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Language Policy in Multilingual and Multicultural Pakistan

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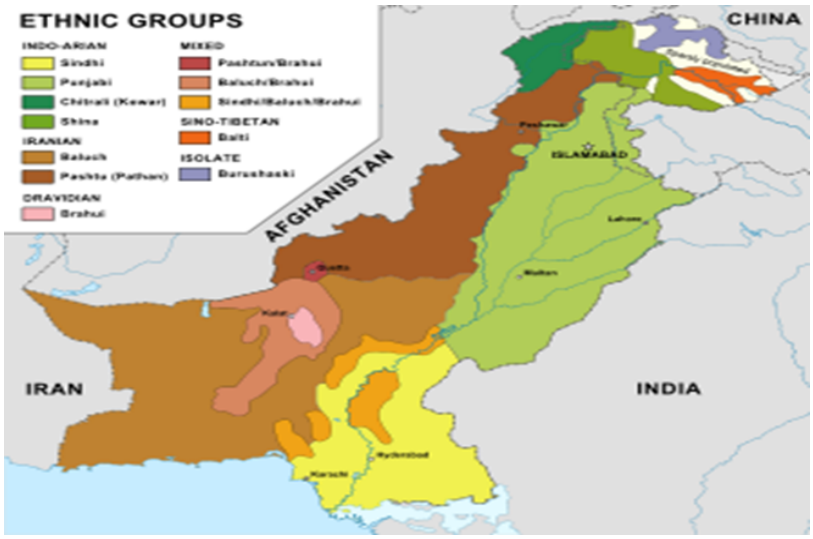
Abstract

Pakistan is one of the most populous countries with diversity in language and culture. Urdu is the national language and English is the official language. The only education language in most provinces is Urdu. However, most minority language speaker are discriminated and non-Urdu languages are a sign of stigma and poverty. Language policy makers in Pakistan are recommended to mind the following points to improve communication among Pakistanis so as to lead them to respect each other's language and culture. Education must be in mother language, all small indigenous languages should have orthography and endangered languages must be revitalized. Intercultural communication can be improved by help of media and encouraging and motivating people to learn other provinces languages. Overall, mutual intelligibility should be encouraged and enhanced in order to introduce different cultures to people. Television and Radio have crucial role in bring people in friendship from different cultures by producing movies in different languages and having music national channels. People should be aware that then can communicate by their own languages else Urdu and English because most languages in Pakistan derived from same language family.

Key words: diversity, language, communication, mutual intelligibility

INTRODUCTION

According to Rahman (2003), Pakistan is a multilingual country with six major and over fifty-nine small languages. Moreover, about 98% of languages spoken in Pakistan are of the Indo-Iranian branch (sub-branches: 75% of the Indo-Aryan branch and 20% of the Iranian branch), a branch of the Indo-European family of languages. Most languages of Pakistan have Perso-Arabic script, with significant vocabulary which are derived from Persian, Turkish, and Arabic. Punjabi (Shahmukhi), Saraiki, Sindhi, Pashto, Urdu, Balochi, Kashmiri (Koshur) are the general spoken languages within Pakistan. The major ethnic groups of Pakistan in numerical size include Punjabis, Pashtuns, Sindhis, Saraikis, Muhajirs, Balochis, Hindkowans, Chitralis and other smaller groups. (Wikipedia, 2013)



Major ethnic groups in Pakistan, Platon (1973)

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However, as Rahman (2003) indicates, English and Urdu are the languages of the domains of power—government, corporate sector, media, and education. Unfortunately, 91% to 95% of the country's children have no access to education in their mother tongue, making Pakistan one of 44 countries facing the same issue (Coleman, Pinnock, & Walter, as cited in Gouleta, 2013).

Rahman (2003) states that the state's policies have favored these two languages at the expense of others. This has resulted in ethnic identity crisis in speakers of languages other than Urdu. It has also resulted in English having become a symbol of the elite, sophistication and power.

According to Torwali (2013), enforcing a single language, Urdu, as educational and security policies language to achieve an imagined national cohesion is similar to a Trojan horse which strikes down the very goals for which it was intended. On the other hand, this "one language, one religion, one nation" policy founds the hegemony of a single language and as a result an alien culture because language is the most effective driver of culture. This speeds up the language and culture change within society and ends with more chaos and an unending identity crisis. The most harmful and chaotic linguistic and cultural factors is the national policies of education.

Capstick (2010) the British Council's English language advisor in Pakistan indicates if people can have access education in their home language, all communities will be respected. But Pakistan is linguistically fractured and the dominance of two languages, Urdu and English, has led to the exclusion of children speaking one of the many other languages that are used throughout the country. This issue has the potential to accelerate social and political conflict in the country.

How to optimise communication in Pakistan while maintaining the linguistic diversity of the area?

As a master of multilingualism student who is learning how to deal with day-to-day issues such as helping multilingual areas overcome linguistic diversity problems, design language policies or give schools advice on how best to teach children with foreign language or multilingual backgrounds, I would like to mention some points about the linguistic diversity of Pakistan, students education problem and improving communication in this area.

Education in mother language

If children are forced to switch abruptly or transition too soon from learning in their mother tongue to schooling in a second language, their first language acquisition may be weakened or even lost. Even more importantly, their self-confidence as learners and their interest in what they are learning may decline, leading to lack of motivation, school failure and early school drop-out. (Morosu, as cited in Seifi, 2014)

Submersion instruction, application of Urdu as language of school instruction in non-Urdu regions makes students frustrated and increase underachievement.

Gouleta (2013) argues that the majority of first and second grade textbooks are inappropriate for young children especially those whose mother language is different from the language of school instruction. Books have long passages, complex texts and layouts, and they are written in Urdu using the Nasta-liq script (the "cursive" nonlinear form of Arabic), which makes it very difficult for young learners to become fluent readers. This is a huge disadvantage for children from linguistically diverse and poor households.

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Application of strong type of bilingual education like immersion is recommended in order to provide non-Urdu students with pleasant learning situation by respecting their rights as learning in their mother language or first language. This helps all minority language students in Pakistan to feel they belong to this country and release the pressure on their families due to their children's educational problems.

Therefore, application of mother languages of the children in schools in all on-Urdu provinces should be encouraged as the Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa government adopted Pashto as medium of instruction in primary education currricula. Moreover, it resolved to incorporate four other languages such as Hinko, Khowar, Seriaki and Indus Kohistani to be gradually incorporated in the education at the primary stages. Hopefully, such decisions for the other languages in the province will also be undertaken. (Torwali, 2013)

The vital solution for dropouts in schools is to promote bilingual education which can help students obtain knowledge in their mother language to build strong educational foundation and to retain pride in their own language. If they learn their own culture at school, their self-steam will be given back to them. As a result, they will have tendency to learn Urdu and English in order to have success in higher stages of education and to have a proper job deserving their talent and hard- working. This kind of additive education will support the unity of the country and may help to solve the identity crisis in the country.

Orthography for small indigenous languages and preserve endangered ones

All language activists, teachers, linguists and historians should be invited to develop writing systems for languages without any script and standardize different scripts of the same languages with different dialects. Call for cooperation on working on local languages by holding linguistic conferences and rewarding the best researchers is a must.

Government should sponsor linguistics, applied linguistics, anthropology and history department to work together to save the endangered languages, languages which are losing speakers gradually or have lost already. Those departments can allocate time and money to conduct some research on those regional dying languages and encourage students to document them, teach them to their communities and to transfer them to young generations.

Improving intercultural communication

Diplo (n. d.) mentions that lack of knowledge of another culture can lead to feel embarrassing or create misunderstandings in communication. At the worst, such mistakes may confuse or even offend the people that we wish to communicate with, making the conclusion of business deals or international agreements difficult or impossible.

"I do not want my house to be walled in on all sides and my windows to be stuffed. I want the cultures of all the lands to be blown about my house as freely as possible. But I refuse to be blown off my feet by any". (Gandhi, 1920, P. 170)

Additionally, Rahman (2003) mentions that the less powerful native languages of Pakistan are becoming markers of lower status, culture shame and stigma.

In order to instill confidence into local people, grandparents can be invited to storytelling meetings to describe the history of region and introducing brave people who had great role in the independency of Pakistan. Parents can be involved in education of children by helping teachers to transfer culture to young generations. Grandparents can have a great role in promoting and encouraging the literature in regional languages, as well.

To bring young people from different provinces as Balochistan, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Punjab, and Sindh in friendship and communicating closely with each other, town halls can provide people with free tours which can improve their relationships and introduce language and culture of different regions to young people. These relations persuade them to communicate by searching linguistic similarities or at least learn some new words in different local languages.

As a result, they may try to bridge the gap between different cultures and languages by communicating via modern mass media as face book, twitter and what's app.

Encourage all provinces to learn other languages

Rahman (2003) believes that while it may be impossible to change the trend of globalization, it is possible to persuade the concept of additive bilingualism rather than subtractive bilingualism. This means that we should add to our repertoire of languages to obtain power while retaining skills and pride in our own languages. In order to do this the state and our education system should promote the concept of linguistic rights.

Moreover, learning different languages of Pakistan creates more chances of having a job in different provinces. People should be encouraged to be tolerate to other cultures and religions by raising awareness. Indigenous cultures day should be celebrated. This is the duty of media in Pakistan to show all cultures in the country without bias so as to make people close to each other. The government should prepare situations of freedom of working and having education all over Pakistan for all people. According to European commission (2008), media can give knowledge about the benefits of learning a new language since the learning of other languages has many values. "It supports cognitive functions such as attention, perception, memory, concentration, concept formation, critical thinking, problem solving, cognitive flexibility, and ability to work in team. It supports both the cognitive development of young children, the mental agility of old people". (P. 8)

Motivate children and adults to learn other languages

Motivation has a key role in learning another language. If children become literate in their first language, this will pave the road for learning national language and other languages of other provinces. School and teachers have a major role in enhancing children's self-steam by teaching subjects in their first language and providing a better situation for learning national language which is necessary to develop to higher stages in education. Regarding learning English language which is the most important official language, this is the duty of authorities to send teachers to all poor parts of the country to give the chance of learning English to poor students who have no access to suitable resources.

Learning other languages must be a part of students' leisure time like sport. Moreover, efforts should be made to involve adults in language learning and helping children in learning different languages. Parents or grandparents can participate in story reading programs in languages that they know. This persuades children to have a good reason to speak Urdu, English and other Pakistani languages.

It should not be overlooked that minority language speakers build a valuable language resources. Their motivation to learn Urdu, language of other provinces in Pakistan and English will be enhanced if they are given value in their own language.

Media should stop discriminating local languages by making fun of them and using those languages for minimizing local people. National TV and radio programs can introduce successful people from small cities while talking in their language that may have positive effect.

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Mutual intelligibility

As mentioned earlier majority of Pakistani languages are members of sub group of Indo-Iranian branch of Indo-European language family. Their major vocabularies include Arabic, Turkish and Persian words. This characteristic of languages of Pakistan created a good chance for most people to understand each other without speaking in English or Urdu. By raising awareness of people regarding this issue that they have common roots in their languages this helps them to feel closer and have warm relationships. Moreover, Media have great influence on people's attitudes toward other cultures and languages; therefore, authorities can sponsor the media to produce interesting movies, series and documentary programs about different cultures in Pakistan in different languages. For instance, the famous actors can speak in different minority languages. As a result, this leads to motivate people to think positively toward each other and have tendency to learn more languages. Radio and television can prepare educational language programs on indigenous languages along with the culture which they represent. National TV and radio should broadcast news and other programs in different languages at the same time to make all languages visible to people in order to encourage them to remember and think that they can understand different Pakistani languages. Sufficient time be allocated for the national TV broadcasts in regional languages.

Moreover, sub-titling movies and news in different Pakistani languages can have a great influence on learning different languages, as well. Broadcasting the role of different minority language speakers on the history of Pakistan during independency era can erase the stigma of speaking non-Urdu languages and help people remind that Pakistan is made of diversity of languages and cultures. Having a national music channel with daily live programs can connect all provinces. Consequently, listening to local music may help in learning, practicing of local languages and optimizing communication. Additionally, it should be suggested that the parliament and court proceedings and important national documents be written in major regional languages in addition to English and Urdu as the Frisian province in the Netherlands which has two official languages of Dutch and Frisian.

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