

ASSINGMENT - 2

Sociolinguistics (5656)

**RELATION BETWEEN LANGUAGE AND CULTURE
IN THE PERSPECTIVE OF HISTORICAL
DEVELOPMENT OF URDU LANGUAGE**

Mrs Ishrat Aamer Qureshi

Student of Diploma TEFL

Roll No : **AP504192**

Department of English, Alama Iqbal Open University, Pakistan

ishrataamer@hotmail.com

1. Abstract

This paper aims to explore the relationship between a language and its culture. It takes into account, the **history of Urdu language, and its development**. The deep relations of Urdu language to its culture are brought to light by citing examples from the linguistic and literary aspects of Urdu language.

2. Literature Review

In order to understand the relationship of language to culture it is important to have a clear understanding of the terms ‘language’ and ‘culture’.

2.1. Language.

2.1.1 Language is the human capacity for acquiring and using complex system of communication.

2.1.2 When used as a general concept, ‘language’ may refer to the cognitive ability to learn and use system of complex communication or to describe the set of rules that make up these systems, or the set of utterances that can be produced from those rules. Human language is unique because its complex structure affords a wide range of expressions.

2.1.3 The human language is the only system which relies mostly on social convention and learning. Language is thought to have originated when early humans first started cooperating with one another.

2.2. Culture.

2.2.1 The etymology of the modern term ‘culture’ has a classical origin. In English, the word culture is based on a term used by Cicero in his Tusculan Disputations, where he wrote of a cultivation of the soul or “cultura animi”. He used an agricultural metaphor to describe the development of a philosophical soul. Samuel Pufendorf took over this metaphor in a modern context, meaning something similar but his use, and that of many writers after him “refers to all the ways in which human beings overcome their original barbarism, and through artifice become fully human”.

2.2.2. In the 19th century, the term developed to refer first to the betterment of the individual, especially through education, and then to the fulfillment of national aspirations. In the mid 19th century, some scientists used the term ‘culture’ to a universal human capacity. For the German sociologist, George Simmel, culture referred to “the

cultivation of individuals through the agency of external forms which have been objectified in the course of history”.

2.2.3. In the 20th century culture emerged, as a central concept in anthropology, encompassing the range of human phenomena that can not be attributed to genetic inheritance. The term ‘culture’ in American anthropology, had two meanings : (1) the evolved human capacity to classify and represent experiences with symbols, and to act imaginatively and creatively; and (2) the distinct ways that people living in different parts of the world classified and represented their experiences, and acted creatively.

2.2.4 Culture has two main aspects: the physical aspects created by a society, its so called material culture, the intangibles such as language, customs, ideologies etc., that are the main referent of the term culture.

2.3 Language and Culture.

2.3.1 Languages, understood as the particular set of speech norms of a particular community, are also a part of the larger culture of the community, in which they are spoken. Humans use language as a way of signaling identity with one cultural group and difference from others. Among speakers of one language, several different ways of using the language exist.

2.3.2 A community’s way of using language is a part of community’s culture, just like other shared practices. The ways of speaking function not only to facilitate communication, but also serve to indicate the culture of the community in which that particular language is being used. For example in the Australian language Dyrbal, a married man must use a special set of words to refer to every day items when speaking in the presence of his mother-in law. Languages hence differ not only in pronunciation, vocabulary or grammar, but also through having different “cultures of speaking”. Some cultures for example have elaborate system of “social deixis”, systems of signaling social distances through linguistic means. In English, social deixis is shown through difference between addressing some people by first name and others by surname, but also in titles such as “Mrs”, “boy”, “your honour”, etc.

2.3.3 Languages hence, truly represent their cultures. Today a language is understood not only as a particular set of norms of a particular community, but also a part of the larger culture of the community.

2.3.4 The connection between culture and language had been noted as far back as the classical period and probably long after. The ancient Greeks, for example, distinguished between civilized people and barbarous, by the word ‘barbaros’ meaning “**those who babble**” that is those who speak unintelligible languages. The fact that different groups speak different, mutually unintelligible languages is often considered more tangible evidence of cultural differences than other less obvious cultural traits.

2.3.5. Franz Boas, the founder of American anthropology, maintained that the shared language of a community is the most essential carrier of their common culture . Boas was the first anthropologist who considered it unimaginable to study the culture of a people without also becoming acquainted with their language. For Boas, the fact that the intellectual culture of people was largely constructed, shared and maintained through the use of language, meant that understanding the language of a cultural group was the key to understanding its culture.

2.3.6. The structural theory of Ferdinand de Saussure which describes symbolic systems as consisting of signs, has come to be applied widely in the study of culture. The parallel between language and culture can than be understood as analog to the parallel between a linguistic sign, consisting for example the sound [kau] and the meaning “cow”, and a cultural sign, consisting for example the cultural form of “wearing a crown” and the cultural meaning of “being a king”.

2.3.7. The relation between language and culture can be best understood by the fact that culture itself is a language. It is the language of deep ideologies of its people, the knowledge shared by them over a period of years or centuries, of the stories told to their children generation after generations. Culture, which finds its expression in language, is itself the language of the physical and geographical features of its land. The customs, festivals and ceremonies ‘speak’ of a people’s culture.

2.4 The History of Urdu Language and its Development

2.4.1. Urdu is the national language and lingua franca of Pakistan, the history of Urdu language is much older than that of Pakistan, which spreads over a period of almost 900 hundred years.

2.4.2. Upon the conquest of the lands past the Indus, the Muslim armies gathered and prepared for their battles. The strength of the communication between them could be the determinant of their fate. Thus were laid the foundations of Urdu language. It began with

Muhammad Bin Qasim, the Arab, who entered what is now Pakistan, proclaiming the message of One God and his final Messenger in 712 AD.

2.4.3. For the next thousand years many Arab, Persian and Turkish armies conquered the region. A language that constituted all the languages that had come into power by then, came to be known as 'Urdu' meaning camp, referring to the history of language, how it came into existence through army camps. It was also known as '**Rekhta**' meaning molded. Urdu was the language of the camp in the region what is now modern day Pakistan, and from here the **Khariboli** speaking Indians and the Persian speaking Iranian mingled together and a third language, Urdu was born. Urdu, is a bridge between two branches of Indo-Iranian language, viz., Khariboli and Persian. Today Urdu has adopted numerous Arabic and Persian words.

2.4.4. The language of the Muslims of Central and Southern Asia was Persian for the time between 1000 A.D and 1700 A.D. It was the language of the government, literature, education. After the 1700's, Urdu emerged as a dominating force replacing Persian gradually. Urdu however could be considered as a derivative of Persian as its vocabulary remained over 70% Farsi. Urdu differentiated itself from its predecessor with additional grammatical usages and greater influence of Arabic.

2.4.5. The word Urdu is derived from the same Turkish word '**Ordu**' meaning army which has given English the word '**horde**'. Urdu arose in the contact situation which developed from the invasions of the Indian sub-continent by Turkish dynasties from the 11th century onwards.

2.5 Urdu: A Representative of the Culture of Sub-continent

2.5.1. The culture of a community is the sum total of all the experiences, its members go through, together. The style and tempo of every day existence, the way of life, religion, laws, the attitudes, beliefs, customs, traditions, art, clothing, food, language and the achievements of a society, together form the culture of the people, living in a community. Since Urdu is the language born to this land, the culture of this land finds its fullest expression in this language.

2.5.2. The culture of the sub-continent is reflected in : the vocabulary; the proverbial phrases; the Urdu poetry, which is undoubtedly is true expression of the deepest sentiments and feelings of its people.

2.5.2.1. Vocabulary: The words in Urdu, which reflect typical features of the community's culture, do not have their exact equivalents in English or in other languages. The words which refer to the costumes are unique, e.g. 'dopatta', 'shalwar qameez', 'arosi jorha', etc. Words referring to the festivals and customs of this region, rarely find their equivalent in other languages. Examples are: 'Besakhi', 'Basant'; those indicating religious occasions, Eid-ul-Fitar, Eid-ul-Azha; those indicating religious beliefs, 'Pehla Qalma', 'Khatm-e-Nabuwat'. That we don't find exact equivalents for them in other languages, indicates that Urdu fulfills the communicative needs of its users, no where do they feel handicapped, rather they have a wide variety of words to rely upon. Urdu is sufficiently reliable and caters for the requirements of its hindu users as well, words like 'holi', 'dewali', 'rakhi', or 'rakshabandhan' are very much related to their concepts and festivals.

2.5.2.2. Proverbs: A major part of the Urdu language consists of proverbial expressions. Proverbs add to the richness of this language. The Urdu word 'mahawira' means the specific style of the native speakers, which relates not only to the structure of the sentences but also to the idiomatic phrases in Urdu language. A famous Urdu poet and writer, Altaf Hussain Hali, says that 'mahawira' is something which is spoken in accordance to the native speaker's style. Generally the words in 'mahawira' are supposed to be understood in their metaphorical meanings, and not in their real meaning. A 'mahawira' can be used in speech only in the native speaker's style. Moreover, the words of a 'mahawira' cannot be replaced by their close synonyms, rather the same words are to be used in the same order. As Hali says; (Hali, Rozmarra aur Mahavira)

”مجاورہ لغت میں مطابقتاً بات چیت کرنے کو کہتے ہیں، خواہ وہ بات چیت اہل زبان کے روزمرہ کے موافق ہو خواہ مخالف، لیکن اصلاح میں خاص اہل زبان کے روزمرہ بول چال یا اسلوب بیان کا نام مجاورہ ہے۔“

A number of idiomatic phrases are as follows:-

-- لہو لگا کر شہیدوں میں داخل ہونا --
-- عید کا چاند ہونا --
-- گھوڑے بیچ کے سونا --
-- ہتھیلی پر سرسوں جمانا --
-- فاتحہ پڑھنا --

The point to be noted is that the metaphorical meanings convey an idea which only a native speaker can understand in its full sense because he is the one who is familiar to that culture. A few of the proverbial expressions are as follows:-

-- اُلٹے بانس بریلی کو --
-- بارہ برس دلی میں رہے بھاڑ ہی جھونکا کیے --
-- باسی کڑھی میں اُبال آیا --
-- سوت نہ کپاس جو لا ہے سے لٹھم لٹھا --
-- یہاں کا باوا آدم ہی نرالا ہے --
-- میں بھی رانی تو بھی رانی کون بھرے گا پانی --

2.5.2.3. Poetry: Among the modern languages, Urdu has the richest treasure of poetry. During the Mughal rule the kings and the statesmen enjoyed a luxurious life. The kings were constantly adding upon the territory, they looted whatever they found in the occupied lands, and brought it to their homeland. This gave the people especially the poets a typical mood of enjoying a time at leisure, which is not found elsewhere.

گو ہاتھ کو جنبش نہیں آنکھوں میں تو دم ہے
رہنے دوا بھی ساغرو میں امرے آگے

A cherishable stock of Romantic poetry is an asset to be valued forever,

درِ دل لکھوں کب تک جاؤں اُن کو دکھلاؤں
انگلیاں فگار اپنی خامہ خوں چکاں اپنا

The poetry of Bahadar Shah Zafar, depicts the decline of Mughal rule and represents the feelings and sentiments of its defeated peoples

نہ کسی کی آنکھ کا نور ہوں نہ کسی کے دل کا قرار ہوں
جو کسی کے کام نہ آسکے میں وہ ایک مشکِ غبار ہوں

Though the same mood was also reflected in Ghalib,

ہوئے مرنے کے ہم جوڑ سوا ہوئے کیوں نہ غرقِ دریا
نہ کبھی جنازہ اٹھتا نہ کہیں مزار ہوتا

Iqbal's poetry yet another treasure, presented the concept of 'Khudi', a unique and wholesome representation of the remedy for the sufferings of the Muslims of this region.

خودی کو کر باندا اتنا کہ ہر تقدیر سے پہلے
خدا بندے سے خود پوچھے بتا تیری رضا کیا ہے

and

وہی جہاں ہے ترا جس کو تو کرے پیدا
یہ سنگ و خشت نہیں جو تری نگاہ میں ہے

The poetry of Nazir Akbar Abadi, also known as the 'poet of people' reflects not only the culture but also the thoughts and inclinations of the people of this land.

ابھی ہماری بڑی دکان تھی، ابھی ہمارا بڑا کسب تھا
کہیں خوشامد، کہیں درآمد، کہیں تواضع کہیں ادب تھا
بڑی تھی ذات اور بڑی صفات اور بڑا حسب اور بڑا نسب تھا
خودی کے مٹتے ہی پھر جو دیکھنا نو کچھ نسب تھا نہ کچھ حسب تھا
نہ باپ بیٹے، نہ دوست دشمن، نہ عاشق اور نہ ضم کسی کے
عجب طرح کی ہوئی فراغت، کوئی ہمارا نہ ہم کسی کے

He paints in words, the scenic beauty of rain fall as,

کیا کیا مچی ہیں یارو برسات کی بہاریں
کوئی تو جھولتی ہے جھولے کی ڈور جھوڑے
یا ساتھنوں میں اپنی پاؤں سے پاؤں جوڑے
بادل کھڑے ہیں سر پر بر سے ہیں تھوڑے تھوڑے
بوندوں سے بھگتے ہیں لال اور گلابی جوڑے
کیا کیا مچی ہیں یارو برسات کی بہاریں

3. Conclusion

3.1 Language, though intangible yet a very strong aspect of its culture fulfills the needs of its users, as it understands their needs. It is therefore deeply related to its culture. The culture of any community finds its true manifestation in the language of its native speakers.

3.2. Language, hence, is considered to be one of the strongest tools of Nationalism.

3.3. Culture is indicative of the living style of its people. The relation between a language and the people who speak it is so intimate that the two can scarcely be thought apart. "A language lives only so long as there are people who speak and use it as their native tongue, and its greatness is only that given to it by these people." (Baugh, Cable – A History of the English Language). It is undoubtedly the people who give life to a language, or who can bring to life a language which has been long forgotten.

3.4. A Language brings to life, the culture of its people. The culture of a community is the sum total of the shared experiences of its people. A language, when spoken with zeal, keeps the culture of its people alive.

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