

Karachi weds Lahore

The performance of ethnolinguistic identities in Pakistani TV comedy

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This paper investigates the mixing of Urdu and Punjabi language elements in a comic television serial – *Larka Karachi Ka Kuri Lahore Di* – that aired during the month of Ramzan (Urdu for Ramadan) in 2012. The serial features exaggerated depictions of a Punjabi Lahori family and a *muhajir* (Urdu-speaking) Karachiite family. Of particular interest is the way marked phonological features and lexical items are deployed to highlight *panjabiyat* ('Punjabi-ness'). This study explores relationships between the humorous performance of language mixing and language ideologies in Pakistan. Even in places where *panjabiyat* is strongly emphasized, the lexico-grammatical choices made by the characters still render the language maximally understandable to an Urdu-speaking (rather than Punjabi-speaking) audience. Using theories of 'mixed language,' this study seeks to address the importance and implications of these ways of performing ethnolinguistic identity.

Keywords: language ideologies, language contact, language mixing, language and media, Pakistani television, Urdu, Punjabi

1. Introduction & background

In this paper, I investigate the characteristics of mixed Punjabi-Urdu utterances in Pakistani popular media, and moreover hope to understand both the indexicality exhibited in the borrowing of lexical, grammatical, and multimodal features of Punjabi into Urdu, as well as the regularity of this process. For this analysis I focus on the 2012 serial *Larka Karachi Ka Kuri Lahore Di*, 'The Boy From Karachi and the Girl From Lahore.' This serial is basically in Urdu, although my investigation of this corpus shows that a variety of marked Punjabi features are mapped onto speech that is perfectly understandable to Urdu-speakers in order to project a

certain *panjabiyat* ('Punjabi-ness') onto Urdu grammatical forms. *Panjabiyat* can hold certain negative or humorous connotations when used during Urdu utterances. In this paper, I build from a general understanding of the relationship between Punjabi and Urdu in contemporary Pakistan to look specifically at linguistic data from this serial. I ask what theoretical models of language mixing can we use to understand this process, and also, what are the implications of the patterns of language mixing shown?

Punjabi is the mother tongue of about half of the Pakistani population (exact numbers tend to vary depending on which language varieties are counted as Punjabi, and who is doing the counting) and the most widely-spoken language in the country's most politically and economically powerful province, yet it has long been relegated to a subordinate position by the hegemonic state political and cultural apparatus. Along with English, Urdu is the preferred language of the socially mobile and of the middle and upper classes, while Punjabi is widely considered to be crude and vulgar as well as ideologically tied to lower socioeconomic status, rural populations, and a limited economic future (cf. Mansoor 1993). This attitude has its roots in nineteenth century colonial administrative policy (Mir 2010: 30–32, 59–61), and has persisted into the present day. Kamran Ali writes that "almost half a century after its independence and more than thirty years after the creation of Bangladesh, the Pakistani state has been unable to resolve the question of national integration of its many cultures and diverse linguistic groups" (2004: 128). The official languages, English (predominantly used by educated elites) and Urdu (long seen as the emblematic language of Muslim South Asia), function as cross-regional *linguae francae* and predominate in administrative business, print media, education, and politics. For example, there is only one Punjabi newspaper in the entire country, compared to hundreds of Urdu daily and weekly publications. Unlike in Indian Punjab, in Pakistan there is no such thing as a Punjabi-medium school. While other ethnic groups, such as Sindhis, Pathans, and Balochis, place a high value on linguistic identity and language promotion for solidarity reasons, this has not been the case in Punjab (Rahman 1998, 2002). Furthermore, the Punjabi elite themselves have continued to be a driving force behind the ideological supremacy of Urdu (Ali 2004; Zaman 2002).

Rahman (1996, 2004) argues that Punjabis choose to assimilate to Urdu in relevant contexts to increase their social mobility, and moreover there is extreme 'culture shame' associated with Punjabi. While these arguments may be true in part, I believe that they provide an incomplete picture of the status of Punjabi in Pakistan. Recent historical work by Farina Mir (2010) takes a more nuanced track, arguing that Punjabi and Urdu are not so much in a simple hierarchy with each other as each operating in different social spheres. In Punjab, language has traditionally been relegated to a particular set of domains of usage. While Urdu was

adopted by the colonial state as the primary language of governance and education (in Punjab and elsewhere), daily life and local cultural production continued to operate outside, or at the margins of, this administrative system. Furthermore, I agree with Mir's assertion that "...the postcolonial fate of Punjabi in Pakistan appears in striking continuity with the ways the language functioned historically" (2010: 192). There is a major linguistic inequality between the two; Urdu is used not only for public or official life but is also a language of the home, the everyday, and the mundane. Punjabi, on the other hand does not have this sort of flexibility. Thus there are high rates of Pakistani Punjabis who are functionally bilingual in both languages, against likely much lower rates of native Urdu speakers who have a strong command of Punjabi.

Larka Karachi Ka Kuri Lahore Di (hereafter *LK3LD*) was a comedy serial that ran from July 18 through August 24, 2012, and was produced especially as a "Ramadan special," airing every night of the month of Ramadan and over the Eid-ul Fitr holiday. Given the relationship between Urdu and Punjabi as described above, and the fact that this serial was produced for a national audience, it is not surprising that most of the dialogue is in Urdu. There are a total of thirty seven episodes, which follow two families meeting and arranging a marriage. The families are distant relations, with the boy's immediate family an Urdu-speaking *muhajir* family hailing from Karachi, and the girl's family being Punjabis from Lahore. The boy's family comes for an extended stay in Lahore where despite misunderstandings, pratfalls, and the complex social ballet inherent in arranging a marriage, eventually the boy and the girl fall for each other, all the preparations are made, and the compact between the two families is doubly sealed as the girl's paternal grandfather and the boy's paternal grandmother also fall in love and marry. A large part of the comedic material in *LK3LD* comes from the cultural and linguistic differences between the two families, which were exaggerated for heightened comedic effect.

2. Theoretical framework

In her discussion of the phenomenon of accent in English, Rosina Lippi-Green (1997: 64) defines language ideology as "a bias toward an abstract, idealized homogeneous language, which is imposed and maintained by dominant institutions and which has as its model the written language, but which is drawn primarily from the spoken language of the upper middle class." Unsurprisingly, the paradigmatic object of investigation in these studies has remained the relationship of minority languages or marginalized language varieties in relationship to the hegemonic, majority language in a given society. However, Punjabi is not a minority

language nor is it the language of a single politically or economically suppressed group; but at the same time, the language is marginalized in certain ways. Early analysis by Christopher Shackle proposes the value hierarchy of English > Urdu > Punjabi (1970). Later sociolinguistic research on language attitudes (Mansoor 1993) demonstrates that even native speakers of Punjabi tend to denigrate it as backwards and vulgar, while at the same time displaying positive attitudes towards Urdu as the language of modernity and culture. These earlier works are supported by Tariq Rahman's (1996, 2004) more recent sociolinguistic analysis of Punjabi in Pakistan. However, I believe that these studies provide too simplistic an explanation for the complex position of Punjabi in the Pakistani sociolinguistic landscape.

Pierre Bourdieu's *Distinction* (1984) problematizes the idea of "taste" by correlating cultural consumption with social class, and his *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991) describes the idea of linguistic capital, and how it functions in an economy of language; both concepts are highly productive for this study. Richard Popp connects Bourdieu's linguistic marketplace with media consumption: "[Media texts] act as a resource from which individuals can draw speech patterns – and the cultural capital with which they are linked" (2006:7). The serial examined here creates a microcosm for examining the linguistic marketplace of Pakistani popular culture. In addition to the Bourdieuan concept of linguistic capital and linguistic marketplace, I look to the linguistic anthropological material on indexicality (cf. Ochs 1992; Silverstein 1976) to understand the phenomena in *LK3LD* as constructed, contextualized, and fundamental in interaction. Here I draw also on Asif Agha's work on register, emblem, and cultural value (2003, 2004), particularly his notion of enregisterment, "whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users" (2005: 38). Agha's concept is also highly productive when addressing the social valences of the different varieties and styles of Punjabi found in this television serial. By examining the mixed language varieties that are deployed there, I hope to show what parts of language are more or less subject to becoming socially marked, or enregistered, as indexical of a given speaker's geographic or ethnic identity.

3. Language mixing in *LK3LD*

To demonstrate the complexity of the language mixing seen in *LK3LD*, and its distinctiveness from code switching or L1 accent phenomena, I provide the following examples. For ease of illustration, bold text is unambiguously Urdu, italics are unambiguously Punjabi, and segments in plain text are common to both languages.

(1) Grandfather and Grandmother, Ep. 20

Grandfather:

Shamsii jii **aap** naaraaz ho mujh se?
 Shamsi HON 2PL angry be.2PRES 1-OBL with
 ‘Miss Shamsi, are you angry with me?’

Grandmother:

Jaaiye **aap** yahaa.n se, ham aap se nahii.n bolte!
 Go-IMP.FORMAL 2PL here from 1PL 2PL with NEG speak-PRES.MPL
 ‘Go away from here, I’m not talking to you!’

This example, a dialogue spoken between the *muhajir* grandmother and the Punjabi grandfather, exhibits two characteristic marked features. The first is the grandfather’s use of the verb form *ho* with the Urdu formal second person pronoun *aap*. While Urdu has three variations on the second person pronoun, a formal, an informal, and an intimate, Punjabi only has two, yet their paradigms are quite similar (and bear obvious similarity to pronominal systems in other Indo-European languages):

Urdu 2nd person pronouns	Corresponding present tense ‘be’ verb form	Punjabi 2nd person pronouns	Corresponding present tense ‘be’ verb form
<i>aap</i> (respectful, singular or plural)	<i>hai.n</i>	–	–
<i>tum</i> (informal, singular or plural)	<i>ho</i>	<i>tussi.n</i> (more respectful, singular or plural)	<i>ho</i> (in some phonological environments <i>o</i>)
<i>tuu</i> (intimate, singular only)	<i>hai</i>	<i>tuu.n</i> (intimate singular only)	<i>hai</i> (in some phonological environments <i>aii</i>)

One of the characteristic and regular features of the Punjabi L1 accent in Urdu is the use of verb form *ho* with the most formal second person pronoun *aap*. Its usage in this dialogue, that is, in the performance context, is indexical of the grandfather’s Punjabi identity. The grandmother’s response is equally important as an index of her identity; the usage of the first person plural pronoun and masculine plural verb endings is classically associated with the speech of older women from places such as Lucknow or Allahabad (cities in Uttar Pradesh, India). It marks the grandmother’s age as well as her geographical origin. Her dialogue is also more marked than the grandfather’s in general, with his dialogue consisting of mostly neutral words. In dialogues such as these, there is reliance upon fixed linguistic stereotypes.

Yet simply attributing these language mixing phenomena to stereotyping doesn't help to understand either the process by which these utterances are formed or, necessarily, the social work they perform. For one thing, there are stereotypes of both Urdu and Punjabi that are used in socially valent ways; yet they hardly cancel each other out. Stereotypical Punjabi utterances far outweigh Urdu utterances. Consider the following examples.

(2) Suraiyya, Ep. 1

Haaii *te fir kii hoyā?* Mai.n to Rima kii taraf se
 Oh so then what be-PRF.MSG 1SG so Rima POSS direction from
 gaa rahii huu.n naa Pataa lagna chahiye
 sing CONT-FSG be.PRF.FSG NEG knowledge strike-CONT should
 logo.n ko! *ParauNe* aa rahe hai.n Karachi se
 people-OBL ACC relatives come CONT-MPL be.PRES.PL Karachi from
 Rima kaa rishtaa leke
 Rima POSS.MSG proposal bring.PART

'Oh, so what? I'm singing on behalf of Rima, aren't I? People should know! The relatives are coming from Karachi bringing a marriage proposal for Rima.'

Here, we see a rare sentence completely in Punjabi, yet it is followed by a long passage that displays only one marked Punjabi word: *parauNe* 'relatives.' All grammatical particles and core vocabulary are either unambiguously Urdu or common to both. The data across the entire series shows, unsurprisingly given the relationship between ethnicity and kin-groups, that kinship terms are one of the most indexical markers of ethnic identity in the Pakistani context. The first sentence can be seen as setting up the speaker's stance in the conversation; although the rest of her utterance is not in Punjabi, she indexes her identity and her relationship to the interlocutor (her family member; this utterance takes place in a conversation between two Punjabi speakers), while at the same time shouldering the burden of communicating to the television audience.

(3) Suraiyya, Ep. 15:

ikk te is mahalle me.n ghar inne zyaada, mai.n te thakk
 one so this neighborhood in house so many many 1SG so tired
 gayii aa.n mithaaiyaa.n vaaND vaaND ke
 go-PERF.FSG be-PRES.1SG sweet-PL distribute distribute PRT
 kidhar bhejuu.n?
 where send-SUBJ.1SG

'For one thing there are so many houses in this neighborhood, I've gotten tired out. Where all shall I send sweets having distributed them?'

Throughout the serial, mixing with Urdu is less common when two Punjabis are talking to each other, or when Punjabi characters are talking to themselves, as in this example. Even in this case, the speaker continues to employ Urdu postpositions, verb suffixes (even if not verb stems), and directionals. She does use a higher number of Punjabi grammatical forms, but they are etymologically and phonetically quite close to their Urdu counterparts, e.g. Punjabi *aa.n* is quite similar sounding to Urdu *huu.n*, Punjabi *inne* is similar sounding to Urdu *itne*.

In a television broadcast, of course, there is always an intended audience for a given utterance, so the character must walk a line of believability between how much she can perform her identity as Punjabi (notably, she adds Punjabi tonality and de-aspirates the voiced dental stop in the Urdu interrogative word *kidhar* ‘to where’) while at the same time being accountable for communicating with a national television audience, even a television audience that might have large segments of native Punjabi speakers.

(4) Grandfather, Ep. 20

Mai.n	<i>dariyaa</i>		<i>naii.n</i>	<i>siigaa</i> ,		mai.n	ne	
1SG	be afraid.PERF-MSG	NEG	be.PERF-MSG,	1SG	ERG			
samjhaa		sirkas	kaa	koi	bandar	ai.	Yeh	
understand-PERF-MSG		circus	POSS.MSG	some	monkey	be.PRES.SG	This	
kyaa	bane		hue		ho?			
what	become-PERF.MPL		be-PERF.MPL		be.2INF			

‘I wasn’t afraid, I thought it was some monkey from the circus. What’s this you’ve become?’

Here again we see that demonstratives, postpositions, interrogatives, and verb forms (including ergative verbs) are all Urduized, with the exception of Punjabi *siigaa* rather than Urdu *thaa*, and Punjabi *ai* for Urdu *hai*. This last form can also be attributed to dropping of *h* in this context as a feature of L1 accent, or even as a mere result of quick speech, with *siigaa* being the more striking example. Yet the use of Urdu ergative forms in the almost immediately following context (which would not occur in this context in Punjabi) is perhaps an even more profound indicator that Urdu grammar is being privileged over Punjabi grammar, even in the utterances that are supposed to sound the most Punjabi.

(5) Grandfather, Ep. 31

Yeh *muNDaa* *itnaa* *kabaraayaa* *huaa* *kyuu.n*
 DEM boy so much-MSG worry-PERF.MSG be.PERF.MSG why
ai? **Itnii** *kabaraahat* **to** *vyaah* **ke baad**
 be.PRES.3SG so much- worry so marriage after
otii *ai*
 be-HAB.FSG be.PRES.3SG

‘Why is this boy so worried? This much tension happens *after* marriage.’

Here again we see that Urdu demonstratives, verb suffixes, postpositions, and emphatic particles (**to**) are preferred over their Punjabi counterparts. In this example, I have marked *kabaraayaa* and *kabaraahat* as unambiguously Punjabi because they display the typical pattern of Punjabi high tone and loss of aspiration on the ‘gh’ segments rather than the Urdu voiced aspirate (in Urdu these forms are realized as *ghabaraayaa* and *ghabaraahat*).

Throughout these examples the data consistently shows that characters maintain the use of Urdu postpositions, possessives, verbal morphology, and demonstratives even when *panjabiyat* is to be emphasized. Lexical choice in these cases shows a strong tendency to favor, first of all, neutral words, that is those common to both languages; then either words that are symbolically Punjabi or those that can be ‘punjabified’ throughout; and finally words that are markedly Urdu-sounding to the exclusion of Punjabi.

Finally, I offer a comparison of a dialogue in the Punjabi/Urdu mix of *LK3LD* with standard Urdu (SU) and Punjabi (SP) versions:

(6) Suraiyya, Ep. 18

LK3LD: Dil **kaa** **baRaa** *changaa* **thaa**
 SU: Dil **kaa** **baRaa** **achchhaa** **thaa**
 SP: Dil *daa* *vaDDaa* *changaa* *sii*
 heart POSS-MSG big-MSG good-MSG be.PERF
 ‘He was very good-hearted.’

Dil (‘heart’) is a Persian borrowing common to both languages. Again, the preference appears to be for Urdu postpositions and verbs, and in this case one Urdu adjective and one Punjabi adjective are chosen each. Although the expression *bhalaa-changaa* ‘perfectly good’ is commonly used in Urdu, meaning *changaa* would be understood perfectly even by Urdu speakers who were unfamiliar with Punjabi, *changaa* on its own indexes Punjabi identity. It is possible that because the

phonological difference between **ach**chaa and *changaa* is greater than that between **ba**Raa and *va*DDaa that *changaa* has a greater role in indexing Punjabi identity than does *va*DDaa, so in this situation the former is preferred, while **ba**Raa is realized as Urdu for ease of understanding by an Urdu audience.

4. Mixed languages and linguistic hegemony

It seems that a useful way of approaching the mixed language situation would be through a theoretical model, as approaches like simple code switching or L1 accent don't seem to offer explanations for the intense small scale mixing between the two languages that was illustrated above. Following Matras' definition of the INFL-language as "the source language that provides the finite verb inflection", that is, "the source of the grammatical structures influencing the predication" (2003: 163) in a mixed language, with regard to the present case it seems that Urdu would take on that role, while Punjabi then leans more towards being a lexifier. This is not completely regular, given that we are talking here about a performance language and not a language of everyday life, but on the whole it is the Urdu morphosyntactic system that seems prevalent. This is especially true in that, as seen above, the language in *LK3LD* typically employs ergativity after stretches of Urdu, in places where Punjabi would not use the ergative. Yet although the grammatical structures must remain intelligible to Urdu speakers, this is weighed against the performance of *panjabiyat* that influences not only retention, or even perhaps exaggeration, of L1 accent, but also deployment of marked Punjabi terms throughout each utterance.

Admittedly, the present case doesn't fit perfectly with the current models of mixed languages. This is perhaps due in part to the fact that the language of the serial is a somewhat artificial mixed language, being used in a specific media/performance context rather than in everyday life. Winford argues that it is "generally easy to identify the sources of the components [of a mixed language]; ... even in cases where the two languages are genetically related and hence typologically similar, ... it is still possible to identify the precise sources of the components" (2003: 170). Bakker too, argues that mixed languages involve a much more even ratio of components from each language than code-mixing does (2003: 129), yet when languages are so closely related that many words and even grammatical particles are identical, is this still a useful criterion? The mixture of typologically distinct languages is interesting for obvious reasons, but the mixing of very similar languages also affords a unique understanding of language mixing phenomena, because it perhaps foregrounds more subtle differences between the component languages.

5. Conclusions

As with much language stereotyping, there is a way in which a humorous context somewhat diffuses the direct offensiveness of such actions. However, I want to avoid calling the language used in the present serial “Mock” Punjabi (after Jane Hill’s, 1993, 1998 “Mock Spanish”), because the situation is too dissimilar from that of Spanish in the United States. In Hill’s examples Mock Spanish is generally used by monolingual Anglos for purposes of distancing and othering, deployed “in limited and specialized ways that support a broader project of social and economic domination of Spanish speakers in the region” (1993: 146). In the case of Punjabi in Pakistan, even if we see some of the utterances as a kind of mocking, the dynamic of a dominant group disparaging a less powerful group does not apply here. I also do not believe that the blend I have discussed above is simply explained by familiar processes of code switching or code mixing. Again, this is perhaps why the notion of ‘mixed language’ is useful in this context. The creation of the Punjabi-Urdu mixture here is not just about the representation of one ethnolinguistic group as superior to another, as the serial certainly allows for positive and negative representation to occur in both ethnolinguistic groups (of course, the marriage in the serial is neither inter-religious nor even inter-sect; in addition, no Balochis or Sindhis or Christians or Ismailis are represented: there are limits to the multicultural tolerance of the Pakistani media establishment). At the same time, the serial coerces the viewer into being complicit in a certain ideology that says that there can be ethnic variation, there can be language variation, there can exist a friendly rivalry between Karachi and Lahore, and yet we must not threaten the central unity of the Pakistani state.

The undercurrent of this ideology is made clear by the fact that the serial takes place over the month of Ramadan; this foregrounds the Islamic nature of the Pakistani state and in turn the idea that being Muslim is the main component of a Pakistani identity, and that in a harmonious multicultural Pakistan, ethnic and linguistic differences will be less important factors. This can also be seen in the gendering of the roles in the series, the *muhajir* man comes to Lahore to subdue his Punjabi bride (who is at some level foreign and at some level, being of the same religious and national community and the same extended family, not) and return with her to Karachi. The situation is more nuanced than just that; the girl in the series displays positive if stereotypical qualities of the strong Punjabi womanhood, and there are other ways in which there are good and bad sides to characters on both sides. More importantly, if more indirectly, I believe the language mixing in this series incorporates the aspirational qualities of the Pakistani state (linguistic and cultural harmony under the umbrella of Urdu linguistic and Islamic cultural dominance) while at the same time seeming inclusive of minorities.

Finally, however, despite the evidence of bias in favor of the state, of Islam, of the dominance of Urdu, of marriage, heteronormativity, and tradition, I want to resist the temptation to oversimplify media production as a simple extension of state cultural, political, and linguistic hegemony. It seems to me that like the Punjabi language itself, film and television also operate outside, rather than in opposition to, the sphere of linguistic control of the Pakistani state, something Mir described as a legacy of resilience rather than resistance (2010: 61). Ravi Vasudevan (1995) writes of Indian cinema that “while the cinematic institution was thus perceived to be culturally illegitimate, its popular appeal, its social reach, was acknowledged and presented a threat, or at least an impediment, to the cultivation of civil society” (2001: 62). In allowing for an understanding of the spectating public as both heterogeneously constituted and widely contested, Vasudevan’s analysis problematizes a body of South Asian critical film scholarship that has displayed a tendency to posit popular cinema and popular media as a unilateral outgrowth of postcolonial nationalism. It is important here to recognize the agency of the viewers themselves, the work they do in interpreting and circulating the linguistic and cultural ideologies at play in any popular media.

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