Semio-Communicative Aspects of Urdu-Hindi Loan Words in English

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Abstract

Semio-communication deals with the selection and application of linguistic structures and, how the decision to speak in language, the human formal, abstract system of communication, is inextricably bound up with the physical, psychological, functional, pragmatic, cultural universe in essence, the semiotic world. The present study tries to focus upon the semio-communicative aspect of Urdu-Hindi loan words in English, showing their relevance in fulfilling the communication need and their impact on the listeners or readers.

Key words: Semio-communication, Borrowing, Code-switching, linguistic and referential gaps, Urdu-Hindi loan words in English

Introduction

Communication could be a bipolar development played chiefly by senders and receivers. Apart from these two, a third agent that plays a crucial role in communication is 'Semiotics'. Semiotics is basically the study of signs and symbols that persons use to represent reality, how these signs and symbols are understood within the world of experience, particularly, globally and universally and the way persons then make use of those signs and symbols to deal with and make sense of their reality and experience. Semiotics, the science of signs and of the codes to grasp them, has nice relevance to several areas of life.

This results in the notion of 'Semio-communication'. It pertains deliberately with regard to the selection and application of linguistic structures and, how the decision to speak in language, the human formal, abstract system of communication is inextricably bound up with the

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physical, psychological, functional, pragmatic, cultural universe in essence, the semiotic world. Therefore we can say that the meaning of an expression doesn't solely lie within the word however it's within the minds of the users. It's the communicative pact between the speakers (or writers) and hearers (or readers) that shapes the meaning of an expression. Hence different words have different communicative effects when utilized by different individuals of various cultures.

1. Borrowing

The words taken from one language and transferred into another are known as 'loanwords' or 'borrowings'. Borrowing refers to "the process of importing linguistic items from one linguistic system into another, a process that occurs any time two cultures are in contact over a period of time" (Hoffer 2002). Borrowing is a common linguistic phenomenon, and almost all languages contain borrowed items. Items affected by it are called 'borrowings', 'loans', or 'transfers', and the languages involved are frequently labeled, according to their roles, 'donor' and 'recipient' (Weinreich, 1953). The employment of such a term is quite figurative, because the language that imports foreign words doesn't also return them. Once one language takes lexemes from another, the new items are typically known as loanwords or borrowings – although neither term is actually appropriate, because the receiving language doesn't offer them back.

1.1. Borrowing and Code-switching

For many decades several attempts are made to seek out diagnostic criterion which is able to distinguish borrowing, code-switching and code mixing. One approach in distinguishing code-switching from borrowing (Scotton, 1988) uses the amount of social significance of the item. If the nonnative item carries social significance, it is a code-switched. The criterion may not be useful where the form and meaning are identical however the label is completely different. Poplack (1988) appears to suggest that the employment of a borrowed item is code-switching until enough speakers use it and it is accepted by native speakers into the dictionary. A more precise delimitation appears troublesome at this point within the study of borrowing and code-switching.

1.2. Recent Approach to Loan Words

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The most recent approach to deal with "loan words" is a communicative (C) approach. The approach tries to eliminate the shortcomings of the previous approaches and pay more attention to those aspects overlooked by the earlier approaches. According to the communicative approach, in every communication the following aspects should be taken into consideration:

i. Communication is a socio-cultural behavior.
ii. Communication involves sending and receiving messages.
iii. Messages are encoded by senders and intend to be decoded by receivers.
iv. Senders and receivers of messages are participants in the process.
v. Participants are socio-cultural beings and share a common code.
vi. Messages are sent and received to achieve certain purposes.

2. Need of Borrowing

2.1. Gap

The existence of lexical gaps is very common in all languages. In a situation where speakers are confronted with the lack of lexical item which can be coordinated with a given communicative situation, a surrogate word is created by borrowing it from a donor language. Dagut (1981) believes that lexical gaps might be motivated either on linguistic grounds or on extra-linguistic grounds. A linguistic gap occurs when a given referent is known to the speakers of both languages but lexicalized in only one of the languages. To put it in other words, the meaning of the item exists in both languages but only one of the languages lexicalizes it. Such a lexical gap which has some linguistic reasons is called linguistic gap.

2.1.1. Referential Gap

There are also some cases where the speakers of one of the languages are familiar with a given referent and their language has a word to refer to it, but the speakers of the other language are not familiar with the referent and consequently their language has no word to refer to it. Such a lexical gap which has some extra-linguistic motivations is called referential gap. One way to fill in the possible blanks is employing loan words.

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2.2. Language Contact

Languages which stay in contact for many centuries also tend to influence the structure of one another. in the same manner, lexical items also are borrowed into the other. Same case is with the English spoken in India. India got the exposure of the many languages like Persian due to invasion and other contacts. The last foreign language to carry its sway in India is English, that eve now continues to play an outstanding role in Indian life. English is spoken by less than ten percent of the Indian population. Though this is a small percentage, it is perhaps the most elite and important language in India nowadays.

As English has been in contact with other Indian languages, there has been a lot of influence on one another. English has borrowed items from other Indian languages and vice-versa. In the same way, Urdu-Hindi too has influenced English and enriched it with its vocabulary. The words which are borrowed into Indian English have a different impact on its users as compared to the native English equivalents. There is some socio-cultural relevance of these loan words that we will be discussing in this paper.

3. The Present Study

The present study tries to focus upon the semio-communicative aspect of Urdu-Hindi loan words in English, showing their relevance in fulfilling the communication and their impact on the listeners or readers.

For instance, Indian media use the term 'lathi charge' for dispersing the crowd using cane or baton by the police or military. The term is a 'loan blend', as 'lathi' is borrowed from Urdu-Hindi and 'charge' is an English word. The communicative value that the term has is not supposed to be in any other equivalent term. Even if the loan is substituted by an equivalent English expression 'baton charge', the impact on the reader changes. This illustrates how the communication takes place and what role do the signs play in communication.

The study discusses the need of borrowing also, which is relevant to the present research. For the study, the data of Hindi-Urdu loan words has been taken from Indian English newspapers like *The Hindu, Times of India* and *Hindustan Times*.

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The selection of such words by the decoder is based on certain socio-cultural factors. Following are some of the words along with their occurrence found in the Indian English newspapers:

i. **Avtar** '*Farhan Akhtar's different avtars*'

In Hinduism, an avatar is a deliberate descent of a deity to Earth, or a descent of the Supreme Being (e.g. Vishnu), and is mostly translated into English as "incarnation", but more accurately as "appearance" or "manifestation" (Wikipedia®, 2015).

Hence, this word has entirely a different communicative effect on its readers than any of its English equivalents. It is a culturally loaded term. Such terms are deliberately chosen by the media to gain the attention of the readers. 'Avtar' is not only a new style or form that a person has taken but it represents a physical manifestation of a spiritual being.

ii. **Guru** '*Golf Guru: The number One*'

'Guru' is also not simply a teacher but it has too many cultural connotations attached to it. The term is particularly attached to ancient Indian 'guru-shishya' tradition. The importance of finding a guru who can impart transcendental knowledge (vidyā) is emphasized in Hinduism. One of the main Hindu texts, the *Bhagavad Gita*, is a dialogue between God in the form of Krishna and his friend Arjuna, a Kshatriya prince who accepts Krishna as his *guru* on the battlefield, prior to a large battle. Not only does this dialogue outline many of the ideals of Hinduism, but their relationship is considered an ideal one of Guru-Shishya. In the Gita, Krishna speaks to Arjuna of the importance of finding a guru. Hence, no equivalent can play the same role as it plays.

iii. **Jungle** '*Leopard found in bathroom of house; trapped, released in jungle*'

Forest cannot play that role which jungle plays. Jungle is not simply a land overgrown with dense vegetation but it represents a lawless area. That's why we call people 'junglee' if they behave uncivilized.

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iv. **Khaki** *'Cop in Jhabua village sheds khaki to serve as a sarpanch.'*

Here, 'khaki' is a metonymical expression which refers to 'the police service'. The color of the uniform of police in India is 'khaki'; therefore, this word is used. Again this is showing the cultural aspect of the selection of the words. The khaki color has become also the symbol of Indian military.

v. **Karma** *'Raima Sen: I believe in God and Karma'*

This is again a beautiful example to show that words are loaded with meanings. They are typically meant for their typical decoder. The beauty of this word can only be understood by Indian readers. Karma cannot be translated exactly into English. It is not only deeds but it includes in itself the intentions also that affect the future of a person. Karma in Hinduism is related to the concept of rebirth also and the socio-economic status individual is bestowed upon at birth, and beyond.

vi. **Loot:** '*......they looted a businessman and shot dead a goldsmith*'

Similarly, 'loot' originally meant the indiscriminate taking of goods by force as part of a military or political victory such as war, natural disaster, or rioting. As 'loot' is done on large scale hence is weightier than robbery or stealing.

vii. **Pajama** ' *.......dressed in a cream kurta pajama that was embroidered in the same colour'*

Pajama is a typical dress having Indian cultural value. Hence no other word can serve the purpose.

viii. **Yoga** *'Hot yoga is passe, 'snowga' is new cool craze'*

Similarly, 'yoga' is also a culturally loaded term which typically represents a special type of meditation practiced in India including breath control and the adoption of specific bodily postures.

ix. **Maharaja** *'The maharaja he couldn't be.....'*

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Similarly, 'maharaja' represents Indian culture, whose equivalent in English is 'great king'.

        x.   **Mantra** '*Chanting of mantras, gulal signal for fun*'

'"Mantra" means a sacred utterance, numinous sound, or a syllable, word, phonemes, or group of words believed by some to have psychological and spiritual power. Mantra may or may not be syntactic or have literal meaning; the spiritual value of mantra comes when it is audible, visible, or present in though.' (Wikipedia®, 2015).

The word is heavily loaded with religious connotations. It typically represents Hindu way of repeating words and sounds to aid concentration in meditation. Such words have a powerful influence on the readers which cannot be achieved by any other English equivalent.

        xi.   **Jihad** *Jihad* refers mainly to a religious/spiritual duty of Muslims. In Arabic, the word *jihād* is a noun meaning "struggle" or "resisting". A person engaged in jihad is called a mujahid, the plural of which is mujahideen. The word *jihad* appears frequently in the Quran, often in the idiomatic expression "striving in the way of God (al-jihad fi sabil Allah)" with focus on spiritual struggle to obey and reform from within oneself and to follow God's dictum (Wikipedia®, 2015)

Jihad is not a violent concept but now is being used by some groups of people in a wrong way to justify their own interests. As a result of this, the term has become so sensitive that it is now used typically for Muslim terrorists only. Media also uses it with a definite purpose to provoke the readers. It shows the psychological state of both the encoders and decoders of the word. We can say that the word is so much culturally, religiously and politically loaded.

        xii.   **Dargah** '*People holding placards as they offer prayers at a Dargah for team India's victory in 2015 cricket World Cup, in Bhopal on Wednesday*'

The term *dargah* has a religious connotation. It doesn't simply mean tomb or shrine but it particularly refers to Muslim saints' (spiritual leaders or spiritual visionaries) tombs.

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xiii. **Moksha** *'It happens only in Banaras, where death is not fearful, and dying here means attaining moksha'*

In Hinduism and Jainism, *moksha* means 'release from the cycle of rebirth impelled by the law of karma'. It is heavily religiously and culturally loaded. No other equivalent can serve the same purpose as it is serving.

xiv. **Gherao** '*Students of a few government hostels in the city and members of the Students Federation of India gheraoed the District Collectorate here on Thursday….'*

Gherao means 'encirclement'. The word was even added to the *Concise Oxford English Dictionary* in 2004. It means a protest in which workers prevent employers leaving a place of work until their demands are met. The term is equally used in the context of students and universities. There is no term in English that can express this exact meaning of the term. The word gives the 'desi tadka' of Indian culture.

xv. **Dharna** '*Dharna staged demanding better service in mess'*

Dharna is a non-violent sit-in protest. It catches the attention of the reader as the word has a shade of typical Indian culture in it.

4. Conclusion

After analyzing these loan words, we can see that the selection and application of linguistic structures is intentional and it carries not only meaning but also the physical, psychological, functional, pragmatic, cultural universe i.e., the semiotic world with it. So we can say that the meaning of an expression doesn't only lie within the word but it is in the minds of the users. It is the communicative pact between the speakers (or writers) and hearers (or readers) which shapes the meaning of an expression. Hence different words have different communicative effects when used by different people of different cultures.

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