

Chapter 6

A Sociological Study of the Role of Language in Education

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ABSTRACT

The present article is on the role of language in education. This article collected opinions of respondents about the role that language plays in the process of learning and education. Subjects were asked about their preferred mediums of instruction and their feelings about studying in a particular medium of instruction. The study also focused on the reasons why the respondents opted for a certain medium of instruction. Relationships between proficiencies in the first and second language, i.e., Urdu and English were evaluated. Other findings were related to their proficiency in the first language, gender, place of residence, social pressure, the medium of instruction and quality of education. At the end, recommendations developed by researchers are to clarify the issues regarding the role of language in education.

INTRODUCTION

Language is the key element of education, and literacy is a person's ability to read and write (Bruner, 1975). According to UNESCO, literacy is a person's 'ability to identify, understand, interpret, create, communicate and compute, using printed and written materials associated with varying contexts'. To perform all of these functions the importance of language cannot be ignored.

Man is the only being which has been endowed with the ability to speak and communicate; this power has not been granted to any other species. It develops an individual's intellectual capability and makes him to think abstract concepts. Language is a social concept and is defined by man's community life. Socialization and political thought are directly related to man's ability to communicate (Lawton, 2002).

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Pakistan is a country of diverse cultures and six major languages are spoken in this country. Alongside these six languages, over 57 other languages are spoken. Urdu and English control the domains of power, as Urdu is the national language and English is the official language. Some of the smaller languages have become extinct due to the importance given to Urdu and English. The national language Urdu is spoken by 7.5% of the entire population of Pakistan. At the time of partition, it was spoken by the people who had migrated from India to Pakistan. They came to settle in urban Sindh and as they were educated people, they dominated the bureaucracy, even though they were only 3% of the total population (Rahman, 1996).

Indigenous people have to learn Urdu and English to get a job and settle in the private and public sectors. The elites of the country strived for the continuation of English as it differentiates them from the masses. Thus, both of these languages became identity-marker rather than a means of communication and imparting knowledge (Rahman, 2003).

Historical Background of Languages in Pakistan

When Pakistan emerged as an independent nation in 1947, from the British colony, there were many diverse ethnic groups in the new state, these included; Bengalis, Punjabis, Sindhis, Pashtuns and Balochs. More than 50% of the population of the new state were Bengalis, who in 1971 separated from Pakistan and formed their own independent state, Bangladesh. This separation had many reasons in the background that included ethnic and linguistic reasons as well. Urdu was chosen to be the national language which made all the other languages go into the background and made them lose their worth. Various constitutions have also led to disregard the various linguistic and ethnic groups in Pakistan (Ayres, 2003).

There are four major languages spoken in Pakistan, which make a majority of the entire population, but are a minority with respect to the entire population. All of them have their diverse cultures, geography as well as history, and are indigenous in their areas, but share a common religion, i.e., Islam. Table 1 shows the percentage of speakers in Pakistan that speak each different language.

Table 1. Languages Spoken in Pakistan

Languages	Percentage of Speakers
Punjabi	44.15%
Pashto	15.42%
Sindhi	14.1%
Saraiki	10.53%
Urdu	7.57%
Balochi	3.57%
Other	4.0%

Source: Census 1998

Punjabi, spoken by both Indian and Pakistani Punjabis, is a major language and used for private pleasure in both the countries, and also as a domain of power in the Indian Punjab. Pashto is spoken in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, tribal areas of Pakistan and in Afghanistan; it is also used as a domain of power

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