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Shagufta Anbreen*

Fakhira Riaz†

Yasmin Akhtar‡

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English and Khwar: The study of Social Media Linguistic Practices of Khwar Speakers

Abstract:

Khwar is a language that belongs to Dardic group. It is spoken in different parts of Pakistan predominantly in Chitral where it is considered as lingua franca of the area. In the recent era, technology has become advanced and people have started to use different social mediums like Facebook to get in contact with their counterparts. As the social media networks are linguistically diverse so speakers choose a specific language for interaction. Among these languages, English is considered as the dominant language which has influenced the linguistic practices of the speakers. This study explores the linguistic practices of Khwar speakers on Facebook. To explore the linguistic practices of the speakers twenty participants are selected among which ten are males and ten are females. The posts and comments on the Facebook of the speakers have been analyzed to explore the similarities and differences in the linguistic practices of the speakers.

Key Words:

Khwar Language; Social Media; Linguistic Practices.

Introduction

Language is a distinct attribute of human beings which enables them to interact with one other and it empowers them to convey their message. Language is used by the speakers as a medium of interaction in different social situations and while carrying out social affairs. So the relationship between society and language is being studied in order to understand the relationship between both the entities. Holmes (1992, p. 16) stated that ‘the sociolinguist’s aim is to move towards a theory which provides a motivated account of the way language is used in a community, and of the choices, people make when they use language.’ With the advancement in technology, especially the invention of internet, people have witnessed a drastic change in the way of communication and interaction. Social media has now become an integral part of human life (Amant, 2017). It has become an ideal platform for sharing ideas and ultimate option for interaction with a large number of people around the globe. Social media provide a platform to form different types of communities where people with the common interest come together and interact with each other. The social networking sites like Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram allow people to form web pages where people share different types of content, talk on various subjects and communicate with each other (Mayfield, 2008).

Among different social networking websites, Facebook is considered as the most popular. Stelzner in his study has stated that according to the press room of Facebook (2016), the daily active users on Facebook are 1.23 billion & 1.15 billion people

use Facebook through smartphones daily. It is calculated that 85.5 percent of the Facebook users are out of Canada and America. Facebook has become a major source which is used to access a large number people with diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds. As people with different linguistic background come together and state their point of view on different subject matters so they are compelled to interact with other members in a mutually understood language. As a consequence of different linguistic backgrounds, people choose a medium of interaction which is feasible to all the members. This effect the linguistic practices of the people on

* Student, Department of English, Fatima Jinnah Women University, The Mall, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

† Assistant Professor, Department of English, Fatima Jinnah Women University, The Mall, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.
Email: drfakhiriaz@fjwu.edu.pk

‡ Lecturer, Department of English, Fatima Jinnah Women University, The Mall, Rawalpindi, Punjab, Pakistan.

social media especially people who speak minority languages. Being a language of technology, commerce, education and business, English has become the source of communication on social media as it is more privileged than any other language. In recent years social networks have provided great space for researchers to look into linguistic patterns of male and female speakers of different languages especially the posts, comments and profiles on Facebook ([Nazir, 2012](#)). As it is a common thought that linguistic practices of men and women are different and males and females have different approaches towards language in a society. So males and females are expected to act differently in any society so are expected to show different approach towards language on social media than men. This expected behavior of males and females are proved by different researches on social media and the researches has actually shown that women tend to use Facebook to maintain the relationship, unlike men who use Facebook to carry out a specific task ([Muscanell&Guadagno, 2012](#)). So the notion is that the linguistic practices of male and females are different from each other.

Khovar being a less dominant language is also influenced by English and the linguistic practices of the speakers (males and females) on social media are affected by the English language. Khovar with its sister Kalasha language belongs to Dardic group. It is considered as the oldest among Dardic language and it still contains some traits of Indo-Aryan languages in terms of phonology as well as vocabulary and grammar. It is a lingua franca of northern Pakistan as it is used by the speakers to communicate with other people who have different linguistic background. The researches on Khovar language are very few as the language is not being studied by the researchers. One of important and prominent study on Khovar was conducted by Brien in 1895 which includes the introduction and description of Khovar. This study focuses on the vocabulary of Khovar (Rönnqvist, 2013). The aim of this research is to find out the linguistic practices of male and female Khovar speakers on social media.

Literature Review

Khovar Language: A Brief Introduction

Khovar has been given many names by the people who are familiar with it and they are out of the Khovar community. The outside Khovar speaking communities have distinctive names for Khovar vernacular like Khowari, Khawar, Chitrali, Citrali, Chitrari, Arniya, Patu, Kashkari, and Qashqari. The name is basically derived from the name of district 'Chiltrar'; which is pronounced as Chitral by the Europeans people and other foreigners; however 'Khovar' is the proper name which means the language of Kho people ([Munnings, 1990](#)).

Khovar language is spoken by 200,000–300,000 people in Pakistan living in different parts of Pakistan (Khan & Liljegren, 2016). It is predominantly spoken in Chitral which is situated in the northwest of Pakistan. It is also spoken in the west of GaramChisma in Lukkuh valley of Chitral. It is also a dominant language in northern Chitral and being spoken in the valleys like Torkhow, Mulkhov, Laspur, and Yarkhun. In the south of Chitral, it is spoken in Hindu Raj Range but it is a minority language in the villages of south Mirkhani. Along with Khovar Kalasha language is spoken by the people between the Chitral town and Mirkhani. Khovar is not concentrated in Chitral valley only but it crosses the boundaries of Chitral to other parts of Pakistan as well. It is the dominant language of people of Ishkomen Valley where the majority of the people are Khovar speakers. It is also spoken in Yasin valley, where Khovar is predominantly spoken in villages like Thaus, Sandhi etc. likewise there are permanent communities of Khovar speakers in Swat, Peshawar, and Rawalpindi ([Munnings, 1990](#)).

According to the Khovar Academy, Khovar language has 60 alphabets which are written from right to left. Though it is considered as lingua franca of Chitral it didn't flourish till the rule of Mehtar of Chitral state. With the passage of time little work was done by the scholars on Khovar language one of which was the invention the typewriter of Khovar was invented by Rehmat Aziz Chitrali in 1996 but the journals and books were not published in Khovar language for a very long time. So, monthly Zhang started the initiative for use of Khovar language and started to publish news in Khovar language. In written form, the Perso-Arabian script is used with Nastaliq style. The sounds and characters were first designed in 1921 by NasirUIMulk which are

still in use. The literary community of Chitral is active and working on Khowar language and, as a result of their endeavor, 40 books have been published in Khowar language (Administrative, n.d.). Though Pakistan is a multilingual country the emphasis is on two languages Urdu and English, other languages are not given much importance.

Language Choice

In a multilingual community, the choice and preference of language is highly influenced by the presence of different languages. Various factors contribute to the choice and preference of a language for interaction; some of the factors which contribute to the language choice patterns include prestige, power, and dominance ([Dweik & Qawar, 2015](#)). The choice of the language also depends on the domain in which the interaction takes place that is family, friend or offices and the choice of the language also greatly depends on the participants who are involved in the conversation ([Ansah, 2014](#)).

The choice of a language has different purposes behind it; people choose to communicate in a certain language according to their needs and always adjust their linguistic practices with new circumstances ([Qawar, 2014](#)). According to [Ansah \(2014\)](#) who studied language choice of people in Larteh (a district in Ghana) which is a multilingual community, the languages which are spoken by the people in Ghana are Leteh, Akuapem Twi, and English. One specific language doesn't actually prevail in their society, but, they choose language according to the situation; for example, in church people choose Twi and sometimes code-switching between English and Twi. In the funeral, the language is chosen according to the addresses' linguistic repertoire.

The choice of a particular language is a result of perception and attitude of the people about a language and also the role played by the language in particular society ([Qawar, 2014](#)). The research done on the Quebec community (which is a multilingual community) choice of language and attitude of the people towards French, English, and Arabic is relevant to the idea that people have certain feelings towards different languages. The responses of the respondents depict that most of the multilingual people have a positive attitude towards English. They consider it as most useful, dominant language and consider it as part of their Canadian identity. French is also considered as a dominant language by the people and has the same positive attitude for being the language used in religious ceremonies. On the other hand, Arabic is considered as the least important language of the province and the responses show that it is the most difficult to learn. So, the speakers in different social settings choose different languages according to their needs and purpose of communication ([Dweik & Qawar, 2015](#)).

Internet and World Wide Web: Linguistic Practices of the Users

Facebook is a popular social network which is used by a large number of people which was launched in 2004 owned by FB. It was initially created for the students of Harvard but it spread throughout the world. It gradually expanded to other colleges in the area of Boston, Canada and other parts of United States; by 2006 it became accessible to everyone between age 13 and older with an email address. People can connect with others in a variety of ways through Facebook like a post, comment, like, share, wall, info, blog, videos and shared photos. It grew very fast among masses and by September 2013 the number of active users of Facebook reached up to 1.06 billion people ([AbuSa'aleek, 2015](#)). According to the newsroom of Facebook (2017), current users have reached to 2 billion which is a new landmark achieved by Facebook.

Facebook has become the most popular social network which allows the members to share ideas, chat and to communicate with people in different languages around the world. The young people around the world use Facebook as a study tool which gives them the opportunity to interact with a large number of people while exploring the profiles of different people on Facebook the young people meet new people and explore relationships through the English language which enables them to learn the target language. It creates a community where people come together and receive comments and suggestions which give them room to

improve their language skills. Facebook is a source to connect with the people across the borders of their lands which gives the users means to write in different languages. The people who use social media come across people with different linguistic backgrounds which affect their linguistic practices. The conversation of two Chinese students on Facebook is one example which shows the linguistic practices of multilingual speakers on social media especially Facebook who are in contact with people who speak different languages. They choose Mandarin Chinese to communicate with Chinese speaking people while speaking with American friends they choose English as a medium of communication ([Schreiber, 2015](#)). Besides a great platform for learning language Facebook is a place which provides a great platform for the users to practice their native language through interaction and communication so it affords a space to maintain any language (Honeycutt & Cunliffe, 2010). While on the scenario of the world the languages are diminishing and some are on the verge of extinction. It is estimated that only 80 languages have above 2 million users among 6000+ languages which exist in the world. 95% of world's languages have less than 1 million speakers and approximately 6000 are there in per language which is very less in number. It has alarmed linguists that how languages are not used by the speakers which make a language an endangered language. It is stated that around by 2100 ninety percent of world languages will be severely in danger (Taprial & Kanwar, 2012). But Facebook and other social platforms encourage users to use their language and these platforms have provided them with the opportunity to choose their native language in communication, as a result, thousands of speakers of endangered languages are using their language on Facebook for interaction.

Gender and Linguistic Practices

Gender is a social construct and it indicates the social roles given to the males and females in any society. The society assigns certain behavior, action, and characters to both male and female so they are expected to follow those expectations of the society. Gender is some of all those explicit qualities which include manners, a way of speaking, dressing and the kind of conversation. On the other hand, sex is a biological phenomenon which is 'chromosomal difference, internal and external differences, hormonal production and other physiological differences'. Gender is defined in different ways as initially it was taken in political, scientific and social term but then it was taken to see women subjugation in different fields of life, women empowerment and the positive role of women in progress of the society. It is not a concern with the qualities of individual's characters or behavior rather it refers to all the people living in that society who share same characteristics. So the relationship between gender and society is important to understand because the society 'language encompasses the thoughts of people' which in return is shaped by the society (Rasul, 2013). Many types of research have been conducted on language and gender but the researches on linguistic practices of people are mostly concerned with the identity crises and privacy or the researches deal with the language change. There is little attention paid to the issue of gender, handful researches are available which deal with the online linguistic practices of males and females. Eckert & McConnell-Ginnet believe that women use more standard language than men ([Nazir, 2012](#)). The women choose the more standard or advanced form of any language than men do. Women follow the trends in society and frequently use the newer form of language than men. Researchers believe that women belong to same social status as men choose a non-prestigious language in casual conversation while opting for prestigious language in formal talks ([Gal, 1978](#)). So the linguistic practices of male and female always differ during a conversation.

Research Methodology

The study implies qualitative method for the exploration of the linguistic practices of male and female Khowar speakers on Facebook. The posts and comments of the participants were observed for six months in 2017. The comments and posts were collected from the walls of the participants who use Facebook on daily basis. With the data collected from the walls of speakers, the linguistic practices of the male and female speakers were analyzed. The participants consisted of twenty Facebook users who were the members of Chumarkhan.

Chumarkhan is a group of native Khovar speakers on Facebook. It was created in 2012 by Shujat Ali Bahadur and his friends who are native Khovar speakers. The name of the group is derived from the name of place, which is situated between Chitral and Ghizer district of Gilgit Baltistan named ChumuroKaan. This place is famous for its mineral deposits so the group was named after this famous place. The purpose of the formation of the group is to bring their close friends on one platform. The members of the group have reached up to 9,457. The sample of the study was selected through snow ball sampling which is a technique to find participants for the study, in which one subject is identified, who in return gives name of another one and so on. Through snowball sampling, twenty participants were identified, among them ten were females and ten were males. Though the members of Chumarkhan are all over Pakistan but the present study includes the residents of Rawalpindi and Islamabad.

Data Analysis

The analysis of data was carried out on the basis of language preference and language choice by the speakers in the comments and posts on Facebook which gave an understanding of their linguistic practices. The categorization of the posts depicts that participants choose English for most of the posts on Facebook. The main language for interaction and conversation among the speakers is English. As the choice of the language differs in different posts of the Khovar speakers on Facebook, so the choice of language in different posts and comments are discussed below in detail. English language dominated the posts and comments of Khovar native speakers. The posts in English are 210, which is very high in term of numbers, the posts in Khovar language are 36, then there are posts in Urdu language which are forty nine in number and five posts are in other different languages; these languages are mainly spoken in the province of Gilgit Baltistan which include Shina, Balti, Domaki etc. The preference of the language by the speakers are depicted through the following table

Table 1. Language Choice of Participants

S. No.	Languages	English	Urdu	Khovar	Others
1	Total number of posts (300)	210	49	36	5

Choice of English Language

The findings of the current study reinforce the results of [Sadiq \(2015\)](#) that English actually has become first choice for interaction on social media with other people. The screenings of the posts and comments show that Khovar native speakers prefer English as a source of interaction on social media.

For example, in the following posts, the language being used by the participants is English. Similarly, in other posts, the choice of language is solely English.



I miss you guys 😊

All the posts by participants which are used to wish somebody on his success, all the birthday messages and also condolences are expressed in English language. Like the posts which are mentioned below:

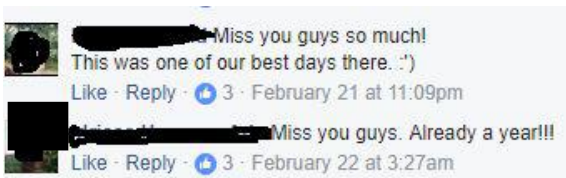




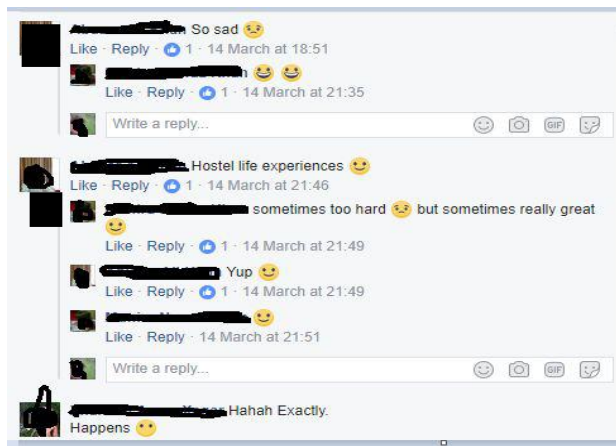
Similarly for wishing someone on birthday, the participants choose English language.

Language Choice on Comments of English Posts

The current study also analyzes comments on the Facebook posts on walls of Khowar speakers. There is handful of research done on the comments of Khowar speakers on Facebook posts. According to Reich (2013) who studied the posts on news articles on Facebook, the comments on the Facebook are important as they give new face to the journalism. Reich emphasized the relevance of the comments in journalism because of the participation of the masses or audience in the interaction. The screening of the comments on the posts shows that the participants choose English as a medium to comment. It is prevalent in the comments section and it is always preferred by the speakers to comment on any kind of post in English.



Another post show similar condition where English is being used by the participants to comment on the posts



This is the case with all the English posts whether that post is based on any national or international news, or to congratulate anyone and also the comment section of the posts about condolences, the language choice for comment is solely English.

Khowar Language

The native speakers of Khowar on Facebook choose Khowar language for few posts. During the observation, it became evident that the participants prefer Khowar language only in specific situations. The choice of Khowar

is evident in the posts of the speakers when a person posts something that is related to specific person or any memory which is particularly concerned with one person in the friend list of the participant. The example below is witness to the idea that participant use Khowar for particular purpose



Translation: just Shut Up

As it is evident through the posts that Khowar is chosen when a specific memory is shared by the participant, which refers to one individual in the friend list. This is depicted through the post which is mentioned below:



Translation: see it has been five years.

Comments on Khowar Posts

The comments on Khowar posts are mostly in Khowar language. The participants choose Khowar most of the times to comment on the Khowar posts. Like the example below:



Translation: so beautiful

I don't remember the time. Brother what was the time?

So beautiful

Really enjoyed

But the choice of language on Khowar posts is not solely in Khowar language. Unlike comments on English language which are entirely in English language, the participants sometimes choose English for comments on Khowar posts as well. Though most of the conversation among the speakers happen to be in Khowar, but the

speakers don't always choose to comment in Khowar language. Like the comments on below Khowar post, participants actually choose English as well for comments



Urdu Language

Urdu is the second best choice for interaction and communication by the speakers on Facebook. It could be seen that through the table 1.1 that the posts in Urdu are more in number than Khowar. The numbers of posts in Urdu are forty nine as compared to Khowar posts which are thirty six. So it is clear that Urdu is being used by the speakers more than Khowar language. This shows that Khowar is not the priority of the speakers on social media as the choice of language by the speakers in most of the posts is Urdu or English. Like the below post shows the choice of Urdu language

baji 😊 :D ajj ka din mujh jaisy gareeb kailiy ahn 😊 :p 😊 ;)

Similarly the following posts and comments reveal that Urdu language is being used by the speakers for funny or humorous comments.



The important thing about these posts are that the Urdu is selected for those posts which are informal in nature, for example, a joke or any witty comment on any on one in frierd list. Otherwise, English language is used for the posts and comments.

Similarities and Differences in the Linguistic Practice of Khowar Male and Female Speakers

Gender differences were also explored in this study for which the online activities of the male and female Khowar speakers on Facebook were analyzed. Through posts and comments, the language of the speakers is

observed which shows that there is no difference between the linguistic practices of Khowar speakers in terms of choice and preference of language. Both of the genders choose English for their conversation and interaction on Facebook. Most of the posts, comments and interaction which take place among the speakers are in English regardless of gender. The choice of language is the same among both the genders as both of them choose to post and comment in English language.

There is only one case in which the choice of language differs among both the genders that are when the participants interact with close family and best friends. Male participants choose Khowar to interact with close friend and family frequently. It could be seen in the posts and especially the conversation in comments section which revealed that the male speakers use Khowar to comment on posts while English or Urdu are preferred less. The posts by males below actually prove the point that males prefer Khowar over English of interaction with friends.



Translation: it's been five years



Translation: life is too short

However, females choose English or Urdu in order to communicate with close relations like family as well. There isn't a single post on the walls of female participants in Khowar language as the posts are mostly in English. But there are few posts in Urdu language which shows that females are inclined to use the language which is most prestigious among the masses. So, the difference occurs only in linguistic practices of the male and female speaker while they are communicating with close friends; otherwise, both the genders choose English for communication. The screening of the posts revealed that Khowar is preferred in very few posts and comments by both genders of Khowar speakers. Both males and females like to use English which is a prestigious and standard language rather than Khowar.

Conclusion

The study of the linguistic practices of female and male Khowar speakers revealed that the English language has a dominated their online activities as the speakers mostly use English language for interaction on Facebook. The results reveal that as the native speakers have opportunity to interact and communicate with each other on Facebook but they don't choose Khowar for interaction. Most of the communication between the speakers happen to be in English and Urdu rather than Khowar so it has been neglected by the people on social media. The use of Khowar language is limited to only few posts in which participants address a particular friend, otherwise, the communication among participants takes place in English. The gender similarities and differences was also the focus of the study which depicted that both males and females use English language for posts and comments. Thus, English dominates the linguistic practices of Khowar speakers on Facebook.

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