

(Im)Mobility of Urdu-English Mixing: Analyzing Hybrid Linguistic Performative Economies among Pakistani-origin Muslim Youth

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In de Fina and Perrino (2013), they critique studies of speech communities that are viewed as relatively homogenous and bound to specific locations. In response, they argue that, “although in the past, dislocations often implied drastic separations from places and cultures of origin, nowadays the diffusion of new globalizing media has resulted in the ability of displaced populations to keep in touch with their home countries and with other, far away interlocutors, and in the possibility for those who are not physically displaced, to constitute and take part in virtual transnational communities ‘with no sense of place’” (Ibid. 510). This notion was echoed by Sapir (1931) who argues that the far-reaching techniques of communication as lessened the “importance of mere geographical contiguity.” Following this argument, this paper examines some of the ways that transnational youth population take part in a kind of transnational speech that lack a sense of bounded location in the conventional understanding of speech community. And yet there is some facet of community that exists by focusing on some linguistic consistencies for Urdu-Hindi transnational speakers, including college students.

During my ethnographic fieldwork (both online and offline), I observed the ways that Urdu was being reformulated for needs by transnational in-migrant college students in both NYC and Lahore. In Nakassis’ (2016) research with Tamil-speaking college students, he analyzes their hybrid performative economies of mixed English and Tamil linguistic practices as part of a larger desire for ‘style,’ while the ‘disfluencies and hybridizations of English with Tamil keep its excesses in check.’ Similarly, to speak only in one or the other grammatical system, here Urdu or English, would index a lack of global sociality and urban competence for bilingual Pakistani-origin. Instead, I observed how college youth incorporated

linguistic-hybrid performative economies as part of their participation in the youth formation under study. In this paper, I argue that mobility imaginaries become present in and through Urdu-English linguistic mixing practices occurring in higher educational spaces, online, and beyond (cf. Salazar 2010). In other words, the moment of encounter with the cosmopolitan and concomitant anxieties could be observed in in the very grammatical constructions they spoke.

References:

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