

Englishization of Urdu

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Abstract

The present research is intended to explore the mechanism which is causing, driving and accelerating the process of language change in Urdu. The particular focus is on the interplay of various factors which are resulting in the emergence of a more English-like Urdu language. The phenomenon of language change has been approached from a societal perspective and the link between social change and language change has been given particular attention by assuming that a change in society leads to a corresponding change in language and vice versa. Keeping in view the complex and multi-pronged nature of language-change, a mixed methodology has been employed. The findings show that changes in language are caused by different and numerous considerations and that these changes are natural, neutral and inevitable.

Index terms— language-change, language and society, urdu, englishization.

1 Introduction

language is one of the distinguishing characteristics of a human society. The intricate and intimate relation that exists between these two entities is studied in sociolinguistics. Both these entities, language and society, are subject to change and are continuously changing. They cannot afford to be static as their being static is tantamount to their death. Language change is an inevitable phenomenon in every natural and living language. Urdu language is also subject to this fundamental law but the contemporary changes in the lexical, syntactical and grammatical levels of Urdu show a noticeable influence of English language as there is an abundance of English lexical items in current written and spoken Urdu. Urdu language, by its very nature, is an accommodative language, accepting heavily the words and grammatical rules of other languages like Turkish, Persian, Arabic and other Central Asian and South Asian languages. But the influence of English, in last two or three decades, has become conspicuous and discernable to such an extent that the voices against this development are being raised from different forums. This study is an attempt to know and analyze the factors which are behind this phenomenon of Englishization of Urdu and to what extent these changes are progressive or retrogressive.

2 II.

3 Problem Statement

The phenomenon of language-change is assumed to be a result of the interplay of various linguistic and nonlinguistic factors. The current direction of changes in Urdu language is towards English. The Englishization of Urdu is being frowned upon. The problem under consideration is the detection and analysis of factors responsible for changes in Urdu language. Though language-changes occurs at almost all levels of language analysis - phonological, graphological, lexical, syntactical and semantic, yet keeping in view the broadness of this venture, only the lexical changes have been studied. An additional problem is to investigate whether language-change is beneficial or detrimental for language and what the speaker's attitudes are towards language-change.

4 III.

5 Theoretical Considerations

Historically, Urdu has developed in a language contact situation over a long period of time, roughly from 1100 A.D. Since its emergence, it has assimilated the linguistic features from all languages with which it came into contact. Urdu was known by several names, including Hindvi, Dehlvi, Hindustani, Zuban-e-Urdu or Rekhta. It is usually recognized that Urdu and Hindi share a common grammatical system. They differ only on the bases of script in which they are written. Urdu uses Persian script while Hindi is written in Devanagiri script. According to Dr. Tariq Rehman (1996), these different scripts are used for political and ideological reasons as the Hindu wanted to identify themselves with Sanskrit and the Muslim wanted to retain their Arabopersian identity and the result is in the form of a Sanskritized Hindi and a Persianized Urdu. Amrit Rai in his *A House Divided: The Origin and Development of Hindi-Urdu* (1984) discusses the process by which two styles of one language drifted apart from the 18th century onwards.

While Hindi kept itself immune from external influences, Urdu succumbed to such influences and has changed dramatically over the past six decades. But the most conspicuous influence on Urdu is that of English in recent times, especially in its lexicology where a large number of English words can be seen in contemporary written and spoken Urdu. The Englishization of world cultures is a global phenomenon which has been an object of intense debate at various forums but the Englishization of world languages has been able to get comparatively less attention of researchers. Language, culture and society are intricately related to one another. The cultural and social changes are usually studied in isolation, whereas our focus is on the changes in language due to different cultural and social changes.

There is an intense and seemingly unnecessary concern for language change. The scholars of Urdu language usually lament the changes in Urdu and deem it as something corrupt that is a threat to the purity of Urdu. It is paradoxical that while the changes caused by Oriental languages are welcomed by the defenders of Urdu, the changes brought about by English are considered detrimental. For instance, in Urdu the plural form of word *Ustad* is also *Ustad* but under the influence of Persian grammar the correct plural form is often considered as *Usatza*. Similarly the rules for making feminine gender are predominantly Persio-Arabic. In this study, efforts have been made to explore the nature of language-change and its repercussions on a language.

IV.

6 Literature Review

Despite its ubiquitous nature, language change as a concept and as an area of linguistic investigation has usually been regarded as something separate from the study of language in general. The literature on language change is replete with comparative or historical studies. But in recent years, the subject has captured the attention of linguists and resultantly there are journals which are specifically dedicated to language-change, such as *Diachronica*, *Journal of Historical Pragmatics* and *Language Variations in Change*.

R. L. Trask in his *Why Do Languages Change* (2009) provides a comprehensive survey of the factors which cause changes in languages. Though his focus remains on the variations which are taking place or have taken place in English language but given the similar nature of the entity called language, his findings are helpful for the researchers who want to investigate the change in any language. Trask is primarily concerned with cultural factors and the impact of new innovations on the lexicon of English language but he also does discuss the temporal considerations and their influence on pronunciation and grammatical structures of English. The changes brought about by different political and ideological trends, which differentiate American English from British English, have also been discussed at length. The factors discussed by Trask are equally relevant for analyzing changes in any language as no language can escape the influence of temporal and spatial factors.

In his another book entitled *Language Change* (1994) R. L. Trask has specifically discussed the changes in vocabulary, pronunciation, spellings, grammar and meaning in English language. Trask also points out the inevitability of this change and the neutrality of this phenomenon as it is, according to Trask, neither progressive nor retrogressive. Trask's views about the neutrality, inevitability and naturalness of language-change and the arguments given by him are applicable in the case of Urdu as well.

Raymond Hickey in *Motives for Language Change* (2003) compiles a plethora of scholarly articles on language change by world-renowned linguists including Jean Aitchison, Richard Hogg, David Denison and many others. The volume presents a valuable collection of views about language change from different perspectives by dedicating an essay to a particular aspect of language change like E-language, metaphors, social context of language change, the role of speaker in language change and dialectology. It provides a valuable and all-encompassing insight into the process of language-change.

About the nature of language change, which is a matter of much controversy as prevailing view is that language change is not desirable, Jean Aitchison's classical work *Language Change: Progress or Decay?* (2001) gives a very interesting and lively account of language change and its repercussions. He also relates two extremes of this change in the form of language birth and language death. By taking into account the various sociolinguistic and psycholinguistic factors, he establishes the naturalness, inevitability and continuity of this process.

Perhaps the most comprehensive and allinclusive discussion on language change can be found in William Labov's *Principles of Linguistic Change: Cognitive and Cultural Factors* (2010). It focuses on the minutest of

the factors and motives that can trigger any change in language. From socioeconomic to identity politics, from migration to media impact and from locality to gender factor, it presents and discusses a whole panorama of mechanisms of language change. Geoffrey Leech and Marianne Hundt in *Change in Contemporary English: A Grammatical Study* (2009) gives a detailed description of how the English language has been changing recently, focusing specially on the late 20th century written standard English by using the empirical evidence of computer corpora.

Rudi Keller in *On Language Change: The Invisible Hand in Language* (1994) traces the historical dimensions of language change along with various responses towards language change by different people. The book presents this phenomenon as a product of the cumulative and simultaneous work of diverse factors whose intricate interplay quite silently results in a change in language.

Language Change and Sociolinguistics (2004) by Jonathan Marshall is an attempt to approach language-change from a social perspective. The book explains changes in language as a consequence of changes in demography and other social variables.

The problem with the literature discussed above is that its prime focus is on changes in English language. There is an acute dearth of material on changes in Urdu language. Though the findings of English language-change can be applied to the study of changes in Urdu, yet the issue is that English has been subject to changes caused by internal factors while Urdu is being modified predominantly by external factors.

V.

7 Methodology

In the present research, in order to explain the factors behind language-change, we have adopted a mixed methodology by using questionnaires and interviews. The questionnaire has been designed to elicit the people's views regarding their linguistic preferences and the motives behind these preferences.

The questionnaire was distributed in a population of hundred individuals of both sexes from different social, educational and ethnic background. Keeping in mind the fact that sometimes people are not conscious about their motives behind a particular action and the resultant impact of this fact on the validity of our methodology, the interview has been employed to supplement the data. Moreover, language-change is a societal phenomenon and to get a reliable amount of data concerning any social phenomenon, a relatively large sample is needed which can best be approached by questionnaire as interview is not feasible for a large sample. However, a relatively small number of participants has been interviewed to compensate the deficiencies of questionnaire. Some data is collected from real world spoken and written texts to demonstrate the impact of English language on Urdu language. The sources for such data include TV talk shows, news bulletins, Urdu newspapers, books, advertisements, and text messages.

About the nature of language-change, some questions were added in the questionnaire; the interview method has also been employed to know about the views of participants about the changes which are taking place in Urdu.

8 VI.

9 Data Collection

The following headlines from different Urdu newspapers show the influence of English language over Urdu.

10 ?

Chairman NAB ki appointment per hakoomat aur opposition main deadlock.

11 ?

Corrupt system ko badal kr behtareen health care system lain gay.

12 ?

Electronic media main 2015 tak 41 million rupaye ki investment.

? Flood warning ke liye instruments ki purchase nahi ho saki.

There are numerous such headings daily appearing in newspapers which contain quite a few words and expressions from English language. The words like subsidy, joint investigation team, security forces, drone attacks, merit, target killing, budget, roadmap, policy and many other seem to have no alternative in Urdu, though it is not the case but the recurrent use of English words has caused an erasure of their Urdu equivalent from public memory. Similarly in textbooks, there are many English words which are written in Urdu script without providing their corresponding term in Urdu.

The text messaging is perhaps causing the most obvious changes in languages. Young people are not only using telegraphic expressions, they are also changing the spellings. David Crystal's book *Txtng: The Gr8 Db8* (2008) explores this area. The following text messages are meant to show the language change.

? Ppr main bzi ho ktnay bje end ho ga ppr? Em waiting ? Yr koi fit si buks to bta for geography. M in lhr ? Ramzan css ki registration ka kya procedure ha?

Mean kab hoti ha n how? N fee also?

The questionnaire was designed to elicit information about the factors behind language change. Further information about language change and people's attitude about language change was gathered through a semi-structured interview. Because of the unfamiliarity with the topic, the interviewees were asked direct questioned about mechanism and nature of language change. VII.

13 Discussion

The results showed that the major factor responsible for language-change and intrusion of English lexical items in Urdu is the introduction of new inventions like mobile phone, laptop, tablet PCs and other such gadgets. Because the young people spend a lot of time in using these gadgets, the kind of language used in these gadgets becomes a part of their speech habits. For example, text messages are extremely popular with young people; and though Urdu has an almost exact equivalent of the word message in the form of paigham yet the popular use of message has caused a somewhat semantic change for paigham as its connotation has undergone a slight change.

When we said to a respondent that 'ham ne apko paigham bhaija tha', he was somewhat perplexed but when we said 'ham ne apko message kia tha', he felt no ambiguity in understanding our intended meaning.

Another reason for lexical change in Urdu can be attributed to the phenomenon of globalization. Because of rapid movement of ideas, concepts and fashions, there is no time to translate them into native languages. So all imported stuff in the form of ideas, concepts, discoveries and innovations is being adopted rather than being adapted.

The official policies which have made English language a language of power, prestige and a symbol of social superiority are also contributing in the process of Englishization of Urdu language in particular and Englishization of native culture in general.

The following table is an attempt to summarize our findings in a graphical manner: The chart shows that the immensely popular electronic gadgets are the main factors behind Englishization of language in our society and they are mentioned by 93% of our respondents as the main motive of using English words in their everyday conversation. Next come the official policies of our government and the resultant association of English with high-profile jobs. It is considered a factor by 70% respondents. The prestige associated with English language accounts for language-change according to 55% people. Interestingly, the much-trumpeted inadequacy of Urdu language is a reason of Englishization of Urdu cited by only 18% of our respondents.

The prevailing globalization which is transforming world societies and is eliminating their respective distinguishing features and leading the world towards a global culture is a reason to 57% of respondents.

As far as our other question is concerned i.e. the nature of language change, there is an interesting finding as the more educated respondents were generally of the view that it was harmful for Urdu while the less educated respondents deemed it something neutral. The prevailing view reflects that language is for communication and if it serves its purpose more effectively by using English words, it is acceptable. More than 90% of respondents expressed the view that intrusion of English lexical items in the current Urdu is not detrimental for our language and, therefore, there is no reason to be worried about it.

While a smaller number of respondents, comprising nearly 10% of the respondents showed their concern about language change and expressed a desire that the authorities and masses should do something to check this undesirable development. It is a worth mentioning point that though in minority, such people were those who were comparatively more educated. The reason for this phenomenon needs another research and it may well serve as a starting point for a study.

14 VIII.

15 Conclusion

Our research was aimed to investigate the mechanism behind Englishization of Urdu. The study establishes a fact that it is an inevitable consequence of Englishization of our society as society is more and more being intruded by gadgets which are programmed with English as operating language, there is an ever-increasing flood of ideas and concepts coming from English speaking intelligentsia influencing the intellectual milieu of 'consumer societies', the

16 Factors of language change

Volume XIV Issue VI Version I immense popularity of cultural products of English speaking world in the form of movies, songs, comedy shows and sports commentaries. The cumulative effect of all the above-mentioned developments is resulting in the form of Englishization of Urdu.

The study also shows that language-change is not something negative. It is not positive either. Simply it is neutral; a natural process which is adopted by language to adjust itself according to the linguistic needs of its speech community. Language reflects the concerns of society and it is because of Englishization of society that language is showing a similar tendency.



Figure 1: Figure 1

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