



NOT JUST MOI (MEDIUM OF INSTRUCTION): THE AMBIVALENT ATTITUDE TOWARDS ENGLISH IN THE LANGUAGE EDUCATION POLICY OF THE MULTICULTURAL PAKISTAN

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ABSTRACT

In the case of the Indian subcontinent, language has just not been a tool of communication or a Medium of Instruction (MOI) in a classroom. It has played a pivotal role in the politics of the region. Urdu and Hindi languages shaped the Hindu and Muslim identities in the British India in which the English language as a medium of instruction (EMI) was associated with the social prestige, mobility, modernism, and employability. In the (post)colonial times, Muslim nationalists favoured Urdu as a national language and binding force for the regional integrity of the newly-born Pakistani state, unification of its multiethnic citizens and Muslim identity while the nationalist Muslims of India and Hindus voted in the favour of Hindi as the national language of India, territorial integrity and secular identity of India. Since the inception of Pakistan, the Bengali Muslims of Eastern Pakistan could not accept Urdu as the national language because they considered that it marginalized them and obliterated their ethnic identity. This Urdu-Bengali language controversy proved to be one of the key causes of the fall of Dhaka, the Eastern Pakistan. The current study suggests that the national language should not flourish at the cost of fracturing people's linguistic identities, and marginalization of the regional languages in a pluralist multicultural nation, and English as medium of instruction should be promoted to enhance employability opportunities and English language proficiency of the transnational workers in a growing neoliberal economy.

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Introduction

Urdu as a national language, medium of instruction in the Pakistani public schools as well as the language of national curricula has not been very successful in integrating the Pakistani nation after the partition of British India in 1947 (Rahman, 1997; Mahboob, 2002; Jabeen, Chandio, & Qasim, 2020). The Bengali Muslims of East Pakistani took this enforced policy as an assimilationist agenda furthered by the West Pakistan to hegemonize their popular Bengali culture, distinct language and ethnic identity. English previously being the language of colonial masters and now a symbol of elitism, has further deepened the divide among the Pakistani society as it enhanced the chances of employability and social mobility for the graduates of English-medium schools and Higher Education Institutes (HEIs), while fairly marginalized the graduates of Urdu medium institutes and greatly to those passing out from the Madrasas- Islamic religious schools (Ahmed, 2011; Ammar, Naveen, Fawad, & Qasim, 2015; Shamim & Rashid, 2019). The neoliberal economy, internationalization of education and transnational migrations has further marginalized Urdu and other vernacular languages. Historically, the symbolic identity of Urdu with the Muslim identity has been in opposition to the English language that became a trope for modernism, liberalism, westernization and colonialism for the Pakistani masses. The love and hate relationship with the English language promoted an ambivalent attitude of the policymakers to the extent that the Supreme Court of Pakistan had to intervene in the favor of Urdu Language, meant to be used as an official language. Instead of favoring and promoting English language as a skill and medium of instruction (EMI), the policy makers still find it difficult to resolve the inherent ideological and historical conflicts associated with the identities, cultures, values these languages espouse. Since education is “the most formalized channel by which speakers acquire the symbolic and cultural credentials that are given premium in society at large.” (Stroud and Wee, 2011), the recent single curriculum launched by the current Pakistani government is an effort to streamline the public, Islamic and English medium schools. Academic policy makers know that education is “a key site for the construction of social identities and of unequal relations of power.” (Martin-Jones & Heller, 1996). The new education policy of Pakistan should recognize the importance of English language, treat it as a language skill, consider it as a tool for communication while giving it its due place since higher English language proficiency is directly correlated to employability in the booming freelance market and neoliberal economy, transnational neoliberal economy, local whitecollar public jobs, research, and local

and transnational higher education. The upcoming language policies should strike a balance among English as lingua franca, Urdu as national language and other vernacular languages.

Research Methodology

It is a 'transdisciplinary' research (Fairclough, 2003), which recognizes research as "a process of bringing different disciplines and theories to bear together on a research topic, setting up a dialogue between them through which each is liable to change" (Fairclough, 2006:10). Therefore, the present research study has critically analyzed the role of language in multicultural and multiethnic Pakistan while drawing on the prevailing discourses on the official educational policy documents, history, and sociolinguistics. Specifically, the current investigation highlights the importance of linguistic capital by taking insights from the theoretical underpinnings of globalization, multiculturalism, neoliberalism, history and contemporary local education policies to understand and analyze the relationship of language with power, culture, ideology and identity formation. The primary sources of data have been accessed from the official website of the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training, Pakistan, and include National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2017, National Education Policy Framework (NEPF) 2018, and Single National Curriculum (SNC) 2021, The National Human Development Report (NHDR) 2017 on Pakistan available on the UNDP website has also been consulted. The analysis is informed by Pierre Bourdieu's sociolinguistic concept of linguistic capital. Linguistic capital as a form of cultural capital offers various linguistic resources and abilities and an individual. The acquisition, competence and proficiency level of these languages determine an individual's position and value in a society and formal market such as the fashionable, educational, political and administrative markets (2000: 474-475).

Language, Multiculturalism, and Identity: Historical Overview

In the pluralistic Indian society, Persian and Sanskrits were the most popular languages used during the Muslim Mughal rulers (1526-1858) in India. However, the Muslims associated themselves with the Persian language, the language of the Muslim rulers and elite while Sanskrit was the language of ancient India and represented Hindu culture, identity and ideology. The British Raj(rule) of India (1858-

1947) displaced the old master's language with English, and promoted Urdu language to construct a new identity for the Indian Muslim. Tharoor also notices the fact that "the court language of the Mughals was Persian and the Muslim section of the population used Urdu – a mixture of Persian, Arabic and Sanskrit (p.154). In his letter (dated 28 January 1835) to John Tytler, an assistant surgeon and a teacher serving at the Hindu College, Lord Macaulay, a British politician, decried oriental languages-based knowledge in favor of English medium scientific-based knowledge and education:

I know that your Sanscrit and Arabic Books do not sell. I know that the English books of the School book Society do sell. I know that you cannot find a single person at your Colleges who will learn Sanscrit and Arabic without being paid for it. I know that the Students who learn English are willing to pay. I believe therefore that the native population if left to itself would prefer our mode of education to yours. (p.123)

Macaulay alludes to the linguistic capital of the English language that is a saleable commodity in comparison with the contemporary oriental languages. He also terms English education as "the truth" whereas considers the oriental knowledge as "falsehood" (p.123).

Macaulay in 'Minute on Indian Education' of 1835 defines the purpose of the English educational system in India. In his own words, it would create "a class of persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinion, in morals and in intellect" (Reprinted in The Post-Colonial Studies Reader, second edition, p. 375).

Urdu became "the medium of instruction in the Islamic seminaries (madrasas) and the major language of religious writings. It also became part of the Muslim identity" (Rahman, 2006:101). Later, the Indian Muslims visualized Urdu as a tool to preserve Muslim identity, resist linguistic imperialism of English and Hindi speaking majority Hindus. There was a fear that linguistic majorities mostly are "reluctant to grant 'their' minorities rights, especially linguistic and cultural rights, because they would rather see their minorities assimilated" A threat to an ethnic group's language is thus a threat to the cultural and linguistic survival of the group. Lack of linguistic rights often prevents a group from achieving educational, economic, and political equity with other groups. Injustice caused by failure to respect linguistic human rights is thus one of the important factors which can contribute to inter-ethnic conflict, and often does (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1995: 495-496). However, the linguistic capital created a noticeable division between the Muslim haves and have-nots on the basis of medium of instruction and language literacy. The rich Muslim community afforded elitist English medium modern education while the conservative lower middle class took Urdu medium education.

The All India Muslim League linked Urdu language with the two-nation theory (a theory that purported that Hindus and Muslims were to different nations) and later Islamic movements like Jama'at-i-Islami associated it with the Pakistani nationalism. It is because language forms a central part of our identities (Cummins, 2000). Functionally, it is not limited to "thinking and communicating with others" rather it has evolved into a community, wealth, politics, and "power over both people and places" (Thornton, 2018). Pragmatically, the poor class in rural and urban areas are "as deeply rooted in vernaculars such as Baluchi, Pakhtun, Punjabi, Siraiki, and Sindhi. Outside of the Muhajir communities of Sind, Urdu is not used below the lower-middle class" (Nasr, 1994: 85). Unfortunately, East Wing of Pakistan now called Bangladesh seceded in 1971 from Pakistan, a country that was carved out of Indian subcontinent in 1947 on the basis of two-nation theory, as a result of a civil war. The multiethnic groups unified as one nation in the name of Islam under the flag of new Muslim state Pakistan. One of the grievances that led to the Dhaka fall was the Bengali language. They foresaw the language of the center as a "threat to the [ir] cultural and linguistic survival." It is also observed that "Lack of linguistic rights often prevents a group from achieving educational, economic, and political equity with other groups [and it is] thus one of the important factors which can contribute to inter-ethnic conflict, and often does. (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas 1995: 495–496). Ironically, the Bengali-speaking Muslims in East Pakistan were a majority, but the center of national power was in the control of West Pakistan and associated primarily with the Punjabi ethnic group proficient in Urdu and English languages (Ayres, 2009:12).

Language Education Policy of the Multicultural Pakistan

The 18th Amendment to the Constitution of Pakistan in 2010 devolved powers and declared education a provisional matter. At the Federal level, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has outlined the central education policy named as National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2018 that observes how the students graduating from the English-medium Private schools get more employability opportunities than those passing out from the public sector schools which "mostly use Urdu and the regional mother tongue as a language of instruction." In the English-medium public-sector schools with the "low capacity of teachers to teach English as a second language", the students are "unable to achieve even basic competency levels" (NCF, 2018: 3). Thus, unexpected outcomes may emerge if any model without proper planning is applied. Infrastructural

support and teacher training are pivotal to attain “a privileged form of linguistic capital (Sah & Li, 2018).

To put it another way, the medium of instruction and language proficiency level are the distinct divisive factors which have attached prestige to the English language and high-cost private schools. The English-medium elitist private schools are quite expensive and beyond the reach of an ordinary low-income family. The English-medium public educational institutions have issues with the quality of teaching, “capacity of teachers, especially in rural areas”, and learning resources. It has also been documented that children of parents proficient only in the vernacular language face greater problems in the learning of foreign language (NFC, 2018, p.64). Pakistan National Human Development Report (NDHR) of 2017 notes that English as a medium of instruction is proving to be “a barrier to learning and frustrates students, contributing to the prevalence of cheating (NDHR, 2017:56).

Article 251 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 1973 declared Urdu to be the national language of the country. It is aligned with what Bourdieu (2000) suggests to forge a unified national identity. In a multiethnic diverse nation, the state is responsible for the introduction of a “legitimate” national language that helps in the integration of different classes into a “single linguistic community” (p.469). However, it was written in the same article in the first version of the Pakistani constitution passed in 1973 that English is temporarily allowed till “arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu” (The Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, 2012). Though Urdu has to be legitimized and promoted as a national language for nation-building purposes, English as a medium of instruction and communication skill would unify the educational practices and labor market by “establishing the new hierarchy of linguistic practices” (Bourdieu, 2000: 470).

In addition to the propagation of national language, the Provincial Assembly may promote the use of a provincial language (NFC, 2018: 64). The provinces have the authority to choose the medium of instruction for their educational institutes (NFC, 2018:65). Urdu is the lingua franca of Pakistan and, quite interestingly, “mother tongue of only 8% people in Pakistan ” (NFC, 2018: 65). Out of every 100, 15 young learners have Urdu, 37 Punjabi, 10 Sindhi, 13 Pushto, 4 Balochi, 13 Seraiki and 8 other languages as their first language (NHDR, 2017: 35). Majority of the population use their provincial languages like Punjabi in Punjab, Sindhi in Sindh, Pashto and Hindko in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Balochi in Balochistan, and Shina in Gilgit-Baltistan as medium of instruction and language of communication. The

policymakers at the provincial level would have to take into consideration that the regional languages should not experience “linguistic wrongs”, a phenomenon which explains that the languages are initially “marginalized and deprived of resources or recognition,” and it eventually leads to the “extinction of the languages” (Phillipson & Skutnabb-Kangas, 1995:483-484).

The Federal Government has encouraged the “multilingual policy, starting from mother tongue (i.e. L 1) as medium of instruction in early grades, and moving to L 2 (Urdu and English) at lower secondary or secondary levels”. It has also recommended the inclusion of Arabic, Persian, Turkish, and Chinese languages, and introducing uniform policy on languages and medium of instruction in order to bridge the disparity among the learners coming from the affluent families and lower strata of the society, and offer equal learning and employment opportunities (NFC, 2018:68). The onerous of responsibility in determining the language requirements of the learners is enormous on the policymakers, curriculum developers and educational institutions as the educational system has the “monopoly in the large-scale production of producers/consumers, and therefore in the reproduction of the market” (Bourdieu, 2000:475). Some languages belonging to “a threatened linguistic capital” like Arabic, Persian and Turkish in the Pakistani context have “intrinsic” value outside the market. Notwithstanding, the national, official and vernacular languages have “social” and cultural value while English has the “capacity to function as linguistic capital”(Bourdieu, 2000:475). The neoliberal economy, characterized by deregulation and privatization, in order to make it more competitive and attractive to foreign investment (Fairclough, 2006:9) have added more value to the English language which is “serving as a medium that facilitates the free cross-border flows of goods, finances, ideas, and people that define our global world” (Park & Wee, 2013).

In Pakistan, the Ministry of Federal Education and Professional Training has recently introduced its policy regarding the implementation of Single National Curriculum (SNC) from Grade 1-5. It has outlined that English as a language is to be taught “as a language rather than subject.” Whereas it warrants that the focus would be on “development of language skills and competencies” in case of Urdu, it safeguards, at the same time, the “promotion of diversity of culture and languages especially regional languages of Pakistan” (SNC, 2021). The introduction of English as a language at the primary level is a step in the right direction. However, it should be replicated at the secondary and tertiary level.

The unequal investment in the learning and skill development give birth to political, social and economic vulnerabilities for the impoverished classes and ethnic groups. If the language policies are not properly constructed and reinforced by careful planning, EMI would serve to “(re)produce linguistic marginalization and educational inequality and injustice for children from a lower socioeconomic status” (Sah & Li, 2018). When such marginalized students remain silent, their “nonparticipation under these conditions have frequently been interpreted as lack of academic ability or effort, and teachers' interactions with students have reflected a pattern of low expectations which become self-fulfilling” (Cummins, 1996). Thus, all inclusive language policies are required to tap and groom the linguistic potential of the learners, eventually, adding up to the linguistic capital of the individual and community.

Today, the case of the use of English is much more complex as the “older models of language and identity” have transformed. It is no more a colonizing language with an imperial center (Park & Wee, 2013). Still it is argued that “English should be rejected as a language that reproduces imperialistic relations, leading to the destruction and devaluation of local language, culture, and identity”, however, those who counter such notions, argue that it can be a “legitimate language of local expression, a language that can bear the burden of local experience without limiting such experience through the lens of the colonialist” and thus can be “transformed into a weapon to strike back at the oppressive global relationships of power” (Park & Wee, 2013). Apparently, the case seems to tilt in favor of those who consider it a language of inequality, ideological distinction and class division.

If the state language policies exclude the importance of regional languages, “students’ language, culture and experience ... students are immediately starting from a disadvantage. Everything they have learned about life and the world up to this point is being dismissed as irrelevant to school learning...” (Cummins, 1996). He further informs that it is a challenge for teachers to “ minimize the impact that is potentially disempowering and resulting from the “official” rejection of students’ languages and cultures. This is not only a technical issue of how to implement appropriate forms of literacy and content instruction when students have weaker language skills (Cummins, 2000).

Conclusion and Recommendations

The policymakers should prioritize the languages, and invest in the linguist capital in order to increase the employability of its working class in the local and transnational job market. National Vocational and Technical Training Commission (NAVTTTC), the national regulator responsible for the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) policy making at the Federal level, should include English language as a skill in the National “Skills for All” program, and introduce programs to enhance the Pakistani workers’ relevant language proficiency. The Federal and Provincial governments should coordinate to do need analysis for the language requirements of learners aligned with the 21st century communication skills and market demands. The Federal government with the help of its donor agencies should invest in the language capital, offer remedial programs in the rural public schools, and enhance the language(s) level. The governments should build a national competency framework for the ESL teachers, and work for their continuing professional development. In order to economize the cost of teachers' training, the in-service ESL master teacher trainers may be prepared in coordination with the educational agencies to create a snowball effect, and thus subsequently train more educators locally.

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