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Pakistani Culture and Learning of English

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Abstract

Language is at the centre of human life. It gains more importance when we talk about a language with reference to a particular culture in which it is spoken. A language is the transmitter of a culture because it is through language that a culture is expressed and transmitted. Learning language in the native culture is different from learning language in a non-native culture. In this article the researchers have discussed the issues of language, culture, the relationship between language and culture, bi/multilingualism and bi/multilingual cultures and some problems relating to the learning of English language in Pakistani culture. In Pakistan, the learners have to learn English as a second language, so they have to learn it formally in schools

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and colleges. Therefore, learning English has been simultaneously associated with teaching of English.

Definitions of Culture

Culture is an ambiguous and highly complex term that is really hard to define. Generally speaking culture can be defined as the socially required knowledge that someone has by being a member of a particular society (Hudson, 1980:74).

According to Lusting and Koester (Eds.2006:13) “Culture is a learned set of shared interpretations about beliefs, values, norms, and social practices that affects the behaviours of a relatively large group of people. Thus, culture is linked to human symbolic processes.” Lyons (1981) discusses the word ‘culture’ or its equivalent in other languages had several meanings or related senses. In the classical sense it is more or less synonyms with ‘civilization’ that is the antonym of ‘barbarianism’, and it refers to excellence in literature, art, manners and social institutions. In the other sense, as ‘culture’ is used in social sciences and especially by ethnographers, the beliefs, behaviours, manners, ways of doing things, customs and traditions, and a lot more, combined together, is generally known as the culture of a society. Every society has its own culture. The distinctive art, literature, manners, and ways of living of people of a society give birth and shape to the culture of that society; and it is not to be measured in terms of the degree of sophistication in any ways to call it ‘culture’. It is rather the distinctiveness of a culture from other cultures that gives it identity as a specific ‘culture’.

Definitions of Language

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The word language is borrowed in English from French, which in turn is a popular derivative of Latin “lingua” referring to ‘tongue’ or ‘speech’ (Haugen, 1972). *Webster’s II New Riverside Dictionary* defines language as “1. The sounds, words, and combination of words that constitute a system for the expression of thoughts and feelings among number of people, as those with a shared history or set of traditions. 2. A particular style or form of utterance (Webber, 1984:394-95). The first two entries in *Collin Cobuild English Dictionary* show that “A language is a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds and written symbols which are used by the people of a particular country or region for talking or writing” or “ language is the use of a system of communication which consists of a set of sounds or written symbols” (Sinclair, 1995:932).

Language is a social tool with the help of which, we human beings as members of a group or society, interact and communicate. It is because of language that we can express our feelings, needs, desires and ideas to others. Without language man would have remained a dumb animal. According to Varshney (2007:1) “Without language human civilization, as we know it, would have remained an impossibility ... Besides being a means of communication, and store house of knowledge, it is an instrument of thinking as well as a source of delight (e.g, singing). Language is a very complex human phenomenon. It is the most powerful, convenient and permanent means and form of communication. Language is spoken as well as written.”

Loreto Todd (1997:6) defines language in a very simple way saying that “a language is a set of signals by which we communicate.”

The Inter-Relationship of Language and Culture

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The relationship between language and culture is a very complex phenomenon. As man's environment is physical as well as social, "a state of social well being, which depends on harmony with the environment, demands harmony of both kinds" (Halliday, 1984:8). Harmony with the environment needs some medium or channel for the transmission of those "patterns of living" to him, which he has to learn to act as a member of a 'social environment' or 'society'. Language serves as the main channel for this purpose. It is through the medium of language that "man adopts a society's 'culture', its mode of thought and action, its belief and values."

It is also important to point out here that it is learnt at school, language of the classroom or textbook rather, as Halliday (1984:9) asserts, it is the language in everyday use: in the home, in the street, in the market, and in the buses and trains, that transmits to the child "the essential qualities of society and the nature of social being". To Halliday (1979:15) "Language is the medium through which a human being becomes a personality, in consequence of his membership of society and his occupancy of social roles".

Culture is learnt and communicated through words (a language). Language is the tool through which we express our culture. If we cannot express in words, no one would come to know about culture. So we see that language is an important ingredient of culture. Only human beings have the capacity of language. Children themselves are culture. Culture grows within an infant and he grows with it.

The relationship between language and culture is deeply rooted. Language is used to maintain and convey culture ties. Different ideas stem from differing language use within one's culture and the whole intertwining of these relationships start at one's birth.

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“Culture is communication, communication is culture.”

Foreign language learning is comprised of several components, including grammatical competence, communicative competence, language proficiency, as well as a change in attitudes towards one's own or another culture. For scholars and laymen alike, cultural competence, i.e., the knowledge of the conventions, customs, beliefs, and systems of meaning of another country, is indisputably an integral part of foreign language learning, and many teachers have seen it as their goal to incorporate the teaching of culture into the foreign language curriculum.

Bi/Multilingualism and Bi/Multilingual Cultures

Though generally a bilingual is defined as a person who has native-like control of two languages, however, ‘bilingualism’ or ‘multilingualism’ has always been somewhat a controversial term amongst the linguists. The term ‘bilingualism’ can be applied to a broad range of situations between two extremes. To Emeneau (1980:38) one extreme is the individual “who learns more or less well another language than his mother tongue for various types of communication that on the whole are shared by few in his linguistic community”. The other extreme is the situation “in which many members of a linguistic community, being in continuous contact with many members of another linguistic community, learn more or less well the language of that other community”.

Bilingualism, however, can result from two different situations as asserted by Labov, (1972). The second language is acquired naturally when two languages come into contact; the second language is learned in a formal situation such as schools. The distinction between the two kinds of bilingualism has a great relevance to an understanding of attitudes towards bilingualism

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in a country or society. The first type of bilingualism is a type of group process that may take place gradually and naturally in a country or society where immigration is prevalent. The second kind of bilingualism is a process of individual environment. As far as the Pakistani situation with reference to the use of English is concerned it can be largely placed under the second category that is learned bilingualism.

Bilingualism is a result of language contact, and Filipovic (1986) as cited by Macek (1991) has categorized it in other way direct and indirect contact. Direct contact occurs when bilingual speakers use their languages in active communication; and its effects can be felt in words, phrases, sentences, sentence group and discourse. Indirect contact is based on transition through spoken and written intermediaries, especially mass media. In this case only parts of language are affected, particularly words; and generally syntax does not suffer. Macek (1991) asserts that in the rapidly changing socio-linguistic scene of the world “the distinction between direct and indirect contact, between bilingualism and mono-lingualism seems to be fuzzy rather than clear cut.”

In the present situation of the world, closely related to these issues of bi/multilingualism are the issues of multiculturalism. Since there are inherent complications related to the term culture itself as Coffey (2000) points out, the term multiculturalism too becomes obscure, intangible and difficult to define in many respects. However, it is clear that multilingualism and multiculturalism support and reinforce each other, which has become a norm today in many parts of the world. Discussing the new language possibilities in today’s world, Rassool (2004:12) asserts, “no more than ever before, societies cannot be regarded as culturally insulated national units in which one or two common or national languages define cultural capital”.

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Pakistani Culture

Population: 159,196,336 (July 2004 estimate)

Ethnic Make-up: Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashtun (Pathan), Baloch, Muhajir (immigrants from India at the time of partition and their descendants).

Religions: Muslim 97% (Sunni 77%, Shi'a 20%), Christian, and others 3%

Languages in Pakistan

Urdu and English are the official languages of Pakistan. English is the lingua franca of the Pakistani elite and most of the government ministries. Urdu is closely related to Hindi but is written in an extended Arabic alphabet rather than in Devanagari. Urdu also has more loans from Arabic and Persian than Hindi has.

Many other languages are spoken in Pakistan, including Punjabi, Siraiki, Sindhi, Pashtu, Balochi, Hindko, Brahui, Burushaski, Balti, Khawar, Gujrati and other languages with smaller numbers of speakers.

English Culture

The English language is the *de facto* official language of the United Kingdom, and is spoken monolingually by an estimated 95% of the British population. The **culture of the United Kingdom** refers to the patterns of human activity and symbolism associated with the United Kingdom and the British people. It is informed by the UK's history as a developed island

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country, being a major power, and, its composition of four countries—England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales—each of which have preserved and distinct customs, cultures and symbolism.

Through the study of literature, the second/foreign language learner of English is introduced to the historical as well as the current culture of the English speaking peoples. With the culture, they also come to study and understand the world view of the native speakers. No language makes sense to its learner without some understanding of the world view it represents.

Difference between the Two Cultures

The main difference between the Pakistani culture and that of the English is religion. Islam is the religion of the majority of the people in Pakistan whereas the majority of the English people practice Christianity. This ultimately leaves a great impact on the languages being used in both the cultures as it affects a large part of the vocabulary and the context in which it is used. Both the peoples have different beliefs, ideologies and ways of living. Besides geographical and climatic differences there are some other differences inherent in both the peoples because of their respective culture in which they have born and grown. This cross cultural difference poses great hindrance in the way of learning English in Pakistan because the Pakistani learners have already grown up with their own language and culture and now they have to face the problem of foreign language and culture at the same time.

English Language in Pakistan

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Since the British colonized India, English language has been enjoying very important position in this area. After the partition, English was retained as the official language of Pakistan. With the passage of time, because of advancement and progress in science and technology, English language has become even more important. Although Urdu has also become the official language of Pakistan, yet it is English that enjoys a more respectable position in Pakistan because it is used more widely in different fields of life in Pakistan. Besides this, Urdu is still in the process of developing tools to absorb difficult terms of science and technology. So it is imperative that English is given a proper place and respect in our country and we should change our attitude towards teaching and learning of English in the country.

Pakistani Culture and Learning of English language

The teaching of culture is not akin to the transmission of information regarding the people of the target community or country-even though *knowledge about* (let alone *experience of*) the "target group" is an important ingredient (see Nostrand, 1967: 118). It would be nothing short of ludicrous to assert that culture is merely a repository of facts and experiences to which one can have recourse, if need be. Furthermore, what Kramsch herself seems to insinuate is that to learn a foreign language is not merely to learn how to communicate but also to discover how much leeway the target language allows learners to manipulate grammatical forms, sounds, and meanings, and to reflect upon, or even flout, socially accepted norms at work both in their own or the target culture.

Pakistani culture is distinct from the English culture. Both the cultures have their particular vocabulary and expressions related to their ways of living, religions, customs,

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etiquettes etc. and they do facilitate or hinder in the way the people learn their native or foreign language. There are many words and expressions peculiar to our religion Islam and our customs and habits which have found their way into Pakistani variety of English. Various aspects of Pakistani culture affect the learning as well as teaching of English in Pakistan. Expressions and vocabulary related to Pakistani culture have been incorporated into the variety of English being learnt and taught in Pakistan

We cannot go about fostering "communicative competence" without taking into account the different views and perspectives of people in different cultures which may enhance or even inhibit communication. After all, communication requires understanding, and understanding requires stepping into the shoes of the foreigner and sifting her cultural baggage, while always 'putting [the target] culture in relation with one's own' (Kramsch, 1993: 205). Moreover, we should be cognisant of the fact that '[i]f we teach language without teaching at the same time the culture in which it operates, we are teaching meaningless symbols or symbols to which the student attaches the wrong meaning...!' (Politzer, 1959: 100-101).

Language Learning, Language Acquisition and Communication

A child acquires his mother tongue naturally. He picks the language from his environment and hence without much conscious efforts he gets the first language. But while learning a second language the learner has to do conscious effort. Learning is defined as a deliberate, conscious attempt to master a language. Acquisition is defined as a less deliberate, subconscious process of mastering a language, and is often associated with the manner in which

children acquire their native or first language. First language is also referred to as L1 in the literature. L2 is the second language.

Some Positions Relating to Acquisition and Learning

Most linguists take the position that the first language is acquired and the second language is learnt. There are others who argue that the process of learning the L1 and L2 are same. There is a natural, biological and social need to learn one's first language. When a child learns its mother tongue, its mind is clear, as it is learning a language for the first time. Whereas, when a learner starts learning a second language, there is a clash between the system of the first language and that of the second language which in turn will affect his/her learning speed. When one language system becomes more or less a habit, the learning of the second language becomes rather difficult. According to McDonough (1986:95) it is usually assumed that children and adolescents or adults are quite different types of learners, for example because of the spontaneous nature of language acquisition by children and the contrasting more cerebral, logical processes of the adult". However, many linguists use the term 'second language acquisition' (SLA).

In Pakistan the learners have to learn English as a second language, so they have to learn it formally in schools and colleges. Therefore, learning English has been simultaneously associated with teaching of English.

General Attitude towards English

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When the British colonized India they brought English language with them. It is usually an accepted fact that the language of the rulers is the language of the people. As a result the people of India had to learn English under compulsion. Even after the Independence, English continued to enjoy an important position in Pakistan as it was retained as the official language of Pakistan. Our attitude towards English has been very passive but due to the international currency of English we had to change our attitude; that is why still we have retained English as a compulsory subject up to degree level in our institutions. There is another reason of changing our attitude towards it. Use of Urdu does not help us much outside Pakistan. So we have to learn a major language and as English is the lingua franca, so we have to learn it. However, an interesting fact about learning English in Pakistan is that there remains a lot of touch of local cultural varieties and the students can hardly be blamed for it as their exposure to this sort of English forces them to learn and use it.

Languages of Pakistan

Pakistan is linguistically a very rich country. Urdu and English are the official languages of the Pakistan. Urdu is also the national language of the country. Most of the people of Pakistan are multilingual because first they acquire their mother tongue Urdu, Punjabi, Pasto, Sindhi or Balochi. Then, they learn Urdu as it is their national language. After this they have to learn English as a second compulsory language which is also the official language of Pakistan, and a lot of official correspondence in high offices and banks is done through English. Many students at school learn Arabic as it is our religious language. They also learn Persian as their cultural heritage is preserved in Persian.

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Pakistan has four provinces and every province has at least one major language spoken by its people. For example, Punjabi is spoken by the majority of the population of Punjab. Similarly Sindhi, Pashto and Balochi are spoken as major languages by the people of Sindh, NWFP and Balochistan respectively. There are also other languages spoken by the people of Pakistan. About 75 to 80 languages are spoken in Pakistan. The following table shows the six major languages spoken by the people Pakistan.

Numbers of speakers of larger languages

Language	2008 estimate		1998 census		Main areas spoken
1 <u>Punjabi</u>	76,367,360	44.17%	58,433,431	44.15%	<u>Punjab</u>
2 <u>Pashto</u>	26,692,890	15.44%	20,408,621	15.42%	<u>Khyber Pakhtunkhwa</u>
3 <u>Sindhi</u>	26,410,910	15.12%	18,661,571	14.10%	<u>Sindh</u>
4 <u>Seraiki</u>	18,019,610	10.42%	13,936,594	10.53%	<u>South Punjab</u>
5 <u>Urdu</u>	13,120,540	7.59%	10,019,576	7.57%	<u>Karachi</u>
6 <u>Balochi</u>	6,204,540	3.59%	4,724,871	3.57%	<u>Balochistan</u>
7 Others	8,089,150	3.59%	6,167,515	4.66%	
Total	172,900,000	100%	132,352,279	100%	Pakistan

Census History of Major languages

Source:http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Demographics_of_Pakistan

Most of the people of Pakistan, however, are bilingual or trilingual as they speak or understand at least two to three languages and almost all Pakistanis speak or understand the national language, Urdu.

World Englishes and Pakistani English

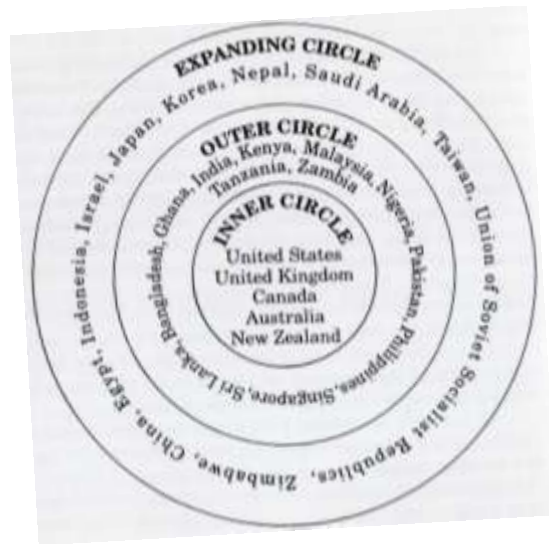
There are two recognized international standards of English; British standard and American standard. What about the other varieties of English being used in different countries of the world? Some regional dialects of English have become so different that they almost qualify to be called different languages. Kachru (1989) and many other linguists are of the opinion that English as spoken and written by the well educated and elite of different countries should also be recognized as standard English. In this way there can be Pakistani English, and Indian English, etc. Kachru (1989) cited in McKay (2009:6) maintains:

The various roles English serves in different countries of the world are best conceived of in terms of three concentric circles: (a) the *Inner Circle*, where English is the primary language of the country such as in Australia, Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom; (b) the *Outer Circle*, where English serves as a second language in multilingual country such as Singapore, India, and the Philippines; and (c) the *Expanding Circle*, where English is widely studied as a foreign language such as in China, Japan, and Korea.

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Three Concentric Circles of English (Source: Mifflin, 1992:528)

Mifflin (1992:528) points out that there are 350 million native speakers and more than 400 million non-native speakers of English. Thus, there are 750 million to one billion speakers of English in the world. Giving arguments for recognizing Pakistani English Hassan (2004:4) writes thus:

In the nineteen eighties and nineties some people felt that the kind of language used in Pakistan (which they now called Pakistani English, PE or Penglish) deserved to be recognized as a full-fledged member of a large group of languages, related to a greater or lesser degree with one another, lumped together under the general name, 'English.'

Today we talk of Standard English (SE) as providing touchstones of acceptability round the world. We get assertions about standard and non-standard (or sub-standard) forms or

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‘standard’ or ‘regional’ forms. Such substitutions might soften the idea of correctness about language used by the non-native learners of English. Pakistani students have a considerable amount of exposure to Pakistani English. This creates a confusing situation when they are strictly corrected on the principles of ‘standard’ English. Concluding his remarks about Pakistani English and ‘standard’ English Hassan (2004:9) says that “It is unfair to teach students one kind of English at school, and then evaluate them according to another”.

If Pakistanis can communicate in Pakistani English they should not be penalized for ‘small’ mistakes in pronunciation, grammar or idiom, especially in areas that are now so hardened by traditional use, social exposure and frequent repetition that there is little hope of remedying them. Pakistanis feel more comfortable with Pakistani English. It is better to use Pakistani English to its full potential than to continually downgrade and penalize it.

Conclusion

Most of the people in Pakistan are multilingual as they have to learn several languages at different stages of their life. For example, first they have to learn their mother language, Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi, or Balochi; then they learn their national language Urdu. At school they learn English as a second compulsory language. They have to learn Arabic as it is their religious language, and finally they have to learn Persian as their cultural heritage is preserved in Persian. It is a very complex situation in which Pakistani learners have to learn English. Cross-cultural problem further complicates this situation. As English is a foreign language, therefore, its learning poses great difficulty for the Pakistani learners as well as teachers who are the non-native teachers of this language. Pakistani learners have to learn English in a formal setting in schools and colleges, so it poses difficulties not only to the learners of English but also to the Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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Pakistani teachers of English. The solution for this difficulty is to change our attitude positively towards the teaching and learning of English.

Textbooks and other imported teaching materials for teaching English pose difficulty for our learners because of the non-suitability of certain contexts used in the materials and also because of the alien culture. Native culture of English poses difficulty for the second language learners of English.

It is important that for the facilitation of Pakistani learners, the teachers and syllabus designers make their cultural components an important ingredient of the course. For Pakistani learners we should try to publish local materials in English. It can have the translations of Pakistani writers. These books should have language activities based on local context reflecting the cultural values of our students. According to a new development in this direction we should make use of Pakistani standards English. We need language materials that are easy and help learners in using English for communicative purposes. The language materials must take into consideration the learning and cultural needs of Pakistani students and the local materials thus developed will lead to more successful language learning, as they will incorporate the cultural values of our own students. It will also increase the motivation to learn English. It is Important to use materials that pose least difficulty for learners. It is suggested that our students of English must have knowledge of the target culture to have an overall understanding of the culture of the target language as well to broaden their outlook at international level.

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