



An Investigation into the Role of Language in Regional Connectivity in Afghanistan and Pakistan

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Abstract

This article intends to explore the role of the regional language Pashto spoken in Afghanistan and Pakistan in regional connectivity. The aim of this study is to reveal whether the role of Pashto language is positive or negative in the regional connectivity between the two neighbouring countries. The impacts of Pashto on Pakistan and Afghanistan cultures are taken into consideration because it is claimed that language is culture and culture is language. Furthermore, Sapir (1921) also added that due to the close association of language and culture, with each other, one cannot be understood/appreciated without the knowledge/comprehension of the other. It implies that the present study investigates the correlation between Pashto language and Pashtun culture in both countries. The data for this study is collected from Pashto language Poets, authors, MPhil, and PhD scholars belonging to Pakistan and Afghanistan. The findings of the study revealed that the regional language Pashto plays a vitally important role in regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan. The study also found that people of both countries are inclined towards the purification and learning of Pashto language along with the learning of English language in the same territories. Therefore, they are also learning culture and social norms in both countries alike. The findings of the study also revealed that Pashto language in both countries can be used as a tool for dialogues to strengthen peace, trade, and business.

Keywords: Pashto language, regional connectivity, Pakistan & Afghanistan

Introduction

‘Regional Connectivity’ or ‘Regionalism’ is one of the key topics under discussion in Pakistan in the present scenario. It is often used to refer to Pakistan-China relations through China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a mega project because it brings the two countries in firm connections in many ways, for instance, through trade, business, education, jobs, etc. to develop infrastructure in both countries. It implies that ‘Regional Connectivity’ is very important for a country’s development. It is not unusual for a country’s regional contexts to offer numerous problems and opportunities (ESCAP, 2014). For 40 years long War in Afghanistan has greatly contributed to instability and has also had very bad impacts on Pakistan’s culture, society, politics, education, peace, and prosperity. Pakistan is very rich and diverse in regional connectivity because



of the strategic importance of its geographical location. China is considered a key ally of Pakistan on the basis of its support in the developments in the arena of trade, jobs, economic growth and freeing itself from energy crisis (Khursheed et al., 2019).

Likewise, on the basis of the same language, culture, society, social norms Afghanistan and Pakistan, or Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, the province of Pakistan are closely related. It also means that regional connectivity considers the social, cultural, linguistic, political economic and religious aspects of the countries.

Therefore, this paper explores the role that regional language “Pashto” or “Pakhto” plays in the processes of regional connectivity and integration between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashto Language pedagogy and policy need to be situated within wider political, social, and economic contexts to bring connectivity between the countries Afghanistan and Pakistan because language is considered one of the main sources of countries integration and prosperity. It is quite understandable that language is the basic and important means of communication. It helps in understanding of both countries’ cultures.

Research Questions

1. What is the role of Regional Language (Pashto) in regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan?
2. In what ways (positive or negative) does the Pashto language impact the regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

Literature Review

In this section, related research studies are briefly reviewed to strengthen and support the current study. Owing to Pakistan’s complex neighborhoods, in South Asia, Central Asia, the Middle East and China. It is very important to decide what “Pakistan regional context” really means. Pakistan shares its borders with unstable, economic, and politically established countries. Thus, Pakistan develops its foreign policy and strengthens bonds with nearby countries as added by Khursheed et al., (2019).

Presently, the discussion on ‘regional connectivity is mainly based on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). It is very comprehensible because Pakistan needs much more, better, and modern infrastructure. The benefits and progress in terms of construction of infrastructure in CPEC framework is very understandable and impressive. At the same time, public discussion seems too much focused on CPEC. It seems to be ignoring the connections with other closely related regional countries. These connections could be due to various important factors such as social, political, linguistic, religion etc. Relations with Afghanistan, according to Khursheed et al (2019), could also be highly relevant in near future. It implies that with or without CPEC Afghanistan as neighbor country could not be ignored by Pakistan because Afghanistan shares close geographical, linguistic, social, cultural, political, and religious borders with Pakistan. Linking, with Central Asian countries will be very difficult without Afghanistan. So, “Regional



Connectivity” between Afghanistan and Pakistan is very important especially in terms of peace, trade, and business. The current study is mainly focused on the regional language “Pashto” commonly spoken in both countries i.e., how it works to bring both countries in close relations to each other because language is the main source of communication and relations across the world.

Thematic Analysis (TA) is a method for systematically identifying, organizing, and offering insight into, patterns of meaning (themes) across a dataset. Through focusing on meaning *across* a dataset, TA allows the researcher to see and make sense of collective or shared meanings and experiences. Identifying unique and idiosyncratic meanings and experiences found only within a single data item is not the focus of TA. This method, then, is a way of identifying what is common to the way a topic is talked or written about, and of making sense of those commonalities. (Cooper, et.al., 2012)

Data Interpretations and Discussion

The main aim of this research article is to investigate the role of regional language Pashto in bringing regional connectivity between the two neighbor countries i.e., Afghanistan and Pakistan, especially Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa formerly known as the North-West Frontier province of Pakistan. For this purpose, interviews are conducted from the Pashto language experts i.e., MPhil and PhD scholars and poets. In total 17 participants, 10 MPhil and 7 PhD scholars are interviewed. The data taken from the participants is analyzed below.

Responses to Question No one. i.e.

What is the role of regional language (Pashto) in regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

- i. The role of Pashto language is very positive, because it links the two immediate neighbor countries Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- ii. Yes, for interrelations between Afghanistan and Pakistan or any other country language is a key factor. It is the way of expression and communication between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
- iii. Language plays an important role in a country’s regional connectivity, and it is true in relation to Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pashto is spoken in both the country as Pashtuns live at the both sides of the Pak-Afghan borders. This gives the Pashto language a key role of connecting the people of these two neighboring countries.
- iv. Pashto language is widely spoken in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, Pakistan, and Afghanistan, which links Pashtuns in both countries. So, the importance of Pashto language cannot be ignored in regional connectivity.
- v. As a language is means of communication and information, and it is true regarding Pashto language, which is the regional language spoken in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and widely in Afghanistan, and Pashto is national language of Afghanistan.



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- vi. Pashto language is very important and the role of it is very positive because it connects Pashtuns of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to Pashtuns of Afghanistan. It is the language spoken by around 18 million people.
 - vii. In regional connectivity the role of Pashto language is very positive because Pashto is the native language of Pashtuns, where they live, they speak Pashto. And it is one of the two official languages spoken in Afghanistan. In Persian literature Pashto is called “Afghani” because it is mainly spoken in Afghanistan. Pashto is also the second largest regional language, mainly spoken in province Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and in the northern districts of the province Baluchistan.
 - viii. Yes, very true, Pashto is an important language for regional integration between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It is not only a language spoken in the two countries with large population, but Pashto is also considered as a culture of Pashtun. It is very important to know that all other languages are only languages spoken by their native speakers. Pashto is native, regional, and home language of Pashtuns and it is their culture as well. For example, Pashtuns have Pashto which means they are very respectable, loyal, hard workers and true friends. So, they are strongly connected with their neighbor countries Pakistan and Afghanistan. Pashtuns in Pakistan, love Pashtuns in Afghanistan due to the sameness in their language which is Pashto. Pashto works very great in regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan.
 - ix. Pashto is language as well as a code of conduct and it shows the belief and social system of the Pashtuns or Afghan living in Pakistan and Afghanistan.
 - x. Language is considered a system of binary opposition and it helps in understanding of others as mentioned in Gul.,et al (2022). It is true regarding the Pashto language because it helps in understanding others in Pakistan and Afghanistan. It implies that Pashto language is a great source of regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan because it helps in negotiation.

Considering the responses to the question No 1, it can be argued that regional language Pashto plays a pivotal role in regional connectivity and integration between Afghanistan and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and mostly Baluchistan provinces of Pakistan. So, the role of regional Pashto in regional connectivity cannot be ignored like other components of regional integration, regional language Pashto could also be taken into consideration. Almost all the participants of the study have agreed that Pashto as a language is mainly used for communication as a main means of education, trades, jobs, business and literature appreciation for ethnic group of Pashto in both of the countries. It implies that Pakistan and Afghanistan are linked, or they can be more strongly linked while using this source of language in positive ways for positive purposes.

It also means that Pashtuns are considered a single ethnic group inhabited in both countries. As we found in the participants responses through language comes culture and social norms of the speakers together. So, Pashtuns in both countries share common culture, language, and religion as



well. Therefore, they are culturally, and linguistically interconnected on the basis of the same language, in Afghanistan and Pakistan. It can be true to say that regional language Pashto paved the way for regional connectivity in two countries.

Responses to question No 2. i.e.

Whether regional language (Pashto) impacts are positive or negative on the regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan?

In question No 1, general comments are taken from the participants under the investigation of the study i.e., what is the role of regional language Pashto in regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan. The researchers found that the role of Pashto in integration of Pakistan and Afghanistan is very important and impressive and cannot be totally ignored. The second question gives important views of the Pashto language impacts on regional connectivity in Afghanistan and Pakistan, whether these impacts are positive or negative.

i. Yes, the impacts of Pashto language are very positive on regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan because Pashtuns have a very strong linguistic identity. Along with political and economic components of integration in Pakistan and Afghanistan, Great poet of Pashto language used Pashto language as a rally for the unity of Pashtuns. Likewise, Pir Bayazid also used Pashto language as an expedient means to spread his message to the Pashtun masses.

Khushal Khan Khattak, Selections from the Poetry of the Afghans so, regional connectivity is possible using regional language Pashto in both countries.

ii. Generally, a language plays a positive role in regional connectivity contexts between or among countries but in case of Pashto it can say the role is negative due to some political parties. Or certain slogans used by group of people to create violence in both countries. So, in short, in case of Pakistan and Afghanistan regional connectivity, the role of Pashto language is negative. People of Pakistan and Afghanistan are very different in nature though their language is same.

iii. Again, Pashto language plays an important positive role in regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is a matter of closeness for the people of Afghanistan and Pakistan to be agreed upon Pashto language and Pashto culture in both countries.

iv. Some people or some political parties are using Pashto language for their political gains and support in Afghanistan and Pakistan. They have hidden agendas in their mind for the future of Pakistan and Afghanistan. They want to bring chaos to both countries while using Pashto language as a means of communication and convincing the masses. They use Pashto language as a weapon to create violence in both countries.

v. As it was said earlier that Pashto is not only a language spoken by Pashtuns and it is also a culture. So, the Pashto language helps a lot to bring regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan.



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- vi. Pashto language plays very important role in regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan because people living in both countries are very alike in their culture, values and social norms. To great extent they have sameness in their food, dress etc.
 - vii. Like a one nation making three components are essential such as the geography, language, and generation. Among these languages is at the utmost, it links two nations very strongly. In case of Pakistan and Afghanistan this is very true, because Pashto language is the regional language for Pashtuns in both countries and code of life and code of conduct, culture as well for Pashtuns in both countries.
 - viii. The impact of Pashto language on regional connectivity is very positive because it spoken in Pakistan and Afghanistan by many as a native language. Therefore, they share and express common belief and social norms which helps in creating or bounding strong relations.

From the responses of the participants to the question No 2, it can be inferred that regional language Pashto plays very positive roles in regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Almost all the participants opined that both of the countries share similar culture, social norms, and code of conduct. Therefore, Pashto language could be used as a positive means of communication to strengthen the social and cultural ties between Pakistan and Afghanistan. It can also be inferred from the participant's responses that Pashto language in both countries could be used as a tool for dialogues to maintain peace and prosperity and strengthen trades, business, and education opportunities.

Theme No 1: Positive Role

It implies that Pashto/Afghani plays positive role in regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Theme No 2: Same Culture and Same Language

In both countries language and culture are same or in other words language culture are feeding one another. So, it is also positive aspects language for regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Theme No 3: Language and Beliefs

Language is a means of communication. It is also medium for the expression of feelings and emotions. People living in Afghanistan and Pakistan shares common beliefs which pave ways for regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan.

Theme No 4: Language is culture and culture is language

In both countries mostly culture and language which Pashto are same. People who are living in Pakistan and Afghanistan shares common food, dresses, festivals, and religion. These are the factors contribute to the connectivity of any country. Likewise, they contribute to regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan.



Conclusion

Keeping in view the discussion on the role of regional language Pashto in “Regional Connectivity” between Afghanistan and Pakistan. It is argued that regional language Pashto plays a very important and positive role like other components used for regional connectivity/integration for instance, politics, religion, culture, and economic growth etc. Pashto language can link both countries in a true sense. The study also found that Pashto language can be used to bring unity among the Pashtuns in both countries. Pashto language in both countries could be used as a tool for dialogues to maintain peace and prosperity and strengthen trades, business, and education opportunities.

It has the power to connect all its speakers to understand each other culture, values etc. in both countries. Pashto language is not only a native language of Pashtuns, but also their remarkable mark of identity, culture, and society. Therefore, the impacts of Pashto language are very positive on regional connectivity between Afghanistan and Pakistan. Pashto language can also be a positive sign for the prospects of regional connectivity between Pakistan and Afghanistan



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