

# Language Variations in Afghanistan

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**Abstract:** *The Language variations in Afghanistan are an important topic in usage of a language. Therefore, the reader of this article would learn about variations in language, especially the included examples would help them to know about language variations in English, Dari, Pashto and other languages of our country (Afghanistan). On the other hand, it helps the learners of the second language to learn about language variations.*

**Keywords:** Variations, Dialects, Code Switching, Pidgin and Creole

## 1. Introduction

Language variety or simple variety covers any of the overlapping subcategories of a language. For example, in each society we have literary languages and common people's languages; even in literary and common languages, we do have varieties. Many people believe that varieties are incorrect ways of speaking but that is not true, because varieties have their own ways of pronouncing words, their own special vocabulary and even their own grammatical rules. For example, in American English we say, "She's **gotten** better." But in British English, we'd say, "She's **got** better." Similarly, in Dari and Pashto languages, we have such varieties; therefore, in this article, I have researched on varieties of some common languages in Afghanistan, especially Dari and Pashto.

## 2. Theoretical Frame

In this part, we give some theories and the explanation of the certain models with real examples of a number of common languages in Afghanistan.

### Language, Dialects, and Varieties

"Language acquisition is one of the most impressive and fascinating aspects of human development" (Lightbown & Spada, 2006, p.1). There are different aspects in linguistics if we study it in depth, for example, have you ever heard about variety? What does it mean? Is there any connection between a language and variety? Therefore, first we do need to know what variety is. Hudson (as cited in Wardaugh, 2010) defines variety as "a set of linguistics items with similar distribution" (p.23). Based on this definition, we could give examples of Pashto language in different provinces of Afghanistan and Pakistan like Kandahar, Konar, Khost, Gazni and Peshawar. Therefore, the word variety is broad, it covers the greatest and smallest units like language and dialect, register, isogloss and smaller units of dialects.

First, language and dialect are two ambiguous aspects of variation according to Wardaugh (2010) a language is a single linguistic norm or a group of that norm but a dialect is one of the norms. For example, Dari language is a single linguistics norm in Afghanistan as a language but it has different dialects in different provinces of Afghanistan. Dari in Badakhshan province in the north of our country has a different dialect from Dari in Herat in the west of

Afghanistan. Dari in Ghazni differs from Dari in Kabul, even Ghazni and Kabul are in the central area of Afghanistan. Therefore, according to Haugen (as cited in Wardaugh, 2010) "both language and dialect are a number of conflicting senses" (p.25). I do agree with this idea of Haugen because sometimes dialect is part of a language and sometimes it stands as single unit outside the language. Both language and dialect are types of variety.

Second, dialect continuum which shows the natural variety in a language is a good example. I believe a dialect continuum's example is four different groups of one language as A, B, C, D. I think, sometimes it may happen that group D will not understand the language of group A. In fact, both groups use one language. Therefore, dialect continuum causes mutually unintelligible. The good example of dialect continuum is Pashto language which is spoken in different provinces of Afghanistan. In the south and east, Pashto in Kandahar is different from Pashto in Ghazni and Pashto in the Ningarhar is different from Pashto in Khost, sometimes because of dialect continuum of Pashto it happens that one part of Pashto speakers do not understand Pashto language of other parts in the country.

Register is another aspect of language varieties. We do need to know what register is? Register is a set of linguistic features that people use in certain working occupations according to Wardaugh (2010). For example, there are specific terms in medical field that only medical doctors use and know them, but ordinary people have no ideas about that. Therefore, register is one aspect of variety in linguistics. I believe, the terminology that we have in TESOL is unfamiliar for medical doctors as well.

Isogloss and dialect boundaries are related to variation. Wardaugh (2010) defines "isogloss as a boundary between two geographical areas which are different with respect to one linguistics feature and dialect boundary is a boundary where several isoglosses occur in the same place"(p.43). An example of isogloss in Afghanistan is the line between Jalalabad and Kabul. In Kabul for food people say (Gheza) but in Jalalabad people say (Qhategh). The other example of isogloss is the line between Herat and Kabul. In Herat for sweets people say (Dashlama) and in Kabul People say (Shirini). In fact, these are the line separating the areas that people use the words differently.

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To sum up, variety is a general term which covers the largest and smallest units of linguistics. The given examples of a language and dialect, register and isogloss are examples in Afghan context. I think these examples and experiences help Afghan Learners to learn these linguistic units in a better way by applying real life examples from different languages in our country. We are lucky to be in a multilingual country and have experience of different languages.

### Pidgin and Creole

A language is used for communication purpose; there are different languages around the world for communication. I do agree that if a person knows one language, he is like one person, and if he knows two languages he is like two people. Besides native languages that we have in different countries, there are other types of languages to be considered. Therefore, there are some contact languages like a variety of lingua franca, pidgins, and creoles that people use for communicative purposes around the world.

First, we could call lingua franca as a contact language. Lingua franca is a third language between two different language speakers. I think that the lingua franca could be like a business language that people use for trade purposes. For example, there are many examples of lingua francas in different places of the world. Examples of lingua franca are Greek, Arabic, English, Hindi, I think these lingua francas may change according to the need of people. For example, I like to say that in Dubai Arabs and Afghans use English as lingua franca to communicate. I believe, people use English as a business language in Dubai. On the other hand, in Afghanistan Balochi, Pashai, and Uzbeki speakers could use Dari and Pashto as lingua franca.

Second, I like to say that Pidgin is a type of a contact language which is used for communication. Pidgins are created from different languages, which is language contact between different speakers of different languages. I know that "A pidgin is a language with no native speakers: it is no one's first language but is a contact language" (Wardough, 2010, p. 57). For example, pidgin is a simplified language that develops as communication between two or more groups as a contact language. I believe, that Pidgin is no one's mother language but it is instead learned as the second language, I could include that it is a contact language. Therefore, pidgin is "a reduced variety of a normal language" (Wardough, 2010, p. 58). To consider that, I think it is difficult for me to give an example of pidgin language in Afghanistan.

Third, Creole is considered as a contact language. "Creole is often defined as a pidgin that has become the first language of a new generation of speakers" (Wardough, 2010, p.59). Creole takes place when pidgin is the contact-language of parents. For example, when children of these parents learned their parents contact language, which is pidgin, their language becomes Creole. "A Creole, therefore, is a normal language in almost every sense"(Wardough, 2010, p.59). I believe that Creole and Pidgin are the process of developing and changing a language. Sometimes it happens if a Pidgin is no longer used or needed, it dies.

In conclusion, besides the native languages of different countries. I think, there are different contact languages that people use for communication. These contact languages are Lingua franca, Pidgin and Creole.

### Code Switching

Most speakers of bilingual and multilingual countries use several varieties of any language they speak; it is the norm for many people throughout the world. The particular dialect or language that a person chooses to use on any occasion is a code, a system used for communication between two or more parties (Wardough, 2010). People use different codes to communicate, and even they use code switching in a conversation by shifting from one code to another. In a multilingual country like Afghanistan, the ability to shift from one language to another is accepted as a quite normal conversation. Therefore, shifting from one code to another is called code switching; code switching has two kinds situational and metaphorical.

First situational code switching, "situational code switching occurs when the languages used change according to the situations in which the conversant find themselves: they speak one language in one situation and another in a different one" (Wardough, 2010, p.101). Afghanistan is a multi-lingual country. Code switching happens intentionally and unintentionally in a daily conversation of people. Therefore, it is important to find out, whether it is situational or metaphorical. In situational code switching, there is no topic changes in the speech. For example, when Ashraf Ghani, the president of our country talks, he always uses two formal languages of Afghanistan in his speech. Afghanistan has two formal languages (Pashto and Dari). Ashraf Ghani code switches while talking from Pashto to Dari. He uses code switching because most of the audience are Pashto and Dari speakers. Therefore, he uses both Pashto and Dari in his speech.

In a like manner, Dari and Pashto are the formal languages of Afghanistan; therefore, Ashraf Ghani gives prestige to these two languages. I like to say that most of people in Afghanistan are familiar with Pashto and Dari languages even their native language is different from Pashto and Dari. I believe Ashraf Ghani tries to give the idea that Pashto and Dari languages are equal. However, he is a Pashto speaker but he uses Dari as well in order to consider that Dari speakers have the same right as Pashto speakers in Afghanistan. I like the strategy that he uses in his speech, but I am sure in written form it is not possible for Ashraf Ghani to write the way he speaks. That is why I think code-switching could happen in oral conversation and informal written texts such as informal text messages. I believe that in formal written texts it is not possible to shift from one language or another language, because in writing we should focus on one group of speakers as audience. Therefore, it is important to know the audience in speaking and writing.

Second, metaphorical code switching is a change in topic of a language. "Metaphorical switching is a more complicated phenomenon. When a change of topic requires a change in the language used, it is called metaphorical code switching. The interesting point here is that some topics may be

discussed in either code, but the choice of code adds a distinct flavor to what is said about the topic. The choice encodes certain social values" (Wardough, 2010, pp.101-103). I do agree with Wardough (2010) that metaphorical code-switching has formal and informal, personal and official situation. The good example of metaphorical switching is when two close friends talk; the topic that they use is related to their interest. But, when their instructor joins these two close friends' conversation, the topic of their speech changes. They cannot talk about shopping with their instructor.

However, I think in bilingual and multilingual countries people use code-switching based on the confidence that they have on a language. I believe that even two different speakers Pashto and Dari could speak on one topic by using their native languages. The Pashto speaker could speak in Pashto and Dari speaker could response in Dari, which is also one way of code-switching according to (Wardough, 2010). In fact, the Pashto speaker gives prestige to Pashto and likes to speak in Pashto and the Dari speaker gives prestige to Dari and speaks in Dari. For example, in their conversation for a Pashto speaker it would be easy to say (Ho) instead of (Balli) which means (Yes) in English. And they do most of the time, I know Pashto speakers that they speak in a Pashto language with Dari speakers even they know Dari. Vice versa, I know Dari speakers who speak in Dari with Pashto speakers even they know Pashto. I like to say that this is a real example of giving value to a language.

Finally, code switching is used for conversational purposes in bilingual and multilingual countries in order to give prestige to a language in a country. The two types of code-switching are situational and metaphorical. People use these two types as a means of conversation. Situational code switching is usage of more than one language. It is shifting from one language to another language. However, the metaphorical switching focuses on changing the topic while speaking.

### Speech Communities

Authors have different views about speech community. According to Wardough (2010) "the kind of group that sociolinguists attempt to study is called speech community" (p.119). However, Bloomfield (1933, cited in Wardough, 2010) defined "a speech community is a group of people who interact by means of speech" (p.42). Moreover, I liked the way that Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) pointed out about speech community and linguistic community.

Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) pointed out that "there are no priority grounds which force us to define speech communities so that all members speak the same language" (p.122). For example, in order to support Gumperz's idea, I state that Afghanistan is a multilingual country; there are Dari speakers' community, Pashto speakers' community, and other languages. We can call each community as an individual speech community or we can call all of these languages as a speech community. I think there is no right or wrong answer.

Therefore, bilingual and multilingual considerations lead Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) to use the term

linguistic community rather than speech community. Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) defined that linguistic communities may involve face to face interaction of small groups or it may involve large groups' interaction. A social group may be monolingual or multilingual to use social communication. It shows relationship of communities, their social cohesiveness, and their difference in certain ways.

For example, I confidently say that in Afghanistan there are different Pashto speakers from different provinces. Therefore, according to linguistic norms there are differences among Pashto speakers in Afghanistan. The Pashto speakers in Kandahar use different accent, vocabulary than those of Pashto speakers in Jalalabad in some ways. I'm sure while they interact with each other they may not recognize some words or pronunciation, unless Pashto is a single language but it has differences among small groups. I like to share the example of (Y'eah) which is a Kandahari Pashto word for (Yes) in English. However, people in Jalalabad say (Ho or Auo) for (Yes). Therefore, while a Kandahari Pashto speaker use (Y'eah) the Jalalabadi Pashto speaker becomes confused whether the Kandahari Pashto speaker said yes or no. I believe, this example shows the difference in the pronunciation and vocabulary of a single language.

In a like manner, I like to say that the other example could be Dari language, in Afghanistan. There are different Dari speakers in different provinces. For example, the Herat people's Dari is different from those of Kabul people's Dari. There are differences in vocabulary, pronunciation and other language areas. For example, people in Herat say (Eshtaoni) for (Chi taor asti) in Dari, which means (how are you) in English. I believe, while two Dari speakers from Herat and Kabul speak, they do not know some vocabularies in their interaction.

However, Pashto and Dari are from two different communities in Afghanistan, but there are differences among Pashto speakers in certain ways and Dari speakers in certain ways as small groups. All the examples that I mentioned in this essay, are based on Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) consideration about linguistic communities as small groups. We could apply linguistic communities of large groups according to Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010). For example, differences between Dari and Pashto languages as a large group's communication. These two languages have many differences in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation and other linguistics areas. I liked the way that Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough, 2010) expressed his ideas about linguistic community because Dari and Pashto languages make two different linguistic communities in Afghanistan.

To sum up, different authors have different claims about speech community. Therefore, speech community "is a very abstract concept because the particular norms that a community uses may or may not be exclusively linguistic in nature, and even the linguistic norms themselves may vary considerably among small sub-groups" (Wardough, 2010, p.122). As a result, the Gumperz (1971, cited in Wardough,

2010) idea about speech community and linguistic community has been highlighted in this paper.

### Language and Culture

Language teachers' responsibility is to help learners to develop their abilities in a language and be able to communicate in real life situations. Therefore, in order to learn a language, we need to have information about culture of that language. One of the discussions in sociolinguistics is the relationship between a language and culture. It is about how the structure and meaning of a certain language influences certain culture and how the effect of culture is toward the use of a language. Moreover, Whorf states that there are relationship between a language and culture; his view about structure of a language determines the way that a language influences culture and culture influences a language and a language determines worldview/culture. Therefore, in order to consider relationship between a language and culture it would be helpful to look through other items related to language and culture like kinship system, taxonomies, prototype theory, taboo and euphemism.

Kinship terminologies are needed to be considered while learning a language, people refer to different kinds of kin in their daily life. Kinship systems are worldwide of language features, and it is important in organization of a language (Wardhaugh, 2010). Therefore, kinship shows family relationships among different languages. For example, in Pashto for mother Pashtoons say (Ady) and for father they say (Palar). Consequently, when an English speaker prefers to learn Pashto, he/she should consider these kinship terminologies.

Taxonomy is a system of classification, which shows a way of organizing the different aspects of the world that they live (Wardhaugh, 2010). The kinship terminology shows how basic are certain systems of classification in language and society. "People also use a language to classify and categorize various aspects of the world in which they live, but they don't always classify things the way scientist do; they often develop system which we call folk taxonomies rather than scientific classification" (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 242). Therefore, Wardhaugh (2010) defines folk taxonomy as "a way of classifying a certain part of reality so that it makes some kind of senses to those who have to deal with it" (p.242). For example, TB (Tuberculosis) is a medical term for that disease; but most of people in the northern part of Afghanistan call that (Sel) disease which is a folk taxonomy and it is makes sense in that area. Sel refers to all types of diseases related to lung not only TB. Therefore, "a folk taxonomy of diseases is something that develops with little or no conscious attention. That can be shown to have a complex hierarchical structure in, therefore, a rather surprising finding. Evidently, a language and culture are related very closely and much of the relationship remains hidden from view of most of us" (Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 244).

Prototype terminology is used for a typical example that people tend to learn through, rather than through definitions. For example, typical items for furniture is chair and table not flower or book, the typical items for fruits are apple and

orange not cucumber. Therefore, each language has their own prototype terminologies.

Taboo and Euphemism terminologies are considered to be noticed in language and culture issues. Taboo is forbidden of actions and words and euphemism is using one word to avoid using another word in a language. For example, the taboo word in Afghan context is the word (Uff), especially people do not use that in front of their parents and elders. But instead of the word (Uff) they could use (Astaghfurallah). Euphemism is a word or phrase which is used instead of taboo words and phrase, and is considered to be socially acceptable. For example, instead of (Bad Kadi) which is a taboo phrase, it is better to use (KhobNakadi), they both have the same meaning but one is taboo and the other is euphemism.

Finally, a language has close relationship with culture; therefore, for leaning a language it is important to learn the relationship of that language and its culture. Therefore, there are different items related to a language and culture like kinship system, taxonomies, prototype theory, taboo and euphemism in every language. These related items to language and culture help the learners to consider while using them in their daily communication.

### Language Planning

"Language planning is a government authorized, long-term, sustained, and conscious effort to alter a language's function in a society for the purpose of solving communication problems" Weinstein (as cited in Wardhaugh, 2010, p. 378). Therefore, language planning is premeditated from authorities of a government, it could be long-term; the purpose is to solve communicative problems through using a language. Moreover, language planning covers up status planning, corpus planning, linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism and internationalizations.

First, status planning is "changes the function of a language or a variety of language and the rights of those who use it" (Wardhaugh, 2010, p.379). For example, in Afghanistan we do have a large number of tribes like Pashaie, Palochi, Turkmani, whose languages have no status. It means these languages are in minority and not used in Afghanistan's education system. The languages that the Afghanistan government has planned for education system are Dari and Pashto. For example, in matriculation exam there are Dari exam manuals and Pashto exam manuals.

Second, corpus planning refers to the language's necessary changes in structure, spelling, and vocabulary based on the society need and interest. The real example of corpus planning is in Iran. The Iran government developed a specific dictionary which involves new vocabulary. For example, instead of bicycle they use (Docharkha) and instead of Computer (Roanna). I do believe that corpus planning develops a language's prestige in the world, if a country uses vocabulary of another country; it looks to be dependent.

Third, linguistic assimilation is focused on use of a dominant language in a society. Like the society could decide that all citizens should use the dominant language. For example, in

Afghanistan, the dominant languages are Dari and Pashto, although there are different languages like Balochi, Pashaie, Turkmani but people adopt the majority to speak in Dari and Pashto.

Forth, linguistic pluralism is developing and using of more than one language alongside an official language of a country (Wardhaugh, 2010). For example, in NGOs in Afghanistan people use English alongside Dari and Pashto. They use English for official purposes like writing a letter, contracts, and communication.

Finally, internationalization is retaining in internationally used language for communicative purposes. For example, Afghan people use English language for educational and trade purposes, they either use English in the NGOs.

To sum up, language planning is a plan of government authorities, and these plans include status planning, corpus planning, linguistic assimilation, linguistic pluralism and internationalizations in a country.

### Acquisition Planning

"language planning cannot be understood apart from its social context or apart from the history which produced that context" (Cooper, 1989, p.183). I do agree with Cooper's this idea. Language planning is related to the social context, every country has a policy of language planning. Their plan is based social context of their country. For example, acquisition planning is a type of language planning and it is important in the social context. Therefore, I like to talk about acquisition planning and goals for acquisition policy such as acquisition, reacquisition, and maintenance.

First of all it is important to know what is acquisition planning. I believe it is a plan to acquire a language; the acquired language could be the first or second language for the learner. The government takes the main role in acquisition planning policies. For example, the Afghanistan government's policy in the high schools' curriculum is to add English language as a subject in order to motivate learners to acquire English besides their native languages (Dari and Pashto). However, there are different ways to acquire a language; according to Cooper (1989) people may learn a language directly through having opportunities such as official classes. Or people could learn a language through incentive method from the environment without taking any official classes. In a like manner, it is possible that both opportunity and incentive methods have included in the learning process of a language. In this case, I do agree with Cooper's (1989) statement that sometimes it is difficult to evaluate which part of the acquisition came from official classes and which part of the acquisition came from the society.

Moreover, reacquisition happens when there is a need to rebuild a language in a society. For example, most of Afghans' children who are immigrated to US are not able to speak in Dari or Pashto which is their mother language. Therefore, their parents try to create the opportunities for their children to learn their mother language. I believe,

reacquisition has a main role in the maintenance of a language.

Maintenance is the other goal for acquisition policy; I think it is very important for a group of people to maintain their language, especially when they emigrate from one place to another place. For example, there are a number of Afghans in the Europe who lived there more than twenty years but they maintained their native language (Dari or Pashto); even their children who were born and raised in Europe are able to speak Dari or Pashto fluently.

To sum up, acquisition planning has an important role in the language policy of a country. It is an opportunity to acquire a language, and it is helpful for reacquisition, and maintenance of a language. Therefore, every country has different policies in the acquisition planning systems, and according to Cooper (1989) the language planning is connected to the social context of a country.

## 3. Methodological Framework

### Study Population

The population includes adults from different provinces of Afghanistan, who currently leave in Kabul city and have brought their language and culture to the Capital of our country (Afghanistan). Therefore, mainly the provided examples of this paper are taken from two formal languages (Pashto and Dari) with all difference and similarities they have. The participants are selected from:

- Public Universities: (Kabul University and Kabul Education University)
- Governmental School Teachers
- Public

**Table 1: Study Population**

No.	Size of the population	Numbers	%
1	Kabul University Teachers	5	15%
2	Kabul University Students	8	16%
3	Kabul Education University Teachers	2	6%
4	Kabul Education University Students	4	14%
5	Governmental School Teachers	3	10%
6	Public	20	39%
Total		42	100%

Remarks: 15% represents the number of 5 adult Kabul University Teachers; 16% represent the number of 8 Kabul University Students; 6% represent 2 Kabul Education University Teachers; 14% represent 4 Kabul Education University Students; 10% represent 3 Governmental School Teachers; 39% represent 20 Public people.

## 4. Results of the Research

The result of the study shows that there are differences in a language even if it is the same language used in a society with in one group of people. The provided examples from two formal languages (Dari and Pashto) of Afghanistan

highlight the difference among those languages which are spoken in different part of the country. Therefore, there is variation in language use. The research from different university, school and public people helped to find out real examples to show the difference in a language and a two languages used in a country, especially in Afghanistan; which is a multi-lingual country.

computer skills for female students and staff, translating news from first language to target language and vice versa. She has the ability to teach academic English and English for Specific Purpose (ESP) classes.

## 5. Conclusion

The language variation in Afghanistan is an article which talks about usage of a language and the provided examples are about languages differences in Afghanistan. Therefore, this article helps the reader to find out the variations in English, Dari, Pashto and other languages of Afghanistan. However, this article helps the second language learners of a target language to know about a language variations of the target language that they prefer to learn.

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