



A SOCIOLINGUISTICS STUDY: DIGLOSSIA IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH IN SOCIAL MEDIA

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Abstract- This research article examines various scenarios due to which diglossic behaviour is revealed in different social media platforms and its impact on the standard (H) variety of Pakistani English. This linguistic research also explores how the high and low varieties of Pakistani English change in different contexts. The problem regarding both age and gender is also examined for its impact of using alternative varieties of Pakistani English in different social settings. Furthermore, this research aims at investigating the impact of Pakistani English diglossia on different social media sites as a reflection of Pakistani English speaking communities among different social contexts. Additionally, this research also examines diglossia in two most popular social media platforms; Facebook, and Twitter. This research article may draw some generalized results about diglossia in Pakistani English speaking communities especially in Pakistan. These two platforms Facebook and Twitter offer different kinds of diglossic attitudes by its users. The research concludes that high (H) variety of Pakistani English is employed by users for issues related to politics, current affairs, education, administration, business, law and religion. As for as low variety (L) is concerned, it is employed by users for fashion news, colloquial purposes like everyday conversation, music, sports related news and gossiping.

Keywords: Twitter, Facebook, Diglossia, Social Media, Online, Pakistani English, and Low & High Variety

I. INTRODUCTION

According to Harris & Hodges (1981) diglossia is a situation where two different varieties – High (H) and Low (L) – of the same language are used by its speakers in a society. Sociolinguistics as a field, that studies the relationship between language and society, have always been understudied by sociolinguists for various concepts that include diglossia too. The two varieties in diglossia, high and low, have certain characteristics. High variety (H) is considered formal variety as it is used for formal purposes for example, books, journals, research, official documentation, and law etc. Low variety (L) on the other hand is informal in its capacity as it is used by speaker in an informal situation. These situations may include daily conversation, language employed at social gathering, general gossiping. This variety (L) is not used officially as it is not supported by the institutions in any form. Saville-Troike (1982) argues that there are distinctive differences between the two varieties – (H) and (L). Each variety has its accents, dialects, different styles, and registers. Though each variety serves its own purpose yet both the varieties – (H) and (L) – are interrelated and they complement each other. High variety (H) is considered as more prestigious as compared to low variety (L).

Different languages spoken in a society can, possibly, have different varieties for example Pakistani society has six to seven language varieties such as Urdu, which is its national language, English, the official language and Pashto, Punjabi, Sindhi, and Balochi are some of its indigenous varieties. As the same time a single language can have different varieties such as Pakistani English that is spoken in Pakistan has two varieties; one that is employed officially such as used in courts' decision, officially used by universities, government institutions and in English newspapers published daily. Low (L) variety of Pakistani English is used mostly in daily conversation and on social media. People tend to use low variety of Pakistani English mostly on Facebook and Twitter which are the two most popular social media platforms used in Pakistan.

Since, High variety (H) is formal so it has its own formal rules and regulation that are strictly observed by its users. These rules and regulation include sound grammatical structure, complex sentence structure, and it is highly inflected as well. Fiction writers tend to employ it in their literary pieces. It is formally taught in educational institutions. In fact H, along with Urdu high variety, is taught as a compulsory subject

in schools, colleges and universities.

This research article pointed out various scenarios due to which diglossic attitudes emerge in the world of social media and its impacts on high variety of Pakistani English. The research further explored the notion that whether the change in the topic affects the change in the variety as well. Furthermore, the research also covered the role of gender in using different varieties. Finally, the age factor was also considered in using different varieties on the two social media platforms – Twitter and Facebook.

Research Questions

Q1. What are the factor that allow active users of social media to use H & L varieties of Pakistani English?

Research Objectives

To examine the factors that contribute to the diglossic condition in Pakistani English for social media users.

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Ferguson (1959), in his research article titled *Diglossia*, defines Diglossia as 'the use of two different varieties of the same language by the same speaker in separate socially-determined contexts'. Ferguson (1959) further states that Diglossia is established set of language which is also employed along with the standard and non-standard forms of the language. Though Diglossia, in high variety (H) has more complex structure since it is quite formal in its nature. It is highly prestigious as official institutions in a society correspond through it so it has its value. Ferguson (1959) further states it the H variety is learned in formal condition such as in classrooms. Though, it is formal, and it is employed for official and formal purpose, yet the masses do not use in their day-to-day life as they prefer the informal variety i.e. low variety (L). According the Ferguson (1959) the two varieties –high and low – must be of the same language.

Pakistani English, following the definition of Ferguson (1959) can be divided into two varieties – high (H) and low (L). High variety of Pakistani English function as formal variety as it is used by judiciary, universities, in the official matters of Pakistani government etc. While low variety of Pakistani English is employed in informal situations such as daily conversation and mostly on social media. Alshamrania (2007) argues that though H variety has its prestige status, and its structure is more compound and complex but there are limitations in using H variety, for example, one cannot speak to his/her family or friends in high variety (H).

High (H) and low variety (L) are acquired in a different way. Children tends to learn low variety from their surrounding hence it is learnt unconsciously. On the other hand, high variety (H) is acquired in conditioned environment – in schools and colleges. Standard Pakistani English (from now onwards SPE) is learnt in schools by kids and they go through various tests in each grade. The SPE is high variety hence it is compulsory for students to pass the exam – both written and oral. While Non-Standard Pakistani English (from now on NSPE) which is low variety (L) is used by speakers in informal situations. It is mostly used in social media platforms where the user is not so much concerned with the structure rather he is focused on communicating the idea.

Contrary to Ferguson (1959) who forwarded the concept that different varieties must be of a same language, Fishman (1967) suggests that 'there may be more than two language varieties used within a diglossic community'. Fishman (1967) further states that Diglossia include all varieties of a language which is used by members of the society. Thus Diglossia refers to different kinds of sociolinguistic scenarios ranging from stylistics differences in the same variety of a language or the utilization of separate dialects of the same or different languages. To conclude, Fishman (1967) argues that each variety, whether high (H) or low (L), has its own function in a society. It does not matter if they are different varieties of the same language as their uses will vary.

Wardhaugh (1986) further discusses Diglossia by giving various examples of the high and low varieties of different languages. In Switzerland, states Wardhaugh (1986), there are two varieties of the same language, German.

The high variety is called Standard German (H) and Swiss German (L). While Standard French (H), a high variety of French in Haiti is used while Haitian Creole is its low variety (L). Wardhaugh (1986) then gives example of Katharevousa, high variety (H) in Greece, and Dhimotiki which is its low variety (L). According

to Haeri (2000) a high variety (H) is a variety which is used for formal writing, for educational purposes and mostly in administration. While low variety, which he called 'vernaculars', are mostly used in oral conversations, social media, fiction and poetry. Al-Mamari (2011) has explained Diglossia, a sociolinguistic concept, which consist of two varieties of the same language and each variety serves different and unique purpose. Arabic and Pakistani English are the two examples of the Diglossia. Ferguson (1959) argues that high variety (h) is learned formally, through proper training and it takes a lot of practice. It is prestigious and it is employed by the educated section of the society. And low variety (L) can be learnt without any formal training and is used by masses generally. An educated person, states Ferguson (1959) can, to a greater extent, understand and interpret the variety used by an uneducated person. But the reverse is quite impossible for an uneducated person, who uses low variety (L), to understand and respond using high variety (H). This simply means that common people, who employ Non-Standard Pakistani English (NSPE), which is low variety (L), in Pakistan, though may be able to grasp the basic idea of high variety (h), yet they will not be able to produce argument in Standard Pakistani English (SPE) which is a high variety (H).

III. METHODOLOGY

The data was collected for one week from the two social media platforms – Twitter and Facebook. There are 1.26 and 3.2 million active users of Twitter and Facebook in Pakistan respectively. The researcher observed both the social media platforms keenly and gathered the data. The research is qualitative in its nature so the gathered data was then analyzed for the two varieties of Pakistani English – high (H) and low (L). The purpose behind choosing Twitter and Facebook was that these two social media platforms are at the moment the two most popular in Pakistani. The researcher collected data concerning different issues such as fashion, religion, showbiz, news, politics, and sport events. The researcher kept in view gender and age of the users as well. Around 500 personal statuses and tweets were collected and then later on categorized into Standard Pakistani English (SPE), a high (H) variety, and Non-Standard Pakistani English (NSPE) which is a low variety (L).

IV. ANALYSIS & DISCUSSION

Pakistani English is undoubtedly a diglossic language. The social media has experienced greater heights in recent years because of its popularity among youth. Social media has now become a mandatory part of their daily life. People are always discussing something using either Facebook or Twitter. These discussions vary in its nature. It ranges from politics to showbiz industry to current affairs to sports to personal conversations. This section analyzes the role of the two varieties of Pakistani English H and L in social media.

The two most popular social media platforms in Pakistan are Twitter and Facebook. People discuss almost everything online both with their friends and strangers they meet online. Users, while interacting, either use SPE (H) or NSPE (L) or both depending on the topic under discussion. There are, though, certain factors behind utilizing either SPE (H) or NSPE (L).

Most of the user interact with their family members and their friends of Twitter and Facebook so they use NSPE (L) because the purpose is to interact, to share, to discuss things informally hence they avoid using SPE which is a high variety. Most of the topics which people discuss with their near and dears are such which can be discussed in NSPE (L). These topics mostly include showbiz news, politics, and sports. These users are further divided based upon their age and gender. The young users tend to be much more informal, using NSPE (L) and they mostly discuss showbiz, music and movies. They tend to be casual in their approach. Only on few occasion they tend to use SPE (H) such as when they are interacting with their elders, teachers or strangers. When it comes to gender, female users of Twitter and Facebook, often, tend to use NSPE (L) because they sometime employ code-mixing. The female users of Twitter and Facebook, it was observed, tend to discuss the topics which tend to fall under NSPE (L). These topics of discussion are chiefly showbiz and ongoing TV serials as at the end of each episode, the viewer use the platform of Twitter and Facebook to discuss the characters, plot, theme, events of that very particular TV series in NSPE (L). The second topic which female users tend to discuss education sector. Since female education ratio as an issue to most of the educated female users of Twitter and Facebook spread awareness about the essence of female education and its role in the development of Pakistan. Since the topic is quite debatable so these female users use both SPE (H) and NSPE (L). They use high variety SPE (H) in discussing this issue with an educated person while in order to simplify their point of view, they tend to

use NSPE (L).

Some users of Twitter and Facebook, as the collected data suggest employ SPE (H) all the time. These users are mostly academicians, journalists and research scholars. Journalist whose job is to provide news and this require meticulous research and using exact language. Their variety which journalist employ is usually Standard Pakistan English which is a high variety (H). Journalist tend to focus on the topics which are more formal and serious in nature. They discuss politics and politicians. They tend to criticize governmental policies for which they employ polished language. The prime example are the topic journalists of Pakistan such as Hamid Mir, Cyril Almeida, Abbas Nasir, and Talat Hussain etc. These journalists utilize SPE (H) variety in their tweets to convey their ideas.

Research scholars present facts and figure based on their researches so their tweets on Twitter and their statuses on Facebook are highly sophisticated. They use SPE (H) for this purpose. Most of the researcher have other researcher in their social circle on Twitter and Facebook this is why that most of the time their language is SPE (H) because they are almost always in contact with other fellow scholars.

Academician also employ formal variety of Pakistan English that is SPE (H). Academician tend to discuss matters related to education sectors. They discuss is mostly intellectual so they choose high variety (H) for that matter. As the researcher observed that most of the academician, who happen to be teachers, lecturers and professors, have their students in their online social circle so they choose high variety (H) to discuss different topics with them. Their topics range from researches, different kinds of books, and education.

The researcher observed that Male users of both the platforms – Twitter and Facebook – discuss topics such as sports and politics. Their discussion happens to involve both varieties – high (H) and low (L). Since cricket is extremely popular sports in Pakistan, so the male section of the social media discuss is primarily. They during this topic employ low varies that is NSPE (L). Their arguments are mixtures of serious logical arguments and at times fallacious too.

The other topic while male users of Twitter and Facebook discuss is politics. Since politics means heated discussion, so the variety is largely SPE (H). One of the prime example of using SPE (H) variety of Pakistani English is the tweets of the current Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan.

As it was established from the literature review that it is possible for a language to have different varieties so this this true for the Pakistani English as well. There are different factors involved in using the two varieties – SPE and NSPE – of Pakistani English by the users of the social media platform Twitter and Facebook. These factors involve the topic under the discussion which may need SPE (H) or the topic may be such that need NSPE (L). Another factor is the education level of the users. User A and User B may not be equally educated when are discussing international politics so one User with higher qualification has to employ NSPE (L) for the sake of the other user.

V. CONCLUSION

This research study discussed and analyzed diglossia in Pakistani English in the two most popular social media platform – Twitter and Facebook – in Pakistan. Sociolinguists are of the opinion that Pakistani English is a diglossic language because there are two varieties: Standard Pakistani English (H) variety and then there are other colloquial varieties (L). It was established that Standard Pakistani English is of higher value but at the same time it cannot be used everywhere all the time. It is indeed L variety of Pakistani English that is used generally in social media.

The study revealed that there are diglossic tendencies in social media. It also concluded that the younger generation tend to use L variety more often. The users of H variety can easily use L but it is not possible for L variety users to express themselves in H variety completely. Most of the posts and the tweets discuss different kinds of issues. These issues include sports, politics, and music and economy.

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