A Pilot Research Study
From Metro Station (Azadi Chowk) to Lahore Railway Station, Punjab.

Exploring Identities in Social Classes by Linguistic Variants in Urdu

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Abstract:

This sociolinguistic study investigates social stratification based on phonetic differences in borrowed foreign words in different social groups in urban area of Lahore, Punjab. Lahore is multilingual society with Urdu, Panjabi and English (medium of instruction in schools in Punjab) as major languages of communication in different situations by different social groups. Being a post- colonial society many English words have become part of daily routine conversation. Similar to Labov's survey techniques (conducted in New York City, 1966), a survey in socio-dialectology was held from Metro Station Azadi Chowk to Railway Station, Lahore. Hypothetic word list was used to investigate how speakers from different social classes pronounce them, helping the researcher come to certain conclusion. A pre-pilot study based on observation of daily talk in different groups was conducted. After this a survey was designed collecting data by asking participants read an address(with tokens of linguistic investigation) for a lost destination to receive natural use of words in daily lives. For this study, use of diphthong (ai) versus (ae) in foreign borrowed words was explored in social segments .The study exhibited that lower working class and upper middle social preserved consistency in using borrowed words according to their social setting but the middle class showed vacillation in pronunciation. Lower

working classes used diphthong ((ae) versus (ai) mostly, and upper middle class used (ai) in words frequently. But the middle class used (ai) with hypercorrection, vacillating between (ai) and (ae) sound, showing tendency to increase (ai) sound with conscious reading and speech. A phenomenon of phonological transformation of borrowed words, according to local language, was observed as well. All the social groups in the study used (rhotic (r)and voiced T) in words that accord with local accent. Punajbi language influence, occupation ,education and social interaction are found to be causative for linguistic variants.

Key words: linguistic variants in Urdu, Linguistic stratification, socio-dialectology

Introduction

Lahore is post-colonial, multilingual society with strong Punjabi influence being mother tongue of the residents especially older ones (a decade ago, the trend changed in Urban areas and Urdu language is used as the first language).But Punjabi is still spoken widely in every nook and corner of Lahore as language of communication. Urdu (national language) and English(official language), being mediums of school instructions, are also used frequently in different situation by different social groups .The age groups for this investigation ranged from 25 to 60 onwards, displaying the fact that they had been speaking Punjabi since their childhood. Being a post-colonial phenomenon, English borrowed words have become part of Urdu language word bank.

This study investigates social implications of phonological differences in the use of diphthong (ai) verus (ae) (e.g. Sai.kl versus sei.kl) in borrowed foreign words in Urdu among different social groups.

This is a pilot study that could be used for large scale systematic study selecting stratified sampling form social groups. Fifty six subjects became part of the study, mostly men.

11 women participated in the study so no analysis is conducted on gender differences in language use in social classes. The study was conducted from Metro Station (Azadi Chowk) to Railway Station, Lahore. The researcher covered the distance between these two stations, stopping at different points to collect information from people belonging to different classes, selecting them on their occupation basis. Variations in accent in (ai) versus (ae) among different groups expounds "pattern of social differentiation within speech communities" (Meshthrie 2004) or "structured heterogeneity".(Labov 2006)

Terms used in the study:

I have divided social groups included in my study into four groups.

L/UWC   Lower and Upper working class. Lower working class is underpaid or homeless people.

LMWC   Lower Middle Working Class is educated social group working as employees on lower wages.

LMBC   Education Level of Lower Middle Business Class was less than LMWC. This is business community running their own small businesses.

UMC   Upper Middle Class

Literature Review

I did not find relevant studies in Pakistani context, so this study could be a baseline study for future research.

Labov (2006, as cited in Meshthrie et al, 2004) conducted his research at Martha's Vineyard in New England for understanding social patterns and linguistic variants among

different social classes. A large number of tourists inhibit the island in summer.Labov selected phonic determinants among social classes. He studied variation in use of diphthong (ai) and (au).From 69 tape recorded interviews, Labov found these characteristic of social communities: ethnicity, occupation, geographical location. Labov's study indicates ups and downs in use of linguistic varaints. These relate to change in speech patterns and norms over time. Relationship between poor residents on the island with the rich tourists reflected a change in speech pattern of young people who turned their back to older specific speech patterns. Labov's study on vernacular speech displays individual conscious style of speech in relaxed, informal style, learnt in early age within a group they lived with. These vernaculars change in different social settings like education setting and interaction with different social groups. The study also exposes resistance by a specific community at the arrival of these tourists and tolerance for bearing them for economic reasons. Certain pronunciation patterns within this community showed their individuality and resistance to change their speech patterns. Labov's study at Vineyard illustrates relationship among linguistic variants and social communities. This variation in social classes per age group showed their "stronger sense of 'us' (islander) versus 'them' (mainlander/tourists)."

Meshthrie et al (2004) further explicates Labov's study conducted in New York City (1966), showing social stratification using linguistic variable (r) after vowels e.g. lark or bar. English speakers differ in use of (r) all over the world. RP pronunciation does not stress on (r) but in Scotland (r) is stressed. Labov conducted a pilot study to systematic understanding of speech habits of the city. He focused his pilot study on three departmental stores characterized by the social class of the customers. He hypnotized that the sales person at departmental stores reflected the norms of their customers. Labov's questions for collecting samples of variants was:

"Excuse me, where the women's shoes?". The shoes shops were at fourth floor and he knew that the response would be 'fourth floor". At fourth floor he asked: "Excuse me, what floor is this". He got this token twice every time by asking "excuse me", confirming the linguistic variants he heard. Then Labov wrote down details like approximate age, sex, and ethnic identity of the individual. Labov collected data from 264 subjects and collected 1000 token of the variable (r) within six and half hours. The data showed certain patterns of speech within social class groups"Some 62 percent of high status store's employees, 51 per cent of middle status store's and 20 percent of lower status store's employees used (r) in at least one of the four tokens". On deliberate repetition, these groups showed tendency to use (r) form increasingly. Middle status stores' sales persons showed greater tendency towards using (r).Through this pilot study Labov presented a systematic and "representative sample of the city."

Trudgill (1974) analyzed different linguistic variants to describe the norms of the city of Norwich. He selected grammatical variable that involve two alternate forms for the same grammatical unit. In Norwich, there are two grammatical variables of third person singular tense: She sings and she sing. She sings is the standard form and she sing is the local dialect. Trudgill shows relationship between social class and these variables. The study showed difference between norms of both classes: middle classes and working classes. Middle classes used more standard form of (s) in present tense with third person singular than working classes.

Eckert (1998) expounds linguistic and social differences in her study on Burnouts and Jokes. Eckert chose a high school in Detroit because of its attraction to adolescents from different areas and backgrounds. She spent two years in this school observing students in hall ways, café, and play grounds not in classrooms interacting with them for better understanding their social and linguistic situation. She found two categories of

students: Burnouts and Jokes. Burnouts had adversarial relationship with the school and belonged to working class. They skip classes and smoke and drank often. Jokes participated in school activities, got better grades and accepted school values. These two groups were not only in opposing relationship with the school but their language reflected the difference between them. Burnouts used specialized vocabulary related with drugs, ungrammatical structures in sentences and backing the vowels: punch (paunch), but (bought)

Methodology

For investigating linguistic determinants, I took an initiative study or pre-pilot study. For this, I spent an hour at Railway Station Lahore (hub of different social communities) at peak hours. It was observed that diphthongs in foreign words are linguistic variants need to be investigated.

After this initial realization of differences, a plan was designed based on Labov's study (2006) conducted in New York City in three different classes based departmental stores. Labov focused on a linguistic variant (r) in exploration of identities within social segregation based on socio-economic, gender or ethnic features. I used linguistic variant (ai) for this study. For collection of data, survey technique was used, asking people help me reach the address written on a chit. I changed the address according to the place I was conducting survey. But the set of words remained the same. I started my journey from Metro Station (Azadi Chowk) to Railway Station, Lahore. I included auto rickshaw drivers, fruit vendors, qulis(porters), shoe sellers, artificial jewelry dealers, teachers,doctors,gold jewelry dealers. This journey from Azadi chowk to Station led me collect data from people who came in my way. I had not have to make effort to search for people for my investigation. They were scattered every here and there.

To record my tokens, I used a clicking rosary to count for the variation. After I asked my participant to help me with the address, they would read it loudly and then I would discuss where the place was and the land marks in the address. They would guide me with all vigor and detail as if it was a noble task they were performing by guiding a person lost for destination. If they did not use some words or one of the words, I would deliberately ask about that place indirectly forcing them to pronounce it for me. After I left, I would note down the frequency of variant (ai), number of hypercorrection in one of the three tokens, approximate age and approximate education level by assessing their reading comprehension problems in reading. Many subjects in lower and upper working class refused to read the passage as they were illiterate. Ten teachers from middle class English medium school were selected and they were all graduate. Education level of upper middle class was also evident from their profession. Percentage and graphs are used for analyzing the data.
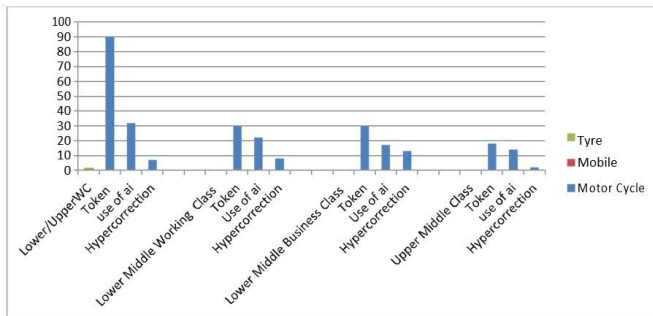
Results

After analyzing the data, these figures came to surface regarding linguistic variants in different classes.

Pronunciation of (ai) in Motor Cycle, Mobile, Tyre

L/UWC	LMWC	LMBC	UMC
36%	73%	57%	78%

In the use of foreign words L/UWC used 36% diphthong (ai),LMWC 73%,LMBC 57% and Upper middle class 78%.Lower working classes used foreign words according to their local Punjabi acent e.g. Saekle, Taer, Mobael.

Hypercorrection is evident in lower middle classes and less evident in rest of the two, representing satisfaction of these classes with their social roes or identities.

Discussion

Lower working class used foreign words according to their Punjabi local accent. For example: cyle is pronounced saekl, mobile is pronounced as mobael, tyre is pronounced as taer. Lower middle classes were vacillating between two sounds (ai) and (ae). This class was prone to hypercorrection. Upper middle class used diphthong (ai) frequently and hypercorrection was quite less .Education, occupation, ethnicity and interaction with particular community determine the linguistic variants in classes. Teachers in this study were low paid but they used (ai) more than lower middle business class.

Phenomenon of hyper-correction was evident in all class but it was most evident in lower middle class being aspirant to cross their status. Upper middle class and lower working class showed a constant behavior in language use. Only lower middle class vacillates between two sounds. Language being identity marker in this study reveals that upper middle class and lower working class are satisfied or adjusted to their social roles or identities within their social class strata. But lower middle class being unsatisfied with their identity or identify determinants, represents the class in search for their real identity.

A small number of women became part of the study. First, I found it difficult to guise their class; secondly they were not easily accessible, being reluctant to answer my questions on the way. Only eleven women became part of the study. Six of them were teachers, two were doctors and three belonged to lower middle class. The age range of these participants was between 25 to above sixty. Ten students included in the study were excluded later on, as the researcher was not given much time to spend with them. A study on students could further highlight markers and determiners in the student class. This area needs to be explored.

Phonological difference between (a) versus (ɒ) in foreign words like Kalidj versus kɒlidj, kɒməm verus kamən et can be explored for influence of ethnicity in linguistic determinants.

Gender-based research on above mentioned subjects can further high light the social differences.

A historical study in linguistic variants can unfold further hidden areas of research.

Conclusion:

The study reflects that linguistic variants distinguish different classes in Lahore. Use of diphthong (ai) in foreign words is used differently by different classes. The results found in this study are not categorical; these are generalization how classes differ on linguistic termsEthnicity, occupation and education contribute their major role in linguistic variations. Punjabi influence transforms foreign pronunciation according to local accent. These variations are identity markers. Use of language by social segments displays their concept of identity and their social roles.

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