

**Research Article**

## **From Excluded to Exclusive**

**Praveen Singh\***

Research Scholar, Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, IIT-Madras,  
Chennai, Tamil Nadu, India

Email: simpleton80.praveen@gmail.com

### **ABSTRACT**

Language, we might safely say is the oldest construct of mankind and being the oldest construct it also remains the surest way to know someone or even know a group/society. It is indeed the case that there are other aspects of our lives as human beings that reveal our identities: aspects such as religion, clothing, rituals/festivals, etc. to name a few. Nonetheless, it is felt that none of these aforementioned aspects is as revealing of us as is language. This paper not only wishes to bring to light the issues of identity associated with a group of people using a certain language/dialect and living in Old Lucknow (esp. areas Raja Bazar, Asharfabaad and Chowk) but also highlights the issue of perceived exclusion and neglect by them because they feel that the language/dialect they speak isn't getting enough recognition. Despite the perceived distance, what has come to be neglected is slowly beginning to negotiate the status of being exclusive once again.

**Keywords:** Dialect, Excluded, Exclusive, Language, Rituals

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The connection between language and identity has been studied by a great many scholars in the past, esp. in the past five decades and there can hardly be an

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argument on the issue of language being essential to the identification of an individual or entire community (cf. Joseph, 2004; Edwards, 2009; Khubchandani, 1991 and 1997 among others). Language, we might safely say is the oldest construct of mankind and being the oldest construct it also remains the surest way to know someone or even know a group/society. It is indeed the case that there are other aspects of our lives as human beings that reveal our identities: aspects such as religion, clothing, rituals/festivals, etc., to name a few. Nonetheless, it is felt that none of these aforementioned aspects is as revealing of us as is language. To sum up, language is constitutive of us as human beings.

History is replete with incidents when an individual or an entire group of people has tried to influence the language of those it wanted to mould. In this connection one may mention the works of thinkers such as Robert Phillipson (1992) and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) which showed that languages have sometimes been used to acquire a certain population. And Robins' *The Byzantine Grammarians: Their Place in History* (1993) is and mould them to think in ways that ensure the longevity of those ruling. A revealing description of how language teaching and language learning was a cause for concern to even those whose major interest lay in the expansion of their empires at minimal costs. Homogenization of different groups was sought by forcing a language or another down the captives' throats. Perhaps, the powers that be have always known that "the mere fact of a common speech serves as a peculiarly potent symbol of the social solidarity of those who speak the language", as Sapir said it (Mandelbaum, 1985: 15). We are not going to argue that it is always the people in power that have their ways with those who find themselves on the lower rungs of social hierarchy. There is some evidence that the ones who are not in power find ways to negotiate their space even without visible revolutions. The resistance offered to forces of homogenization is often so subtle that it becomes extremely difficult to give an account of it. However, this must not be seen as an excuse to stay away from such demanding studies and we are hopeful to give a detailed account of such negotiations in the future.

It is therefore not surprising that every time an individual or a group feels that their languages are not getting a fair deal, they tend to see this as an attempt at stiffling their voices and an attempt at jeopardizing their whole existence. The resistance then offered by such individuals/groups is a way to address the perceived injustice meted out to them.

This paper not only wishes to bring to light the issues of identity associated with a group of people using a certain language/dialect/'microlect' and living in Old Lucknow (esp. areas Raja Bazar, Asharfabaad and Chowk) but also highlight the issue of perceived exclusion and neglect by them because they feel that the language/dialect they speak isn't getting enough recognition. There is however another more important point that we want to make through this paper and that is of how

the language/dialect in question here has become a tool for the same people to assert uniqueness and superiority consciously and how the language/dialect in question helps the learners among the younger generation cope better when it comes to education (both primary and higher levels) when the medium of instruction is English, a language which is seen by many as a window to a superior and prosperous social existence.

Kelkar (1968: 5) has described Lucknow as an “adherent area” but also claimed that for Hindi-Urdu (or Hirdu, a term coined by Kelkar 1968 for Hindi-Urdu) ‘both “native” and “adherent” speakers have to be counted as equally “good informants”’. In the present paper we shall keep referring to a variety of Hirdu (=Hindi-Urdu or HU) closer to either the H variety or the U variety (for details kindly refer to Kelkar 1968). Shapiro (2006) says that “[t]he emergence of MSH [Modern Standard Hindi] cannot be fully understood except in reference to a prior forging of a literary Urdu, which took place in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, first in the Islamic courts of South India, most particularly in the courts of Golconda and Bijapur, but later in such northern centres as Aurangabad, Lucknow and Delhi.”

To repeat partially, we discuss in this paper the case of Urdu or to be more precise the case of Hirdu which is closer to the U variety and used by those living in Old Lucknow<sup>1</sup>. We intend to call it Urdu of Old Lucknow (LU or Lucknawi Urdu) as the speakers in these parts, esp. if they are Muslims, generally like to see themselves as speakers of Urdu and not as speakers of Hindi or Hirdu (latter term obviously not known to the majority). There are clear cases that the ‘microlect’ (in the sense of Kelkar, 1968: 17) these speakers use is seen as having a shared existence with the Perso-Arabic script which is written from right to left. The school going younger generation seems not much concerned about the label that is given to the variety they speak and pick a label between Hindi or Urdu only when probed repetitively and religion seems to be a big factor in the choice of the label they settle for.

It is a case of lament that whereas the best of the writers/thinkers who wrote in Hindi or Urdu in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and during the first half of 20<sup>th</sup> century had knowledge of and wrote both in the Devanaagari script and also in the Perso-Arabic script (the latter largely being the preferred script in those times), the younger generation today knows and chooses to read and write only in one of these two scripts: (deva)naagari has become synonymous with Hindi and Perso-Arabic script with Urdu.

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<sup>1</sup>The reason for choosing the Urdu of Old Lucknow is that the author grew up in Lucknow and had access to the speakers in the different areas of Lucknow. He went for some time to a madrasa to learn Urdu which essentially began with the exercise in learning the Perso-Arabic script and later led to the learning of several words of Persian-Arabic origin from the booklets.

### Issue of Identity and Relative Exclusion

When one looks at the census data for the total number of speakers of Hindi one finds a considerable increase in the number of people claiming to be speakers of Hindi. There were about 330 million people claiming Hindi as their mother tongue in 1991. The number shot up to about 440 million by the year 2001. One can therefore see a sharp increase in the total number of Hindi speakers in India. Urdu on the other hand had only about 43 million speakers in 1991 and about 51 million speakers by the year 2001<sup>2</sup>. There is a definite increase in the overall number of Urdu speakers between the years 1991 and 2001 but not as good as expected. Now it may be said that the estimates do not reveal a correct picture of facts as they stand and we shall not try to contest that claim, if made. We have other facts we would like to draw the reader's attention to. The reader may find valuable data on the number of Urdu speakers in Cardona and Jain (2003) and the dedicated chapters there.

It is generally the case that Urdu is looked at as the language of those who follow Islam. There is indeed some discrimination that creeps in the moment a nation or society starts equating a language with a particular religion and especially if the religion is one of the minorities. Urdu has certainly been at the receiving end because of different attempts at stereo-typing (cf. Abdullah, 2002; Naim 1994). Farouqui (1994: 782) too writes that Urdu has been "so neglected in India that it has become the language of only the Muslims" and that "Urdu education has become synonymous with Muslim education". Abdullah (2002: 2288) mentions Salman Khurshid who asserts that "...despite constitutional affirmation of the status of Urdu as a national language, efforts have been made in the past to wipe it out from the social sphere by the activists with different faces". He further points towards Khurshid's claim that there has been a "discriminatory treatment of Urdu by the UP government which has not made provision for Urdu even as an elective subject but offers Sanskrit as one of the *modern* Indian language" (Abdullah, 2002: 2288, italics in the original).

Farouqui (1994) mentions several reasons for the decline of Urdu in India after having studied them at some length. Similarly, Pai (2002) offers a few reasons, tracing them back to colonial India and also in the post-independent India, for the decline of Urdu in Uttar Pradesh. We needn't repeat all of them here. What may be interesting to note is that even when Pai (2002) citing Russell (1999: 44) tells us that Urdu has been relegated to the status of a language spoken only "at home", she would like us to believe that instruction in Urdu has grown in popularity in the recent past. It may in fact be true that people are taking a liking for the study of Urdu because the Urdu that is taught in the madrasas, "the only sources of education

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<sup>2</sup>The data for both Hindi and Urdu was taken from the Census data 1991 and 2001 respectively.

in Urdu” is not the same as the Urdu spoken by people (Pai, 2002: 2707) and one of the reasons may also be that Urdu is as much used as is Hindi in the Indian film Industry (Pai, 2002). Urdu is also seen as a language with a rich heritage and is associated with ‘tehzeeb’ (=refinement/elegance). And the ‘microlect’ we are talking about, i.e. U variety of Hindi-Urdu that we have chosen to call LU is certainly seen as one which is associated with rich heritage and ‘tehzeeb’.

Schmidt (2003: 290) believes that the period between 1740 and 1780 which was otherwise a golden period for the Delhi School of Urdu poetry was “also a period of rapid disintegration of the Mughal Empire”. Repeated attacks on Delhi meant that “most of the Urdu poets moved eastwards, particularly to Lucknow” which led to a Lucknow School of Urdu by the nineteenth century and came to be regarded as Standard Urdu, bereft of the influences from its counterpart in Delhi but with an “extreme Persianization” (Schmidt. 2003: 290).

It is the sense of richness and refinement that gives the speakers of U variety of Hirdu in Old Lucknow, i.e. speakers of LU, a sense of superiority. Be it the highly educated or not so educated, a speaker of LU sees himself/herself as being in possession of something special which makes him/her superior to those around. LU generally has more loanwords from Persian and Arabic and less of Sanskrit loans or Sanskritized words. It is possible for the shop-owners in areas such as Chowk (of Old Lucknow) to use an HU variety while talking to their employees or labourers that work in the markets and who generally come from one of the neighbouring areas of Lucknow where it is largely Awadhi or Old Baiswari or some other regional dialect that is spoken. It is interesting to note that even those shopkeepers who were not raised in Old Lucknow try to speak in the same style, use the same register as is used by those who grew up speaking LU. They do not always succeed but the attempt on their part can well be seen when they make conscious use of the honorific “aap” (=you) in their speech to give respect to others while talking. The choice of certain lexical items in the speech of the residents of Old Lucknow betrays their identity. And again what stands out is the sounds that reveal an individual’s upbringing.

It is only a matter of observation when the pronunciation and the choice of words and idioms give away the true identity of the speaker. And it is not only the literate that can make out, even those who cannot boast of much literacy are generally found picking such cues to ascertain the distance between themselves and the speaker. The differences thus arrived at have led to clear articulation of the distance between the users of LU and the non-users.

There are speakers in other areas of Lucknow which may be safely identified as Punjabi speakers of Hirdu or as Bengali speakers of Hirdu. What gives them away is their pronunciation and again the lexical choice largely but we shall not go into

the details about the distinctions in this paper. These and others who try to earn themselves space in the Old Lucknow area have to adapt to the living styles and the speaking styles of the LU speakers of Old Lucknow.

### Some formal issues in LU

A lot of what would be said about LU is true for U variety of HU for we are essentially speaking about the Urdu spoken in Old Lucknow. The change of labels only facilitates the locating of the ‘microlect’ in question.

A certain difference is seen among the older speakers of LU who still like to retain the older verb-endings “-iye” with the honorific “aap” and the younger speakers of LU who seem to have found yet another way of respecting and at the same time being less formal. These younger speakers may be seen using “aap” with the “-o” endings in verbs<sup>3</sup>. There is a conscious attempt on the part of the elderly to stick to the more formal “-iye” and also expecting the younger speakers to maintain the formal. In the case of any deviation on the part of the speaker, they are quick to correct him/her and even if they do not correct the speaker, one feels that a certain note is made of such deviations. The displeasure may be shown even by deliberate repetition of the sentence with the more formal “-iye”. This is still a common observation when the use of “ap-o” is noted as early as in Kellogg (1876) as mentioned by Jain (2003). For further details on the second person pronominals the reader is requested to follow Jain (2003) and the references there in. A couple of examples may not be out of place here:

- 1) aap ghar jaa-iye  
you-2P.Hon. home go-2P.Hon.  
‘You can go home.’
- 2) aap ghar jaa-o  
you-2P.Hon. home go- 2P. Non-Hon.

Although a lot seems to have undergone a change but the use of “tu” (=you) is still not a preferred usage except among the younger users who are largely influenced by the serials and movies where a particular style is favoured. However, it must be noted that even the younger ones are careful about the choice of second person pronominals when talking to people outside their peer group.

Hirdu as is the case has borrowed extensively from several languages including classical Sanskrit, classical Persian, Arabic and English which seem to be the major sources for borrowings in Hindi-Urdu (Kelkar, 1968: 11). Therefore, LU of

<sup>3</sup>The author observes that the “aap” followed by “-o” verb-ending is a more regular feature among the Punjabi speakers of Hirdu living in Lucknow. (Panjabis are generally found living in Alam Bagh, Chandan Nagar and Krishna Nagar areas of Lucknow).

the older speakers is found to be full of borrowings. A greater influence of English can be easily seen in the LU of younger speakers, more so among those who go to reasonably better schools. Kelkar (1968: 6) mentions that the “casual middlebrow” style of Hirdu is most receptive to borrowings from English and we do know that the younger generations have largely been associated with the use of casual styles and registers. It is therefore no surprise to the observer.

What the borrowings from various languages have done is that they have added to the complexity of syllable structure in LU. Then there are certain phonemes in LU which are not found in the H variety of Hirdu. A few phonemes found in LU are such that they might also be found in H-U variety. But, there is rarely a case of a phoneme that is found only in the H variety and not found in the LU (retroflex nasal /N/ being one such rarity but the reader may be made aware of the contention that Beg (1977: 260) makes about the presence of retroflex /N/ in the Dakkhini Urdu).

Returning to the innovative point about the complex syllable structure and phonemic inventories, we may first notice that even though Kelkar (1968: 15) writing half a century ago was of the opinion that “Hindi literature [wa]s barely 80 years old”, he too felt that “Urdu [wa]s older only by a generation or so”. Now it is fair to say that this difference wasn’t much of a difference for Kelkar for he was referring to how the speakers of both Hindi and Urdu tend to appropriate older literatures as being foundational texts for the modern day versions of Hindi and Urdu. We shall, nevertheless, draw insights from Shapiro (2003) who informs us that

“the emergence of MSH cannot be fully understood except in reference to the prior forging of a literary Urdu, which took place in the sixteenth and the seventeenth centuries, first in the Islamic courts of South India, most particularly in the courts of Golconda and Bijapur, but later in such northern centres as Aurangabad, Lucknow and Delhi”. (Shapiro 2003: 255)

Shapiro also believes that even around 1950s and 1960s there were very “few genuine native speakers of *Khari Boli*” but post independence, efforts of the Government of India to promote Hindi has led to tens of millions of people speaking some variety of MSH, even those “living in geographical areas which would have been thought of as the heartlands of Braj, Avadhi, Bhojpuri, etc.” (Shapiro, 2003: 200: 256). There is a definite effort by institutions “towards increased Sanskritization of Hindi” (ibid.) which seems to become problematic for those who would like a more accessible language for their mundane affairs.

Problems for the speakers of Hindi have arisen because

“Sanskritization of Hindi in the modern period has led to a situation in which there is for many speakers a disjunction between the set of phonemes in their

operative systems and the set of phonemes necessary for the learned vocabulary in the educated register of the language. Such a disjunction also occurs with regard to permissible consonant clusters where learned borrowings from Sanskrit, Arabic, English, etc. Require a more extensive inventory than exist in the native Hindi stratum of the language” (Shapiro, 2003: 257).

I shall argue, following Shapiro, that even when there exist some of the similar problems for the speakers of LU, they are considerably fewer in number because LU has a substratum that is comparatively more complex than the one available to a speaker of H variety of Hindi-Urdu and is richer with respect to not only the possible consonant clusters but also with respect to the phonemes available. Students or other youngsters who are more directly in contact with the technological tools and mass media find it less difficult to cope with the expectations of the learned class. However, students and other youngsters who hail from the surrounding areas of Lucknow and speak some variety of Hindi turn out to have problems when it comes to coping with the pressures of the languages which essentially have complex sequences and other phonemes that are not part of the learner’s first language. We shall briefly have a look at those.

Both Kelkar (1968) and Schmidt (2003), among others have listed some of the phonological differences between Hindi and Urdu and we shall not repeat them unless it is fruitful to the case being made here.

Lexical differences have created such unbridgable gaps between formal H and U variants of HU that Schmidt claims that “an Urdu speaker needs a dictionary to read modern Hindi literature even if he has learned the Devanaagari script” (Schmidt, 2003: 292). We may benefit from some of the examples Schmidt cites:

| Urdu  | Hindi   |           |
|-------|---------|-----------|
| shaxs | manuSya | ‘person’  |
| bEtA  | putra   | ‘son’     |
| bAp   | pitA    | ‘father’  |
| mulk  | dEsh    | ‘country’ |
| hissa | aMsh    | ‘share’   |

Schmidt’s claim above about the lexical divergences must be read the other way round too. It is not only the Sanskritization of Hindi that has taken an Urdu speaker away from Hindi but also the Persianization of Urdu that has taken a Hindi speaker away from it. And the speakers of both the languages would have to build the bridges of some sort so that the two languages that share “remarkable synchronic isomorphism and common ancestry” (Singh, 1996: 1) continue to exchange with ease the heritage that essentially should have led to a common inheritance (cf. Rai, 1986).

Nevertheless, it is found that students who come from the areas that are part of Old Lucknow and speak LU as their first language, they tend to be better equipped to cope with the pressures of learning English. It is important to mention that English has indeed come to acquire an important place in the post-independent India and even when there have been voices against the hegemony of English it continues to grow in popularity and power. It is seen as a window of opportunity and better living among those who do not possess it. English is a language with more complex consonant clusters in the onset and in the coda and there are a few phonemes which seem to be hard to master for the students who grew up speaking one of the variants of H (unless they are exposed to English in the early years).

It is common among students to point out when somebody ends up saying /iskul/ for /skul/ 'school' and /tirEning/ for /training/ 'training'. These problems have been much discussed by phonologists discussing the phonologies of the dialects of Eastern Hindi. Since Lucknow's trans-gomti area is largely inhabited by immigrants from the neighbouring regions in the East and North one finds that they face some problem coping with some of the Sanskrit 'tatsama' words in Hindi and of course borrowing from Urdu and English which have complex consonant clusters. Children who grow up in such households are seen struggling with words with complex consonant clusters.

Kelkar (1968: 30) mentions that "[o]ccasionally there will correlations between the original tag of the lexical item and the choice of the phonemic rendering. For example, the form U /b<sup>h</sup>asam/ will coexist with U /qism/ (from U {type}) and the form H /b<sup>h</sup>asm/ will coexist with H /kisam/ - simply because {bhasma} is H and {qism-type} is U." What we would like to submit is that even when Kelkar is careful in mentioning that this happens only occasionally, it might be worth our while to look deeper for the explanations for such anomalies where the language seems to have the formal potential to give the phonemic rendering of what it borrows but ends up with a different rendering. If a speaker's phonology allows him to render the word as it is heard, then the 'tags' of nationality or geography should not come in the way of its proper phonemic rendering (by proper we only mean what is generally expected of a speaker of the language from which the given word has been borrowed). To say that despite the phonological presence of equally complex words in the borrower's language the borrower may render it phonemically differently is to suggest that the speakers/borrowers know the history of words they speak (cf. Ford *et al.*, 1997; Dasgupta *et al.*, 2000; Singh and Starosta, 2003).

Let us now go to some of the sounds that tend to alienate the students from their peers when they try to speak. The first sound found in (3) below is often seen to be a problem for many of students coming from Eastern parts of Uttar Pradesh even when Kelkar (1968) and others record that it is a sound of Hindi.

3) /shanti/ 'peace', /shAmil/ 'included/ acceded'<sup>4</sup>, etc.

For students with LU as their first language this sound is not a problem. This renders the phonemic rendering of words of English like 'she', 'shiver', 'show', etc. easy for such students. Even the older speakers of LU find it easy to speak such words.

Hindi is said to maintain the distinction between the aspirated plosive /p<sup>h</sup>/ and the borrowed labio-dental /f/, however it is now felt that the younger generations, under the influence of English seem to have lost this distinction. There are several linguists who have already made similar observations and even Kelkar (1968: 31) mentions the presence of only the labio-dental /f/ for U speakers. This lack does not in any sense deprive the LU speakers as the lack of the aspirated plosive /p<sup>h</sup>/ is not considered a loss by the speakers. So words such as /p<sup>h</sup>ikr/ 'worry' and /sap<sup>h</sup>/ 'clean' is preferably rendered as /fikr/ and /saf/ respectively. One reason for this waiving off of a crucial loss may be understood by the impact English has had on the languages. So if LU lacks the aspirated plosive, its speakers don't feel that they have lost anything because most of the English borrowings into Hindi or Urdu actually have only the labio-dental fricative /f/ as in 'free', 'finish', 'filter', 'coffee', etc. Even speakers of Hindi or other dialects of Hindi that could be said to have lost the sound /p<sup>h</sup>/ do not find it awkward and instead are oblivious to the change that has happened in their speech. So while singing or giving speeches also they seem to prefer the new entrant /f/.

Words such as /zor/ 'force', /zinda/ 'alive', /vazn/ 'weight', etc. which have the alveolar /z/, seem to be easy to pronounce for the LU speakers while those that may have Awadhi or other dialects as their mother tongue may find it slightly inconvenient. The speakers of these and other variants of H variety are usually heard replacing the alveolar /z/ with the affricative /J/ as in 'judge'.

In fact we even find Kelkar (1968: 33) mentioning that the postalveolar fricative /zh/ of words such 'rouge' and 'television' is always rendered /J/ in Hindi.<sup>5</sup>

Kelkar (1968: 33) mentions that English items call for the use of /v, y, sh, f, z, and D/<sup>6</sup> and on page 31, he lists that Persian items call for use of /v, y, sh, f, z, x, q/ and a few other sounds. The /x/ is the velar fricative as in /xud/ 'self', and the /q/ is the uvular plosive as in /baqi/ 'remainder' (Kelkar 1968: 32). If we compare the set of Phonemes thus listed we clearly find that the speaker of Urdu, in our case the LU speaker, is at an advantage when it comes to the sounds that are required to speak English without giving away one's regional identity. It remains a matter

<sup>4</sup>All the examples are from Kelkar (1968) unless stated otherwise.

<sup>5</sup>Kelkar (1968) uses a different symbol to represent the affricative stop /J/.

<sup>6</sup>The symbols /sh/ and /D/ are different from the ones used by Kelkar (1968). The /sh/ is homorganic with affricates and /D/ represents a retroflex stop.

of pity that any difference in the phonemic rendering of a language is looked down upon in the society.

## CONCLUSION

Through the examples above, we have tried to show that speakers of Urdu in Old Lucknow have an advantage over others for it cannot be wished away that linguistic capital is no capital. Languages have played important roles in not only joining the forces of a population, they have been used to create huge divides among people (Serbian and Croatian, for instance, cf. Edwards, 2009: 64). The complex consonant clusters and the history of heavy Persianised lexical base of LU give the speakers, especially the younger speakers of LU an advantage when it comes to learning and speaking English. The quiet knowledge of this edge is easily seen in classrooms and other settings where the acceptance largely depends on one's eloquence in English or in a particular genre. The recitation of Urdu poetry at special gatherings/events or even singing of Hindi songs require a command that gives the possessor of LU an edge. The advantage that the students speaking LU draw are too many to mention at one go. What is interesting to note is that despite the oft-heard grudges by some who claim that Urdu is not getting its due, the authors would like to claim that despite the neglect, Urdu is bound to succeed in the times to come as a language this country is already proud of. Attempts to show this variety in bad light are bound to go in vain because of the new sensitivities among the youth and those who speak this variety. The case of LU and the advantages its speakers have is our way of pointing out the merits in knowing this variety and also proposing that more people pay attention to it.

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