Semantic Shift in Cultural Lexicon of Kashmiri

Dr. Shabina
Ms. Rukhsana Shawl

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Abstract

The process of language change is quite evident in the cultural lexicon of Kashmiri in the process of semantic shifts. Semantic shift occurs as a word moves from one set of circumstances to another, resulting in an extension or narrowing of the range of meanings.

Language Change

David Crystal (2003:256,257), while defining language change, writes, "In Historical linguistics, a general term referring to change within a language over a period of time, seen as a universal and unstoppable process. The phenomenon was first systematically investigated by comparative philologists at the end of eighteenth century, and in the twentieth century by historical linguists and sociolinguists. All aspects of language are involved, though most attention has been paid to phonology and lexis, where change is most noticeable and frequent."

It is an attested fact, nowadays, that all languages are continually changing. For instance, at any given moment the English language, for example, has a huge variety within itself, and this variety is known as synchronic variation. From these different forms comes the effect on language over time that is known as diachronic change. So, the tendency for languages to this process of change seems somewhat unavoidable and inevitable, but in most of the cases unobservable, and marks its imprint over a period of time.

Language change occurs in accordance with both the external and internal causal factors. The external causal factors, according to Campbell and Mixco (2007,60) "lie outside the structure of language itself and outside the human organism; they include such things as expressive uses of

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language, positive and negative social evaluations (prestige, stigma), the effects of literacy, prescriptive grammar, educational policies, political decree, language planning, language contact and so on."

According to Campbell and Mixco (*Ibid*,60), "Internal causal factors rely on the limitations and resources of human speech production and perception, physical explanations of change stemming from the physiology of human speech organs and cognitive explanations involving the perception, processing or learning of language. These internal factors are largely responsible for the natural, regular, universal aspects of language and language change." Thus, the kinds of changes that result due to the way speakers of a language steadily alter and change their language over time are the internal causes of language change.

Ottenheimer (2006:209,210) writes, "Internal change, in contrast to external change, tends to be somewhat more predictable because existing structural patterns in a language can be seen as exerting more pressure in certain directions than others. A good example of this is the increasing use in American English of the third-person plural pronouns *they, them, their* in place of their singular counterparts *he/she, him/her* and *his/her*."

Wardhaugh also accounts for language change from the internal and external factor point of view. Writes Wardhaugh (2003:190,191) "The traditional view of language change also favors a 'family tree' account of change and of the relationships among languages. Linguists tend to reconstruct the histories of related languages or varieties of a language in such a way that sharp differentiations are made between those languages or varieties, so that at one point in time one thing (that is, a language itself, or a variety, or even a specific linguistic item) splits into two-or-more, is lost. More rarely, there is coalescence. The alternative 'wave' account of change and relationships is much less easy to work with. In this approach the various changes that occur must be seen as flowing into and interacting with one another. It is not at all easy to reconcile the need to find contrasts with the desire to maintain certain fluidity in boundaries."

Adrian Beard (2004), in his book *Language Change*, also discusses the causes of language change as internal and external. The internal issues mainly involve looking at the way how new words are formed, the influence of dictionaries on spellings and meanings and so on and so forth. These internal issues are related to and within the general approach of external factors that have influenced

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and are influencing this process of language change e.g., the way changing social contexts are reflected in a language. Beard describes that the process of language change is bound up with the social change and that the language change is an ongoing process, rather than just historical study.

Besides the above-mentioned causes of language change, there are a number of other factors like economy and language contact situation which also play due role in the process of language change.

I.   Economy: Speakers tend to make their utterances as efficient and effective as possible to reach their communication goals. Speaking involves, therefore, a planning of costs and benefits.

II.   Language-contact-extensive borrowing, especially in contact situations with bilinguals, multilinguals-borrowing affects all areas but mostly the lexicon.

In modern times language change is, for example, being brought about by technology.

For example, mobile technologies have drastically altered language with the use of instant messaging and texting from mobile phones. So, language changes, usually very slowly, sometimes very rapidly. .

In brief, language change can be defined as the process of modification and alteration of features at different levels like phonetic, morphological, syntactic and semantic over a period of time. The present paper deals with the changes at the semantic level paving the way to the process of semantic shift in cultural lexicon of Kashmiri.

Semantic Shift in Cultural Lexicon of Kashmiri

The process of semantic shift is, for the most part, studied in accordance with the reference to the process of semantic change. Semantic shift is defined as a change in which the meaning of a word undergoes some change (often somewhat related to its original meaning). This process occurs when existing words take a new meaning by shrinking or extending their domain or usage. It also results in an extension of the range of meanings when a word moves from one set of circumstances to another. For example, *navigator*, which once applied only to ships but, with the development of planes and cars, now applies to multiple forms of travel.

Semantic shift is that process in which a word takes on a new meaning, often related to the original, and loses its original one. And this ability of words to take on a new meaning capacitates an entire sentence/phrase/ clause of a new meaning. This process of semantic shift is very well exhibited

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in the cultural lexicon of Kashmiri language. There are a number of instances whereby meaning associated with a word has been extended or narrowed. Following are given some of the examples of semantic shifts in the Kashmiri cultural lexicon:

1.   *'khatim'*

Source: Arabic
Meaning: finish, complete
Meaning in Kashmiri: finish, recitation of Quranic verses as an offering to Allah

Explanation: In Kashmiri, *'khatim'* is used for the occasion when Quranic verses are recited as an offering to Allah (swt), besides its original meaning of 'finish, complete'. So, the word '*khatim*' has extended its domain of usage by a complete shift from its original meaning.

2.   *'bab'*

Source: Persian
Meaning: father
Meaning in Kashmiri: father, grandfather, saints

Explanation: '*bab'* in Persian is used to address father. In Kashmiri it is used for father, grandfather (both paternal as well as maternal). Besides this*,* the word *'bab'* is affixed to the names of saints as a mark of respect, for example *ahad bab.* The word **'bab'** has extended its usage in the cultural lexicon of Kashmiri.

3.   '*həki:m'*

Source: Arabic
Meaning: Philosopher, intelligent, physician
Meaning in Kashmiri: physician

Explanation: **'***həki:m'* is used in Kashmiri for a person who practices Unani medicine (branch of medicine) in contrast to its meaning in Arabic as philosopher. So, the word '*həki:m'* has added to its domain of meaning in Kashmiri.

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4.   '*varta:v*'

Source: Sanskrit
Meaning: use, custom, character, gifts
Meaning in Kashmiri: gifts (cash and kind)

Explanation: '*varta:v*' is a term in Kashmiri which is mainly used in the context of engagements and weddings. It refers to the gifts, in the form of cash and kind that are presented to bride and groom on their engagement and/ or wedding. The term has, therefore, narrowed its use from its original meaning of use, character, custom, and gifts in Sanskrit.

5.   '*hə:ziri:*'

Source: Arabic
Meaning: Obeisance, Presence
Meaning in Kashmiri: Return gifts (cash and kind)

Expalnation: '*hə:ziri:*' is the word that is associated with marriage in Kashmiri cultural lexicon. It means the gifts given by the side of bride to the groom's side in response to the gifts that are given to the bride by groom's side at the time of engagement. The meaning of '*hə:ziri:*' is entirely different from its original meaning of 'obeisance,' in Arabic.

6.   '*pi:r*'

Source: Persian
Meaning: Old person
Meaning in Kashmiri: A Saint

Explanation: The word '*pi:r*' is used in Kashmiri for a person of exceptional holiness which is a shift from its original meaning of 'old' in Persian.

7.   '*dargah*'

Source: Persian
Meaning: Royal Court, shrine

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Meaning in Kashmiri: a shrine

Explanation: '*dargah'* is used in Kashmiri for shrine, and the most famous example in this regard is Hazratbal shrine commonly referred to as '*dargah*' by local masses. So this word has shifted from its original meaning of 'court' in Persian.

8. '*kəhvɨ*'

source: Persian
Meaning: Coffee
Meaning in Kashmiri: 'Kashmiri tea'

Explanation: The word 'kəhvɨ' is invariably used in Kashmiri for the tea made of '*da:lči:n'* (cinnamon), *'ə:l'* (green cardomom) and sometimes also '*kɔŋ'* (saffron) in contrast to its original meaning of 'coffee' in Persian.

9. '*Khaza:ni:'*

Source: Arabic
Meaning: Treasure
Meaning in Kashmiri: treasure, water tank

Explanation: In addition to its original meaning of 'treasure', the word '*khaza:nɨ:'* is used in Kashmiri for the water tanks that are fitted in '*hama:m'*(bathroom).

The above account shows in a lucid way the process of semantic shift in the cultural lexicon of Kashmiri. As is clear, the narrowing and widening of meaning are mostly prevalent in the cultural lexicon of Kashmiri.

Conclusion

The process of semantic shift forms an important component as far as Kashmiri is concerned. The process of semantic shift is obvious in cultural terms, notably
 Among the ones borrowed from other languages like Sanskrit, Arabic, and Persian.

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Dr. Shabina
Assistant Professor
Department of Functional English
Government Degree College
Ganderbal 191201
Jammu and Kashmir
India
shabinaallaqaband@yahoo.co.in

Ms Rukhsana Shawl
Chief Librarian
Government Degree College, Ganderbal

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