



RESEARCH PAPER

Investigating the Views of Pakistani People regarding the Dominant Role of English in Comparison to Urdu in Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

This study intended to investigate the perceptions and views of Pakistani people regarding the dominant status of English in comparison to Urdu through a self-developed questionnaire. 100 Pakistani residents belonging to different provinces participated in the study. Their responses were analyzed using descriptive frequency analysis through SPSS. The findings revealed that the members of Pakistani society still perceive English dominating in the most significant fields and areas such as education, official communication, and more. The study holds significance in that it utilized questionnaire to collect data, which was not used in previous studies. The study contributes to look further into the concept of linguistic imperialism in Pakistan. The replication of the study with large data set, including the representative population of all the provinces can be conducted to have more detailed view of the concept of English dominance and linguistic imperialism in the future.

KEYWORDS

English Dominance in Pakistan, English Urdu Divide, Linguistic Imperialism, Pakistan, English Urdu Status

Introduction

Language is not only the source of communication, it also plays a crucial role in shaping culture, identities and political knowledge of a particular society. beyond this, it is related to the issues of power, hegemony, and cultural imperialism. Historically, Pakistan had its roots as a colonized state under the governance of British Raj. Pakistan is a linguistically diverse country with frequent speakers of Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Saraiki, Pashto, and others. This research aims to look for the dominant role played by English according to the perceptions and views of Pakistani residents.

Linguistic imperialism arises due to the dominant role played by one language in a society, often at the cost of other local languages. It is a rule that dominant people always carry their culture and language along with them, and transfer it to the inferior or less dominant nations, which are often the captured ones. This encourages the norm of oppression, mental or physical slavery, and prejudice in the society. In our country, English dominates in comparison to other languages like: Pashto, Siraiki, Punjabi ETC. Numerous taboos are also associated with such languages. For instance, in a classroom, a person unaware of how to converse in English language, and interacts in a local language such as Punjabi is considered less educated and ill mannered.

The empowerment of English by different Pakistani institutes such as education and offices is evident from the fact that most of the elite schools are English medium, and most of the job opportunities are confined to the persons knowing the efficient use of

English language. English is a global language which carries prestige in Pakistani society as well. In many elite schools, it is preferred to be the medium of communication. Teachers and students who know how to speak and write English language fluently and appropriately are always in an advantageous position. There is a huge threat that local languages might extinct with the passage of time due to the ever-increasing dominance of English.

Atif (2013) explained the aftermath of colonialism. Educational policy of 2009 appreciated the usage and nourishment of English language in our Country. This linguistic imperialism is closely linked to "Traditional British Imperialism". This research paper aims to throw light on the impact of the dominance of English language and culture in Pakistani context and how the society perceives about this imposition in that it affected their lives.

Literature review

The concept of linguistic imperialism

The word imperialism is rooted in imperium from Latin, referring to the dominance exerted by a politically, economically, or socially dominant state over the less dominant one. It relates to the colonial era, where Europeans colonized different states such as Africa and Asia. Robert Phillipson is one of the pioneers to introduce the concept of linguistic imperialism. He defines linguistic imperialism as the retention and sustenance of the relation of dominance by a language over the other (Phillipson, 1992:47). This term was originally derived in 1930s. The terms such as linguistic nationalism, language dominance, and language imperialism are synonymous to it. The factors behind language imperialism include economic, political, and social differences. The dominant language causes either extinction or death of the suppressed language according to Phillipson. Similarly, Pennycook (1994) states that linguistic imperialism is the control of one language over other languages within a society, where the hold of that one particular language causes deflation of others. The suppressed communities may not have the valor to speak or resist in the matter of being dominated. The study of linguistic imperialism now looks at the role of language policy in any country, the suppression and domination relationship, the establishment of European languages on other continents, the bond built between those languages and the local ones, and either those imposed languages are used as a tool to unify all in the society, or preserve western interests.

While stating the impacts of linguistic imperialism, Phillipson (1992, 2009) says that it impacts the culture, educational patterns, media, economy, communication, politics, and paramilitary activities. It favors those who can speak the dominant language by opening the doors for them to education, better employment opportunities, and more. The change in subordinate language occur in that its structural patterns are also aligned according to the dominant language. It also alters the linguistic ideology of the people in that people under its impact consider dominant language more glorified and fascinating, and other languages are marginalized due to it. People learn dominant language in their educational institutes on the expense of other local languages. They try to gain proficiency in that influential language. It promotes linguisticism, which is the preference and hold of the people speaking standard language, quite similar to the favors given to socially and economically well settled people over the poor, or to the people belonging to higher class over different marginalized groups on the bases of race, color, and ethnicity.

Historical overview of linguistic imperialism in South Asian context

Phillipson (1992) described three stages for the progression of linguistic imperialism. These include the imposition of the power status of the colonizer, which is not confined to economy or politics, but also extends itself towards linguistic imposition, the training of local elites to guard the interests of the colonizers, and alteration in the views of local people using impactful modes such as media and technology. The British expansion of its colonies and its taking South Asia under its control is also based on these stages.

The most prominent era containing the element of linguistic imperialism on a huge pace was of European colonization. While captivating various states, which were politically and economically less dominant, Europeans were backed and supported by military as well as commercial and Christians' preachings to shift their cultural values and linguistic norms (Fanon, 1952, Mühlhäusler, 1996, Rassool, 2007). This British expansion of the colonies got entered into South Asia with the advent of East India company followed by the efforts of British colonizers to expand their economical hold to political one. British state got control and ended Muslim rule over South Asia in 1857. This began the era of imperialism with Britain becoming colonizer, and South Asia as colonized. This fulfilled the very first stage, which is the hold and imposition of power holders on the subordinates. During this rule, doors towards employment were opened for the people who adopted the culture of colonizers. This included, most prominently, learning English language. Ways towards better opportunities were paved for the people who knew English.

This biased behave of the rulers led to the production of elite class, who could speak English. The English speakers attained the status of elite class because only these people were advantaged economically. For instance, only those people were able to get access to valued jobs who could speak English. The people disowning English were deprived of any good position at almost all work places. Same things were observed to have taken place in political sphere as well. This led to a divide within the local population, with elite class on one side, protecting the interests of the colonizers in the form of offering themselves as informants of the rulers, and the poor and deprived people on the other. The picturization of western culture through media on a large scale, and its adaptation by the locals even today is the instance of the fulfillment of the third stage, which is the spread of language and culture through media and technology. Not only media, but various social platforms such as Hello talk, and clubhouse can be traced, with English natives most active on them, spreading their language by aiding the people to learn English.

Neo linguistic imperialism and Pakistan

According to Phillipson (2012) as cited in (Zeng et al., 2023), Neo linguistic imperialism is the hold of the language of the colonizers of the past on the local residents of the state which was once colonized. This hold stays on the people in post-colonial era as well as the locals, instead of promoting their own language and culture, retain the use of the language of the colonizers without the interference of the colonizers and imposition of their language.

Zeng et al., (2023) states following traits of neo linguistic imperialism. Firstly, neo linguistic imperialism is locally driven in that locals sustain the use of dominant language due to its association with economic values and the higher status in the society. Secondly, there is a structural motivation behind the retention of the use of dominant language due to the idea that it unifies the speakers in the society. Thirdly, it is a product of that previous attitude of the locals at the time of colonial imperialism, which still exists, and enforces the

superior inferior divide in the society, asserting that the speakers of the imperial language are superior, while the users of regional or local languages are inferior ones. Lastly, it normalizes the use of imperial language in the society, introducing the common believe in the society that the use of this particular language is not associated with colonialism anymore, but due to its association and interconnectivity with good status.

Being a part of Pakistani community, the researchers have observed that the stages mentioned by (Zeng et al., 2023) exist in Pakistani context in that even today, higher job positions and ways of economic stability are considered to be associated with the learning and mastery over English language. This attitude of considering the speakers of local languages inferior, and English speakers as superiors exists even today with the promotion of accented English these days IE, the person who speaks accented English is considered to be educated. English is adopted as a fashion these days, ignoring this fact entirely that it is actually a colonial legacy.

The historical overview of language education policies

We now come exclusively to the language education policies adopted in South Asia from mid 18th century, when British colonizers were in hold, to the educational policy adopted by Pakistan till 2008. The study conducted by Alia Amir (2008) is of great help in having a historical overview in this regards due to its compact provision of the status of English, Urdu, and other local languages from mid18th century till 2008. She conducted a critical discourse analysis of three documents regarding language policies in three different eras. These include Macaulay's Minutes (1853), from British hold on South Asia, the Constitution of Pakistan (1973) after independence of 1947, and national education policy of Pakistan (2008). She states two different policies adopted by British regarding Indian education. One policy, which was at first in prevalence was of orientalist, who believed that the elimination of the local languages would produce rebels and would lead to the loss of Indian potential and intelligence which these people hold (Rahman, 1999:90). Therefore, they supported the construction of Madrassas and colleges for the learning of local languages including Persian, Arabic, and Hindustani, also known as Urdu these days. William Hasting, who was the first Governor general of India, supported the construction of Calcutta Madrassa monetarily in this regards for the teachings of Persian, Arabic, and Islamic law (Amir, 2008). According to Cohn (1996), as cited in Amir (2008), the major influential figures in favor of orientalist policy were William Hastings, (the first governor general of India who supported the establishment of Calcutta Madrassa for the learning of local languages), John Gilchrist, (the assistant surgeon who wrote first Urdu grammar and dictionary), and Charles Wilkins, (the translator of Bhagwad Gita, a Hindu book into English).

This policy was followed by the policy introduced by Anglicists, who were of the view that English, due to being the language of literature, science, and all the valued studies and knowledges of the world, should be taught in India as well. Thomas Babington Macaulay was the most prominent proposer of the theory, who wrote the famous Macaulay's Minutes in 1835 for the governor of India at that time. English spread in India as a result. All the academic curriculum was then taught in English. Macaulay proposed that because English culture and education is superior, it should be taught in India as well. He referred to the English scholars and literary figures such as Milton, Lock, and more in his minutes, stating that these people were true scholars, therefore should be studied. He introduced the concept of (we) for the colonizers with English as a superior, and (others) for the Indians as colonized with their local languages being inferior.

The constitution of Pakistan (1973) reveals the same othering according to Amir (2008), but in a different manner and in a different context. It links Urdu with the unification of the whole Pakistani nation, and awards Urdu with the same status as was of English before independence. The constitution of Pakistan assigned the dominant role to Urdu language as it stated that Urdu would be the official language in coming 15 years, which explicitly meant that Urdu will be the national and official language, but what it meant implicitly was that in current situation at that time, because it was not possible to assign Urdu the status of official language, therefore English would be used as the official language (Amir, 2008). With regards to provincial languages, the constitutions encouraged their teaching, but these did not enjoy the status equivalent to Urdu. Urdu dominates over these languages even today in that it is the lingua Franca (the language used for mutual communication amongst speakers of two different languages) in Pakistan.

The National Education Policy document of 2008 asserts the importance and the crucial role of English more strongly as it states that the medium of instructions at primary, secondary, and higher education will be English. The given reason for this step is the salience of English in terms of its being associated with globalization and with competing at international forums. English is necessary to be taught due to its interconnectivity with the economic betterment. The document gives more importance to English and Urdu. Urdu and English medium schools are a result of this policy where English is used as a medium of instructions at English medium, and Urdu is at Urdu medium institutes. Local languages are taught and promoted by Madrassas only (Amir, 2008).

The status of English and Urdu in Pakistan:

After having a historical overview of linguistic imperialism, its prevalence in Pakistan, and the language policies adopted by (Pakistan and India in combine), the status of English and Urdu in Pakistan is discussed next. This status will be explored with the help of pre-existing studies.

The first study with regards to the status of English and Urdu in Pakistan was conducted by Abbas et al. (2018), aiming to assess the competing status of English and Urdu after the declaration of Urdu to be the official language of Pakistan, and the steps taken to functionalize Urdu as an official language in 2015. 60 interviews were conducted with the participants selected through purposive sampling to discuss the role of these languages in academics, their salience and significance, the status of their speakers, and their future (Abbas et al. 2018). The participants belonged to the educated sphere of Pakistani society. 15 participants from each university, two private and two public sectors were selected for the interview. The study concluded that people are well aware of the significance of English for international connectivity, and Urdu for unification within the nation. English holds upper hand in terms of being used in pedagogical setup, and is perceived to have better future. While answering the question regarding the salience of these two languages, the participants showed their association with these languages in different ways. Urdu was considered to be an esthetic language due to the unsurpassed literature produced in it. While English was expressed to be the language of technological advancements, scientific progression, and economic excellence. With regards to the speakers of Urdu and English languages, the interviewees expressed that Urdu speakers are mannered, polite, and educated, while English speakers are psychologically strong IE, confident and active. They added that both English and Urdu influenced each other. English added such words to Urdu which have replaced Urdu words entirely in that if thought, the Urdu versions of those added words do not come to mind, and those English words are used in Urdu as a result. English is also influenced by the addition of some words from Punjabi and Urdu like Izzat, Dupatta, and more (Abbas et al. 2018). Finally,

the participants expressed satisfaction in terms of the future of Urdu and English through the words (bright and safe). An interesting view regarding the future of these two languages was observed to be that Urdu can be made safe and preserved by taking some measures and acting upon some certain steps such as by producing more literature, and by promoting it more in education. While English seems to be stabled already according to the perception of the participants. English enjoys good status even today, and will continue to progress towards excellent future (Abbas et al., 2018).

This tussle between English and Urdu is evident looking at the functions of both languages within social context. Each language performs distinctively in the Pakistani society. Khalique (2007) presents an example of the distinctive roles performed by both languages in his composition, where he stated that in his organization, Strengthening Participatory Organization (SPO), he is able to observe the intellect of the workers in case of Urdu language being the medium of communication because of the inclusion of such people in SPO who know Urdu only. One of the tasks of his NGO is to build projects regarding human rights and to deal with gender issues. He stated that when sent in the groups of the organization, the project documents are well received and get good response when they are written in Urdu. Also, SPO has trained and assisted several other organizations. The trainers and trainees are better able to make advantage from the curriculum written in Urdu. Their training sessions improved in terms of quality and maximum participation after the organizations' conversion of the curriculum manual from English to Urdu. The organization contains local people as members, speaking at least 9 different languages as their mother tongue, they prefer Urdu for mutual communication. But the recording of the proceeding of the meetings is done using English. The important proceedings of the meeting being recorded in English language denotes its status in Pakistani society.

Khalique (2007) went on suggesting that if there exist no good system of teaching English to local people, Urdu should replace English officially, and all the official work should be carried out in Urdu in order to get benefit from the potential of Pakistani intellect. Urdu should function as a main language, and mother tongues must compulsorily be taught at schools and other institutes. People should be allowed to express themselves using their mother tongue. English should be taught as a subject to seek for the skills needed to communicate with international community. Beside English and Urdu, other Asian languages should also be taught to Pakistanis to flourish and refine their intellect, and the capability to communicate on international forums.

Besides playing its role in social setup, the English Urdu divide also impacts education and learner's identity, and their future aspirations. One such study was conducted by Shamim and Rashid in (2019) to explore the views of students regarding this divide. In depth interviews were conducted with three students from one of the universities of Karachi. The students were representatives of all three prevalent educational systems in Pakistani society, with one student belonging to an elite English medium school offering A-levels, another student from a private English medium school with matric, and the last student from Urdu medium school with matric. The interview consisted of three parts, with life history at first, the use of English at institute in present and the relatedness of self-identity second, and future desires to join real or unimagined communities and the investment to learn English lastly. The interviews were transcribed in subsequent stage, followed by the thematic analysis. The interviewees held a command over switching English and Urdu, and were asked to do so during the interview as well. The first theme which was generated through thematic analysis was of the recognition of the linguistic asset. All three participants expressed that English is best for the conversation and interaction in formal settings, while Urdu, though holds less academic

value in comparison to English, is very useful in the informal interaction. The mother tongue of the participants is useful to flourish the bond between the family and close friends. On the whole, all of their languages are of great value, but English is valued the most due to its use in academic and for future excellence.

The next theme was of knowing English, social class, schooling, and identity. According to the views of the participants, social class, identity, schooling, and language are intertwined. Good schooling (English medium) leads to more exposure to English, which dominates in the society at all higher ranks, and wins a good social identity for the speaker, and it is obvious that no poor can think of studying in those elite English medium schools.) With regards to the next theme, which was English and current languages, the participants indicated that being efficient in English is of aid to them in excelling socially and academically. They are able to communicate well with both elites and poor being familiar to both English and Urdu. But the academic institutes retain the same policy of awarding English a dominant status in that, as indicated by one of the participants, there institute conducts a test for awarding admission to the candidates in English, but there is no such test for Urdu. In addition to that, the competent speakers of English face no difficulty in constructing their identity in the society, while the situation is all opposite for mere Urdu speakers. As far as the last theme of the investment and interest of students in learning English for better future is concerned, two of the participants revealed that they plan to continue learning and improving their English. One participant wants to do it because she has to enter into English media by becoming a journalist in an English newspaper. The other participant wants to learn English to build and strengthen connections over social media platforms and to get access to the content produced in English language. All of the aforementioned themes in this study uncover the perceptions of Pakistani residents, youth in specific, regarding the sustenance of the dominant role and position of English in the society.

All of the above-mentioned studies have investigated the status of English and Urdu in Pakistani society in some way. Most of the studies have used interviewing technique to collect the data regarding the perceptions and views of Pakistani people. This study intends to utilize a self-developed questionnaire to collect data regarding the retention of the dominant role of English in the society. The questionnaire has been developed based on certain fields and areas in the society where English dominates. These areas have been assembled after reading several previous studies. Some of the most significant areas include banking and finance, education, mutual communication, interaction with international communities and on international forums, business communication, and more.

Research Hypotheses

Based on the knowledge acquired through previous studies, this research hypothesizes that:

H1 English dominates in the formal settings of Pakistan

H0 English does not dominate in the formal settings of Pakistan

Material and Methods

The study followed quantitative approach as it intended to investigate the current status of English in comparison to Urdu in Pakistani society according to the views of Pakistani people.

Population

The respondents of the questionnaire were the residents of Pakistan, aged between 18 to 61, belonging to either education or work sector. All were exposed to English for at least one year. 100 persons responded in total to the online questionnaire shared with them.

Sampling

The study employed convenient sampling to investigate the perceptions of Pakistani residents with regard to the status of Urdu and the dominant role played by English in Pakistani context.

Instrument

A self-developed questionnaire was utilized to collect the data regarding the perceptions of Pakistani residents about the role of English and Urdu. The questionnaire was based on 27 items initially, but item 11 had to be discarded due to the feedback of the respondents regarding that item being unintelligible, and only 26 items were analyzed. The data was collected with a questionnaire having scattered items, but those items were categorized later on for the better presentation and analysis. The questionnaire was classified into eight categories including English in education, at official places, in communication, social interaction at different institutes, social media, developmental areas, advertisements and market, and in entertainment. These categories were further assigned formal and informal. English at official places, in education, and in developmental areas were assigned as formal, while the rest of the types were assigned informal. The questionnaire is given in the appendix section at the end.

Procedure

The participants were presented with the questionnaire online, utilizing Google forms. The gathered responses were then subjected to statistical analysis. A descriptive frequency analysis of the items was performed using SPSS to get the percentage of people agreeing to or disagreeing with the statements presented.

Results and discussion

The data expressed English being dominant in several fields in Pakistani society. The statistics have been presented in the figure below. The findings of this research significantly highlight the dominance of English language over Urdu. Even after 75 years of independence, we are dependent on English language, particularly in our educational setup. The collected data indicated that most of the educational institutes from primary to university level use English as a medium of instruction. The H1 of the first hypothesis English dominates in the formal settings of Pakistan was accepted. Data proved that English dominates in the formal setting of Pakistan. H0: English does not dominate in the informal settings of Pakistan was accepted

Table1
Descriptive frequency Analysis

Categories	Percentage of dominance
English in Education:	88%
English in communication	86%
English for social interaction at different institutes	19%
English at official places	72%

English in developmental areas	89%
English at social media	78%
English in entertainment	27%
English in advertising	63%

Discussion

The aim of the current study was to highlight the views of people in Pakistan regarding the dominant role of English over Urdu language in society. The findings of this study showed significant insights into the perceptions and attitudes of people towards the mix use of two languages, elaborating the challenges related to language dynamics in Pakistan. Overall, the results revealed that English holds a prominent status in Pakistani society, mainly in the domains such as education, official, legal, and mass communication domains.

Conclusion

A massive population approved the importance of English for career progression and acknowledge it as a symbol of prestige and prominent social status. English as a medium of instruction in elite educational institutions is considered as an indicator of ultimate success for them. The universal prestige of English cannot be denied. Looking at the responses of the participants, it is concluded that it is necessary to preserve and promote Urdu, emphasizing its value as the national language and the symbol cultural identity.

Recommendation

Young generation lacking proficiency in Urdu can cause loss of enriched culture and linguistic diversity in Pakistan. The government and educational institutions should play their potential role in establishing language policies and endorsing language diversity. Efforts should be made to assure that Urdu is given equal importance as English in educational settings. Students must have access to reliable sources of instruction in both languages. Curriculum reforms, teacher training programs, and the provision of adequate resources for teaching and learning Urdu can be some initial measures to take in this regard.

This study can be conducted, accessing the respondents from all the provinces of Pakistan, to have larger data. This will add more to the preexisting literature, helpful in comprehending the status of English and Urdu in Pakistani society. Similarly, the status of local languages such as Punjabi, Siraiki, Pashto, and Balochi can also be assessed in comparison to Urdu.

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