

The Fall of Urdu and the Triumph of English in Pakistan: A Political Economic Analysis

ZEHRA AFTAB and JOHN WILLOUGHBY

In this paper, we investigate both how the use of language in higher education in Pakistan has evolved and why the medium of instruction remains a contested terrain. We focus on the struggle between advocates for the use of Urdu and the use of English in higher education. By examining the repeated failed attempts by high political authorities to replace English with Urdu, we demonstrate the usefulness of evolutionary theories of path-dependent institutional change while placing language struggles in the context of national and class stratification.

JEL Classifications: I23, I24, P16, Z13

Keywords: Higher Education, Education and Inequality, Language, Pakistan

INTRODUCTION

Political struggles over language use in education and government have destabilised political orders throughout the world. In Pakistan, disputes have centered on the appropriate medium of instruction in higher education. This paper explores the dynamics of the conflict between advocates of English and Urdu by deploying an institutionalist theory of economic evolution developed by Avner Greif. We argue that despite occasional, formally successful attempts to replace English with Urdu in higher education, these political victories have had minimal effect on the hegemonic use of English in most universities and colleges. This is because of the evolution of underlying ‘quasi-parameters’ which reinforce the use of English. This gradualist evolutionary perspective leads to our conclusion that the use of English in higher education and the higher reaches of government will strengthen even though only a relatively small minority of the Pakistani population is competent in English. This has important implications for Pakistan’s development trajectory and the implementation of inclusive government educational policies which can lessen socio-economic inequality.

This conclusion challenges the argument that the use of English is simply an imperial imposition on the Pakistani population. Where it is no doubt true that the spread of English throughout the world is a product of 19th and early 20th century British colonialism and late 20th and early 21st century American predominance, it does not follow that the Pakistani population would abandon the use of English if somehow the

political economic influence of the United States declined. We contend that the contemporary preference for English is not a product of coercion but due to changing language preferences within the Pakistani population.

The literature on the political conflicts between advocates of English and advocates of Urdu have largely been descriptive accounts of language struggles motivated by the imperative to forge a unified nation in a multilingual society. While these studies provide invaluable detail, they do not provide a compelling reason for the failure of Urdu to become the medium of instruction in higher education. We need to look at the factors which regulate language preference among those eligible to receive higher education.

This paper cannot provide a definitive answer to this question. It does, however, propose an evolutionary economic framework that can allow the analyst to explore the internal and external which regulate language use. We believe that understanding these factors can explain why the occasional victories of Urdu campaigners for a change of the medium of higher education instruction from English to Urdu are so pyrrhic. Such a framework can also be deployed to understand similar language conflicts in other linguistically diverse nation-states.

This paper is organised into the following sections. Section I presents a schematic outline of conflicts over the medium of educational instruction in higher education along with an account of the evolution of the Pakistani educational system. Section II begins with a literature review of studies of the conflict between English and Urdu and then introduces a Greifian analysis of institutional change which we then apply to the linguistic hegemony of English in Pakistan's higher education system. In this section, we present three hypotheses which identify the underlying factors in Pakistan that regulate language use in higher education. Section III offers a brief conclusion.

I. THE HISTORICAL STRUGGLE OVER LANGUAGE USE IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN PAKISTAN

Pakistan is a multilingual, multicultural society with more than 66 spoken languages (Lewis, et al. 2016). At the time of independence 56 percent of the population spoke Bengali, i.e. the population of then East Pakistan; while the majority language of West Pakistan was Punjabi (67 percent of West Pakistan) followed by Sindhi and Pashto. Only a relatively small minority spoke Urdu. However, Urdu, despite being a minority language, emerged as the proclaimed national language even though English remained the language of official business.¹

With reference to schooling, Pakistan is characterised by five broad (pre-university) schooling streams using different languages: elite English-medium schools (including military cadet schools), non-elite private English-medium schools catering to the lower-middle and middle-income classes, government-run Urdu-medium schools, public vernacular (mostly Sindhi or Pashto) medium schools, and madrassas (Islamic seminaries) which mainly use Urdu. University education is mostly imparted in English

¹The present-day linguistic make-up of Pakistan is: Punjabi, 44.15 percent; Pashto, 15.42 percent; Sindhi, 14.10 percent; Siraiki, 10.53 percent; Urdu, 7.57 percent; Balochi, 3.57 percent; Others, 4.66 percent. *Census Report of Pakistan*. Population Census Organisation, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan. 2001. Table 2-7, p.107.

even though there are university students who have received earlier education in another language and are not very proficient in English. This is a particularly challenging situation.

Although, public, private, and religious schools have existed side-by-side since pre-partition, over the years, especially during the decade of the 1980s and 1990s, both the private sector providing modern secular education and madrassas providing religious education have flourished. This dynamic has further reinforced the tensions in the Pakistani education landscape. From an estimated 150 at the time of Pakistan's independence in 1947, there are now some 32,000 madrassas attended by 2.5 million students (Abbas, 2019). Although the private sector was always a player in Pakistan's education system in the form of missionary and elite schools, their nationalisation in 1972 was a setback for this education sector. Nevertheless, it was in the wake of neoliberal denationalisation in the 1980s that private education made a comeback, and experienced accelerated growth during the 1990s (Andarabi, et al. 2002). Today private schools are no longer an elite phenomenon. Low-fee private schools have emerged in most urban centers and most of them profess to be English-medium although quality remains poor, and the trifurcation of the education sector continues. In today's Pakistan, it is English that opens doors to much coveted jobs in the military and civil service and gives not only a social but also a psychological advantage to those fluent in the language (Phillipson, 1992).

In contrast, Urdu has historically been associated with national religious identity. This occurred even though Indian Muslims spoke a variety of languages including Bengali, Punjabi, Pashto, Sindhi, and Gujrati. Linguistic historians maintain that Urdu is an Indic language which incorporated words from local languages and Sanskrit. Its connections were to India and the local culture, though the script was Perso-Arabic. The Islamisation of the language began in the mid-eighteenth century as Muslim poets purged the language of its Sanskrit elements and replaced Indian/Hindu cultural allusions/metaphors with Iranian imagery and Islamic references. What emerged was highly Persianised Urdu full of Islamic cultural references which served as an identity marker for the educated Muslim elite of Delhi and Lucknow. (See Rahman, 2008 for a detailed discussion.) This, in turn, alienated Hindus and led to the Sanskritisation of Hindi, creating the Urdu-Hindi divide (Brass, 1974).

The association between Urdu and Islam was further cemented during the British era. As Muslim political power shrank, ulema, along with poets and political activists, started writing and publishing pamphlets in Urdu. It became the favoured language for religious debate among Muslim scholars, and, in time, emerged as a repository for Islamic literature (Rahman, 2008).

In contrast, English was originally associated with the assertion of British colonial power. The British colonisers came to the Indian Subcontinent with the objective of resource extraction, which required the imposition of Anglo colonial rule. When British imperial control was established, British rulers replaced Persian with English as the official language in British India during the 19th century (Powell, 2002). They also introduced English as a medium of instruction as they wanted to create a local gentry that would help them administer colonial India. (Rassool, 2007). However, English language education was only made available in major urban schools and higher education institutions while the education of the rest of the locals was imparted either in Urdu or in

vernacular languages. An incentive to join the English-medium schools was the opening of civil service positions for the local population in 1832, 41 years after the 1791 Act of Native Exclusion (Rahman, 2006:30), for which the main selection criteria was competence in English.

The Congress and Muslim league leadership emerged from these English-medium schools. Jinnah, in his freedom movement, used the English-educated bureaucracy, military, and judiciary, which had originally been in the service of the British Raj. This led Hamza Alavi to dub the newly formed state of Pakistan “a vice-regal” state – a state that continued to be ruled by the “Salariat” in power: the military, bureaucratic, and landed elite that continued its colonial administrative practices (Alavi, 1972). Jinnah in using these very intermediaries in his struggle for the Muslim national movement had made these social structures even more strongly embedded in what emerged as the state of Pakistan (Nasr, 2001). It is not surprising that these English-educated agents/actors opted for English as the language of official state business, as this had been the language of business in colonial India.

At the time of independence, Pakistan, like many other ex-colonial countries, was faced with the problem of developing a language policy in a multilingual society. As in many new countries, formulating an appropriate policy was complicated by different language groups competing for recognition and status. The nation’s founders, as mentioned above, were themselves trained in English. The military, judiciary, and civil service were Anglicised institutions, and the people working within them wanted to continue state business in English, but they also wanted to unite an ethnically diverse population under the umbrella of a national language. Thus, the early leaders of Pakistan tried to both maintain English while creating a symbolic national language which might eventually become the dominant language of the population. Jinnah himself made forceful speeches in favour of Urdu as Pakistan’s emerging national language.

Given the ambiguity of Pakistan’s language policy, the role of medium instruction in higher education became politically fraught. If the educated elite continued to be instructed in English, then this would only strengthen the role of the English elite and make it difficult for Urdu to transform itself from a designated national language to an actual national language. The importance of this issue was recognised by educational authorities almost immediately after independence. When the Advisory Board of Education held its first meeting in 1948, it resolved that the mother tongue should be the medium of instruction at the primary stage. Moreover, it also recommended that English be replaced by Urdu in the universities (ABE, 1949), while secondary education should be in Urdu (ABE, 1955). As a result, a number of institutions were established to do basic work in Urdu, from coining new terms to translations, to developing new tools and techniques to expedite its adoption as an official language (Rahman, 1997: 233).

Since this first conference on education in 1948, the basic contradictions of language in education policy have remained constant and the general theme of the elite response has been to obfuscate the language conflict by promising change but not delivering it. English, especially for higher education, is justified by the state, in the interest of modernisation because it is the language of science and technology. On the other hand, Urdu is justified in the interest of Pakistani national unification. The documents kept insisting that the vernacular tongue is the best medium of instruction for

a child, but, except in East Pakistan (until 1971, when it became Bangladesh), Sindh, and some parts of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KP), no mother tongues were used as medium of instruction at the primary and secondary levels.

By the end of the 1950s, despite the efforts of the Urdu lobby to promote the use of Urdu and the ruling elites' apparent support of these efforts, it was English which emerged as the dominant language in government and higher education. The Central Superior Services (CSS) exams were held in English, and higher education was also in English. Hence, the urban Urdu middle-class also had a strong incentive to be educated in English. Not only the urban upper middle class but even feudal/tribal elites, though not literate themselves, sought to educate their children in elite English-medium schools (Rahman, 1997).² Moreover, under the patronage of General Ayub Khan, who himself was an Anglicised military dictator, the armed forces started developing their own schools—cadet colleges and PAF Model Schools—to provide subsidised, English-medium schooling, to prepare students for careers in the defense forces. In the words of Rahman,

“The elite of wealth (feudal and tribal lords; business magnates, etc.) and the elite of power (the military and bureaucratic elites) made arrangements to facilitate the entry of their children into the elite, thus narrowing its base of selection, through promoting elitist schooling while professing to create equal opportunities for all through vernacularisation (Rahman, 1997: 184).

In 1959 the Sharif Commission on Education defended the above-mentioned government-subsidised English-language educational institutions in the name of efficiency and modernisation (CNE, 1959). However, the commission also recommended that both Urdu and Bengali be used as mediums of instruction from Class VI onward, and in this way, in about fifteen years, Urdu would reach a point of development where it would become the medium of instruction at the university level. The Commission had also stated that until Urdu was ready to replace English, English should continue to be used for advanced study and research. This statement allowed confusion to take root in terms of how and when and by whom it would be determined that Urdu was ready to replace English. This was a convenient method of maintaining the status quo, and English was given a fifteen-year extension (Khaliq, 2007).

In 1966 students from less privileged Urdu-medium institutions protested against government-subsidised cadet schools, and a new commission under Justice Hamoodur Rahman was set up to examine student unrest and students' welfare problems. The commission agreed that cadet colleges and PAF schools violated the constitutional assurance that all citizens are equal before the law because teaching in English excluded some students. At the same time, the commission also defended the schools in the name of efficiency and modernisation (GOP, 1966:18). As a result, these cadet colleges multiplied post-1970. Moreover, the Hamoodur Rahman Commission also criticised those universities which had adopted Urdu as a medium of examination in BA for being over-zealous. (Karachi, Punjab, and Sindh universities were criticised for allowing Urdu and Sindhi as languages for instruction and sitting exams).

Despite these setbacks, the Urdu political advocates continued their pro-Urdu campaigns by demanding that signboards should be in Urdu and that proceedings of

²Examples include Aitchison in Lahore and Burn Hall in Abbottabad.

meetings be in Urdu (Rahman, 1997). Despite all the efforts of the Urdu lobby, the elitist officer corps of the higher administration, judiciary, and the military kept using English. Higher education, especially in scientific and technological subjects, also continued to be given in English. Urdu was allowed eventually for the Arts (i.e. Social Sciences and Humanities). According to Rahman (2019), although the policy was couched in the language of popular demand (i.e. Urdu) and facilitated access to higher education, it ghettoised the non-Science students and disciplines since they bore the stigma of being culturally and intellectually inferior.

In 1969, there was a new government, and a new committee (headed by Air Marshal Nur Khan) was constituted to overhaul the educational system. This committee recommended that Urdu and Bengali should be used as the medium of instruction by 1975 (PNEP, 1969). This was also the first time that an official document acknowledged that the use of English as the medium of instruction at higher levels was perpetuating the gulf between the “rulers and the ruled” (PNEP, 1969:3). However, the elite English medium schools (including the cadet colleges) remained, and the New Education Policy left the task of examining ‘the question of the change over from English to the national languages’ to a commission which would be established in 1972 (NEP, 1970: 19). Thus, the incipient radicalism of Nur Khan was reversed as the status quo asserted itself.

1971 marked the partition of Pakistan. In West Pakistan, the democratically elected Peoples’ Party formed the government with ZA Bhutto as Prime Minister. The 1973 Constitution of the Republic was promulgated under Bhutto with Article 251 pertaining to language in education. The article declared Urdu as the national language and pledged to further its development. Moreover, a time frame of 15 years was set for the replacement of English with Urdu. The timing of the Constitution coincided with the lapse of the fifteen-year extension given to English by the Sharif Commission and hence refreshed that extension for another fifteen years.³

Given Bhutto’s left-leaning social democratic agenda and secular views as well as his Sindhi roots, he was looked upon with suspicion by the Urdu lobby which by now comprised a large religious element in the Jamiat-e- Ulema-i-Islam (a religiously motivated party). Afraid of being categorised as the “Other”, and to placate his opponents Bhutto succumbed to the integrative appeal of both Islam and Urdu,⁴ while Sindhis demanded to promote and encourage Sindhi as an official language in the province, in congruence with Article 251(3) of the Constitution. This culminated in the Urdu-Sindhi language riots of January 1970 and July 1972. These riots were the response of the supporters of Urdu to what they thought was an effort to dislodge them from their position and make Sindhi the dominant language for education and administration in Sindh (Amin, 1988). Finally, Sindhi was adopted as the official language of Sindh, but little effort was made in real terms to give the language its due official status. In KPK and Balochistan, similar efforts were made by the provincial governments but, at the federal level, and in elite schools, English reigned supreme.

³The constitution also recognised the linguistic rights of speakers of regional and minority languages by allowing the Provincial Governments freedom to develop their languages.

⁴Although the 1967 Foundation Documents of PPP contained phrases expressing Marxian views, such as ‘understanding of universe and altering it’ and ‘comprehension of the inexorable process of history’, such phrases were deleted from the 1972 education policy and the Marxian content diluted, and the party claimed to advocate ‘Islamic Marxism’ (Durrani & Ansari, 2018).

Bhutto chose to placate the Urdu lobby (who by now was mostly aligned with religious parties) by announcing cosmetic Islamic measures rather than the less emotive, and more controversial, strategy of giving Urdu the place of English in educational institutions. By now, it was clearer than ever before: the supporters of Urdu became linked to the religious right-wing while the ethno-nationalistic elites and the anglicised elite were left of center, being either inclined to socialism (Amin, 1988:244) or liberalism, respectively (Rahman, 1997:18). The fortunes of Urdu would now be connected more closely than ever before with the struggle between the religious and the secular in Pakistani politics (Rahman, 1997:18).

It was during General Zia ul Haq's martial law that both Urdu and Islam came into their own. Zia himself hailed from a middle-class, religious background and therefore had the support of Urdu *mohajirs* and other Urdu advocates who appreciated his policies of Islamisation/Urduisation as part of his 'centralising ideology'. Now, Urdu was not only associated with Islam, but also with authoritarianism. In 1979 Zia ordered that all speeches should be in Urdu and also set up the Muqtadra Qaumi Zaban (National Language Authority) to consider ways and means for the promotion of Urdu as the national language of Pakistan and to make all necessary arrangements in this regard. By the end of 1979, many offices in Punjab began to use Urdu rather than English. Zia also ordered that Urdu be the medium of instruction in all schools from grade I, such that by 1989 the matriculation (10th grade) examination could be conducted in Urdu. Moreover, the Ministry of Education instructed schools not to use the English-medium nomenclature, and Islamic education was decided to be a compulsory subject until graduation. Considering the above initiatives Zia ul Haq was declared the 'Patron of Urdu', and such was the confidence of the Urdu lobby in him that in 1981 at the Annual Urdu Conference at Lahore (27–28 November, 1981) the Urdu lobby demanded that Urdu should be imposed through a presidential ordinance. But, in the end, despite all the fervor and enthusiasm even the 'Patron of Urdu' and martial-law administrator, Zia ul Haq, could not purge Pakistan of the English language either in the official domain or as a medium of instruction.⁵

Although many of the government and federal model schools did adopt Urdu from grade 1, the cadet schools and elite private schools remained in English medium. The major argument of the English lobby was that Pakistan would fall behind other countries if English was abandoned, while the Urdu lobby insisted that sufficient books did exist in Urdu and more could be translated. However, no practical steps materialised, and in 1983 the elite schools were given legal protection to prepare their students for senior and higher senior Cambridge examinations thus making the two parallel streams of education even more distinct. Instead, Urdu became a compulsory subject in these schools until class 12. Moreover, on 11 October 1987 General Zia ul Haq himself allayed any residual fears of the English lobby by declaring that English could not be abandoned altogether. According to Rahman, apart from a few editorials against the continuation of English language schooling, the reversal of the 1979 education policy, the biggest concrete step taken in favour of Urdu, was allowed to take place almost silently (Rahman, 1997: 198). Moreover, in 1987, despite the initial fervor, ministries were also instructed to continue their proceedings in English. Zia knew that the Urdu lobby would keep favouring him

⁵For newspaper articles related to the Urdu-English debate, see Akhtar, Rahman, and Syed, 1986.

despite their disappointment in his pro-Urdu stance, and Zia in the end realised that he could not alienate the Anglicised elite in the long run. Hence, English reigned supreme and the net result was two parallel streams of education: Urdu medium and English-medium.⁶

Zia's pro-Islamic policies also benefited madrassas and contributed towards further cementing/ amplifying the existing fissures in the Pakistan education landscape: President Zia administered a formalised zakat (Islamic religious tax–2.5 percent) process which was a departure from the tradition of leaving the donation of money to the individual. Money was now automatically deducted from bank balances and dispersed at the local level to institutions deemed worthy of support by religious leaders, creating new incentives for opening religious schools (Singer, 2001). This combined with extensive US/Saudi funding during the Afghan jihad led to mushroom growth of madrassas in Pakistan in the decade of the 1980s. However, Saudi funding predates the Afghan war; Saudi funding of *Ahl-e-Hadith* and *Deobandi* madrassas (which teach a more puritanical version of Islam than had traditionally been practiced in Pakistan) can be traced back to the 1970s under ZA Bhutto as he looked towards the Gulf states for support. The exact number is difficult to trace, but according to one estimate, in 1971 there were 900 madrassas in Pakistan, but by 1988 this number had increased to 8,000 with an additional 25,000 unregistered religious schools clustered along the Pakistan–Afghan border (Rashid, 2000). This funding not only predates, but also outlasted the Afghan jihad, and post-Afghan war madrassas continue to flourish (Nasr, 2000).

At the time of Zia ul Haq's assassination in August 1988, the position of Urdu in the sphere of higher education was not much better than it was when he first took power. By now the religious Urdu lobby had completely alienated the leftist secular forces. In 1989 Benazir Bhutto attempted to introduce English in all schools from class I as an attempt at modernisation, despite the fact that this policy conflicted with her party's socialist agenda. This policy was hurriedly launched through a government notification and with no well-defined implementation strategy. Little effort was made by the educational planners and school leaders in public sector schools to go beyond introducing English as a formality.

General Musharraf assumed power in October 1999 through a military coup. Musharraf's modernisation and "enlightened moderation" in religion replaced the more fundamentalist policies of Zia ul Haq. His government reiterated Benazir's pro-English stance supporting English as the language of and for development (Shamim, 2008). However, again no proper implementation strategies were adopted to translate these policy statements into practice in schools in Pakistan.

In 2010, under the 18th amendment to the Constitution, education became a provincial issue. This made the provinces more autonomous than before with the result that the Punjab government under chief minister Shahbaz Sharif decided to support the local demand for English in the public schools. The Punjab government passed an executive order converting many government Urdu-medium schools to English-medium.

⁶Under different circumstances, perhaps the demand for Urdu emerging as the national language might have been viewed as compatible with social justice and may have appealed to Pakistani leftists and liberals, but Urdu had now not only become associated with rightist Islamic forces, but also with authoritarian rule which had even labelled ethno-nationalists (vernacular supporters) as anti-state actors, hence, forever alienating the liberal, socialist forces.

The schools did not have sufficient numbers of teachers who could implement this policy in any meaningful way. Nor were the students exposed to English outside school, and the policy failed. In 2011 the British Council concluded that teachers still taught in Urdu and Punjabi just as they did before this policy was declared (PEELI, 2013: 22–23).

In 2014 the decision was reversed, and today the confusion regarding the medium of instruction continues, and in practice, public schools can be Urdu, English, Sindhi, or Pashto medium, depending on their location, with English being introduced in some public schools from grade III and in some from grade V. Matriculation (i.e. 10th grade) examination may be taken in Urdu or English, but Intermediate (i.e. 12th grade) examinations take place in English (Abbas, 1993). More recently in 2020, Imran Khan's government attempted to strengthen the instruction of Urdu at the primary and secondary levels through the introduction of a Single National Curriculum (see, Hussain & Saigol 2020, for a critique).

On the other hand, some English medium schools are now offering British O-level and A-levels to their students, thus increasing the gulf between Urdu and English language instruction. Higher education continues to be in English, and examinations for access to key government positions remain in English as well. We summarise the above discussion with a timeline of the English-Urdu disputes provided in Annexure I.

The narrative illustrates that while the state/ruling elite apparently supported Urdu because of its supposed integrative value, in the formal official domains it continued to support the use of English. Although the use of Urdu at the primary and secondary levels has expanded, this has not affected the hegemony of English within universities and colleges. Moreover, the increasing importance at lower levels of education should be analysed in the context of the increasing proportion of middle-class families sending their children to lower-cost private English medium schools of uncertain quality (ASER, 2015).

II. A GREIFIAN ANALYSIS OF INSTITUTIONAL CHANGE TO UNDERSTAND THE EVOLUTION OF PAKISTAN'S LANGUAGE POLICY IN HIGHER EDUCATIONAL INSTITUTIONS

Concerning the literature on language use in Pakistan, most studies are descriptions of the linguistic landscape most scholars focus on the effect that different language policies have on different language groups. They provide a valuable historical account of national/provincial language struggles and how these conflicts perpetuate regional and class divisions (Abbas, 1993; Rahman, 2011; David, Ali, & Baloch, 2017; Murshid, 1985; Durrani, 2012; Durrani, et al. 2018). There has also been important ethnographic work that demonstrates how divisive ethnolinguistic identities have been forged through the separation of English and Urdu medium educational systems (Manan, David, & Dumanig, 2020, Shamim & Rashid, 2019). Rahman (1997) provides the most detailed historical narrative explaining intensifying class divisions by using the power elite theory developed in the mid-twentieth century (Pareto, 1935; Mosca, 1939; Mills, 1956). In this framework, language conflicts are interpreted as part of the struggle for resources between the ruling elite (military officers, business leaders, government, and political officials) and the proto-elite (an aspiring middle class largely excluded from power).

We agree with this class analytical approach and accept the argument that Pakistani's system of power privileges the socio-political status of an English-speaking elite. Thus, we do not take issue with Alavi's and Phillipson's arguments that the rise of English is associated with imperial projects of the United Kingdom and the United States (Alavi, 1972 & Phillipson, 2008). We also note, however, that the increasing demand from the middle class for English suggests a different contemporary dynamic regulating language use is at work. The sharp rise in the number of lower-status private English language schools (Andrabi, Das, & Khwaja, 2002) needs to be explained. (In fairness, Rahman does note this phenomenon in his work.) Moreover, to our knowledge, no analyst has attempted to link the rise of Urdu-medium madrassas to the further consolidation of English in Pakistan's higher education system.

An alternative methodology to power elite analysis is articulated by Ali and David (2021) who adopt a historical institutional approach to study policy choices associated with different language regimes. Their work is based on the framework developed by Sonntag and Cardinal (2015) which emphasises path dependence and focuses on the traditions/norms which regulate the activities of state officials. Sonntag and Cardinal argue that when policies do change, this occurs during critical junctures or crises caused by exogenous shocks to the governing system. In our opinion, this dependence on critical junctures to explain change (or lack thereof) is not analytically robust because this framework disconnects the actions of state officials from the social interests which the state serves.

Our alternative, Greifian analysis begins with a consideration of how aspects of any institution—norms, beliefs, rules, and the distribution of advantages—are relevant to the Urdu-English choice in Pakistan. Social norms are defined as informal rules of behaviour which are not codified but are reflected in the spontaneous behaviour in the population. Beliefs attach judgments (either positive or negative) to a particular form of behaviour, and rules create government-sanctioned hierarchies of behaviour. Greif defines an institution as a *system* of norms, beliefs, organisations, and rules “exogenous to each individual,” which “conjointly generate a regularity of behaviour” (Greif, 2006: 30).

In one sense, language does seem to fit into Greif's definition of an institution. Language can certainly be viewed as a set of distinct rules of communication which are human-made but not chosen by the individual. Moreover, the continual use of language depends on the strength of payoffs in terms of facilitated communication with others. On the other hand, there is an aspect of language which escapes the definition of an institution. Language is not generated through a belief system or a set of norms in the same way that a pre-pandemic handshake or procedures governing marriage might be. While the particular language we use is learned, our ability to communicate in the enhanced way which humans can is a genetically programmed capacity more similar to the capability of walking on two legs. The issue of language as an institution becomes relevant, however, when studying language choice or the way in which different forms of linguistic expression are used in different social contexts. Language becomes more like an institution when the use of a particular linguistic expression is challenged. In this sense, norms govern the words and grammar appropriate for communication within a social group, beliefs make one more likely to elevate one language or dialect over

another, and rules regulate which language is permitted to be used in particular government-sanctioned contexts. Greif, by distinguishing between rules and beliefs, places motivation at the center of the analysis and argues that if prescriptive rules are to have an impact, individuals must be motivated to follow them.

Greif develops a theory of change by labeling structural features of a society (such as demographic composition or particular trading relations) quasi-parameters if they evolve over time and either reinforce or undermine the net benefits related to a particular institutionalised behaviour, such as receiving educational instruction in a specific language. In the case where the evolution of these variables weakens benefits, then norms, beliefs and rules can change as the particular institution becomes more sensitive to exogenous shocks. On the other hand, we observe institutional stability if the movement of these variables reinforce behaviours (Greif, 2004).

This framework bears some resemblance to older theories of institutional change. For example, in Marx's most general discussions of historical evolution, changes in technology (the forces of production) can be interpreted as an evolving quasi parameter which ultimately disrupts a regime's property institutions (relations of production). Society becomes less resilient, and changes in the environment can lead to a rapid institutional change in property relations (Marx, 1978:3-6). Smith's more gradualist theory of evolution can also be interpreted through a Greifian framework. In this case, the steady increase in internal and external trade serves as a quasi-parameter whose expansion reinforces those political institutions which support commercial society (Smith, 1981: 411-17). In contrast, Thorstein Veblen's original theory of institutional change is not relevant to this discussion since Veblen maintained that institutions are sticky even as underlying economic conditions change.

How can a Greifian framework be used to explain the declining salience of struggles to make Urdu the language of instruction in Pakistan's higher education institutions? We hypothesise that there are three major quasi-parameters which affect language use in universities and colleges. The first two clearly reinforce the use of English in higher education, while the last one appears to challenge English as a medium of instruction but paradoxically strengthens its contemporary predominance.

The first quasi-parameter is the general rise in educational attainment in Pakistan's population. While educational outcomes lag behind other countries in South Asia, the proportion of children receiving some education has risen. We hypothesise that such trends increase the demand for English instruction at the primary and secondary levels. This is because some students with the support of their parents who otherwise would not have received very much education will now desire to attend colleges and universities. This, in turn, requires competence in English. Learning English as a child to gain entry to a college or university will make this non-elite population resistant to any attempt to remove English as the medium of instruction. This increased support of the status quo will occur whether the language of instruction at the primary or secondary level is in English.

Our second hypothesis is that increased socio-economic globalisation also increases the demand for English. Increasing numbers of professional jobs require English competence. Pakistan's previous efforts at making Urdu the medium of instruction in universities recognised this by focusing on changing instruction only in law and social sciences. The further evolution of the global networks of trade, education, and communication, however,

have made even Urdu instruction in these fields less attractive. Many legal issues now take on a global dimension, while social science investigations increasingly rely on English to communicate findings to the wider global community. The power of English as the international language of business, science, and diplomacy is demonstrated by two examples. First, even with the exit of the UK from the European Union, the primary form of communication amongst the countries of the Union continues to be English rather than German or French. Second, the increasing number of English language degree programs in China and other countries of East Asia suggests that the importance of English has become stronger in areas where not long ago, this language was rarely used.

Our third hypothesis is counter-intuitive and requires more explanation. We argue that in the case of Pakistan, the rise of Urdu instruction in the booming madrassa sector has had the paradoxical effect of strengthening the hold of English in Pakistan’s traditional higher education institutions. The religious schools’ use of Urdu and to a lesser extent Arabic does not have spillover effects on higher education medium of instruction because of its strong separatist tendencies. The students in madrassas are using education for both moral/religious instruction that their parents require and for entry into religious-oriented jobs such as Imams, teachers in the madrassas, and judges in sharia law. In a way, the rise of these schools has created a more segregated society which has drained potential students who might previously have demanded Urdu instruction in universities.

A provocative analogy can be made with Israel’s educational system. Its educational system has a world-class secular higher education sector. While the medium of instruction is in Hebrew, students are expected to read complex texts in English. On the other hand, Israel also has a large independent system of education for orthodox and ultra-orthodox Jewish students who wish to focus on religious instruction. The result has been a separation of Israel’s Jewish population. Increasing numbers of secular and religious Jews do not participate in each other’s institutions (Wolff, 2022). As in Pakistan, the rise of religious schools has, if anything, strengthened the efforts by Israel’s traditional colleges and universities to become more tightly integrated with Western institutions. This strengthens the commitment of university educators to a sophisticated degree of competence in English from their students.

We summarise our arguments in the following Table 1.

Table 1
*The Strengthening Grip of the Use of English in Pakistan’s
Higher Education Institutions*

Evolution of Quasi-Parameters		Impact on the Use of English in Higher Education Institutions
Hypothesised Effect		
Increased educational attainment at primary and secondary levels	Increased parental and student demand for instruction in English	Strengthen
Increased socio-economic globalisation	Increased demand for professionals who are competent in English	Strengthen
Rise in the use of Urdu in religious educational institutions	Separation of sectors of the population more likely to demand instruction in Urdu from secular educational institutions	Strengthen

These trends imply that the endogenous evolution of these three quasi-parameters has reinforced and strengthened the use of English in Pakistan's universities and colleges. Thus, it is unlikely that future campaigns to change the medium of instruction in universities and colleges will be successful. This does not necessarily mean that controversies over the appropriate language of instruction at the primary and secondary levels will not continue. It is likely, however, that whatever the medium of instruction in lower levels of education, there will also be increased emphasis on English language instruction as well—especially for schools which cater to Pakistan's middle class.

III. CONCLUDING REFLECTIONS

The use of language is an intrinsic part of the functioning of any human economy, but language is not often conceived as a productive input or resource (part of the forces of production) or as an institution which plays a crucial role in the reproduction of social difference (part of the relations of production). Adam Smith did argue that the human propensity to trade is closely linked to our ability to use language, but very few other economists have treated language as part of our economic experience (Smith, 2001). Perhaps this is because of the centrality of language to all aspects of the human experience is so obvious that its role in the functioning and structure of the economy need not be noted.

It is more in the realm of politics that language use has been seen as central to the formation of coherent political units. The ability to enforce order and promulgate a series of laws requires the ability to communicate. For this reason, the creation of nations is often associated with the promulgation of a national standard language which in turn marginalises those subjects who communicate through alternative languages or dialects (Anderson, 2002). The creation of a new class/racial/ethnic/linguistic order also has a transnational dimension. For example, Phillipson has argued that the spread of a particular language is often associated with an imperial project—the establishment of a formal empire or the creation of key economic and political institutions which project the power of the nation or certain key members of the political-economic elite. Indeed, in a provocative article, Phillipson labels the spread of English in the late twentieth and early twenty-first century as the result of a process of linguistic imperialism which has consolidated the neo-liberal economic order (Phillipson, 2008). In addition, Hamza Alavi noted in his earlier analysis of the formation of the Pakistani state that the roots of the late 1940s governing order had its roots in the British sponsorship of a ruling elite lodged in the bureaucracies and militaries of the colonial state (Alavi, 1972).

Both Phillipson's and Alavi's arguments are important but caricature the role of English in contemporary Pakistani society. We acknowledge that English competency is unequally distributed and reflects intense class and regional inequalities. We also agree with the obvious but important point that the rise of English in South Asia is due to the colonial experience. Nevertheless, we argue that English use in Pakistani society is no longer an imperial imposition. The increasing use of English in China, for example, hardly reflects capitulation to a Western imperial order, and the same could be said for Pakistan. There are now important non-elite constituencies demanding the maintenance of English as the medium of instruction in higher education institutions.

In this essay, we explored the complex issues associated with the legitimization of particular languages by analysing the contentious struggles between advocates for Urdu and advocates for English with respect to Pakistan's higher education system. Much of our analysis is admittedly speculative, but we think that it opens a productive research path for the understanding of language use and language conflict in Pakistan. Collecting empirical data on attitudes towards English, Urdu, and other languages in Pakistan would be very useful. In addition, attempting to link the use of English to globalisation through careful empirical studies would allow future research projects to confirm or reject the hypotheses we have offered. Finally, we believe that more attention should be paid to the social and educational implications of the rise of both a vibrant Urdu sector of religious education and the new private English language schools. Pakistan is still searching for an educational framework which can integrate rather than separate the contending social groups which make up the nation-state. Recognising the stability of the use of English in colleges and universities is paradoxically an essential part of designing policies that can create greater social integration.

ANNEXURE 1

TIMELINE OF POLICY ON LANGUAGE AND HIGHER EDUCATION

- 1948: Advisory Board of Education meets in 1948 and states that Urdu should replace English as the language of instruction in higher education.
- 1952: First cadet college (Hasan Abdal) was established; this was followed by setting up a cadet college in Chittagong, then East Pakistan, in 1958. Post 1958 Ayub Khan continued to establish Cadet Schools and PAF Model Schools to train students for careers in defense forces.
- 1957–58: The University of Karachi forbade students from taking examinations in Sindhi.
- 1959: Sharif Commission defends instruction of English in universities but calls for Urdu and Bengali to be used in Secondary Schools. Urdu and Bengali should replace English in universities in fifteen years (1974).
- 1963-1966: Urdu was allowed as the language of instruction in universities in Humanities and Social Sciences. Karachi University (allowed Urdu in 1963), Punjab University (allowed Urdu in 1966), and Sindh University (allowed Sindhi) (RCSP, 1966: 114).
- 1966: Urdu students protest against state-subsidised English Language Cadet Schools/Colleges. The Ministry of Education (MoEd), requested Justice Hamoodur Rahman to lead the "Commission on Students Problems and Welfare" to consider controversy.
- 1966: Hamoodur Rahman Commission agreed that state-subsidised English language schools were unconstitutional but defended the continued use of English in universities on efficiency grounds and criticised the universities which had adopted Urdu as the medium of examination in B.A./M.A.
- 1969: New Commission led by Air Marshall Nur Khan stated that Urdu and Bengali should be the primary medium of instruction in universities by 1975. Timing and policies to implement of transition would be determined by the commission to be created in 1972.

- 1970: First Urdu-Sindhi Language Riots.
- 1971: Partition of Pakistan. Disputes over Bengali and the status of higher education in East Pakistan are no longer part of higher education policy.
- 1972: Second Urdu-Sindhi Language Riots
- 1973: Constitution of Pakistan promulgated. Urdu was declared to be the national language. Higher education in Urdu to be implemented within fifteen years (1988).
- 1972: Sindhi Language Authority (SLA) was established under the Use of Sindhi Language Act 1972 and Sindhi was adopted as an official regional language of Sindh.
- 1979: Zia ul Haq ordered that all government-related speeches should be in Urdu.
- 1979: National Language Authority (Muqtadra Qaumi Zaban) was created to promote Urdu.
- 1979: Order issued that all instruction in Year 1 be in Urdu so that matriculation exams could be in Urdu by 1989. Islamic education made a compulsory part of school instruction.
- 1980s: Rapid Growth of Islamic Madrassas where Urdu was the main language of instruction.
- 1983: Elite English-language schools given legal protection so that students could prepare for senior Cambridge Exams.
- 1983: Urdu language training became compulsory through Grade 12.
- 1987: Zia proclaimed that English could not be completely abandoned as a language of instruction. Ministries were instructed to continue holding proceedings in English.
- 1989: Benazir Bhutto attempts to introduce English instruction in all classes from grade 1.
- 2010: 18th amendment of the Constitution makes education policy a provincial issue.
- 2011: Punjab government passed executive order converting Urdu medium schools to English medium schools.
- 2014: Punjab government revokes executive order.
- 2020: Single National Curriculum. In provinces where SNC was adopted, private schools have been advised to teach Islamiyat and Social Studies in Urdu initially from grades one to three class later this will be implemented from grades 1 to 5.

REFERENCES

- Abbas, A. (2019). *Madrassah mirage: A contemporary history of Islamic schools in Pakistan*. Publisher: AL-ABBAS International.
- Abbas, S. (1993). The power of English in Pakistan. *World Englishes*, 12 (2), 147–156.
- Abdullah, S. (1976). *Pakistan mein Urdu ka masla. The problem of Urdu in Pakistan*. Lahore: Maktaba Khayaban-e-Adab, 1976.
- ABE (1948). *The Advisory Board of Education: First meeting*, June 1948. Ministry of Education. Karachi: Manager of publications.
- ABE (1949). *The Advisory Board of Education: Second meeting*, February 1949. Ministry of Education. Karachi: Manager of publications.

- ABE (1955). *The Advisory Board of Education: Fifth meeting*, March 1953. Ministry of Education. Karachi: Manager of Publications.
- ABE 1958. *Proceedings of the seventh meeting of the Advisory Board of Education*, January. Ministry of Education. Karachi: Manager of Publications.
- Afzal, M. (2018). Saudi Arabia's hold on Pakistan. *Policy Brief*. Washington, DC: Brookings Institution Press, 129.
- Akhtar, B. M., Rahman, K. & Syed, M. (1986). *Qaomi Zaban Akhbarat Ke Aine Men (Urdu: The National Language as Reflected in the Press)*. Islamabad: Muqtdra Qaomi Zaban.
- Alavi, H. (1972). The state in post-colonial societies: Pakistan and Bangladesh. *New Left Review*, 1(74), 59–81.
- Alavi, H. (2004). The territorial dimension of Pakistani nationhood. In Abbas Rashid (ed.) *Pakistan: Perspectives on state and society*, SAHE: Lahore.
- Ali, A. & David, M. K. (2021). A historical institutionalism approach to the politics of languages of Pakistan. *Hor J. Hum. & Soc. Sci. Res.* 3(1), 75–90.
- Amin, Tahir (1988). *Ethno-national movements of Pakistan: Domestic and international factors*. Islamabad: Institute of Policy Studies.
- Anderson, Benedict (2002). *Imagined communities*. (London: Verso, 2006).
- Andrabi, Tahir, Das J., & Khwaja (2002). The rise of private schooling in Pakistan, catering to the urban elite or educating the rural poor? Harvard University. (Working Paper, pp. 4–9).
- ASER, (2015). *Annual status of education report: Pakistan 2015*. Lahore: South Asian Forum for Education Development.
- Baron & Byrne (1987). *Social psychology: Understanding human interaction*. Allyn & Bacon, Boston.
- Bourdieu, P. & Passeron, J. C. (1977). *Reproduction in education, society and culture*. Beverly Hills: Sage.
- Brass, P. R. (1974). *Language, religion and politics in North India*. Cambridge University Press.
- Carter, Angela (1983). Notes from the front line. In M. Wander (ed.) *On gender and writing*. London: Pandora.
- Census (2001). 1998. *Census report of Pakistan*. Islamabad: Population Census Organisation, Statistics Division, Government of Pakistan.
- CNE (1959). *Report of the commission on national education*. Ministry of Education. Constitution, 1973. *Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan*. Government of Pakistan.
- David, M. K., Ali, M., & Baloch, G. M. (2017). Language shift or maintenance: The case of the Sindhi language in Pakistan. *Language Problems and Language Planning*, 41(1).
- Durrani, M. (2012). *Banishing colonial specters: Language ideology and education policy in Pakistan*. University of Pennsylvania, 27(1), Spring 2012.
- Durrani, Iftikhar Ur Rehman & Ansari, Sarfraz Hussain (2018). The 1972 educational policy of Pakistan: An historical account of its marxian content. *ISSRA Papers*, X(II).
- GOP (1966). Report of the commission on student's problems and welfare and problems. Government of Pakistan, Ministry of Education.
- Greif, A. & D. Laitin (2004). A theory of endogenous institutional change. *American Political Science Review*, 98(4), 633–52.

- Greif, A. (2006). *Institutions and the path to the modern economy: Lessons from medieval trade*. Cambridge University Press.
- Greif, A. & Tadelis, S. (2010). A theory of moral persistence: Crypto-morality and political legitimacy. *Journal of Comparative Economics*, 38(3), 229–244.
- Hussain, Neelam & Saigol, Rubina (2020). Single national curriculum. *Dawn News*, September 6.
- Institute of Social and Policy Sciences (I-SAPS) (2010). Private sector in Pakistan, mapping and musing. I-SAPS. Islamabad.
- Khalique, H. (2007). The Urdu-English relationship and its impact on Pakistan's social development. *The Annual of Urdu Studies*, 22.
- Knight, J. (1992). *Institutions and social conflict*. Cambridge University Press.
- Lewis, M. P., Simons, G. F., & Fenning, C. F. (2016). *Ethnologue: Languages of the World*. Publisher: SIL International. (19th edition). <http://www.ethnologue.com>
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., & Dumanig, F. (2016). English language teaching in Pakistan: Language policies, delusions, and solutions. In Robert Kirkpatrick (ed.) *English language education policy in Asia*, 219–244. (1st ed). Springer.
- Marx, Karl (1978). Marx on the history of his opinions, selection from preface to a contribution to the critique of political economy. In Tucker, Robert C. *The Marx-Engels Reader* (second edition). New York: W.W. Norton and Company.
- Mills, C. Wright (1956). *The power elite*. New York: Oxford University Press.
- Mosca, G. (1939). *The ruling class*. New York: McGraw Hill.
- Murshid, Tazeen M. (1985). The bengal muslim intelligentsia, 1937-77, the tension between the religious and the secular. University of Oxford. (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis).
- Nasr, V. (2000). The rise of sunni militancy in Pakistan: The changing role of Islamism and the Ulama in society and politics. *Modern Asian Studies*, 34(1), 139–80.
- Nasr, V. (2001). *The Islamic leviathan: Islam and the making of state power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- NEP, (1970). *The new education policy*. Ministry of Education & Scientific Research, Government of Pakistan.
- Papageorgiou, T., Katselidis, I., & Michaelides, P. (2013). Schumpeter, commons, and veblen on institutions. *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology*, 72(5), 1232–54.
- GoP. *Economic survey, 2014-15*. Economic Adviser's Wing, Finance Division, Government of Pakistan, Islamabad.
- Ministry of Education (2003). *Pakistan school education statistics, 2000-01*. Islamabad.
- Ministry of Education (2009). *Pakistan education statistics 2007-08*. Islamabad.
- Pareto, V. (1935). *The mind and society*. New York: Harcourt-Brace.
- Phillipson, Ronald (1992). *Linguistic imperialism*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Phillipson, Ronald (2008). The linguistic imperialism of neo-liberal empire. *Critical Inquiry in Language Studies*, 5(1), 1–43.
- PNEP (1969). Proposals for a new educational policy. Ministry of Education & Scientific Research.
- Powell, R. (2002). Language planning and the British Empire: Comparing Pakistan, Malaysia and Kenya. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 3(3), 205–279.

- Punjab Education and English Language Initiative (PEELI) (2013). *Can english medium education work in Pakistan? Lessons from Punjab*. Islamabad: The British Council.
- Rahman, T. (1997). The Urdu-English controversy in Pakistan. *Modern Asian Studies*, 31(1), 177–2.
- Rahman, T. (2005). *Denizens of alien Worlds: A study of education, inequality and polarisation in Pakistan*. Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2006). *Language and politics in Pakistan*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2008). *Language, ideology and power: Language-learning among the Muslims of Pakistan and North India*. Karachi: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2011). Passports to privilege: The English-medium schools in Pakistan. *Peace and Democracy in South Asia*, January 2005, 1(1).
- Rahman, T. (2019). Mother tongue education policy in Pakistan. In *International Handbook Policy in Asia*. London: Routledge.
- Rashid, A. (2000). *Taliban, militant Islam, oil and fundamentalism in Central Asia*. Yale University Press.
- Rassool, N. (2007). *Global issues in language, education and development: Perspectives from Postcolonial countries*. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters Ltd.
- Shamim, F. (2008). Trends, issues and challenges in English language education in Pakistan. *Asia Pacific Journal of Education*, 28(3).
- Shamim & Rashid (2019). The English/ Urdu-Medium divide in Pakistan: Consequences for learner identity and future life chances. *Journal of Education and Educational Development*, 6(1).
- Singer, P. W. (2001). Pakistan's Madrassahs: Ensuring a system of education not Jihad. (Analysis Paper No. 14, November 2001, 3).
- Smith, Adam (1981). *An inquiry into the nature and causes of the wealth of nations*. Indianapolis, Liberty Fund.
- Smith, Adam (2001). *The Wealth of Nations: Books, 1–3* (London: 1970).
- Sonntag, S. K., & Cardinal, L. (2015). State traditions and language regimes: A historical institutionalism approach to language policy. *Acta Universitatis Sapientiae, European and Regional Studies*, 8(1), 5–21.
- Wolff, L. (2022). Challenges from Within: Israel's religious and ethnic divisions and their impact on schooling. In Yonah Hibson Matemba and Bruce A. Collet (ed.) *The Bloomsbury Handbook of Religious Education in the Global South*. London: Bloomsbury Academic, 373–88.