

Official Language and Medium of Instruction in Pakistan: Exploring Urdu English Controversy

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Abstract

This study provides a thorough analysis of the controversy between Urdu and English as the country's de facto language and medium of instruction in education. Different people in various parts of Pakistan speak a wide variety of languages. The process of deciding on an official language and medium of instruction for Pakistan is fraught with challenges. While Urdu is widely spoken and understood across Pakistan, the significance of English in today's globalized economy cannot be overstated. Selecting a language that strikes a middle ground between globalism and nationalism is essential. Since its independence, Pakistan has struggled with linguistic issues, especially when East Pakistan split off to become Bangladesh due to linguistic differences. The research also delves into how English is used for government and how Urdu is used by the local press and the general public. Both students and educators in Pakistan have a favorable view of the English language, recognizing that without proficiency in and acceptance of the language, their country would be cut off from the rest of the world. This research also offers an in-depth review of the current discussion and a study of language regulations in the classroom. The views of curriculum designers are also reflected in this. This research might help authorities in Pakistan create a more efficient and effective medium of education.

Keywords: *official language, medium of instruction, Urdu, English, Pakistan, Bangladesh*

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Introduction

Pakistan is home to 74 distinct languages. The Constitution of Pakistan (1973) establishes Urdu as the national language and English as the official language. Without any explicit requirements for their usage in state business, education, or daily life, the Constitution merely acknowledges the variety of regional/provincial languages. In Pakistan, both English and Urdu are spoken by a sizable portion of the population (Simons & Charles, 2018). As a result, their 'linguistic capital' is highly valued in the Pakistani linguistic market (Bourdieu, 1991). Urdu serves as a de facto national language for many people. But the military and the bureaucracy, two of the country's most privileged organizations, choose English as their language of choice (Rehman, 2004). Therefore, it should come as no surprise that English serves as the gatekeeper for admittance into elite universities and high-paying professions. Despite the fact that regional languages are recognized as important to teach in Pakistan's National Education Policy (NEP, 2009), they are not as widely spoken as English or Urdu and are instead reserved for more personal and intimate settings (Manan & David, 2014; Rahman, 2003). The purpose of this research is to go further into the debate over whether language should be used as official language and medium of teaching in schools between Urdu and English. We begin with a detailed history of how Urdu and other languages in the area, including Hindi and Bengali, have fought over the years to establish themselves as the de facto national language of Pakistan.

Second, we illuminate the Urdu-English difference in terms of the influence of language in education. Urdu is used as the language of teaching in the public sector, whereas English is used in the commercial sector. Next, we look at how Urdu-English is put to use in a variety of Pakistani contexts, before wrapping off with some thoughts on how locals see the two languages.

Language and Cultural Identity

If we take a look at the situation in Pakistan, we discover that more than 70 different languages are spoken there. The native vernaculars, Urdu (the national language and lingua franca), and English (the international language) are the three types of languages spoken in Pakistan (Khan, 2016; Khan & Iqbal, 2011). English and Urdu have been identified as the languages of the media, government, and the business world (Rahman, 2011). Less dominant indigenous languages in Pakistan are increasingly being used as symbols of cultural inferiority and humiliation. Urdu and English are expanding into areas formerly dominated by indigenous mother tongue vernaculars, causing a change in the local languages.

An influential language has more worth as cultural capital, as shown by the case of Pakistan. Punjabi, Siraiki, Brahvi, Sindhi, etc., are all examples of regional or vernacular languages that are spoken in Pakistan but are not given

the same economic weight as English or Urdu. Here is a rundown of the linguistic pecking order: Although Pashto and Sindhi are considered identity identifiers and are used informally, Urdu, English, and the local language then prevail in the N.W.F.P and Sindh. Since Pakistan's inception, several scholarly sources (Abbas, Aslam & Rana, 2011; Coleman & Capstick, 2012) have attested to English's continued significance, dominance, and prestige in Pakistani society. As a result, this has given rise to concerns about language shame and ethnic identity among speakers of these underrepresented languages (Rahman, 2011).

Urdu and Hindi Share a Symbolic History

Urdu, written in Perso-Arabic script, is more closely linked with Muslims than Hindi, written in the "Devangari" alphabet, which is more closely associated with Hindus. Thus, Urdu has more religious importance among Muslims and Hindi among Hindus. Urdu's adoption by India's Muslim elites helped establish its place in Islamic culture and the Muslim community's sense of self. However, the elite Muslims of India were able to maintain their influence by establishing official schools, particularly in North India, where Urdu was the language of teaching (Rahman 2002: 210-211). One of the many ingeniously conceived and implemented technologies that sprung out as a result of recent events was the printing press, which made widespread book distribution possible for the first time. The lower-ranking officials, like as non-commission officers, and the legal system utilized a variant of "Hindustani" (Urdu) written in either the Persian or Roman scripts. The fact that the Sufis employed an older version of Urdu called "Hindvi" in their poetry is more evidence that Muslims are associated with the language (Rehman, 2008; Sohail, 2012). While Muslims contributed the Urdu language to India, Askari claims that is the extent of their contribution. It's worth tens of thousands of times more than the Taj Mahal. As Askari (2008) puts it, "We are proud of this language".

A distinct nation for the Muslims of the Indo-Pak subcontinent, Pakistan was founded in 1947 on the backs of Islam and the Urdu language. Under the leadership of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Muslims of the subcontinent eventually led to the partition of India, creating Pakistan and Bharat (India) as two independent states. Islam was the primary distinguishing symbol of the Indian Muslims who banded together to challenge the Hindu majority so that they could get just rights in the fields of politics and economy (Jalal, 1985). Urdu evolved as a symbol of Muslim identity in the nineteenth century, and subsequently, throughout the course of the Pakistan movement, it became a supplementary sign of the identity of Indian Muslims who supported the foundation of the new state (Rehman, 2002).

In the 19th century, the political implications of using a particular language to build identity were particularly salient when considering the identities of Hindus and Muslims. This theory was bolstered by subsequent events, notably the Hindi-Urdu conflict. This incident represented a stark and obvious split in the philosophy and methods of governing countries in the subcontinent, between Hindus and Muslims (Rahman & Knight, 1996). This ultimately resulted in the partition of the subcontinent into Pakistan and Bharat.

Urdu and its Conflicts

Urdu-Hindi Conflict

The British East India Company officially replaced Persian with regional dialects in numerous regions in 1837. As a result, in the northern parts of the Indian subcontinent, the government favored Urdu over Hindi. The conflict arose because India implemented a different language policy in the 1860s, which was seen as discriminatory. While both Urdu and Hindi were favored in the classroom, official documents were seldom written in either the Hindi or Nagari scripts. Sir Syed Ahamad Khan entered the fray as a result of the British government's decision, which he saw as a defeat for Muslims. Hindus, on the other hand, reacted enthusiastically to the news, and the movement quickly expanded, eventually reaching every Hindu in the northwest regions of India within only a few months. Allahabad served as the movement's epicenter.

The ruling has significant implications for the use of Urdu in public life. Sir Syed was convinced that Congress was actively attempting to advance Hindu interests at the expense of the Muslim population. In 1893, Sir Syed's United Patriotic Alliance (founded on this conviction) became the Mohammeden Defense Alliance (MDA). During this period, tensions between the Hindu and Muslim communities were high, and many individual Hindus made derogatory comments against Islam. It seemed that Muslims and Hindus in certain regions were having trouble getting along.

This mistrust, which sprang primarily from a linguistic barrier, has never fully subsided, and Urdu is still often mistakenly identified as the Muslim language, despite the fact that it serves as a common language for a wide range of Indians.

Urdu Bengali Conflict

During Pakistan's formative years, Urdu and Bengali came into dispute with one another over the use of their respective languages. Pakistan was founded as a Muslim-majority nation after British India was divided in 1947. However, as most people in East Pakistan (modern-day Bangladesh) spoke Bengali, language became a divisive issue there. In the 1950s and 1960s, the

central government of Pakistan pushed Urdu as the only national language, ignoring the linguistic and cultural rights of Bengali speakers. This stoked the debate around the language problem. Protests and turmoil broke out when Urdu became the national language because Bengali speakers felt they had been marginalized. East Pakistan's political climate owes a great deal to the language debate. Beginning in 1952, the Language Movement rose to prominence and began to represent Bengali nationalism and cultural identity (Baxter, 1997). The movement campaigned against making Urdu the only official language of Pakistan and instead sought to establish Bengali as one of the national languages (Baxter, 1997). Several activists were killed when police opened fire on peaceful marchers in Dhaka on February 21, 1952, the high point of the Bengali language struggle. The desire for linguistic and cultural independence in East Pakistan was bolstered by this occasion, which became known as the Language Martyrs' Day or Ekushey (Baxter, 1997). The power dynamics between West Pakistan, where Urdu is the dominant language, and East Pakistan, where Bengali is the dominant language, were laid bare by the Urdu-Bengali debate. As a result of political and cultural discrimination, Bengali speakers eventually organized into nationalist groups, which culminated to the Bangladesh Liberation War in 1971 and the establishment of Bangladesh as a sovereign nation (Baxter, 1997).

English in Pakistan

Before Pakistan was ever established, the English language was widely spoken over the Indo-Pakistani peninsula. It was the British who first brought English to the Indo-Pakistani subcontinent in the 16th century (Mahboob, 2009). English maintained its elevated prominence as the language of government, politics, and society throughout the duration of British colonial administration. During British control, the language expanded because of the opportunities it provided for upward social mobility (Mahboob 2009; Rahman 1996). Generally speaking, people picked up English via their schooling. Pakistan's governmental, commercial, and educational sectors have all relied heavily on English since the country's founding in 1947 (Mahboob, 2009), despite Urdu being the official language. The first governor general of Pakistan, Muhammed Ali Jinnah, spoke in English to Pakistan's first constituent assembly on the day of the country's independence (Mahboob, 2009), demonstrating the high esteem in which the English language was held from the very beginning. In fact, English was sufficiently ingrained in Pakistani society and politics by the time of independence that it was guaranteed a place in the country's constitution as an official language (Mahboob 2009; Rahman, 1996).

Official Language Policy (Urdu-English)

Even before Pakistan was established, English and Urdu were two of the most widely spoken languages in the region. Rahman (2011) argues that Urdu and English are the languages of education and promotion throughout a wide range of fields and spheres of influence. They have been vying with one another for instructional primacy and social advancement. The first disagreement occurred when Lord Macaulay advocated for an English-only education (Macaulay, 1835), whereas Sir Sayyid insisted that Urdu be used instead (Waseem, 2014). Even though Urdu's popularity grew after Pakistan's establishment, the language was never able to unseat English as the dominant language of government or business (Raheem, 2015). English-medium education has continued and even grown in popularity in Pakistan despite the fact that the country's constitution from 1973 mandated that Urdu would replace English as the official language in 15 years. The irony is that no amount of government effort will ever make English obsolete. The authorities' lack of seriousness and hesitation, together with the worldwide usage of English, undoubtedly play a part in the present state of things. According to Malik (2016), in 2015 the government of Pakistan began a drive to make Urdu the country's official language. As part of this campaign, the constitution and other important pieces of law are being translated into Urdu. Urdu is making genuine headway toward replacing English as the official language of government. It is critical to review the relative significance of these two languages throughout this transition phase, as promised in the constitution of 1973. People are aware of English's worldwide reach but also admire Urdu for its ability to strengthen bonds inside the nation.

Language Controversy in Medium of Instruction

Since Pakistan's independence, the medium of education has been a contentious topic. The debates over Pakistan's official language of instruction may be seen in historical context.

Dominated by the British:

When the British were in control, the official language of government and schools was English. They pioneered the use of English as the privileged community's lingua franca. In the Subcontinent, its use rose to the level of official language. When a language is adopted as the official language of government, it automatically gains status. The regional languages Urdu and others like it were neglected.

Early Partition (1947-1958):

In 1947, when Pakistan first established as an independent country, the majority of its citizens spoke Urdu. Urdu, spoken by the country's vast majority, was therefore designated by Muhammad Ali Jinnah as the country's official language. Urdu became an official language of instruction and institutional advancement in 1948. However, the Bangla language and other

regional languages opposed Urdu since they have a longer history in the places where they are spoken. The language argument persisted after 1956, with several discussions centering on which language should serve as the instructional medium. Those in support of Urdu have advocated for it to be used as the language of teaching to demonstrate national unity via a single language and to protect cultural traditions. Science, history, and math are now all taught in Urdu. English has acquired prestige value all throughout the globe, which is why its advocates stress the importance of using it as a medium of education. They stress the significance of learning English as the language of achievement since it is the language of science. If the population does not learn English, we will fall farther behind in the global development competition.

Ayub Khan's Era (1958-1969):

During Ayub Khan's rule, the English language was favored. The use of English in classrooms has increased. In the business world, they started teaching in English. When the rich and poor are taught differently, social stratification based on socioeconomic status will emerge. Because English is used as the medium of instruction in private schools for the children of the elite, while Urdu is used in the public sector, those who speak English are seen as powerful elites while those who speak Urdu are seen as members of a lower social class. There was a rise in feelings of inferiority and inequality as a result of the policy's decision to use English as the medium of education rather than the native language.

The Sharif Commission, established in 1959, proposed that both Urdu and Bangla be utilized as mediums of education from Class VI forward; this would pave the way for Urdu to become the medium of instruction at the university level in around fifteen years. The Commission had said unequivocally that English should be used for advanced study and research until Urdu was ready to replace it. This remark was made for a reason. It sowed doubt about the timing, methodology, and arbiters of the decision to switch to Urdu from English. The status quo was therefore easily preserved, and English was granted a fifteen-year lease.

However, Urdu was became the official language of instruction in all public schools in Pakistan after the Commission's report recommended it. This caused a great deal of annoyance in Sindh, where the use of Sindhi as a medium of instruction was commonplace enough. A lot of Sindhis saw it as a personal attack on their language and culture. Gujarati-medium schools existed in Sindh, but the Gujarati-speaking population was being absorbed by the native Sindhi population in rural areas or by the Urdu-speaking population in urban centers. Even though the judgment was overturned to favor Sindhi, it helped drive a lasting gulf between the Sindhi and Muhajir (migrants from

India, who use Urdu as their primary language) groups in the region. Therefore, the rich continued to govern in English while the underprivileged struggled for their languages and customs. However, the cultural and political Muhajir leadership at the time cannot be exonerated for supporting the government's position on the language problem.

The Hamood ur Rehman Commission Report, which examined the well-being and issues of students at the same time, just reinforces this claim. Universities in Karachi, Punjab, and Sindh are criticized for recognizing Urdu and Sindhi as official languages. According to the article, some people sped up the transition based on emotion rather than logic (Rahman 1996, 234).

Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's Era (1970-1977):

Urdu and other regional languages were encouraged for use as teaching mediums under the administration of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto. Urdu has been designated as the official language of teaching in both the public and private sectors. The Urdu language is used for instruction across the board. They have worked to standardize Urdu-language instructional materials and to spread the language's popularity. Urdu has replaced English as the language of teaching but English continues to be a taught topic. Urdu and English are now recognized equally in Pakistan.

Zia-ul-Haq Era (1977-1988):

The Islamization of schools became a hallmark of the Zia administration. He spoke a lot about how schools should become more Islamic. In Islamic schools, the Urdu language is mandated as the medium of teaching. The government mandated that all students take Islamic studies. Because of Zia's emphasis on Urdu and Islamic education, English's position has declined and it has been subjected to several difficulties.

Time Period after the End of Zia (1988):

After the reign of Zia, the English language rose to prominence. It was adopted by the private education sector as the medium of teaching. Because it is the language of worldwide communication and scientific understanding, English has become more popular. The English language is the subject of extensive attempts to improve it.

In 2009, politicians acknowledged the value of a child's native language and advocated for mandatory instruction in the language. The policy's goal is for students to fully grasp course material and reap the full potential of their education. The odds that a youngster would fully grasp a subject and benefit from the solid foundation that comes from learning in one's mother language are much higher. Due to a lack of qualified teachers fluent in the local language, private schools have a difficult time meeting the needs of their students. On the other side, it's important to speak English if you want a high-paying career.

In 2009, the government mandated that all students attending a public school get their education in an English-medium classroom. Both Urdu and English are now required courses for students in grades 1 through 12 in Pakistan. In both public and private high schools, English is employed as the primary language of teaching and communication.

National Education Policy (NEP) 2009:

The Pakistani government's Ministry of Education made the decision public. According to this strategy, the local language would be taught as a topic alongside Urdu in elementary schools. This policy actively encouraged the use of many languages. The NEP 2009 emphasized the significance of the regional language Urdu and supported the development of Urdu as a symbol of national identity.

Devolution of Education (18th Amendment) 2010:

In 2010, this change was made. The Pakistani government has officially proclaimed this strategy. With this change, the federal government no longer has jurisdiction over state-run schools. The policy allows each province to adopt its own policies. The provinces have the freedom to choose their preferred language for classroom teaching. The goal of this strategy is to provide more control over educational decisions to the province so that they may better meet the needs of their citizens.

Punjab Education Policy 2010-2015:

The Punjabi government made the announcement. This policy addresses the question of which language will be used as the medium of teaching in public elementary and secondary institutions. As a result of this strategy, Urdu is now being used as the language of teaching, with English also being included as a required subject. While teaching English to fulfill the need for international communication, the focus of this strategy is on ensuring the continued existence of the country's unique culture and history.

Sindh Language Policy 2013:

The government of Sindh is responsible for the new regulation. The government of Sindh mandated that all public schools in the province use Sindhi as their language of teaching. The policy's primary goal is the preservation of the Sindhi language and the advancement of Sindhi culture. Urdu and English are taught alongside one another to accommodate both local and global demands.

National Education Policy 2017-2025:

In 2017, the strategy was unveiled by the Government of Pakistan's Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training. According to this policy, the primary objective of the NEP is to ensure that all students get a high-quality education. Without addressing the medium of teaching in Pakistan, they pushed for the use of regional languages. Since Shehbaz Shareef came to

power, there has been a shift in policy favoring the use of English as the language of education. He mandated that all public and private institutions use English as their primary language of teaching.

Urdu-English Use in A Variety Of Settings

Administration

At the outset of the Zia dictatorship, there was much fanfare about the impending adoption of Urdu as the state language. On June 3, 1984, under Raja Zafrul Haq, Urdu was adopted as the official language of government in the Ministries of Religious Affairs and Haj and Information and Broadcasting. It was planned for the national assembly to switch to Urdu in 1988 (Pakistan Today, 12 February 1984), and all political heavyweights, including Zia ul Haq himself, spoke only Urdu. But in 1987, it was reported that the ministries were encouraged not to abandon English, the Auqaf department had returned to it, and there had been no alteration to the competitive exams for the highest levels of government ('Editorial,' Dawn, 29 April 1987).

Media

Mainstream media in Pakistan are based on Urdu and English due to a slant in educational policies. Ironically, the most powerful journalism in Pakistan is written in English, further separating the country's elite from the rest of the population. English newspapers are more open with their news and comments than their Urdu counterparts. Over ninety-five percent of all programming on private television networks is presented in Urdu. They are mostly concerned with metropolitan regions, whereas speakers of indigenous languages are concentrated in outlying locations. The number of indigenous language shows on state-run TV is insufficient in comparison to the number of Urdu shows.

How Pakistanis View English and Urdu?

Naseem et al. (2015) surveyed educators and their students to discover how they felt about using English or Urdu as the country's de facto language. English is the language of choice among educators, who recognize both its educational value and its contemporary relevance.

Since most standardized tests are administered in English, they argued that the language should be a top priority in classrooms. They also stressed the pride of being an English speaker and the ease with which they could acquire information. They did, however, concede that a large portion of the Pakistani population lives in rural regions where English is not the native language and proposed making English instruction obligatory. Urban regions showed a greater preference for the use of English in the classroom. Students were in agreement that having English recognized as the language of government would improve their access to and understanding of higher learning and professional prospects. They understood the significance of learning new things and the plethora of fresh literature available. They hoped to improve

their academic performance, find gainful work, and continue their studies, maybe even studying overseas.

Abbas, F., & Iqbal, Z. (2018) found that respondents in their survey saw English as the global language and emphasized its significance from a worldwide viewpoint. When asked to rank the importance of languages spoken throughout the world, they gave Punjabi the lowest possible score, while giving Urdu a neutral grade. The respondents placed a high value on the English and Urdu languages but placed less value on the Punjabi language. Both English and Urdu fared better than Punjabi in the respondents' eyes.

Conclusion

According to the findings, Urdu and English continue to compete fiercely for supremacy in the nation. The population recognizes Urdu's value in fostering ties throughout the country, even as they recognize English's global reach. Since English is the language of seminars and conferences on a national and worldwide scale, its scholarly significance much exceeds that of Urdu. The interviewees doubted that English would eventually replace Urdu, although they were optimistic about the future of the English language. Therefore, English maintains its superiority even in this transitional period. Urdu and other regional languages should be protected since they represent Pakistan's cultural legacy. Urdu, along with other regional languages, should be encouraged in order to sustain our national identity and culture. If the replacement of English with Urdu is to be achieved at all, more and more earnest efforts are needed to raise public consciousness about the significance of Urdu and to affirm its value.

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