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**Urdu Figurative Language and
Creativity in Pakistani English**

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URDU FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE AND CREATIVITY IN PAKISTANI ENGLISH

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Abstract

This paper examines the use of the Urdu figurative language in Pakistani English. Based on the written data from Pakistani English newspapers and magazines, this paper aims to show how Urdu similes, metaphors, fixed collocations, cultural and social expressions are involved in creating uniqueness in Pakistani English. This particular area of code-switching has not yet been investigated in Pakistani English. This brief paper is an attempt to fill this gap. It would certainly encourage the other researchers to explore this phenomenon in detail. Urdu figurative language has potential to penetrate in Pakistani English since Urdu has a strong presence in the minds of the Pakistani Urdu-English bilinguals.

Introduction

The status of English as an international and global language has made it available in all parts of the world. It is spoken and understood almost in all countries of the world. Recently, it is very easy to find Chinese/English or Japanese/English bilinguals in such traditionally monolingual countries as Japan or China on account of its dominant position. English is the official language of 21 and co-official language of about 16 countries. Kachru (1992) divided English speakers into following three groups:

1. 'Inner circle' where English is used as a native or first language. (ENL) e.g. United Kingdom, America, Australia, etc.
2. 'Outer circle' where English is used as a second or additional language. (ESL) e.g. India, Pakistan, Singapore, etc.
3. 'Expanding circle' where English is used as a foreign language. (EFL) e.g., Japan, Korea, China, etc.

This model of three concentric circles has been the standard framework of World Englishes studies. This model has been defined with reference to historical, sociolinguistic and literary contexts. English has been institutionalized in the outer circle because it works in diverse cultural settings in all these countries. We can easily find the linguistic variations and innovations in the English language because of the linguistic and social conditions in which it operates.

As Y. Kachru (2001) rightly stated, there is no 'International English' in which every English language user is competent. In fact, we have world Englishes with their own cultural bases and rhetorical strategies. In Pakistan, English is used in a non-native and

different cultural context. That is why, creativity is manifested at all levels in Pakistani English. However, in this paper, I have described only those features of the Urdu figurative language which have been found in Pakistani English and occur quite regularly. The sources of the examples have been given in brackets. Urdu words and phrases have been written in Italics with their approximate English equivalents.

Urdu Figurative Language in Pakistani English

In the process of nativization of English in Pakistan, the importance of the Urdu figurative language cannot be ignored. Figurative language is different from ordinary language as it is not used in its basic literal sense. Urdu figurative language makes a remarkable contribution in transforming English into a new and non-native variety of English i.e. Pakistani English. Such non-native varieties of English demonstrate the identities of those communities that use it in new contexts. Creativity in English emerges from local, cultural and stylistic strategies (Kachru 1987).

The figurative level of a language consists of culturally dependent expressions, fixed collocations, proverbs and metaphors which lead to the creation of unique cultural images. Pakistani English reveals the use of Urdu similes, metaphors, cultural specific expressions and transcreation of idiomatic expressions. The use of the Urdu figurative language seems to be an attempt to portray pure Pakistani realities. It also serves a wide variety of crucial communicative functions in Pakistani English. In non-native context, English can borrow different figurative expressions from the indigenous languages because of its close contact with those languages. To begin with, the next section of this paper introduces the use of Urdu metaphors in Pakistani English.

Urdu Metaphors

In Pakistani English, Urdu metaphors and symbols, which are unique to Pakistani experience, occur quite frequently and regularly. These metaphors reflect typical Pakistani social customs, localized attitudes and behaviours. Infact, the use of metaphors pervades all human languages. Metaphor involves the juxtaposition of two apparently unrelated domains (Littlemore 2005).

Metaphors are not literally true. Mostly, metaphors are based on similarity or analogy between different things or situations. In order to grasp the meaning of the metaphor, as it was intended by the speaker/writer, it is important that the listener/reader is familiar with the cultural background of the context in which it has been used. Typically, metaphors are culturally-loaded expressions whose meaning has to be inferred through reference to shared cultural knowledge (Littlemore 2001). As Carter (1997) significantly observes that the appropriate ground of metaphors is often culturally specific, it will not necessarily be familiar to non-native speakers.

The main reason of the use of Urdu metaphors in Pakistani English is that they serve an excellent evaluative device (ibid: 150). Metaphor is often used to convey one's evaluation of a situation, and an inability to understand the metaphor can lead the listener

or reader to completely misinterpret the evaluation. Metaphors are strongly associated with evaluative orientations (Moon 1998). Here is one example of the use of an Urdu evaluative metaphor in an English frame:

He is called *sher ka bacha* (lion' child) and *mard ka bacha* (high minded). (January 08, 2006 D)

The metaphorical expression 'sher ka bacha' in the above example suggests courage, fortitude and bravery. In the rural areas of Pakistan, women are often murdered in the name of honour killing. The murderer is held in a high esteem in these areas. But for a native speaker of English, it is not always easy to guess which meaning or connotation is intended. In this example, the non-native speaker of Urdu may have no difficulties with the lexical aspects of the metaphor but will be confused by its discursal and pragmatic features.

When individuals are interpreting familiar metaphors, both literal and metaphoric meanings are likely to be activated. In the following example, the metaphorical expression reflects typical Pakistani customs and traditions. The word 'kutta' has been used in an abusive manner. Pakistani readers can easily comprehend the negative evaluation attached to this metaphorical expression. Here a policeman is asking his other fellow to take the report of that person who has come to register his complaint. This example shows typical Pakistani police culture where ordinary people are treated high-handedly.

Take the report of this buffalo's *kutta*, (dog) he is in hurry. (May 22, 2005 D)

In Pakistani English, Urdu metaphors are also used to label new concepts (Littlemore 2001). It has been demonstrated that one of the principal ways of discussing new concepts is by borrowing vocabulary from existing fields and adapting its meaning to the new context (Dirven 1985). Sometimes, Urdu metaphors are used in Pakistani English to fill a lexical gap created by a new semantic field. The word 'khaki' is the name of the colour that denotes Pakistan Army. In Pakistan, Army took over the democratic governments several times. Different politician joined hand with Army Generals for their personal benefits. They have been termed as 'chamchas' in the example 1. In the second example, an Urdu word 'danda' indicates the power and strength of Pakistan military by which they control the state affairs and the whole country:

1. We in Pakistan are being pulled in different directions. While the khakis and their *chamchas* (spoons) control the country's real estate. (May 21, 2006 D)
2. Helpless to break free from the military *danda* (stick), widespread militarisation has emasculated our minds. (December 17, 2006 D)

In all languages, words can figuratively extend their meanings. In Pakistani English, figurative extension of word meaning can be seen as well. Metaphorical extension strategies exploit the fact that the meaning of words can often be worked out by

analyzing the metaphorical processes that were involved in their formation (Littlemore 2002). Look at the following example where an Urdu word 'lota' has been used in the literal sense. Literally 'lota' means a water jug with a spout used for ablution:

The plaster of the room was falling and a plastic *lota* and a water bottle were lying on her bedside. (March 11, 2007 D)

In the following example, the word 'lota' has been used figuratively. In Pakistani politics, the person who changes his political party for personal benefit is called 'lota' as is clear from the following example:

Included in them are the incumbent civil and military cabal; PML Shujaat League *lotas*; PPP Bhutto jiyalas and PML Nawaz Sharif's majhas (July 16, 2006 D)

The words 'lotaism' and 'lotacracy' are the metaphorical extension of an Urdu word 'lota'. In order to work out the meaning of the word, one can think of the concepts, which are associated with the word. Concept that is associated with the word 'lota' might include the fact that it is a kind of water pot that is used for ablution. This technique is usually referred to as 'associative fluency' (Carroll 1993). We can see the metaphorical extension in the following two examples:

1. What sparked this '*lotaism*' or 'Q' tendency in me was a minor news item which stated that a heated debate is going on in Nepal as to which animal should be declared the national animal of the country, the cow or the rhinoceros. (December 31, 2006 D)
2. *Lotacracy* is a bad word, if a word at all and you premised yourself never to use it. (September 18, 2005 D)

The above examples suggest that the writer has applied Urdu words figuratively keeping in view that the Pakistani reader knows about the literal meaning of that particular word. The literal meaning does not disappear but plays an essential part in the interpretation of the metaphor (Mooij 1976). Metaphors are powerful tools to describe or interpret a new situation.

Another important aspect of the figurative use of Urdu words in Pakistani English is the issue of animation, where objects are given apparently animate or even human characteristics (Littlemore 2005). Look at the use of an Urdu word 'mehndi' in the following example:

This particular function is the most colourful and pleasurable function of the whole wedding; to make your *mehndi* (henna) flourish and more enjoyable you need the best CDs of mehndi songs. (May 15, 2005 D)

Metaphors tend to make language entertaining and memorable (Whitney et al. 1996). Urdu metaphors have the tendency to make Pakistani English entertaining and creative.

Metaphorical expressions are more likely to be remembered than the actual ones. It has been suggested that metaphorical language encourages independent thinking (Carter 1997:146). Figurative thinking allows the writer to change the grammatical class of the word. In the following example, an Urdu adjective 'desi' has been used as a noun to describe a particular class of persons. It has been used figuratively in an English sentence. Non-natives residents of America particularly from South Asia have been termed as 'desis' here:

The residents are mostly white Americans, there are quite a few *desis* also.
(March 25, 2007 D)

Look at another interesting example of the use of an Urdu word 'shor' literally means 'noise' but here it has been used figuratively to denote pop music. Pop music is always full of noise and drum beating. It is very popular among teenagers.

I love melody and don't like *shor* (pop music). (July 02, 2005 D)

Metonymy and Metaphor

In figurative language, it is not always easy to decide what constitutes a metaphor and what does not (Littlemore 2005). Metaphors cannot easily be distinguished from other figures of speech (simile, allegory or symbol). While comparing one object with another, some people would view similes as metaphors, others may think in opposite direction. Same is the case with metaphor and metonymy. In metonymy, one can trace a literal relationship between the word that is used metonymically and the context in which it is used (ibid 2005). However, the extent to which metonymy differs from metaphor is a controversial area and is beyond the scope of this paper. Here are two examples of the use of an Urdu word 'dada'. In the first example, the word has been used in its literal sense while the second example reflects the metonymic use of the word 'dada':

1. Her grandfather stood over the ruined house and kept on shouting, "Nooran, Nooran." After 14 hours, a feeble voice started coming from the inside, "*Dada, Dada.*" (grand father) Noorul Huda was still alive. (November 20, 2005 D)
2. No matter whether you run a grocery shop or a departmental store, the agent of *dada* would approach you for a monthly *bhatta*, extortion. (April 02, 2006 D)

In order to understand the metonymy in the above example 2, we need to appreciate that the word 'dada' stands for a very powerful and influential person who is involved in all kinds of illegal activities. Metonymy is generally thought to have a referential rather than an evaluative function (Kovecses 2002).

Cultural Specific Expressions

Urdu cultural terms are thought to pose the most difficult problem for native speakers of English when they are used in English frames because they cannot be translated properly. Typical Pakistani cultural and social expressions representing Pakistani norms, culture,

customs and traditions occur quite frequently in Pakistani English. As one of the most common ways of being creative in a language is to employ its words figuratively, Urdu words are used in variety of contexts in Pakistani English in both their literal and figurative senses. It is therefore important for readers to be able to work out not only the literal, but also the metaphorical meanings of words.

Firstly, look at the use of an Urdu borrowed word ‘chaddar’ in Pakistani English. It is used in different contexts in Pakistan. In the first example it refers to a head covering worn by Pakistani females or piece of cloth used by males to put it around their shoulders. But in example 2 and 3, it means a piece of cloth embellished with religious verses in order to put it on the grave of a Sufi saint. The word ‘dhoti’ in example 1 is perfectly cultural specific word that creates uniqueness in Pakistani English and cannot be translated in English:

1. The third segment of Jacquard loom had the male models sashaying about in black *dhotis* with orange and black *chaddars* and their female counterparts in white short kameezes and pants with orange jacquard *chaddars*. (June 05, 2005 D)
2. MPAs will lay ‘*chaddars*’ at the shrine on March 30. (March 25, 2007 D)
3. Punjab Auqaf Minister formally inaugurated the Urs celebrations by performing the traditional ‘*chaddar-laying*’ ceremony at the shrine of the Sufi poet. (March 25, 2007 D)

The word ‘chaddar’ can collocate with chardevari as in the following example. This figurative expression (cover and four walls) refers to the concept of the sanctity of women’s honour as laid down by Islam:

Pious hypocrisy became fashionable. The begums were told to get out of saris, sleeveless tops and slacks and pushed towards *chaddar* and *chardiwari*. (cover and four walls) (December 17, 2006 D)

The literal meaning of the word ‘mithai’ is ‘sweet’, whereas the extended and figurative meaning refers to a heavy tip as is clear from the following example:

Every other day, you tackle issues like the rising tuition fee and van drivers’ demands for a hefty tip (*mithai* (sweet) and bakshish). (December 18, 2005 D)

The Punjabi word ‘masi’ literally means a real sister of one’s mother (aunt). It is often used with extended meanings in Pakistani English. In the following examples it refers to a housemaid who does cleaning and other work in someone’s house:

1. My *maasi* is also a contributor. Since she is illiterate, she only gives me sparks of imagination by narrating the inside stories of houses where she works in. (July 02, 2006 D)
2. Even in the middle class households one now finds several other characters like the *masi* (housemaid) who are there to make your life or the life of your family easier — or perhaps harder. (June 19, 2005 D)

The word ‘*mirasi*’ is used to denote one of the traditional social classes into which people are divided in Pakistani society, whereas in the following context, it has been used to refer to a singer or actor related to showbiz. In Pakistan, anybody who is remotely connected with showbiz is looked down upon. This example shows that actors and singers have always had a low social status in Pakistani society.

Everybody stopped calling me by my real name and started mocking me by calling me a *mirasi*. (November 27, 2005 D)

And finally we can see the use of an Urdu word ‘*mohalla*’ in both its literal and figurative senses. In the first example, it means a particular locality whereas in the second example, it refers to the people of nearby locality or neighborhood:

1. We are grateful to the chief executive of the local electrical supply corporation for allowing the installation of a new electric power transformer in our *mohalla*. (September 3, 2006 D)
2. Let father be buried by the *mohalla* when his cough finally consumes him. (December 25, 2005 D)

The examples in the above section seem to suggest that it is impossible to convey the typical Pakistani way of life without using these social and cultural expressions from Pakistani culture. All these cultural terms create uniqueness in Pakistani English.

Urdu Idioms and Proverbs

Proverbs and idioms are important aspects of the figurative language. Proverbs always express moral beliefs and social norms. They are heavily imbued with the culture of that society in which they are used and cannot be translated properly. In the following examples, Urdu proverbs have been used in two different English sentences:

1. My unbending procrastination is one thing that repels the beauty of the world but they say ‘*sabar ka phal meetha*’ (patience has its reward) (January 22, 2006 D)
2. Talk about ‘*lakkhar hazam, pathar hazam*’ (very powerful and digestive stomach), they deserve a batter deal, if only for their patience in eating such swill day after day. (October 2006 M)

Generally those expressions whose meaning cannot automatically be derived from an analysis of the words' typical meanings are called idioms. Fixed expressions consisting of many words, sometimes constituting full sentences may be borrowed in non-native varieties of English, though usually as loan translation. For example, in the new Englishes, some new idioms have developed. The reason is that the non-native speakers are not fully aware of the exact structure and real meaning and their usage. The following examples show how Urdu idioms have been literally translated in Pakistani English:

1. *Dust in my mouth* for what I am to say, for if we fail now, history will write the obituary. 'Here lies Pakistani which perished due to self-inflicted wounds of corruption'. (Talaat 2002)
2. When he talks about *smashing the kashkol* or the begging bowl because he, under the tutelage of his banker prime minister, has rolled out one great budget after another since General Musharraf got the duo on board. (June 18, 2006 D)
3. Manifestos of the political parties promise so much in exchange for the citizen's vote that one is apt to dream that after November 1988 Pakistan will become a land of milk and honey where *the sheep and the wolf will drink from the same water hole*. (Talaat 2002)

Conclusion

We have thus seen that the Urdu figurative language is very much prevalent in Pakistani English. The figurative devices such as metaphors, metonymy, idioms and proverbs perform important evaluative functions. The use of the Urdu figurative language is also likely to involve a significant degree of creative thinking in Pakistani English. Urdu figurative language serves a number of purposes in Pakistani English, the main ones being: to signal evaluation (positive or negative) (Littlemore 2005); to make language entertaining; to denote Pakistani cultural and social attitudes. These occurrences of Urdu metaphors and other parts of figurative language contribute to the uniqueness of Pakistani English. This uniqueness and changes in Pakistani English from the idealized norm can be viewed as a meaningful deviation or creativity. But this creativity springs from the configuration of two or more codes (Kachru 1987). This uniqueness and creativity is manifested in all the non-native varieties of English. The above data and examples demonstrate the evidence of creativity and shared characteristics, which are unique to Pakistani English.

Note: (D: *Dawn*, Lahore daily newspaper; M: Mag, Karachi weekly magazine)

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