

Urdu as Medium of Instruction in Professional Institutions

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Some may go into shock seeing this title of our editorial. What a silly idea, what a stupid thought, how can we live in "stone age." (If there was indeed such an age.) I remember during my medical college days at Dow Medical College, in one departmental test (stage) I described the boundaries of femoral triangle in Urdu; that sent my demonstrator teacher into disbelief; what are you saying. I was amazed as I was describing the boundaries accurately, but he couldn't digest it because it was in Urdu. Later after many years I was invited to give a talk on post-splenectomy septicemia based on my original research on Sprague Dawley rats, as I began in Urdu, one well-wisher doctor came on the stage and whispered in my ears; "Please don't do, what people will think, give lecture in English." Unfortunately, I had to comply with his absurd idea.

While some people may be stunned here with the idea of imparting medical education in Urdu, others in different countries would be equally appalled to know that medical education in Pakistani medical colleges is imparted in a language other than national language; and these countries not only include advanced countries like USA, UK, France, Germany, Japan but also others not so advanced countries like Turkey, Iran, Syria and Vietnam.¹

The real problem is not the language per se but the "inferiority complex" which is so deeply etched in our DNA. This is one of the prices you pay for the long period of slavery. The slavery gets embedded in the DNAs of the people and after apparently departure of the slave masters, some in the society put their feet in colonial masters' shoes; they even behave worse than the formal masters. We then see idiotic things in the society e.g. court proceedings in English while poor victim may not understand a single word uttered by his or his opponent's lawyer. Similarly, in teaching hospitals patients' cases are presented in English while the poor patient lying in the bed may not understand a word of it although something very wrong may have

been attributed to him. He simply can't interfere and rectify the mistake of the presenter.

Please let me make it clear through historical perspective how two classes of languages hamper development of society and scientific progress. Let's assume that there were two different classes in England and America in terms of languages; one official language i.e. English and then some other public language. In that case there would have been a barrier thwarting input of intellect and intelligence of the people who weren't able to communicate in English. Then the world would have deprived of "formally uneducated"? Then mere language barrier would have kept us away from Edison and Michael Faraday's historic contributions of enormous benefit to the public. Faraday would have not dared to attend a Professor's talk and ask him a silly question which resulted in his invention of motors; now fundamental part of so many common machines. Edison would have spent all his life selling newspapers in the trains and the world would have been without electricity light bulbs.

Some may argue that it's not possible to teach medicine and engineering in Urdu language or Urdu does not have good enough vocabulary to deal with scientific terms and descriptions. First by its nature Urdu language has immense capacity of absorbing new words from all languages may that be English, Turkish, Arabic, French, Hindi, Spanish etc. as its very birth occurred in army comprised of people speaking different languages. Urdu was the official language of Osmania University, Hyderabad Deccan where Engineering and Medicine were taught in Urdu back in 1930s. I had the honor of being taught by a teacher at DJ Science College Karachi who had done his MBBS in Urdu language from Osmania University in Hyderabad Deccan.² In Azad Kashmir official language is Urdu where all correspondence is carried out in Urdu. And believe it or not that correspondence is much more beautiful than English.

Language is not simple means of communication; it carries with it cultural & social values & colors, history, norms, expressions; providing strong scaffolds for a sound society. At times enemy attacks your cultural roots through demeaning our mother tongue and national language. In order to create inferiority complexes, they try keep our new generations in dark from great work of our ancestors to make us to believe that we belonged to a backward "race" or community. Despite the fact that Muslims founded almost all modern sciences when the West was in Dark Ages, the names of the great Scientists like Ibn-e Sina (ابن سينا) and Al-Zahrawi (الزهراوي) were changed to Avicenna and Abulcasis respectively.³ Similarly, when Indian forces forcefully annexed most developed princely independent state of Hyderabad Deccan, they not only killed several hundred thousand Muslims, they also burnt over 80,000 precious books in Urdu.^{2,4}

Teaching and learning in mother tongue and national language make one understand and comprehend much better.⁵ Who cares if a driver does not know English if he is honest, possessing excellent driving skills and good behavior. Many excellent students struggle with English in understanding and in expressing. These hurdles can be overcome once we decide to teach them in Urdu. Our medium of instructions and examination can be transformed into Urdu easily. Some of our Cricket players are excellent while they know little English and same is true for players of other countries too. However, I must make it clear that while emphasizing teaching in mother tongue and national language we are not undermining English as a second language. It's good to learn English as it is spoken in several countries. Knowing other languages have considerable benefits for example learning Arabic is immensely beneficial in understanding Quran which also makes Salah alive and learning English helps in acquiring modern scientific knowledge. If someone intends to go to an English-speaking country, naturally English will be quite useful and same can be said about French for France and German for Germany etc.

If we intend to make Urdu as our instrument of teaching and learning, we must publish and/or translate books in Urdu swiftly. I had a Vietnamese colleague in USA who told me that every new medical book is instantaneously translated in Vietnamese's language by University students. Just one look at Readers' Digest will tell you that in how many languages it is published. Unfortunately, despite the explicit orders of Supreme Court of Pakistan, Urdu has not been officially adopted as office language in Pakistan's institutions except in Azad Kashmir.⁶

Languages are great signs of Allah all Mighty; like colors of mountains and man, animal and flowers. As language is boundless communication skill and therefore; common sense is to use the tool which does the job most efficiently and effectively. Poetry is beauty of language. If you translate Iqbal or Ghalib's poetry in English, you will see that it loses its charm, luster and effect. As a Pathologist I can assure that writing histopathology and cytopathology reports in Urdu will be much more fun and understandable for both the doctor and the patients.

It's high time to delete the slavery codons from our DNAs and shun our inferiority complexes to march on the road of progress. We must be proud in teaching and learning in Urdu. It has been proven beyond doubt that children learn much better in their mother tongues.⁷

References

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