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Language Medium Dynamics in Pakistani Education: A Historical Analysis

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Abstract: Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, Siraiki, and Baluchi are Pakistan's main languages. Although Urdu is the national language, English is still spoken in significant areas like higher bureaucracy and the armed forces officer corps, a remnant of British colonialism. This manuscript examines Pakistan's language medium dispute regarding English-only schooling for the privileged before partition. An English-educated Anglicized elite was expected to maintain British rule in their own interests, strengthening the empire. Thus, most provinces taught the masses in Urdu, save Sind, where Sindhi was used. This method produced a cost-effective subordinate workforce. In modern Pakistan, the elite attend exclusive English-medium schools, whereas most other schools, especially in metropolitan Sind, have a large Urdu population and teach in Urdu. The indigenously educated proto-elite, mostly Urdu-trained, opposes this duality and wants Urdu as the medium of education. Their argument is that such a transition will help them rise in power, countering the current preference for English education.

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Introduction

The decision about the language of instruction, which is a component of status planning in the field of education, is primarily dependent on political considerations. The ruling elite are the ones who are responsible for this responsibility, and as a result, it is completely influenced by the interests that they believe to be important. According to Cooper (1989), these interests may include the consolidation and perpetuation of their authority, the facilitation of the elite's access to key positions, the promotion of modernization and nation-building, and the goal to create a unified nation-state out of a variety of ethnic groupings. The purpose of this study is to investigate the ongoing debate that is taking place in Pakistan over the medium of instruction, notably in the sphere of politics, with a particular emphasis on ethnic factors. Due to the limited amount of space available, it is unfortunate that important topics such as bilingualism and the attitudes of society towards languages are not discussed here. However, it is essential to realize that these factors have been given substantial consideration in more extensive studies on language planning (Rahman, 1995a) and the historical discourse on language controversies in Pakistan (Rahman, 1996a). That is something that should be acknowledged (Rehman. 1997).

Pakistan's linguistic landscape, as determined by the distribution of speakers according to the 1981 Census, shows a wide range of diversity. The main languages and their corresponding percentages are: The population is comprised of Punjabi (48.2%), Pashto (13.2%), Sindhi (11.8%), Siraiki (9.5%), Urdu (7.6%), Baluchi (3%), Hindko (2.4%), Brahvi (1.2%), and various regional languages like as Khowar, Gujrati, Shina, Balti, Kohistani, Brushaski, Wakhi, etc., which collectively make up 2.8% of the population. The primary language of instruction is mostly

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Sindhi and, to a lesser degree, Pashto, despite the variety of languages spoken. Urdu, a non-native language, has become the national language of Pakistan. It is now the main language used for teaching in government schools, especially in urban areas such as Karachi and Hyderabad, where it has become the primary language for a large urban population. Urdu's rise as a significant mode of teaching can be linked to the period following independence. The 1951 Census emphasized that Urdu was the predominant language of instruction in most primary and middle schools in West Pakistan, except in areas where Sindhi, Pashto, or English were utilized. Urdu was frequently taught as a second language, even in those regions. In West Pakistan, a common trend developed where most literate folks preferred to write in Urdu. The linguistic environment in Pakistan, influenced by historical events, highlights the intricate relationship between language, education, and regional identity (Shackle, 2006).

Additional evidence that supports the contention that Urdu is the major language of instruction in government schools, especially in the cities of Sind that are dominated by the Mohajir, will be elaborated upon in later parts; these sections will focus on Sindhi and Pashto. It is important to highlight that English, on the other hand, is the language that is used as the medium of instruction in prestigious educational institutions such as schools for the military forces, public schools, private schools that are taught in English, and universities. This remarkable status that is assigned to English is met with criticism by a group that Rahman (1996b) refers to as the Urdu proto-elite. This group advocates for the replacement of English with Urdu. The Urdu language, on the other hand, is met with opposition from advocates of indigenous languages, more notably from regionalists and ethno-nationalists. The power dynamics between the Westernized ruling elite and the indigenous proto-elite are inextricably connected to these divergent views, the power dynamics being discussed here. At the same time, they are a reflection of the larger conflict that exists within the social landscape between the central authority and the periphery (David et al., 2017).

According to the findings of this research, the conflict surrounding the medium of instruction is not merely an educational issue; rather, it is a matter that is infused with political dimensions. In the ongoing power struggle, Westernized elites compete against indigenous proto-elites, and the central authority competes with the periphery. These dimensions are the result of this battle. In addition to digging into the complexities of this argument, the paper offers a chronological account of the historical discussions that have surrounded the medium of instruction. This helps to throw light on the changing dynamics and perspectives that have occurred over the course of time.

Language Instruction Dilemmas: The Orientalist-Anglicist Debate

One of the most significant turning points in India's history was the arrival of the British era, which marked the beginning of the modern era. It was during this time period that there was a substantial increase in the professional middle class, particularly within the realm of bureaucracy, which resulted in the state becoming the main employer. The language that the state chose to use for its administrative activities was of the utmost significance because it became inextricably connected to the authority that was possessed by the political system. During the time that Muslims ruled India, Persian was the language that was adopted for administrative purposes. In spite of this, a language dispute between the Orientalists and the Anglicists occurred as a result of the entrance of the British.

There were a significant number of English speakers among the Orientalists, and they advocated for the continuation of Persian as the administrative language. They were concerned that if they used English as the medium of instruction, it would alienate the native intelligentsia and maybe inspire insurrection. This was the core of their thinking. The Anglicists, on the other hand, who advocated for the universal adoption of English, believed that teaching the language would result in the development of an Anglicized elite. It was believed that this elite would be innately loyal to the imperial authority because it owed its power and social standing to the rule of the

British imperial government. As a matter of fact, the Orientalist and Anglicist strategies were both driven by a political motivation, which was the consolidation of the newly constituted empire (Rahman, 1996c).

In the year 1835, Lord William Bentinck, who was serving as Governor General at the time, made a significant change in language policy. This change was a direct result of the influence of renowned Anglicists such as Trevelyan and Macaulay. Bentinck chose to Anglicize the language and switch the medium of instruction to English, despite the fact that he was an Anglicist imperialist himself, as is obvious in his correspondence with Trevelyan. While this was going on, in the year 1837, the language that was used in the courts went through a transition. On the other hand, the vernacular language was the one that prevailed, as stated in the resolution that was issued by the Governor General on September 4, 1839 (Malaviya, 1897: 49). This language was considered to be understood by the natives. The delicate interplay that existed between language choices, political ideologies, and the establishment of imperial control in India throughout the colonial period is reflected in this historical juncture. The dispute over language, which was influenced by the viewpoints of Orientalists and Anglicists, created the framework for long-lasting repercussions on education, governance, and the structures of society in the subcontinent (Bhattacharya, 2017).

The Language Divide: Vernacular and English in Colonial India

At the beginning of the nineteenth century, there was a strong desire to Anglicize languages, which resulted in the neglect of vernacular languages. Notable figures such as Sir Erskine Perry, who served in the Bombay Presidency, were ardent supporters of the promotion of English (Richey, 1922). On the other hand, other individuals, such as George Jervis, expressed concerns regarding the possibility of an Anglicized elite being isolated from the rest of the native population, citing their perceived superiority (Jervis, 1847: 12). With the Governor General-in-Council's decision to support education in vernacular languages, this linguistic debate was finally resolved (Richey, 1922). This decision was the critical step that brought about the resolution of this controversy (Evans, 2002).

The allure of prominent posts, particularly within the sought-covenanted public service such as the Indian Public Service (ICS), which was accessible through English, sparked significant interest among Indians to gain fluency in the language (RPI Oudh, 1869; RPI Punjab, 1871, 1877, 1888, etc.). This enthusiasm was pushed forward by the fact that English was the language of communication. A policy that was pursued by the Education Commission of 1882 (1883) was established by the Wood's Despatch of 1854, which created the groundwork for the dissemination of Western knowledge through the medium of English. Lord Curzon, an advocate for vernacularization, voiced his worries during a conference held in Simla in 1904, pointing out that the promotion of English education had resulted in the neglect of vernacular languages (Basu, 1947: 63–64). This was in spite of the fact that the English language continues to be the primary focus of attention. In turn, this led to a rebirth of interest in vernacularization, which was a positive development.

Vernacularization garnered significant support as the Indian nationalist movement gained steam, which included widespread backing for the movement. However, a variety of perspectives surfaced among nationalist politicians concerning the selection of vernacular language as an alternative to written English. In the same way that Muslims saw Urdu as a symbol of their identity and pride, Hindus regarded Hindi as a symbol of their identity. As a consequence of this, the issue around Hindi and Urdu became linked with all efforts that were made to vernacularize the language (for a detailed discussion of the controversy, see Brass, 1974; Dittmer, 1972; Robinson, 1974). During a crucial juncture in India's history, this intricate historical backdrop sheds light on the dynamic interplay that existed between educational systems, cultural identities, and linguistic policy. The vernacularization debate, which is molded by different perspectives, demonstrates the varied nature of language politics in the

context of colonialism and the tremendous impact that it had on the trajectory of education in the subcontinent Mohanty, P. (2002).

Despite the fact that Gandhi emphasized the relevance of the mother tongue in education and asserted its function as the foundational element (Hussain, 1938: 17), Muslims began to express their dissatisfaction with the Congress government in 1936. They had the impression that Hindi was being imposed on them, and they showed no regard for Urdu (Jang, 1940). On the other hand, the British and the Indian elite both had a strong hostility to the practice of vernacularization at all levels of schooling. As a consequence of this, vernacular languages were only introduced up until the high school level, even though English continued to be the medium of instruction in higher education. The aristocracy supported chiefs' colleges for their sons, which placed an emphasis on the learning of the English language and customs (Raleigh, 1906: 245). On the other hand, vernaculars were mostly utilized in government schools for the masses. The majority of Indians were not able to attend European or convent schools because of birth or economic restraints (Sharp, 1918). The professional middle class chose to attend these different types of schools. According to Education in India (1941: 113), European schools, which only admitted ten to twenty percent of Indian students, resulted in much higher expenditures, with each student costing Rs156, compared to Rs14 for all types of educational institutions, ranging from basic schools to universities.

The result was that the people who were educated in vernaculars were only able to aspire to positions of subordination within the bureaucracy. The most powerful jobs were held for Englishmen or Indians who were fluent in English, either because they had received their education in English-medium institutions or because they demonstrated exceptional talent. Through the implementation of the vernacularization of mass education, a major reduction in bureaucracy was established, which resulted in the elimination of the requirement for importation from England. This lesser "salariat," as Alavi (1987) referred to it, eventually developed into the anti-English lobby or the vernacular proto-elite in Pakistan when the country gained its independence. At the same time, members of the upper salariat, who were members of the Anglicized elite, obtained positions of influence within the ruling elite. To get a complete understanding of the issue surrounding the medium of instruction, one must have an understanding of the power struggle that exists between various elites or sectors of the salariat (Alcott, B., & Rose, P. (2015).

Educational Discourse: The Role of Urdu as the Medium of Instruction

Urdu, historically representing Muslim identity throughout the Hindi-Urdu debate, maintained its importance in post-independence Pakistan. The Muslim League leaders in power maintained the connection between Urdu and Islam as well as Pakistani identity. They viewed Urdu not just for its symbolic significance but also as a unifying influence with the ability to assimilate the various nationalities of Pakistan. As a result, Urdu was chosen as the national language, and a uni-national thesis was promoted to highlight the idea that Pakistanis are a unified group. During the initial years of Pakistan, the choice to substitute English with Urdu was widely embraced, as demonstrated by the establishment of an Official Language Committee in Punjab in 1949. The committee's goal was to substitute English terminology with Urdu equivalents and suggested the use of Urdu in secondary education and universities. Despite the general agreement in favor of Urdu over English, exclusive schools, such as cadet colleges, increased significantly, particularly following Ayub Khan's enforcement of martial law. Ayub Khan, in his capacity as a commander and then as the ruler, supported the creation of prestigious public institutions to educate bright young men for leadership positions (Zia, R. (2003).

The pro-Urdu campaign continued through the Urdu proto-elite, promoting the use of Urdu in areas of influence like administration, justice, and education. The officer corps in higher administration, judiciary, and the military persisted in using English despite the efforts made. Furthermore, higher education, particularly in scientific

and technological fields, continued to be primarily conducted in English. In 1969, after Ayub Khan left, General Yahya's administration started a committee headed by Air Marshal Nur Khan to revamp the educational system. The group suggested that Urdu and Bengali should replace English as the medium of education by 1975. The concept encountered substantial opposition from advocates of English and regional languages.

Opponents of Zulfiqar Ali Bhutto's government, such as the National Awami Party and Jamiat-e-Ulema-i-Islam in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP) and Baluchistan, supported the use of Urdu during his tenure from 1971 to 1977. The PPP did not support the promotion of Urdu during its time in power, as it would have been in agreement with the opposition's position. The Urdu lobby, mostly consisting of religious individuals who were against Bhutto, utilized Urdu conferences as forums to criticize the PPP. Overall, the historical and symbolic importance of Urdu faced obstacles and resistance when trying to gain influence in powerful circles, highlighting the intricate linguistic and political environment in Pakistan.

From 1977 until 1988, during General Zia Ul Haq's martial law regime, the powerful Urdu lobby supported the right-wing ideology, encouraged by the general's focus on Urdu and Islam as representations of Pakistani and Muslim identity. In 1979, Zia created the Muqtadra Qaumi Zaban (National Language Authority) and required Urdu to be used as the main language of teaching in all schools (Pakistan Times, 4 February 1979). Therefore, in 1989, the matriculation examination was scheduled to be exclusively administered in Urdu. The proposal to eliminate exclusive English-medium schools was reversed before being fully executed. General Zia acquiesced to persuasion and allowed English to be used as a language of teaching in certain schools, as reported on October 28, 1987, in the Pakistan Times. Even after years of democratic rule, English continued to be the main language of instruction in exclusive institutions.

Liberal humanists and left-leaning elements of the intelligentsia have often supported the use of English, especially during Benazir Bhutto's two terms in office from 1988 to 1990 and 1993 to 1996. The preference for English can be linked to Urdu's relationship with conservative groups promoting more rigorous enforcement of Sharia law or fundamentalist interpretations of it. Linguistic decisions in education are closely linked to wider ideological and political factors, influencing the language dynamics in Pakistan's educational system.

Urdu in Contention: Exploring Ethno-Nationalist Resistance

Resistance to Urdu among aristocratic groups is frequently subtle, masked by claims of efficiency, global connectivity, or modernism. The English-speaking elite often conceals their resistance to Urdu by expressing it indirectly. Advocates of regional or indigenous languages in Pakistan openly and firmly resist the dominance of Urdu. Urdu faced significant resistance during the Bengali Language Movement between 1948 and 1954. Despite Jinnah's rejection in March 1948, the movement continued to gain pace, resulting in terrible events in Dhaka on February 21, 1952, where police killed some of its adherents. This tragedy resulted in long-lasting anger, which ultimately led to the call for the establishment of Bangladesh in 1971. Although Bengali was formally acknowledged as a national language in 1956, it had previously served as a representation of East Bengal's increasing disconnection from West Pakistan during the language struggle. This symbolic connection contributed to the ultimate formation of Bangladesh.

Sindhi became a prominent language in the lower echelons of authority in West Pakistan. After non-Muslims left Sind in 1947, Urdu-speaking Mohajirs took their place, according to the Census of 1951. In 1981, Mohajirs made up 22.6% of the population in Sind, while Sindhis accounted for 52.4%. Mohajirs were notably dominant in major cities such as Karachi and Hyderabad despite their larger numbers (Census, 1981). Sind was essentially divided between Sindhis and non-Sindhis, with a power struggle occurring due to the debate over the medium of instruction between Urdu and Sindhi. The language selection dynamics and power conflicts in Sind

highlight the complex relationship between linguistic identity and regional politics. The debate about the language used for teaching provides insight into the larger socio-political issues in the region.

In 1948, a year after Pakistan was founded, there were 69 Urdu-medium schools with 18,440 pupils in Sind, but only 57 Sindhi-medium schools had 6,965 students (ABE, 1950: 59). In 1954, there were 187 Urdu-medium schools, surpassing the 76 Sindhi-medium institutions. Approximately 30 primary Sindhi-medium schools were closed during Ayub Khan's rule from 1958 to 1969 (LAD-Sind, 29 May 1974: 30).

The central government's unwavering endorsement of Urdu negatively affected Sindhi's standing. The 1959 Report on National Education awarded Urdu the same status in Sind as in the rest of West Pakistan, suggesting that Sindhi, formerly used as a medium of instruction up to matriculation, would be replaced by Urdu. Protests by the Sindhi community in 1992 prompted the reinstatement of Sindhi's previous status, as documented by Rashdi in 1984. Nevertheless, several Sindhi-medium schools were shut down, and the authorized utilization of the language was limited (LAD-Sind, 19 November 1973).

In 1966, ethno-nationalistic student pressure groups in Sind attempted to persuade the University of Sind to use Sindhi as the language for teaching and testing, but the government resisted this proposal. Nur Khan's proposed New Education Policy prioritized Urdu over Sindhi, leading to protests by Sindhi nationalists following G.M. Syed. The government's efforts to control the increasing impact of ethnicity in Sind were not successful despite not implementing extreme measures.

In 1970, the Board of Intermediate and Secondary Education and Sind University collaborated to encourage the use of Sindhi, sparking opposition from the Mohajirs. In January-February 1971, language riots broke out, intensifying the ongoing division between the Mohajirs and Sindhis. The PPP government under Bhutto took over this division when it came into power in 1971. The Sind PPP introduced the Sind Bill of 1972, which required the study of Sindhi and Urdu from levels IV to XII and made proficiency in Sindhi a prerequisite for employment in Sind. The Mohajirs protested, leading to rioting that caused substantial human and property damage (LAD-Pakistan, 28 August 1972). The Mohajirs have gained political influence through the Mohajir Qaumi Movement (MQM) and have since associated themselves with Urdu. Sindhi is mainly employed in rural schools where the majority of the population is Sindhi. In urban areas like Karachi, where Mohajirs are the largest group, the teaching of Sindhi is usually minimal.

The thorough analysis of the Sindhi example demonstrates that it was the sole language used in positions of authority, though to a lesser extent, in the area currently referred to as Pakistan under British governance. Conversely, Urdu was the common language of the Punjab, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), and Baluchistan. Language movements in these areas faced the issue of replacing Urdu while also maintaining the status of their own languages, as seen in Sindh (for further information, see Rahman, 1996a).

Language became closely connected with ethno-nationalism in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Baluchistan. Khan Ghaffar Khan's Khudai Khidmatgar Movement and his son Wali Khan's political parties, first the National Awami Party and then the Awami National Party, highlighted Pashto as an important symbol of identity for the Pashtuns. The ruling class viewed Pashto with distrust due to its affiliation with Afghanistan's irredentist ambitions, especially the Pakhtunistan notion in the North West Frontier Province (Khyber Pakhtunkhwa). In 1984, Pashto was allowed to be used as a language of instruction in some schools in the KP Province. Nevertheless, the execution of the program was met with opposition from the Pakhtun community due to fears of possible ghettoization, as noted in a report on Pashto (Education Department, 1991). The assessment indicated that Pashto was not consistently implemented in primary schools and was not included as a topic in Urdu-medium schools (Education Department, 1991: 1–4). Despite being introduced, the teaching efficiency of this language was lower

compared to Urdu and English in government schools, resulting in fewer schools using it as a medium of instruction.

Language has been significant in ethno-nationalism in Baluchistan, leading to Baluchi not being used as a teaching language in schools. Both the absence of standards and concerns about potential ghettoization contribute to this. Furthermore, the multi-ethnic makeup of Baluchistan, especially in the capital Quetta, where non-Baluchi speakers surpass Baluchi speakers, contributes to the intricacy of language interactions.

In Punjab, the primary ethnic group's language, Punjabi, is neglected, while Urdu is actively endorsed as the language of culture and national unity. This promotion caters to the largely Punjabi governing elite's interests, as Urdu offers a more extensive support base and larger geographical reach for government and employment prospects than Punjab alone. The intentional refusal to recognize Punjabi as a medium of teaching, especially in primary education, is defended by the elite as a way to maintain Urdu as a representation of national unity. The Punjabi Movement, which supports the use of Punjabi in educational and other settings, is considered to be quite feeble, even in Lahore (Shackle, 1970). The foundation is primarily socio-psychological rather than political, motivated by the aim to sustain Punjabi culture and self-esteem among its supporters (Qaisar & Pal, 1988; also referenced by Kammi, 1988).

The Siraiki Movement, which began in southern Punjab, aims to promote Siraiki as the language used for teaching in schools. The movement is not only linguistic but also has political implications, as Siraikis aims to establish a distinct province inside Punjab. The discontent arising from underdevelopment is seen as a type of 'internal colonialism' by activists in the movement (Rahman, 1995e).

Conclusion

English remains the dominant language associated with authority and social status in Pakistan. It acts as an entrance for wealthy and powerful individuals to obtain prestigious positions, essentially excluding those educated in Urdu. The governing elite in Pakistan verbally expresses support for Urdu, notwithstanding the actual situation. This perceived support for Urdu is strategic, acting as a symbol of national unity that enables the elite to exert control over a wider power structure than would be possible in a more decentralized setup.

Yet, the central backing of Urdu is resented by the outlying provinces of Pakistan. The ethno-nationalist emerging ruling class in regions such as Sind, the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Baluchistan, and the Siraiki area want to use their own languages for teaching. They support this strategy in accordance with the multi-ethnic thesis, which argues that the many regions of Pakistan contain various ethnocultural communities that should have significant self-governance and, in certain situations, complete independence. The desire for linguistic independence conflicts with the views of Pakistani nationalists and the ruling class, resulting in a continuous power struggle between the central government and ethno-nationalist leaders.

The medium of instruction argument in Pakistan is not just a linguistic debate but a reflection of the wider power struggle among different pressure groups, elites, and proto-elites throughout the country. The conflict illustrates the underlying contradictions between centralized control and regional independence, emphasizing the complex interplay of power and identity in the Pakistani setting.

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