

Interface of Language and Archaeology: Excavating Cultural Past Through Extinct Vocabulary in Hindko of Hazara

Dr. Muhammad Ali Khan¹, Dr. Nazakat Awan², Bilal Ahmed (DPhil.)³

^{1, 2} Department of English at Hazara University, Mansehra. KP Pakistan.

Email: roomiee@hotmail.com, nazakat.nazakat@gmail.com

³ Department of Linguistics and Literature, The University of Haripur, KP Pakistan.

Email: malikb421@gmail.com

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Abstract

One of the attributes of human language is displacement. It means that humans can inflect language between past and future. The interface of language and archeology is interesting to recover and discover material and cultural past. The undertaken study attempts to clasp receding past by unveiling material objects through linguistic memory of the inhabitants. An ethnographic approach is applied by immersing in Hindko speaking areas of Hazara division to locate answers of the research questions. It is revealed that most of cultural heritage has speedily disappeared in past and old people are the only source to trace it. Data showed pre-globalization remnants of culture in pottery, wears, agriculture and food items where there was no access of modern means of preserving records. The study showed that interface of language and archeology can help a great deal to excavate cultural past by answering many archeological pursuits.

Keywords: Language, Archeology, Interface, Cultural Past, Hindko, Extinct vocabulary,

Introduction

A language is an associate and part of cultural activities in any community. It is language through which people communicate and transact their social, political and cultural affairs of life. A society has its specific structure which grows changes and often vanishes with the passage of time. In other words, a society has its various phases where cultural activities pass through embryonic stages to its fullness and ultimately towards decline. It is historical evidence that a society leaves behind its remnants in archaeological annals. The customs, the rituals, the architectures and the utterances are buried deep with passing times. The facts related to this entire cultural heritage are difficult to trace until burrowed and excavated through different means. Material discovery by means of digging and exploring with the help of mattock, shovel, hoe and trowel is the most popular and conventional way of reaching past. This archaeological digging leads us back where a society has lived to its fullness and possessed a vibrant and vital time once. The dust tells stories of dominance and charm. The sites, the structured circumferences, the deserted courtyards, the dilapidated paths lead us to what we cannot see or observe today. Archeology is all about science of exploring past, investigating modes and ways of people living in ages ago. One school of thought believes that the science of archeology mainly deals with recovery and analysis of material culture. This historical bulk rests in the form of artifacts, eco-facts, bio-facts and cultural landscapes. The analysis and examination of human material remains may consist of fossils, the rubrics of buildings, the items such as pottery, jewelry etc. The objectives and mission of an archeologist is thus is a job of reconstructing past. The interdisciplinary relation of archeology with subjects like

paleontology and anthropology has broadened its scope to understand human culture and lifestyle in past. Excavation by default is although a recognized tool but it is not the only method of exploring and understanding erstwhile cultural activities. Many historical objects disintegrate over time and only durable items like potsherds can survive for hundreds of centuries. According to Huffman (1970) the archeologists encounter considerable difficulty in synthesizing and amalgamating historical lines due to missing links because of incomplete and distorted information. One of the many important methods that archeologists adopt is reconstructing past with the help of present. This method works on the assumption that there has been some continuity through time and so archeologists attempt to interpret past through present. The most common approaches used by archeologists are theoretical models and experiments. The information like demographic shift, environmental changes are credible sources to trace plausible information about historical facts. Ethno-archeological study is a systematic way of studying culture and people. It is the recording and analysis of culture based on participant observation. The current study is an attempt to analyze past through linguistic structures under Ethno-archeological design. The study endeavors to travel back in past and bring out some extinct and dead layers of cultural past in a particular region through extinct vocabulary of Hindko language. The following discussion illustrates how archeology and language are interrelated.

Language and archaeology:

Language and culture are closely related to each other. Language is an integral part of culture and remains at center of total cultural activities in any community. A language forms a culture and is a vehicle to carry ahead culture to next generations. Various dimensions of language like pragmatics, semantics, orthography, morphology and syntax are determinants of cultural repertoire in any living community. There is complex and intricate relation between language, archeology and archeogenetics and latest research is all about bringing harmonizing ground for them (Cavalli-Sforza, Menozzi, and Piazza 1994; Kohl and Fawcett 1995; Meskell 1998; Renfrew and Boyle 2000). As in social and cultural structures there remains process of formation and decay there are similar parallels in the life of any language. A language like an animate being goes through its early stages to later stages of development and decay. In languages there are grammatical and lexical changes which depend on respective social and political factors for their survival or extinction. A language is never a fixed or static phenomenon. It shapes and is being shaped with time. Huffman (1970) and Oliver (1966) mention this correlation by giving reference of between the spread of Iron Age culture in southern and eastern sub equatorial Africa and the dispersal of Bantu speakers. Wilson (1985, 2012) draws attention towards this important interface of language and archeology in Eastern Polynesian (EP) languages context. A language works as retrospective and reflexive document to flashback in history. A cultural past left behind or repudiated for any reason is hardly ignorable phenomenon for an archaeologist. Although these material items or objects are shrouded in past but their nomenclatures present in the language of old speakers are sources of peeping into past. In this regard language, its remnant vocabulary through participant observation with old speakers is a very significant digging tool to uncover cultural and physical world in past. The mutual relation and techniques of defining this mutuality can lead to a significant arena of research in archeology. Colin Renfrew draws light on the links between archeology and linguistics focusing especially Indo-European languages families. Lexicostatistics and glottochronology are about quantification; a scientific approach to the classification of languages. Paul Haggarty (n.d) while giving interview tells us how linguistics plays an important role in tracing the human story. He thinks that unlike the archeological record our languages are still living lineages. Languages are like windows on our past; corroborating records like genetics to help in tracing our posterity. Although written records are of immense value but oral traditions to large extent are helpful in his regard. The comparison of surviving languages can help in

reconstructing ancestral stages. Paul Haggarty (n.d) further says that languages do not reconstruct long lost ethnic identity or cultural complex.

Review of Literature

The current study is unique due to many reasons. It is unconventional in archeological studies as it is trying to excavate historical undersurfaces through language. As discussed above there is close link of language and archeology. Various studies are conducted on this topic. These studies vary in many respects. These are conducted in different regions with different perspectives. Lamberg (2002) discusses interface of language and archeology in Indo-Iranian context. The study tries to trace back following historical linguistic track. It is rather not through language but an archeological surfing of languages. Renfrew (1987), Mallory (1989), Gamkrelidze and Ivanov (1984, 1995), and Mallory and Mair (2000) take this aspect of language and archeology in quite different sense. Their research is about Proto-Indian-European languages. Renfrew and Boyle (2000) discuss about renewed interest in archeogenetics and relation of archeology and languages. Sutton (1973) finds similar relation between language and archeology in Kenyan context. Carter (1973)'s work is about comparative Bantu in African context. Ehret (1972) also interrogates Bantu question but it is from study of Bantu origin context followed by critique. Henrici (1973) has classified Bantu by exploring its history. Huffman (1974) has worked in archeological sense to understand linguistic affinities of Iron Age in Rhodesia. All these studies in one way or other provide evidence that mutual relation of language and history is quite old and indispensable. Hymes (1983) finds another development in the same era was lexicostatistics, the counting of cognate words between two or more languages in a standardized list. Dumont d'Urville (1834) compared a number of Oceanic languages (which would today be called Austronesian) and proposed a method for calculating a coefficient of their relationship. When he extended his comparison to a sample of Amerindian languages, he correctly concluded that they were not related to oceanic. Swadesh (1952) finds that a sister discipline to lexicostatistics is glottochronology, the notion that if the differentiation between languages can be assigned numerical status, then it might be regularly related to the time-depth of the split between languages. Wotton (1730) had the idea of calculating how rapidly languages change, by comparing ancient texts of known dates with the modern form of those languages, while Latham (1850) first sketched the possibility of assigning a precise date to the divergence of two languages through the application of a mathematical algorithm. There is no such study conducted in Pakistani settings and there is a gap which this study would attempt to fill. Above cited literature provides insight about language archeology workability.

Purpose of the Study:

The purpose of current study was an archeological one. It was to travel back not by excavation but through extinct vocabulary. The study aimed to investigate through repudiated or dead words about recent past and such items which had buried somewhere in past. The focus of the study was in Hindko speaking region and through investigation the purpose of excavating past were served.

Significance of the Study:

The study is significant from linguistics-archeological point of view. After this research the life style, cultural past and various items in use of people which are not in trend today will be explored. The study will reconstruct past. It will throw light on those aspects of regional culture, which is no more surviving. The study hence will connect the missing links of present age to past. The lost history of a specific culture will revive to large extent.

Research questions: The research attempted to seek the answers of following questions:

1. What is the interface of archeology and language in Hindko speaking regions of Hazara Division?
2. How does this interface reflect cultural past in Hazara region?

Methodology

The undertaken study was unconventional with respect to archeological perspective. Oral and linguistic tradition was implied here to trace back remnants of culture in particular region. The speakers of Hindko above seventy years of age served as archival source of cultural past in Hazara region of current Khyber Pakhtunkhwa. These people were approached in different areas of district Mansehra and Abbottabad. Twenty people above seventy years of age were contacted for the sake of collecting extinct nomenclatures and uses of material objects which were in use in their time. These respondents formed a direct link to past to observe what was buried now. The material objects were hidden from today's people but once they existed and had active role in cultural activities. The items of past were categorized on the following patterns.

- i. Pottery
- ii. Tools
- iii. Construction
- iv. Foot wears

The respondents not only told the names but also explained functions, designs and various modes of these cultural markers of the past. The collection and interpretation of data on the basis of this ethnographic participatory approach is as follow:

Interpretation of Collected Data

- i. **Pottery:** Pottery has always been fundamental human need in all times. It is generally earthenware, porcelain, plasticware and stoneware. Skibo (1991) with reference to Kalinga pottery illustrates importance of pottery in archeological studies.
 - a. **Kori:** Kori was once a clay pot for making whey. Today it is replaced by steel cauldrons, grinders and other ceramic pots. The respondents were affirmative about its absence in current dairy uses. It had its particular size, shape and features. People in past never used any other container for churning yogurt. Some respondents also used word *Chatoori* for it
 - b. **Karragha:** Karragha is also no more in current use. It used to be a shaft in whey pot tied with fine string for churning butter. It worked as a pulley for providing to and fro motion to Karragha operated by mostly women at homes.



- c. **Tabbakh.** *Tabbakh* or *dabbakhs* (some respondents pronounced) were clay dishes for meals mostly for serving cereals, rice and broth etc. People eagerly used them for daily use and events. It could accommodate about six people for single serving. There is no culture of these pots in current time. Today people mostly use single plate ceramic dishes.
 - d. **Kooza.** *Kooza* was another important feature of this region. It was an ewer made of clay used for multi purposes but dominantly for ablution in mosques. People also used it for pouring melted *desi ghee* (clarified butter) on cooked rice in marriages or religious rituals. Today it is replaced by other handy dishes and basins for hand washing.
 - e. **Sarranwaan.** *Sarranwaan* was a bowel shaped container for drinking water, milk or soaking various nuts. It was also made of clay and the same shape made with silver is called *katori* which is still in use. A close alternate of *Saranwaan* in modern time is a big bowl.
- ii. **Tools.** There were number of tools used in recent past but have now buried in dust of time. These tools were for various purposes. Current study addresses them under a heading of tools which range from cutting, agricultural and other tools.
- a. **Hamchoor.** *Hamchoor* is a name for snow removing shovel from the roofs of the houses. It was made of wooden frame and knit with strong cotton thread. It was lighter from today's wipers but served as very useful tool for swift clearing of snowy roofs.



- b. **Damreen.** *Damreen* was a wooden hand tool like a small cricket bat for beating and washing clothes and such jobs used to be done by women usually going to small streams and rivers nearby the villages. As of now the tool has been extinct, and no more in use of the people by dint of which new generations are unaware of the word.
- c. **Mohla.** *Mohla* was another wooden tool for beating raw rice to have finished product of rice. The tool was like a mortar and pestle of modern concept of grinding spices but was not made of stone to avoid splintering of fresh rice. It needed adroitness of an artist and was widely used in dominantly agricultural terrain. The respondents had fade memory of it in their minds.



- d. ***Tonr.*** *Tonr* is a kind of chest for storing flour. It was made of wood in simple or embroidered form. Its size also depended on the requirement of a family. Some dialects of Hindko also used word *kaloti* for it. The main purpose was storage of flour and it had separate sections in it but could be used for other dry material like cereals, pulses etc. There is no such custom in these areas. People have opted for other different products of multinational companies.
- e. ***Phohri.*** *Phohri* was another crop related tool for sifting grains. It was used for wheat and rice both. Pronunciation of the name varied according to dialects of various regions. This tool is extinct and rapidly losing its name from the vocabulary of Hindko.



- f. ***Phandi.*** *Phandi* was a kind of mat for sitting purposes made of local grass. It was a special thick kind of grass collected for this particular purpose. *Phandi* was of different size and shape. Some people used it in simple shape while some *phandis* were in embroidered forms as well. It was used in fields to work with crops or for sitting purposes at any place.
- g. ***Darubraan.*** *Darubraan* was a specific tool for beating and pressing soils of barn roofs or houses. It was used during rains and it kept roofs stronger and intact. It had a sizeable shaft fixed in a rectangular wooden plain piece and used as a slap on roof. The respondents still recall its thudding sound on roofs but cemented houses and modern ways of construction have pushed it into past.



- h. **Darhilna.** *Dilli* is a special kind of burning wood and *Darhilna* used to be an enclave or place for placing *Dilli* for lighting purposes. People used to make it while designing their new houses. It used to be an essential part of drawing rooms.
 - i. **Baagri.** Another important aspect of agrarian life was variety of items for fire purposes. *Baagri* was a distinctive feature of every hearth. It was a special curved space in hearths for storing ash of the woods. Clay hearths were incomplete without *Baagri*. Today it is disappeared both in vocabulary and culture. Modern fire stoves and cylinders have replaced it.
- iii. **Foot Wears.** Some of the respondents had frequently used such foot wears which are no more in current use. These foot wears were not common shoes but were made to fight chill of cold weather. These kept people safe from frosty and snowy soil. Some important are mentioned below.
- a. **Poolaan.** *Poolaan* used to be special sneakers made of rice grass. These were used in snow to conduct daily works smoothly. These foot wears were very useful in slippery places and were soft and comfortable as well. Now there is flood of modern shoes and joggers and except old people no one knows their name. Everyone according to respondents could make them but few experts had greater adroitness in making them more sophisticated.
 - b. **Kharaawaan.** *Kharaawaan* were other shoes made of wood. Only carpenters had art of making them. They were not as comfortable like *poolaan* but were stronger and people used clothes (*thoothayword* for socks) inside them to relax their hardness. These were used where people encountered use of water in ablution or crossing watery channels.
- iv. **Construction.** In construction also there were separate names according to engineering needs.
- a. **Mairaan.** These were shredded pieces of wood used in the lattice of a roof. These made houses beautiful from inside but also stronger to bear the load of mud and soil on it. The concept of *Mairaan* is story of past and now it is only in the vocabulary of older people. Along with this name there are umpteen other terms of construction like *Chaalian* (long sheaf of wood to supported by pillars).

Conclusion.

Language shift is a very significant component of historical linguistics. Time is always in flux and language and material objects keep flowing in this flux. It is always a challenging in archeology to dig past. Language is one of the important data to reveal past. The fast development in current era has very speedily introduced newer commodities of life resultantly throwing back earlier ones in the basket of past. On the other side the decay of language is not as faster as material things.

The speakers of language have fortunately longer days than those objects of use which once co-existed with the language. Present study deals with this equilibrium of linguistics and archeology via interpretive tools of language. Linguistics is a useful tool in understanding and tracing the history of cultures. The relationship between archeology and linguistics exhibits the internal dynamics and potency of the subjects and external social and political trends. The phenomenon of language death is well appropriate to understand co-existence of living things and their presence in history. Archaeologists and linguists share a difficulty in confronting and identifying processes of convergence and divergence. Glyn Daniel (1962) while emphasizing the relation of both subjects opines that

“We must alas, for the most part, keep the builders and bearers of our prehistoric cultures speechless and physically neutral. This may seem to you an unsatisfying conclusion. And so, it is but then much of our prehistory is unsatisfying and difficult, tantalizingly meagre and sketchy. We can appreciate this and accept the limitations of prehistory along with its excitements”. (Daniel 1962, 114-115).

The Australian linguist R. M. W. Dixon (1997; 1993) and Trubetskoy (1968) convincingly argue about convergence of language and archeology. Everything is not material. If it is lost and not recorded in annals of history then it is lost forever. It cannot be excavated and recovered. These are the speakers who provide trail to these objects. The data collected in current study reflected same. The objects once part and parcel of a living culture were dead. They could not make their place in any museum or literary documents. They were at the verge of their extinction. The study gave them a new light of the day and they have reappeared on timeline of history. The study found the answers of both research questions. There are many archaic vocabulary items and they indicate existence of recent past. To add in current project a new extensive project on the same line with diverse methodology is needed to explore at wider level new dimensions of similar investigations.

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