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Investigating Dissimilarities in the Morphosyntax of Urdu, Punjabi and English Languages

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Abstract

Pakistan has a rich linguistic diversity with several regional languages. However, with the increasing influence of globalization, people are shifting towards English because of its attribution to social, educational and professional mobility in Pakistan. This language shift comes with various challenges that reflect the complex correlation between languages and cultures. Hockett (1958) connects the language learning process with cultural transmission which means a native knowledge once acquired influences second language acquisition because the mother tongue knowledge provides a solid formation of cognitive abilities and thinking patterns of an individual which interferes the second language learning. Therefore, this study examines the morphological and syntactic dissimilarities between the native (Punjabi, Urdu) and foreign (English) languages. Additionally, it addresses the interferences between the languages that lead to errors in the target language. For this purpose, a morphosyntax of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages is examined. The findings reveal the significant differences in the morphological and syntactic structures of these three languages and learners tend to apply native rules and structures to the target language that leads to errors. Thus, this study is significant in addressing language barriers aiming to suggest pedagogical strategies to address the linguistic difficulties of English language learners in a multilingual society.

Keyword: English language, linguistic diversity, morphosyntax, Punjabi, Urdu

Introduction

Pakistan is blessed with linguistic diversity with several regional languages. However, people are shifting towards English in pursuit of better educational and financial opportunities. As, Garcia (2017) penned that the opportunities regarding literacy level are immense for people having a profound connection with English language proficiency. Therefore, people in Pakistan are opting for



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English because English language proficiency is crucial in facilitating global collaboration and access to knowledge. However, this shift has its own challenges that reflect the intricate relation between languages and cultures. Various studies demonstrated that students with their already adopted native languages encounter challenges while learning English as a target language. As, from the early childhood stage, they focus on language imitation rather than structural comprehension of a language. Consequently, this led to a situation where students are reluctant to write anything creatively. Hockett (1958) connected the process of language learning with cultural transmission and emphasized that the acquired native knowledge influences the second language learning and a learner's despite of their different backgrounds face difficulties with the interference of mother tongue and commit errors in target language. Hamza et al. (2017) declared that errors are primarily caused by the influence of mother tongue. Thus, it has long been known that a person's mother tongue and culture have a profound impact on learning a target language and in the transmission of linguistic features between a learner's native language and the target language. Therefore, a comparative study is required to find out the differences in the morphosyntax of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages to examine the linguistic differences and the areas of interferences that leads to error in learning the foreign language.

Literature Review

Pakistan's linguistics diversity is a valuable asset that adds depth and richness to the country's linguistic and cultural fabric. According to Census (2001), there are five major indigenous languages in the country with 44.15% Punjabi speakers, followed by Pashto 15.42%, Sindhi with 14.10%, Saraiki 10.53%, Urdu 7.57%, and 4.66% speakers from other local languages. Haider et al. (2021) opined that due to globalization and geographical advancement many minority languages are driven to the periphery. Mansoor (2004) claimed that in Pakistani linguistic scenario two languages including English and Urdu are believed to be prestigious and the other regional languages are being marginalized and restricted to specific domains of use. Because the dominant languages are prioritized in almost every domain, the regional language legacy is shattering. Garcia (2011) penned that the opportunities regarding literacy level are immense for people having a profound connection with Urdu or English language proficiency. Therefore, people are shifting towards English for its attribution with social, cultural and economic opportunities. However, this shift comes with its own challenges, as many researchers concluded that non-native speakers face various challenges while learning a foreign language. Kambal (1980) discovered tenses, verb formation and prepositions being the biggest hurdles for non-native students of Khartoum University Sudan. In another study, Kharma (1983) revealed structural errors due to incorrect usage of tenses in the writing of Kuwaiti high school students. Lin (2002) examined twenty-six essays by Taiwanese EFL students and identified four problematic areas including poor sentence construction, incorrect verb forms, sentence fragments and incorrect use of vocabulary. Rababah (2003) also found frequent errors in the English writing of Jordanian students. Nurruzaman et al. (2018) identified grammatical, lexical and semantic errors made by Saudi Arabian students. Similarly, various studies demonstrated that as



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Pakistan is a multilingual landscape with scores of languages, students with their already adopted native tongues encounter difficulties in learning English as a foreign language. Moreover, from the early childhood stage, they focus on language imitation rather than understanding. Consequently, this led to a situation where students are hesitant to engage in creative writing. Jamil et al. (2016) carried out error analysis research on composition writing at postgraduate level in KPK. The results revealed that almost seventy three percent errors were related to tenses and 63.33% students committed spelling mistakes. While there are many researches that identified the errors committed by English language learners there are some related comparative researches on the structural differences between English and other native languages that give a valuable insight into the ways native L1 differs from the foreign language. Alduais (2012) compared English with Arabic using contrastive Lado Analysis to give an insight into the structural challenges faced by learners. He revealed that Arabic languages have a free word order and English has a fixed word order which present challenges for language learners. Chohan and Garcia (2019) conducted a phonemic comparison of Punjabi and English by using levenshtein algorithm to examine the phonemic di(similarities) between English and Punjabi languages. Most of the studies examined Arabic and Chinese languages leaving a gap regarding languages like Urdu and Punjabi. Moreover, some studies have explored these languages separately, a comparative analysis on Urdu, Punjabi and English is limited. Therefore, this research is significant in its nature to analyze the morphological and syntactic structure of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages to examine the morphosyntax difference within the morphological and syntactic framework of generative grammar proposed by Noam Chomsky for analyzing the language structure. He suggested different parameters that determine how different languages are structured in terms of sentence structure or word order. Additionally, it also focuses on the morphosyntax of the language including inflectional forms and verb agreement.

Research Problem

This research aims to examine the morphological and syntactic structure of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages. Many researchers concluded that the native knowledge influences the learning process of the second language. It happens because our native language forms the basis of our linguistic knowledge and patterns of thinking. So, as we learn a new language, we tend to apply our native rules and structures to the new language that leads to errors. Therefore, this study aims to find out the differences in the construction of selected languages to examine the morphosyntax of these languages and the areas of language interferences.

Significance of the Study

This study is significant in identifying the morphological and syntactic differences in the selected languages as it provides a rich understanding of language functionality within different cultural and linguistic contexts. Additionally, this comparative study gives a valuable insight into the ways in which languages are structured, their differences and the causes that lead to errors along with the cultural influences in language use. Moreover, this



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morphosyntactic examination of languages will advance our understanding of how languages influence each other in multilingual context. In addition, it can contribute in the development of language assessment tools by highlighting the areas of language interference.

Research Objectives

1. To find out the differences in the morphosyntax of Punjabi, Urdu and English languages.
2. To suggest pedagogical strategies for addressing the linguistic needs of Punjabi, Urdu-English language learners.

Research Questions

1. What are the differences in the morphosyntax of Punjabi, Urdu and English languages?
2. What recommendations can be proposed to address the linguistic needs of Punjabi, Urdu-English language learners.

Methods and Materials

Considering the objectives, this study adopts a comparative research design to examine the differences in the morphological and syntactic construction of Urdu, Punjabi and English languages to highlight the areas of language interference that leads to error. Data were collected from standard sources of selected languages by utilizing dictionaries and textbooks and the morphosyntax was examined in the collected data. Moreover, the differences in selected languages were compared to identify the linguistic patterns.

Data Analysis

The collected data is analyzed to examine the morphosyntax of selected languages.

Noun Inflection and Gender

The noun pluralization refers to the grammatical changes that a noun undergoes. Additionally, the pluralization of nouns in Punjabi, Urdu and English languages take different endings. As in English the noun takes its pluralization by adding 's' or 'es' with the noun. However, in Urdu and Punjabi the pluralization is more complex that takes the masculine and feminine form. In English the noun 'book' is pluralized with the addition of 's', in Urdu 'کتاب' is pluralized with the addition of 'یں', whereas in Punjabi 'کتاب' is pluralized with 'اں'. Thus, the morphology of these languages is different in the ways the noun ends and the plurality is marked.

Punjabi	Urdu	English
کتاب کتاباں	کتاب کتابیں	Book Books
کڑی کڑیاں	لڑکی لڑکیاں	Girl Girls



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Both Punjabi and Urdu languages have grammatical genders that affect verb, adjectives and pronoun agreement. These gender categories are divided into masculine and feminine. Masculine nouns end on 'ا' (aa), and feminine nouns end on 'ی' (ai), as the noun boy and girl takes these forms in Urdu and Punjabi, لڑکا (larkaa), لڑکی (larkii), کڑی (girl), منڈا (boy). In English language we have neutral-gender forms. Moreover, the adjectives in both Punjabi and Urdu are gendered and changes according to the given noun. In Urdu the adjective 'good' changes based on the gender of the noun it modifies. When referring to a girl, it takes the feminine form اچھی "Achii" while for a boy, it takes the masculine form اچھا "Acha". In contrast, in English adjectives are gender neutral and do not change based on the given gender. For example 'good girl' and 'good boy' take the same form of adjective regardless of gender. Furthermore, in Urdu and Punjabi we have language interferences with English language where we say 'uska shohar', with 'uska' being masculine and used according to the noun 'shohar'. However, in English we use 'her husband', where the pronoun 'her' is used which contrasts with the usage in Urdu and Punjabi 'شوہر اوپدا'. These linguistic differences often lead to errors when learners apply their native rules to the target language.

Punjabi	Urdu	English
منڈا کڑی	لڑکا لڑکی	Boy Girl
چنگی کڑی چنگا منڈا	لڑکی اچھی لڑکا اچھا	Good girl Good Boy
شوہر اوپدا ووہٹی اوپدی	شوہر اسکا بیوی اسکی	Her husband His wife

Pronoun and Verb

The use of pronoun varies in Urdu, Punjabi and English languages. The pronouns in English are simple with no distinction of formality and informality. Whereas both Urdu and Punjabi reflect pronoun variation based on formality and informality in gender. In English we use "you" in both formal and informal conditions. In contrast, in Urdu we have formal pronoun 'Aap' and informal pronoun 'Tum'. Similarly, in Punjabi we have formal pronoun 'تو سی' and informal pronoun 'تو'. Moreover, the use of pronoun also differs in case of gender. For example, in English we use 'his' for both 'book and pen', whereas in Urdu and Punjabi different pronouns are used as follows, (his pen) 'کتاب اسکی', (her book) 'کتاب اوپدا', 'کتاب اوپدی', 'قلم اسکا'. In this case a feminine pronoun is used for book and a masculine pronoun is used for pen. Thus, Urdu and Punjabi have gender specific pronouns.

Punjabi	Urdu	English
تو سی تو	آپ (Aap) تو (Tum)	You (Formal/Informal)
اے ک کتاب اوپدی ای ہے	ہے ک کتاب اسکی یہ	This is his book
اے قلم اوپدا ای ہے	ہے قلم اسکا یہ	This is his pen



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Verbs are the vital part of any language that conveys the state of action and they vary across different languages. In English the verbs are not based on formality or gender and in Urdu and Punjabi the verbs have a more complex system and are based on person, gender and formality as shown in the case 'جاتا' (masculine) 'جاتی ہوں' (feminine). These verbs are gender-based and undergo changes depending on the femininity and masculinity of the subject. Similarly, Punjabi language conjugate verbs according to gender, number and formality 'جاڈا', 'جاڈی'. On contrary, verbs in English do not change based on gender, number and formality, as 'I go' can be used for both male and female with the exception of the third-person singular as 'he goes/she goes'.

Punjabi	Urdu	English
جاڈا مہیں	میں جاتا ہوں	I go
جاڈی مہیں	میں جاتی ہوں	I go, She goes/ He goes
اے رڈی پڑھک کتاب کڑی	ہے رڈی پڑھکتا لڑکی	The girl is reading the book
منڈا اے ریڈا پڑھک کتاب	لڑکا کتاب پڑھ رہا ہے	The boy is reading a book

Preposition and Sentence Structure

In English, pre-positions appear before the noun as "on" before the noun 'book'. Whereas, postposition appear after the noun in both Urdu and Punjabi as 'کتاب پر' and in the given sentence 'کی' is used after noun 'پارک'. Moreover, the selected languages differ in term of their syntactic structure. The English languages follow S-V-O structure in which verb is placed before the object. As in the sentence 'she went towards the park', the verb 'went' is followed by the object 'park'. In contrast, Urdu and Punjabi languages follow S-O-V structure 'وہ پارک کی طرف گئی'

Punjabi	Urdu	English
تے ک کتاب	کتاب پر	On book
گئی چلی ول پارک اوہ	وہ پارک کی طرف گئی	She went towards the park.
S O V اے جاڈی سکول او	S O V ہے جاتی سکول وہ	S V O She goes to school

Findings and Conclusion

This comparative study provides a valuable insight into the ways in which the selected languages are structured and their differences. The morphological and syntactic structure in Punjabi, Urdu and English languages differ in terms of gender, verb agreement, noun inflections, use of prepositions and sentence structure. These language differences and interferences create challenges for Urdu, Punjabi- English language learners and they commit errors. As, English language learners in Pakistan come from a diverse background and their mother tongue and English language varies in nature, semantic, morphological and syntactic patterns that influences their English language learning. Mostly, the learners apply native rules and structures to the target language which lead to errors. One of the major linguistic differences is the syntactic structure of the native and foreign language that led to error in constructing the sentences when



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learners apply the native S-O-V rules to the target (English) S-V-O language structure. Additionally, in Urdu and Punjabi verb changes according to gender whereas in English it remains unaffected by gender except the third person singular that takes 's' form. Moreover, in Urdu and Punjabi languages possessive pronouns involves gender agreement that can cause error for native Urdu and Punjabi speakers while learning English. For example, 'uska shohar' (his husband), 'uski bivi' (her wife). Here, 'uska' is used for masculine noun and 'uski' is used for feminine noun which is opposite to the rules applied in English where the possessive pronoun must be according to the gender of the possessor. When from the early childhood learners learn the masculine and feminine native language rules, these rules are so ingrained in their daily use that they unconsciously apply them to the foreign language. Furthermore, the use of prepositions also differs in native Urdu and Punjabi languages. Due to this language interference, the lexical and syntactic choices take different forms creating challenges for English learners and affecting their written and spoken English. By identifying the causes of mother tongue infused errors, this study could promote better cross-cultural understanding and collaboration in a globalized world and learners will become more proficient in English without losing their cultural and linguistic identity. Moreover, we should create an inclusive and effective learning opportunities for English language learners by making them aware of the specific differences between their native and English language. Here, English language teachers can help students identifying the linguistic differences including gender-verb agreement, possessive pronouns, noun inflections and syntactic word order. Similarly, constructive feedback will help learners in understanding the areas of language interferences. Additionally, language should be taught in context rather than in isolation. Furthermore, there should be a specific focus to educate and train Pakistani English language teachers, keeping in mind the diverse challenges arising due to the influence of different mother tongues.

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