

Pashto and English in Afghanistan: An Overview of Past, Present and the Future of Contact linguistics in the Planning

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Abstract

This paper overviews the contact of English and Pashto language in Afghanistan, covering the twentieth century and look ahead into the future for the prospects of two languages coming into contact with each other. Research is primarily qualitative and based on archival sources supplemented by a string of interviews conducted during 2010-2016. The study aimed to find the causes, nature and outcome of English, Pashto contact in Afghanistan. As the period and languages involved in the study have an extensive profile, therefore, the researchers limited themselves to the most significant points in the form of overview and leave the details to future researchers to further refine the assumptions and findings provided here. The study finds colonialism and postcolonial globalization as the deterministic forces that compelled Afghanistan to let English flourish in Afghanistan. However, the very factor of the colonial arsenal that powered the introduction of English in Afghanistan also became a major barrier as Afghans were suspicious of the English people and their language. The love-hate relation for English language and its accompanying culture creates a complex contact-linguistic situation where some actors like the Anglophone west and Afghan authorities promote English and provide a rich context for Pashto language to change as a result of this contact, while on the other hand, the resistance to foreign influence and military presence in Afghanistan taints the process of English language acquisition as well.

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1. Introduction

Afghanistan is a multilingual state and it is home to 41 languages, however, most of these minority languages are concentrated in the north, northeast, northwest. A major part of the linguistic map of Afghanistan is covered by Pashto and Dari as the major national languages, followed by Hazargai, Turkoman and Uzbeki as the major regional languages. Afghanistan is a strange case of contradiction, as the multilingualism and cultural diversity is part of many official proclamations, the practice tells an opposite story where a language with more available resources overwhelms other languages in all places where the expression of authority and domination associated with the use of language. Therefore, in practice, Pashto and Dari competed with each other, the regional languages and minority languages with an obvious tilt of conditions in their favor. Afghan history acted as a decisive force in bringing new languages and dominations consistently into Afghanistan and thereby consistently provided fresh fuel and ingredients to keep the cauldron of languages burning and the broth of culture becoming complex and rich. After the establishment of a central rule of Pashtun in Afghanistan, the inflow of conquerors' languages halted briefly but the emergent colonial powers in the form of the Russian Empire/ USSR on one side and the British rule on the other side broke this serenity in Afghanistan's linguistic landscape. The establishment of British influence at the beginning of the twentieth century (as Afghanistan came under British suzerainty) tilted the scale of influence in the favor of the British political and linguistic influence. The first modern school that was established for the education of the ruling elite had English as a medium of instruction. The hand and glove relation of English language and political influence makes the study of contact of English as a new arrival and Pashto as the entrenched language significant for the understanding of mode and dynamics of contact linguistic theoretically and in practice.

2. Research objectives and methods

The research article is based on qualitative data and procedures. The primary data comes from interviews with Afghans during 2010-2016, and archival sources. Secondary data comes from publication in print and web. The text of recorded and transcribed interviews, archives and the significant secondary sources were subject to content analysis and textual analysis.¹ The study aimed to find:

1. The causal forces resulting in contact of Pashto and English in Afghanistan,
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2. The nature of language contact of Pashto and English in Afghanistan,
3. The future of language contact of Pashto and English in Afghanistan.

The theoretical and conceptual frameworks of this study are primarily informed by the study of the works of Ahmad, Schumann and Haugen.² Ahmad's concept of Hybrid Language Policy and Planning (HLPP) conceptualized the contact of languages in Afghanistan in terms of a process of integration as the confluence of languages and their speaker. The primarily macro-sociolinguistic perspective of Ahmad's work rationalizes the context (national or sub-national) as a field in the equilibrium state, a state where maintenance of the de facto status quo becomes the primary focus of the language policy and planning. It is theorized that the resourceful actors (political, social and economic elite in a polity) work for the maintenance of the status quo. The status quo often reflects an imbalanced distribution and allocation of resources to languages. Therefore, the asymmetry favors a gradual rise and dominance of one language at the cost of other languages in the political system. The continuation and support of asymmetric relations can trigger two different processes. One, if the political leaders consider the multilingualism and linguistic variation as a potential asset that guarantees the cultural nuances of the speakers and keep them satisfied with the preservation and accommodation of their culture then an accommodative approach to languages is adopted where preservation/ accommodation of the marginalized languages is aimed and the practice of empowerment and removal of barriers ensures that the status quo gradually reflect more accommodation and preservation of existing diversity. Two, the authority value uniformity and homogeneity as a more efficient form of language planning and further tilt the power balance in favor of one or a few languages at the cost of others. The ultimate assimilation of a minority or minoritized languages into the dominant language(s) is conceived as the preferred and desirable outcome in the second approach. The second approach often results in the increase of grievances and resistance while the first approach requires a change of mind of the ruling elite and redistribution of resources. While the first approach supports the minority, it ruffles the feather of the dominant language group from whom the ruling elite derive power, the second approach also has its challenges as it appeasing the powerful/majority it further alienates the minority. Therefore, normally out of the two poles neither comes into practice and instead a middle ground or swing from one to the other poles becomes evident in practice. Schumann's concept of acculturation as a determinant of language learning explains the micro-sociolinguistics that operate at the level of the individual speaker and the local community's intersection. He has postulated the presence of eight psychological and sociolinguistic determinant that arise from the culture (as a preferred and desirable way of living and lifestyle) of a language user

community and decide the likelihood of the learner to move to a target language group (a process that Schumann calls acculturation and he considers better acculturation as a force that facilitates language learning/acquisition), the person moves away from the culture and language of her/his first language. Therefore, acculturation describes how a person adjusts into the target language's culture. The first of the acculturating factor is the social distance between the target language (TL) and language learner groups. The greater this difference the more difficult it becomes for the learner to fully assimilate into the target language group. The second factor is the nature of integration pattern, i.e. realizing in assimilation, accommodation or preservation. The third factor in acculturation is that of "enclosure" which reflects the commonality of social institutions of the learner's group and the target language's group. The fourth factor is that of cohesiveness, which describes how strong is the relation/tie of the learner with her/his first language. The fifth factor is the relative size of the L1 and L2/TL group. If the size of L1 is large enough then the boundaries between the L1 and TL prohibit assimilation and henceforth successful acquisition of the target language. "Congruence" is the sixth factor of acculturation which outlines the role of similarity or differences between the cultural views and beliefs. If both groups (L1 and TL) then the congruence of their views helps the learner to easily move between L1 and TL and assimilate as well. Attitude and duration of contact are the seventh and the eighth factors that point to the image or stereotype of TL in the L1 community, a positive attitude facilitate acculturation/absorption into TL while the negative stereotyping often make the TL undesirable. The longer a person remains in contact the better acculturation takes place, short contacts do not help in assimilation. Schumann also talks about the "ego permeability, motivation, language shock and cultural shock" as the psychological factors that operate at the individual level and determine acculturation. Haugen proposed a four-step process in which language is systematically modified, most commonly to elevate its role in society and make it perform formal functions in a polity. The steps he proposed, include, "norm selection, codification, implementation and elaboration". The process is linear and sometime the steps may overlap. It begins with choosing a language or a variety of language (called code) for the elevated role, then dictionaries, pedagogical grammars etc. pour in to provide reference work (especially for formal learning in schools), it is followed by introduction of the language for education, official use etc. and finally the acceptance or rejection of this by the target community. This construct is applied in the overview that is provided in the following sections, i.e. past of Pashto and English contact, present of Pashto and English contact, and future of Pashto and English contact.

3. Pashto and English Contact: Past, Present and the Future

Pashto is the official and national language of Afghanistan. It is also a language of the majority i.e. ethnic Pashtuns. After the inception of the modern state of Afghanistan in 1747, the speakers of the language dominated a vast majority of geography that spans the current Pakistan and Afghanistan combined. However, the ruling elite in the past did not use it as the language of the court, and instead, they followed the regional tradition in the choice of language of the court that was Persian (the Afghan version then became Dari). Thus the language, though spoken by the majority was not the language of the court. The situation continued well into the first quarter of the twentieth century. Therefore, the elite in the court was not connected with the majority of the population through the language that the majority spoke. The Mughal/ Persia effect was the main determinant of the choice of the official language in Afghanistan. The South Asian context soon changed as the Mughals were defeated by the British army and in their stead became the rulers of South Asia. Initially, Afghan rulers welcomed this change, as Mughals were a constant nuisance for their rule. The first major effect of the contact between the Dari speaking ethnic Pashtun court of the Kabul and British India was that of friendship. However, the first adventure of Britain into Afghanistan changed the Afghan attitude once for all when the British army captured Afghanistan as a result of the first Anglo-Afghan war. The Afghan ruling elite that had earlier started to introduce English terminology in the military and had the services of full-time translators were disillusioned about British intentions. They therefore, started to discourage the English people's presence in Afghanistan. The two Anglo-Afghan wars in the nineteenth-century therefore permanently changed the Afghan view of English people, and the people to people contact the English and Pashtun were almost non-existent. Well into the twentieth century Afghan elite regulated movement between Kabul and British India through passport system. They actively discouraged Afghan people to go to India.

However, education was an important issue that Afghan rulers faced in the early days of the twentieth century. Amir Abdur Rahman who had remained in exile in Bkhara that was under the Russian controlled had witnessed the importance of modernization of the army and the power of education desired earnestly to consolidate Afghanistan on the model of a modern state. He, however, only succeeded in achieving the preliminary objective of modernization i.e. consolidation. His son Habibullah Khan continued the primary mission as he received the Afghan state in a consolidated form and introduced modern education in 1904 by starting a school first initially intended to educate the elite in Kabul. English was part of the Habibiya School and his son Amanullah Khan

expanded the schooling by introducing Nijat and Istiqlal schools and opening the branches of these schools in other cities. The modern schooling had English as the medium of instruction.

Afghan rulers did not restrict foreign language teaching to English, they introduced French, German and Turkish in the first half of the twentieth century to keep their options open in international contact. As for Afghan rulers, the introduction of a foreign language equated the establishment of foreign relations and the purpose of introducing a language in their modernized schools was to create educated people who would later engage in diplomatic ties, and commerce (the central pillars of Afghanistan intent to engage with the international community). The English language, however, remained dominant as long as British rule continued in the neighborhood of Afghanistan, although Afghanistan earnestly took steps to somewhat balance this lopsided tilt to the English by promoting languages of other powers of Europe and the Muslim world. The contact of Pashto and English happened at the level of elite, primarily in Kabul. People to people contact was not profound therefore language contact at popular level did not take place and the effects of English remained limited to some scientific fields (in science and technology French and German were also equal competitors). In the matter of keeping the official records, Afghanistan's official gazette (Salnama or yearbook) used to have only English as the foreign language section.

The second world war brought changes to global consequences. The world witnessed the emergence of a great number of newly independent countries as a result of the end of the war that weakened and in some places (such as south Asia) eliminated colonialism. However, the end of colonialism in the neighborhood did not end the worries of Afghanistan to have a powerful neighbor with a powerful language. The Soviet Union as the heir of Czarist Russia was present in the immediate neighborhood. In this context of the world now polarizing into two blocks of capitalism (free world) and Socialism, Afghanistan chose to remain neutral and thus joined Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and tried to keep good working relations with both of the worlds. As a member of NAM, Afghanistan could not engage in a military alliance, therefore, education and commerce became the main focus of benefiting from the technological advancement in both blocs. USSR as well as the USA (as the champion of capitalism) tried their best to outdo each other in offering the best education and technological assistance. A great number of Afghans were therefore given training and education in USSR (through the Russian language) and the USA (through the English language) to support the transfer of technology and knowledge. On the one hand, the English language department opened in the University of Kabul so on the other hand Russian medium polytechnic institute started to function in Afghanistan in

addition to the scholars who went to USSR and the USA to learn Russian and English language. The influence of the USA remained limited and the formation of PDPA (People Democratic Party of Afghanistan) and its precursor Khalq and Percham parties as a result of constitutionalism and democratization made the USSR influence outdo American influence. The political alignment accelerated the pace of aid and assistance in education (both general and technical) increased the influence of Russian influence and thus minimized the footprints of the English language. The arrival of Russian forces and technical staff for the support of the post-Saur revolution government of Afghanistan made the Russian language victorious and it appeared that that English language would become extinct in Afghanistan as the socialist government and political parties declared the USA as the enemy of Afghanistan, and chances of language contact became rare for Afghans.

However, the USA and the Anglophone world capitalized on the political dissidents who fled to Pakistan as refugees. The education that was supported by USAID and the British Council included English language learning as an essential component. The Afghan refugee diaspora also participated in the mainstream education of Pakistan that had English as a key element of the curriculum. The Russian language hit a snag in Afghanistan as the resistance gave place to civil war. The formal education of Afghans, both inside and outside was in doldrums as the social fabric was torn by the decades' long civil war.

The second arrival of the English language came on the back of Operation Enduring Freedom and United Nations Assistance Mission to Afghanistan (UNAMA), as the Anglophone USA was the major investor and supplier for the post-Taliban set up in Afghanistan. Afghan diaspora who were sympathetic to the Anglophone world and who also knew the English language became the key position holders in Afghanistan. The revival of education as part of Afghan reconstruction saw pouring in of huge amounts of resources and personnel to teach the English language. The American University establishment as the icon and flagship of reconstructed Afghanistan is an English medium. English has been made as the compulsory component of school syllabus in state-run schools.

As the government supports the spread of English, the ousted Taliban oppose modern Education in general and English language teachers in particular. There have been many reports of killing and threatening of the English language teachers on the grounds of considering them spies of the occupying US army (as per Taliban's Night Letters or Shabnamas).

The future of English depends on the presence of the Anglophone world's influence in Afghanistan. The past experience of the Soviet-backed promotion of the Russian language shows that the decline of their influence saw the decline of

the Russian language as well. However, the global trend of linking modern education, aided by the domination of English in international communication provides clues of the resilience of the English language in Afghanistan to withstand the pressure of withdrawal of Anglophone world's military and decrease in assistance. Especially, after mainstreaming of Taliban who is the main opponents of the English language in Afghanistan and in the current trend of more and more Pashtuns leaving the Taliban and participating in mainstream education (with the English language as a key component, will hold ample opportunity for Pashto-English contact). The future of Pashto-English is also expected to rise due to the influence of social media, internet and TV etc. where the trend of using English-Pashto code-switching and mixing and hybridization will Englishize Pashto and Pashtoize English.

4. Findings and Conclusion

The researchers conclude that English entered Afghanistan as the language of the followers of Christ whom Afghan considered not heathens, but three Anglo-Afghan war made them distrustful of the English people and their language. They say English as a Trojan horse that would sneak in the English culture followed by the English army and occupation, so the popular resistance to English people translated in refusing to eagerly learn the English language. However, after the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan, when Americans came to support the resistance against the Soviet army and Soviet-backed government, Afghan refugees (belonging to the ethnic Pashtun majority) saw them as the messiah who helped them to fight for freedom. The positive sentiments among refugees made the English language learning popular among the refugees. However, the rise of the Taliban and their overthrow at the hand of the US and Anglophone armies split the attitude towards the English language. On one side, the supporters and functionaries of the Taliban started to oppose the English language, while on the other side, those who supported the US invasion, will continue support of English spread in Afghanistan.

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¹ The details of various techniques and aspect of these analyses is amply discussed in books on research methodology. Some works are cited in references for reference.

² Ayaz Ahmad's doctoral dissertation, "Role of English in Afghan language policy and planning with its impact on national integration (2001-2010)", Schumann's acculturation theory and Hagugen's presentation of language planning (see the provided references for publication details).
