



**Prospects of Mother Tongue as Medium of Education in Pakistan:
A Case Study
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Abstract: *Almost seven thousand distinct languages are used in 196 countries on the earth and almost half of these languages exist with writing systems. In this situation, debate on introducing education in mother tongue or proposing mother tongue in education has become one of the critical issues among the scholars of Social Sciences such as Phillipson (1992), Pattanayak (2003), Woldemariam (2008) and Moyo, (2008) and Coleman (2010). This disputation has also become critical in the religious, ethnic and linguistically diverse terrains of Pakistan whose linguistic fabric consists of more than sixty languages (Shehzad et al. 2013). Declaration of Urdu as the national language and English the official language not only evoked the speakers of other languages spoken in the country but also resulted into language movements including the movements of Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Punjabi and Saraiki languages. Although these were ad hoc movements, they gave rise to the notion of adopting mother tongue for education in some parts of the country such as Sindh, KPK and Baluchistan provinces. These demagogic decisions caused serious damage not only to the speakers, but also to their languages. As English remained the symbol of prestige and Urdu was supported for national cohesion, ghettoization of the speakers of other languages resulted into social, linguistic and education apartheid in the country. This paper aims to explore linguistic, socio-linguistic and socio-political implications of both education in mother tongue and mother tongue in education in Pakistan that would further lay some sound basis for the argument in other multilingual countries also. The current paper presents the multilayered model of the linguistic diversity in Pakistan which may support viability of mother tongue in education but also questions the idea of education in mother tongue due to some serious sociolinguistic, socio-political and linguistic implications.*

Keywords: Language policy, Mother tongue, Education,
Linguistic Diversity

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Introduction

Language in education and education in language has always been foci of interest among social scientists in general and linguists and language activists (Margaret, 2008) in particular. Linguists are primarily concerned with the matrix of languages from the perspective of syntax, semantics, pragmatics and discourse mostly; however, the language activists are the people who focus on language vitalization of minority languages through different activities at the levels of academia and society. Thus, every linguist can be a language activist but every language activist may or may not be a linguist. On the whole, with the emergence of language activism (Margaret, 2008 & Penfield et al. 2008) mother tongue as medium of instruction in education has become a critical issue of linguistically diverse countries including Pakistan. Pakistan's linguistic scenario consists of more than sixty languages and roughly 10-15 languages only are used in both oral and written traditions. So, adopting mother tongue as a medium of instruction has become a sensitive and complex question with manifold interpretations. Unfortunately, this critical issue has not been addressed sufficiently in the context of Pakistan by the intellectuals; whereas, some demagogic decisions made by the politicians have caused serious damage to the speakers of regional languages at social, educational and economic spheres of life in Pakistan.

The current paper which is exploratory in nature aims to explore linguistic, socio-linguistic and socio-political implications of both *education in mother tongue* and *mother tongue in education* in Pakistan that would further lay some sound basis for an argument in other multilingual countries also. The current paper presents the *multilayered model* of the linguistic diversity in Pakistan which may support viability of *mother tongue in education* but questions the idea of *education in mother tongue* due to some serious sociolinguistic and socio-political and linguistic implications.

Language and Politics: Historical Overview

Politics and language has always been a critical debate since the creation of Pakistan in 1947. The issue became quite sensitive in East Pakistan (Bangladesh now) when in 1948 the founder of the country Muhammad Ali Jinnah addressing the people of East Pakistan declared Urdu as language of

the state which was a minority language then despite of carrying legacy of prestige since Mughal's time.

Bengalis who consisted almost 55% of the total population, according to census of 1951, did not embrace the idea of one official language. This proclamation caused anxiety among the speakers of other languages which also played a vital role in creating ethno-nationalism in Pakistan. After the death of Muhammad Ali Jinnah, promoting Urdu as national and implementing English as official language not only evoked the speakers of other languages but also resulted into split of the country turning East Pakistan into a separate state called Bangladesh. Furthermore, this situation caused the emergence of language movements including the movements of Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Punjabi and Saraiki languages in Pakistan (Shehzad et al, 2013).

On the other hand, due to lack of logistics, resources and more importantly due to the politics of language, English remained the official language of the country. According to Haque (1993), the administrative machinery before partition was trained to run the official businesses in English language and the elite, at the same time, maintained the status of English language as official in the newly born state. Thus, inevitability of English language not only for national and international bureaucratic affairs was stamped but efforts were successful to introduce English language as medium of instruction in education which resulted into English medium schools. Haque was also of the view that English was the language of arbitration in lessening the intensity of serious linguistic conflict between Urdu and Bangla after partition.

In sum, throughout the history of Pakistan Urdu was supported overtly and English remained the language of high prestige/elite and was promoted covertly. This English-Urdu controversy caused the marginalization of the speakers of other languages which resulted into social, linguistic and education apartheid in the country. A brief overview is presented below in Table 1.

Table 1. Brief Linguistic Historical Overview of Pakistan

1947-1971	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urdu-Bangla conflict • Split of East and West Pakistan • The language movements of movements of Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi, Punjabi and Saraiki
1973-1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urdu-English conflict • Urdu as National language (1973 Constitution) • English as de facto official language (1973 Constitution)
1979-1988	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urdu only policy, Arabic as a compulsory language in schools rendered political purposes • <i>Muqtadira Qaumi Zaban</i> (Establishment of National Language Authority) in 1979 • Sindhi as medium of instruction in Sindh and Sindhi language as subject was taught
1988-1999	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Urdu English conflict (Urdu medium schools reverted to English)
1999 onward	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • English as dominant language and symbol of elite, and Urdu became the lingua franca of Pakistan. • Promotion of English medium school • Urdu medium schools • Very less indigenous languages medium schools

Adapted from Shehzad et al. 2013

Language Policy and 1973 Constitution

After the debacle of Bangladesh in 1971, Pakistan promulgated its constitution third time in 1973. The Prime Minister of Pakistan Zulfikar Ali Bhutto, in order to please both the supporters of Urdu and English, declared Urdu as the national language and English as the official language for the next fifteen years until arrangements would be made to replace it with Urdu. Other languages Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Balochi were declared as the provincial languages and were given rights to be preserved and promoted and be used as the provincial languages. Article 251 of 1973 Constitution depicts the language policy of the country as follows:

251: National language.

(1): The National language of Pakistan is Urdu, and arrangements shall be made for its being used for official and other purposes within fifteen years from the commencing day.

(2): Subject to clause (1), the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacement by Urdu.

(3): Without prejudice to the status of the National language, a Provincial Assembly may by law prescribe measures for the teaching, promotion and use of a Provincial language in addition to the National language.

Linguistic Diversity: Multi-Layered Model

Thus, akin to many other postcolonial developing countries, Pakistan according to Nadakarni (1983), followed tripartite language structure policy based on the usage of languages in different domains of life as follows:

- 1) In-group language interaction (the use of indigenous language among the individuals of same ethnicity)
- 2) Out-group interaction (the use of Urdu among the ethnically different individuals)
- 3) Interaction for specific purpose (English for official purposes and education)

This language structure not only caused the linguistic divide of the people of Pakistan but it also bifurcated the education system of Pakistan into English and Urdu medium primarily. This macro structure of the linguistic diversity of Pakistan consists of almost ten languages including the languages mentioned in the following Table 2. which exist in both written and oral forms.

Table 2. Linguistic diversity of Pakistan (Macro Structure)

NATIVE SPEAKERS OF PAKISTANI LANGUAGES			
Language	2008 estimate	1998 census	Main areas spoken
Punjabi	44.17%	44.15%	Punjab
Pukhto	15.44%	15.42%	Khyber Pukhtoon Kha
Sindhi	15.35%	14.10%	Sind
Saraiki	10.42%	10.53%	South Punjab
Urdu	7.59%	7.57%	Karachi
Balochi	3.59%	3.57%	Balochistan
Others	3.59%	4.66%	
(Rahman, 2004)			
Population: aged 0–14 :35.4%; Population: aged 15–64 :60.3%; Population: aged 65+ : 4.3%			

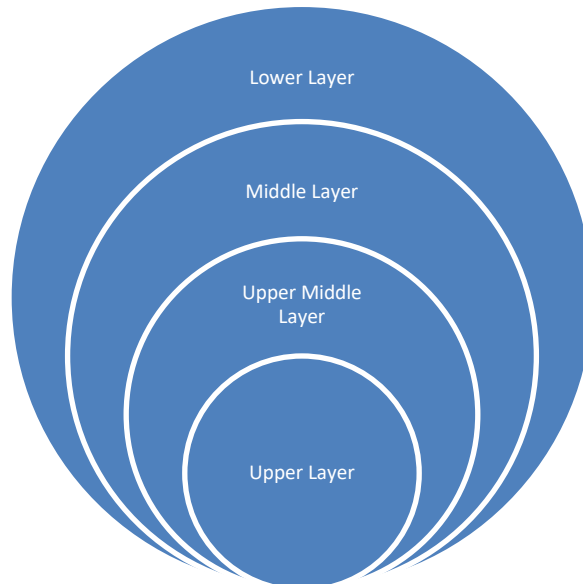
However, Rahman’s (2004) structure is a superficial view of the linguistic matrix of Pakistan. Apart from the above mentioned languages, more than fifty other languages spoken in Pakistan have many varieties/dialects as demonstrated in Figure 3. These varieties/dialects may or may not be intelligible to the speakers of two different varieties of the same language spoken on the extreme ends of the continuum. For example, Hindko is the dialect of Punjabi but it is not intelligible to the speakers of many other dialects of Punjabi. Same is the situation with Pashto/Pukhto and other languages of the country.

Table 3. Variation in Each language

Languages of Pakistan	Variation in Each Language
Punjabi	Majhi, Doabi, Malwi, Powadh, Pothohari, Lahnda, Multani, Saraiki, Shahpoori, Janghochi, Jangli, Hindkoand others
Pukhto	Southeastern, Waneci, Marwat, Khatak, Bannuchi, Tani, Kohistani, Zardan, Afridi, Wardak, Southeastern, South and others
Sindhi	Sindhi Saraiki, Vicholi, Lari, Lasi, Thari , Kachi, Kutch
Balochi	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Western Rakhshani: (7 varieties); Southern Makrani (4 varieties); Coastal, Lashari, Kechi, Karachi; Eastern or Suleimani Dialect (4 varieties); Sarhaddi Rakhshani, Afghan Rakhshani, Turkmen Rakhshani, Panjguri Rakhshani, Kalati Rakhshani, Kharani Rakhshani, Sarawani; Eastern or Suleimani Dialect: Bugti, Mari, Mazari, Mandwani, Joti • Brahvi • Pashto • Farsi
Gilgati/Balti	<p>Shina: Gilgati Shina, Astori Shina, Chillasi Shina, Kohistani Shina</p> <p>Balti, Broshaski, Khowar, Torwali, Klashwar, Domeeli, Wakhi</p>
Other Pakistani Languages	Almost 70

Keeping the complex linguistic diversity of Pakistan, therefore, we propose the multilayered model (See Figure 4) which explains the diverse variation in language distribution in the country. The upper layer consists of English and Urdu as official and lingua franca and/or language for wider communication respectively which are used in written and/or spoken forms in the official domains of life such as media, law, education and workplace. The upper middle layer contains other major language varieties of Pakistan which exist in both written and spoken forms such as Vicholi dialect of Sindhi, Peshawri dialect of Pashto, and Lehnda of Punjabi. Some of these varieties, for example, Vicholi of Sindhi language are also taught at school level to the students. There are other major language varieties which are widely used in spoken form but their written scripts do not exist. For example, Lari, Lasi, Thari, and Kachi of Sindhi; Shahpoori, Janghochi, Jangli of Punjabi; almost twenty dialects of Pashto and some varieties of Balochi, Brahvi, Balti come in the middle layer of the model. Rest of the language varieties whose speakers are least in number, for example, Kudndal Shahi, Bandi Shungli, Arsoniwar (Rizvi, 2007) are under serious threat of endangerment and are included in the lower layer of the proposed model of linguistic diversity of Pakistan.

Figure 1. Multi-layered Linguistic Matrix of Pakistan



Mother Tongue as Medium Of Instruction/Education

The choice of mother tongue as the best medium of instruction in education is axiomatic from the perspectives of psychology, sociology and education (Coleman, 2010, Woldemariam, 2008, Moyo, 2008). However, some other critical manifestations of this argument also need to be addressed rationally.

Firstly, conceptualizing *mother tongue* has also become serious debate among the linguists such as Pattanayak (2003), according to whom, less clear understanding in conceptualizing the mother tongue has created serious chaotic situation among educationists. Is the mother tongue mother's language or the father's language or the language learnt first by a child? In many Asian countries like Pakistan, the mother adopts the culture and language of her husband and their child, thus, learns the language of the father. In some bilingual situations especially when parents are from two different language backgrounds but they speak the third language with their children. This situation is also quite common in the urban areas of Pakistan where parents are from Punjabi and Pashto background speak Urdu or English with their children. Thus, the notion of the mother tongue of a child in this situation also becomes complex. The problem could be resolved by simplifying the concept of mother tongue as the *home language* only. As Coleman (2010) reports that learning is more effective if the education is given in "the same language spoken at home, so learning can be reinforced. This also enables the parents to get involved and monitor and contribute to children's education".

Secondly, the multilayered nature of all the languages as argued in the Multilayered Linguistic diversity model proposed in this paper also poses a serious challenge to the decision makers with regard to which variety/dialect of a language should be the medium of medium of instruction. For example, in the province of Sindh of Pakistan, Sindhi medium education runs in Vicholi dialect of Sindhi language which is depriving the children of Lari, Lasi, Thari, and Kachi (dialects of Sindhi) speakers from their mother tongues. Similarly, according to a news report ("Mother as Mode of Instruction" 2013) the chief minister of Balochistan government, recently, declared mother tongue (Balochi) as medium of instruction in Balochistan. This decision may cause ghettoization of the speakers of Brahvi, Pukhto and Farsi speakers of the province.

Thirdly, estimating the exact distribution of the speakers linguistically and geographically is also a challenging task in imparting the education in mother tongue. With 7000 languages of this multilingual world of our planet, about 100 languages are the languages of 95% of the world population (Coulmas, 1983 in Pattanayak, 2003) and planning education in more than six thousand mother tongues (their varieties also) for the 5% users only is more likely the wastage of human resources which can be used in upgrading their life styles. Similar is the situation in Pakistan seven major languages (languages in upper and upper middle layer in the proposed model) are used by 85% of the total population (Coleman, 2010) and rest of the languages which are more than fifty (in middle and lower layers in the proposed model) are used by 15% of the population only.

Finally, arranging linguistic resources such as standardized version of a language/variety, teaching material and other pedagogical facilities and extra linguistic resources including teachers/trainers, logistics and infrastructure are seemed almost impossible in the linguistically diverse context like Pakistan.

Implications

Role of language in education indeed is decisive from social, psychological and economic perspectives. In multilingual countries like Pakistan, debate on education in mother tongue has become a political entity . Similarly, some demagogues in every multilingual country are denying the implications of this demand that can cause some serious damages to the people socially, psychologically, politically educationally and economically.

Linguistic Implications: Threats to Language Vitality

Adopting education in mother tongue in Pakistan may cause a serious threat to language vitality. As it has been mentioned above that Vicholi is the only dialect of Sindhi language which has been chosen for the medium of education in the Sindh province of Pakistan which may lead to the marginalization of the other dialects such as Lari, Lasi, Thari ,and Kachi of Sindhi language which ultimately would lead towards the endangerment of these language varieties. Same situation is true for other languages as well.

Socio-political Implications

There are several socio-political implications of implementing mother tongue as the medium of education in Pakistan including *academic closure/ education apartheid* and class conflict; fission of intera-ethno-nationalism; identity crisis and damages to social cohesion. Giving education in mother tongue may lead towards not only the *ghettoization* of the speakers socially and economically but it is likely to cause *academic closure or education apartheid* also as happened in Pakistan. For example, some politicians and even educationists send their children abroad for education in Anglophone countries but they have been deceiving the locals for the struggle of their linguistic rights including education in mother tongue only. This situation may further lead beyond ethno-nationalism to intera-ethno nationalism, for example, at some point of time the speakers of Lari, Lasi, Thari, and Kachi might protest against the education in Vicholi dialect only and similar resistance one can expect in Balochistan from Brahvi, Pukhto and Farsi speakers if Balochi language is adopted as medium of instruction. If it would so, the fission of intera-ethno nationalism would definitely be unavoidable which would result into nothing less than a chaos and violence in the country. This may further create the issue of identity crisis which would lead towards damages to social cohesion.

Conclusion

In sum, connectedness between language, education and ideology is social and political nexus which is not viewed by its homogeneity. These social and political ideologies drift the role of language in education towards diatribe sometimes in the linguistically diverse countries like Pakistan. The role of mother tongue in education in multilingual countries like Pakistan has not been defined rationally yet. This paper which is exploratory in nature discusses and brings forth not only the challenges for introducing mother tongue in education but it also provides sufficient debate on the implications of adopting mother tongue as the medium of education in Pakistan. The implications discussed in this paper cover wide range of scope from linguistic to socio-political scenario of Pakistan. In addition, the model of linguistic diversity of Pakistan has also been proposed in the study which would serve as guidance for policy makers in the country.

Recommendations

- i. Keeping the whole linguistic scenario and socio-political implications in mind, introducing *mother tongue in education* would be a wise decision than giving *education in mother tongue*.
- ii. Language policy of Pakistan is needed to be pursued and experts from the fields of education, sociology, anthropology and linguistics must also be taken on board for this purpose.
- iii. Role of languages including English, Urdu and rest of the Pakistani languages in Education policy also needs to be re-investigated and rationalized.
- iv. The concept of *national language* may also be re-explored to decrease linguistic apartheid and ethno-nationalism in Pakistan (for details see Shehzad et al. 2013).

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