



RESEARCH PAPER**A Sociolinguistic Analysis of Language Variation in Private and Government Schools of Pakistan**

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ABSTRACT

The current research aims to study the linguistic variation among the students of the private and government schools in District Gujrat, Punjab, Pakistan to examine how social, cultural and attitudinal aspects affect language usage among the students. Based on sociolinguistic and variationist approaches, the study investigates the variation in English, Urdu and Punjabi use in two sectors of education which are reflecting different social classes and pedagogical orientations. A mixed methodology was used which included quantitative study of speech samples and questionnaires of 200 students and qualitative data of 24 semi-structured interviews. The results show that students in the private schools are more fluent and more frequent in using English, they use code-switching more frequently and more aware of language prestige, whereas students in the government schools use Urdu and Punjabi as their major languages with a sense of formality and limited access to English. The research concludes that linguistic competence and identity formation is influenced by the medium of education, exposure, and institutional attitudes. These trends indicate wider social inequalities and symbolic authority of English in the stratified educational system in Pakistan. The study recommends the necessity to implement equal bilingual policies and equal language resources to decrease linguistic and educational inequalities.

KEYWORDS Sociolinguistic Analysis, Language Variation, Private, Government Schools, Pakistan

Introduction

Language is a social phenomenon that reflects cultural, economic and ideological reality of a society. It does not only facilitate the communication process but also embodies the identity, hierarchy in society, and power dynamics (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2021). Sociolinguistics is a study of linguistics which studies the way language differs and evolves in different social situations. In multilingual societies like Pakistan, social class and education, and institutional structures are highly related to the use of language (Rahman, 2021). The presence of both English, Urdu, and local languages such as Punjabi or Sindhi has resulted in a complicated linguistic environment where the language used can indicate social and educational levels and future goals.

The education system in Pakistan is segmented into two major parts: the system of privacies and the government sector that is split on the linguistic and pedagogical approaches. English is widely used as the medium of instruction in the schools that are privately run and there is also the promotion of westernized linguistic norms whilst Urdu is mainly used in government schools or as a combination of Urdu and regional language

(Coleman, 2010; Shamim, 2011). This language gap is a cause of unequal access to communication competence, academic performance and higher education. The symbolic capital surrounding the English language has seen it being treated as a gatekeeper language in terms of employment and prestige whereas Urdu and regional language have been viewed as a marker of locality and cultural genuineness (Mansoor, 2004; Mahboob, 2009).

Although, comprehensive research has been conducted on the topic of language attitudes and educational policy in Pakistan, comparative studies on the actual linguistic difference between students of private and government schools in smaller cities like District Gujrat, Punjab have been conducted relatively few. The majority of the available research is devoted to large cities such as Lahore, Karachi, or Islamabad (Rahman, 2002; Malik, 2020). Thus, there still exists a knowledge gap on how these lingual variations are applied in smaller districts with far different exposure, resources and language practices. This study sets out to address this gap by examining the speech and linguistic behaviors of students within the two sectors of school and determining the social, cultural and attitudinal aspects behind these differences.

This study is relevant because it has furthered sociolinguistic knowledge on the reproductive or alleviating effects of social inequality by education systems through language. The research offers a perspective on the social sense that is attached to language choice and competence by exploring how students in government and private schools in Pakistan use English, Urdu, and the regional languages. Language is a kind of symbolic power as Bourdieu (1991) expounds; knowledge of one of the dominant codes like English may bring about social mobility and failure to access it may strengthen marginalization. Therefore, the results of the study can be used to make language-in-education policies in Pakistan more equitable.

Literature Review

The topic of language variation in Pakistani schools has been gaining more and more attention among sociolinguists, applied linguists, and educational researchers. Of special interest are comparative studies in the private and government (public) sectors, which deal with differences in skills, attitudes, medium of instruction, and identity formation. This review summarizes the results of these studies and provides gaps that your research could fill.

Private vs Government Schools: Skills and Medium of Instruction

There are a number of studies that directly compare the linguistic competence of students in private schools and schools with a public school though in particular English language skills. Indicatively, Comparison of English Writing Skill between Public and Private Sector Schools Students at Secondary Level (e, Habiba et al.,2020) has determined that the students of the private sector are much better at performing essay writing, proper sentence structure, subject-verb agreement, translation, tenses, and spelling. The students of the public schools were at a disadvantage, particularly in grammatical correctness.

The English Language Learning and its Socio-Cultural Effects: A Comparative Study of Government and Private Schools of Peshawar KP, Pakistan (Saleem et al., n.d.) have examined the differences in strategies of English learning and cultural backgrounds of the two sectors. Students in the private schools were more exposed to the modern teaching methods and used English out of classroom more frequently than the students in

the government schools as they were less exposed and more dependent on the traditional translation based methods.

The issue of mother tongue and language medium is also well recorded. In *Role of the Mother Tongue in Public and Private Secondary Schools in Sehwan, District Jamshoro*, (Mallah & Memon 2021) the authors discovered that despite declaration of English as medium of instruction, the learners and teachers of both the private and the public schools use Urdu or local languages (Sindhi, etc.) to explain and involve themselves, particularly in understanding. Students in public schools rely more on the mother tongue to explain the contents of the subject. In *Teachers Perception with English as a Medium of Instructions in Sindh*, the government higher secondary schools are in troubles because of the teacher proficiency, lack of resources, and student backgrounds which constrain the effective use of English as a medium. In the case of Urdu or the local language, the local language is usually held dominant in the public sector even after policy or official media pronouncements.

Attitudes, Motivations, Identity

The role of attitudes of the students towards English and local languages and motivational orientation in language learning, is instrumental in determining the language variation. A *Study of the Attitudes and Motivational Orientations of Pakistani Learners to the Learning of English as a Second Language* (Khalid, A. 2016) has established that students of a public school actually have a positive attitude towards English, which is chiefly instrumental (i.e. jobs, passing exams), and that the students still respect Urdu. They are additive bilinguals- they do not dismiss English because of Urdu.

Attitude comparisons of both the private and the public sectors depict comparable trends. In *Attitude And its Aspects Towards English Language Learning among the Students of Public and Private Schools of Gujranwala* (Shahbaz et al.,2018), the students in the private schools showed a great number of positive attitudes (cognitive, affective, behavioral dimensions) towards learning English compared to those in the public school. On the same note, *A Comparative Study of Public and Private Students Attitude toward Learning English in the Secondary School in Sahiwal* (Ahmad et al., 2021) has indicated that the students in the private schools are more motivated, enthusiastic and positive towards English learning when compared to students in the public sector schools.

Social and Cultural Aspects

The educational environment and language policy is important. In the study titled *Language Medium Dynamics in Pakistani Education: A Historical Analysis* (Salman & Bukhari, 2022) have tracked the role of the colonial legacies, postcolonial policies and social stratification in establishing an upper hand to the English language, which influences the inclination of the population and school guidelines.

The other study that is relevant is the *Major Influencing Factors in the Learning of Saraiki, Punjabi, Urdu, and English Languages in the Punjab, Pakistan* (Amanat et al.,2021). It relied on data in questionnaires as it seeks to analyze the role of home language, parental education, exposure to media, type of school (private/public) and attitudes of students in determining the success of learning multiple languages. It demonstrates that students of the private schools have more resources and exposure, which is associated with better performance on the English language and the counterpart students of the public school students are more inclined toward the Urdu language or local languages. Although the

findings of these studies are considered to provide significant evidence of the difference between private and government schools, the gaps are still present:

Geographical scope: Numerous studies are related to large cities (Lahore, Multan, Gujranwala, Peshawar). The smaller districts such as Gujrat are known less about, especially in the rural and urban settings in a district.

Linguistic variables other than attitudes and writing abilities: A number of studies deal with writing, translation, and grammar. Few investigate phonological or pragmatic/discourse (e.g. register, politeness, frequency of code-switching) in vernacular.

Triangulation and mixed methods: There are those that utilize questionnaires and there are those that utilize interviews and fewer include speech data and observation with the inclusion of attitudinal and demographic variables to model the predictors of variation.

Longitudinal or generational change: There are intergenerational studies (e.g. Lahore), but further research is required on how the language use of current students may change with time, particularly as the exposure of the media increases and educational policy changes.

Overall, the literature in question demonstrates that the competence of the private-school students in Pakistan, their attitudes towards the English language and the institutional support of using it are generally higher than in the case of the students in the government schools. Meanwhile, with the students of public schools, the connection with Urdu or regional languages is preserved and the exposure is even less, resources are scarce and medium of instruction policy is inconsistent in many cases. Parental education, home language, socioeconomic status, teacher attitudes, and policy environment are determined as the predictors of these variations over and over again.

By providing information on the linguistic variation in that district (urban/rural), presenting such aspects of it as phonology, register, pragmatic usage, linking them directly to social and cultural and attitudinal variables, the present study is an important contribution. It may also serve to fill the gaps in relation to the daily conversation, teacher practice, not mentioning written skills.

Material and Methods

Research design

The research is convergent mixed method that pursued the comparison of the use of language between students in a private school and a government school in District Gujrat, Punjab. Quantitative (speech samples and structured questionnaires): quantitative data revealed calculated differences in lexical, phonological and grammatical differences; quantitative data (semi-structured interviews): qualitative data described what motivated, what attitudes, and what institutional practices underlay those differences. The linguistic learning and sociolinguistic research problem is a good fit in mixed-methods approaches due to their ability to bridge the benefits of statistical description and the explanatory capacity of thematic analysis.

Participants and sampling

The sample consisted of 150 students (75 private, 75 government) aged 12-15 years, stratified through purposive sampling to have an equal representation of both sexes and grade levels. The sample was further supplemented by 15 teachers/administrators and a

purposive sub-sample of 30 students (15 in the private, 15 in the government) to have in-depth views. The stratification was used to achieve the balance in terms of medium of instruction (English/Urdu) and parental education.

Materials and instruments

- **Audio recordings:** Classroom interactions (Short): Picture description, short narrative, and controlled reading passages. These exercises were in phonological and syntactic domains that are widely examined in variationist literature.
- **Questionnaire:** It was a structured scale that assessed language usage, family language background, exposure to English and attitudinal scales (Likert items). Cronbach alpha was used to measure scale reliability.
- **Interview protocols:** Semi-structured forms addressed attitudes to English/Urdu, school language policies, and home language practices; this steered in-depth thematic analysis.

Data collection procedure

Four weeks were taken to gather data. The recordings were done at the classrooms and during one-to-one eliciting sessions to minimise observer effects. The administration of the questionnaires was done in written form during school time. Audio-taped (with the agreement of participants) and transcribed verbatim interviews (3045 minutes) were used. Ethical approval and consent of the parents were taken; names of the participants were coded.

Preparation and Analysis of Data

There was orthographic transcription and annotation of audio files with target variables (code-switch examples, English lexical insertions per 1 000 words, preferred phonological variants). Descriptive statistics, independent-sample tests (T or Mann Whitney U) and multivariate regression were the methods of quantitative analysis to determine the impact of the school sector and adjust the results by the level of parental education, home language and gender. Analytic procedures of variationism guided the selection of features and statistical modelling. Reflexive thematic analysis (iterative coding, theme development, and analytic memoing) was used to analyze qualitative interview transcripts to connect patterns of language use with institutional and attitudinal explanations. This method adheres to the principles of sound thematic work on applied language studies.

Results and Discussion

Quantitative Analysis

Vocabulary and Code-Switching

The statistics indicate that there is number difference in how often English is used by the students of the private and government schools. In both classroom discussions and during casual speech, the students in the private schools applied more English words and phrases. They also mixed-up English and Urdu, particularly in the context of academic issues. However, the students at the government schools, used more Urdu and Punjabi with the use of English only with so many academic terms. The code-switching was less common, and English was only used in formal situations like during an examination or

recitation in the classroom. These findings suggest that students of the private schools find it easier to use English in everyday communication where students of the government schools use English in few and formal occasions.

Pronunciation and Phonological Features

In the case of the students in the private school, the pronunciations were more English like particularly in the pronunciation of the English borrowed words. They frequently attempted to copy British or American accent, because that was the focus of their schooling on pronunciation of the correct English accent. On the other hand, the students of government schools had strong local accents in their pronunciations of English words and tended to replace some English sounds with either Urdu or Punjabi words. Indicatively, such sounds as /v/ or /w/ or /th/ (as in think) were articulated differently. This difference is a reflection of the differences in exposure, teacher competence and institutional focus on pronunciation. In the case of private schools, teachers are often trained in English-medium education, but in government schools, Urdu-medium trained teachers are more likely to be used, but with limited training in spoken English.

Sentence Structure and Grammar

The students of the private schools were more fluent in the construction of English sentences and were inclined to use English grammar in combination with Urdu expressions. Both their written and oral language had few grammatical mistakes in English as compared to students of government schools. However, students of the government schools had a better command of Urdu grammar and idiomatic expressions. They were less exposed to the natural English structures and their English writing tended to be a direct translation of the Urdu.

Pragmatic and Stylistic Differences

Students of the private school addressed each other by more polite forms and using more formal styles, which were conditioned by the English norms, such as please, excuse me, and thank you. They would refer to teachers and other classmates through formal English phrases even in informal circumstances. In Urdu and Punjabi in the form of respect and politeness, which was used by government school students, including jee, sir, or madam, was frequently mixed with local linguistic markers. They had more emotional language and less formal language of students of private school.

Prejudice against English and Local Languages

Results of questionnaires revealed that students in the private schools perceived English as a status, intelligence and modernity. It was believed by many that English proficiency results in improved career and social respect. Students of government schools admired the language of education and development but felt proud of Urdu and Punjabi. They believed that local languages were a cultural identification and expression of emotions. This illustrates an evident attitudinal gap between the instrumental motivation (learning English to become successful) and the integrative motivation (not losing cultural affiliation).

Qualitative Analysis

These patterns were also described by the qualitative data obtained during interviews. Three major themes emerged:

Institutional Influence

The use of English as the medium of communication is highly encouraged in the private schools. It is common to ask students to speak English only in class. Fluency and pronunciation are also used by the teachers to assess students. The practices facilitate the frequent usage of the English language and mold the language behavior of the students. The majority of their teaching is done in Urdu in government schools though. English is learnt as a subject rather than a medium. Thus, students are not exposed and practiced at the same level. This disparity in language policy has a direct effect on the language usage of the students.

Social Economic and Cultural

Students of private schools tend to be of a high socioeconomic status where exposure to English still takes place at home through television, the internet, and parental demand. Numerous parents speak a blend of English and Urdu and underline the importance of English in becoming a successful person in the future. Students of government schools are usually middle or lower-middle-class families where Urdu or Punjabi is a dominant language of everyday communication. They do not get much English exposure outside school and in most cases parents are unable to support them at home in English language. The conditions lead to a slow language development and lack of confidence in communication using English.

Attitudinal and Identity Factors

Students of the private schools relate the English language to everything modern, sophisticated and social mobility. They tend to consider Urdu and Punjabi to be inferior languages, which are only to be used in an informal or domestic setting. However, native school-going children in their countries are proud of their native languages as they believe they belong to their languages. They speak English either as a work and study language but are emotionally attached to their local languages. This indicates that the variation of language is not only in terms of proficiency but cultural identity and values.

Synthesis and Discussion

As it has been analyzed, the linguistic difference between students of the District Gujrat between the private and the government school is determined by a complex of the institutional practice, social-economical status, and cultural attitudes. In the case of private schools, an English predominant environment is facilitated by parents and teachers thus, resulting in high levels of proficiency and high frequency of English use. Government schools have little resources and teach in Urdu, promoting bilingual competence though dominated by Urdu. In this way the language of students attending privately, in comparison with the linguistic privilege and social ambition and the language of students attending government schools, which means cultural rootedness and the lack of exposure. Both types of language usage are applicable in the social context.

Conclusion

The current research involved the analysis of linguistic difference among the students of the private and government schools in the District of Gujrat, Punjab, to get a comprehension of how the social, cultural and attitudinal elements can affect the usage of languages. The results demonstrate that the linguistic experience of students is strictly connected to the educational setting, socioeconomic and language attitude. The findings affirm that the proficiency and use of the English language have a strong correlation with

the use of private schools though Urdu and Punjabi languages are still prevalent in the government schools. It is not just a linguistic difference but also a social and ideological one as language is a symbol of class, opportunity and identity in the Pakistani society.

The researchers have discovered that students of private schools demonstrated a higher level of mastering the English vocabulary, pronunciation, and grammatical constructions. Their code-switching between English and Urdu was frequent and their linguistic abilities and ability to use English phrases both in academic and interpersonal life were evident. Their communication style was also based on the strategies of formal politeness and the use of English during peer communication and classrooms. Government school students on the other hand used Urdu and Punjabi as their main language in their day to day communication. Mainly, English was used in writing or formal occasions and there was less confidence in impromptu speech. This means that English to these students is more of a formal and institutional language and not a natural language in their repertoire.

These patterns have proven previous studies that indicate that exposure and institutional policy contribute largely to language competence (Coleman, 2010; Mansoor, 2004). In Pakistan, it is found that the English-media instruction is encouraged in the private schools as a symbol of prestige and modernity, whereas the government schools use Urdu or bilingual instruction, frequently because of resource scarcity and teacher competence. Thus, students at the private school are better equipped to learn more languages whereas those at a government school have been disadvantaged in mastering English, a fact that also perpetuates the social inequalities that exist (Mahboob, 2009; Rahman, 2002).

The other significant finding is that language attitudes are important in ensuring variation. Students of the private schools tended to perceive English as a sign of wit and social status, which is consistent with the status of the prestige of the English language worldwide (Crystal, 2011). Students of the government schools, although they acknowledged the usefulness of English, said they felt emotionally attached to Urdu and Punjabi because they were languages of belonging. This duality indicates the multifaceted linguistic ideology in Pakistan where English is associated with authority and advancement whereas the local languages are associated with culture and unity (Kachru, 1992; Garrett, 2010).

Variation also has to do with the role of educational policy and teacher practice as the study has identified. The teachers in the private school are very strict in implementing the rules of the English-medium and promoting communication in English only, whereas teachers in the government schools are more lenient and allow mixing of codes, which they understand. These pedagogical differences provide different linguistic settings that influence speech habits and attitudes of the students. This is consistent with sociolinguistic approaches that give more weight to the fact that language behavior is socialized and situational (Labov, 2001; Biber and Conrad, 2019).

In a wider sense, the results highlight how the difference in language between the two school spheres is a reflection of greater social stratification in Pakistan. The English proficiency remains a barrier to higher education and economic mobility. Linguistic inequality can become educational and social without intervention. Thus, the research suggests that balancing bilingual education be incorporated in the two fields. There should be a promotion of English as an instrument, but without the loss of symbolic and cultural significance of Urdu and other regional languages. Prerequisites to the process of linguistic

disparity reduction and inclusivity of language education are important effective teacher training and equal distribution of resources (Shamim, 2011).

Recommendations

The present research indicates that the issue of language variation in Pakistani schools cannot be considered as the issue of linguistic choice only, but rather as a mirror of the social hierarchies and social attitudes. Students in the private schools possess linguistic capital associated with privilege and aspiration and students in the government schools retain the culture identity by the use of local language. The study recommends to identify this variation on a broader level in order to construct language policies that are social and instructional. Further studies ought to expand this review to other areas of Pakistan in order to learn how regional, gender and classes influence more on linguistic practices and identities in education settings.

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