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Language and Culture

(With Special Reference to English Language and Punjabi Culture)

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Abstract - This research article is intended to explore the extent to which English language has influenced the culture of the Sub-continent. The assumption that any lexical item is a product of collaborative forces like economic scenario, ethical framework, political configuration, psychological makeup and religious approach of any culture inculcates the proposition that lexicon-adoption is not a purely linguistic phenomenon. Appropriation of the cultural background of the 'Carrier' word by the 'Receiving' culture is also the consequence of this lexicon-adoption. The assertion of this premise is established by data collection through a self-administered questionnaire with a sample size of 200 people. The result amplifies the validity of the idea that language arrogation can never be seen in isolation from its cultural implications.

I. INTRODUCTION

Language can be defined as a set of conventional, written or spoken symbols through which humans, as members of social group and as participants of culture, can communicate with each other. Language is an integral part of a culture and culture in turns is a vital part of a society. According to Edward B. Taylor, an anthropologist, "culture is the complex whole which includes knowledge, customs, values, norms and beliefs and social organization of any society", and language is the verbal expression of this culture. The analogy of this relationship can be made to a living system; culture is a living cell and language is the DNA of it, encoding cultural information and rendering its transmission possible.

This implies that Language is not just a part of culture but is also a medium of culture. Language influences the thought and perception of reality. It is an established fact that language is a social and cultural phenomenon not an "individual expression" (Hirschkop). It is through the medium of language that a man adopts a society's culture, its modes of thoughts and actions, its beliefs and values. "Human being becomes a personality, in consequence of his membership of society and his occupancy of social roles" (Halliday).

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Linguists like Parucha, Clark propose the notion of language evolution depends on the social needs. They suggest that language acquired by an individual will have an effect on the society of which the individual is a part (Clark & Clark). The implication of these propositions is that language and culture are inseparable to the extent of determining the roles and effects of each other.

This issue of relationship inspires complexity in a bi/multilingual society, for here the matter of identity gains acceleration. Lustig and Koester relate cultural and social identity to the language. "Cultural identity refers to our sense of belonging to a particular culture or ethnic group. It is formed through a process that results from membership in a particular culture and it involves learning about and accepting the traditions, heritage, language, religion, aesthetics, thinking patterns and social structures of a culture. That is people internalize the beliefs, values, norms and social practices of their culture and identify with that culture as part of their self-concept". The establishment of a bi/multilingual society with the very advent of British Colonial rule in the Subcontinent created serious concerns regarding native culture. Where the British Raj acclaimed the superior official status of the English language, it also provided a gateway of power to the English culture. Variations in the native culture and more significantly, the introduction of the new words embodying new concepts were the inference of this bi/multiculturalism.

Moreover, self-identity usually depends on culture to such a great extent that immersion in a very different culture—with which a person does not share common ways of life or beliefs—can cause a feeling of confusion and disorientation. Anthropologists refer to this phenomenon as culture shock.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The relationship between culture and language is a reciprocal one i.e. culture is always at the back of language and language is always a carrier of culture. The historio-political background of the British colonial rule in the Sub-continent provides the basic impetus to the natives for the adoption of English language and the recent prevalent wave of Globalization and Westernization is imparting on this language an undue privilege of being a global language. Pakistan is also

confronting this situation. As culture is inseparable from language, in spite of all the disparities and clashes of the English culture with the indigenous culture, English language is emitting the information encoded in it and people, unconsciously, or may be unwillingly, are adopting, or coerced to adopt, them.

III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

The formation of any lexical item in any language is not an abstract phenomenon. Socio-economic context, historio-political considerations and ethical formulation of any culture work in unison in the generation of "words". For instance, the word 'Honeymoon', more than a word it is a concept, a framework of complete ideology. By the end of the 19th century, the ideas of social freedom accorded to the couples following the tradition of the 18th century Age of Enlightenment, economic stability of industrial freedom, intellectual reasoning of romanticism and sentimentality and psychic pursuit of attainment of harmony and mutual affection enhanced the cultural position of the very word. The appropriation of this lexicon in the Subcontinent changed the ab initio concept of the 'bridal tours' which were largely made after marriages along with other family members for the purpose of developing intimacy of the new couple with relatives.

Words like 'paratha', 'nikah', 'sharm o haya', have got no relative word in English language, for they are not supported by the cultural and social bedrock of that society. In the like manner, words like 'call girl', 'boyfriend', 'girlfriend', 'Valentine day' and many more, have got no roots in the native culture of Pakistan, the absence of proportional words in the native languages is the manifestation of this fact. People have espoused such words and the cultural elements of them by dint of English adoption.

IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

"Language is the formative organ of thought. Intellectual activity, entirely mental, entirely internal, and to some extent passing without trace, becomes through sound, externalized in speech and perceptible to the senses. Thought and language are therefore one and inseparable from each other." Wilhelm von Humboldt.

This intricacy of language and culture relationship is also the benchmark of Whorf theory. Whorf theory of linguistic relativity has got its root in Humboldt's doctrine of language which focuses on the essential differences between two languages. Whorf propounds that "the forms of a person's thoughts are controlled by inexorable laws of pattern of which he is unconscious. These patterns are the unperceived intricate systematizations of his own language-shown readily enough by a candid comparison and contrast with other languages, especially those of a different linguistic family. His thinking itself is in a language, in

English, in Sanskrit, in Chinese. And every language is a vast pattern-system, different from others, in which are culturally ordained the forms and categories by which the personality not only communicates, but also analyzes nature, notices or neglects types of relationship and phenomena, channels his reasoning, and builds the house of his consciousness. (In Gumperz and Levinson 21) This is the concept of "Linguistic relativity" underscoring the nature of meaning; two languages may code the same incidents utilizing semantic concepts or distinctions peculiar to each language. As a result, each language reflects different perspectives of the same bit of reality. This renders the view of presenting conceptual representation through any language.

By dovetailing Whorf's theory in 1956, Lucy and Slobin have demonstrated that language can directly influence our thoughts. Through verbal limitation, grammatical focus, and structural emphasis, oral communication can pattern our very way of thinking. Lucy carried out different experiments and observations on American and Yucatec villagers pertaining to the grammatical treatment of the nominal numbers like pluralization and comprehension of the story-events through pictures. Based on the results, Lucy deduced that English speakers habitually attended to the number of various objects of reference more than Yucatec speakers; moreover, in using plural less frequently, the Yucatec speakers consequently viewed picture scenes differently and noticed less variations opposed to the English speakers. The frequency of pluralization in each language influenced both the verbal and nonverbal interpretation of pictures.

Cultural anthropologist Andy Clark concludes that language not only "confers on us added powers of communication; it also enables us to reshape a variety of difficult but important tasks into formats suited to the basic computational capacities of the human brain".

Berlin and his collaborators generated their support of language, culture relationship through the study of naming the colours and revealed that cultures interpret colors differently as a result of their languages. "Zuni, a language of the American Southwest, for example, exhibits two terms that we might translate as "yellow" (46). Closer analysis reveals that one term is verbal and refers to things that become yellow by ripening or aging whereas the other is adjectival and refers to things that have had yellow substances applied to them. The customary approach in Zuni would select one term as "basic" and ignore the aspect of its meaning (i.e., the manner of becoming colored) for which there is no English equivalent." This means that language embodies the concepts of culture in it and any shift of language can lead to a relative shift in culture.

Therefore, as Brian Skotko says, "Variations in thoughts and languages can ultimately pinpoint cultural differences. These external outputs can thus provide

valuable clues for implicit community laws, religious beliefs, and unrecorded customs. By studying the variations in language, we can understand variations in thoughts and place them in the context of a cultural setting. In doing so, cultural linguists gain an even greater insight into the societies."

relation between language and culture; focusing on the determining of the level of awareness of the masses about this relation. This questionnaire was distributed among the people of varying age group with different educational and social background. Our respondents were mainly from University of Sargodha, including both students and teachers, and then common people from Sargodha, Faisalabad and Lahore.

V. DATA COLLECTION

a) *Instrument*

Instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire comprising ten questions about the

VI. THE SAMPLE QUESTIONNAIRE IS GIVEN HERE:

Department of English, University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.

Dear fellows.

We are conducting a survey to find out the reasons of language shift from Punjabi to English. Please make it authentic by your honest participation. Thank you.

Gender: -----

Age: -----

Education: -----

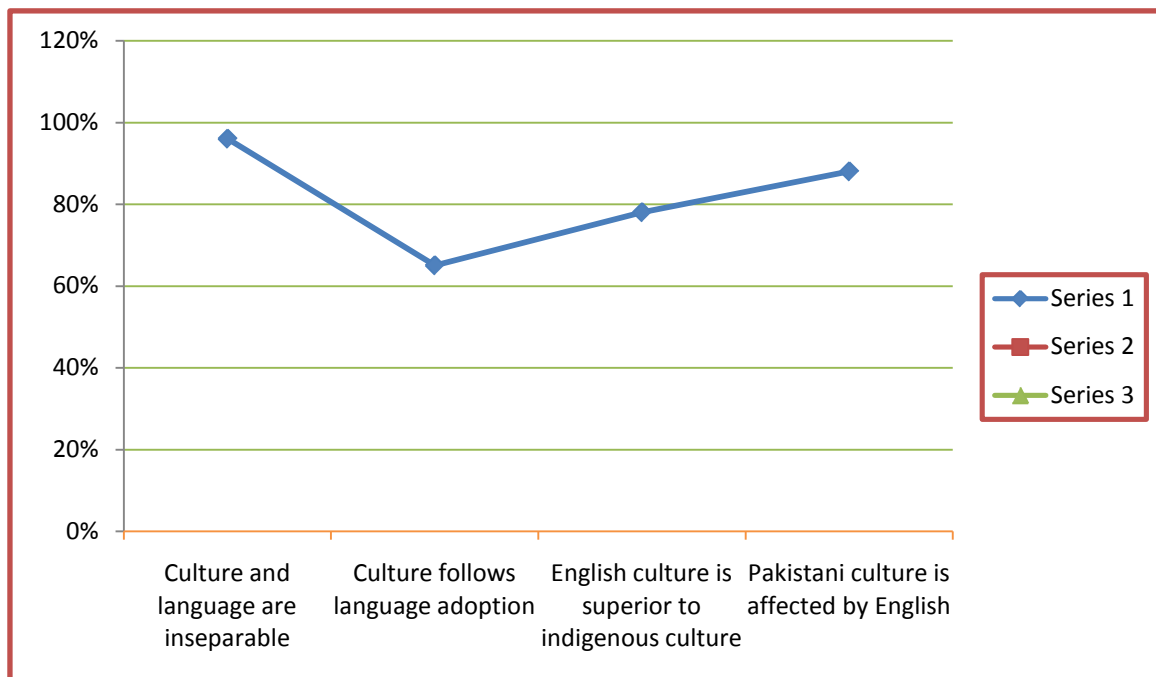
1. Do you think that Pakistani culture is much influenced by English language?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly Disagree
2. Do you think that your native language has proportional words to the concepts like 'girlfriend', 'boyfriend', and call girl etc.?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
3. Do you think that idea of Valentine is in accordance with Punjabi culture?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly agree
4. Do you think that you can adopt or use English language without adopting English culture?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
5. Do you think that English language and the thought associated with it is providing the basic frame-work of our educational system?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

6. Do you think that English music is becoming popular because it is superior to local music?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
7. Do you think that institutions like Old houses can be in pre-colonial era?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
8. Pakistani culture is much influenced by English culture. Do you think that it is also happening vice versa?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
9. Do you think that brunch and buffet have changed our eating habits?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
10. Do you think that cultural change in Pakistan is because of language shift?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

a) *Data Analysis*

The analysis of data shows that English language has a deep impact on our culture but this

impact is taking place in a somewhat hidden manner; it is oblivion to common masses.



Our questionnaire contained ten questions and it was distributed to 200 people of various social, educational and ethnic background. The participants include students of English language, teachers of English language, engineering students, students of fine arts and laymen of either sex from different age groups. The meticulous analysis, presented in the form of chart given above, reveals the fact that 96% people are aware that language and culture have an intimate relationship. About the adoption of culture which accompanies language adoption, 65% people responded in affirmative. As for as comparison of English culture with indigenous culture is concerned; though in postmodern world where emphasis is on cultural relativism and any question like this is not desirable, 78% people consider English as a superior culture. 88% people think that Pakistani culture has, or is being, affected by English culture.

It is an oversimplified version of the results deducted from our research solely to provide an initial insight into this phenomenon. The more obvious manifestation of this lingual impact on indigenous culture has been discussed in the analysis of the different aspects of indigenous culture. British anthropologist Edward B. Tylor gave one of the first complete definitions of culture in his book *Primitive Culture* (1871). His definition stated that culture includes socially acquired knowledge, beliefs, art, law, morals, customs, and habits. In 1930 American anthropologist George P. Murdock went much further, listing 637 major subdivisions of culture. Murdock developed an elaborate coding system, known as the Human Relation Area Files. He used this system to identify and sort hundreds of distinctive cultural variations that could be used to compare different cultures.

Later anthropologists came up with simpler categorizations of culture. A common practice is to divide all of culture into three broad categories: material, social, and ideological. A fourth category, the arts, has characteristics of both material and ideological culture. Let's analyze the effect of English on these categories of culture:

i. *Material Culture*

Material culture includes those patterns of social activities that a society produces in order to fulfill materialistic needs of its individuals i.e. food, shelter, clothe etc. This system is commonly known as economy. When we probe the extent of affectedness in material culture by English language and thought, it becomes obvious in our food habits, in our architecture, in our dress code, and in our financial set-up. In food, the concepts like brunch and buffet and the introduction of junk food is the result of acculturation. Similarly the architecture of Sub-continent has gone through a noticeable change and it is no longer a distinct one; it has become westernized. The idea of 'attached bath' is

embarrassing for old generation in this area as they were, one can see in villages, used to build their bathrooms in the farthest possible corner of their home. The 'Zanaan khanay' and 'Mardaan khanay' are now extinct; drawing-rooms, lounges, dining-rooms and bedrooms have become increasingly common that we no longer can imagine a house without these 'necessities'. The most obvious effect is to be seen in the change of dress code of this area. Western dress is not only popular but also has become a symbol of social prestige and superiority with a corresponding attachment of a sense of inferiority for native dress code. Economic institutions and their working set-up have also gone through a westernized metamorphosis. In short, as material culture is the tangible manifestation of the theoretical consideration of a culture, it is the most affected category of culture because English language has penetrated into the theoretical and philosophical basis of native culture of this area.

ii. *Social Culture*

People in all types of societies organize themselves in relation to each other for work and other duties, and to structure their interactions. Although social culture, in its essence, has not been changed but there are superficial changes in social culture; mainly due to their relation to 'culture' and 'civilization' and 'sophistication'. Joint family system -- the most popular system in Sub-continent—has transformed into nuclear family. The complicated system of kinship that included a cluster of relations like 'Mama', 'Chacha', 'Phuppha', 'Khalu', 'Taya' has reduced to a simplified 'Uncle'. Same is the case with 'cousin' that is a one-word substitute for 'Taya-zaad-Bhai', 'Mamu-zaad-Behan' and a lot more.

Political aspect of culture has also been changed after the interaction of English and Sub-continental culture. Institutionalized democracy – with all its subsidiaries – is thriving at the cost of indigenous power structure based on tribes and 'Bradiries'.

iii. *Ideological Culture*

In every society, culturally unique ways of thinking about the world unite people in their behavior. Anthropologists often refer to the body of ideas that people share as ideology. Ideology can be broken down into at least three specific categories: beliefs, values, and ideals. People's beliefs give them an understanding of how the world works and how they should respond to the actions of others and their environments. Particular beliefs often tie in closely with the daily concerns of domestic life, such as making a living, health and sickness, happiness and sadness, interpersonal relationships, and death. People's values tell them the differences between right and wrong or good and bad. Ideals serve as models for what people hope to achieve in life.

Many people rely on *religion*, systems of belief in the supernatural (things beyond the natural world), to

shape their values and ideals and to influence their behavior. Beliefs, values, and ideals also come from observations of the natural world, a practice anthropologists commonly refer to as *secularism*.

The words like 'Liberalism', 'Secularism', and 'Non conformism' have succeeded to make a rift in the strong edifice of faith in the lives of the people of this area.

iv. *Art*

Like all other fields of social patterns, art of this area could not remain immune from the aggressive advances of English art. In poetry, it made our native poetry more humane and more concerned with mundane concerns. Poetry, in Sub-continent, was preoccupied with the obsession of love and other mystical and abstract themes. It was the influence of English poetry that revolutionized it and it started to deal with social, political and philosophical themes. The most popular literary genre in pre-Anglo era was 'Dastan' – a tale of fairies and djinns and magic carpets; totally alienated from reality – it was replaced by a more vigorous and pragmatist form of literature, known as novel. All the artistic movements in England changed the taste of indigenous people, owing to the fact that they were subjugated to the English.

VII. CONCLUSION

The discussion leads us to a conclusion which asserts that language and culture are intricately related to each other and the lexical items of a particular language are the products of the accumulative work of all the cultural forces so when a particular word moves from one culture to another culture; it inevitably takes with it all its cultural consideration. This is the reason that a word gives its complete, more or less, meaning in its actual cultural context. This phenomenon also throws light on the fact that why there are some words in Urdu that are purely English and they do not have their equivalent? It is because of the cultural disparity. Our discussion also helps us in explaining the reasons of the poor results in English language in Pakistan. Pakistani students face problems in learning English because they do not have a direct exposure to English culture and it hinders them to assimilate the full connotative and denotative implication of a lexical item.

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