

The Linguistic Impact of Viral Social Media Trends on Pashto: A Case Study of TikTok and Facebook Content

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Abstract: Communications are now moving virtual hence changes in language use can be seen quite visibly on sites like TikTok and Facebook in many languages. What this study explores is how the massive spread of viral social media trends influences the usage of Pashto, which has approximately 50 million speakers in Pakistan and in Afghanistan. There has been relatively little scholarly work done on the impact dealt out by digital media to regional and minority languages such as Pashto, although it is quite a significant subject. This research explores how viral content in TikTok and Facebook is affecting Pashto's lexical syntactic, and phonological characteristics. The research examines 500 videos and posts posted during the period of 2022-2024 via Qualitative approach, and discovers new patterns of code-switching, lingua borrows from English and Urdu as well as new slang and change in sentence structures. Using insights from sociolinguistics and media studies, this study extends the examination of the impact of young people on language change and the importance of these changes for cultural identity and language maintenance. Results demonstrate that social networks intensify Pashto's presence and creative potential, but the same channels facilitate the formation of new linguistic styles and possible neglect of the traditional linguistic norms. This research contributes to the current debate on digital sociolinguistics and how digital media affects minority languages and offers guidelines for teachers, policymakers, and linguists on a way of utilizing digital channels while retaining traditional languages.

Keywords: Facebook, Tiktok, Pashto language, Pakistan, sociolinguistics

Introduction

The developments in digital technology and social media have revolutionised the way that people communicate globally. In regions with established oral cultures, e.g. where the speakers of the Pashto tongue live in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the influence of such platforms as represented by TikTok, and Facebook is more evident. Digital media have not only changed people's ways of communicating socially and self-expression but also in generating new ways of writing that differ from such normative language.

Famous regional South Asian language Pashto boasts a rich oral history and intricate phonology with complex syntax. Pashto, which was always outside the sphere of education and media ruled by Urdu or English, has found social media an outlet for its expression and to find fresh relevance (Khan, 2022). As new internet users are used to operating in global platforms, their linguistic effects contribute to

transformations in Pashto. Modern online trends on TikTok and Facebook characterized by brevity and instant communication expose how the Pashto is changing on the contemporary social media scene.

The dynamism and collaboration of social media trigger novelty of new linguistic expression. Users frequently use catchphrases, hashtags, emojis, and memes (and many of these are borrowed from global English or Urdu vocabularies) as part of their pashto conversations. Such practices promote code-switching, foreign vocabulary inclusion, and beg to reorganize grammatical forms at times. Though these practices add to the expressiveness of Pashto, they create concerns over language erosion, a loss of culture, and difficulties in cross-generation communication (Iqbal, 2022).

The underlying research seeks to evaluate both the scope and impacts of these language changes. The research explores the effect viral trends from TikTok and Facebook have had on Pashto's vocabulary, grammar and phonology as well as how these changes relate to millennium cultural, social and generational audiences. The study utilizes an analysis of online content for the review period of 2022-2024, to identify the advantages and disadvantages that digital media offers to the use of the Pashto language.

This study is distinct for its distinctive approach that treads two important dimensions at once: In doing so, the attempt moves the field of digital sociolinguistics forward and provides a useful understanding of the change in Pashto language from the regional perspective. Furthermore, it goes deeper into this constant conversation about whether digital globalization supports language preservation or drives it to evolve. In this process, the research raises critical questions: Social media helps revive Pashto or does it contribute to its fragmentation? What effect does the influence of social media on communication have on the concept of linguistic purity? What should educators, policymakers, and communities do in turn?

The paper is presented in the following order: First, it provides an overview of the scholarly studies that analyze how social media has an impact on minority languages. Afterwards, the methodology of collecting and processing data is provided, introducing the peculiar linguistic changes found in Pashto social media sites. Finally, it provides the main results, explores the theoretical implications, and provides action for further studies.

Literature Review

Social-media linguistics impact on non-dominant languages has been receiving increased scholarly attention over the last few years. Androutsopoulos (2014) and Tagg (2015) have both written on more occasions, Scholarly attention has, for the most part, focused on major global languages such as English and Spanish but there is dearth of research focussing on regional languages such as Pashto particularly in South Asia.

Conventional to date, Pashto as part of the Indo-Iranian sub-Branch of Indo-European linguistic structure has been more commonly used as an oral language. In many instances, Pashto has been invisible across educational curricula, published readings and institutional set ups such as was advocated for by Khan (2022). The marginalized status of the Pashto has led to both limitations in its standardization as well as in its development. However the advent of social media has provided an avenue for expression of regional identities and the use of vernacular language. Digital platforms like-TikTok and- Facebook enable content to be distributed without the use of the traditional gate-keepers, and therefore, the users can publish material in their native languages (Eisenlauer, 2013).

Studies about languages such as Yoruba (Ogunyemi, 2020), Tagalog (Gonzales & Bautista, 2019), and Welsh (Jones & Uribe-Jongbloed, 2013) show that social media has a part in not This study demonstrates how digital platforms tend to promote linguistic innovation because they drive the creation of memes, slang and short videos. At the same time, the introduction of leading languages like English in native conversations has raised questions about the maintenance of purity in languages and

the destiny of such languages.

Young people in the city of Pakistan often switch codes from Urdu to English which has been well researched (Hussain, 2025). The most recent findings indicate an increase in code-mixing with the use of Pashto, which is largely also shown for Tik Tok and Facebook users (Jones, 2013). Through the use of visual and auditory aspects, these platforms promote the performative form of communication among the users and in that way encourages innovative language practices. The use of audio tracks, captions, and hashtags fits into this trend because users recombine linguistic features so as to reach more viewers and facilitate co-understanding.

Research conducted in 2022 by Khan on Pashto TikTok videos clearly indicated that there are high frequencies of English and Urdu words, especially in videos for entertainment or the targeted youth. In addition, Khan et al. (2023) also observed the adaptation of romanized Pashto and English captions within online Pashto poetry and storytelling groups in Facebook to reach at-diaspora communities. Such behavior shows that young Pashto speakers are increasingly adopting a more flexible idea of language and self.

Such academic studies tend to reiterate that online language practices depend on users' sense of identity and their connections to communities. Language on social media is commonly used for identity-formation creating a tie with specific groups, trends, or ideologies (Simonite, 2023). In the case of speakers of Pashto this can take the form of displays of ethnic pride, a feel for home, or interaction with global viewpoints. These opposing desires are manifested in language: users do not follow Classic patterns, as one would suspect, but choose contemporary styles.

Based on the up-to-date studies, there are dual interpretations of the role of social media in influencing minority languages: It facilitates the contributions of regular people towards public discussion while fuelling the propagation of the styles of blended languages. For Pashto, preliminary analysis brings out improved visibility, innovative use of language, and creative self-expression, while there are qualms on matter of language erosion and the breakdown of identities of cultures. This research broadens this insight by providing a deep, empirical, study of viral Pashto material on TikTok and Facebook, with special focus on linguistic structure, user demographics and thematic content.

Methodology

The present study takes a qualitative approach to content analysis to discuss the influence of viral trends having effect on TikTok and Facebook on linguistic developments in Pashto. The purpose will be to discover the trends in code-switching, introduction of new words/expression or in grammatical structure and how the aforementioned trends affect the language habits of Pashto speakers.

Data Collection

Data were sampled using purposive sampling technique targeting user-generated contents on TikTok and Facebook from January 2022 to January 2024. Of the chosen materials, 250 videos were obtained from TikTok and 250 posts from Facebook, which make up 500 items in total. The criteria for inclusion were: The content had to be to some extent in Pashto, show viral qualities high view/share counts and be informal, colloquial communication with a general, youthful audience.

Sampling Strategy

The sampling strategy took into consideration the representations of both male and female creators, urban and rural users, and all ages, but especially, the age group of 16-30 years that are the most active online. Relevant content was discovered within the hashtag searches, (such as #PashtoTikTok, #PashtoHumor, and #PakhtunCulture). Facebook groups and pages which discussed Pashto entertainment, storytelling and meme culture were also sampled.

Analytical Framework

Content was recorded, translated where necessary, and NVivo software was used to analyze content. We developed a coding scheme, referencing popular models from sociolinguistics (Myers-Scotton's Matrix Language Frame Model, etc.) and digital rhetoric (Androutsopoulos, 2014). The main areas of the investigation were:

Lexical Borrowing: Frequency of English and Urdu words used in Pashto discourse.

Code-Switching: Intra-sentential and inter-sentential switching.

Slang and Neologisms: Use of casual, entertaining, or internet-only language.

Syntactic Shifts: A number of key folklore trends are observed in the linguistic shifts in the sentence structure and ordering of words among Pashto speakers on social media, influenced by exposure to other languages.

Orthographic Practices: Hiring Romanized Pashto or a mix of scripts.

Ethical Considerations

The analysis only included available material to the general public. To protect users privacy all usernames were wiped from the dataset. The research followed the ethical standards as defined by the American Anthropological Association and the academia at a local level.

Using this framework, we ensure that our analysis about the impacts of social media on the Pashto linguistic environment not only can be trusted but also is ethical. In the subsequent, we will look and analyze the data in this framework.

Data Analysis

Among 500 cases, including 250 TikTok videos and 250 Facebook posts, there were significant trends in the Pashto language, which was affected by the usage of social media. These changes can be observed in the way users were using lexical choices, sentence patterns, pronunciation and written symbols to a large extent that the youth brought into platforms, which exposed them to global viral content and pop culture. This section is supposed to provide detailed analysis of each linguistic category under study.

1. Lexical Borrowing and Hybridization

One of the especially attention-catching developments was the involved use of English and Urdu words in practice of Pashto language. Such lexical borrowing was widely used in cases involving humor, fashion, beauty, and motivational speeches. Phrases such as "like," "comment," "follow," and "vlog" also flowed readily to Pashto terminology, for example: "Sta vlog kha woo, please like kawa". Your vlog was excellent, please hit me like. Such language characteristics indicate formation of a new linguistic mode in Pashto, which combines the traditional Pashto with loanwords for expressive and practical benefits.

The TikTok videos were very speckled in order to spare Urdu words and the prevalence of Urdu audio clips in trends is most likely the reason. "These were the words such as "mazak", and "dost" and "pyar" which were in widespread use and were often used to replace Pashto equivalents. This is an emerging diglossia, where speakers use Urdu or English words because of popularity or social worth (Saeed, 2021).

2. Code-Switching Patterns

Code-switching was one of the most frequent patterns observed in the collected data. Users often used every one of the three languages—Pashto, Urdu, and English/on every single sentence, a phenomenon that raised its head most on Facebook, given the textual nature of the medium. For instance: Zaka chi main stress feel kawa, ma ek video upload kawo" (Because I was feeling stressed, I chose to upload a video").

Urban youth and people of diaspora backgrounds used intra-sentential switching most. Semi-fluent bilingual users were also keen on the inter-sentential switching, alternately using one language for a part of the sentence and another for the next, tending to elicit humor or heightened emotion. Such behaviors represent changing identities of the younger generations as they cross over different linguistic environments (Mukhtiar, 2005).

3. Slang, Neologisms, and Internet Speak

Now through the internet a variety of slang and innovative expressions are part of everyday speech in Pashto. Mass usage of memes, hashtags, and the TikTok trends has led to colloquialisms such as “trend zama” and innovative phrases, such as ‘

Humor in such places TikTok was, quite often, created via exaggerated expressions and elongated drawn words, such as “zaaaaaama” or “yaaaaaar”. These styles reflect global meme styles, and relate to the interactive and performative role of digital platforms (Androutsopoulos, 2014).

Facebook comments frequently included abbreviations like “LOL,” or “OMG” or “BTW,” written in Roman Pashto. Such blending creates an informal tone and promotes the interaction especially among the audience who are technology inclined and are part of the diaspora.

4. Reduction in Sentence Structure and Rearrangements of Words

Streamlining of Pashto syntax was one of the major trends on TikTok. This led to simplifying the sentence complexity, downplaying of grammatical agreements and the adaption of a SVO, with an English influence. For instance, instead of what you would typically see in Pashto, one can use: I upload video instead of “Za video rawrawakram”.

Such modifications in construction of sentences depict the needs for brief and explicit communication online especially in short video sites. Such shifts reveal the influence of global languages that are largely spoken across the world on the way that Pashto speakers process language (Naveed, 2022).

5. Romanization and Orthographic Variation

One of the significant things was the massive use of Roman script to write Pashto, especially on Facebook. Users frequently posted in “Roman Pashto” as illustrated in “sta song der khud de, repeat kawam.” Young users, in particular, resorted to Romanized Pashto out of necessity – they simply do not know the script, or it is a lot easier to use on mobile phones.

However, this trend has drawbacks. In the absence of a unified style of spelling, Roman Pashto will give rise to a plethora of orthographic variations and will weaken the nuance of grammar. Although it makes the language more ready and visible, it also results in script loss and confuses orthography (Janisar, 2021).

6. Gendered Language Use

Significant variations occurred in language tendencies in terms of gender among users. Female content creators—especially those who worked on TikTok tended to add in Urdu phrases based on the image that Urdu represents urban sophistication and cultural glamour. Conversely, male users often reinforced their Pashto identity through use of pristine vocabulary – sometimes even humorously mocking linguistic code or contemporary trends.

This phenomenon does not only show differences of language, but also surface underlying societal assumptions and identity markers. It depicts the ways by which such gender norms and online identities influence the way language is used, thus creating a multiple identity of linguistic voice (Khan, 2023).

7. Generational Divide and Language Transmission

It was found that the results exhibit a notable generational divide as to how language is applied among

users. Senior users (35+) preferred more traditional Pashto phrases, which were reflected their vocabulary and grammar, and mentioning concerns about how younger generations are changing the language. A number of comments strongly disagreed with a suspected impairment to Pashto emphasizing concerns relating to the language's purity and differences between generations.

Oppositely, younger audiences embraced mixing languages often happily about how they amalgamated different languages influences. The contrast between conserving language forms and the incorporation of new expressions reflects a pressing need for mechanisms that honor tradition as well as flexibility (Hussain, 2025).

8. Community Identity and Cultural Expression

As the threat of language dilution hangs over, the evidence shows that Pashto is still a live medium for cultural expression online. The creators publish material in Pashto which touches on Pakhtunwali culture, regional practices, poetry, and comedy. Visual and musical content growth in Pashto indicates the great role of digital platforms in preserving cultural identity (Haq, 2023).

These digital items easily gain prominence and focus, an indication of the audience deep interest and profound emotional resonance. The trend in itself highlights the centrality that Pashto youth attribute to the preservation of their heritage while in a larger global context of language practices.

To sum up social media influences Pashto linguistically in complicated ways. It evokes both creative expression and linguistic innovation and on the other hand poses barriers to both maintaining consistency and passing traditions to the next generation. Lexical borrowing, code-switching, and orthographic variation are used to demonstrate the complexity and evolution of the Pashto language according to digital-era dynamics.

Conclusion and Recommendations

From our findings, we find that sites such as TikTok and Facebook have significant influence on the Pashto language. Due to practices that involve lexical borrowing, code-switching, syntactic simplification and arising Romanized pashto, the digital space has not only made the use of Pashto language more complex, but it has also made it easier.

The social media has revitalised an interest in Pashto, especially for the younger generation, who may be missed in the normal school rooms. With the help of TikTok and Facebook, the youth speaking Pashto can create and watch content in their native language which helps support creativity, cultural dignity, and social connection. Digital content that discusses Pakhtunwali, folklore, and traditional poetry (presented in a modern format) remains to connect people with history and their underlying values.

At the same time, there is a massive change in the language that causes panic about a possible language dilution. The continuous adoption of Urdu and English terms, a non-standardized Roman script, and assumption of easier grammatical patterns threaten the aesthetic potential of the rich but complex payoff of the traditional Pashto over time. While this development can not be marked down as intrinsically negative, responsible regulation is required to maintain the complexity of the language and maintain cultural uniques.

These trends are indicative of a broader shift in language use among younger people facing their diverse ethnic, national, and global identities through language to be adaptable in use. By borrowing from viral trends and memes, as well as from online aesthetics, Pashto speakers show the way regional languages can flourish and fail in the digital age.

Recommendations:

Standardization of Roman Pashto: Develop and promote an official standardization of written Pashto with the use of Roman script. Such a system would enhance uniformity, which is good for digital users

who prefer the Roman alphabet.

Launch programs that bring up digital skills and make the local languages more valuable for the community. Promote launch campaigns at educational institutions and NGO companions to pass on to the young people the value of preserving language traditions, comprehension of classical sentence, and the pleasure of traditional idiomatic usage.

Support for Pashto Content Creators: Work with local creators to give grants and help create better Pashto material, including tutorials and education series and cultural narratives.

Bringing Pashto to the scene in terms of language technology resources. Attempting to encourage the presence of Pashto in digital platforms, urge developers to implement Pashto functionality in predictive text, speech and digital translation tools.

Research and Documentation: Create systematic accumulations of digital resources for documentation of Pashto language shifts over time focused on contributions from younger generations.

Policy Interventions: Include training in social media skills, use of local languages etc into Pakistan's general education & cultural agenda.

To sum up, as a result of linguistic continuity, social media creates barriers yet offers otherwise impossible opportunities to invigorate and revive Pashto. Practical steps and equitable policies could facilitate the preservation and respect for the dynamism of Pashto as it evolves with the digital world.

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