

# VARIABILITY OF RHOTICITY AND THE REALISATION OF RHOTICS IN PUNJABI-ENGLISH BILINGUALS – A FORENSIC PERSPECTIVE

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## ABSTRACT

Forensic casework in the UK increasingly involves bilingual speakers where one of the languages is English. Such speakers may, however, be quite heterogeneous in terms of their social identification – and also in terms of their accents of English. Differences in rhoticity and in the variability in the realisation of the rhotics between these two subgroups was examined.

The selected population comprises second generation Punjabi-English bilinguals (whose habitual home language is Punjabi) from south east Britain. It is hypothesized that the permeability between the two languages (considered in terms of rhoticity and realisation of /r/) is based on social identification. Specifically, subjects were partitioned into two groups ('British Asian'- or 'Asian'- identified) on the basis of their responses to a questionnaire.

The main research question was whether 'British Asian' speakers of English acquire the local (south east British) pattern of /r/-pronunciation with no postvocalic realisation, or whether, by contrast, they employ /r/ postvocally. In addition, the pattern rhotic realisations was examined in the two groups. A profile of Punjabi phonetics is used as a reference against which the bilinguals' realisations of /r/ may be compared. Findings are discussed in terms of gender differences [1], [2] and whether social identification (and hence the use of rhotics) may be modified under different speaking situations [3].

### Key References

- [1] Romaine, S. (1979) Postvocalic /r/ in Scottish English: Sound Change in progress? in Trudgill, P. (1979) *Sociolinguistic Patterns in British English*. Edward Arnold: London.
- [2] Heselwood, B. & McChrystal, L. (2000) Gender, accent featured and voicing in Panjabi-English bilingual children. *Leeds Working Papers in Linguistics & Phonetics* 8. 45-70.
- [3] Lindsey, G. & Hirson, A. (1999) Variable robustness of non-standard /r/ in English: evidence from accent disguise. *International Journal of Speech, Language and the Law*, 6 (2) 278-288.