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Multiple Nested Triglossic Situation in Pakistan

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Abstract

Sociolinguistically most of the countries of the world can be described as diglossic societies. But diglossia is not always a simple phenomenon. Sometimes, it is a very complex sociolinguistic situation. There is a diglossia within a diglossia. Sociolinguists have coined different terms to describe different diglossic situations.

There have appeared two fascinating types of multiple language polyglossia in the literature - 'Double Overlapping Diglossia' and 'Double Nested Diglossia'. These types more clearly describe the diglossic situation in Pakistan where there is intersection of two diglossic situations, one involving Urdu and some vernacular (Punjabi) and the other involving Urdu and English.

The article investigates the diglossic situation in Pakistan and concludes that 'Multiple Nested Triglossia' is the better term to define the situation prevalent in Pakistan.

Keywords: Diglossia, Multiple Language Polyglossia, Double Overlapping Diglossia, Double Nested Diglossia, Multiple Nested Triglossia

1. Introduction

Diglossia is formed from Greek *diglossos* which means "bilingual". It refers to a socio-linguistic situation in which two very different varieties of a language co-occur throughout a

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speech community, each with a distinct range of social function” (Crystal 1997). The term ‘diglossia’ is associated with the American linguist Charles A. Ferguson. Ferguson suggests that “the High and Low varieties should belong to the same language” (Hudson 1996). However, some writers have extended the use of this term. In their opinion, the term ‘diglossia’ includes the situations where the High and Low varieties are two different languages. “It is by no means rare for two or more distinct languages or language varieties to be used side by side within a single community, with or without a high degree of bilingualism” (Trask 1999).

Thus, in a diglossic situation two or more than two distinct languages or language varieties can be used in a single community (Matthews 1997). Everyone of these languages or language varieties has special functions and is considered appropriate only for these special functions.

There is difference in prestige associated with different varieties. The more prestigious variety is called High (or H) variety and the other language or language variety that enjoys little prestige is called Low (or L) variety. L is often the mother tongue of most speakers while H is learned as a second or target language through formal education. The L variety is usually used for daily ordinary conversation and is not often written. The H variety is used in news broadcasts, newspapers, literature, lectures, sermons etc.

Diglossia is not a rare phenomenon. It is found in most of the countries of the world. Spain, Germany, Switzerland, Austria, Singapore, India, Pakistan, etc., have diglossic situations.

The first part of the article introduces the term *diglossia*, and the second gives us background literature and research on the topic up to the present time. The third part puts forward the hypothesis proved in the present article and the fourth one discusses the factors creating diglossia in Pakistan and analyses the Pakistani sociolinguistic situation. The last part gives concludes the discussion.

2. Previous Research

Psichari (1928) is perhaps the earliest writer who has described a diglossic situation. He refers to the situation of Greek at the end of the 19th century. He describes Greece as "a country that doesn't want its language." This shows his preference for Katharévusa (a form of modern Greek, used in literature as opposed to everyday speech and writing, that employs some of the features of classical Greek) in place of Dimotiki (a language of everyday medium of communication).

Marçais (1930) refers to the diglossic situation prevalent in the Arab world in the thirties. He points out the gulf between the classical Arabic and the Arabic dialects.

The term diglossia was first introduced into English from French by **Ferguson (1959)**. This linguist was responsible for publicizing the term in a famous 1959 article on Diglossia in the journal *Word*. He used the term diglossia to refer to “one particular kind of standardization where two varieties of a language exist side by side throughout the community, with each having a definite role to play” (p.232). Ferguson applied the term to situations where the

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vernacular (which he called ‘low’ or L) and the formal language (called ‘high’ or H) could be regarded as variants of the same language.

Joan Rubin (1960) showed that the linguistically unrelated Guaraní and Spanish in Paraguay had also the diglossic condition. Thus, the use of the term diglossia was expanded. The widespread nature of Paraguayan bilingualism caused **Fishman (1967)** to hypothesize that diglossia could occur in any situation where two language varieties, even unrelated ones, are used in functionally distinct ways. The notion “diglossia” can also be used to characterize other multilingual situations where the H and L varieties are not genetically related, such as Sanskrit (as H) and Kannada (as L) in India. Since then, the research on diglossias has focused to a great extent, though not entirely, on characterizing various kinds of extended diglossias.

Trudgill (1974) points out that in situations like that of Greece where the two varieties Katharevousa (H) and Dhimotiki (L) have particular political orientations the status of each tends to vary according to individuals’ political points of view. Moreover, in the course of time, terms like polyglossia, double overlapping diglossia, double nested diglossia, and triglossia were coined to describe complex diglossic situations prevalent in the different countries of the world.

3. Hypotheses

For studying the complex socio-linguistic situation in Pakistan, we test the following hypothesis:

H: The term multiple nested triglossia is better than diglossia to describe the Pakistani socio-linguistic situation.

4. The Hypotheses Testing

Defining Factors of Diglossia

Post-1959 research on diglossia has concentrated on a number of variables and important questions: function, prestige, literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, stability, grammar, lexicon, phonology, the difference between diglossia and standard-with-dialects, extent of distribution in space, time, and in various language families, and finally what engenders diglossia and what conditions favor its development.

1. Function: Diglossia is different from Bilingualism. Diglossia has H and L varieties that are used for different purposes. H is a more formal variety and L is used for less politically important functions. They have their respective domains in which they are normally used.

2. Prestige: H is highly valued, prestigious variety. People have more positive attitude towards H. It is the language of ‘great’ literature, religious texts etc. The L-variety is felt to be less worthy, corrupt, ‘broken’, vulgar, undignified, and ‘the stigmatized variety’ etc.

3. Literary Heritage: H usually has a long literary tradition and is used in writing. The H variety is considered to be a language. The L variety is used in novels, plays etc; to show

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characters as uneducated and rustic. The L-variety is also used often by servants and children.

4. Acquisition: L-variety is usually acquired as a first language while H-variety is learned through schooling in a formal educational setting.

5. Standardization: H is strictly standardized. Grammars and dictionaries are written by native grammarians in H-variety. L is rarely standardized. Grammars of L-variety are usually written by foreigners.

6. Stability: Diglossias are generally stable and long-lived phenomena. They persist for centuries or even millennia. Diglossia in Arab countries has survived for centuries. H and L borrow from one another. L-varieties displace the H-variety, but H only displaces L if H is the mother tongue of an elite.

7. Grammar: The grammars of H are more complex than the grammars of L-variety. They have more complex morphology, tense systems, gender systems, agreement, syntax than L-variety. Cases and verb inflections are reduced in L.

8. Lexicon: Lexicon is often somewhat shared, but generally there is differentiation; H has vocabulary that L lacks, and vice-versa. There paired lexical items. L and H have different terms for the same object.

9. Phonology: There are two phonological systems. The phonology of H is more complex. H has usually underlying phonological system while L diverges from this system in the course of development of thousands of years.

10. Distribution of Diglossia in Language Families, Space, and Time. Diglossia is not limited to any geographical area or language family, and diglossias have existed for centuries or millennia (Arabic, South Asia). Most diglossias involve literacy, but oral diglossias are conceivable.

12. What Engenders Diglossia and under What Conditions

(a) Existence of an ancient or prestigious literature, composed in the H-variety, which the linguistic culture wishes to preserve as such.

(b) Literacy is usually a condition, but is usually restricted to a small elite. When conditions require universal literacy in H, pedagogical problems ensue.

(c) Diglossias do not spring up overnight; they take time to develop.

These three factors, perhaps linked with religion, make diglossia extremely stable in Arabic and other linguistic cultures such as that of South Asia.

5. Diglossia and Pakistan

Urdu vs. English

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Function: A key defining characteristics of diglossia is that the two varieties (High and Low) are kept apart functionally. One is used in one set of circumstances and the other in an entirely different set. For example, English (H variety) in Pakistan is used for delivering formal speeches in the functions of high Government officials and inter offices communication. In contrast, Urdu (L variety) is used in giving instructions to workers in low prestige occupations or household servants or in conversation with familiars, in popular programmes on the radio and television.

There is leaking in the functions already defined as Urdu is also being used as an official language in the offices. This is because constitution declares Urdu as the National and Official language of Pakistan.

Prestige: The H variety is the prestige variety while the low variety lacks the prestige. Although people frequently use L-variety, yet they may deny that they do not know it. The H variety is considered more beautiful, logical, and expressive than the L variety. These characteristics are also attributed to English in Pakistan. And in highly formal situations in Pakistan the use of Urdu is considered a sign of low social status.

Literary Heritage: The superiority of the H variety is undoubtedly reinforced by a considerable body of literature in H variety. The literature associated with the L variety will have none of the same prestige. The Urdu literature is not considered equal to the literature in English in Pakistan.

Acquisition: An important difference between English and Urdu in Pakistan is that English is learnt in Formal settings e.g. classroom whereas Urdu is learnt in informal situations.

Standardization: H variety is standardized but L variety is rarely standardized. In case of, use of two different languages both the varieties may be standardized e.g. use of English as H variety and Urdu as L variety in Pakistan. However, the fact cannot be denied that interest in the grammar of Urdu is not there.

Stability: Diglossia is extremely stable phenomenon and there are many cases that have lasted for centuries. Diglossic situation as regards English and Urdu has been prevailing for more than hundred years.

Grammar: Grammar of H variety is highly defined and standardized in case of using two varieties of the same language. But in case of using two different languages both may have highly prescribed grammar as English and Urdu in Pakistan.

Lexicon: There is marked difference between lexical items of the two varieties. English and Urdu have different lexicons. Lexicon of English is growing at higher pace than that of Urdu.

Phonology: Phonological systems of the two varieties can easily be distinguished. Both English and Urdu have two different phonological systems. But both are affecting each other to a considerable extent.

Difference between Diglossia and the Standard-with-dialects

In diglossia, no-one speaks the H-variety as a mother tongue, only the L-variety. In the Standard-with-dialects situation, some speakers speak H as a mother tongue, while others speak L-varieties as a mother tongue and acquire H as a second system. But in Pakistan, both English (H variety) and Urdu (L variety) do not have the native speakers.

6. Urdu as a Diglossic Language: Persianized Urdu vs. Layman's Urdu

Function: The Persianized variety of Urdu is regarded as the H variety and commonly spoken variety of Urdu is regarded as L variety. H variety is used in official and formal situations like offices, religious sermons, official addresses etc. L variety is used in informal situations like at home, in the market, among friends etc.

Prestige: Educated people prefer to speak H variety because it is thought to be the expression of their status. It is prestigious because it represents their identity as a religious group. Low variety is spoken by the less educated and uneducated people.

Literary heritage: Considerable literary heritage is available in the in H variety of Urdu. But there is no comparable literature found in the L variety.

Acquisition: L variety is learnt at home as it is the native language of many. H variety is learnt at schools (formal education). All the books taught in schools are in H variety.

Standardization: H variety of Urdu is highly standardized but the L variety is in the state of flux, borrowing words from the regional varieties.

Stability: The diglossic situation is stable for more than hundred years.

Grammar: The grammar of H variety is standardized. There is no standardization of L variety. We find more complexity and range of syntax in H variety that is missing in L variety.

Lexicon: H variety has richer lexicon as compared to the L variety. L variety translates the vocabulary present in the H variety.

Phonology: The rules for phonological system of H variety are standardized and complex as compared to those of L variety.

10. Difference between Diglossia and the Standard-with-dialects: L-variety has the native speakers but the H-variety does not have the native speakers.

7. Persianized Urdu vs. Punjabi

Function: Persianized variety of Urdu is regarded as the H variety and Punjabi is regarded as L variety. H variety is used in official and formal situations like offices, religious sermons, official addresses etc. L variety is used in informal situations like at home, in the market,

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among friends etc.

Prestige: Educated people prefer to speak H variety because it is thought to be the expression of their status. It is prestigious because it represents their identity. Low variety is spoken by the less educated and uneducated people. The speakers of low variety consider the speakers of H-variety as socially conspicuous (Sabeeha Mansor).

Literary Heritage: Considerable literary heritage is available in the in H-variety as well as in the L-variety. But the difference is that of readership. H-variety has comparatively bigger readership.

Acquisition: L variety is learnt at home as it is the native language of many. H variety is learnt at schools (formal education). All the books taught in schools are in H variety.

Standardization: H-variety is highly standardized but the L-variety has no standardization.

Stability: The diglossic situation is stable for more than hundred years.

Grammar: The grammar of H variety is standardized. There is no standardization of L variety. We find more complexity and range of structures in H-variety that are missing in L-variety.

Lexicon: Both the varieties have richer lexicon.

Phonology: The rules for phonological system of H-variety are standardized and complex as compared to those of L-variety.

8. Polyglossia

There are two fascinating types of multiple language polyglossia that have appeared in the literature:

- 1 Double overlapping diglossia
2. Double nested diglossia

1. Double Overlapping Diglossia (Triglossia)

Abdul Aziz Mkilifi (1978) describe the situation in Tanzania as Triglossia but more profoundly as a “situation of intersection between two developing diglossic situations, one involving Swahili and some vernacular and the other involving Swahili and English.” At the moment Swahili is involved in two diglossic systems: as the H language with the various Tanzanian vernaculars as Lows (L), and as the L-Language with English as the H.

Abdul Aziz explains in fascinating detail how it all works. The people learned vernacular languages first at home before beginning school, although most of them learned some Swahili as well. This of course is the typical pattern of acquisition for L varieties those who were exposed to Swahili in addition to their vernaculars said that they did not even realize that they

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were speaking different languages until they got to school. This state of affairs is partly due to the fact that all the vernaculars involved and Swahili itself are Bantu languages. In primary school Swahili was the medium of instruction, either from the beginning or after the vernacular had been used in the first two grades. This introduction of the new language variety in school is the typical of the acquisition of an H variety. Swahili was a school language only. In this manner, the vernacular—Swahili diglossia pattern was established. The secondary schools offered English as a subject and medium of instruction. It quickly gained the status of H variety. It is the language of higher education in particular and success in general. In this situation Swahili became the L-variety. Swahili is the language of culture and communication at National level. Swahili is the H variety with respect to the vernaculars and L with respect to English.

2. Double Nested Diglossia

The situation in Khalapur India, a rural village, north of Delhi described by Gumperz (1964) can be called double nested diglossia.:

Subdiglossic situations within major diglossic situations with distinctive difference in varieties of a language (or languages) and their functions is called Double Nested Diglossia. The situation can be explained as follows:

Language	Status	Name	Function
Hindi	H (H)	Oratorical	Formal
Hindi	H (L)	Conversational	Formally Informal
Khalapur	L (H)	Saf Boli	Informally Formal
Khalapur	L (L)	Moti Boli	Informal (servants)

9. Concluding Remarks

Both the types of Diglossia are truly portraying the diglossic situation prevalent in Pakistan. Double Nested Diglossia is true to small geographical boundaries where it is easier to study language variations and functional distinctions. It is also restricted to two languages. Above mentioned Triglossia is closer to the situation in Pakistan. The situation in Pakistan is “situation of intersection between two developing diglossic situations, one involving Urdu and some vernacular and the other involving Urdu and English.”

At the moment Urdu is involved in two diglossic systems: as the H language with the various vernaculars as Lows (L), and as the L-Language with English as the H. The people learn vernacular languages first at home before beginning school, although most of them learn some Urdu as well. This, of course, is the typical pattern of acquisition for L varieties.

In primary school stage, Urdu is the medium of instructions, either from the beginning or after the vernacular has been used in the first grades. The introduction of the new language variety in school is the typical of the acquisition of an H variety. Urdu is a school language only in the context. In this manner, the vernacular—Urdu diglossia pattern is established.

The secondary schools offer English as a subject and medium of instructions. It quickly gains Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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the status of H variety. It is the language of higher education in particular and success in general. In this situation Urdu becomes the L-variety. Urdu is the language of culture and communication at National level. Urdu is the H variety with respect to the vernaculars and L with respect to English.

It is simplified rather over simplified for the sake of explanation and understanding. But keeping in view the complexities within this triglossic situation we like to give our own coined term **Multiple Nested Triglossia** because the situation is not that simple. English, Urdu and Vernaculars are used with huge amount of linguistic variations and functional diversities.

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