



RESEARCH PAPER

Institutionalization of National Language in Pakistan: Policymaking and Practices

Dr. Sarah Syed Kazmi

Assistant Professor, Department of English, Sir Syed University of Engineering and Technology, Karachi, Sindh, Pakistan

***Corresponding Author** sarahsk@ssuet.edu.pk

ABSTRACT

The objective of this research is to delve into the role of a singular national language in a linguistically heterogeneous society and its socio-economic implications. The research employs mixed-method approach; drawing on the discursive as well as deductive methods to analyze the role of state policies, constitutional provisions, academic statutes and rapidly expanding contours of the global geo-politics on the status of national and official language. The research arrives at the conclusion that despite institutionalizing a language as the national language and conferring the official status upon it; the multi-tiered system of education stands out as a colonial legacy and poses a major stumbling block in the way of socio-economic progress. The colonial legacy continues in a self-sustained system of communication without being an overly colonial precept, camouflaged in terms, readily in common currency such as globalization and modernization.

KEYWORDS Institutionalization, Language Planning, Language Policies, National Language, Official Language, Indigenous, Heterogenous

Introduction

Language planning is a momentous exercise inclusive of corpus planning, acquisition as well as status planning. In the linguistic parlance, language acquisition is also substituted with status planning. It is the state machinery rather than the language experts who decide the status such as official, national or academic that will be conferred upon a language. Therefore, language policies are made by the government, institutionalized by the state machinery and disseminated among the masses. Policy-making be it language or otherwise is deeply mired in politics and is hardly driven by the expert guidance of language experts. That is why, language planning pivots around political and not academic factors for the most part. Language acquisition is affected by socio-economic factors; since members of a speech community may readily adopt a language because of better economic prospects associated with it, resulting in language shifts. In case the language planners are vested with language planning, the rightful support to vernacular languages may disrupt the language shifts triggered by state policies in the light of peculiar economic factors.

Likewise, the language policies concerned with standardization fall within the ambit of the government which enjoys the writ to sanction, authorize and standardize. In this regard government by virtue of its position also takes to resolve linguistic issues. Corpus planning involves a host of preliminary responsibilities such as lexicology, scripts and orthography culminating in the standardization of a language. The subsequent enrichment of the vocabulary; adding lexical items, taking into account neologism with the rapidly changing contours of the global milieu, results in the 'modernization' of a language.

Pakistani culture boasts of a rich tapestry of multicultural and multiethnic strands in which the role of Urdu has been instrumental in bringing together the ethno-linguistically heterogeneous society on a common median. Since Urdu is emblematic of 'nationhood', it becomes a viable force to reckon with on the part of the minority language groups. The ensuing resistance however may well galvanize the minority groups to streamline linguistic practices such as maintaining orthographies, lexicon and grammar.

Literature Review

Before Pakistan came into being, the linguistic landscape was inhabited by a number of contesting factors such as the British colonizers; the Muslim and Hindu leadership embodied by the Muslim League and Congress respectively, the Urdu-speaking, Muslim intelligentsia of Lucknow and Delhi, the Urdu poet-philosophers, the Muslim scholars based in seminaries, the local aristocracy priding in the use of Urdu and the vernacular-spoken peasants in contradistinction to their feudal lords, contributing uniquely to the linguistic make-up of the society. The colonial agency offered English-medium education only in urban centres to produce an English-speaking gentry to help bridge the communication gap between the colonizer and the colonized, thereby ensuring the smooth-functioning of the colonial business. The Anglicized military, judiciary and bureaucracy was strongly embedded in the social fabric of the newly founded independent state and hence small wonder that these Anglicized servicemen opted for English as the language of official communication and documentation in keeping with the colonial practices.

In the historical perspective, Urdu has been an epitome of solidarity and Muslim identity precipitating into an integrative tool; unifying multifarious communities and ethnicities since the Pakistan Movement. All India Muslim League's unequivocal support for Urdu invariably propelled it to a high vantage point. The privilege of 'national' identity associated with Urdu further bolstered its position. Thus, when a language is conditioned with religion, it naturally becomes synonymous to 'nationhood' (Ayres, 2009). This is true not only in the wake of Islamization of Urdu; purging it of Sanskritic expressions; 'Persianizing' and 'Arabicizing' it in a bid to lend it a religious veneer. The Hindus followed suit, where the staunch advocates of Hindi vied for equal linguistic rights, quite the same way, Muslims carried out an advocacy of Urdu. Hindi by default, therefore, became synonymous with Hindus while Urdu became the determinant of Muslim identity.

Material and Methods

Employing the deductive approach to the genesis of Urdu and its subsequent institutionalization in the newly-found independent state of Pakistan, we come across a complete volt-face regarding the role of Urdu. The language which was painstakingly conditioned with Muslim identity and unity was now being considered with a pinch of salt. Since it was only spoken by the four per cent of the then Pakistani population who had it as their mother tongue MT, or first language L1; linguistic friction ensued with the decision of elevating it to the status of a national language (Wilber and Donald, 1964). Ironically Punjab acceded to Urdu as the cultural language of Punjab and not bracketing it with the *Muhajir* (the migrants from the Subcontinent settling in Pakistan) per se. The term *Muhajir* entails within its folds, diverse migrant groups backed by a distinct lexicon, vocalization and literary ethos. After the partition of the subcontinent, the Urdu-speaking people migrating to the newly formed Pakistan from India came to be known as *Muhajir* (Ayres, 2009). Although they were less than even half of the Pakistani population at that time, yet they were appointed in the upper echelons of bureaucracy (Tudor, 2013). They occupied key posts such as holding 29 per cent of offices in the cabinet in 1947 whereby the figures declined only by 8 per cent almost after a decade in 1958 (Tudor, 2013). On the other hand, a large chunk of cross-border civil

servants was gradually weeded out in successive attempts in 1959, 1969 and 1972 respectively (Shaikh, 2012). Interestingly the institutions like civil service, military and judiciary were predominantly 'Anglicized', and Urdu however was not prevalent in these institutions as an official medium of communication.

Bengali however was the majority language prevalent in the East Pakistan while Urdu was not even the majority language in the West Pakistan. Despite the latent linguistic friction, Urdu was readily adopted by various linguistic communities as their second language. The contestation for recognition and status as national language continued with respect to Urdu and Bengali; not to forget that Bengali was the only majority language in East Pakistan. Punjabi despite being the majority language spoken in Punjab was conspicuously missing from the political arena. This might be due to the historical legacy handed down to the posterity, dating back to the reign of Ranjit Singh, who despite being a strong Punjabi-speaking ruler of the pre-colonial Punjab, employed Persian for official communication, whereas the informal discourse took place in Punjabi even in the court (Rahman, 2019). Thus, the supporters of Urdu comprise not merely Urdu speakers but also Punjabi speakers who are more conversant with Urdu in terms of official communication. To a certain extent this is also applicable on the Pashtun population; those with a relatively stronger smattering of Urdu are ready to proceed with Urdu in officialdom.

The period following independence was beset with numerous challenges on the constitutional and political front yet the special status bestowed upon Urdu remained unchanged due to its popularity even among those who did not speak it as their mother tongue. English continued to be espoused as an official language within the spheres of power in Pakistan despite Urdu being declared as the national as well as official language.

This establishment of "*Rashtrabhash* or *Sangram Parishad*" (The State Language Committee of Action) in East Pakistan on December 5, 1947 addressed the raging ethno-linguistic controversies (Jabeen, Amir Ali Chandio and Zarina Qasim, 2010). The language riots of 1948 resulted from massive protests undertaken by the Bengali workers serving in the public sector as well as students from Dhaka University in 1948. The wide-spread riots registered their protest against the omission of Bengali from official documents, forms, currency notes, coins and stamps. The Urdu-Bengali conflict gained momentum to the extent that according to the constitution of 1956, Bengali too was made the national language (Torwali, 2014). Bengali played the same pivotal role in East Pakistan that Urdu played in unifying masses. The irreconcilable socio-political and ethno-linguistic issues precipitated into the East Pakistan Bengali Movement (1948-1954). Pragmatically the emerging linguistic hierarchy had English at the top-notch as the official language while Urdu was conferred the status of the national language. Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi along with Bengali had been relegated to provincial status. It was owing to the widespread protests by Bengali supporters that Bengali was also later elevated to the status of a national language.

The decade of 1960s was rife with students' protests against elitist, English medium schools and secondary as well tertiary educational institutes. Students hailing from public sector schools protested vociferously against the discrimination meted out to them on account of their training in Urdu medium. Not only was this a blatant violation of the paragraph 15 under Right NO. VI of the 1962 Constitution, where it categorically stated that all the citizens were equal before law, but the elitist institutions acted otherwise (Constitution of Pakistan 1962). As a result, a commission was formed to look into the grievances of the students. The report verified that the schools had disrupted the equation of 'equality'; yet they also produced highly competent students who could readily make it to the top-brass in military or occupy the top-notch in bureaucracy.

Although Bengali concretized Bengali identity and solidarity among a vast swath of Bengali population, yet even after the secession of East Pakistan which led to Bangladesh becoming an independent state, West Bengal has not been merged with it despite recurrent demands by the then Chief Minister of West Bengal, Mamta Banerjee as pointed out by Hari Pada Roychoudhury.

The worsening linguistic conflicts aggravated the prospects of political stability giving in to a military coup in 1958 by General Ayub Khan. In the wake of a glaring lack of trust, the government policies did not deliver. The state provisions, media of mass communication and academia did not include Bengali despite the fact that the provision was enshrined in the 1956 Constitution; conferring the status of a national language upon Bengali. This indiscretion was partially attributed to learning of Devanagari script which the West Pakistanis found difficult to master. The linguistic and cultural affinities with Sanskrit, rid Bengali of the popular appeal primarily hinging on the religious element.

This was followed by the military rule of General Yahya Khan from 1969-1971 during which the East Pakistan's secession took place. Ironically even the 1962 Constitution declared Bengali as the national language. Even the poetry of the Nobel Laureate Rabindranath Tagore was banned from being aired on Radio Pakistan (Ahsan, 2017). The position of Bengali was compromised on various accounts. Bengali overtly lacked a 'religious' veneer, whereas Urdu was pre-eminently bracketed with Islam, and likewise Hindi was attributed with the Hindus. The conspicuous absence of a religious outlook deprived Bengali of the prestigious status that Urdu and Hindi came to enjoy. Urdu rose in terms of esteem as it received patronage from the All India Muslim League, during the Pakistan Movement, and that it was promoted as the sole representative language of the Muslims. Bengali was closely akin to Sanskrit and hence could not achieve the limelight enjoyed by Urdu and Hindi. This goes on to demonstrating that conditioning a language with religion lends it the emblem of 'nationhood'; whereby bestowing a national character by default.

This however marked a period of unrest during which the language riots had clearly risen above the linguistic plane, assuming a struggle for equal socio-political and economic rights. General Ayub's military regime was marked by an increase in ventures aimed at 'modernization', thereby legitimizing the role of English. The Hamoodur Rahman Education report published in 1966 recorded disparagingly that the universities in Punjab and Karachi had allowed the Bachelor's examination to be conducted in Urdu (Ayres, 2003). This was followed by Nur Khan's Proposals in 1969 for a New Educational Policy during the military regime of Yahya Khan, propounding Bengali as the medium of instruction primarily in East Pakistan. It also clearly stated that Urdu would retain its national status vis-à-vis West Pakistan. In the aftermath of 1971 war, Bhutto acceded to the parliament in 1972 and nationalized the educational institutions; also declaring Urdu as the national language of Pakistan. This was later enshrined in the Article 251 of the Constitution of 1973.

Interspersed with a short democratic interlude under Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, Sindh gained a preponderant cultural recognition and political patronage. The success of Awami League in 1970 elections was a litmus test of the Bengalis' support and solidarity unto the party. The Pakistan People's Party had reservations in accepting the victory of a Pro-Bengali Party. This paved way for negotiations led by power-sharing agenda but bore no success. This precipitated in the declaration of an independent Bangladesh in March, 1971 resulting in soaring tensions on the political front. A civil war broke out, which ultimately culminated in the secession of Bangladesh in December 1971.

Z.A Bhutto made Sindhi the official language of Sindh in a historic move. In 1972, the three provinces of Pakistan i.e., Punjab, the then NWFP and Baluchistan adopted Urdu

respectively despite boasting of their regional languages such as Punjabi, Pashto and Balochi. This was also a dramatic move which embarrassed PPP having declared Sindhi as the official language of Sindh while the other provinces had readily opted for Urdu.

The linguistic friction between Urdu and Sindhi surfaced in 1971-72 which led to an uneasy contestation for power. The Urdu-Sindhi conflicts also showcased the unequal power positioning among the speakers of both the languages further manifesting in the rural-urban divide, where Urdu thrived with its peculiar cosmopolitan appeal, spoken in the metropolitan city of Karachi while Sindhi was largely spoken in rural Sindh. This gave rise to social disparities and patterns of displacement among native Sindhi speakers who learnt Urdu by compulsion as a means of survival, while Urdu speakers were not bound by any means to learn Sindhi. The Urdu-Sindhi denomination was further manifest in the urban-rural distinction as demographic shifts towards Karachi; the urban city centre led to an influx of Urdu language learners. Therefore, speakers from other parts of Pakistan, primarily Sindhis learnt Urdu whereas Urdu speakers were not compelled to learn indigenous languages. This further bolstered the position of Urdu in the urban city centres.

General Zia's preoccupation with Islamization paved way to further entrench Urdu's position, especially in academic circles where Urdu was made the medium of instruction right from the first grade. Due to the Martial Law, the pressure groups operating among the linguistically marginalized segments of the society could not register protest against the marginalization of indigenous languages. This however could not stop the top-tier English medium schools from recording their protest, as a result of which the order was withdrawn in 1987. The latter democratic governments following Zia's era claimed to confer prestige upon Urdu and that Urdu had been promoted for official communication during their respective regimes. Yet English remains the official language till to date and English medium is deeply embedded as primary, secondary and tertiary education continues to be imparted in English. The kinship between Islamization and demand for Urdu-medium education at different tiers reached the pinnacle during Zia regime, especially with the proliferation of Islamic seminaries. Ever since Zia's era came to an end, English was ensconced as strongly as ever and continues to remain so.

State Provisions

State institutions play a significant role in the formulation as well as execution of Language Policies. Language Planning has been referred to as the act of developing grammar, lexicon and normative orthography to help articulate in a heterogeneous speech community (Cooper, 1989). *Majlis e Zaban e Daftari* was established in 1949. It was designated with the task of building up a rich repository of Urdu (Ali, 2017; Rehman, 1997). Chief Minister Hanif Ramay and Dr. Fateh Muhammad Malik worked diligently at the *Majlis* during the then Prime Minister Z.A. Bhutto's regime; a groundbreaking contribution which was thwarted owing to political stalemate (Ali, 2017). Likewise Official Language Committee took it upon itself to conduct the proceedings in Urdu.

The Advisory Board of Education stipulated in its first ever meeting in 1948 that mother tongue should be the medium of education at elementary stage. It further resolved that English would be substituted with Urdu at universities. A number of bodies were established to ensure propagation of Urdu, translation of texts and improvisation of tools and requisite material to expedite adoption of Urdu in the official domain. Yet the language policy still hinges on English as the language of higher education, considering it inevitable for scientific advancement. Thus, be it the superior civil services of bureaucracy, officer cadre of military, or earning a professional degree, English has been an indispensable, staple component of academic excellence. This was partly triggered by a move on the part of the

military to launch a chain of their own academic institutes such PAF, Bahria and APS to name a few; in a bid to provide subsidized, English-medium education. The feudal elites also followed suit and sought to educate their children at English-medium schools despite the fact that they themselves lacked literacy in English.

The Sharif Commission on Education in 1959 favoured the subsidized, English-medium education under the pretext of modernization. The Commission however laid down that Urdu and Bengali were going to be used as medium of instruction from sixth grade onwards. The Commission further envisaged that in about fifteen years, Urdu would be adopted at the tertiary level of education. The Commission still deemed English as the language of science and advancement, adding the caveat that as soon as Urdu was in a position to replace English, it would be readily adopted in the academic circles. This was a source of confusion as to who and how was it going to be determined that Urdu had reached a stage where it could conveniently replace English. The ensuing ambiguity further entrenched the status quo where English remained entrenched in its preferential position getting another lease of fifteen years (Khalique, 2007).

According to Article 251 of the constitution (1973), Urdu was declared the national language of Pakistan (Pakistan Constitution). The Article 251 (2) further added that English could remain in use until arrangements were complete and Urdu could replace English. The constitution further elucidated that Urdu was to become the National language of Pakistan within a period of 15 years since the constitution was passed in 1973. The Article 28 of the constitution of Pakistan enshrined that the people enjoyed the right to protect their ethnicities; which can be looked at in tandem with the Article 251 (3); laying down that provincial assemblies had the liberty to devise modalities for the promulgation of indigenous languages as well as Urdu; the national language through a repertoire of statutes and state institutions. The Supreme Court directed the state to expedite the adoption of Urdu as the official in the light of the afore-mentioned Articles. This ruling was issued by the Supreme Court in Urdu, comprising a ten-point action plan by the Cabinet division highlighting the significance of Urdu in terms of official proceedings, communication and academic correspondence. It emphasized the need to translate texts from English to Urdu such as official documents and letters. The agenda stressed the need for the provincial and federal governments to interact at close quarters so that Urdu could be assimilated into the public sector (Asad, 2015).

Lok Virsa Museum variously known as Pakistan National Museum of Ethnology, Heritage Museum or Folk Heritage Museum owes its appellation to the Institute of Folk and Traditional Heritage which showcases a host of cultural artefacts such as pottery, cultural art and craft was also one of the hallmarks of the government to promote indigenous languages and culture

There are five streams of education in Pakistan at school level. Elitist English medium schools, non-elite English-medium schools which cater to the low income groups from the middle and lower middle class; public sector Urdu-medium schools, government-run vernacular based schools such as Sindhi and Pashto and Islamic seminaries which primarily employ Urdu for education and in some cases vernacular languages such as Punjabi, Seraiki, Pashto and Sindhi.

Conclusion

The prevalence of English among the elite segments of the society has tilted in the favour of English-medium education to the extent that even with the steady proliferation of Islamic seminaries where the medium of education remains Urdu, English continues to bask

in the limelight. The religious seminaries have assumed the proportions of self-segregated educational outlets, where English and Urdu medium streams do not intermingle. On the other hand, even the relatively small number of Urdu speaking population has not been able to exert influence to trigger drastic linguistic changes in the favour of Urdu. English holds a snob value being a class determinant. Parents who lack English language proficiency urge their children to seek education at English-medium schools notwithstanding if it is an English-medium school only in the namesake, where virtually Urdu is the medium of instruction.

Recommendations

In a pluralistic, ethno-linguistically rich society, employing a doctrinaire position will lead to resistance from linguistic communities whose native language is distinct from the official language. Thus, it is imperative to take into careful consideration how ethno-linguistic nuances traverse different linguistic domains. Interestingly, the high echelons of society diffuse a fairly large capacity for absorbing English so much so that the print media has fared well as compared to electronic media. This disparity however shows that maintaining the colonial language in multiple linguistic domains of import will stand out as a marker of subaltern identity. It is important to confer prestige on indigenous languages and to embrace them in the mainstream.

The Aga Khan Rural Support Program reported that parents in the Northern Areas of Pakistan registered their protest against education in indigenous languages, vociferously demanding education in English (Ayres, 2009). With the rapidly expanding contours of the global, academic milieu the number of students opting for IELTS and TOEFL has escalated. Those who choose O' and A' Level examination has also increased. Those who attend foreign universities hold better chances to occupy key positions in the job market on their return, further establishing the position of English.

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