Phonological Change in Bulandshahri: A Social Perspective

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Abstract

All human languages change over time and therefore there is no such language which is unchanged or in its initial form. Language change can be traced at different linguistic levels like phonology, morphology, grammar, and semantics, this happens due to the way language is used and acquired by individuals or group of people in the society. This is an outcome of socio-political contacts, such as language policy, language planning, transportation, immigration, etc. Notably, the need for technological advancement and the use of the internet plays a significant role in language change. Consequently, new vocabularies are included in the dictionaries, glossaries, and thesauri to meet the need of time and new technological discoveries such as transport, domestic appliances, and industrial equipment, sports, entertainment, and healthcare. Language change takes place in different situations, such as language learning, language contact, social differentiation, nature and attitudes. Therefore, this paper deals with the factors responsible for language change in Urdu spoken in and around the vicinity of Bulandshahr districts, especially from the phonological point of view.

Keywords: Bulandshahri, phonological change, consonant cluster, social perspective

1. Introduction

While discussing linguistics, language change must be addressed. Language change occurs very swiftly whenever speakers come in contact with the people of different geographical places who speak a different language, but even within the same small community also, there are various factors responsible for it based on speaker's age, gender, sex, ethnicity, and social and educational background. Through the interactions among these speakers belonging to different classes, we encounter new words, expressions, and pronunciations which we integrate into our speech or vocabularies. Even if your family has lived in the same area for generations, you can probably identify several differences between the language you use and the way your ancestors speak. Every successive generation makes its small contribution to language change and when sufficient time has passed by the impact of these changes becomes more obvious.

Language change is the phenomenon by which permanent alterations are made in the features and the use of a language over time. All natural languages change, and language change affects all areas of language use. Types of language change include sound changes, lexical changes, semantic changes, and syntactic changes. The branch of linguistics that is expressly concerned with changes in a language (or in languages) over time is historical linguistics (also known as diachronic linguistics).

2. Language Contact and Language Change

Historical linguistics came to identify slight late that, the language contact results in language change especially from structural perspective in the language. However, it is believed that, the area of language contact has emerged parallel to language itself. This deals with a situation where the speakers of two languages or two dialects come in contact with each other in order to communicate. Therefore, the types of language contact are studied and research depending on the way speakers of two different speech communities interacts with each other to exchange complex thoughts, ideas, information and so on. Interestingly, it is not necessary that speakers will be involved to contact; there are instances where different platforms are involved for contact for example, social media, news, TV, etc. through which speakers of one community establishes contact with other speech community. Examples of such phenomenon can best be understood from the present day contact of English with the speakers of other languages through media, newspaper, IT, etc.

Since early time writers and researchers writing about the language, they consider 'contact' as one of the sources to trace change in a language over certain period of time in terms of 'features'. As every language has certain unique features which travels from one language to another with the course of time due to the contact situation. Any lexical item or any linguistic feature of language 'A' may travel to language 'B'. For example, negation marker 'अ' → 'a' = /ə/ has travelled from Sanskrit to English and serves the same function (political vs **a**political). Similarly, the vocalic sounds borrowed to Hindi from Urdu, while Urdu has loaned it from Arabic. This all happens due to the contact situation between the two

or more languages, possibly, Hindi would not have borrowed vocal sounds if would not have come in contact with Urdu.

Notably, the contact between languages may happen in two ways; direct or indirect. Direct contact refers to the situation when the speakers of two languages come in contact with each other as an outcome of several circumstances (due to invasion, expulsion, immigration, etc.). While indirect contact may be considered as the interaction between the two speech communities interact with each other through mediation like: social media, television, literature, and internet, etc. This can best be explained in terms of contact between English and other Indian or world's language through different platform.

Based on the type of contact, changes may vary as per the situation. As a matter of fact, lexical borrowing happens when a linguistic item is borrowed from one language to other. While structural borrowing may lead to change the other language with the course of time.

2.1. Attitudes

The level of consciousness helps native speakers to recognize language change that to what extent language is affected. Language change is not so noticeable when it happens among the closed class as they are not much conscious, rather it becomes more noticeable when happens at open class. Language change that takes place at open class is referred to as lexical change. When native speakers talk about change in the language, they refer to the use of new words or phrases in their language.

Since ages, the common speakers have considered language change as a process of language decay. This results in the development of such feeling among the speakers where they look to the past to find some source to un-change the language. Consequently, it gives birth to the idea of correct and incorrect use of language. Correct use of language refers to the explicit rules i.e. a complex and standard grammar used in the old texts. While on the other hand, incorrect use of language deals with the undesirable or colloquial grammar which is socially less acceptable. However, to establish an objective definition for language change, such versions are superficial. Indeed, this is somewhat more relevant from the perspective of attitudes of the speaker towards their language, instead of language which is neutral in itself.

2.2. Code-mixing

Code-mixing is a phenomenon where two or more codes are used within the same sentence either in text or speech. In modern time, it is a widespread practice in the society, where speakers use at least two different codes to establish communication. Studying code-mixing broadens our horizon about the nature, culture, and constraints of human language (Myers Scotton, 1993a; Boeschoten, 1998; Azuma, 1998), in addition to the relationship shared among the different languages based on the individual use of language strategies and attitudes in a specific socio-cultural domain.

3. The Results of Language Change

When accompanied by splits of populations, language change results first in dialect divergence (the kinds of differences we witness between Dakkhni Urdu and Urdu; between the Lucknowi Urdu and of Bhopal; between Old Urdu and modern Urdu and Pakistani Urdu). Over longer periods, we see the emergence of separate languages as in the contemporary Indo-Aryan languages, whose divergence began in the 13th century. Though political considerations often intervene in whether a particular speech variety is considered to be a language or a dialect, the basic idea behind linguistic classifications is that dialects are mutually intelligible, whereas languages are not.

4. Why Language Change Happens?

In general, language change is unintentional and never been a target of native speakers. Language change is an outcome of need. However, language change may result due to both internal and external reasons.

Notably, it is totally out of scope to talk about language change in terms of exact date and time. For instance, the insertion of schwa vowel /ə/ in between consonant cluster at initial, medial, and final positions in Bulandshahri (qabr /qəbr/ vs qabar /qəbər/). No Bulandshahri speaker can tell us that why such addition happened. Indeed, none of us can offer the description for the same that certain change happens, and at what exact moment a particular change took place in a language.

Let us assume the claim that noticeable change happens due to the use of certain linguistic items that represent a particular social class among the speakers of the same language. For example, Urdu has a clear contrast between short and long vowels which participates in meaning change if altered with each other e.g., dar /dər/ 'door' and dAr /dār/ 'title', dam /dəm/ 'courage' and dAm /dām/ 'price' contrastively, there are several languages which does not distinguish between their short and long vowels. Consider the claim that unusual changes can be carried through if the speech community is homogenous or if for some reason, they become markers of social class. However, it is noteworthy to mention that Bulandshahri is spoken by a smaller speech community in contrast with other languages of north India like Urdu, Hindi, etc.

The other factors are also being used by a social class which is either high status or have a direct influence of Urdu. The use of nasal vowels is less common while oral vowels are largely used, even sometimes instead of nasals vowels, while nasality is used as a marker of both honour and plurality of verb as per the subject. These instances may satisfy the questions that why certain features or phonemes are coined in any language over time. Despite having no evidence for the predictability of any feature or phoneme, one may talk about the factors which may result in language change, and what are the levels at which a particular language has changed (phonology, morphology, syntax, etc.). These factors create

the source to measure and compare the changes in any language both from a diachronic and synchronic point of view. The following table offers the description of the phonological change in medial and final consonant clusters of Bulandshahri. Bulandshahri has also witnessed very limited or rare occurrence of initial consonant clusters at word level like Urdu.

Notably, it is almost impossible to talk about the exact date and time when a particular linguistic phenomenon happened in any language rather one can tell you the approximate timing in terms of years or centuries. One can tell you more easily about the change about date or century rather than pinpoint date and time in any language, this also helps in establishing the chronological order of change between two or more point of time. This is feasible because the outcome of every change has a different result due to the neighbouring sounds (preceding or following). Following are the examples which offer a detailed description regarding the aforementioned points.

5. Evidences of Phonological Change in Bulandshahri

i) Addition of Schwa Vowel /ə/

While discussing language change at phonological level, it becomes very essential to discuss about the **epenthesis**. Vowel epenthesis is a process whereby a vowel is inserted to break up a consonant cluster in order to make the two consonants more distinct. Notably, this process is somehow forbidden in many languages or its verities. However, there are several instances available in Bulandshahri. Following section deals with vowel epenthesis at initial, medial, and final consonant cluster.

a) At Initial Consonant Cluster

Interestingly, there are very few initial consonant clusters available in standard Urdu. Usually when the native speaker speaks in a hurry, they come to form initial consonant clusters in Urdu. On the contrary, the native speakers of Bulandshahri generally insert a schwa vowel /ə/ in between initial consonant cluster to sharpen the distinction between the two consonants, but the meaning remains unchanged. Following examples shows the insertion of schwa vowel /ə/ at initial consonant cluster.

drxt   /drxt/   'tree'   →   daraxt /dərəxt/
kmi   /kmi/   'deficiency' →   kami   /kəmi/

There is another case where initial syllable is deleted to form a new lexicon in Bulandshahri, whereas no change in meaning takes place. For example, taqriban /təqribən/ to kariban /kəribən/ means 'almost'.

b) At Medial Consonant Cluster

There are cases of vowel insertion at medial consonant cluster in Bulandshahri. Interestingly by inserting vowel /ɑ/ a new word is formed 'janawar' /jənɑvər/ 'pig' from 'janwar' /jɑnvər/ 'animal' to refer to a particular type of animal only i.e. 'pig'. However, the word 'janwar /jɑnvər/' is used to refer 'animal' in general. Please see the following example.

For example, janwar   /jɑnvər/   'animal' (in general)

     jan**a**war   /jən**ɑ**vər/   used for 'pig' only.

c) At Final Consonant Cluster

Insertion of schwa vowel at final consonant cluster is very common in Bulanshahri. However, there is no change in meaning takes place. Following are the examples of such instances.

	Standard Urdu				**Bulandshahri**	
i)	sabr	/səbr/	'patience'	→	sabar	/səbər/
ii)	mard	/mərd/	'man'	→	marad	/mərəd/
iii)	marz	/mərz/	'disease'	→	maraj	/mərəj/
iv)	jism	/jɪsm/	'body'	→	jisam	/jɪsəm/
v)	vaqt	/vəqt/	'time'	→	vaqat	/vəkət/
vi)	farq	/fərq/	'difference'	→	faraq	/fərəq/

The above example shows that, the schwa vowel (/ə/) is inserted at the final consonant cluster in Bulandshahri. The first column presents the words of standard Urdu while second column shows the data from Bulandshahri.

6. Dropping of Vocal Sound S, Z, Q, G, X, H (/ʃ/, /z/, /q/, /ɣ/, /x/ & /H/)

It has been noticed that, the speakers of Bulandshahri does not necessarily pronounce vocal or glottal sounds borrowed from Arabic and Persian into Urdu i.e. /ʃ/, /z/, /q/, /ɣ/, /x/and /H/. This happens due to the contact situation of Bulandshahri with other high status language spoken simultaneously in market-places and formal meetings i.e. Hindi. Generally, Hindi does not include vocal and glottal sounds into their phonological inventory as compared to standard Urdu. Therefore, it is a strong tendency among the native speakers of Bulandshahri to omit such loaned sounds of Arabic. For example, alveolar fricative /z/, and uvular plosive /q/, glottal fricative /H/, etc.

Notably, the speakers of Bulandshahri omit both vocalic and glottalic sound loaned from Arabic to Urdu and also not able to differentiate between the two sounds based on their place and manner of articulation for example, post-alveolar fricative /ʃ/, is replaced with alveolar fricative /s/ during speech. While this plays role in differentiating two different words shikwa /ʃɪkvɑ/ vs sikwa /**s**ɪkvɑ/ in standard Urdu and therefore spoken differently by

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Burhan Ahmad Abbasi, Research Scholar
Phonological Change in Bulandshahri: A Social Perspective   125

its speakers to refer to two different linguistic items, but in Bulandshahri both are same at spoken level. Strikingly, the speakers of Bulanshahri are able to distinguish between these two forms of word (shikwa /ʃɪkvɑ/ and sikwa /sɪkvɑ/) based on their contextual use but the pronunciation remains same. There is another case where the consonant uvular fricative /x/ is changed to velar fricative /kʰ/ which also results in lexical ambiguity i.e. khaas /**x**ās/ 'specific' vs khas /**kʰ**ās/ 'to cough'. Earlier is the adjective while latter is the noun. Furthermore, alveolar fricative /z/ is changed to palatal affricate /j/ e.g. zaleel /**z**əlil/ 'characterless' to jaleel /**j**əlil/ 'great'. Such changes in place and manner of articulation plays role in meaning change of a lexical item, as the earlier is adjective means 'characterless' while the latter could be both a noun or an adjective which is determined based on their use in a particular context. Similarly, the Bulandshahri speakers also omit the post-glottal fricative /H/ and uses glottal fricative /h/ only irrespective of their place of occurrence in a lexicon for example, hal /**H**əl/ 'solution' and hal /**h**əl/ 'plough'. They also omit uvular plosive /ɣ/ and uses velar plosive /g/ at all positions irrespective of lexicon which consists of such sounds. These phonemes result in meaning change based on their particular features for example, gul /ɣul/ 'noise' and gul /**g**ul/ 'to extinguish'. Similarly, uvular plosive /q/ is replaced with velar plosive /k/ at all positions in lexicons e.g., faqeer /fə**q**ir/ 'sufi or saint' vs fakir /fə**k**ir/ 'beggar', however in standard Urdu both are different lexical item (at written and spoken) but in Bulandshahri written differently and spoken alike. Following are some of the examples which present such phenomenon in Bulandshahri in contrast with standard Urdu.

	Standard Urdu				**Bulandshahri**	
i)	zaleel	/**z**əlil/	'characterless'	→	/**j**əlil/	'great'
ii)	zevar	/**z**evər/	'golds'	→	/**j**evər/	'a place'
iii)	shahar	/ʃehər/	'town or city'	→	/**s**ehər/	'early morning'
iv)	shikwa	/ʃɪkvɑ/	'complaint'	→	/**s**ɪkvɑ/	'to roast'
v)	khaas	/**x**ās/	'personal or special'	→	/**kʰ**ās/	'to cough'
vi)	khali	/**x**ɑli/	'empty'	→	/**kʰ**ɑli/	'ate'
vii)	gul	/ɣul/	'noise'	→	/**g**ul/	'to extinguish'
viii)	hal	/**H**əl/	'solution'	→	/**h**əl/	'plough'
ix)	qalai	/**q**ələi/	'whitewash'	→	/**k**ələi/	'uncomfortable'
x)	faqeer	/fə**q**ir/	'sufi or saint'	→	/fə**k**ir/	'beggar'

In the above example, the first column presents the data of standard Urdu while the second column deals with data of Bulandshahri. Significantly, the speakers of standard Urdu can easily differentiate between the glottalic and vocalic sounds, as this may result to form two different lexical items in terms of their meaning e.g. zaleel 'characterless' and jaleel 'great'. Therefore, the speakers of standard Urdu write and pronounce such words differently. While the speakers of Bulandshahri write differently but pronounce alike and drops vocalic and glottalic sounds loaned from Arabic. Evidently above examples is a presentation the linguistic nuances of such sounds which results in meaning change of two lexical items, if changed with each other. This study requires more investigation in terms of change related to

morphology, syntax, and semantics. Therefore, this study may provide insights to the young researcher in the area of language change in general and Bulandshahri in particular.

7. Conclusions

A significant amount of attention has been given to the research in the area of language change due to its diversity. There are several techniques employed to research language change in order to look at them from different angles so that new dimension for the research can be opened. Significantly, the linguists who have looked language change from one type of change or single instance of change may now look to them from several approaches or perspectives (phonological, morphological, syntactic, and semantic).

In this paper, I have discussed about the language change in Bulandshahri at phonological level in contrast with standard Urdu. Bulandshahri is considered as one of the verities of Urdu spoken in Bulandshahr district and its adjoining areas. The data clearly shows that, the speakers of Bulandshahri insert shwa (/ə/) at different levels (initial, medial and final) in syllables during speech (see examples in section 5). Further, the data also shows that, the vocalic and glottalic sounds borrowed from Arabic to standard Urdu is omitted in Bulandshahri (being one of the verities of Urdu). Such changes in Bulandshahri are taking place due to its long and direct contact with Hindi and some of its dialects like: Khari Boli, Baraj Bhasha, etc.

This paper is organised into several sections; section 1 talk about the introduction pertaining to language change in general and its effect at different linguistic levels (phonology, morphology, syntactic, and semantic). Significantly, this paper deals only with the phonological change in Bulandshahri, section 2 and 3 deals with the outcome and factors involved in language change respectively. Following section 4 focuses about the reasons involved in language change. Further, section 5 deals with the evidence of phonological change in Bulandshahri. While 6 revolves around the dropping of glottalic and vocalic sound during speech and their importance in two different lexical items in terms of meaning. Lastly, section 7 offers the linguistic nuances and conclusions of this study including future work.

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