Urdu and English in E-discourse Variation in the Theme of Linguistic Hegemony

MUHAMMAD SHABAN RAFI
Department of English Language and Literature
University of Management and Technology
Pakistan

Abstract:

Dominance of English as has invariably been buttressed by imperial ideologies glorifies on the Internet, which seemingly perpetuates renaissance of linguistic imperialism in Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC). This study presupposes that Urdu is subject to English hegemony perhaps more profound than ever before. This predates colonial expansion in the sub-continent; however dominance of English over Urdu in CMC flags up variation in the theme of linguistic hegemony. On an attempt to account dominance of English, the data was sampled from 200 Bachelor of Science students (who had both the Urdu and English as national languages) of five universities situated in Lahore, Pakistan. The study reveals a deeper degree of penetration, apparently more profound than the colonial onslaught, of English basic and non-basic words into the Urdu language. Moreover, the study suggests setting out language policy to safeguard the Urdu language, which seems an easy prey to its English predator.

Key words: Urdu, English, linguistic hegemony, language and power, computer-mediated-communication.

Introduction

One of the most subtle demonstrations of the power of language is the mean by which it provides us ways to express thoughts. In doing so; language constructs human sociology for coexistence. The metaphor of *language and power* falls on

diametrically opposed streams i.e., power through dominance and power through consent. However, language enacts as a medium of expression to exercise power in both the streams as supported by Simpson and Mayr (2010, 2-5). The first one explains control of the dominant group has privileged access to social resources e.g., education, knowledge and wealth through coercive approach – exercised by the ideological state apparatuses. On the other hand, the second one unarguably draws on how the privileged group ideology is legitimated by people. It is important to underpin that power is not just a matter of language rather that power exists in other modalities also, including the concrete and modality of physical force as noted by Norman Fairclough (1989). Similar verdict has been endorsed by contemporary researchers (Phillipson 2009; Crystal 2003; Jenkins 2006, 50-54; Kirkpatrick 2007, 55-67) who believe that increasing economy, military, academic and technological strength of English speaking countries has legitimated English as a lingua franca.

English travelled in this region along with the East India Company during 1600s. Gradually, if not instantly, the English language dominated indigenous languages especially in the formal context; however it could not gain much currency until it was associated with privileges. Spread of English in the subcontinent was legitimated by the people over the period of time. Also, local languages had passive resistance to the dominance of English in the social institutions (Jenkins 2006, 50-54). Even though English has retreated to native shores, the linguistic and cultural consequences of imperialism have changed the global scene (Kachru 2008, 272). Though all languages are equal at least organically acceptance of English as a superior over regional dialects and languages has been a crucial reason for English to sustain its hegemony. Kachru (2008, 272) asserts that English has acquired neutrality in a linguistic context where strength of native languages are either

undermined or overlooked. The result is that English continues to be a language of power and prestige.

English has been a major language for communication between people and state apparatuses since the inception of Pakistan. The role of Urdu as national language is subject to marginalization especially in the written form in Judiciary, Army, Education, Media and other disciplines of life. Moreover, Urdu has seemingly subdued to its English counterpart in the context of Computer-Mediated-Communication (CMC). Since the proliferation of mediated-communication Urdu has been adopting to the linguistic ecology of English. The present study speculates that English has a robust impact on Urdu in the mediated-communication. Apart from English code-mixing Urdu has been losing its words and phonemes in the mediated-communication. Moreover, while communicating in Urdu if this is necessary at all, it is largely Romanized, which might have some implications on Urdu alphabets because of its natural affinity with English.

Since the Internet has found relatively young people its potential users, the present study speculates the English language has been legitimated by them. Being computer savvy they are aware how to accommodate and appropriate the English language in the mediated-communication. Thus, the study begs a question how Pakistani young students response to hegemony of English in the mediated-communication. It is unarguably assumed that use of English is so pervasive cutting across discursive boundaries, that it may be considered to have infiltrated all domains of Urdu. Urdu seems to be showing no resistance to English when in contact on the Internet.

Methodology

Data Collection

Since the young people were presupposed the potential users of CMC, a sample consists of 200 Facebook users was

drawn from five universities. The sample was relatively homogeneous in terms of cultural background (Lahore, Pakistan), academic background (Bachelor of Science students), and age background (18-24 years old). The Facebook wall was the primary source of data collection. Five volunteers who belonged to these institutions were engaged during the process of data collection. They were the primary informants. The researcher shared with them the purpose and ethical limitations of the study. The same things were shared with the participants as well. In order to avoid observer paradox, each one of these volunteers was requested to maintain a group of Bachelor of Science (BS) students on their respective Facebook pages. They managed to add on average 375 participants over the period of two months. The researcher had access to all the participants through the volunteers. Each participant was selected based on the criteria of maximum linguistic posting on his or her wall. Albeit the present study was not experimental yet measures were taken to filter out certain effects, which might influence the participants' choice of linguistic forms.

Data Analysis

To answer the research question how the young people negotiate hegemony of English in the mediated-communication the impact of English on Urdu was investigated. The notion of 'impact' is used here to refer to influence or effect. Features including English lexical and syntactic borrowing/code-mixing in Urdu were inspected. And, to discern the impact the measure of frequency was calculated, which described the occurrence of English basic and non-basic forms in the Urdu language. The frequency of occurrence was determined if at least a word was repeated twice within a conversation and a minimum of five times in the whole data. Given the merits of measure of frequency, it might give us a clue about the potential of a feature to reside in the system of the recipient language. Daoudi (2011, 65) asserts that there are fundamentally two

advantages for calculating frequency. First frequency of a word underlines how significant it is for users to know. Second measure of frequency gives precision to lexicographers' judgment on which words to institutionalise.

As mentioned above the study presumes morphological and phonological implications of English on the system of Urdu language. To debunk this assumption, the study would investigate graphemes of Urdu language in its Romanized text.

To enable the results to be extrapolated and representative, a degree of superficiality that many studies encompass is avoided by supporting empirical evidence with factual details. Based on the ethical framework suggested by Mann and Stewart (2000, 40–47) data was sampled from 200 BS students of five universities situated in Lahore, Pakistan. The study anticipates that CMC is central to this particular cohort. The analysis procedure was conceived from theoretical works of British linguists as discussed and applied in a concrete way by Stubbs (1996, 22–50).

Results and Discussion

Urdu has been in contact with English for around four centuries but their encounter in the virtual world draws a linguistic landscape which supposedly mirrors a profound influence of English on Urdu. It is natural when two languages are in contact they eventually influence each other but the one has economic and military strength holds the central position. This is true in the case of English, which is quite prevalent in the virtual environment. The study diametrically opposes the blanket generalization of multilingual Internet. Nonetheless, it speculates the spread of Englishes that maybe a phenomenon of e-colonization. The following sections show an overwhelming borrowing of English basic and non-basic words in Urdu; this puts the aforementioned speculation on its head. In the mediated-communication, Urdu regresses towards Roman

script that shows its organic affinity with English. In the result some of its graphemes are depleting. It seems as Urdu is an easy prey to its English predator in CMC.

Lexical Borrowing

Lexicons are among the components of the Urdu language which are more easily and radically affected. As many as 974 English basic words were found in mixed Urdu and English posts. Nevertheless, I have tabulated most frequently occurring non-basic English words in table 1. The exact number of non-basic English words in Urdu may have exceeded far more than what we calculated if we had expanded the canvas of our investigation over to no-equivalent forms. It is hard to predict how many of these words will further establish in the Urdu language but we may speculate that the words which are more frequent in Urdu conversation will accumulate a strong tendency to replace their counterparts. A fair number of these words appeared in Urdu with the advent of electronic communication. Many of these words may have found their way into Urdu because of prestigious connotations or the fact that their counterparts sound too cumbersome to use in mainstream language or the participants might not know their equivalent forms. Non-basic English words were often saturated into the weak and unmarked class of Urdu language.

Table 1
Frequently Occurring English Non-basic Words in Urdu

account, addition, advocate, advocacy, area, arrangement, artist, attitude, baby, background, basket, birthday, body, builder, business, café, cake, caliber, call, century, character, champion, clock, colour, comment, condition, conspiracy, control, cool, contact, cost, count, dance, day, dear, death, design, detail, display, distance, dish, document, doubt, drama, drink, education, economy, energy, enjoy, environment, episode, example, face, fake, family, farewell, fashion, flag, friend, fun, gift, government, guarantee, guess, guys, heart, holiday, hospital, idea, image, interest(ing), inauguration, inbox, information, insult, interpreter, intension, issue, job, labour, lane, level, light, life, line, link, list, load-shedding, loud, lock, lucky, mail, main, match,

mate, meat, meeting, memory, message, mind, minute, month, movie, net, number, ok, page, part, partner, partnership, party, performance, person, personality, photo, photography, pic(s), pillow, plan, plot, please, point, politics, politician, post, profile, practice, press, problem, product, program, operation, original, race, reminder, reply, room, scene, sentence, sequence, shirt, sitting-area, situation, song, sorry, status, style, summer, system, taste, text, time, tour, translation, transport, trip, type, volume, uncle, weekend, wedding, window, word, yes

Since the data was collected from students the influence of academic English was natural. Table 2 shows words which were frequently used by the participants. Some of the words were acquired mainly as compound e.g., final-year, first-year, and mid-term, however their base forms were also used but in non-academic discourse. Nevertheless, most of the words were acquired as single basic and non-basic forms. English words were acquired along with their grammatical class also. Moreover, they were used in the same class that they originally belonged to for example; for a word that was acting both as a noun and verb when it came to the context of Urdu the same grammatical properties were reiterated. Perhaps, the process of conversion demanded a fair amount of time to do linguistic shuffling which the participants were clearly avoiding. Unlike Widdowson (1997, 139–140) who asserts adaptation and non-conformity in the virtual spread of English, the present study favors adoption and conformity. The former process confirms that forms and meanings are variously actualized, however the later supports that they remain unchanged.

Table 2
Frequently Occurring Academic English Words in Urdu

admission, accept, assignment, batch, board, break, book, candidate, campus, centre, chair, class, classfellow, classmate, cheating, convocation, conference, credit-hours, course, department, exam, fail, feedback, final-year, first-year, group, lecture, madam, marks, mid (mid-term), office, pass, paper, performance, presentation, project, quiz, reject, report (ing) result, roommate, school, semester, section, sir, student, study, subject, submit, topic, transfer, teacher, uni

Apart from the words which have their equivalent forms, there are a number of English words which entered the system of the Urdu language because of no equivalents e.g., vocabulary relating to academic disciplines covering natural sciences, applied sciences, social sciences, arts, and humanities is overwhelmingly in English. It has already been investigated by Ho (2006) that technology and academic matters supposedly trigger code-mixing. The words which influence the system of Urdu due to lack of equivalence, marks the vulnerability or flexibility of Urdu. I believe that the impact can best be measured if investigated in a win-win situation. English words which are adopted by Urdu due to a lack of equivalent forms are not par excellence in terms of compatibility. When a word encounters the equivalent form in the host language then it is acquired and used and then it seems to mark its influence on the system of the recipient language.

Table 1 and 2 index the words which can generally be used both in formal and informal context but they do not explicitly mark cultural connotations. Concurrently, a fair number of English greeting words e.g., best wishes, cool, *congrats* or congratulations, good morning, good night, hello, thank you or thanks, nice, and welcome were mixed in Urdu. In addition to this, English weekdays, colour names and taboo words e.g., a**hole, b**ch, b**shit, f**k, s**t, id**t, and st*pid were regularly borrowed to convey atmosphere, shades of meaning and experiences which are tightly bound up with English background. These words not only index linguistic influence but cultural impact as well. We may not draw a tangible speculation regarding this impact on the participants' cultural values but the recursive use of these words shows a profound influence of English on Urdu in the condition of CMC.

In this section, we have covered English lexical borrowing in Urdu. And we have concluded that Urdu has acquired a fair number of English basic words, which were recursively used in the unmarked class of Urdu language. The

finding can be compared with Daoudi (2011, 69) who found that borrowing of English non-basic forms into Modern Standard Arabic quantitatively far exceeds basic forms. In the next section, we will cover basic English words that are intruding the system of the Urdu language.

Structural Borrowing

As shown in [1] the structural elements which were borrowed have both syntagmatic and paradigmatic affinity with Urdu. The amount of borrowing is crucial to determine the selection between the structures of Urdu and English. The participants generally borrowed isolated English basic words, which aligned them with the structure of Urdu. On the other hand, the utterances which have verb and complement in English were confined to English structure rather than introducing code-mixing. In [1f] the borrowed word 'finals' compound both noun and adjective to refer to final examination, however such instances are very rare. As indicated in [1] English words are serving a basic grammatical function in Urdu.

[1]

    a.   < *bas jis* group *main tjy* **add** *kia hai wohan aur gals* **add** *kar dey apni frds*> (Add some more friends in the group I have added you to.)

    b.   <*par yaar kia masla hai apni* profile **convert** *kar lo bht* doubt *hota ha*> (What is the hunch, convert your profile to overt doubt.)

    c.   <*yar* **fit** *tha* drama *bht.*> (Drama was interesting, dear.)

    d.   <*thek ha bhai ap jetey mere konse abbu ne* **design** *ki ha jo* **main concept** *ko* defend *karun* ap sahi keh rahey ho.> (It is okay brother. You are right. This is not designed by my father that I should defend it. You may be right.)

e. <*aur* **mid paper** *kb say hain*> (When is the midterm exam?)

f. <*Shanty chalo beta* exam *ki tyari karo* **finalx** *aaaney wale han.*> (Relax my son, the exam is close, you ought to prepare for that.)

g. <*logo ki awaaz kyun* **same** *hoti hai*? :p> (Why do people have similarity in their voices?)

h. <**right most** *wala daiem lag ra e* **by face**> (The right most is looking awesome from his/her facial gestures.)

i. <**next weekend** *ki bajaey us say* **next weekend** *ka kya* scene *ha*> (What is the plan on the weekend following next instead of this one?)

j. <*haan jani phnch gya hn* **bt** *tbyt khrab hogai h* :(> (Yes darling, I have reached here but I am not feeling well.)

k. <*acha kia* xxx *ma* admission *nae lia* **cox** xxx *ko ap jesa* students *ki zrorat be nae thi.*> (That was a wise decision that you did not get admission in xxx because xxx did not need student like you.)

l. <*faugi faugi ko* abuses *kartay howe* today **at** wahaga border> (Soldiers while abusing each other at Wahga border.)

m. <hahahaha.. lakin mene usay wapsii mein car pe jatay hue dekha.. with 2 bachay n ainak wala patti :P hahahahaha> (Chuckling… but I saw him/her leaving in his/her car with two buddies and the group that wears glasses… Chuckling)

n. <**Exactly**, *patanai kon bewaqoof thi hmare sath*> (Exactly, I do not know who that fool was?)

o. <xxx **once a** *chawal*, **always a** *chawal!*> (xxx is once a rascal is always a rascal.)

p. <**the** 5-10 years *wala* scene *ya abhi* wala??> (Are you referring to the matter of 5-10 years old or the recent one?)

q. <*hahha bhaee jeee ub* **em changed a lot** *tuu pak aega toh pata chul jae ga* :p lol> (Chuckling, brother I am changed a lot. When you'll return to Pakistan then you may realise it.)

r. <hahaha xxx **u tooo best wishes** *khair say wapis aa*> (Chuckling. xxx best wishes you too. Have a safe return!)

s. <***boi i knw mnd** nae krta*> (Boy, I know it. Please do not mind me)

t. <*hannnn..mein ne khud li thy yeh* **pic in england**..**i still remember**.> (Yes. I still remember that I took this picture in England.)

u. <yes xxx *ny* cheating *ki hai... daikho hath* pent *main hian, phir b jeet gya* **it means**,,, **he has done cheating**... :P> (Yes, xxx might have done cheating. You may notice from body language but even then we have won.)

Irrespective of the structural differences between Urdu and English, the mixture of basic elements at different positions within the utterances [1a-1u] underlines the choices that the participants had to commit with regards to code-mixing. The choices caused manipulation mainly in the structure of Urdu. The participants were quite skilful knowing how to blend English basic elements to the structure of Urdu. The competence of code-mixing finds its roots in the early acquisition of English language. Moreover, CMC has provided a fertile ground to exercise this competence without a fear of accuracy, which, of course, matters in formal discourse. The opportunity that CMC provides to communicate in an informal and personalised context has caused code-mixing of English basic elements more than ever before. Table 3 shows the frequency of English basic words, which are found in mixed Urdu and English text-based conversation of the participants.
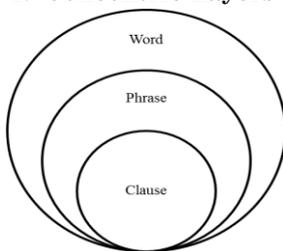
Table 3
Frequently Occurring English Basic Words in Urdu

add, adorable, acting, activate, agree (ed) angry, and, approve (ed), artistic, attack, available, awesome, back, bad, beautiful, because, blood, blush, bore (ing), broadminded, browse (ing), but, butter (ing), buy, cancel, celebrate, change, charge (ing), check, choice, comment, cook (ing), comment, control, convert, correct, creativity, cut, cute, daily, dance (ing), dashing, dear, dedicate (ed), defend, define, decide, delay, delete, depress, deserve, design, detailed, dieting, different, dirty, down, download, drag, drive (ing), drop, edit, encourage, exactly, fake, fashion, fat, favorite, feel (ing), final, finally, flatter (ing), flirting, fit, fracture, free, gather (ing), full, glasses, good, great, guarantee, guess, healthy, ignore, image, imagine, importance, impress, inaugural, insert, international, interpret, labor, last, late, lazy, left, light, like, love, low, lucky, match, miss, movie,   natural, nice, now, on, original, pack (ing), pick, play, politicize (ed), postpone, pretty, promise, quick, range, ready (made),   repeat, reply, request, right, rural, sad, safe, save,   same, select, send, serious, severe, share, shift, short, skinny, slim, smart, so, social, special, start, support, subscribe, sweet, tease, tiring, translate, transport, temporary, treat, upload, urban, wait, wash (ing), watch (ing), welcome, wild, wish, now

The table shows some forms with parenthesis to indicate their dual role e.g., the words: agree/agreed, approve/approved, dedicate/dedicated and politicize/politicized were used both as verb and adjective. Similarly, there are some words which were used both as basic and non-basic forms. Therefore to cover the feature of duality both the forms are tabulated separately. Figure 3 shows a steady increase in the frequency of basic and non-basic forms. Content words followed by main verbs are among the most frequently borrowed forms in mixed Urdu and English utterances. On the other hand, the diffusion of English adjectives, prepositions, conjunctions, adverbs and articles is at a varying degree in Urdu. English articles are among the least borrowed words in Urdu. As shown in [2] both definite (the) and indefinite (a and an) articles were generally borrowed with a noun phrase. There are however, rare cases where both the articles were used to modify/determine Urdu nouns or noun phrases.

So far we have covered the blend of English words, which were frequently used in Urdu conversation. Apart from the borrowing of individual words; compound words were also borrowed in some situations. The data revealed a mixing of English phrases and clauses. Figure 1 represents this trend with the help of three circles. As is evident from the figure as well, each circle indicates the mixing of English clauses, phrases and words, a phenomenon which Kachru (1982) also terms 'mixing'. The innermost circle shows the mixing of English clauses; however the volume is relatively less than phrases and words. As shown in [1q-1u] the participants mixed English clauses to accomplish certain functions in a discourse. On the other hand, the use of English phrases outnumbers clauses. The participants mixed frequently English phrases e.g., by the way, best wishes, by face, come on, excuse me, fuck you, get lost, good luck, happy birthday, hook me up, i know, love it, love you, miss you, my pleasure, nice pic, nice to see you, no worries, part of life, patch up, same here, same to you, see you, stay blessed, thank you, try again, take care, you know, wait and see, well done, well said, what's up? Mixing of English words outweighs phrases and clauses (see table 1, table 2 and table 3). Thus, the frequency of English basic and non-basic words is greater than phrases and clauses mixed in Urdu conversation. The types of code-mixing surfaced in the data can broadly be classified into three categories (insertion, alternation and congruent lexicalisation) as investigated by Muysken (2000, p. 8).

Figure 1. Concentric Layers of English Code-mixing in Urdu

Graphemic Reduction in Urdu

Another very interesting phenomenon of code-mixing is the substitution of Urdu graphemes with English phonemes. Table 4 indexes Urdu graphemes, such as ث،س،ص which were replaced with English phoneme /s/. Similarly, ز، ظ، ض، ذ graphemes were substituted with /z/, and ق، ک were replaced with /k/ sound. Moreover, ع، ح، ه graphemes were among the neutralised sounds. This is an indicative of linguistic reduction. That is; the Urdu alphabets are reduced to the size of English alphabets (as endorsed by Ahmad 2011) which obviously fit in the keyboard. Furthermore, the fact underlines that the Urdu sounds demand relatively complex applications (shift, alt and shift & alt) are compensated with normal key stocks. There is a fair chance that this trend may continue and consolidate with the present keyboard features. Investigation of technological limitations and their impact on languages have access to Internet can be an interesting study to gauge how widespread the phenomenon is! However, investigation of this dimension is beyond the scope of present study.

Table 4
Substitution of Urdu Graphemes with English Phoneme

Urdu Grapheme	English Phoneme
ث	
س	/s/
ص	
ز	
ظ	/z/
ض	
ذ	
ق	/k/
ک	
ع	
ح	/Ø/
ه	

Conclusion

Since the Urdu language has been accommodating English with lock, stock and barrel into its structure to serve numerous functions in a discourse infiltration of English seems to be going through the roof in the mediated-communication. The influence Urdu had once from its mother languages: Arabic, Persian and Turkish has supposedly been replaced by English. English words have literally inundated the Urdu language. Also, Urdu script has been Romanized that eventually perpetuates alphabetic reduction. With the passing of time alphabets of Urdu cover homophonous sound would die down and ultimately extinction of words which are composed out of them. English though has retreated to the native shores it reflects a variation in the theme of linguistic hegemony as supported by (Canagarajah 2003, 2; Phillipson 2009) who assert that a language is composition of abstract structures but it functions to spread and sustain the interests of dominant groups. There is dire need for setting out a national language policy to ensure continued strength of Urdu along with competence in English and full respect for indigenous dialects and languages.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ahmad, R. 2011. "Urdu in Devanagari: Shifting Orthographic Practices and Muslim Identity in Delhi." *Language in Society 40*: 259–284.

Canagarajah, A.S. 2003. *Resisting linguistic imperialism in English teaching.* Oxford, UK: Oxford University Press.

Crystal, D. 2003. *English as a global language*, 2nd Edition. Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Daoudi, A. 2011. "Globalisation and e-Arabic: the emergence of a new language at the literal and figurative

levels." In *Language Contact in Times of Globalization*, edited by C. Hasselblatt, P. Houtzagers, and R. Pareren. 61-76. New York: Editions Rodopi.

Fairclough, N. 1989. *Language and power*. Edinburgh, UK: Addison Wesley Longman Limited.

Ho, W. J. 2006. "Functional complementarity between two languages in ICQ." *International Journal of Bilingualism 10* (4): 429–421.
Retrieved from http://ijb.sagepub.com/content/vol10/issue4/

Jenkins, J. 2006. *World Englishes: A resource book for students*. London, UK: Routledge, Taylor Francis Group.

Kachru, B. B. 2008. "The alchemy of English." In *The post-colonial studies,* edited by A. Bill, G. Griffiths, and H. Tiffin. 2nd Edition. London, UK: Routledge, Taylor & Francis Group.

Kachru, B. 1982. "The bilingual's linguistic repertoire." In *The English Language in Pakistan,* edited by J. R. Baumgardner. Karachi: Oxford University Press.

Kirkpatrick, A. 2007. *World Englishes: Implications for international communication and English language teaching.* Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press.

Mann, C., and F. Stewart. 2000. *Internet communication and qualitative research.* London, Thousand Oaks, New Delhi: Sage Publications.

Muysken, P. 2000. "Bilingual speech: A typology of code mixing." In "The code switching and code mixing in Internet chatting: between 'yes', 'ya', and 'si' a case study." S. M. Cardenas-Claros, and N. Isharyanti. *The JALT CALL Journal 5* (3): 67–78.

Simpson, P., and A. Mayr. 2010. *Language and power: A resource book for the students.* New York, USA: Routledge.

Stubbs, M. 1996. *Text and corpus analysis*. Oxford, UK; Cambridge, Mass: Blackwell Publishers. 22–50.

Widdowson, H. G. 1997. "EIL, ESL, EFL: Global issues and local interests." *World Englishes 16* (1):135–146.