

Urdu of the British Raj: A historical heteroglossic analysis of the postcolonial, cultural and Oriental strains in the Urdu language

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Abstract

The paper posits that Urdu is a naturally heteroglossic or polyphonic language which was invariably exploited by its white colonizers to suit different administrative and political purposes. A historical overview of Urdu is thus taken to explore its debatable status as an indigenous language, its multiple roles and titles during its long history and its exploitive use during the British Raj. Bakhtin's linguistic theory of Heteroglossia is used as a framework for analyzing data taken from two sources: The "Glossary of the British Raj" and "Kipling's glossary of Hindustani-Urdu-Hindi words". The sample consisted of words chosen to reflect three identities of Urdu during the British rule: postcolonial, functional, and oriental. The findings revealed Urdu's natural tendency to adapt to roles that are diverse in their range and import, for which reason it (Urdu) cannot be restricted to a regional identity. A similar approach is used in analyzing the language's status during the British Raj, a period in which its versatility is best expressed through the diverse uses the colonizers employed it for: a lingua franca, a functional language, the language of the subaltern and last but not the least, the alluring language of the Orient. The paper offers new perspectives for rediscovering a linguistic phenomenon: the Urdu language.

Keywords: Urdu, British Raj, Postcolonial language, Heteroglossia, Language of the Orient, Indigenous languages

Introduction

An indigenous language can be broadly defined as the native language of a large speech community, historically and culturally rich, firmly rooted within tradition and representative of the identity and social status of that community. In the context of Pakistan, an indigenous language, in addition to the above, is also a symbol of racial pride for its speakers and an important source of identity construction in that it mirrors the cultural and social values of a people, a cult and a linguistic fraternity. Pakistan has a rich linguistic heritage comprising several regional languages: their varieties and sub dialects such as: Punjabi, Sindhi, Balochi, Pashto, and Balti. While these languages have fastidiously maintained their true status as the major indigenous languages of Pakistan, in being geographically distinct and culture specific, Urdu, the national and official language of Pakistan remains deprived of this position. Ironically, Urdu is

perhaps one of the oldest languages of South East Asia and one which has enjoyed kinship with a diverse range of other languages, lending and receiving their impact; it evolved and emerged through many civilizations and bore the brunt of being cast into countless linguistic molds, losing its pristineness and getting thwarted into innumerable varieties and dialects and yet for all these struggles, it remains isolated and Othered in the populous community of the indigenous languages of Pakistan. The isolation of Urdu should not be confused with it being unpopular or inferior to its counterparts. Urdu was and is one of the most widely spoken languages in the region and has enjoyed prime positions in the domains of power before and after partition of India, yet it has never been restricted to a particular people or place and has continued to flourish and dominate all regional languages of Pakistan despite lacking a native habitat. Urdu rose to prominence in the Mogul era and remained so during the long British rule. It is interesting to observe the factors behind the popularity of Urdu in both these illustrious eras which have little if anything to do with an actual love for the language itself and more with social and political reasons. It was the sign of gentility: the language of the royal Mogul courts, a symbol of Muslim identity in the undivided India and also the official language of the British Raj (having superseded Persian, Hindi and Bengali) it was the elegant language of poetry and above all it was the language of power which was employed for administrative, judicial and educational purposes. For a language to enjoy such privileges as did Urdu, in a land which was hostile to the people and the religion which it (Urdu) represented and to be promoted by colonizers who were equally averse to its Islamic affiliations, is remarkable in itself. And yet it was an alien language, depraved and isolated for not possessing the essential nativity required to base a language in indigenous soil. It was also for its rival languages a potential menace since it was a symbol of Muslim identity and projected 'a world view in which the "other" was either Hindu or British'. In having an Islamic identity, it gave the impression of being 'overwhelmingly religious' and in being the official language of Pakistan it had anti-ethnic implications (Rahman, 2002).

The paper builds upon the notion that Urdu despite being one of the most popular languages of the world falls short of being described as an indigenous language both geographically and on the basis of native speakers and therefore remains for many the revered national and official language of Pakistan and the opulent language of literature. The paper also assumes that in being all inclusive, in terms of cultural assimilation and lexical borrowing, Urdu acquired a fluid identity allowing it to adapt to the demands of the ruling authorities for performing various functions specifically during the British Raj. As for its versatility and multifacetedness, it is a naturally heteroglossic language with an innate capacity for dual voicing, as will be observed during the discussion. Its ability to assume so many identities and become the voice of so many civilizations inspired the following words from a historian:

On the eve of the independence and partition of India, (Urdu) inherited a complex history full of unresolvable and often contradictory associations. Because of these associations, it was opposed by ethnic nationalists and despised by the English-educated élite in Pakistan. In India it became a Muslim preserve and the site of Hindu-Muslim antagonism. In short, Urdu is one of the most politically significant languages in South Asia (Rahman, 2002).

The paper attempts to explore the causes and factors behind the indefinite and ambivalent status of Urdu among the other regional languages of Pakistan which makes its position as an indigenous language speculative and debatable. In doing so, the paper will briefly explore the multiple identities of Urdu as identified in some major scholarly works on the subject and move on to focus upon its status and usage during the British Raj, a period in which Urdu may have developed postcolonial associations. The paper will also include a semantic analysis of selected words from the glossary of the Urdu language as it was used during the British Raj in an attempt to prove that it (Urdu) is naturally heteroglossic which in turn accounts for its malleability and its innate ability to adapt to a disparate variety of roles as is observed through its rich history.

Research questions

1. Which indigenous traits make Urdu a heteroglossic language?
2. What role did the British play in giving Urdu a postcolonial identity?

Literature review

“Urdu, Hindi, and Hindustani are the three names for one speech/language, the *lingua franca* of the Indian subcontinent or undivided British India” (Khan, 2006).

The most challenging task, perhaps, for any linguist interested in the history of Urdu is to trace its origin. Urdu not only has a debatable past but also a host of titles, each referring to a different point of origin. It has been referred to numerously by linguists and historians alike as: Hindi, Hindvi, Dihalvi, Gujri, Dakani and Rekhta (Rahman, 2014) but the fact remains that all these titles only serve to complicate its past and origin even further. It is not the objective of the paper, to either trace the glorious past of Urdu or even attempt to unveil its lineage and origin. This task has adequately been accomplished by many eminent scholars in the field. The paper is however concerned with exploring the status of Urdu and the purposes to which it was employed over its long history, specifically the British Raj. An interesting way of doing so is to briefly recount its various names and the roles thereby reflected in those names.

Names and roles

Urdu has been assigned many diverse identities by kings, invaders, colonisers and poets to which it adapted so wonderfully that one can only marvel at its flexibility. For its suburban and cosmopolitan touch it was called ‘Bambayya Urdu’ and also ‘Khari-Boli’: ‘the speech of the areas around Delhi’ which was used as a vehicular language by the Afghans, Persians and Turks (Rahman, 2018).

It was also the eloquent language of the court, as mentioned in (Gill, 2013) ,“ Eventually it was called Urdu or Urdu-i-Mu’alla, or Zaban-i-Urdu (the language of the exalted camp or court)”(p.17). It was also a hybrid language, for which it earned the title ‘Rekhta’. Gill (2013) also quotes an extract from Mohd Hussain Azad’s book ‘ Abe-e-Hayat’ explaining the relevance of Rekhta/Rikhta as a name used for Urdu:

Rikhta is equivalent to ‘spilled’. Many languages have helped Urdu to become richer: there were many words from the Turkish, Arabic, Persian, Sanskrit and Bhasa languages. (p.17).

Rahman (2018) observes ‘Rekhta means ‘fashioned metal’, ‘spread out’, ‘confused’ and a ‘mixture language’ . This ‘confused mixture’, Urdu has been frequently Othered . It was the stigmatised and uncouth language called ‘Indostan’ and ‘Moors’, described by the English traveler, Edward Terry, as a language which was ‘..vulgar..smooth .. and easie to be pronounced’ (Rahman, 2018). There were more grounds for its marginalization which primarily included its Muslim identity, ‘Urdu was stigmatised as the language of the “foriegners”, the semitic Muslims’, by the British and collaborating Hindus’ (see Khan, 2006 p.17).

There are other identities of Urdu, which indicate its royal status as well as the possibility that it may once have been a pidgin language.

The term *zaban-e-urdu* ‘language of the imperial camp’ came into use about the 17th c.

In the south, Urdu was used by Muslim conquerors of the 14th c. and this language known as Dakhani Urdu (‘southern Urdu’) is still used in the area about Hyderabad. Cardona (1974, as cited in Shapiro & Schiffman, 1981). (p. 85).

Shapiro & Schiffman (1981) also mention a possible variety of Urdu called the ‘Bombay Pidgin Hindi-Urdu’ used in Bombay which is a Level II type spoken by uneducated people with many features of pidginization. Another fascinating identity (of Urdu) contrary to that of an inferior pidgin language is the one which it acquired through its rich and bewitching literature specially through

Urdu poetry in the early 19th and 20th century. It came to be known as ‘the language of love’ or more audaciously ‘the language of dancing girls and prostitutes’ (see Rahman, 2018, p. 134).

In view of the given background, the paper will move on to focus upon another identity of Urdu which is most relevant to the paper: its identity during the British Raj. It is also important in this context, to examine the name given to the lingua franca of the time and the connotations it bore for the British rulers. One of the major concerns of the British, on arriving in India was to control and manipulate the dominant language of the country. In doing so, they prudently named and declared ‘Hindustani’ as the official and administrative language of the country. What is noteworthy here is that Hindustani was essentially Urdu, the language of the Mughal emperors and the Indian Muslims. It as follows:

‘The British considered Hindustani, an urban language of north India, the lingua franca of the whole country. They associated it with (easy) Urdu and not modern, or Sanskritized, Hindi. They learned it to exercise power and, because of that, were not careful of mastering the polite usages of the language or its grammar’ (Rahman, 2007).

These multiple identities of Urdu further reinforce the fact that it is an intrinsically heteroglossic language which can be employed for diverse functions and to remarkable effects. For this unique feature, Urdu has often been exploited to fulfill various designs and objectives of the rulers and the ruled alike. However, the current study is focused towards exploring Urdu’s manipulative use by the British during their long rule in India and the repercussions thereby in terms of its status and perception during and after the period of colonization in social and cultural domains. For this purpose and to avoid any ambiguity, the paper will use the term Urdu and Hindustani interchangeably or in a parallel form as Urdu/Hindustani.

Data collection

Data which constituted: “Glossary of the British Raj” and “Kipling’s glossary of Hindustani-Urdu-Hindi words” was obtained from Wikipedia and Google, respectively. As mentioned earlier, the Hindustani language was a blend of Hindi and Urdu words; therefore the paper will use the words Hindustani and Urdu interchangeably with more emphasis on the Urdu variety of this hybrid language. These sources were approached for easy accessibility and for information suited to the research purpose. The British colonizers used a selected variety of Urdu words usually for communicative purposes, for exerting power, for assimilation and for familiarization with the East. The first data source: “Glossary of the British Raj” contains the British vocabulary attached to the fifth Report of the Committee of the House of Commons on Indian affairs, appointed in 1810, comprising Hindustani words commonly used in the

administration of British India. The second source: “Kipling’s glossary of Hindustani- Urdu -Hindi words” was published in *The Kipling Journal* No 3, September 1927. It is a comprehensive glossary obtained from the assorted works of Rudyard Kipling who is considered as an authority on India, its culture, and the Hindustani language itself. The purpose of choosing Kipling’s glossary is because these words as found in Kipling’s famous works effectively and adequately represented the power relations between the Britishers and Indians and shed light on the manipulative use of Hindustani by the colonizers. Furthermore, Kipling’s work gives the readers a fair idea of how contemporary literature, through a keen observation of the linguistic repertoire of the colonizers perceived the era of British colonization and all the associated patterns. The above-mentioned data was chosen for its historical and literary value and with the purpose of investigating the status and use of Hindustani/ Urdu during the British Raj in social and literary domains. As the main focus of the paper is upon exploring the post-colonial identity of Urdu during the British Raj and since the paper also proposes that Urdu is intrinsically a heteroglossic language, the chosen data was considered extremely relevant to the research objectives.

Methodology

The paper draws upon Bakhtin’s concept of Heteroglossia to analyze the data and address the research questions. In this connection, it is important to elaborate the Russian philosopher’s ideology of language. The fame of Mikhail Bakhtin (1895-1975) primarily rests in his contributions to the poetics of the novel in the form of his literary theories. His passion to explore the anatomy and mechanics of language and to discover its inherent traits drove him to make some phenomenal discoveries. The most important being the duplicity of expression that he saw in all forms of life, specifically in art, literature, and semiotics which he regarded as strong manifestations of life. Bakhtin was opposed to the view that language was a static entity; on the contrary, he believed it to be a system of values and a transmitter of ideologies. He introduced the concepts of ‘double voiced discourse’, ‘plurality of consciousness’ and ‘polyphonic text’ through an in-depth analysis of Dostoevsky and Dicken’s rich literature. Moreover, he furnished language with stronger qualities: flexibility and ‘unfinalizability’. For Bakhtin, no word or utterance was ever complete or in its final form as it perpetually assimilated foreign influences and was always in the state of *becoming*. Bakhtin’s view goes against the view that language is simply a means to communicate information. In other words:

Language cannot relate directly to an external world. Rather, a social field of interacting ways of seeing always mediates the relationship between each speaker and the world. Any way of seeing illuminates some aspects of an object and obscures others. The idea of language

as simply descriptive turns it into a ‘dead, thing-like shell’. Any language-use is mediated by social ways of seeing. Furthermore, these social ways of seeing are always contested, in dialogue, and changing (Robinson, 2011).

Heteroglossia is an effective approach to text analysis, in that it investigates the ability of language for multi-faceted discourse by presenting a disintegrated view of language: socio cultural factors and synchronic and diachronic influences on speech production. Bakhtin’s theories present language as a uniting force: a cultural and historical link between generations of people. This unifying principle is particularly observed in Heteroglossia. Henning (2015) describes Heteroglossia as the objective condition of language marked by a plurality of perspectives and value-laden ideological practices, in challenging contact with each other (p.200). Bakhtin attaches innumerable powers to a language. He presents language as a system of values comprising close-knit living, cultural comingling, and active communication. Language for Bakhtin possesses a delectable richness of expression. It is for him, voluminous and multi layered. Bakhtin’s thinking confronts us with the improbability of monological, monolithic approaches to literature and other human expression (Kleberg, 1991). The paper proposes that Bakhtin’s perspective of language as being a cultural product, as being vulnerable to external influences and as possessing a double voice quality holds true for the Urdu language, since it exhibits all these traits in its long-standing history of evolution and transmittance.

Data which comprises 35 words from the sources mentioned in section 3 will be analyzed through the lens of Heteroglossia with the purpose of showing the polyphonic quality of the Urdu language. Many of the words chosen for analysis are those which were in common usage during the British Raj and were specifically incorporated within the linguistic repertoire of the British for certain ulterior motives. Despite the fact, that these were purely Urdu words and except for differences of pronunciation, there were no structural or morphological changes made to them by the British authorities, it seemed that these words were no longer native Urdu words, rather tools for the Britishers to accomplish their goal of acquiring ultimate power over India. These words thus shed their native colors and acquired the identity of the colonizers. Similarly, the list of words generated from the second source; Kipling’s glossary displays similar patterns of linguistic exploitation by the Britishers to various degrees and ends. Here, two important observations can be made:

1. Urdu maybe naturally malleable, owing to its diverse linguistic traditions.
2. Urdu acquired a distinct post-colonial identity under British rule

Analysis and discussion

The data will be analyzed from three different perspectives to highlight the three diverse notions of Urdu as perceived and propagated by the British rulers:

1. It was the second language of the British which was primarily used to assign subordinate roles to the colonized natives.
2. It was also a functional language which had to be learnt for exercising control and power and for gaining social acceptance from the subject race.
3. On a more subtle level, it was the exotic language of the Orient in which the British indulged to experience the magic of the East.

Selected vocabulary from the two data sources has been tabulated for analysis. The vocabulary has been divided into three categories denoting three different identities of Urdu during the British Raj:

**Table 1:
Glossary of the British Raj**

	Postcolonial Language	Functional Language	Language of the Orient
1	<i>Darogah</i>	<i>Pathan</i>	<i>Ameer</i>
2	<i>Munshi</i>	<i>Sardar</i>	<i>Bazaar</i>
3	<i>Cutwal</i>	<i>Khan</i>	<i>Begum</i>
4	<i>Subahdar</i>	<i>Chokee</i>	<i>Darbar</i>
5	<i>Sepoy</i>	<i>Batta</i>	<i>Haram</i>
6	<i>Thanedar</i>	<i>Jamma</i>	<i>Fakir</i>

Table 2:
Kipling's glossary

	Postcolonial Language	Functional Language	Language of the Orient
1	<i>Angrezi</i>	<i>Dharzee,</i>	<i>Hookah</i>
2	<i>Chota hazri</i>	<i>Ghuzul Khana</i>	<i>Nawab</i>
3	<i>Memsahib</i>	<i>Nimbu Pani</i>	<i>Masnad</i>
4	<i>Sahib</i>	<i>Acha Acha</i>	<i>Devan</i>
5	<i>Hookum</i>	<i>Arre!</i>	<i>Aftaba</i>
6	<i>Belaiti</i>	<i>Meharbani</i>	---

Table-1. Displays the words taken from the first source: 'The glossary of the British Raj'. Since the data includes words that were strictly used for administrative, social and communicative purposes, it does not exhibit the fervor and passion which the British had for Hindustani/Urdu because it does not have a wide vocabulary of those words which betray their more aesthetic cravings for India, its culture and its languages. This tendency is more prominently shown in Table 2, which contains words compiled from the second source: 'Kipling's Glossary', a richer source for exploring the more literary and cultural use of Hindustani/ Urdu by the British. However, there are some remarkably interesting patterns that emerge from Table 1. It distinctly contains words that denote ranks and positions, words that are purely functional and words that have more cultural overtones. This three-way contrast of words not only shows three different perceptions and functions of the language for the British, but it also simultaneously reveals the heteroglossic nature of Urdu which could be adroitly adapted to fulfill different roles and functions and even create an aura of fantasy around itself. Thus, the words appearing in the first column denote the postcolonial status of the speakers of Urdu/Hindustani and the language itself. Words such as *Darogah*, *Subahdar*, *Sepoy* were included in the linguistic repertoire of the British to impose authority upon the Indians in a language they (the Indians) understood and could respond to, in short, their own language. Similarly, words like '*Munshi*', '*Cutwal*' have social and political shades because they denote the ranks and positions occupied by the Indians in their service to the British Empire. These words to date are associated with the British and serve as a sharp reminder of India's colonization. Although these words are still very much used in India and Pakistan in administrative circles, they undoubtedly carry British associations. Moreover, the official ranks they stand for also add to the subordinate or subaltern status of Urdu/Hindustani and its

native culture since most of these positions were occupied by low ranking officials. Thus, these words also highlight the power relations between the British and the Indians which were typical to those between the oppressors and the oppressed. For the British colonizers, this was one of the major aspects of Hindustani and the most advantageous one: the clear dominance which the language of the subaltern gave them over their Hindu and Muslim subjects. This administrative terminology also gave birth to another powerful term, 'Angrez Sarkar'. The term itself, implies double colonization because both words: 'Angrez' and 'Sarkar' symbolize power that is embedded in the words 'white masters'. Thus, Urdu/Hindustani was adopted by the British to ensure compliance and to exert power, from and upon the colonized subjects. The era of the British Rule finds its most vocal interpretation through Urdu/Hindustani because it epitomizes all that the British Raj stood for in terms of the power that was manifested in its administrative machinery. The postcolonial use of Urdu went beyond the assigning of subordinate titles to the Indian people. It included other expressions which shared similar connotations but were more reflective of the social and cultural aspect of colonial rule. An example could be the compound word, '*chota hazri*', a term indigenous to the British Raj. Although, it meant a light midday meal which was served to the British officers, the lexical choice of words: *chota* (small) and *hazri* (presence) focus on the act of 'reporting to' and 'serving upon' a master rather than implying the casual action of consuming a meal. These words became such a prominent feature of spoken and written discourse that Urdu began shedding its noble identity to be categorized as a subordinate language only fit to assign roles of servility upon a people who were compelled to call their rulers, '*Sahib*' and '*Gora*' reiterating the colonial notion of 'the white master' over a brown race. The postcolonial vocabulary of Urdu includes stronger words like *Hookum*, *Angrezi* (the English Language) and *Belaiti* or *Velayati* (any item or thing of foreign make or origin) denoting more emphatically the Otherness of the Indians and the superiority of the British. *Hookum*, which literally means 'an order' or 'a command' was used to flatter the British officers and to show loyalty by implying a readiness to obey all their orders. Similarly, *Angrezi* and *Belaiti* also bear postcolonial colors because they refer to an illusion of the West which is beyond the reach of the subaltern Indians. Urdu was also manipulatively used by the colonizers to glorify their regime. The aura of British Imperialism and its dominating impact over its colonies and upon the outer world became visible through such eponyms as '*Sahib*', '*Gora*' and '*Maim Sahib*'. In other words, Urdu became a tool for articulating the glory of the British Raj: its aura and splendor. The glorification of the invading country in the language of the colonized nation had multiple implications. Firstly, it created the impression that the Indian Muslims and Hindus shared a compatible relationship with their colonizers and were in voluntary service to the British Government or more endearingly the '*Angrez*

Sarkar'. Secondly, it spoke volumes of how well the British were culturally assimilated with the Indians and how prosperous was their regime.

This takes us to the second important adaptation of Urdu/Hindi by the British: its use as a functional language. The British, during their extensive rule over the Indian sub-continent employed various strategies to maintain their position as the colonizers and to assimilate within the subordinate culture of the colonized people. In doing so, their most potent device was to adopt the language of the Indian people or 'Hindustani', which allowed them not only to exercise power but also to produce docile subjects through an environment of disciplined camaraderie. The goal being achieved through the inclusion of a wide range of vocabulary comprising honorific words such as: *Pathan, Sardar, Khan*, through vernacular expressions such as *Acha Acha, Arre!*, *Meharbani*, *hitherao* (come here) and through cultural words as *dharzee* (tailor), *ghuzul khana* (bathroom), and *nimbu pani* (lemonade). Words like, *Chokee* (a point for keeping guard or watch), *Batta* (allowance to troops in the field), *Jamma* (total, amount, assembly) also became part of the cultural fabric. In this context, Urdu/Hindustani transformed into a vehicular language, adopted by the imperial rulers not only for effective communication but also for creating a rapport with their subjects ultimately turning them into passive followers under the unavoidable charm of the Occident. A closer look at the above-mentioned words shows how Urdu was exploited by the British for diverse motives and how it evolved into a multi-dimensional language. Initially the language of the subaltern, it gradually transforms into a communal language emanating warmth and camaraderie. Thus, *Pathan, Sardar* and *Khan* are honorific titles denoting ethnicity with a tone of familiarity about them. They also express comradeship and are used for friendly greetings. Similarly, *dharzee, ghuzul khana, nimbu pani* are core cultural words replete with Eastern colors, ringing through the streets of Lahore and Delhi. The vernacular expressions, *Acha Acha, Arre! Meharbani*, signify various modes of addressing with different levels of formality. In short, the above-mentioned words whether titles, day to day words or vernacular expressions bore strong social implications and brought the British closer to Indian culture. In acquiring such a vocabulary, the colonial rulers were successful in establishing close bonds with their subjects. It afforded them opportunities for assimilation without ever losing their superior position. Thus, Urdu is a language that reverberates with all its ritual shades, molding to the demands of the speakers and sketching pictures with words. As foreign learners of the language, the British adopted a utilitarian approach towards Urdu. They were extremely conscious of the fact that they could truly conquer India if they learnt to capitalize its major languages. Although, Urdu/Hindustani was not impaired or tarnished under British rule, it acquired multiple roles and functions which only served to bring out its versatility.

The third important role played by Urdu was to provide aesthetic relief to the colonizers. Besides, being used as an administrative language, a lingua franca, Urdu afforded more pleasures for the British in that it introduced them to the Orient. Due to its rich literary tradition and prestigious history, Urdu provided the British rulers a glimpse of the enchanting Orient. Many words of Arab and Persian origin were a part of the Urdu glossary of the British and were therefore reminiscent of the Mughal empire and the Orient East. Words such as ‘*Begum*’ (A lady /woman of high rank), ‘*Nawab*’ (Noble of nobles) ‘*Musnud*’, (a seat, a throne or chair of state) ‘*Devan*’ (place of assembly) ‘*Haram*’, (the place where the ladies reside) ‘*Fakir*’ (religious beggar) ‘*Shamiana*’ (an embellished tent) exude royalty and they belong to a totally different cult of Urdu, one which represents the notion of Orientalism. Words denoting items of daily use like, *Hookah* (hubble bubble) and *Aftaba* (water pot) not only have Persian or Arabic associations but also create an ambience of Eastern culture. This aspect of Urdu and its associations with the Orient finds its interpretation in literature: historical fiction, travelogues, postcolonial novels and real stories based on the colonial regime of India where it (Urdu) is hardly ever shown as a static vehicular language. Rather, there is an aura attached to the language which not only serves as a backdrop to the literary work but also enhances the perception of Urdu as a language of the East. Kipling’s glossary is replete with such depictions of Urdu, as the poetic and charismatic language of the East, a notion which is fairly expressed in the literature of the time. It is interesting to observe, how diversely Urdu was perceived by the colonizers and how far reaching were its effects upon the political and social structure of the empire. It was the lingua franca, the language of the subaltern, the functional language and last but not the least, it was the language of the Orient.

Conclusion

The paper assumes the absence of a stable identity for the Urdu language keeping in view its historical past, specifically its evolution during the British Raj. In doing so, the paper briefly traced the numerous roles and titles which the language has occupied during its illustrious history and which add to its not being accepted as an indigenous language of Pakistan. The paper also tried to relate these different roles with its (Urdu’s) intrinsic ability to adapt to different linguistic environments. The fact that Urdu is so rich and malleable is taken as a cause for its fluid identity. Its high prestige may be the reason for its isolation from other regional languages. To strengthen this assumption, the paper used Bakhtin’s model of Heteroglossia to analyze data taken from two historical sources reflecting the use of Urdu during the British Raj to show the ‘double voiced’ or polyphonic quality of Urdu. A quality which was exploited by the British to cast postcolonial and oriental colors over the language. The findings further reiterated the stance that Urdu is a naturally heteroglossic language which allowed for it to be a functional and literary language during post and pre partition days. For being multi voiced, it fulfilled certain political and aesthetic

roles: it acquired a postcolonial identity and served as an illusion of the Orient for the British colonizers. Today, it is the revered national language of Pakistan and is spoken in numerous dialects and varieties in different regions of South East Asia. The paper proposed a broader perspective of Urdu in seeing it as a versatile, rich, and multi-dimensional language deeply entrenched in its past, bearing the shades of its soil and ever evolving.

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