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THE ETHNOGRAPHY OF LANGUAGE AND POWER: ENGLISH AS SYMBOLIC CAPITAL AND URDU AS MORAL IDENTITY IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This current paper explores a sociolinguistic situation in Pakistan as one of the problematic social spaces where the hegemonic opposition in the English and Urdu language exists. According to it, this division is not an apolitical linguistic process, but a sphere of symbolic power, the manifestation of the structural tradition of colonialism that the postcolonial state reproduces. The approach followed by the analysis is based on a critical and grounded approach as developed by Talal Asad and Naveeda Khan but synthesizes theoretical school of Pierre Bourdieu, Michel Foucault, Benedict Anderson, and Ernest Gellner. The paper follows the processes of this reproduction, first, by an educational apartheid that institutionalizes English as symbolic capital, the main mode of social economic mobility, thus, establishing a habitus of classes. Such institutional gate keeping is best illustrated with high stakes testing such as high stakes testing like the Civil Superior Services (CSS) exam, which requires high stakes English proficiency. At the same time, it dismantles the state imposition of Urdu as a minority language as a homogenizing nationalistic project aimed to unify a single, unified moral identity. In this top-down project that resulted in the violent marginalization of Bengali, and subsequent marginalization of other regional languages, this lived, ethnographic encounter with Urdu as a language of heart-wounding and heart-religious "striving" and personal "aspiration" in daily life is contrasted. This hegemonic EnglishUrdu episteme, which is cut across by the class and gender division, is shown to be a kind of symbolic violence that marginalizes regional vernaculars and suppresses the subaltern voices in a systematic manner. A peripheral issue, but a key generator of social stratification and the main barrier to the realization of a pluralistic national identity is this unresolved language question.

I. Introduction: The Linguistic Divide as a Social Field

The sociolinguistic situation in the modern Pakistan is characterized by a certain underlying paradox. It is a country of huge linguistic and ethnic variety where more than 70 different languages are represented (Anjum, 2021). The country has a predominantly regional

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vernacular demographic scene with Punjabi as the mother tongue of its population of about 38.8pc, then there is Pashto (18.2pc), Sindhi (14.6pc), and Saraiki (12.2pc). However, the whole institution, political, and educational structure is based on a hegemonic duopoly: English and Urdu (Manan & David, 2022).

Both languages cannot boast that they are the mother tongue of the majority. The natively spoken English is a remnant of colonization that is spoken by an insignificant part of the population but still occupies an unquestioned hegemony as the language of elite, of law, of higher learning and of governance (Ali, 2024). Although Urdu is also the mother tongue of a minority (around 7.1pc of the population as well), it was chosen at the establishment of the country to become the national language and lingua franca. Its formal purpose was to serve as the main emblem of one unified Islamic-nationalist identity (Raza, 2022).

The given paper looks at the ethnography of this linguistic divide and even proposes that the divide between the English and Urdu language is the main axis of power and social hierarchy in Pakistan. The conceptualization of the separation is:

1. **English as Symbolic Capital:** The main device of socioeconomic mobility (Manan & David, 2022), the access to the bureaucratic power, and the symbol of an elite, modern status of a class. In emic (insider) terms it is the language of the dunya - the temporal world, the market, and the bureaucracy.
2. **Urdu as Moral Identity:** The officially approved vehicle of a common national identity (Raza, 2022) and, more ethnographically, the medium of feeling toward which the expression of individual piety and religious pursuit (Khan, 2012) is directed. The language of deen--faith, morality and self.

The main point of the paper to state is that the current linguistic hierarchy is not a natural and benign effect of the multilingual interaction but an effective force of symbolic power. It is a postcolonial artifact, which was inherited through the policies of the British colonial rule: divide and rule (Hussain, 2008) and actively sustained by the Pakistani ruling classes to replicate their own hegemony and preserve the status quo of the social hierarchies (Khan, 2014). This system, which generates asymmetrical power relations (Khan, 2013), is a kind of symbolic violence against most of the population, the native vernacular triumphed over the corridors of power.

This paper follows the genealogies (Asad, 1993) of these two poles of linguistics using methodology of critical synthesis. It isolates the foundational anthropological and sociological theories of language, power and nationalism and puts them into debate with the ethnographic as well as historical case studies of Pakistani context. It will examine on the first place, the mechanisms through which the English is created, legitimized and reproduced as Bourdieusian symbolic capital, namely, the class-based education system. In this analysis, the case study of Civil Superior Services (CSS) exam will be included as one of the main instruments of elite closure.

Second, it will deconstruct the ideologies—nationalist and religious—that construct Urdu as a "moral identity," distinguishing between the top-down state project (Gellner; Anderson) and the bottom-up, lived experience of piety (Khan; Asad). Finally, it will deploy feminist and postcolonial critiques to expose what this dominant discourse silences and excludes: the gendered experiences of this linguistic field (Zubair, 2001) and the subaltern voices of Pakistan's marginalized regional languages.

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II. Theoretical Grounding: Capital, Discourse, and Imagined Communities

To deconstruct the complex linguistic field of Pakistan, no single European theoretical framework is sufficient. The uncritical application of Western model's risks "blindly essentialising" (Kazmi, 2021) and failing to capture the unique "social reality" (Jalal, 1995) of a postcolonial state. The Pakistani case demands a critical synthesis: one that can account for the *economic* dimensions of class reproduction (Bourdieu), the *ideological* force of nationalism (Anderson, Gellner), the *epistemic* structures of exclusion (Foucault), and the *discursive* nature of religious identity (Asad, Weber). This section outlines the theoretical architecture for this paper.

A. The Bourdieusian Linguistic Market (Bourdieu, 1991)

The most powerful approach to the analysis of the role of English in Pakistan is that of Pierre Bourdieu presented in his works, including Language and Symbolic Power (1991). Bourdieu (1991) sees language as a means of communication, as a symbol of power, and as a capital. He suggests such a "linguistic market", where linguistic expressions are given different values (Manan & David, 2022). In any society, social field, there is a dominant class, which dictates what is considered a "legitimate" language and accent.

The linguistic market in Pakistan is characterized as "legitimate" which is fluency in English (Saleem & Mehmood, 2018). This fluency is a type of "linguistic capital" that is part of "symbolic capital"—a set of goods, material and symbolic, that is "rare and worthy of being sought after" (Bourdieu, 1991). This capital is primarily gained through the education system, creating an accent, confidence and what can be called "an air of authority" (Mustafa 2015). This habitus is then converted directly into economic capital (access to high-paying jobs) and social capital (prestige and elite networks) (Ali & Raza, 2023).

B. Foucauldian Epistemes and Exclusions (Foucault, 1977)

While Bourdieu explains the *reproduction* of class, Michel Foucault explains the *production* of knowledge and the *exclusion* of other ways of knowing (Ullah & Khan, 2020). For Foucault, power is not just repressive; it is productive. It produces "truth" and "knowledge" through "discourse" (Fadli, 2023). In *The Order of Things*, he defines an "episteme" as the historical *a priori*, the underlying structure of knowledge that determines what can be thought and said as legitimate in a given era.

The English-Urdu duopoly in Pakistan functions as a Foucauldian episteme. This discursive framework defines what counts as "legitimate knowledge" (codified almost exclusively in English textbooks for science, law, and technology) and what counts as "legitimate identity" (articulated through state-sponsored Urdu). The primary function of this episteme, like all Foucauldian discourses, is "exclusion." With these two languages as privileges, the pedagogical and bureaucratic institutions of the state make invisible all other types of knowledge, which are rooted in the Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi vernaculars. These vernaculars are pushed to the periphery as cultural ornaments that lack the epistemic legitimacy. This state organized silence, which is explained by the need to unite the nation, is one of the fundamental apparatuses of control.

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C. Nationalism and the Imposition of "High Culture" (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983)

To comprehend the status and function of Urdu as a national language one has to be familiar with the modernist theories of nationalism, in particular the theories of Benedict Anderson and Ernest Gellner.

According to Benedict Anderson (1983) nations are not ancient or natural, but, rather, modern "socially constructed" communities which are imagined by those who feel themselves to be part of a community. This "imagining" is made possible by "print capitalism," which standardizes a vernacular (also called a "print-language") and thus enables millions of people who never meet to imagine themselves as members of a single bounded fraternity (Anderson, 1983).

A functionalist argument is given by Ernest Gellner in Nations and Nationalism (1983). He suggests that nationalism is a prerequisite of the modern, industrial state which demands mobile, literate and culturally uniform manpower. Gellner defines Nationalism as "essentially, the general imposition of a high culture on society" (1983). This "high culture" is an "idiom mediated, academy-supervised idiom," which substitutes for the myriad and local "low cultures" (Gellner, 1983).

In Pakistan, post-1947, a political decision was made in the wake of tremendous linguistic diversity. (Ali & Khan, 2024) It chose Urdu, a language associated with the Muslim identity of the subcontinent (Raza, 2022), and made that Urdu as a "high culture" (Gellner). It tried to establish an Andersonian 'imagined community' with a single Islamic-nationalist identity through state-controlled print media, national songs (milli naghmay) and a national curriculum (Durrani, 2021).

D. Postcolonial and Anthropological Critiques (Asad, 1993)

These European theories, while powerful, must be applied with postcolonial caution. The uncritical application of Western models risks "blindly essentialis[ing]" (Kazmi, 2021) and failing to capture the unique "social reality" (Jalal, 1995) of a postcolonial state. Postcolonial critique resists universalist theories, arguing they are "Eurocentric and inadequate in understanding the non-European world's culture, experience, and realities" (Jalal, 1995). In order to comprehend Pakistan, one has to go beyond the Western constructs (Jalal, 1995) and examine the historical vulnerability to colonial legacies (Kazmi, 2021).

The limitations of the theories are very deep in the state nationalist project, say, as an illustration. Urdu was not inclusively imposed as the one and only high culture (Gellner, 1983) and as the print-language (Anderson, 1983) without the act of imagining. This was an internal colonialism (Hussain, 2008) which resulted in the violent disenfranchisement of Bengali that was one of the key factors in the war in 1971 and the secession of Bangladesh (Hussain, 2008). This episode is an ultimate breakage of the Andersonian imagined community. Moreover, the thesis about nationalism as the product of industrialization formulated by Gellner (Gellner, 1983) does not work in Pakistan, where ethnonationalist movements (Sindh, Baloch, Pashtun) tend to be brought out of the ethno-tribal and rural socio-economic setting (Adeney, 2011).

Genealogies of Religion (1993) by Talal Asad is a much-needed corrective. Asad questions the universal, western, secular idea of the term religion, claiming that it is a contemporary type, created by force (Asad, 1993). He proposes anthropology of the secular and the knowledge of

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Islam not in terms of fixed set of beliefs, but as a discursive tradition (Asad, 1993)- set of practices and arguments, based on a shared textual history, continuously debated and reconstituted.

The framework of Asad, as well as other postcolonial criticisms (Ali, 2024), compels critical synthesis. We can even regard Urdu as a high-down Gellnerian project. Ethnographically, also, we need to study the way in which the moral identity is practiced, has been put into words, and has been challenged as an Islamic discursive tradition.

Max Weber's *Sociology of Religion* (1963) is also relevant here. The Pakistani state's project can be read as an attempt to ground its *rational-bureaucratic* authority (the state) in *traditional* (Islamic) legitimacy, creating an anxious relationship between the secular-bureaucratic state and religious fervor (Weber, 1963).

This synthesis, summarized in Table 1, allows for a nuanced analysis that accounts for both the material structures of power (Bourdieu) and the affective, ideological currents of identity (Anderson, Asad).

Table 1: Synthesis of Theoretical Frameworks in the Pakistani Linguistic Field

Theorist	Core Concept	Application to English (Symbolic Capital)	Application to Urdu (Moral Identity)
Pierre Bourdieu	Linguistic Market; Symbolic Capital; Habitus	English proficiency is the ultimate symbolic capital, acquired via elite education (*habitus*) and converted into economic/social power (Manan & David, 2022).	Urdu's value is high in the "national" field but low in the "economic" field, creating ambivalence (Manan & David, 2022).
Michel Foucault	Power/ Knowledge; Discourse; Episteme; Exclusion	The English-medium "episteme" defines "legitimate knowledge" (e.g., science, law), rendering vernacular knowledge "invisible".	The Urdu-Islamic discourse defines the "legitimate national subject," excluding religious and linguistic minorities (Durrani, 2021).

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B. Anderson & E. Gellner	Imagined Community; Print Capitalism; High vs. Low Culture	N/A (English is the *external* language of global power, not the *nationalist* one).	Urdu was chosen as the "print-language" (Anderson, 1983) and "highculture"(Gellner, 1983) to forge a unified "imagined community" from diverse "low cultures" (Ali & Khan, 2024).
Talal Asad & Saba Mahmood	Discursive Tradition; Critique of Secularism; Lived Piety	The "secular" power of English (in law, bureaucracy) is a modern, Western formation inherited from colonialism (Asad, 1993).	Moves beyond the state project to the ethnographic. Urdu is the language of a "discursive tradition" of Islam (Asad, 1993), used for "striving" (Khan, 2012; Mahmood, 2005).
Max Weber	Sociology of Religion; Forms of Legitimacy	English is the language of the rational-bureaucratic state apparatus (the "iron cage" of administration) (Weber, 1963).	Urdu is the language of traditional (Islamic) and nationalist legitimacy, creating tension with the state's secular-bureaucratic form (Weber, 1963).
Sapir-Who rf & D. Hymes	Linguistic Relativity; Ethnography of Communi-cat ion	English cognitively provides access to "fresh cognitive models" of global knowledge, reinforcing its perceived superiority (Zaman, 2024).	Hymes's framework reveals everyday resistance (e.g., Jatki) to the "polite" hegemonic form of standardized Urdu (Sadiq & Bashir, 2023).

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III. English as Symbolic Capital: The Ethnography of Educational Apartheid

The English dominance as a symbolic capital, is not a glass half full and glass half empty situation in Pakistan. It is a real world social fact that is created, sustained and normalized within a socially classed education system that has been historically established. This section gives a description of this.

This ethnographic work of his provides the foundation of Bourdieu's theory and maps the colonial history of English language power, with an eye to its current expression in Pakistan's "educational apartheid."

A. Genealogies of Power: The Colonial Legacy

English has become the power in Pakistan due to the unbroken continuity of British colonial regime (Ali, 2024). This policy's ideology was famously expressed in Thomas Babington Macaulay's 1835 "Minute on Indian Education" which proposed the creation of a class of "Brown Sahibs"—a group of "persons, Indian in blood and colour, but English in taste, in opinions, in morals, and in intellect" (Rahman, 2014). This policy was not a mere cultural policy but it was a structural divide and rule policy (according to Hussain, 2008).

The British Indian education policy, as it is evidenced by the historical analysis, aimed at segregating the salariat (the group of wage-earners), into two different classes. The English-speaking schools which were the elite generated graduates who were loyal to the British who could be recruited into the high ranks of the Indian Civil Service (ICS). At the same time, another system of vernacular-media generated a low-level bureaucracy and a population of obedient people (Hussain, 2008). This economic, social, and cultural divisive colonial language system was not broken down in 1947 during independence (Khan, 2014). Rather, it was wholesale inherited and handed over by the ruling party within Pakistan, to fulfill its selfish interests (Hussain, 2008). The outcome is a socially stratified society meant to disenfranchise already economically dispossessed people (Khan, 2014).

B. Ethnographic Case: The "Tyranny of Language" and the Two-Tiered System (Public vs. Private)

This colonial heritage is a stark form of educational apartheid nowadays. The Pakistani education system is divided into two parallel and unequal portions, a small, costly and powerful private sector in English, and a large, under-resourced, and disenfranchised government sector in Urdu (or vernacular) (Ali, 2022). According to journalist and educationist Zubeida Mustafa (2015), Zubeida Mustafa refers to this as the tyranny of language, a system in which English has been idealized to such a degree that all reason has been left at the door. The proficiency with the English language becomes the requirement of most of the professional work. This tyranny she believes, brings about a linguistic confusion, a fractured system, which separates the society.

Two separate groups of Pakistani schools, including an elite English-medium school (School A), a lower-fee English-medium school (School B), a public Urdu-medium school (School C), and a madrassah (School D) are critically ethnographically studied to give definite evidence (Khan, 2013). This study's findings reveal that "access to full bilingualism and biliteracy" in both English and Urdu is "restricted to those attending School A" (Khan, 2013). These elite

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

institutions are the "preserve of the affluent" and provide the "quality education" those trains students "to make up places at the top of the economy". While, in the non-elite schools (B, C, and D), "bilingual education" was found to exist "only in theory," functioning as rhetoric rather than reality (Khan, 2013). In these schools, which cater to the "disadvantaged classes", teachers who are not fluent in English themselves are forced to "explain in their mother tongue while teaching from English language textbooks from which the students... memorise passages". This "mismatch" between policy and practice (Khan, 2013) "conditions working class children to accept their lowly status in the class structure". This break down is evident in ethnographic accounts of the physical condition of public Urdu-medium schools, which report them to be "dull" and "stringent"; regularly painted with dirt yellow paint, "insufficient, small and stuffy classrooms" and a "shortage of material resources" (Khattak, 2014). This is the primary way in which access to powerful languages is "institutionalized" and "shapes the chances of different groups of students" (Khan, 2013) is the way that "asymmetrical power relations" are established.

C. The CSS Exam as Elite Gatekeeping: A Case Study

The ultimate institutional mechanism of this Bourdieusian "elite closure" is the state's own Civil Superior Services (CSS) exam, the high-stakes test for entry into the elite bureaucratic jobs (Manan & David, 2022). Although the CSS is ostensibly a meritocratic procedure, it is an extremely efficient social class sieve, or, as has been called a politics of language assessment.

The exam has an intrinsic bias (Altaf, 2017), which is revealed through harsh statistics. The CSS exam in one of the years had a dismal overall rate of success of approximately two per cent and, most embarrassingly, a high failure rate of 92pc in English which was a mandatory subject. This paper functions as the gatekeeper. The most important question is why candidates do not work.

Academic studies of the exam and interview with CSS mentors indicate that those that fail on the exam are not failing on the category of language in the abstract, but fail because they do not have the defined, classed habitus required by the exam.

The original article noted the exam's reliance on a long-form English essay. Mentors report that the most common weaknesses are "weak grammar," "disorganized essays," "limited vocabulary," and a fundamental "inability to structure arguments". Aspirants, they note, "do not have introductions, thesis statements and conclusions in their writing" and show "no training in the conventions of academic writing".

These "linguistic and rhetorical" skills are not neutral tests of "competence and intelligence" (Altaf, 2017) that the state claims to assess. They are the dispositions that have been internalized, the 'natural' ones, from years of being immersed in an elite English-medium education. It is the skills which the public, Urdu-medium, memorization system is not designed to teach: critical reasoning, argumentation, and rhetorical cohesion. The CSS exam, thus, can be considered as the best instrument for "elite capture". It is not screening the most 'intelligent' candidates but rather one looking for a 'particular type of candidate' (Altaf, 2017) who already has the 'legitimate' habitus. It is an advanced political mechanism that "imposes political policies and power" and is used to "decide which layer of the society is failing (the lower class) and which layer is succeeding (the upper class, the elite class)". It guarantees the renewal of the symbolic capital of the elite into the political and economic capital of the state,

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reproducing the colonial-era ruling class in perpetuity.

D. The Habitus of Power: Language, Class, and Mobility

This educational apartheid is the mechanism that produces a classed *habitus* (Manan & David, 2022). Ethnographic inquiry into Pakistani university classrooms reveals the long-term consequences (Khan, 2015). This study demonstrates that a student's prior schooling (public vs. private) is the single most significant factor in determining their "identity and power relationships" within the university setting (Khan, 2015). Students from public, Urdu-medium backgrounds "participate relatively less in classroom discourses" and consciously "position themselves as disadvantaged" when compared to their peers from private, English-medium schools (Khan, 2015). Their economic capital allows them to access the university, and they have the required cultural capital that is legitimized, but they do not have the so-called embodied habitus, the fluency, the accent, the confidence, to flourish in the university (Khan, 2015). According to the comments of the participants of another study, English provided students attending the private school with a certain sense of power that they apparently did not feel (Mustafa, 2015).

In Pakistani environment English, the global language of science and technology, and the scholarly world is viewed to open the students to new cognitive models. Conversely, those who fail to master it are seen to suffer from "intellectual shallowness in communication". This Whorfian perception, whether accurate or not, serves to naturalize the class divide, framing a structural, economic inequality as a cognitive, individual deficit.

IV. Urdu as Moral Identity: Nationalism, Piety, and Aspiration

English is the Language of Economic Capital & Urdu is the Language of Moral Capital. But this identity is not homogeneous. It is a project that has to be divided into two opposing, and even contradictory, projects: one, the state project, working from above, working toward a nationalist homogenization and unity; and two, the lived project, the personal piety project, the project of aspiration, which works from below, works toward something that is more personal, more individual, more varied. This splitting has led many Pakistanis to have an 'ambivalent attitude' towards the language, as stated by Manan & David (2022).

A. The State Project: Imagining a Unified Pakistan

By selecting Urdu as the national language of Pakistan, the decision was a conscious political choice to imagine a community, and to apply the theories of modernism in relation to two concepts, namely "nationalism" (Anderson, 1983; Gellner, 1983). The new state had to deal with "plethora of different languages" (Ali & Khan, 2024) and ethnic divides at its inception. Urdu, although minority, was selected because of its historical importance and past association with Muslim identity (Raza, 2022) and its perceived use as a neutral 'linga franca' which could 'confederate the ethnic divergence'.

Urdu then became the connecting language of the various "low cultures" of the regional languages, as the "high culture" of Gellner (1983). The state used all its resources to propagate this Anderson, 1983, used the term 'imagined community' to refer to this, and it is done at two main levels: the national curriculum and state-controlled media.

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Case Study 1: The Nationalist Curriculum

The national curriculum is the state's primary tool for ideological reproduction. Analysis of compulsory textbooks for Pakistan Studies and Urdu shows they are designed to "discursively construct" a "specific version of Islam" as the core of national belonging (Durrani, 2021). This state-sponsored identity is focused on developing "social integrity" and "morality" (Nayyar, 2009) and has profound implications for the country's religious and linguistic minorities (Durrani, 2021). Studies of these textbooks find they promote an "Islamic model of Pakistani national identity more than to the pluralistic, liberal-democratic one", all articulated through the "Urdu-Arabic framework" (Ali, 2024) of the state.

Case Study 2: Milli Naghmay (National Songs)

The state's ideological project is also cultural. They are inculcated with the spirit of patriotism and provoked with the national pride with the help of Milli Naghmay (national songs) (Ali and Khan, 2024). In further examination, it can be seen that a large number of these songs have forgotten film origins and show a firm application of popular media to fulfil state objectives. An impressive ethnographic point is the song Tum kaun ho pehchaan batao (Tell me who you are, your identity) by Khotay Sikkay (1981). In this song, a row of old singers accompany singing their ethnicities, Punjabi, Sindhi, Baloch and Pakhtun as in their respective style. Finally, a concluding voice brings the parting to the divisions with a single message of a single Pakistani identity. This is not an inconspicuous cultural object; it is a deliberate state-making. It carries out the act of the performance of the imagined community by Anderson by the use of the powerful means of cinema to disseminate the nationalism and the message of unity across the regions over the low cultures of the regions.

This state project, which was top-down, was predetermined with internal contradictions and was violently met. Its failures disclose how deeply flawed implementing universalist European theory of nationalism to a postcolonial environment is. The most disastrous unsuccess was imposing the policy of one nation one language to the majority of Bengali population in East Pakistan. The Bengali Language Movement (Bhasya Andolan), which started in 1948 was the direct reaction of the state that it was the Urdu language that would be the state language. The resultant political harassment and cultural chauvinism, which othered the majority of Bengali speakers, was one of the major factors that led to the 1971 war and the secession of Bangladesh. This occurrence is an unquestionable break in the Andersonian imagined community and proves that the print-language adopted by the state was not inclusive, but, on the contrary, othered most people (Mansoor, 2013). The imposition of Urdu in the state is not modernization but internal colonialism which aims at eliminating their own cultural and lingual identity.

B. The Lived Project: Ethnographies of 'Muslim Becoming'

This is where a crucial anthropological pivot is necessary. To understand Urdu's power, one must move beyond the failures of the *state* and examine the successes of the *self*. As argued in the theoretical framework, we must follow the post-structuralist critiques of Talal Asad (1993) and Saba Mahmood (2005) to look beyond the state's political project to the *lived ethics* of piety and the *discursive traditions* of Islam. Naveeda Khan's (2012) ethnography in Lahore, *Muslim Becoming: Aspiration and Skepticism in Pakistan*, provides the perfect empirical grounding for this

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

move. Khan argues that Pakistan "inherited an aspirational, always-becoming Islam," defined not by fixed dogma but by a "continual striving to be a better Muslim". This "striving" and "aspiration" is an active, everyday moral project, ethnographically visible in "prayers and theological debates," "the building of mosques," "readings of the Qur'an," and "the undertaking of religious pilgrimages".

In this lived, ethnographic context, Urdu is the primary linguistic vehicle. It is the language in which this "aspiration" and its accompanying "skepticism" toward the practices of others is articulated (Khan, 2012). It is the language of the *masjid* (mosque), the family, and personal ethics. This ethnographic observation is a brilliant explanation of the deen/dunya conflict and the attitude that is ambivalent towards language in Pakistan (Manan and David, 2022). An individual can identify English as the language of dunya (the world, the market, the bureaucracy) but Urdu is adored as the language of deen (faith, morality, the self). This establishes a stable diglossia in which one cannot live even half without the other, but they are the opposing co-existing systems of values. The top down project of nationalism in the state is possibly floundering, whereas the bottom up, embodied project of Urdu as the language of piety is quite successful.

V. Intersections, Resistance, and Subaltern Voices

The English-Urdu episteme is not a totalizing, monolithic structure. It is a site of symbolic violence that is actively negotiated, resisted, and experienced differently across the critical intersections of gender and ethnicity. A feminist and postcolonial critique is essential to reveal the voices that are "often omitted in mainstream discourse" (Kausar & Akhtar, 2022).

A. A Feminist Critique: The 'Double Colonization' of Language

Pakistan is not a gender-neutral linguistic field but it is highly patriarchal. The symbolic capital of English is not so available to everyone. There are certain socio-cultural and psychological challenges to learning and using English among female students (Dhondup, 2015). This is supported statistically by the fact that there is no female English teacher in 70pc of rural schools, which is a major set-back since the culture has set parameters that limit interaction between the female pupils and the male teachers. Curriculum bias in this regard is supported by the fact that English textbooks present gender biases in the representation of women, who are portrayed in passive and domestic positions.

The psychological aspect of this devaluation is unveiled by ethnographic research. Research of female university students with vernacular origins (e.g. Hindko, Pashto) speaks of a pervasive inferiority complex. These students are forced to communicate in English or Urdu in case to be regarded as educated and competent and to show their value to the world that dismisses their mother tongues. They prefer Urdu, such as they believe it to be the language of prestige and to become socially equal.

At the same time, the patriarchal norms are also the means of strengthening the role of Urdu as the language of the sense of moral identity. Politeness formulas in Urdu as linguistic analysis by Tariq Rahman shows, serves as a process of segregation and linguistic erasure (Zubair, 2001). During the polite formal talk, a man is not supposed to ask another man about his wife, but rather he can use circumlocutions such as how is your house (ghar vale) or how are your children (bache)? (Zubair, 2001). This language culture that is based on a concept of women as

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

possessions that are under protection makes them visible nowhere in the sphere of publicity (Zubair, 2001). Such analysis, but a postcolonial feminist sensitivity must be made, as explained by various theorists such as Lila Abu-Lughod.In *Do Muslim Women Need Saving?* (2013), Abu-Lughod critiques the Western "rescue narrative" that frames "Muslim women" as passive victims. A simplistic, first-order analysis might conclude: "English empowers women; therefore, we must teach them English." This, Abu-Lughod argues, is a neocolonial trope.

This "saving" narrative distracts from the *real* issues of "poverty and authoritarianism," conditions Abu-Lughod argues are "produced out of global interconnections that implicate the West". For a rural Pakistani woman, her oppression is often a result of economic and feudal structures, not simply a lack of English. Pakistani women thus face a "double colonization" (Saeed, 2015): oppression from local patriarchal structures (often embedded in the "moral" language of Urdu) *and* exploitation by a global neocolonial capitalist system (which uses the "empowering" language of English as its vector). Simply forcing English into the existing "educational apartheid" system does not liberate her; it may only add a new, impossible layer of symbolic violence and failure.

B. The Silenced Subalterns: Foucault's 'Excluded' Voices

The major victims of Foucauldian English-Urdu episteme are the speakers of regional language of Pakistan. Languages other than Urdu, such as Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, Balochi and Saraiki are reduced to Gellner's "low cultures" (Gellner, 1983) in the state's nationalistic project. They are systematically marginalised from "formal structures of power": federal government, the judiciary and higher education (Mansoor, 2013). This is not mere neglect, it is active political silencing that is based on the state's "fear that recognizing indigenous languages would 'create a revolution'", as it did in Bangladesh.

This "deep sense of deprivation" (Mansoor, 2013) has been feeding the decades-long resistance and activism:

- **Punjabi:** The ironic situation in Punjab is that the language of the majority (38.8pc of the country) is used as a vernacular language. Activists point out that Punjabi is offered as an "optional subject" in the intermediate and BA courses. The demands of the movement are straightforward: "Make Punjabi compulsory for primary classes" and "Pass the Punjaniya language bill".
- **Sindhi**: The Sindhi Language Movement is the most organized and politically central among the movements, as the language has been a part of "ethnic identity". The movement is a continuation of the political opposition to the state's attempts to marginalize Sindhi's status and the language.

Demographic-political pressure due to the Urdu-speaking Mohajirs since 1947.

- **Pashto:** The Pakistani state inherited a colonial "policy of suspicion and mistrust" toward Pashtun nationalism. The Pashto language was "tainted" by the ruling class with "perceptions of disloyalty and rebelliousness". The Pashto language movement is thus not just a cultural project, but a political "resisting [of the] State's Nationalization" project.
- **Balochi:** The grievances of Baloch youth are a stark testament to this linguistic exclusion. Activists and students "yearn for better chances to study [their] mother tongue". The language is "notably absent from the curriculum in Balochistan's schools". Students report being "compelled to focus on national and international languages," which "thwarts their

LIBERAL JOURNAL OF LANGUAGE AND LITERATURE REVIEW
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ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

aspirations" and "shatter[s]... dreams" of becoming writers or scholars in their own language.

C. Ethnographies of Communication (Hymes): Micro-Level Resistance

While the macro-structures of Bourdieu and Foucault paint a bleak picture of domination, Dell Hymes's "ethnography of communication" allows for an analysis of micro-level *speech events* where individual agency and resistance become visible. The "dominated" are not passive. One of the most common forms of resistance is *code-switching*. Ethnographic studies show that code-switching between Urdu and English is not, as some critics claim, a "confusion" (Manan & David, 2022), but a "sophisticated social conduct" (Channa et al., 2021) and a "dynamic manifestation of identity" (Ahmed & Butt, 2022) used to project a modern, "hybrid" identity.

A second, more potent form of resistance is the affirmation of the vernacular. An ethnographic study of "JangliBoli" (a Punjabi dialect) in Jhang District (Sadiq & Bashir, 2023) provides a powerful example. The study found that locals consciously *preferred* the "impolite," "Jatki" (rustic) dialect over the "polite," standardized "high culture" of urban Urdu. This preference "reflects on the social dynamics, cultural norms, and functionality of language" (Sadiq & Bashir, 2023). It is a conscious, localized act of linguistic resistance that affirms the value of the "low culture" against the hegemonic state language. Perhaps the most significant act of resistance, however, is the systemic, policy-level push for Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education (MTB-MLE). This movement provides a "pragmatic antidote" to the "crisis of comprehension" and "tyranny of language" that defines the educational apartheid.

A landmark report by The Citizens Foundation (TCF) outlines this pragmatic solution. The TCF model directly addresses the *din/dunya* conflict this paper has documented. Rather than forcing a false choice between the mother tongue (identity) and English (mobility), it proposes "language ladders":

- **Grades Pre-K to 3:** Build foundational literacy and "cognitive understanding" in the child's *mother tongue* or most familiar regional language. This validates the child's home identity (*deen*) and "social belonging".
- **Grades 4 to 7:** Gradually *bridge* to the national and foreign languages (Urdu and English), building on the strong cognitive foundation established in the mother tongue. This provides access to the languages of the *dunya*.

This model is the practical synthesis of the paper's central critique. It breaks the cycle of symbolic violence by arguing that strong mother tongue skills make students *better* at learning foreign languages later. It is a bottom-up, pragmatic solution to a top-down, ideological crisis.

VI. Critical Synthesis and Conclusion

This paper has argued that the linguistic field of Pakistan is a site of symbolic violence, structured by the hegemonic contradiction between English as symbolic capital and Urdu as moral identity. The analysis has synthesized multiple theoretical frameworks —enriched by new ethnographic and documentary evidence—to demonstrate that this dichotomy is:

- A **postcolonial field** (Bourdieu), where English symbolic capital, a direct "colonial remanent" (Ali, 2024), is acquired and reproduced through a system of "educational apartheid". This was definitively illustrated by the case study of the CSS exam, which functions as a class-based *habitus* filter, not a meritocratic test.

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An International Double-Blind Peer-Reviewed Open Access Journal
ISSN (Online): 3006-3175 | ISSN (Print): 3006-3167
Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

- A **nationalist field** (Gellner/Anderson), where Urdu was imposed as a homogenizing "high culture" (Gellner, 1983) to forge an "imagined community" (Anderson, 1983) and secure the Weberian legitimacy of the postcolonial state. This was ethnographically demonstrated through the analysis of state-sponsored textbooks and the conscious, unity-crafting narratives of *milli naghmay*.
- An **ethnographic field** (Khan/Asad), where this top-down "moral identity" is reinterpreted and lived as a personal, bottom-up, religious "aspiration" and "striving" (Khan, 2012) in the language of *deen* (faith), separate from the *dunya* (world) of English.
- A **Foucauldian field**, where this dominant English-Urdu episteme systematically "excludes" and silences subaltern ethnic voices. This was documented through case studies of the Punjabi, Sindhi, Pashto, and Balochi language movements, all of which resist the state's "Urdu-Arabic framework" (Ali, 2024).
- A **contested field** (Hymes), where individuals are not simply "dupes" of the system but active agents who resist domination through sophisticated, everyday speech acts like code-switching (Channa et al., 2021) and vernacular preference (Sadiq & Bashir, 2023), and through macro-political advocacy for pragmatic solutions like MTB-MLE.

This synthesis also reveals the critical limits of applying universalist European theories to the postcolonial world. Gellner's industrial model for nationalism fails in the face of Pakistan's rural-based ethnonationalism (Adeney, 2011). Anderson's model of an "imagined community" ruptures catastrophically with the secession of Bangladesh (Hussain, 2008). A postcolonial critique (Jalal, 1995) is therefore not optional but essential, demanding that we "detach from the Western frameworks" (Jalal, 1995) and see how these "colonial continuities" (Kazmi, 2021) are re-fashioned to serve contemporary neocolonial and state-level agendas (Ali, 2024).

As a researcher and PhD candidate at Quaid-i-Azam University, I am inescapably a product of the very system this paper analyses. My ability to write this paper in academic English, citing and critiquing French, German, and American theorists, is a direct result of my own symbolic capital and acquired *habitus*. I am navigating the *dunya* (world) of international academia using the "language of power," while simultaneously analysing the *deen* (faith/morality) of identity as articulated in Urdu. This positionality is one of deep ambivalence; it affords an "insider" perspective on the tensions of this linguistic divide, but it also risks reproducing the very epistemic exclusions—particularly of the vernacular "subaltern" voices—that I have critiqued. Therefore, this paper is a reflexive effort to apply the instruments of elite discourse in dismantling the machinery of elite closure.

Finally, the ethnography of language in Pakistan is an ethnography of power. The English-Urdu dichotomy is the key arrangement of the social disparity in the country. It is an advanced self-reproduction of classes, ethnic marginalization and a patriarchal system that is disguised under the potent ideologies of merit (English) and morality (Urdu).

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Volume 5, Issue 7 September, 2026

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