words into syllables. Perception and segmentation of syllables are highly influ-

enced by rhythmic variation between languages. South Asian languages, such as Odki, are mostly syllable-timed, i.e., syllables are equally timed and accented. In contrast, English is stress-timed, and the unstressed syllables are sometimes devoiced or produced weakly [18, 19]. This form of rhythmic conflict often makes ESL students label syllable boundaries or overemphasize the non-prominent syllables. The students of ESL in Pakistan tend to distinguish more syllables in the words of the English language than in the standard pronunciation, and this situation is explained by the fact that the students experience the transfer of L1 rhythms to English. These defective perceptions are then used in production, which reinforces non-native pronunciation patterns.

Recording patterns of syllabification among ESL students is thus essential in the study of the internalisation of English phonological structure amongst learners. It also gives a basis to create the pronunciation instruction intervention that has direct exposure to rhythmic variation among languages. In the absence of such targeted instructions, learners might still stick to the strategies that are based on L1, thus, constraining their level of intelligibility in English [20].

3. Research Gap

Existing studies on Pakistani English have mainly been concerned with the major regional languages of Punjabi, Sindhi, and Pashto. These studies have made great contributions by documenting patterns of stress, variation in segments, and phonological transfer between speakers of dominant linguistic groups in Pakistan. For example, studies of Punjabi and Sindhi ESL learners have repeatedly demonstrated that the first-language phonological systems can exert a strong influence on the familiarity with the English stress placement and syllable structure, which often leads to systematic differential elements from the Standard English norms. Likewise, studies on Pashto-speaking learners highlight the difficulties posed by consonant clusters and vowel reduction in the Pashto language concerning English pronunciation, reiterating the influence of native language structures on English pronunciation [21, 22].

Nonetheless, smaller language communities, like those who speak Odki, require significant exploration. Pakistan is home to a variety of languages, with numerous languages used across the provinces and communities in the nation. Despite this variety, phonological research on Pakistani English focuses on languages with many speakers, often overlooking minority languages that could possess unique phonetic and prosodic characteristics. This disparity results in an inadequate understanding of Pakistani English and a limited applicability of existing results.

This lack in literature restricts our understanding of regional differences in English pronunciation and the impact of the first language (L1) transfer on ESL learners as they enhance their phonological skills. Theories of second language acquisition emphasize that the extent of L1 influence varies among learners and is contingent upon the structural characteristics of specific languages. Consequently, the results obtained from Punjabi, Sindhi, or Pashto speakers cannot be directly applied to the Odki ESL learners. In the absence of empirical research, understanding Odki pronunciation patterns largely remains abstract, thereby constraining both insight into its theory and the efficacy of its teaching methods.

Examining the Odki community is important because stress placement and syllable division play a crucial role in speech clarity and listener understanding. Improperly stressed terms or areas and syllable division could be misinterpreted, leading to reduced clarity even if individual letter sounds may be perfectly fine. In educational and workplace environments, such characteristics of pronunciation can impact confidence, involvement, and the perceived ability of speakers. Grasping how Odki ESL speakers perceive and utilize phonological features can thus enhance the inclusivity and effectiveness of pronunciation instruction.

Additionally, examining Odki English will contribute to a deeper understanding of Pakistani English phonology by expanding the scope of research beyond the English language variants of predominant linguistic communities. Current models of World Englishes argue that regional varieties of English are valid linguistic systems shaped by social, cultural, and linguistic influences [23, 24]. Documenting Odki English as a facet of the evolving English scene in Pakistan, rather than merely labelling it as deficient or incorrect.

Ultimately, the insights obtained from this research can inform ESL teaching practices, providing guidance for specific instructional methods to adopt. An explicit and declarative method of teaching pronunciation that considers the learners' linguistic backgrounds has been shown to be more

effective than generalized methods. By identifying phonological challenges faced by Odki ESL learners, educators and material developers can implement targeted strategies aimed at addressing stress and syllabification difficulties. As a result, studying Odki English could enhance both language research theory and classroom practice in Pakistan.

The study discovers that the students have self-realization and strong self-willingness to learn English language. The students are rest-assured that learning English language will make them successful in their academic and professional life. They are intrinsically motivated because English language will develop their image and help with understanding the lectures and movies. The most common and dominant extrinsic factor for learning the target language was to get a good job[25].

4. Materials and Methods

4.1. Research Design

The current study is grounded on a meta-judgmental study of English syllable structure and lexical stress patterns. The method is quantitative and the research design is descriptive in nature. To investigate emerging phonological tendencies within Pakistan's understudied Odki-speaking group, this perceptual design was chosen. The study finds systematic variations in lexical stress and syllabification by using a controlled word dataset. Since this is an exploratory study, the design places a higher priority on frequency analysis and high-impact descriptive data than on generalizability. This method lays the groundwork for the next extensive acoustic-based production of voice samples in English speech from Odki speakers.

4.2. Research Participant

This study involved six male undergraduate speakers, aged between 18 and 25, who are native speakers of the Odki language and use English as a second language. Purposive sampling was used to select participants from a variety of higher education institutions in Karachi, Sindh. To guarantee a baseline level of English ability (at least 12 years of formal English-medium schooling) mandatory to complete challenging metalinguistic tasks, this particular population was chosen.

All participants reported Odki as their L1 (mother tongue) used within their home environment. While English is their preferred language for academic and professional discourse, all participants stated that Odki is their primary L1 (mother tongue) utilised at home. A procedure was made to ensure that no participants had a history of speech or hearing difficulties in order to preserve the integrity of the phonological data. A sample size of six participants was allowed for a thorough, qualitative-leaning quantitative investigation of individual metalinguistic variants, which is consistent with early-stage recording of minority linguistic varieties given the pilot character of this study.

4.3. Speech Material

A stratified selection of phonological difficulty, spanning from monosyllabic to five-syllable structures, was employed to select 100 lexical items used in this study. Words were cross-referenced with high-frequency lists in English educational resources to ensure participants understood the stimuli. To elicit a wide range of metalinguistic judgments, the selection gave priority to distinct phonological settings, such as different consonant clusters and different stress positions in Standard English.

4.4. Procedure

One hundred (100) words were controlled in terms of their syllable counts. For the data collection, participants were provided with hard-copy tables and data collection was within a quiet setting and the environment was selected to minimize distraction**.** Within the survey, the tables of selected words were written precisely. Then the participants received some instructions about the syllables and primary stress and used such examples as Moon (monosyllable), River (disyllable), butterfly (trisyllable) and no practice items were used, and around 25 min were given to the participants. Then the participants were asked to count and to mark the syllables and define the main stress in these 100 words and cross the table and we remained present to ensure that the task was completed independently. Six male Odki native speakers who were living in Karachi for their university education. This urban cohort was chosen to study how Odki speakers perform metalinguistic tasks in English in a multilingual urban setting where Sindhi, Urdu and English are the major

languages.

The participants were asked to:

1. Count syllables in words.
2. Indicate primary stressed syllable in every word.

4.5. Sampling Technique

In the current study, purposive sampling was employed to choose the subjects who fulfilled certain linguistic and academic qualifications for conducting the study. There were six native speakers of Odki, all men, aged between 18 and 25. All the participants spoke Odki as their first language and learnt English as a second language at school. The participants were sampled from the institutions in Karachi, where English is used as a mandatory subject. Everyone completed at least 12 years of formal schooling to secure conversational proficiency in English that was good enough to carry out activities pertaining to metalinguistic syllabification and lexical stress patterns tasks. The respondents who had speech or hearing impairments were not invited to participate in the experiment because the study was to observe the phonological differences based on the factors of language acquisition but not on physiological constraints. This sampling technique was employed to guarantee that valid and relevant data were collected on syllabification and stress patterns among Odki ESL speakers.

4.6. Data Analysis

The Odki ESL data were analysed through quantitative analytical processes to find out patterns of syllabification and accentuation in English words. To begin with, all the responses retrieved from the participants were compiled in tables utilizing Microsoft Word. The responses of each participant to the questions about the number of syllables, and the position of the main stress were coded in the form of numbers to be analysed systematically. To assign syllabification, the numerical values were rated based on the number of syllables that the subjects found. To place stress, stress was coded in terms of where it is (first syllable, second syllable, third syllable, etc.). Each word was counted for frequencies and percentages to extract the most perceived syllable structure and the position of stress among the Odki ESL speakers. This type of experimental design allowed both the determination of the most common patterns of pronunciation and differences and inconsistencies between subjects. To assess anomalies in the norms of standard pronunciation, the responses of the participants were compared with dictionary-based representations of the English pronunciation, especially the model proposed by Roach. Any systematic variation in the perceptions of Odki speakers compared to the norms of the Standard English was viewed as the evidence of phonological variation and the influence of the first language. In addition, it examined patterns to understand whether Odki ESL speakers preferred syllable-timed pronunciation that is typical of the most South Asian languages or the stress-timed rhythm of English. Phonological transfer of Odki to English was investigated by looking at misplacement of stress or excessively or insufficiently syllabifying. Nevertheless, overall phonological inclinations were the main concern of the analysis as opposed to individual performance. Data analysis results were discussed based on prior research on Pakistani English and ESL phonology. This method of contrasting allowed defining the position of Odki English in the context of regional varieties of English in Pakistan.

5. Results and Discussion

The result of the metalinguistic judgment task reveals significant phonological differences in the internalization of English syllable patterns and lexical stress by Odki ESL speakers. This section highlights the cognitive and linguistic pressures that form Odki perceived English, particularly first-language (L1) interference, by synthesizing the data into mean accuracy rates and frequency distributions. Additionally, detailed raw data of 100-word stimuli across all participants is given in **Appendix A**.

5.1. Analysis of Syllabification Patterns

The participants' capacity to recognize syllable boundaries is measured in **Table 1**. The data reveal that lexical complexity and identification accuracy are clearly inversely related.

With respect to Research Question 2, the data suggest that Odki speakers frequently apply L1 phonotactic constraints to English words. A primary finding is the over-syllabification of monosyllabic words containing consonant clusters (e.g., Spring, Thread). According to Contrastive

Analysis (CA), this occurs because Odki, as a syllable-timed language, may not permit the complex onset/coda structures found in English. Consequently, learners insert an epenthetic ghost vowel to break clusters, cognitively transforming a consonant–vowel–consonant (CVC) word into a consonant–vowel–consonant–vowel (CVCV) structure.

Table 1. Mean Accuracy and Error Typology in English Syllabification.

Word Category	Mean Accuracy (%)	Dominant Error Pattern	Primary L1 Influence (Contrastive Analysis (CA))
Monosyllabic	66.7%	Over syllabification	Vowel epenthesis in cluster
Disyllabic	50.0%	Rhythmic neutralization	Syllable-timed equalization
Trisyllabic	40.0%	Boundary variance	L1 rhythmic transfer
Four-Syllabic	33.3%	Medial syllable deletion	Lack of schwa/vowel reduction
Five-Syllabic	25.0%	Structural compression	Complex orthographic parsing

The data reveals a progressive decline in accuracy as lexical complexity increases. While accuracy for monosyllabic items remains at 66.7%, it drops significantly to 33.3% for four-syllable words and reaches its lowest point at 25.0% for five-syllable words.

Data proves that as the word length increases, Odki ESL learners struggle to identify the internal syllable boundaries. The errors in the 4-syllable (33.3%) and 5-syllable (25.0%) categories are primarily characterized by under-syllabification. This occurs because learners often fail to perceive weak syllables (such as the schwa) in English, causing them to compress or omit sounds to fit the syllable-timed rhythmic patterns of their native Odki language.

5.2. Analysis of Lexical Stress Placement

While syllabification accuracy was measured for all 100 stimulus words (including monosyllabic items), the analysis of lexical stress distribution in **Table 2** focuses exclusively on multisyllabic words (2 to 5 syllables). Monosyllabic words were excluded from this specific frequency distribution because they possess only a single vowel peak, meaning stress is fixed and lacks positional variation (initial, medial, or final).

Table 2. Frequency Distribution of Perceived Primary Stress Placement.

Word Category	Initial Stress %	Medial Stress %	Final Stress %	Inter-Participant Agreement
Disyllabic	50.0%	50.0%	0.0%	0.62 (substantial)
Trisyllabic	33.3%	45.0%	21.7%	0.44 (moderate)
Four-Syllabic	16.7%	50.0%	33.3%	0.31 (fair)
Five-Syllabic	8.3%	33.3%	58.4%	0.22 (slight)

The data in **Table 2** prove a clear evolutionary shift in the participants' phonological strategies as lexical complexity increases. Rather than maintaining a consistent stress pattern, the Odki ESL learners demonstrate a "Right-Edge Bias," where the primary stress migrates from the beginning of the word to the end as more syllables are introduced.

5.2.1. The Erosion of Initial Stress

In disyllabic words, the participants are split evenly (50.0% Initial, 50.0% Medial/Final). This suggests that for short words, learners are still somewhat influenced by the standard English patterns they have encountered in basic vocabulary. However, as the words grow to five syllables, the "Initial Stress" placement collapses to only 8.3%. This collapse indicates that for Odki speakers, the cognitive load of maintaining stress at the beginning of a long word is too high. In English, many long words have a "falling" rhythm (stressing the first or second syllable), but the participants find this unnatural.

5.2.2. The Emergence of the Final Stress Anchor

The most significant finding is the jump in Final Stress placement, which rises from 0.0% in 2-syllable words to a dominant 58.4% in 5-syllable words. This suggests a "Default Rhythmic Strategy." Because the participants' native L1 (Odki) is syllable-timed and lacks the complex "jumping" stress of English, the learners adopt a simplified rule: when in doubt, stress the end. By placing the stress on the final or penultimate syllable, the speaker creates a "predictable

anchor" for the word. This results in the characteristic staccato rhythm of Pakistani English, where every syllable is pronounced with nearly equal weight until a heavy emphasis is placed on the termination.

5.2.3. Reliability and Inter-Participant Agreement

The low agreement scores for 5-syllable words (0.22—Slight) is a critical data point. It proves that while there is a general trend toward the "Right-Edge," there is no formal "rule" yet established in the learners' interlanguage. Instead of following a learned phonological rule, the participants are likely guessing based on orthographic (spelling) cues. They see a long string of letters and, lacking a clear mental model for where the stress should go, they intuitively push the emphasis toward the end of the string. This lack of consistency highlights the instability of the learners' phonological competence at higher proficiency levels.

6. Implications

The implications of this study are valuable, both theoretically, from a psycho-educational perspective, and socially. Theoretically, it increases knowledge of regional varieties of Pakistani English through the documentation of phonological patterns of Odki ESL learners and it underscores the influence of the first language (L1) on stress placement and syllabification. The finding of this variability in counting produced syllables and the perception of syllable stress underscores the significance of L1 transfer in learning and illustrates how learners internalize English lexical and phonological rules differently from standard norms. From a pedagogical standpoint, the findings suggest that ESL teaching should not rely on broad approaches but rather be customized to align with the unique phonological characteristics of Odki learners. Recognizing common stress patterns and syllabification errors can assist educators in creating targeted pronunciation activities to enhance intelligibility, fluency, and confidence. Socially and academically, recognizing these phonological variations helps prevent miscommunication, enhances understanding, and fosters inclusive learning environments where speakers from lesser-known linguistic communities are supported and empowered.

7. Conclusions

The present metalinguistic judgement study examined the phonological differences produced by Odki ESL learners, concentrating on syllabication challenges and primary stress positioning in English vocabulary. The findings suggest that Odki speakers exhibit consistent departures from Standard English standards, primarily driven by first language (L1) influence. At times, learners in perception overly divided words into syllables or neglected to assign stress appropriately, as Odki is a syllable-timed language while English is stress-timed. Monosyllabic and disyllabic terms demonstrated stronger cohesion among participants, while trisyllabic, four-syllable, and five-syllable words exhibited more variation in stress placement, revealing inconsistency in perception. These patterns demonstrate that L1 phonological structures have a significant impact on L2 pronunciation, leading to considerable interference in how syllables are stressed and segmented.

This study also highlights the significance of recognizing that Odki ESL learners' pronunciation habits can affect their intelligibility, understanding, and self-assurance in both academic and social environments. This study enhances the limited understanding of Odki English and Pakistani English on a regional level by recording these distinct patterns. The results provide empirical support for the development of tailored, context-aware instruction on pronunciation, emphasizing challenges in syllabification and stress. Integrating these strategies will enhance learner outcomes, promote inclusive pedagogy for ESL, and improve the intelligibility of Odki speakers in diverse English-speaking contexts.

Limitation and Direction for Future Research

These results are exploratory and cannot be applied to the larger Odki-speaking community in Pakistan because the study is a pilot study with six participants from the Karachi area. Rather than providing a final description of Odki English, they are meant to detect emergent trends within this urban community, test the viability of the research design, and provide hypotheses for future research.

Author Contributions

Conceptualization, A.M.A.; methodology, A.M.A.; validation, A.M.A. and A.B.B.; formal analysis, A.M.A. and A.B.B.; investigation, A.B.B.; resources, A.M.A.; data curation, A.M.A.; writing—original draft preparation, A.B.B.; writing—review and editing, A.M.A.; visualization, A.M.A.; supervision, A.M.A.; project administration, A.M.A. Both authors have read and agreed to the published version of the manuscript.

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Informed Consent Statement

Informed consent was obtained from all subjects involved in the study.

Data Availability Statement

Data are available and will be provided if required.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflict of interest.

AI Use Statement

During the preparation of this manuscript, the authors used AI solely for language refinement. No AI tools were used for data analysis, interpretation, or generation of scientific content. All outputs were critically reviewed and edited by the authors. The authors take full responsibility for the integrity and accuracy of the work.

Appendix A

As far as **Table A1** is concerned, four Odki ESL learners perceived the words *cat*, *jump*, *moon*, *cold*, *chair*, *stone*, *flame*, *smile*, and wind as monosyllabic. In contrast, the rest of the words, such as *bread*, *spring*, *sound* and *thread* were identified as disyllabic. However, one participant identified *moon* as monosyllabic but the other words as disyllabic and trisyllabic. Lastly, one participant consistently over-syllabified all monosyllabic words, perceiving them as disyllabic and trisyllabic, and did not point to any word as monosyllabic.

In **Table A1**, there are 20 monosyllabic words; however, four participants stressed over the first syllable of words, while two participants placed stress on the second syllable of the words.

From **Table A2**, three participants identified all 20 words as disyllabic. However, the words *thunder*, *sunset*, *mountain* and *river* were correctly identified as trisyllable words, and the other words were correctly identified as disyllabic by others.

In **Table A2**, there are 20 disyllabic words; three participants placed stress on the first syllable of the words, while three participants placed stress on the second syllable of words.

Table A1. Monosyllabic words with corresponding syllabification and stress markings.

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4
1	Cat	Jump	Light	Moon
2	Bread	Cold	Spring	Cloud
3	Chair	Stone	Flame	Grass
4	Shore	Night	Sound	Thread
5	Smile	Storm	Wind	Wave

Table A2. Disyllabic words with corresponding syllabification and stress markings.

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4	Stimulus 5
1	Garden	Winter	Colour	Pencil	Music

Table A2. *Cont.*

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4	Stimulus 5
2	Table	Pillow	Planet	Shadow	Yellow
3	Circus	Candle	Flower	Berry	Rabbit
4	Thunder	Sunset	Mountain	River	Apple

As shown in **Table A3**, four of the participants perceived that the words *elephant*, *beautiful*, *harmony*, *butterfly*, *celebrate*, *yesterday*, *banana*, *tomato*, *energy* are trisyllabic. same individuals described the words *impossible* and *cinnamon* as four syllables. In contrast, the three participants named the words *elephant* and *imagine* as disyllabic and named *impossible* as a four-syllabic word, while the rest of the words were named as trisyllabic.

Table A3. Trisyllabic words with corresponding syllabification and stress markings.

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4
1	Elephant	Beautiful	Harmony	Butterfly
2	Celebrate	Chocolate	Yesterday	Discovery
3	Cinnamon	Excellent	Imagine	Vacation
4	Memory	Banana	Impossible	Universe
5	Dangerous	Energy	Tomato	Library

In **Table A3**, there are 20 trisyllabic words, two participants placed stress on the first syllable of the words, and two participants stressed on the second syllable of word while one participant placed stress on the third syllable of words.

As far as **Table A4** is concerned, four participants identified *adorable*, *definition*, i*nvitation*, *celebration*, *opportunity*, *calculator*, *motorcycle*, *intelligent*, *irritation* and documentary as four-syllabic words, whereas the rest are grouped as either finally trisyllabic or finally five-syllabic words. In contrast, the remaining three participants identified *refrigerator*, *inspirational*, *development*, *ceremonious*, as five-syllable words, and other words were perceived as four-syllable words.

Table A4. Four-syllabic words with corresponding syllabification and stress markings.

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4
1	Adorable	Definition	Invitation	Opportunity
2	Celebration	Atmospheric	Calculator	Refrigerator
3	Documentary	Hospitality	Motorcycle	Ceremonious
4	Evolutionary	Inspirational	Communicator	Inspiration
5	Authorization	Intelligent	Development	Irritation

In **Table A4**, there are 20 four-syllabic words, and two participants placed stress on the first syllable of words, and two participants placed stress on the second syllable of words and two participants stressed over the third syllable of words.

As far as **Table A5** is concerned, *imagination*, *communication*, *qualification*, *meteorology*, *examination*, and *organization*, and a few other items were identified by five participants as five-syllable words, while *multiplication*, *simplification*, *representation*, *clarification*, *congratulation*, and *verification* were categorized as six-syllabic words. In contrast, one participant indicated that *imagination* is a four-syllabic word, and *simplification* and *representation* were identified as six-syllabic words, while all other words were identified as five-syllabic.

Table A5. Five-syllabic words with corresponding syllabification and stress markings.

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4
1	Imagination	Communication	Transportation	Qualification
2	Meteorology	Examination	Determination	Unacceptable

Table A4. *Cont.*

Set No.	Stimulus 1	Stimulus 2	Stimulus 3	Stimulus 4
3	Organization	Investigation	Appreciation	Pronunciation
4	Population	Multiplication	Cooperation	Verification
5	Congratulation	Simplification	Representation	Clarification

In **Table A5**, there are 20 five-syllabic words, and it was observed that one participant stressed on the first syllable of words and two participants placed stress on the second syllable of words, while three participants stressed on the third syllable of words.

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