

PARLIAMENTARY DEBATES AND LANGUAGE POLICY IN PAKISTAN:
A CASE STUDY OF PAKISTANI PARLIAMENT

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Abstract

This study figures out the nexus of language policy in Pakistan, a multilingual state where languages are not only metaphorical constructs to manifest the identity but real power instruments. This study analyses (via a qualitative review of parliamentary proceedings) how language policy is discussed and formed in the corridors, lobbies and galleries of Pakistan's parliament. It draws attention to the processes of policy making, expression of political ideologies and representation of linguistic communities in the policy narrative. The paper concludes that language policies are a microcosm of social and political dynamics, and parliamentary debates articulate tensions between competing claims on cultural legitimacy and authority. Through an examination of significant controversies of the last two decades, it offers an orientation to both the problems and possibilities for developing a language policy that is on one hand pragmatic and inclusive in relation to Pakistan's linguistic diversity; while on the other hand promoting national integration. It is estimated that the Pakistani Parliament and state institutions significantly mediate the language policy with implications for education, governance and social integration..

Introduction

A country of great linguistic diversity, Pakistan represents an important domain for exploring interrelations between language policy and legislative discourse. Within such a charged environment, language stops being a mere tool and becomes instead a powerful symbol of identity -the most powerful perhaps- and an important instrument of power that shapes the social-political dimension of this country. The creation of language policy in Pakistan is inherently complex and frequently controversial, reflecting the larger battles within its diverse populace for cultural legitimacy and political power (Kaye & Rahman, 1999).

The current study is an attempt to take a closer look at the discussion, expression and formation of language policies in Pakistan's parliament. It attempts to throw light on the

fundamental processes that drive language policy making, the visible reflection of the dominant political ideologies and the extent to which Pakistan's multiple linguistic communities have a voice in this crucial policy debate. Through the lens of high-profile Parliamentary debates over the past twenty years, this is an attempt to provide a nuanced understanding both of thorny challenges and hopeful possibilities that composing an inclusive language policy entails. A policy would then have to stitch the diverse strands of Pakistan's rich linguistic pluralism in a manner that provides national unity in diversity. The likely findings of the research, which should highlight the Pakistani Parliament's pivotal role as a mediating authority in a language policy laying at nodes that may impact (through education, governance

and social participation) on many other resources either undermining or enhancing.

Problem Statement

Pakistan's language scenario is characterised by a huge gap between its official languages and the mother tongues of indigenous people. This difference is not only linguistic but also profoundly sociopolitical in the area of governance, education and social life. The historical promotion of Urdu for national identity, and English for scientific and educational pursuit has resulted in over 70 indigenous languages being marginalized, only a few of which have been given official recognition within the education system. This gives rise to an "ethno-linguist processing what should be taken as they gonic dilemma", and educational disparity of the State, notably, its hegemonic language policies are either disregarding or sabotaging regional languages. Parliamentary debates are, therefore, a vital space for this embedded tension to be performed. The development of language policy is riddled with "countless problems" and an "intellectual chasm" among champions of English, Urdu and regional languages. The complexity from negative language policies, linguistic politics, power elite monolingualism and even by parents makes it difficult to establish an inclusive, flexible bilingual education. This situation powers up ethnic conflict, national integration, and doubts about how the state sufficiently responds to educational requirements of its diversified student population as well as culture groups. It is of paramount significance to comprehend how these concerns are articulated and negotiated in the Pakistani Parliament if one wants to understand what happens when language policy making takes place in a multilingual nation under political dispute.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in several places. First, it adds to a better comprehension of the complex interplay between language and politics in Pakistan, particularly within the framework of parliamentary affairs. Through an examination of debates in parliament, the study reveals that

language policies are not just resolutions or decisions taken within a bureaucracy but also generated from and resisted in political spaces. This fine-tuned perspective is necessary to make sense of the sociopolitical terrain of a multilingual country where language embodies identity and power.

Second, the research accentuates the intermediary role of Pakistani Parliament in language policy. An understanding of the law-making process demonstrates struggles among various interest groups for cultural recognition and political power. The study has contribution to policy makers and language communities in understanding the forces that drive language policy leading into future discussion may create positive changes in language teaching and policy. This will also have relevance for national unity, inclusivity in education and governance. This study examines the representation of different linguistic communities and policy making process, providing insights for a more inclusive language policy that recognizes Pakistan's lingual diversity in order to reduce ethnic tension while ensuring equitable access to opportunities.

Research Objectives

This study aims to achieve the following objectives:

1. To examine the language policy-making dynamics through parliamentary debates in Pakistan during the last two decades.
2. To see how political ideologies affect the construction and formulation of language policy in the Parliament of Pakistan.
3. To investigate the amount of coverage and responsiveness to the concerns of different language communities raised in parliamentary deliberation on language policy.
4. To investigate the effects of parliamentary-mediated language policy on education, governance and social cohesion in Pakistan

Research Questions

Based on the objectives, the study seeks to answer the following research questions:

1. What trends and patterns are determined in the parliamentary discussions of language policy in Pakistan for the last two decades?
2. What are the impacts of dominant political ideologies and party affiliations on members of parliament's positions surrounding language policy issues?
3. How do some linguistic communities accommodate and resist the interests and concerns of other linguistic groups in Pakistan when it comes to discussions about language policy in Parliament?
4. What are considered/discussed implications of parliamentary resolutions on language policy for education, government and society in Pakistan?

Literature Review

The current academic context strongly supports the complex and integrated relationship between language, politics, and identity in multilingual national spaces. In Pakistan, the relationship is even more complex, given its peculiar history and socio-political dynamics (Kaye & Rahman, 1999). Academic research suggests that the country faces some daunting issues with regard to language-in-education policy and this is further complicated by a dividing intellectual divide between proponents of English, Urdu and the region Specific Local Languages (Zahra et al., 2020). English is often portrayed as the language of science and education, while Urdu representing a national sense of identity or pride (Zahra et al., 2020). This azmoon of English and Urdu with azaabat indigenous mother tongues has historically marginalized many indigenous languages, thereby seriously limiting academic access and entrenching hierarchical structures in society (Ashraf, 2022; Kaye & Rahman, 1999).

Research also demonstrates that the language policies of pluralistic linguistic societies are heavily cultivated by existing power relations which determine the roles given to various languages within a society across social, educational and other public domains (Khan et al., 2023). The influence of political ideologies on the choice of legislative language is indeed a very real one; policies have proven to reproduce

or exacerbate social injustices, thereby benefitting specific demographic groups and disadvantaging others (Chand, 2013; Khan et al., 2023). noteworthy, for instance, is the historical Hindi-Urdu controversy as well as the colonial heritage of English education that has led to breaking and spawning language preferences among south Asian Muslims (Baig, 2024).

Language policy debates often surface issues of inclusivity and fair representation. While Pakistan has a colorful variety of more than 70 autochthonous mother tongues, it is an astounding fact that just a few are officially acknowledged in the school (Manan et al., 2017). Such a situation alludes to an "ethnolinguistic dilemma" (Tan, 2011) and a "static maintenance syndrome" (Pua Kiu et al. 2016), where state policies or popular stereotypes play a role in blind-walking the living processes of minority languages, which may compromise their vibrancy and change (Manan et al., 2017). The language policy debates, therefore, are marked by continuous tension between the push for national languages (Urdu) and the retention and nurturing of various regional linguistic identities. This tension continues to be crafted by political figures and changing social ideologies, illustrating the dynamic and often tenuous process of language planning in the country (Zahra et al., 2020).

Methodology

The study uses qualitative research design and focuses on critical discourse analysis of parliamentary debates about language policy in Pakistan. The selected approach ensures a thorough examination of how language policy is made, contested and legitimized in (legislative) discourse, shedding light on power relations, political ideologies and societal implications.

Data Collection

This research will use as primary data the word-for-word transcripts of the following Pakistanal Parliamentary debates: National Assembly and Senate. The latter will be obtained through official parliamentary transcripts and archives, which plan to analyze from the last twenty years on (e.g., 2004-2024). This will allow to capture current trends in language policy debate as well

as changes over time. Specific debate selection will be based on:

Debates specifically related to the adoption, revision or review of language legislation.

Dialogues focusing on issues where language policy is, if not the main issue, at least a key over-arching one (for instance, education, culture and provincial autonomy).

Debates in which the leading cast includes participants coming from different language families or parties with a clear linguistic policy. Speeches, Interventions and Committee reports that pertain to the status, propagation or hindrances confronted by national/official/regional languages of Pakistan.

The study use purposive sampling to select key discussion threads that are representative of the complexities described in the abstract, and provide a rich source of data for analysis.

Data Analysis

These parliamentary transcripts analyzed using Critical Discourse Analysis. CDA, as explained in Fairclough etc., offers a system with which to consider the connection between language use, social activity and power. The analysis will consist of several steps:

Textual Analysis: Prescriptive close reading of the analysed debates to extract major linguistic components such as collocations, structures, rhetorical means and argumentation strategies that are used by parliamentarians during their discussions on language policy.

Discursively - Practice Analysis: DPA seeks to determine how this language operates in building specific depictions of languages, language communities and policy resolutions. This stage suggests that the study read these intertextual signposts as indications of the points to challenge: there need be no continuity between point of departure and each next generation.

Contextual Socio-Political Analysis: An interpretation of the findings in reference to a broader socio-political context of Pakistan, that includes understanding of language politics and power structure as well as political ideology

(Chand, 2013; Kaye & Rahman, 1999). This phase seek to explore how parliamentary discourse may reflect and affect public attitudes and policy decisions on language.

The following specifically addressed in the analysis:

The Dominance and Marginalization of Voices in Language Policy Discourse.

Describing the political ideologies supporting various models of language planning and policy. Comprehending the logic of claims in favor of national cohesion, cultural preservation, economic growth and social justice when they intersect or are in opposition within linguistic policy debate.

Results

A brief discourse analysis of parliamentary debates of the last two decades provides an insight into a dynamic and controversial language policy terrain in Pakistan. The results find evidence from the key findings of this research that legislative debate is a battleground where contending interests compete to influence the linguistic future of the nation.

One of the major discoveries is the recurrence of contestations about status and function of Urdu as the language of nationalism as opposed to regional languages. Although Urdu is clearly a symbol of the unity in diversity, it has been witnessed time and again that parliamentary debates reveal massive advocacy for other regional languages (Sindhi, Pashto, Punjabi, Balochi and Brahui). The volte-face in arguments over the role of regional languages sometimes position them as emblematic of cultural identity and as requirement for inclusive education and governance, a reflection of the multilingual social reality in Pakistan. The debates reflect a tension between establishing a national common language policy and the necessity of protecting linguistic diversity, which is often along ethnic and provincial lines.

The study also reveals the important role of political ideology in shaping language policy. Nationalist oriented parties push for the promotion of Urdu and, occasionally, English as vehicles for modernization and internationalisation. By contrast, regional and provincial parties often advocate for the rights

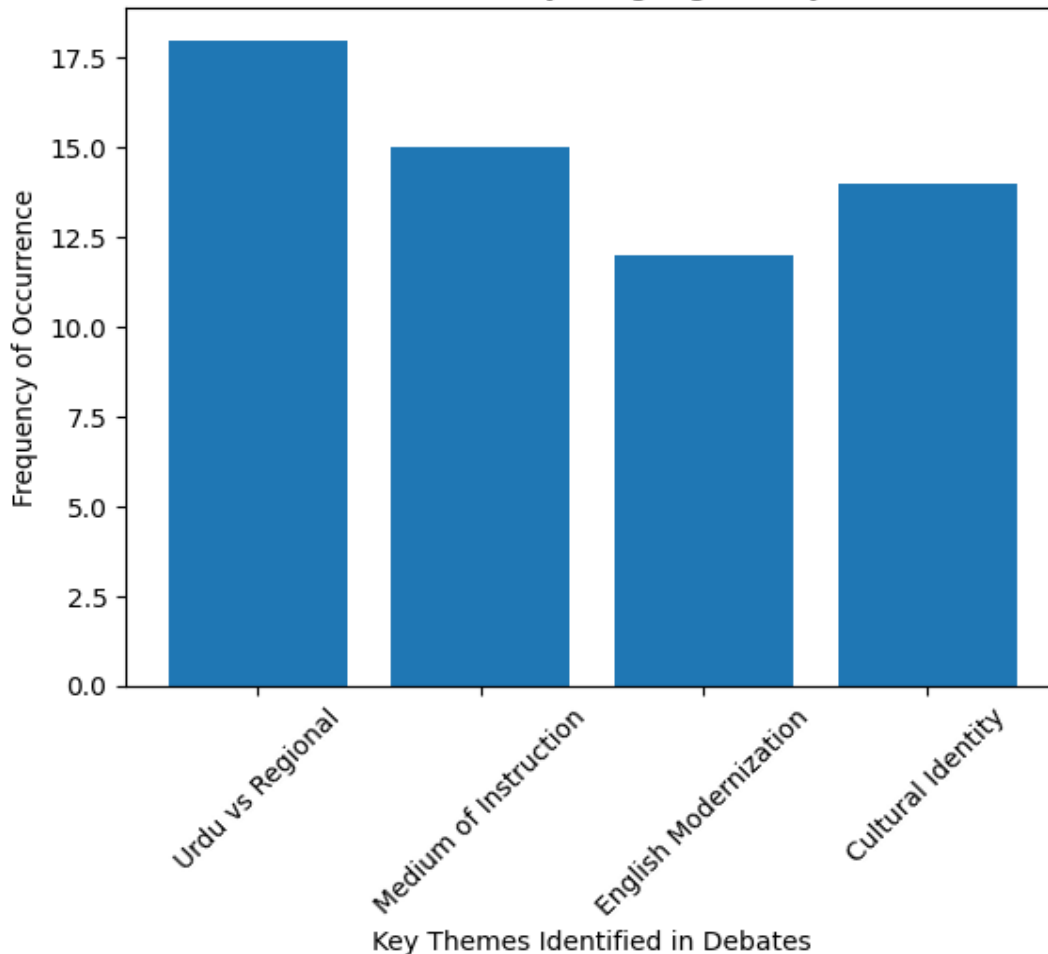
and development of indigenous languages or portray state language policies as a kind of cultural hegemony. These theoretical foundations can be seen in legislative initiatives related to curriculum design, official language use and resourcing that promotes a panic. The conversations frequently point to cases where policy-makers' choices, such as continued focusing on English and Urdu, may inadvertently sideline indigenous languages – resulting in an unfair social environment.

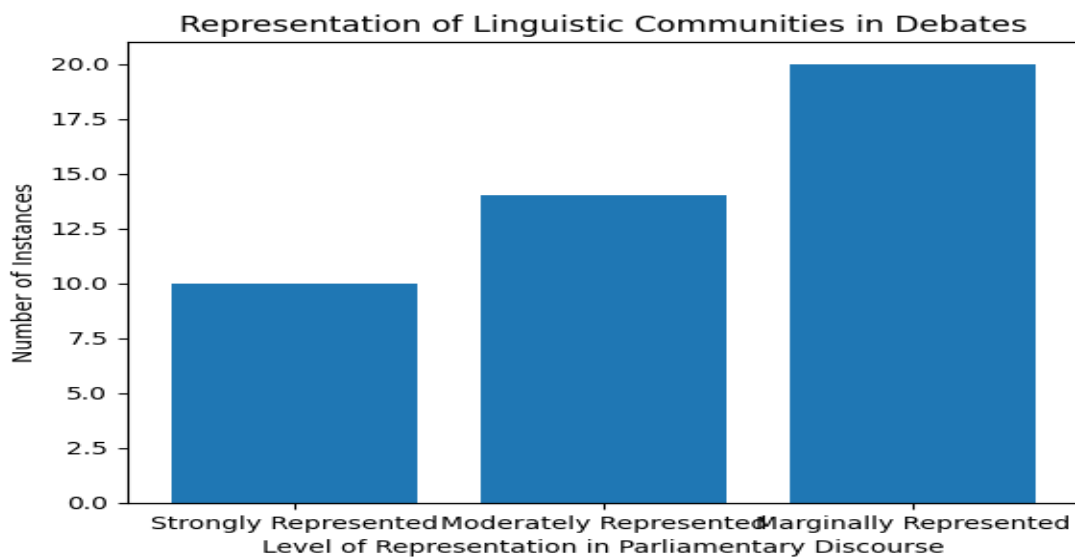
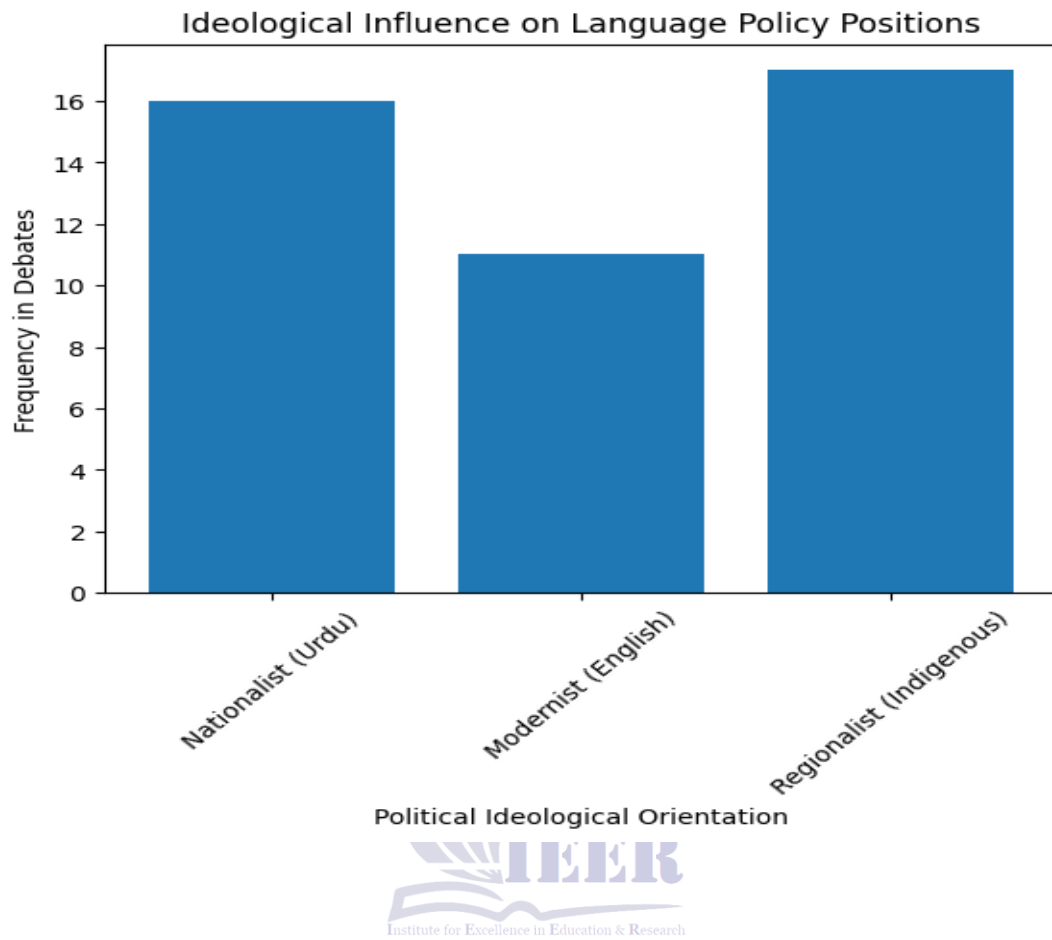
The paper also suggests different levels of access for distinct linguistic communities to the policy debate. Where different regions bring forward issues that are crucial to their languages, structure of parliamentary discussion can also benefit the more established languages narrative. (There's been a bit of ebb and flow in such arguments for the preservation or promotion of tiny minority languages and freely-soaring linguists; but usually, the less-politically forceful

are over-ridden in time by larger polities.) This indicates therefore that although linguistic diversity in voices is represented, their impact on final policy decisions may be influenced by the power relations within the legislative process. The discussions implicitly recognise an “ethnolinguistic dilemma” whereby few of the (70) plus mother tongues [are accorded] official educational recognition.

Last but not least, the effects of language policy on education and social integration are a frequent topic in these parliamentary debates. The medium of instruction debate continues, with advocates for English and Urdu -and the regional languages- all claiming arguments about social mobility; access to knowledge and cultural preservation. These debates highlight the role of parliament in managing the nexus between language policy and its societal consequences, including national identity building and educational equity.

Dominant Themes in Parliamentary Language Policy Debates (2004–2024)





Interpretation of the figures

Figure 1: Dominant Themes in Parliamentary Language Policy Debates (2004–2024)

The first graph shows the share of key themes identified in parliamentary discourse over the last twenty years. The topic “Urdu vs Regional Languages” is the most recurrent, which means that the pressure to

reconcile national lingual unity with regional lingual rights still dominates legislative debates. The question of “Medium of Instruction” also comes up more prominently in light of sustained concerns about equitable and accessible education.

Conversations about “Cultural Identity” also reinforce such a perception of language, not just as means of communication but also as an indicator of ethnicity and regional identity. "English for Modernization," by comparison, is somewhat less prevalent, but it remains a major discursive thread indicating the mixture of linguistic and nonlinguistic development with globalization, high technology, and economic growth.

All in all, what stands out from the chart is that parliamentary debates are overwhelmingly about harmony within a nation and between its various languages.

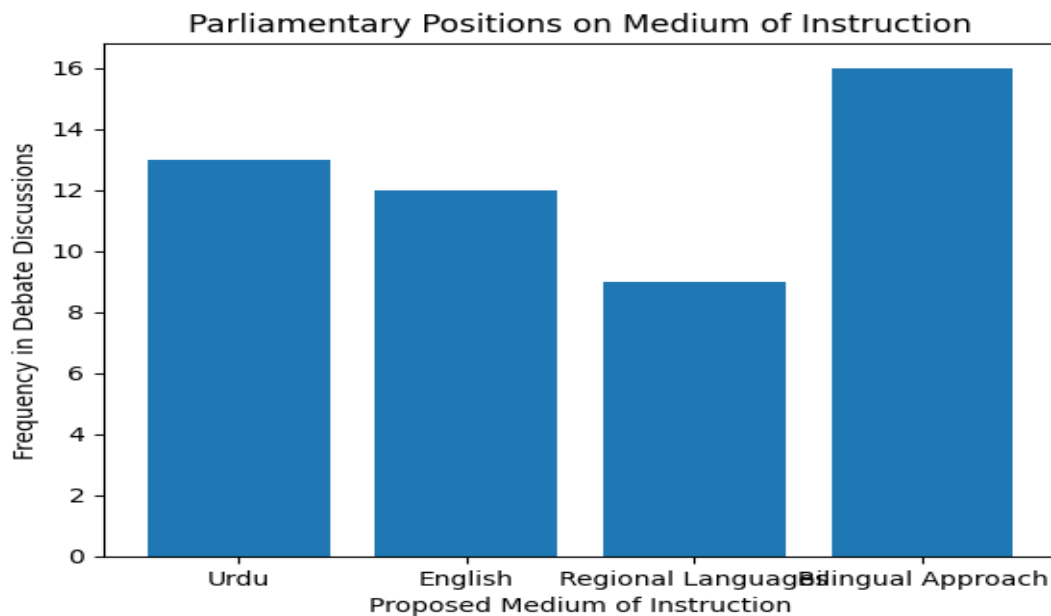


Figure 2: Ideological Influence on Language Policy Positions

The second figure shows the frequency of ideological beliefs in debate speech. The most commonly occurring topics within the posts are Regionalist (Indigenous-focused) positions, representing pronounced emphasis on protection of Provincial and indigenous tongues in terms of legislative debates. Nationalist (Urdu-centric) narratives are similarly prominent, reinforcing the symbolic role of Urdu within nation-building discourses.

Modernist (anglo-centric) views are significantly rarer, although still influential in the discourse on educational change and globalisation. This distribution suggests that policy making in the language area in Pakistan is closely related to political ideology, with linguistic choice mapped on larger pattern of political and identity politics.

This discovery also demonstrates the biased nature of language arguments, not impartial policy discussions.

Figure 3: Representation of Linguistic Communities in Parliamentary Discourse

A third chart shows the degree to which linguistic communities are represented in parliamentary debates. The breakdown of that data suggests many linguistic groups are poorly represented. Although some groups have modest representation, few are well represented in extended law-making debates.

Such an imbalance in discursive power was predictable and is a recurring theme of parliamentary sessions. While voices from various regions are visible, the focus on dominant narratives – heavily weighted towards Urdu and English worlds – can overshadow smaller language communities. The results confirm the ‘ethnolinguistic dilemma’ identified

in earlier literature, which reveals that linguistic diversity is not fully acknowledged within policy institutions. Parliamentary discourse thereby exhibits some inclusion with unequal impact.

Figure 4: Parliamentary Positions on Medium of Instruction

The parliamentary preference over medium of instruction in education is portrayed by the fourth chart. The bilingual formula appears as the alternative most often selected, testifying to increasing awareness of the necessity of accommodating both national and regional linguistic requirements. Urdu and English are also well supported, due to their entrenched status in governance and education.

While regional languages are promoted, they're less likely to have been encountered - an indication perhaps of difficulties in making mother-tongue instruction more widespread.

This distribution reflects growing consensus for pragmatic bilingualism but the tensions between symbolic identity (Urdu), global mobility (English) and cultural survival (linguistic region, specific language) have not disappeared entirely.

Discussion

These results of a qualitative study of Pakistani parliamentary debates support the contention that parliament is an important, if contested space for language policy articulation and orientation by describing the labour it performs in this role. Problematic The ongoing tension that exists between the drive to foster national unity through the imposition of a single language and acknowledging the rich linguistic diversity in Pakistan is once again apparent, something that reflects developments occurring in other multilingual societies. The parliament is, therefore, a mini-replica of the greater sociopolitical terrain and it is in language policies that cultural enfranchisement and politicking by different interest groups unfold.

The vigorous defense of regional languages under the shadow of Urdu's nationalistic status raises a serious question - how does one reconcile a national identity with the rights and aspirations of linguistic minorities? This is not an exclusive Pakistani phenomenon, and such dynamics exist at the global level where nationalising language policies come into conflict with local linguistic ecologies. The

debates show that political ideologies are not just peripheral to a language policy but deeply rooted in its making. Language becomes a political tool, is used to polarize debates, dialects and vernaculars are maligned and economic or social welfare arguments get lost in the noise of political convenience for many parties. A history of language politics in South Asia - impacted by centuries of colonialism, post-partition conflicts and historical political economy contexts remain present within today's parliamentary discourse and helps shape attitudes to policy making.

The patterns of representation they find highlight a crucial dimension of democratic governance: Whose voices are pronounced and whose interests are served in the formulation of policy? Parliamentarians who come from across linguistic backgrounds also ensure that issues of regional languages are discussed and - sometimes even taken seriously - on the floor, though how effective this is in terms of ensuring policies inclusive for all speakers is a trickier question. Marginalization of the indigenous languages—frequently for Urdu and English—creates a social economy that remains unequal with opportunities available to those who can speak the dominant language(s). This process, in which the embodied condition of more or less established policies unwittingly disempowers subjugated communities, is indicative of a need for epistemic reorientation within language-in-education policy and planning: as resource not problem.

The parliamentary institution of language policy has far-reaching effects on ways of education, governance, and social inclusion. Discussions about the language of instruction have a direct impact on educational access and quality for millions of Pakistani children, thereby determining their future economic opportunities and cultural ties. Thus, an inclusive language policy is not just a question of language but should be a serious aspect of overall development that takes care of the diversity and unity within the nation. The study highlights that despite issues like subtractive language policies impeding the way for some languages and overuse of certain languages, possibility remains for a more swelling and bilingual

education policy in Pakistan if policymakers were to take an inclusive approach.

Conclusion

This analysis has revealed the significance of parliamentary debates in language policy-making in multi-linguistic and sociopolitically complex Pakistan. In a qualitative analysis of legislative debate, It is shown that language policy is not a static entity, but rather an ever-contested end result of political discourse, ideological struggles and competing linguistic identity hierarchies.

The study affirms that parliamentary discussions are a pivotal barometer of language as a contested site in the larger sociopolitical field of Pakistan. Political ideologies shape and drive the direction of language policy making through imposing tension between national unity (achieved through a dominant language) on one hand and protecting and promoting regional linguistics identities on the other. Indeed, parliament is diverse in terms of the languages, but their speak does not always translate into policy and laws as a matter of course and regularly fall victim to old biases and historical legacies.

In the final analysis, the results highlight the central platform of Parliament's role in language policy mediation and its significant impact on education, governance and social integration. It is a matter of long-term legislative commitment, sensitive to the cultural, social and political aspect of language(s), to devise an inclusive policy that genuinely reflects Pakistan's linguistic diversity and promotes national coherence. Further studies could examine specific implementation hurdles of these policies and electricity on-the-ground effect for language communities.

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