Language and Power Dynamics in Pakistani Society

Haseena Khan[1], Farman Ullah[2] and Muhammad Nauman[3]

Abstract

Language in Pakistan is more than communication because it is a tool that defines the status of the community, the political environment, and the economy in the country. Due to the ethnic and cultural diversity of people of more than seventy languages in the country, the newly emerging language policy is apparent in the domination of Urdu and English language, which are identified with political power and social status. At the same time, regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi and many others are deliberately excluded and perpetuate the existence of the rich and elite and the poor, dominantly illiterate populace. This paper discusses the role of language in identity and how it supports and reinforces social categorizations. It also looks into how the pervasive use of dominant languages perpetuates exclusion in facets like education, politics, and economics, arguing that language functions as a tool of regulation and oppression. By focusing on the language and power relations in Pakistani society and identifying the impact of language in constructing social relationships and identity in the context of society, the present study provides an understanding of how linguistic factors determine the structure of society.

Keywords: Urdu and English Language, Language and Power, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Balochi.

Introduction

Language is not just a way of exchanging information in society but also expressing ideologies that dominate social relations and government in the politics of a given culture. In Pakistan, a country with a population of over seventy languages in different regions with different names, language more than ever helps support the power relations of society and the social divide. Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Balochi are the languages spoken in the country that depict ethnicity, politics, and social stratum interconnection. The situation in the linguistic landscape of Pakistan can be described as a clear dominance of linguistic resources associated with power – Urdu and English, and systematic exclusion of regional languages. This interaction has far-reaching consequences for education, political power and economic rights, and, importantly for this paper, language as an identificatory and exclusionary tool.

The colonial experience shaped the patterns of power of language in Pakistan, and hence, English was adopted as the official language of administration and of the elite (Rahman, 2002). After gaining independence, colonialism was followed by the existing language policies; English remained the language of political, educational and economic administration (Mahboob, 2014). Identical to Bengali in Bangladesh, the national language, Urdu, has been resisted in some provinces of Pakistan where linguistic identity and regional autonomy become significant issues

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[1]*MPhil Scholar, Department of English, Qurtaba University, Pakistan.*
Corresponding Author Email: haseenakamran@gmail.com
[2]*Lecturer in English, IQRA National University, Swat Campus, Pakistan.*
[3]*PhD Scholar, Department of English, Abdul Wali Khan University Mardan, Pakistan.*

(Shaikh, 2009). However, the languages of this region, like Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, etc., have not been given much regard, and they are not employed as representatives of the provincial, federal, political and economic elite jobs (Haque, 2002). Such distribution of linguistics capital points to the existing social disparities within Pakistani society: those who are able to use more widespread and prestigious languages—Urdu and English in particular—shall have better chances for further employment.

The main focus of this paper is to understand how power relations are established based on language in Pakistan and how language inequalities are built and contribute to access to power in the educational, political and economic spheres. This study will analyze how the state has nurtured linguistic inequalities and how language matters affect social mobility for people speaking the regional language. This research will also examine the formation of power relations in Pakistani society based on social identity, class, and ethnicity, with special reference to language.

The first research question is to review the evolution of language policies in Pakistan with specific reference to the official contact promotion of Urdu and the dominance of English in official and learning domains. What will be done in this paper is looking at how these policies have been used in policy shifts and how language has been employed for political sake and social regulation (Rahman, 2002). The second purpose is to examine how a language affects political, educational, and economic rights in modern Pakistan. Specifically, this paper will analyze the role of language prejudice in reinforcing regional and class differentiation regarding the distribution of resources and chances enjoyed by speakers of a dominant or a subordinate language (Haque, 2002; Shaikh, 2009).

This paper will address the following key research questions:

1. How have language policies in Pakistan contributed to the creation of social and regional inequalities, and how do they sustain existing power structures?
2. In what ways do linguistic proficiency and language use impact access to political, educational, and economic power in contemporary Pakistan?

Significance of the Study

The importance of this study is in the ability to make known the processes through which language works to regulate relations of power in the context of Pakistani society. It looks at language first as a social and political tool of communication and domination rather than a medium of conveying information. Furthermore, this paper will also examine the impact that reforms in language policy could have on abolishing linguistic injustices implemented in Pakistan.

Last, this research will supplement the existing knowledge on language, power and injustice, especially in postcolonial societies. This paper sheds light on what Fenton and Maybin (2004) entitled 'empowerment and disempowerment by language' through a linguistic landscape analysis of the Pakistani context. Finally, the study will shed light on the directions of the desired amendment of linguistic policies and practices that may lead to social justice and national integration in Pakistan.

Literature Review

Power and language have been significant research concerns in sociolinguistics, political science and postcolonial discourse studies. The literature has been published extensively to explain how language plays a role in constructing social relations, power, and ethnic and identity politics in Pakistan. They have focused on historical language policies: roles of regional languages, language and education, and language and economic rights/ political power.

Historical Context and Language Policies in Pakistan

In this context, Pakistan's language policies have also significantly contributed to defining the country's internal power relationships. As it is pointed out by Rahman (2002), the British colonial history of Bangladesh ensured that English was the language of administration, government and education. This colonial legacy was carried on even after Pakistan gained independence in 1947; English remained a dominant language for the ruling and the influential aristocracy, leaving a big gap between the super-ordinate and sub-ordinate. Though there are many regional languages, English was associated with socioeconomic mobility, and the regional languages were all on the receiving end (Mahboob, 2014).

The issue of which language should be the national language was one of the first political crises in India. According to Bashir (2013), the choice to make Urdu is political to unite the many linguistic groups within the country, most especially in urban areas) where Urdu was dominant. Nevertheless, this change was met with much opposition in modern-day East Bengal or Bangladesh and Sindh, where the Bengali or Sindhi language was predominant. As Shaikh (2009) rightly notes, there were sentiments that Urdu, when mandated as the official language, disenfranchised pro-regionalism by the central government and due to this, political relations over this linguistic policy reached its boiling point in 1952 with the Bengali Language Movement, which further resulted in the secession of East Pakistan and declared the importance of language in the disintegration of a nation (Haque, 2002).

Urdu and English have remained dominant in public domains and consolidated what Rahman calls the linguistic elite, which regulates entry to politics and economic opportunities (2002). Currently, the state has elevated the centrality of these languages at the discriminative discomfort of regional languages that include Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Balochi, where their speakers have been socially and politically confined and economically restrained from participation (Mahboob, 2014).

Linguistic Hierarchies and Social Inequality

The interaction of language and education facilitates Pakistani society's social injustice. In the words of Rahman (2002), the educational system of Pakistan entails the use of Urdu and English only, both languages being the medium of instruction in schools and universities, especially in the urban sector of Pakistan. This system is a problem for students from rural areas or students from ethnic minority backgrounds since they learn these dominant languages less. According to Mahboob (2014), learners who speak regional languages such as Sindhi, Pashto, or Balochi are highly restricted in school and have poor chances of economic prosperity.

In this context, Pakistan's education system has reinvented the wheel; the English language has become the key to success and the path to better job opportunities, particularly in quality sectors. The language policy results in structural unfairness favoring students fluent in English and Urdu and pushing students in the regional languages to low-paying jobs or employing them in the informal sector (Rahman, 2002). This linguistic exclusion perpetuates social and economic injustice in a society where language functions as a divider and filter in a race to capture economic fundamentals.

Language in Education and Economic Opportunity
The interaction of language and education facilitates Pakistani society's social injustice. As Rahman has noted, the educational system in Pakistan has two major languages, Urdu and English, which are also the media of instruction, mainly used in urban centers. This system is a problem for students from rural areas or students from ethnic minority backgrounds since they learn these dominant languages less. We approve Mahboob's (2014) conception that Sindhi, Pashto, or Balochi-speaking students encounter significant challenges to educational achievement that cause them to be restricted economically.

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Language and Regionalism: The Politics of Language Movements
Regionalism and linguistic factors have always been a dominating factor in the politics of language in Pakistan. Language issues have been instrumental in political coalitions, particularly in Sindh and Balochistan provinces. Haque notes that language has also been used to demand regional power and authority against the state center. Such early language movements, including the Sindhi Language Movement of the 1970s, felt on the part of Sindhi-speaking people that their language was being sidelined in official processes in favor of Urdu. Likewise, the Balochi Language Movement has remained a part of a nationalist movement for political rights and integrity and the defense of one's ethnic identity (Shaikh, 2009, p. 119).

These movements show that language also means political power besides being a sign of regional pride. For example, Bashir (2013) argues that the restriction of regional languages such as Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi has led to ethnic minorities' feeling that the state marginalizes them and, thus, the necessity of claiming the right to use those languages in the political context. Therefore, language is, on the one hand, a weapon against oppression and, on the other hand, a method through which the state is challenged and power is claimed against the center.

Language and Media: Representations of Power
The use of language in media also reaffirms status differences in this multilingual nation of Pakistan. Urdu and English are authoritative in conventional and online media platforms, while the share of regional languages has been acutely poor. According to Tariq (2011), it is essential to note that media is a tool of soft governance whose role is to influence the public's opinion and remind it of the order that should be maintained. In this regard, the media has not only acted as a mirror that captured and reproduced the language hierarchy in Pakistani society but has also helped to reinforce the status of Urdu and English as the languages of modernity and power.

Regional languages, however, are only used in small local newspapers and magazines, or if they are given a national circulation, they do not have much of an impact. This sort of representation in the media also contributes to the existing hierarchy and widens the marginalization of ethnic and linguistic minorities. According to Mahboob (2014), the current state of media affairs and policies successfully preserves the dominance of Urdu and English-speaking elites. It perpetuates the social, political, and economic hierarchy between Pakistanis.

Methodology

This research aims to determine the power relations between language in Pakistan and how policy has influenced fairness and equality in politics, schools, and jobs. To this end, the research uses qualitative and quantitative methods to provide a holistic view of the subject under consideration. This section explains the approach, sampling technique, data collection tools, and data analysis techniques used to investigate how language maintains power relations in Pakistan.

Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design, aiming to understand the intricate relationship between language and power in a socio-political context. Given the multifaceted nature of the research questions, which include analyzing historical language policies, social hierarchies based on language, and access to opportunities, the mixed-methods approach allows for a thorough examination of quantitative trends and qualitative narratives. The study explores how language influences power dynamics through education, politics, media, and social interactions, drawing from historical data, current sociolinguistic trends, and individual experiences.

Data Collection Methods

Documentary Analysis

Before conducting primary research for this study, the author researched secondary sources including scholarly articles, government documents, policies, and history books. And in these respect historical language policies like the implementation of Urdu and English as national languages in Pakistan help in tracing the ways in which such policies have led to a formation of power relations. Government papers of education and language policies (for instance, the National Education Policy) are also reviewed to assess the state's position on language diversities, its potential impact on social justice.

Surveys and Questionnaires

As a quantitative measure, a survey questionnaire is distributed to a diverse group of respondents drawn from the urban areas, and rural settings across Urdu, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Balochi speaking populations. These are questions that are used in the survey to measure participants' beliefs regarding use of language in education, employment, politics and social class. It allows measuring the degree of essential communication skills in Urdu and English and the relationship with the chances of success and social status.

Interviews and Focus Groups

The data are collected by administering structured questionnaires with people of different linguistic backgrounds. The interviews are made with students, teachers, political activists and professionals to know the real life examples and their experiences in education, employment and politics where the language plays a role of a key to unlock the opportunity or a lock to deny it. In focus groups conducted with speakers of regional languages (Sindhi, Pashto etc.), the participants are asked about the politics of language and social/cultural consequences of language rights through media, political and educational contexts where regional languages have been sidelined. In his typical manner, the interviews and focus groups are utilized to offer detailed situated accounts of how language cuts across power.

Sampling Strategy

Specifically, the study uses purposive sampling in order to identify participants from various linguistic, ethnic and socio-economic backgrounds. The sample is purposively drawn with different regions of Pakistan (e.g., Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochistan), both urban and rural participants, and different age groups. It enables one to capture the features of language use in terms of their differentiated pattern within the various segments of the population. The participants are selected in a way that they meet firsthand the repercussions of language inequalities in education, employment, and politics.

Data Analysis

Quantitative Analysis

The data collected through surveys and questionnaires analyzed using statistical methods, such as descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and correlation analysis, to identify patterns in the relationship between language proficiency and access to various opportunities (education, employment, and political participation). The analysis will help determine whether speakers of Urdu and English have more access to resources and power compared to speakers of regional languages.

Qualitative Analysis

Interviews and focus group data analyzed using thematic analysis. This method seeks to provide modes or dimensions as they are depicted from the responses relative to the issues of language, social stratification, politics, and ethnicity. At this stage, data may be categorized and analyzed with the help of NVivo software for handling the qualitative data.

Ethical Considerations

The ethical consideration is highly observed throughout the research. Participants' consent is sought from them so that they comprehend the aim of the study and that anonymity of answers will be preserved. They are also kindly informed that they have the freedom to withdraw from the study at any times without any repercussions. Firstly, the research respects and follows the norms of private and personal data protection.

Limitations
However, there are some limitations to the present study despite the use of mixed-methods research approach. One of the major drawbacks of the survey and interviews methods is that measuring tools depend on the self-reporting and therefore participant bias can distort the results. Besides, the given research is devoted to the certain regions and linguistic populations, which may cause the generalization of the results for the whole country. However, it is expected that the study is going to provide some insights for understanding the function of the language in constructing power relations in Pakistan.

Results and Discussion
Language and Power in Education
The survey and the interviews show that there are great disparities in education opportunities which are determined by one's ability to speak any of the official languages. Those who were able to speak Urdu or English without difficulty said they afford better quality education. Those students – who used to speak regional languages such as Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi – told me that they frequently faced problems in fetching books or being able to excel in sophisticated educational institutions which are basically Urdu n English medium schools.

Participants expressed that at least a large number of students from rural areas and specifically those who speak regional language are at a major disadvantage in the current system of education competition. As one interviewee from Baluchistan remarked, "If you don't know English or Urdu, you're almost invisible in schools and colleges. We are also denied books so important that even textbooks are in a foreign language our teachers don't understand." These sentiments align with the observation in the literature; Rahman (2002) and Mahboob (2014) affirm that Pakistani education system is a vehicle used to monopolize Urdu and English languages while marginalizing regional languages from education curriculum. This marginalization prevents individuals from advancements in higher education and job opportunities resulting in linguistic separation from one generation to another.

Furthermore, the respondents' survey suggests that those who know English or Urdu are considerably more likely to search for the positions in the private companies, global organizations, and the state administration. On the other hand, regional languages are used and the people who use them are confined to low paying jobs or informal employment. This mirrors the larger society politics where language is the key to unlocking economic fortune as pointed out by Bali (2013).

Linguistic Hierarchy and Political Participation
Based on political power and political participation, the cross-sectional study indicates that political activism strongly depends on language. Educated and urbanized individuals of Karachi, Lahore and few more cities of Pakistan stated that the Urdu speaking people have relatively easy access to political power as compared to regional language speakers. English, as the language of politics and state, was also mentioned by the respondents as one of the crucial to interact with politics especially referring to the state and federal level as well as to bureaucratic agenda.

Discussions held with the focus groups in Sindh and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa made it clear that people who speak regional languages do not feel politically included. Another respondent from Karachi lamented that their voices are never heard in national assembly of Pakistan because our so called leaders who sit in the assembly do not utter a single sentence in the local language and the media available to us is also in Urdu and English. This agrees with Shaikh (2009) who posited

that language is a fundamental source of political marginalization because not only does it influence participation, but also representation in national leadership. It is also maintained by political parties whose agendas tend to favor Urdu and English speakers compounds ethnic and regional strife.

Economic Power and Language Proficiency

The relationship between language and wealth and other economic indicators is also evident in the results obtained. Those respondents who claimed good English or Urdu language said they got better wages, job security and could work for elite companies. For instance, one professional in Islamabad described how "having command over English opens doors in multinational companies," a view shared by many respondents who had pursued careers in corporate or governmental sectors.

On the other hand, the speakers of regional languages were mostly engaged in business, farming, or informal sector. The interviews carried out among the workers in rural Balochistan and Sindh identified a situation where individuals of great skill could not find a well-paying job because of their inability to speak Urdu or English, which are the dominant languages in the province. The argument that there is language segmentation similarly perpetuates the social inequality by aligning speakers of languages that are globally considered as important with higher end jobs within the opening global milieu and relegating others to lower paying jobs within it.

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Conclusion

The analysis presented in this paper has demonstrated how language maintains power relations in a context of the Pakistan. The results depicts that, speaking Urdu and English gives centrality to education, politics and economical affair and on the other side, regional languages are restricted and neglected. This linguistic divide is a reflection of broader social inequalities, with the state's language policies—rooted in Pakistan's colonial past—continuing to favor certain languages over others. The conclusions are based on concepts put forward by Rahman (2002) Mahboob (2014)

according to which language is primarily a medium of social differentiation that determines the extent of a person's control over the means of power and livelihood.

The study also emphasized the necessity of a comprehensible language policy that includes Pakistani linguistic diversity by offering adequate access to opportunities to all linguistic groups. In the best interest of the country's unity and language, there exist provisions that should be pressed into service within Pakistan so as to ensure regional languages a platform in the media and politics such as the multilingual education policy.

Policy Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following policy recommendations are made:

1. *Inclusive Language Education:* The government must ensure regional languages are adopted as part of the formal system of education. Educational policies which will promote and favor the instruction of regional languages in addition to the promotion of the Urdu and English languages will be useful to reduce and minimize the mentioned gap and provide more justice for student learning abilities.

2. *Recognition of Regional Languages in Media:* The use of Regional languages should get airtime and column space in the National media, television, radio and newspapers. This would not only develop linguistic minorities but also would make it possible for them to express at the national level.

3. *Affirmative Action in Employment:* Policies should be introduced that actively promote the inclusion of speakers of regional languages in the formal economy, especially in government jobs, corporate sectors, and international organizations. Language proficiency in regional languages could be considered a valuable skill that fosters diversity and inclusion.

4. *Decentralization of Power:* The devolution of political power to the regional governments could assist find the linguistic and ethnic inequities. This means that there is an opportunity for regional languages to be used at the provincial level thus helping to minimize political alienation in the process increasing political participation.

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