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Social media, discourse and identity:

A context-sensitive analysis of language attitudes in Pakistan

Abstract:

Integrating Discourse Historical Approach (DHA) with a questionnaire survey, this article examines four overlapping layers of Pakistan's linguistic context which lead to determine language attitude(s) and personal and group identities of Pakistan's social media users. This article investigates how social media comments, through the preference of English and Urdu-English hybrid code, exhibit linguistic apartheid. Language preference of Pakistan's social media users is one of the means to project their personal/collective identity(ies) and is intrinsically linked with the country's discursive space. The main argument of this article, therefore, is that the current identity paradigm and discourse situation of Pakistan are embedded in its colonial past and socio-cultural tradition which needs to be studied systematically.

Keywords:

Identity Context Survey Language Attitudes Social-media

1. Preliminary considerations

Example.1 Today is a D Day for rulers IA. Long live IK and TUQ. (Posted by Uo1 in PTI Azadi March Live Streaming Thread, posted on August 28, 2014: zemtv.com)

For the text producers and text recipients on Pakistan's social media to make sense of the above fragments, and for researchers, in addition to understanding English grammar and usage, there is a need to know more about the context of this text

fragments. For example, what is meant by IA in Example.1? Here IA is an abbreviation for InshaAllah, meaning "God willing" This and many other Arabic words are incorporated by Pakistanis in both Urdu and English which are country's official languages. Similarly the flawed syntactic structure as observed on Pakistani social media would make sense to those who have some knowledge of Pakistani English and have the idea that a syntactically flawed hybrid English/Urdu code is acceptable form of language on social media. What this brief illustration shows is that, in order to understand, analyze and explain political discourse of Pakistan, one not only needs knowledge of a few facts surrounding the broader context of Pakistani culture, but also needs to draw upon knowledge of this particular society and its context in a systematic manner. Commenting upon the significance of the study of context for doing discourse analysis Keenoy and Oswick (2003: 139-140) note that:

.....the discourse analysis requires us to attend to aspects of bounded space and multiple locales -the landscapes within which discourse is conducted... the process involves a robust delineation of text and context where the focal discourse is uncoupled and investigated independently of the physical surroundings and the wider social context in which it occurs ... these contexts (that is, other spaces) are not simply a backdrop to text, they are actually embedded within it: the text actually forms part of the text and vice versa (cited in Clarke et al. 2012: 46).

For a detailed analysis of the context of the culture from which a particular set of discourse emerges, this article draws upon Discourse Historical Approach (henceforth DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (henceforth CDA), a key feature of which is a four stage approach to the context analysis along with a small scale survey. To have an idea about the identification paradigm of Pakistani social media text producers, this article presents a systematic study which involves a few steps. These steps start from identifying 'what language choice is made by Pakistani social media users' and proceed to 'what language attitudes are reflected in Pakistan's social media discourse'. In the case of this particular article, these steps materialize in the form of collecting and studying comments posted on Pakistani social media over a period of 20 months plus results of a survey conducted in different cities of Pakistan. The questionnaire as a source of data is important in

making sense of Wodak's (2001) three levels of context beyond the immediate context. Furthermore, there is a need to narrow down the queries addressed in this article (which involve broader issues) to a couple of questions:

1. How does language preference of a speech community reflect multiple layers of its discursive context and identification paradigm?
2. Why do Pakistani social media users prefer a particular language(s) and ignore the others in order to post comments on the social media?

The question, how can we reach an identification paradigm and the relevant discursive context with its multiple layers, is of great importance. This question is pertinent to the field of discourse analysis in general and to critical discourse analysis (CDA) in particular (Brown 1983; Wodak & Chilton 2005; Paltridge 2006; Hart 2011; Locke 2004). Van Dijk (2008) puts forward some novel ideas about discursive context as a construct that exists within the minds of the individuals. Van Dijk's "critical, socio-cognitive theory of context models" (cited in Clarke et al. 2012: 48) is based on three broad strands which could be aptly applied to the study of contextualization of social media comments. The first principle of context models declares context models as based on experience and hierarchically structured. Thus, the text producers and recipients on Pakistani social media make sense of the linguistic situation, language choice and on-going communication indirectly relying on certain presuppositions. According to second principle, the context models are shared by in-group members, thus they facilitate mutual interpretation and production/understanding of discursive choices. Then comes the third and the last strand of the context model which states that the participants of a discourse event are familiar with the genre of the communication situation and make presuppositions accordingly and engage in the purposeful production of appropriate text and talk.

2. Social media and discursive space of Pakistan: the discourse historical approach (DHA)

As mentioned above, in this article DHA has been used and developed as a methodological tool that can offer insights into discursive space of Pakistan. Before outlining the DHA and illustrating how it reflects contextual layers of the social media discourse of Pakistan, it should be mentioned that a survey on

linguistic situation of Pakistan (reported later in this article) was administered in order to solidify and strengthen the claims of this article. Table 2 shows the questionnaire which was used to determine the discursive scenario of Pakistan. The specific aim of the questionnaire survey was to gauge the attitude of the people coming from different backgrounds (educational, ethnic & social) towards different languages of Pakistan. To make sense of the discussion on the following pages, it must be understood how various categories of data (survey result and social media comments text) are interrelated. Here, empirical data would be seen as a phenomenon which has discursive manifestations across four 'heuristic levels of context' (Wodak 2001). These four levels include:

1. The immediate text of the communicative event in question (e.g. in this analysis, the comments from Pakistani social media websites)
2. The intertextual and interdiscursive relationships between utterances, texts, genres and discourses (i.e. identification of intertextual and interdiscursive instances in multilingual textual instances in Pakistani social media comments' discourse)
3. The extralinguistic social variables (e.g. ethnicity, social status, social class)
4. The broader socio-political and historical context which discursive practices are embedded in and related to (e.g. knowledge about broader social and cultural macro-environment that influences language attitude and linguistic situation)

This relationship between text, context and identities are interrelated with the linguistic concepts of multilingualism, multilingual society and standard/prestigious language. In this connection, Pakistani social media users' choice of language seems very interesting which happens to be either English or Urdu or a hybrid Urdu-English code. All these attributes of Pakistan's social media communication are enough to designate it the status of a new genre of communication which is a valuable indicator of people's group and individual identities.

3. Linguistic context(s) of Pakistan: an analysis with insights from the DHA

Analyzing Pakistani social media comments discourse at the first level of

context, the comments posted on Pakistani social media websites are predominantly in two languages: English and Urdu, though these two languages are mother or national languages of no region of the country. The regional languages get no representation on Pakistani social media as far as posting comments is concerned, though regional languages are still used for oral communication by a wider population of the country. According to Abbot (2012), there are six main languages and a total of about 80 languages spoken in Pakistan. The total population of Pakistan who actually speak English is about 3 to 4 per cent and Urdu language is mainly spoken by urban middle class (Rahman 2004: 253). The discrimination against the indigenous languages like Punjabi, Siraeki etc. is evident from the fact that writing and reading skill in these languages is not developed at public schools which is resulting in their gradual desertion and erosion. The choice of English language signifies education, prestige and power. According to Ghani (2003: 105) English in Pakistan serves as a gateway to success, to further education and to white collar jobs. English is the language of higher and wider education. It is not the home language of the population except in the upper strata of society where it is spoken as a status symbol. English is the language of power in comparison to Urdu (i.e. the national language) and other regional languages of Pakistan (Rassool & Mansoor 2009).

Then comes the language of reverence and religious affiliation, i.e. Arabic. Generally people of Pakistan are able to read religious scripture written in Arabic, i.e. Quran but other skills (writing, speaking and listening) in the same language are not developed. Pakistani Muslims love this language, respect it, hold it in high esteem and consider it the most revered and the exalted one. But this language does not enjoy power and status enjoyed by English language. The knowledge of Arabic language does not ensure brighter economic prospects and access to better jobs and social standing. Thus this language does not find space on Pakistani social media comments pages except when there is a need to quote Quranic references and religious traditions.

Taking all these issues into consideration, the DHA's second level of context-from the Pakistani social media language(s) perspective-could be understood. The second level of context makes the intertextual and interdiscursive aspects of the

text apparent thus connecting it with the overall discourse situation of the country. Pakistan's mainstream discourse practices echo certain intertextual and interdiscursive instances. Out of them, the scriptural and religious intertextual instances are overtly discernible. This kind of comments appears quite often on social media where references to religious personalities, quotes from scripture and religious books are incorporated depending upon the nature of the topic under discussion. Comment C.2 below is one of the instances where intertextual and interdiscursive instances are quite evident:

C.2 This is for everyone who want the good things to prevail in the society:
 go people of anti-islam go,
 go denying the hakim go,
 go the ones who do not follow al-islam upon themselves and asking
 others and hukam to establish this right and that right go,
 go the ones that do not read surah an-noor ayah 55, surah al-anfaal ayah
 53 and
 surah ar-rad ayah 11 and surah al-jathiyah ayah 23 go,
 go the ones that bring the fitnah of shubhat and had gathered the
 people in this city and that city go. (Posted by U03 in Tonight
 with Jasmine discussion thread on September 23, 2014:zemtv.com)

At third level of the context, the sociodemographic details of the Pakistani speech community must be discussed. Like in any other culture, language is a marker of one's identity and a representative of values and culture of different ethnic groups of Pakistan. On one hand there is a talk about creation of new provinces in Pakistan on linguistic basis. Along with other factors (such as administrative, economic and political) the demand for the creation of new provinces is also based on the implicit acknowledgement that all the citizens of the country have a right to retain and preserve their linguistic identity. One of such example is the demand of Seraiki province in Southern Punjab of Pakistan.

At fourth level of Pakistan's sociolinguistic context, the sociopolitical and historical scenario of the country has to be taken into account. Pakistan was created in 1947 and was divided into two wings: East Pakistan and West Pakistan. Overall there was an overwhelming majority of Bengalis (Noman 1988; Hananana

2001) and Bengali speaking community (more than 50%) in Pakistan (Ganguly 2010: 91). There was no Urdu-speaking community, state or territory in Pakistan at the time of its creation (Zaidi 2010: 22). But now there is a sizeable Urdu speaking community in Pakistan including both native speakers and non-native speakers. The native speakers migrated from India to Pakistan at the time of the creation of Pakistan in 1947. Over 10 million people emigrated from India to the newly created Pakistan (Zaidi 2010). According to some other sources (e.g. Hassan & Raza 2009: 12) 6.5 million Muslims migrated from India to Pakistan. Within weeks of the country's establishment, in November 1947, it was declared that Urdu would be Pakistan's national language (Rahamnna 1990). This decision about the status of Urdu in the newly created state was made on the assumption that Urdu was an Islamic language which would weld the country's different ethnic groups into one nation (Ahmad 2002). The Bengalis of East Pakistan reacted against this decision vehemently and saw the national language policy as the suppression of their ethno-linguistic identity. This alienation of Bengalis from Urdu language ultimately led to the dismemberment of the united Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh in 1971.

Let us have a look at Table 4.1 which shows the language distribution in (the present day) Pakistan.

Table 4.1: Language distribution in Pakistan [borrowed from Zaidi (2010: 26)]

Language(s)	%age of speakers
Punjabi	44.15
Pashto	15.42
Sindhi	14.10
Seraiki	10.53
Urdu	7.57
Balochi	3.57
Others	4.66

The figures shown in the Table 4.1 are not very recent (as they are according to 1998 census) and there have always been reservations regarding quality of government of Pakistan's data. According to Zaidi (2010), in 2008 another census was supposed to have taken place but it did not happen because of certain political

reason. The most prominent politicians of Pakistan are feudal lords, and the political power of feudal lords lies in the rural areas. The new census would have meant to lead towards redrawing of traditional political constituencies, which is generally not acceptable to the feudal and elite politicians. Nevertheless, these figures paint a fair picture of the linguistic situation of Pakistan where indigenous languages, despite being spoken by the wider population of the country, do not enjoy privileged status and prestige. Writing about language planning in the Fascist Italy, Klein says, "in public education fascism attempted to create a policy of linguistic unification, which bordered on dialectophobia. . . the idea one nation=one language was created" (Klein, 1989: 39). He further says that because in Italy language education interventions "permitted formal, monocentric and endonormative standardization" (Klein, 1989: 42), the result was that Fascist language planning was characterized by "autarchism" (Klein, 1989: 50). This is what exactly happened when the government of newly created Pakistan claimed that Pakistan would be "one nation, one religion, and one language" (Zaidi, 2001), and "Islam is the *raison d'être* of Pakistan" (Husain 2001: 9).

The propositions just stated above regarding the status of language(s) in Pakistan are further strengthened by the result of a survey administered especially for having an idea about the linguistic situation and language attitudes in Pakistani society at present.

4. Linguistic situation of Pakistan and social media discourse: language attitudes in Pakistani context

Dealing with the research question: what kind of language/languages are preferred by Pakistani social media users to post comments on the social media, the study proceeded to investigate this issue within the context of different universities in three major cities of Pakistan (Lahore, Islamabad and Multan) through a small scale survey.

4.1 Survey: questionnaire

Questionnaire research was considered an appropriate form of data collection to explore Pakistani web-user's behaviour towards certain languages. For this purpose a questionnaire was designed which contained thirty two items (which

covered following categories in order to gauge Pakistani culture's language attitude):

- a) socio-demographic information of Pakistani web-users
- b) Pakistani web-users' covert and overt preferences for certain language(s)
- c) Pakistani web-users' reasons for particular language(s) choice for posting comments
- d) Pakistani web-users' reasons for ignoring or discarding certain languages

The questionnaire is divided into three parts. Part one (items 1 to 7) contains items about socio-demographic information of the respondents. Part two of the questionnaire (items 8 to 27) contains language attitudes related items where respondents were asked to choose between the given options. Additionally, some open-ended items have also been included in this part of the questionnaire. The last and third part (items 28 to 32) contains social media language related items which are all open-ended. The 32 items in the questionnaire appeared in the proper order and the respondents were introduced to the purpose of the questionnaire in the opening section of the questionnaire.

4.2 Respondents

Six hundred university students in three major cities of Pakistan (Multan, Lahore and Islamabad) were randomly selected and requested to fill in the questionnaire. It was not possible to get data from other cities of Pakistan due to time and resources constraints.

Table 2: Questionnaire-Results

Section A: Socio-demographic Information			
1. Gender	Male: 45%	Female: 55%	
2. Age	Between 19 to 25: 66%	Between 26 to 35: 44%	
3. Education	Graduation: 75%	Masters: 25%	
4. Location	Multan: 33%	Lahore: 33%	Islamabad: 33%
5. Place of origin	India: 24%	South Punjab: 17.5%	Central Punjab: 58%
6. Mother language	Seraeki: 21%	Punjabi: 58%	Urdu: 15%
	Pashto: 09%	Balochi: 01%	Persian: 01%
7. Language(s) you speak at home	English/Urdu bilingual code: 37%		

Urdu: 30.5% Regional language: 32%

Section B: Language Attitudes

Note: Please choose the appropriate option and encircle it OR if there is no option given, provide the appropriate answers in the blank spaces.

8. I know languages. Only one :01% Two: 14.5% Three: 50%
More than three: 34%
9. By knowing a language I mean: Speaking and listening skill: 32%
Reading skill: 9.5% Writing skill: 05% All four skills: 53.5%
10. I like to write inlanguage. Urdu: 21% English: 23% Both English and Urdu: 60%
Others: 5.5%
11. I like to speak my regional language. Yes: 58% No:14% Neutral: 28%
12. The children at my home /in my surrounding are learning to speak languages. Regional language: 14% Urdu: 30% English: 56%
Others: 0%
13. I would like my children to know..... language Urdu: 22% English: 63% Regional language: 07%
Others: 08%
14. I love Urdu language. Yes: 77% No: 08% Don't know: 5% Neutral :10%
15. I love English language. Yes: 74% No: 06% Don't know: 3% Neutral:17%
16. I love Arabic language. Yes: 61.5% No: 05% Don't know: 4% Neutral:25%
17. I think regional languages are spoken by.....people. Illiterates/ Uncivilized: 26% Literates/Civilized: 51%
Rich: 11% Poor: 12%
18. I think Urdu language is spoken by..... people. Illiterates/ Uncivilized: 03% Literates/Civilized: 80%
Rich: 14% Poor: 02%
19. I think English language is spoken by..... people. Illiterates/ Uncivilized: 01% Literates/Civilized: 60%
Rich: 32% Poor: 01%
20. I think..... language is the most prestigious language. English: 77% Urdu: 23% Arabic: 03%
21. I would like to be proficient in..... language. English: 74.5% Urdu: 23% Arabic: 2.3%

22. I think one must know language. English: 75% Urdu: 23% Arabic: 02 %
Mother/ Regional Language: 03%
23. I really hate language. Punjabi: 21% Seraeeki: 20% Rangri: 13%
No: 41.5% Hindi: 05%
24. I feel embarrassed while speaking..... language in public. English: 45% Urdu: 33.5% Regional/Mother: 21%
25. I feel discriminated because of..... language I speak. English: 47% Urdu: 33% Regional/Mother: 20%
26. People laugh at me when I speak..... Chinese: 3.5% Hindi: 3 % English: 46% Urdu: 31% Regional/Mother: 16%
27. People laugh when they listen to..... language. Chinese: 04% Persian: 02% Hindi: 01 % English: 47% Urdu: 29% Regional/Mother: 15%
Arabic: 01%

Section C: Social Media

28. I sometimes post comments on social media Websites. Yes : 75% No: 25%
29. I like to post comments on social media websites in English language because:
OR Urdu: It is easy to type: 14.5% This practice has learning prospects: 16%
People understand it well: 08% It is a symbol of education: 13%
It is easy to understand: 19% It is easy to communicate in Urdu: 12%
It is easily understood by the others: 15%
30. I sometimes read comments on social media websites. Yes : 93% No: 07%
31. I like to read comments posted on social media websites in English language because:
OR Urdu: It is easy to type: 20% It promises learning prospects: 17%
People understand it well: 17.5%
It is a symbol of education: 08%
It is easy to understand: 15%
It is easy to communicate in Urdu: 7.5%
It is easily understood by the others: 15.6%

32. People usually do not post comments in regional languages because
- They cause embarrassment: 34%
 - They are not easily understandable : 35.5%
 - They have a regional base and are not understood by all: 20%
 - The others will not take them seriously: 15.5%

As the figures in the questionnaire show (see Table 2) show, out of 600, 45% (N=270) of the respondents were male and the rest of 55% were females (N=330). Being university students all of them were young people between 19 to 35 years of age. Thus 66% of the overall 600 respondents (N= 396) were between 19 to 25 years of age and rest of 44% (N=204) were between 26 to 35 years of age. As the survey was administered in the academic settings, all the respondents were educated [75% (N=450) graduation students and 25% (N=150) masters students]. This kind of population for the survey was quite appropriate because the survey was administered in relation to social media discourse. This is generally the young and educated group of people who post and read comments on the social media in Pakistan. Two hundred (33%) out of 600 respondents belonged to Multan, two hundred (33%) from Lahore and remaining two hundred (33%) from Islamabad. In Pakistan, regional languages are in the state of neglect and are being discarded by the native speakers. This language shift is more evident in the educated urban population of the country as compared to the rural one. As it could be observed in this particular survey (items 6 & 7), the respondents reported six indigenous languages (other than Urdu) as their first language. But only 29% (N=174) of the total population speaks indigenous language at home. The rest of them prefer to speak either Urdu (33.5%, N=201) or an English/Urdu hybrid code (37%, N=222) at home as their first language.

4.3 Significant results of the study

The results of the questionnaire study indicate that Urdu and English are the most dominant languages in Pakistani urban middle class and the future of regional languages does not seem very bright. Pakistan is largely a multilingual society where a majority of people know more than three languages (Table 2 item 8).

This survey reflects that there is quite a large number of people (32%, N=193) who consider speaking and listening skills the yardsticks of one's knowledge of a

language (Table 2 item 9). 58% (N=348) of them claim that they love to speak their regional language (Table 2 item 11) but when it comes to the question of writing, a majority of literate people (60%, N=361) like to write in both English and Urdu (Table 2, item 10). The respondents also reported that the majority of children (56%, N=335) in their surrounding are learning to speak English and the respondents themselves (63%, N=378) would like their children to know English (Table 2 items 12 & 13). The items 14, 15 and 16 of Table 2 show that Pakistani people love English (74%, N=444) and Urdu (77%, N=460) more than Arabic (61.5%, N=396) despite their strong love for the religion of Islam and its scripture. As far as regional languages are concerned, they are associated with illiteracy and the unsophistication by many (26%, N=157) (Table 2, item 17).

To make sure that respondents' responses are not influenced by already stated facts or clues, some open-ended items were also included in the questionnaire. The responses of open-ended questions were later interpreted and summarized in the form of a few facts or key points as stated in Table 2 (items 20 to 32). In response to somewhat similar statements in the close-ended section of the questionnaire, the results turn out to be similar in the open-ended section (see Section 3 of the questionnaire). The regional languages are not considered appropriate for posting comments on social media (item 32, Table 2) because people believe that they are not understood by all (35.5%, N=213) and their sphere is confined to a certain region only (20%, N=120). Additionally, regional languages are also considered a source of embarrassment (34%, N=204) and a symbol of non-seriousness (15.5%, N=93).

5. Conclusion

There has always been a growing interest in the field of discourse and context research (Hart, 2011; McKinlay & McVittie, 2011; Miller & Dingwall, 1997). This particular study-by analyzing four levels of context and connecting it with empirical data-makes a humble contribution to the same field. The four levels of context and the interpretation and the explanation of the survey results show how different levels of context provide a glimpse into the discursive social set-up and the identification paradigm of Pakistani society in general and social media in

particular. The systematic application of the DHA leads to determine how understanding of context and the contextual make-up of web-users is influenced not only by discursive skills, but also by a particular linguistic situation and structural and cultural constraints of socio-political and historical conditions. In other words, the DHA illustrates how social media discussions could project personal and group identities of people (which are always embedded in the context of culture and the context of situation). Furthermore, this article demonstrates the value of a disciplined and recursive analysis of social media discussions surrounding interrelated and overlapping phenomena of language attitude and language shift.

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