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***The competing status of Urdu and English after  
declaration of Urdu as official language in Pakistan***

**Abstract:**

The current research aims at exploring the status of Urdu and English in Pakistan. There has always been a rift between Urdu and English in order to stay dominant language in the spheres of power like education, law and bureaucracy in Pakistan. There were many steps taken to replace English practically and the latest of the plans was initiated in 2015 to replace Urdu with English as an official language. This necessitated the current research to re-assess the role of Urdu and English in this phase of transition. The data for the current research was collected by using interview protocol. A sample of 60 participants selected through purposive sample took part in the collection of data. The interview protocol comprised questions on the aspects like the importance of the language, the academic value of the language and the future of that language. The study concludes that the people understand the role of Urdu in the context of nation-wide connection while English is source of connecting with the world. English enjoys better academic value as well as better future prospects in comparison with Urdu.

**Keywords:**

Urdu English National Language Lingua franca

**Introduction:**

Urdu and English have been two important languages of the region since the

birth of Pakistan and even before. The careful perusal of history shows that both Hindus and Muslims made untiring and a century long efforts to win freedom from the British rule (Khan, 2017; Prasad, 2016). They initiated the freedom movement and the struggle for liberation in unison but later on, their ways diverged from each other. There were several reasons for Hindu-Muslim controversy and separation and of these reasons, the language issue was very important. The Hindus wanted Hindi to be the national language after the independence while Muslims wanted Urdu as the successor of English language in India (Metcalf, 2014; Rahman, 2007; Ayres, 2009). Urdu-Hindi controversy was one of the leading causes that forced Muslims to part their way from Hindus and to think of a separate independent country (Jiang & Ya, 2016; Rahman, 2007). In the year 1947, British rulers had to surrender in front of the Indian people and they divided Indian Subcontinent into two independent states namely Pakistan and India (Khan, 2017). This situation led to large scale Muslim population being forced to migrate to Pakistan from India. One year after the independence of Pakistan in 1948, Urdu was decided to be the sole national language of Pakistan (Bughio, 2014; Ali, 2011). English also remained operative in many importance spheres of life such as law, education, and bureaucracy. After seventy years of independence, both these languages continue to compete with one another for dominance in the country today.

### **Literature Review:**

Pakistan is a multilingual and multi ethnic country with 73 languages operative in the country. The linguistic landscape of has become very complex which requires careful planning to create a sense of solidarity and satisfaction among all linguistic groups. In this linguistically complex landscape Urdu language occupies the central place among all languages and the same is reflected in the language policies of the country devised at various times (Mellor, 2015). Sometimes, the critics also contend that the language policies of Pakistan have served to over-patronize Urdu, considering it a cohesive national symbol, at the expense of other languages (Rahman, 2008, 2011). Historically, Urdu is the native language of more than one million people who migrated from northern areas of India like Utter Pardesh, Madhya Pardesh, Bihar and settled in the Sindh Province

which is in the south east of Pakistan. Since they settled in the urban areas of Sindh and had higher education, they occupied most of the bureaucratic places in the country despite the fact that they were in minority (Ansari, 2016).

Urdu is the native language of approximately 8% of country's population (Rahman, 2011), but still it provides a common means of communication for the people hailing from different linguistic backgrounds (Kothari, 2015). It is also used as medium of instruction in educational institutes besides its role as a lingua franca in the country (Javed, 2017). With a purpose to promote Urdu language, National Language Authority was established in 1978 in order to meet national demands of languages (Ilahi, 2013). Urdu as the national language of the country is the representative of national identity of the people of Pakistan (Manan& David, 2014). It unites all the provinces and minor units with the federation and it also connects all the communities in the country with one another in a way that they could communicate and understand one another. Though, Urdu was declared the national language of Pakistan in the year 1948 as mentioned earlier but this status of Urdu as the national language was acknowledged in the constitution of Pakistan in the year 1973. The constitution of Pakistan 1973 states that the national language of Pakistan is Urdu and arrangements shall be made of its being used for official and other purposes within the fifteen years from the commencing day and that the English language may be used for official purposes until arrangements are made for its replacements by Urdu.

English although not being an indigenous language is mentioned in the constitution because of its colonial association. Even after the independence in 1947 the importance of English has stayed on as a British legacy one example of elitist power of English language is that even the constitution of the country is written in English. English is also used as a medium of instruction in education sector (Soomro, 2016). In Pakistan English is taken as a status symbol and a passport to a bright future (Umrani&Bughio, 2017). A person who is proficient in English language has more opportunities than the person who is not. In the words of Shamim (2008) English has served as vehicle to achieve development in the field of science and technology, to become modern and to advance economically on individual as well as national level. English in Pakistan is treated as a language of

power and prestige. English is widely used in the executive, legislative, and judicial purposes (Ansari, Mehmood&Mangool, 2015; Rahman, 2008). According to Manan and David (2014), English language as a British legacy remains in use in all important power spheres.

The status of English language is that of a second language in Pakistan (Pennycook, 2017). Being the legacy of British colonizers, it is considered a status symbol and is spoken widely by the highly influential portion of the population. English is considered a social capital and various institutes that teach English language speak a lot about the inevitable role of English in the country (Haidar, 2017). English is supported by the ruling elite as it ensures the social distinction possessed by them (Khattak, 2014). It is taken as status symbol and the tool of upward mobility with its increasing importance in the upper social classes (Parveen&Mehmood, 2013).

English and Urdu have been two important languages of this geographical area even before the birth of Pakistan. According to Rahman (2011), both Urdu and English are the languages of education and are promoted in various spheres of life and are the languages of the domains of power. They have been competing for a better status as well as a medium of instruction. The earliest controversy could be traced back to the English medium education proposed by Lord Macaulay (Macaulay, 1835) and the demand of Sir Sayyed to use Urdu as medium of instruction (Waseem, 2014). After the birth of Pakistan, efforts were made to promote Urdu which remained successful but Urdu could never replace English in the domains of power (Raheem, 2015). The trend of English medium schooling not only remained but became more popular, as mentioned earlier the constitution of Pakistan formulated in 1973 also declared that within 15 years Urdu will replace English as official language (The constitution of Pakistan, 1973) but unfortunately this vision could not be materialized. The dilemma of the situation is that English still remains irreplaceable despite repeated efforts by the governments. Some contribution for the prevailing situation may be credited to the globalization and internationalization of English while an equal responsibility could be credited to the lack of seriousness and unwillingness of the authorities.

The government of Pakistan initiated a program to give Urdu the status of official language in 2015 (Malik, 2016) and under this program the constitution of

the country and other major laws are being translated. The ground is being smoothened practically for Urdu to replace English as an official language. In this phase of transition which was promised in the constitution of 1973 it becomes necessary to re-assess the status of these two languages in the eyes of the common public.

### **Research Methodology:**

The current research is qualitative in nature and employs interview as a data collection method from the participants of the study. Thus, in order to explore the status of English and Urdu in Pakistan, an interview protocol was designed (see the appendix for details). Since the study was delimited to the opinion of the educated youth, the inclusion criterion was that the participants were university students within the age range of 20 to 35 years. A sample of 60 participants from four universities (two public and two private) was selected using purpose sampling technique. Keeping in view the equal representation criteria, 15 participants from each university were selected. The data collection was personally administered by the researchers. The research instrument was validated by using expert validity criteria. A panel of four socio linguists participated in the process of validation. The suggestions and improvements recommended by the experts were incorporated and the interview protocol was finalized. The final version of semi structured interview protocol (Appendix-I) comprised questions on the aspects like the importance of the language, perceptions about its speakers, cross linguistic influences, maintenance of that language, parents reaction to its use, the academic value of the language and the future of that language.

### **Data Analysis:**

The interview protocol required the participants to express their opinion on various questions related to Urdu and English language. These questions were related to the themes of instrumental and integrative value of the language, the perceptions about the users of language, the issue of maintenance and preservation of language, its academic value, the linguistic transformations taking place and the future of these languages.

In response to the question related to the usefulness, importance and general value of the Urdu language, the participants were very enthusiastic. The participants referred to the role of Urdu as the national language and in this role as

was earlier said by Manan and David, (2014) that Urdu is representative of national identity of the people of Pakistan, it has proved as a source of creating unity among the diverse groups living in the country. The participants described that Urdu is very important in the sense that it provides a common means of communication for the people who belong to different linguistic backgrounds. These people face linguistic barriers and are unable to understand each other and to them, Urdu helps in myriad of roles in the daily lives of people, for example;

- Urdu is a source of uniting people in one bond
- Urdu is a source of creating harmony and nationalism among diverse ethnicity
- Urdu is the national lingua franca
- Urdu is a bridge language and helps us to communicate with every person in the country

With reference to the perceptions about the people who speak Urdu language, the participants believed that they embody education and civilization. They create pleasant impressions on the audience and the listener. Their language represents their politeness and decency. The participants showed a good deal of respect and admiration for the speakers of Urdu. They also appreciated the role of Urdu as being very delicate and sophisticated language. As per perception of the participants, the speakers of Urdu had the ease of communication. Some participants created a correlation between the use of Urdu language and the nationalist spirit.

- o They are educated, cultured and civilized people
- o They are high middle class people with good education
- o They are able to communicate in a better way
- o They are the proud citizens of the country
- o The people who speak Urdu are the ambassador of this language and the nation

The participants mentioned many reasons for learning Urdu which ascertained the views expressed by Rahman (2008, 2011) that Urdu has been promoted a lot in the country. One aspect was the instrumental like better job and improving their careers. They thought that better Urdu language skills will bring them better prospects of life and many opportunities to make progress in their career. The participants also mentioned integrative motivation to study Urdu

language and to promote it. They believed that we being the citizen of Pakistan owe to Urdu language and we must try to promote it in all spheres of life. The participants also described the literary reasons for the importance of Urdu language. They referred to the rich tradition of literature in Urdu. They appreciated the aesthetic value of Urdu language as it embodies marvelous literature. The intellectuals like Faiz and Manto remain unsurpassed in literature.

- ✦ Urdu will help me expedite my progress
- ✦ My job opportunities will increase
- ✦ Urdu has rich culture and heritage. If we do not study Urdu, we shall not be able to understand it
- ✦ To retain our national identity, we have to study Urdu language as it is the marker of our identity
- ✦ Urdu has a vast literature and by studying Urdu, we can understand literature in true sense

The most important aspect of the research was concerned with maintenance and preservation of Urdu language in Pakistan. The participants were quiet satisfied with the maintenance and preservation of Urdu language. The participants discussed that research on Urdu language can prove very fruitful in preserving it. In order to promote and maintain Urdu language, translation of important science and other literature from other languages can be very beneficial as well. Some of the participants described the importance of education sector with regards to maintenance and preservation issues. Some referred to the teaching of Urdu as a subject as well as language already in progress at various levels which has ensured its maintenance and preservation. The participants claimed that literary activities are at the helm of the promotional activities of any language. The production of good literature in any language ensures its promotion so the participant highlighted the need to arrange cultural activities and to promote Urdu in literary circles. Cultural activities and seminars are also very important in this regard. They contended that Urdu must be used more and more as well as in all spheres of life.

- ⇒ There is need to do research work on this language, material from other language should be translated in this language

- ⇒ The Urdu linguistics must work to devise new vocabulary; easy for the masses so that the people start using it in the day to day chores
- ⇒ Urdu is already being taught in the syllabus in the educational institutes
- ⇒ There is a need to promote it in literary circles because literature is a good source of preserving a language. We must write novels and literary works to promote it for preservation
- ⇒ It should be implemented in all the fields

The cross linguistic influence was an important aspect of the interview as it described which language was influenced in what way. In this scenario, the participants related the history of Urdu language as Lashkari language and referred to it as a highly absorbent language. The participants held the opinion that English has influenced Urdu language a lot. There are so many words from English that have become part of Urdu language. The participants referred to the fact that even if we speak Urdu, we mix so many words of English so we mix the codes quite often. The participants also described that sometimes they feel difficulty in retrieving the Urdu words and they fill the gaps by adding English words. Some participants expressed serious doubts about the replacement of Urdu by English. As reflected in the opinion of the participants, the Urdu language has lost its essence and worth under the influence of English.

- ▶ Urdu is a language with a great potential to absorb other languages in it and expand it
- ▶ Urdu keeps on growing, both English and Punjabi have contributed in the expansion of Urdu vocabulary
- ▶ Urdu has borrowed many words from English and they have become a part of Urdu language. Expanding its lexicon
- ▶ The people prefer bilinguality and use English and Urdu both languages simultaneously by mixing them
- ▶ Understanding the status of these languages, it can be said that English is taking place of Urdu as well. This is a dilemma of our society and we must try to come out of this situation

With reference to the academic value of Urdu, the participants saw the



academic value in a positive way as it is our national language. The participants were satisfied as they contended that Urdu is the medium of instruction in many schools and colleges - a clear indication of its academic worth - as Rahman (2011) called it the language of education. The participant also added that Urdu is being taught as a compulsory subject in Pakistan and its teaching is useful because it is being used and understood in all nooks and corners of the country. Some research is also being conducted on Urdu and in this regard, one participant referred to the role of Center for Research in Urdu Language (CRULP). According to the participants, teaching of Urdu language will develop the emotions of nationhood in all provinces and will unite them together. Despite general satisfaction, some of the participants acknowledged the need to improve its use in literary circles and to write good literature in it in order to promote it.

- Since it is our national language so it is our national duty to promote it
- Being the national language its teaching and study will develop the emotion of nationhood in all the provinces and unite them together
- In order to understand our culture and to understand Urdu literature, Urdu language must be studied

The last question related to Urdu required the participant to predict the future of Urdu language. The participants used positive adjectives like good, bright and safe to refer to the future of Urdu language. They related the future of Urdu to its role as the national language of the country and its wider use as a lingua franca in the country similar to what was said by Javed (2017). Some participants referred to the rich literature being produced as guarantee to its survival. The participants appreciated some of the research work being conducted in the country. They believed that research is guarantee that language is important and has bright future.

However, some participants expressed serious doubts to the future of Urdu language under the influence of English. They believed that English being the dominant language of the world is creating certain harmful influence on all the languages and Urdu is no exception in this regard. The sense of superiority attached to English language has created much damage to Urdu language. Many of the participants related its future to the pride taken by its speakers in using it.

They expressed the presence of a direct relationship between what the Urdu speakers think and the future of this language.

- Urdu has a good future as it is widely spoken in the country
- Urdu is the national language of one of the thickly populated country of the world and has its speakers in many countries
- Its future seems to be bleak under the influence and shadow of English
- The future of Urdu is in our hands and depends on our thinking

The participants responded to the questions related to English language with the same enthusiasm. In response to the question related to the importance of English language, the participants discussed at large about the well-established importance of English language. They referred to English as international and global language. They believed that it is a source of connecting with the world and understanding it. Some participants described its importance in the context of business and trade while other participants referred to it as the language of science and technology thus as mentioned earlier, it is used in all important power spheres (Manan& David, 2014). They related its importance to the fact that one cannot work with any reputed national or international organization without knowledge of this language. So in order to operate any business, or to perform your duties in any capacity of job, the people with good level of English proficiency are required. The participants said that the major reason for the paramount importance of English is the process of digitalization, the world has undergone.

- ▶▶ The world has become global village and the people are very closely connected with one another. So in order to connect with the world, you need a language which is globally understood and English provide us that resource
- ▶▶ English is the language of international business and trade
- ▶▶ With the world becoming global village, a lot of digitalization has taken place which owes to English language
- ▶▶ English is the language of science and technology and most of the scientific research reaching the audience is in English language

With reference to the perception about the people who speak English language, the participants showed a general liking and admiration for them. With reference to some important qualities, the participants considered them well

educated, modern and well-groomed people. The participants associated the English language skill with the psychological strength of the peoples who speak English. The psychological labels used by the participants to refer to the speakers of English were confident, intelligent and superior as Umrani and Bughio (2017) also said that it is a status symbol. This shows a sense of liking and positive attitude toward the people who speak English. The participants showed a lot of respect toward the people who speak English similar to the study conducted by Khattak (2014) who advocates that English is a source of social distinction. They related English to the trait of respectability and honor. This is clearly reflected in some of the statements that they spoke.

- ✓ They are modern and elite peoples
- ✓ They are generally taken as educated and literate people
- ✓ The people who speak English are full of confidence
- ✓ If a person speaks English, it shows that he is intelligent and has a lot of knowledge
- ✓ They are confident as they can easily connect to any society and community
- ✓ The people who speak English, they are considered more respectable in comparison with others

The participants talked about the importance of English language in the context of instrumental benefit. They thought that better English will result in finding better jobs and a lift in their career. The participants were of the opinion that English language will guarantee them a prosperous future which can be said in the words of Umrani and Bughio (2017) a passport to a bright future. The participants also thought that English is the need of the hour in order to make progress. The participants also expressed the integrative motivation toward English language. They appreciated the English literature and arts. According to them, English is an important tool for understanding the world.

- ☐ English is important for job, status and self-improvement
- ☐ English will bring me prestige and honor as well as bright future
- ☐ English language must be studied for knowledge and for monetary benefit
- ☐ English is taken as a passport to the progress and prosperity
- ☐ English is required to understand literature of English, understanding

movies and music

- ☐ To understand and react with different cultures across the world. I like English for my own aesthetic literary pleasure

When the languages coexist, it is natural that they influence each other. With reference to the influences of Urdu and Punjabi languages on the English language, the participants enlisted words like 'Izzat' 'Dopatta' and 'Chatni' that have entered the English lexicon from local languages. The participants expressed that the pronunciation patterns of English have been localized or customized to make it intelligible for the people. Thus lexical and phonological were two important dimensions of influence received by English language. Since the English language used in Pakistan is a unique variety of English, the efforts are under way to recognize Pakistani English as an important nonnative variety of English.

- English has got a lot of modification in terms of vocabulary. There are many words which are now part and parcel of English language
- The English spoken by Pakistanis bears a lot of influence of Urdu and Punjabi. It is being modified in terms of style and structure in line with the locally spoken languages
- The accent of English has changed and some other transmissions have also taken place as the style of speaking has changed under the influence of Urdu and Punjabi
- English has started accepting Punjabi and Urdu vocabulary and accent was also Punjabisized and Urduized, so Pakistani English is going to be an established variety

The ultimate importance and survival of any language can be ensured by its implementation in education sector and improving its academic value. According to the participants, the academic value of English is well established. The participants said that learning English language create global linkage and connects them with the people around the world. There were many participants who also expressed that the academic value of English is sponsored by a lot of international conferences held in English. The participant drew the direct relationship between English language proficiency and their academic performance and progress. The participants claimed high academic value for English because it is the language for instruction in the education sector as was discussed by Soomro (2016) in an earlier

study. The participants stressed the need to teach English because it is basic requirement to excel academically and professionally.

- ♥ One must study English in order to excel professionally and academically
- ♥ English has become necessity to get admission in good educational institutes
- ♥ There are many conferences held every year across the globe and English is designated language of the most of the conferences
- ♥ Learning language can be source of connecting with all the people around the world

The last question in the interview protocol about English language asked the opinion of the participants about its future. The participants expressed their views by using words like bright, promising, secure, and shining to refer to the future of the English language. They said that it will survive as it is the language of the developed countries. They referred to its secure future in the context of globalization and the age of digitalization. Likewise, some of the participants even held opinion that its use and importance will increase in the coming years.

- ☐ There is an overall growth of interest in this language over time and it is still expanding
- ☐ There are millions of L1 and L2 speakers and others who speak it as foreign language so nothing can intimidate it
- ☐ The future of English is very bright as there are millions of people across the globe who use this language; there are millions others who are in the process of learning it
- ☐ I think it is going to dominate all the languages of the world and the coming generation will speak only English
- ☐ It is expanding day by day and has a bright future in this age of globalization.

### **Findings:**

The participants referred to the role of Urdu as the national language in order to create unity among the diverse ethno linguistic groups living in the country while they referred to English as international language in the context of business and trade as well as the language of science and technology. The participants believed that the people who speak Urdu language embody education and

civilization as they are polite and decent while they associated the English language skill with education as well as the psychological strength. The participants held the opinion that English and Urdu have both influenced each other as the words from each one of these languages have undergone borrowing and lexical assimilation. The participants expressed that the pronunciation patterns of English have been localized or customized to make it intelligible for the local people. The participants asserted the academic value of Urdu as it is the medium of instruction in schools and colleges as well as a compulsory subject. There were many participants who expressed that the academic value of English is sponsored by a lot of international conferences held in English besides operating as medium of instruction in the education sector. The participants expressed both the instrumental and integrative value of Urdu and English but they attached more instrumental value to English language while Urdu language was related more with the integrative value. The participants related the future of Urdu to its role as the national language of the country and its wider use as a lingua franca in the country; however, some participants expressed doubts to the future of Urdu language under the influence of English being the dominant language of the world. They described the need to promote Urdu language by good literary tradition, by arranging seminars and conferences as well as by the process of translation.

**Conclusion:**

It is concluded from the research that both Urdu and English stay in tough competition with each other to claim dominant role in the country. The people understand the role of Urdu in the context of nation-wide connection while English is a source of connecting with the world. English enjoys better academic value in comparison with Urdu as it is the language of seminars and conferences nationally as well as internationally. The future of the English language is also bright while the participants expressed doubts that the Urdu language is being replaced slowly by the English language. So, English still enjoys better status in this phase of transition as well. More serious and sincere efforts are required to create awareness among masses as to assert the importance of Urdu as well as to create practical grounds for the replacement of English by Urdu if at all it has to be made possible.

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## Appendix-I

### Interview Protocol:

1. How do you evaluate the integrative or personal value of Urdu language?
2. How do you evaluate the integrative or personal value of English language?
3. How do you evaluate the instrumental or practical value of Urdu language?
4. How do you evaluate the instrumental or practical value of English language?
5. How do you find the people who use Urdu language?
6. How do you find the people who use English language?
7. What is being done and what more needs to be done to maintain and preserve Urdu language?
8. What is the academic value of Urdu language according to you?
9. What is the academic value of English language according to you?
10. What are the cross linguistics influences and linguistic transformations taking place?
11. How do you see the future of Urdu language?
12. How do you see the future of English language?

