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## DETERMINING THE STATUS AND USE OF LANGUAGES SPOKEN IN PAKISTAN

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**Summary.** Developing economies in South and South East Asia are faced with numerous challenges socioeconomically, politically and culturally. The multilingual and multi-ethnic makeup of these societies including Pakistan shows a marked confusion to come to terms with a uniform language policy. At the root of this confusion there is, on the one hand, a growing ascendancy of English globally and, on the other hand, the downward trend or at least stagnation in local languages for the failure of these states to have comprehensive strategies to render them vital. Language planning and determining the value of local languages in Pakistan has always been a point of debate in the political, legal and constitutional history of the country. In the pre-partition era, the sub-continental history was marked by Urdu-Hindi controversy, while after 1947, the latter was replaced by Bengali that remained a great source of unrest and ultimately proved an impetus in the division of Pakistan and Bangladesh into two separate countries (Mustafa, 2011). While the country is still grappling with the issue, it is assumed that revisiting its own past policies and the conscious efforts of Malaysia, Switzerland, Nigeria and Canada shall serve as a roadmap and shall inform the stakeholders to avoid time-tested mistakes. This study, thus, takes into consideration the history of language planning in Pakistan and presents cases of other countries that have already embarked on such policies to varying degree of successes.

**Keywords:** language planning, language policy, language status, Urdu, Hindi.

### Introduction

Reforms are underway to gear up the pace of development and to meet international challenges at the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century; Pakistan like other developing countries is faced with challenges of globalization demands. Education is one such sector which has been given primary importance as a tool to transform the society. In the last decade, the government proved seemingly extravagant in spending on higher education in particular. The establishment of Higher Education Commission (HEC) was a step to build a knowledge-based economy. After 2002, the higher education sector was geared up to meet global standards and considerable strides were taken to meet challenges and issues of the science-driven 21<sup>st</sup> century. Establishment of new universities both in public and private sectors as well as the increased enrolment and funding of PhD scholars and research activities within the country and abroad may be included among the visible indicators. However, certain issues remain to be properly addressed if the country is to reap the benefits of transformative education. This study focuses on issues related to language planning in the education sector which has plagued the country

since its inception. Historically a multilingual community, various ethnic groups have language-based political movements to establish or at least maintain their ethnicities. In the wake of these movements, education sector appears to be the most affected one where, for reasons mostly political, various governments have yielded to ethnic will instead of catering to the future needs of the country.

The overall education system of the country has been, to a considerable degree, distracted from achieving its logical ends due to historical inadequacies in language policies implemented from time to time. The role of the state has been more of a negotiator rather than initiator-cum-innovator while dealing with and determining the status of regional/indigenous languages, a position that encouraged various ethnicities to assert their individual identities through their respective languages. This has semi-uprooted the notion of uniformity and equality in the provision of education to the citizens. To start with, the primary and secondary education widely differs in manner and content at provincial level. Each province has its own major language as compulsory part of the syllabus but that permeates only the public sector schools leaving the ones in private and federally administered sector. The latter do not rightfully protect regional language of their jurisdiction and replace it with English. Consequently, in theory at least, the public school students are more prone to learning in their regional language while the latter find themselves at ease with English. This polarization becomes more acute at college and university level where most of the syllabi are English-based leaving the former at a disadvantage. Research studies profusely point to this inherent disadvantage of majority as most of the students receive education in public schools. There is no denying the fact that English has emerged as an international language and its currency particularly in communication, science and technology is rarely disputed. The job market of Pakistan is also under its spell and most of the students do not succeed in getting a foot-hold there.

At another level, the indifferent response of the state to language education particularly in the private sector has allowed the students to get alienated from their ethnic identities in favour of excessive westernization. The majority of such students are found more prone to western culture and lifestyle, risking their cultural and ethnic identities. To counter these historical inadequacies in language planning policies in education, this study advocates a strategy that may be applied to the whole country in an attempt to reform the education system. The objectives of the study are to enable the students to face the global world contributively and to allow them a fair chance to retain their cultural and ethnic identities. The strategy evolved in this study owes much to Stewart's (1968) Language Planning policy of recognizing and preserving important languages along with adopting one or more official languages for cross-language communication.

Soon after the end of Musharraf's dictatorial era (1999–2008), the ethnic unrest and feeling of insecurity among various groups concerning their languages came to the fore. Elected representatives also demanded rightful status to various regional languages. Print and electronic media was employed and several academicians, intellectuals, scholars and freelance writers highlighted the urgency of the matter. It was recommended that all major languages of the country should be acknowledged as national languages as a preservation strategy for local cultural heritage. Eventually, the matter was put before a parliamentary committee to suggest recommendations. However, due to the absence of language planning experts in the committee, the

matter was mainly dealt with politically with less or no attention to its repercussions for the educational system. During the debate, it was also noted that efforts were underway to introduce Chinese in public schools, which seems to be a step in the wrong direction in the absence of a clearly formulated language in education policy. The government needs to seriously revisit its policy of taking decisions on timely basis putting aside the long term interests of the country allied with education (Spolsky, 2009).

Inspired by Labov's (1982) commitment to combat linguistic misconceptions and injustices along with Trudgill's (1991) exhortation to linguists to apply linguistic knowledge to address real-world problems, I decided to document these views to spark the conscience of the nation in general and of the government in particular. At the same time, I must confess that instead of doubting the sincerity of those at the helm of affairs, I attribute our failures to the lack of adequate knowledge and expert opinion on relevant time and forum.

### **Language Situation before the Emergence of Pakistan**

Pakistan was established in 1947 as a result of a century long struggle for freedom by the people of the Indian sub-continent. Before emergence, it was part of the British India including the present-day India and Bangladesh (part of Pakistan till 1971). The areas of the Indian sub-continent that later formed parts of Pakistan were administered as independent units and the colonial rulers had separate policy for each region. The freedom movement took its impetus from a host of unaddressed issues including language question. The Hindus wanted Hindi to succeed English after independence while the Muslims raised their voice in favour of Urdu (Rahman, 2007, p. 57; Ayres, 2009; Rai, 1984). This Urdu-Hindi controversy was at the heart of the polarized India that later forced the Muslims to demand a separate homeland (Rahman, 2007, p. 59). When the partition was about to reach its culminating point, Bengali emerged as another contender the advocates of which rejected both Urdu and Hindi as tokens of political slavery (Rahman, 2006, p. 84).

### **Language Situation after the Emergence of Pakistan**

The freedom movement against the foreign occupation reached its logical end in 1947. Primarily it was the movement against the English rule, but it also widened the gap between the Hindus and Muslims of the sub-continent. Subsequently, the latter also added partition from the former in their agenda that was accepted after years of struggle. Consequently, the English rulers submitted to the will of Indians and divided the country into two separate, independent and autonomous units: India and Pakistan. The areas that formed parts of Pakistan included East Bengal, Punjab, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (former N-W. F. P.), Balochistan, Gilgit Baltistan (former Northern Areas), princely states and tribal areas. A huge influx of migrating people was faced by both the countries from hostile areas on either side of the border that constitutes a disturbing chapter in political history of the region. In this context, it is important to mention that the majority of more than 1 million Muslims migrating from

Hindu dominated territories including Uttar Pradesh, Madhya Pradesh, Bihar and other areas of north India spoke various dialects of Urdu. They were settled in the province of Sindh in general and its capital Karachi in particular.

Once the dream for a separate homeland for the Muslims was realised, the founding fathers had to take decisions on economic, social, and cultural fronts to determine the future fate of the country. The question of language was equally important that would glue the people into one nation and become a token of national pride. However, the answer to the question would not be a straightforward one. The ruling elite in the centre wanted to continue with Urdu (LAD-P25 February 1948, p. 16) with staunch support from Urdu-speaking immigrants (cf. Fatehpuri, 1987) and many scholars and intellectuals (Rahman, 2007, p. 75). A certain section of intelligentsia advocated the case of Arabic that, according to them, derived its status from the religious practices of Islam. They argued that it would contribute in the promotion of strong ties with the Arab world, would unite the Muslims against Urdu that could harbour division and isolation amongst the speakers of other languages (Khan, 1957). Bengalis in particular demanded the Bengali language to be declared as the only national language the speakers of which constituted more than half of the population (56%) of Pakistan. However, it was spoken in East Pakistan only and was as foreign to the people in the west as any other language (Matin, 1994, p. 327). With a view to find solution to the problem, a certain group of leaders proposed that national status should be accorded to major languages with English maintained for official correspondence. Among the virtually impractical solutions there was one which included adoption of Bengali as the national language in Bengal (East Pakistan) and Urdu in the rest of the country (West Pakistan) that could have caused equal resentment for Punjabis who enjoyed the majority.

To put an end to this debate, the government pre-emptively decided the case in favour of Urdu (Zaman, 1984, p. 3) as the sole national language of the country in 1948 (Kazi, 1987, p. 47) and English for official correspondence. It was hoped that various ethnic groups would compromise their positions for greater good but, contrary to it, the situation was aggravating with each passing day. Some historians would justify the feelings of resentment by quoting census count conducted after three years of independence in 1951, where Urdu was the mother tongue of 2.37% and the second language of only 4.2% of the total population of Pakistan, whilst Bengali was the mother tongue of 56.42%, Panjabi 28.55%, Sindhi 8.47%, Pashto 3.48% and Balochi 1.29%. English was the mother tongue of only 0.02% and was spoken by 1.1% of the total population as the second language.

The choice of Urdu and English made the country 'exoglossic' (Bell, 1976, pp. 170–171) as it practically imposed two exotic languages with a tiny number of native speakers that did not form the majority in any sense of the term (Kloss, 1968). The choice was also interpreted as a general disregard for popular sentiment by many. It can be said that this decision was partly political and partly historical but it did deprive various ethnic groups from active contact with their mother tongues particularly in the sphere of education and power circles. Instead of accommodating their concerns, the father of the nation, Quaid-i-Azam Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the Governor General of Pakistan countered all opposition in his address at Dacca University in 1948 and decreed:

*...let me make it very clear to you that the state language of Pakistan is going to be Urdu and no other language. Anyone who tries to mislead you is really the enemy of Pakistan. Without one State Language, no nation can remain tied up solidly together and function. (quoted in Callard, 1957, p. 182)*

On the surface level, the supporters of Urdu would fancy their victory in the face of the unarmed opposition and would rejoice calling shots, drumming the support of the powerful, but others, particularly the Bengalis, would not give up. They protested the verdict and later gathered their resources to make an imprint over the sands of time (Le Page, 1964, p. 27). The central government, on the other hand, embarked on a program to strengthen and thus establish Urdu as lingua franca and the sole national language of the country to be used in all government functions and as the medium instruction at all levels of education. Witnessing these opposing trends, Rahman (2004, p. 9) terms this linguistic decision as the foundation of movement for the eventual separation of East Pakistan (Bangladesh) although he does not doubt the sincerity of the then rulers in striving for unity through Urdu but such a unifying strategy is, according to many researchers, fraught with politics and conflict (Peshkin, 1962; Shackle, 1977; Oldenburg, 1985; Huizinga, 1994; Ayres, 2009). The choice of one language for linguistic and cultural homogeneity was countered on intellectual grounds for having a reverse effect as Crocombe noted:

*Cultural uniformity is not likely to bring peace, it is much more likely to bring totalitarianism. A unitary system is easier for a privileged few to dominate. Cultural and linguistic diversity is one of the world's potential sources of both sanity and fulfilment.*

*(Crocombe, 1983, pp. 148)*

### **Present Status of Various Languages Spoken in Pakistan**

In the present scenario, the people of Pakistan seem divided over the issues of national importance including language. The state owns English and Urdu at government level and equally enthusiastic are the urban-based private sector organisations including educational ones in toeing them. The various regions have not fully accepted the two as alternatives to their own linguistic identities and the people there do not readily identify themselves as a national polity. The recent history reveals resentment with particular reference to riots in Sindh (Ahmed, 1992) where the majority Sindhi speakers are at loggerhead with the minority Urdu speakers. For all practical purposes, the latter do not feel the need of learning Sindhi and are powerful enough to resist any such policy that may give ascendancy to it in the province (Rahman, 2002). Likewise, separatist tendencies also seem to be centring around a language choice in various provinces that need to be addressed on rational and productive basis (Ayres, 2009; Rahman, 2010).

In general, regional languages have become a liability instead of an asset for their speakers to attain higher positions, good jobs and national respect that can be exceptional without English and Urdu. Even the majority Punjabi speaking community in Punjab are noted for their general reluctance to educate their children in their mother tongue. Similarly, measures were adopted by the government of KPK in 2003

to promote Urdu instead of Pashtu in offices and educational institutions. An epoch-making decision in the 1990s was taken in Baluchistan to introduce regional languages as the compulsory medium of instruction (Ayres, 2009; LAD-Bal June 21, April 15, 1990) but the state took not more than three years to reverse it. This mindset of the politico-urban elite summarized in the phrase 'Urdu Imperialism in Pakistan' has historically been responsible for linguistic insecurity among provinces, endangering the survival of regional languages and threatening linguistic and cultural diversity in the country.

### **Language Policies Adopted by Malaysia, Switzerland, Nigeria, and Canada**

All over the world, multiethnic and multilingual countries have faced the confusing issue of formulating language policy in such a way as to relate it to prosperity both global and domestic along with serving as a symbol of unity and linguistic identity. Such countries have either set the direction or are in the process of its resolution. As Pakistan has yet to satisfy its people and to take them on board for it, some case studies have been selected that may help facilitate and guide the course of direction; the policy planners may undertake in drafting a national language policy. At the same time, it is acknowledged that these case studies may not be fully relevant to Pakistan as language planning can only be appreciated with reference to its social context (Cooper, 1989, p. 3; Ferguson, 1977, p. 9).

After independence from the colonial rule in 1957, Malaysian policy makers were enthusiastic about replacing English and selected Bahasa Melayu as their national language in education and official correspondence (Gill, 2002, p. 37). They focused on education and followed the agenda of nation-building, identity and national unity (Tollefson & Tsui, 2004, p. viii). A comprehensive program of cultivation and modernization of the national language was launched with the support of the government. However, they did not appreciate changing global trends and the currency of English in private sector business and industry that did not form active part of their policy. It was sensed that after a period of more than 40 years, Malaysia could not replace English owing to its international status. Globalization forced them to engage with international community and to open English-medium educational institutions with a view to internationalize it. However, this was not all, the government also felt it their duty to revisit its decades old policy of language. Consequently, at the dawn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century they changed side and announced the reversal of their previous policy switching over from Bahasa Melayu to English as the medium of instruction at all levels. It is important to note that this reversal was 'top-down' implying that the ruling elite took this decision without actually consulting its end users (Gill, 2005, p. 243; Kaplan & Baldauf, 1997, p. 196).

Switzerland is often quoted as a success story in handling diverse linguistic and cultural interests in a multilingual setting. Although with the population of only over 8 million, it has four national languages including German, French, Italian and Romanche (Fasold, 1984). In the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was a vulnerably lone republic faced with the challenge to keep united its various ethnic groups amidst powerful monarchies. To avoid an internal rift, the 1848 constitution had explicitly mentioned

German, Italian and French as national languages without discrimination. The Swiss government successfully manages the country's diversity through the interplay of three institutional principles including *language territoriality*, *language freedom* and *subsidiarity* (Grin, 1998).

*Territoriality* implies an unwritten constitutional principle that specifies it a duty of each canton to ensure the extent and homogeneity of their language territory. The law also denies the right of education to its citizen in other national languages. The principle of *language freedom*, also unwritten, is meant to ensure freedom of expression and use of language in private sphere, e.g., language of business and commerce. *The Subsidiarity* principle renders each canton sovereign and empowers it to decide areas to be delegated to the confederation including language policy and higher education. In other words, language policy rests in canton and any administrative act applies it to the canton of its origin. Each canton has also ensured recourse to small political units operating in the canton to deal with bilingual or trilingual situation. The policy of Switzerland based on territoriality has resulted in attachment of its citizen with the country. In March 1996, a huge majority voted for a constitutional amendment that allowed the central government to work for the uplift of Romanche and Italian language and culture by increasing its support.

Nigeria has also attempted to streamline its language situation by declaring major languages including Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba as national languages while English enjoys the official status. National languages are used in domestic affairs in the provinces while English is used at national and international administration of affairs (Schmied, 1991). All these languages are used in judicial system, parliament, formulation and promulgation of laws. The language of primary education remains the mother tongue while English is added to it later. Secondary level school education make all of them compulsory for teaching while at university level, they can be taught but all are optional (<http://www.unesco.org/culture/ich/doc/src/00245-EN.pdf>). The 1981 national education policy states that every child should learn, in addition to his own, any of the three languages (Oyetade, 2003). However, many scholars differentiate between the stated and real policy of the state as far as the extent of implementation of language policy is concerned. One main reason is the existence of minority languages whose speakers have been opposing this state of affairs in the country. To counter the problem that exists in Nigeria, the case of Canada emerges more informative and instructive.

Canadian province of Quebec is inhabited by two major ethnic groups where English-speaking is in majority while the French ones are in minority. The former held a sway over labor market and employment opportunities that compelled the French-speaking minority to learn English to secure entry into and compete for various sociocultural, political and economic positions. This state of affairs did not continue for long and after crossing a threshold, this resentment converted into a series of conflicts followed by a demand for linguistic rights for the French-speaking communities both inside and outside Quebec. The rising discontent resulted in the passage of a popular bill in 1977 that gave equal rights to French and English in the country and declared the former as the official language of Quebec. It made education in French obligatory for immigrant children from other provinces and introduced "Francization Certificate" in private and public companies in Quebec. Further, Sign Law was also passed in 1989

that implemented the use of French in all outdoor commercial signs (Oyetade, 2003, pp. 112–113).

### **Conclusion and recommendations**

In the context of Pakistan, it is observed that much urgent work is needed to revisit the past policies and to do away with inadequacies therein. A countrywide National language policy is the demand of the hour particularly in the context of education. A renewed enthusiasm is also observed among writers, scholars and intellectuals (see also Khalique, 2007; Lyon & Edgar, 2010; Rahman, 2011). In addition, several points of fundamental importance are highlighted and proposed according to which language policy can be formulated keeping in view national unity and education development in the country. These points can be discussed and elaborated at micro level to reach a unanimous decision.

- All major languages of sizeable population may be considered as national languages.
- Provincial languages should be made the medium of official discourse in the respectable provinces in addition to their status as a mother tongue.
- Urdu should be declared as a medium of communication between the people of Pakistan as a lingua franca in addition to its status as a mother tongue.
- Provincial language may be made a compulsory course at school level up to the 10<sup>th</sup> grade (metric level) with English and Urdu included as compulsory courses from the 6<sup>th</sup> grade onwards.
- The state needs to enforce the same in all private sector schools operating in the jurisdiction of each province. Similarly, the federally administered schools (private/public) must offer one compulsory course in either of these languages at the choice of student(s) along with Urdu and English.
- From F.A in Science and Technology subjects all the subjects should be taught in English and student(s) should be offered at least one year English language proficiency course during their two years of study of F.A along with regular courses.
- From F.A in Arts, Humanities and Social Sciences, all the subjects except language and literature may be taught in English.
- Language courses may be made compulsory for government officials for service in other province.
- It may be enforced that all public and private sector universities operating in the general stream must have a full-fledged department / institute / academy offering courses in the provincial language.
- English may be declared the official language of the country as an international language while the use of age old worn out stamp of imperial language may be discouraged.
- Urdu shall be declared the language of communication and business across the country.
- Provincial language proficiency to communicate with local people is necessary for everyday business.



- Provision should be made in educational institutions for those who want to work, settle, study or carry on business in other province to get proficiency in the language of that province.
- Efforts should be made to teach all provincial languages to the people of Pakistan. This can be initiated from some level at university education that before graduating students can be asked to learn at least one provincial language other than their own. This will encourage the mobility among people of all provinces.
- Measures may be taken to allow one province to sponsor, promote and fund its language in the universities of other province(s) by launching a language department/institute/academy.
- To avoid controversy and to make this draft more acceptable, it is recommended that any time it may be put before a panel of language experts and academicians from all over the country to discuss it thoroughly in collaboration with the ones who contributed in creation of this draft.
- Recourse to popular opinion through print and electronic media can be sought for improvement and creating awareness about importance of the matter among masses.
- Once the draft is presented before the parliament, it is recommended that those who drafted this document may be allowed to answer any query or reservation expressed during the course of its enactment.

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### **PAKISTANO KALBOS: STATUSO IR VARTOSENOS ANALIZĖ**

**Santrauka.** Pietų ir pietryčių Azijos besivystančios šalys susiduria su įvairiais socialiniais, ekonominiais, politiniais ir kultūriniais iššūkiais. Šių visuomenių, kaip pavyzdžiui, Pakistano, daugiakalbė ir įvairiaetninė sandara vis dar ženkliai apsunkina vieningos kalbų politikos sukūrimo galimybę. Sumaištį dar labiau padidina nuolat auganti anglų kalbos, kaip pasaulinės kalbos, svarba bei nykstanti arba stagnuojanti vietinių kalbų reikšmė, daugiakalbėms šalims nesugebant vykdyti visapusiškos kalbų išsaugojimo strategijos. Pakistane kalbų planavimas ir vietinių kalbų statuso įvertinimas visada sukeldavo diskusijų šalies politinėje, teisinėje ir konstitucinėje istorijos plotmėje. Iki pasidalijimo subkontinentinei šaliai istorijai buvo būdinga urdu–hindi polemika, tačiau po 1947 metų iškilo bengali kalba, dėl kurios kilo nemažai nesutarimų, galiausiai ji tapo viena iš priežasčių, nulėmusių atskirų Pakistano ir Bangladešo valstybių susiformavimą (Mustafa, 2011). Kol Pakistanas vis dar bando spręsti kalbų planavimo problemas, galima daryti prielaidą, kad, išanalizavus jo vykdytą kalbų politiką bei Malaizijos, Šveicarijos, Nigerijos ir Kanados kalbų planavimo žingsnius, galima nubrėžti gaires ir padėti visoms suinteresuotoms pusėms išvengti tų pačių klaidų. Tad pastarasis tyrimas nagrinėja kalbų planavimo patirtį Pakistane bei kitų šalių daugiau ar mažiau sėkmingus kalbų politikos įgyvendinimo atvejus.

**Pagrindinės sąvokos:** kalbų planavimas, kalbų politika, kalbos statusas, ugru kalba, hindi kalba.