Queer but Language: A Sociolinguistic Study of *Farsi*

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Abstract

In this paper we have tried to settle whether Farsi, a secret code language spoken by the hijras, is a language or not. Hijras are a marginalized community that lives in sequestered groups in many cities of India and Pakistan. The present study, by challenging the assertions of Hall, Nagar and Munawar et al., is based on the assumption that hijras' Farsi is more than a mere code or mixture, and explores, identifies and describes its nature and status as a language. Using ethnographic research methods, the data for the present study has been collected from the spoken language of hijras settled in D. G. Khan and Rawalpindi, two Pakistani urban areas. By employing Bell's seven point criteria for language analysis, data for the present study has been analysed. Linguistically, Farsi contains its own vocabulary and shows various syntactical and morphological differences from the other 'mainstream' languages. Sociolinguistic analysis shows that Farsi is as good a language as any other. However, the number of its lexical items is small which is perhaps because of its limited and private usage.

Key terms: Farsi, hijras, queer, sociolinguistics.

1. INTRODUCTION

In 2009, the hijras in a Pakistani city, Taxila, staged a protest against police highhandedness and attracted Pakistani media attention (Daily Times, 2009). As a result, in the newly restored and liberated Supreme Court of Pakistan, they won a historic verdict in their favour which gave them the right to vote. Suddenly many people in Pakistan, got interested in these hitherto vilified and socially marginalized people. Academic interest in their life and customs acquired new boost. During our fieldwork for another study about the hijras, we came across the following expression uttered by a hijra:

Kaɽe kaɽɑ ho[1].

When asked what the meaning of the expression may be, the hijra initially shied away. However, on persuasion and a little monetary incentive, she relented to explain. This revelation led to the assumption in the minds of the present researchers that a community can even develop a separate, secret language of its own, with an elaborate code system that can be used as a survival tool in a society which is hostile to such minority groups. But does such an in-group communication, in this case Farsi, qualify to become a language in the true sense of the term, is the question that we try to settle in the present study.

A bulk of work (e.g. Shah, 1961; Kessler, 1987 and 1990; Singh, 1989; Rais, 1993; Nanda, 1990; Balaji and Maloy, 1997; Mcelhinny, 2003; Khattak, 2004; Brown, 2005; Reddy, 2005; Khilji, 2008, etc) is available on hijras of the Subcontinent as they have attracted the attention of anthropologists, sociologists and psychologists, even as early as in the nineteenth century (as Hall, 2005, p. 128 cites Shortt, 1873 and Faridi, 1899) who studied the various aspects of hijra life, like their sexuality, queer identity, social organization, health issues, social status, etc. 'Discussed variously in the anthropological literature as "transvestites", "eunuchs", hermaphrodites", and even "a third sex", most of India's hijras were raised as boys before taking up residence in one of the many hijra communities that exist in almost every region of India' (Hall, 1997, p. 430). Same is the case of hijras in Pakistan. They are predominantly male. However, 'according to a survey, there is only one inborn hijra out of thousand hijras in Pakistan' (Latif as cited in Khattak, 2004, p. 4). The reasons why they live in cloistered in-groups, leading to their social marginalization and economic poverty, are numerous. For those same reasons, they have developed this language called Farsi as a weapon/tool to defend themselves against any encroachment on their secured space. The fear of a hostile majority is at the root of feeling this need to develop a secret language. The question for the present study, as stated above, is whether this language, used by only one and a half million hijras in Pakistan (see Ali, 2007, p. 7), is a language at all when analyzed in the light of various language theories?

Farsi has remained a secret language as the hijra community is extremely protective about it. Even the well researched works (such as Brown, 2005) have failed to notice the private nature of this language. Same is the case with Rahman (1996) who brings into light almost all the languages of Pakistan but makes no mention of Farsi. However, a few (e.g. Khattak, 2004; Khilji, 2008, etc) have mentioned it as the language of hijra community. On the other hand, Hall (2005, p. 129) and Nagar (2008, p. i) assert that it is a "lexical code" and "a code language", respectively. Since both these studies focus the other aspects of the language, as, for instance, how it is linked with their identity, sexuality etc, therefore, their claim regarding its status may be misleading. Munawar et al. (as cited in Khattak, 2004, p. 21) opine that, 'Their language is a mixture of Persian, Urdu and Punjabi, which is called *Farsi Chandrana*'. If on the one hand this statement acknowledges a distinct status for Farsi, on the other it limits it.

In order to establish whether Farsi is a language or not, we need to first define what *a* language is. Many linguists (Sapir, 1933; Barber, 1972; Bakhtin, 1986; Aitchison, 1996; Hudson, 1996; Lanehart, 1996; Aitchison, 2003; Chapman, 2006, etc) have attempted to define language in terms of its various functions and features. Downes (1998) considers it very complicated to define. Quine (as cited in Chapman, 2006) and Bucholtz and Hall (2004) place it in the socio-cultural contexts. However, 'the question, "what is *a* language?" is not the same as the question, "what is language?"' (Downes, 1998, p. 16) as *a* language means a particular language that is different from others, involving social factors while language involves the psychological factors as well. Sociolinguists have varied opinions regarding the definition of *a* language as some believe in the existence of idiolects since 'every individual speaks a language different from every other' (Whitney as cited in Downes, 1998, p. 16), while others believe in the existence of only dialects and believe that 'there is no real distinction between "language" and "dialect" (1996, p. 36). Due to the ambiguity of the term *a* language, some linguists (e.g. Chambers and Trudgill, 1980; Duranti, 1997; Fishman, 2002, etc) are of the view that it is not yet properly defined and, being a non-technical term, it may be replaced with some other term. Going by the existing debates, if English, Urdu, Hindi, etc belong to the category of *a* language, Farsi may also be called so if its linguistic features meet the minimum standard.

It is asserted that as long as mutual intelligibility is found, it is one language, no matter whether its speakers are separated by social barriers and geographical borders. But for many sociolinguists mutual intelligibility alone is not enough to give a shared speech the status of a complete language. Then what does constitute a language?

> 'What it takes to make a language is not a set of structural linguistic properties or lack of intelligibility with related linguistic systems, but rather the conviction that the linguistic system in question is a symbol of nationalist or ethnic identity. There are cases around the world of the two logical possibilities—cases in which mutually unintelligible linguistic varieties belong to the same language and others where mutually intelligible varieties are separate languages'. (Fasold, 1999, p. 1)

This leads to the concept of 'speech community' according to which a tongue should be considered *a* language if the people who speak it think so. 'Dutch and German must be regarded as separate languages since, in spite of their similarities, the Dutch consider that they speak Dutch and the Germans consider that they speak German' (Aitchison, 2003, p. 114). Two conspicuous examples of this concept can be Urdu-Hindi and Punjabi-Siraiki. Many similarities can be traced between Urdu and Hindi. 'Urdu and Hindi are genetically closely related languages. Both Urdu and Hindi belong to the Indo-Aryan language family … The syntactic structures of Urdu and Hindi are quite similar; their phonology, morphology, and vocabulary are, however, different' (Ahmad, 2008, p. 2). Though there are some such differences, their phonology, morphology, and vocabulary are, however, not totally different as Ahmad claims. Urdu and Hindi are regarded as separate languages predominantly because their respective speech communities consider them as such. Indian Muslims consider Urdu a separate language owned by them (Farouqi n.d.), and in Pakistan it is considered to be the 'lingual aspect of national integration of Pakistan' (Durrani, 2008). There are even less linguistic differences between Siraiki and Punjabi, yet they are also regarded as separate languages because the communities concerned, due to larger cultural differences from each other, like to consider them as distinct.

2. METHODOLOGY

The population for the present study has been selected from the hijras settled in the two cities, D. G. Khan and Rawalpindi, located in the Punjab province of Pakistan. During our data collection period (September, 2008 to September, 2009), those who came to these two cities from other cities, with different entertaining organizations like circus companies, were also included in the population of the study. Though the hijras were randomly observed and asked questions wherever and whenever they were found i.e. either in fairs or on roads and streets, yet purposive sampling was also used in the field research where four out of 16 hijra *deras* (hijra households) were selected (two from each city of the locale).

From these *deras,* twenty out of 200 hijras were interviewed including four gurus (head of hijra household). The four focus group discussions were also conducted from these four households. Two *mirasis*[2] (one from each city) were also interviewed because they enjoy a close affinity with the hijras and thus are well informed about their language. In this way, we were able to double check if the hijras of our sample population were forthright in giving us information about Farsi. Building good rapport and gaining confidence of the hijras of our population was challenging. We made use of 'phatic communion' (Senft, 2003), developed a close friendship with the four key 'native' informants (two from each of the cities) and started doing non-participant observations of their outdoor activities like dancing, begging, prostitution, etc. and participant observation of certain indoor festivities, for example, *birth* of a hijra (hijra induction to a hijra household), making kin relations, *wada khana* (grand feast), etc, we[3] became participant observers of their daily life and discourse. Four focus group discussions (two from each city) were also conducted.

Other tools like daily diary, field notes and photography were also used to collect data. All the interviews and discussions were audio-recorded. After having gathered the data, it was transcribed using Roman script from Punjabi, Siraiki and Urdu in which the interviews and the discussions were conducted. The question in mind was: *What are the linguistic and social features of Farsi?* To investigate the problem, we applied, alongside the concept of the speech community, 'Bell's seven criteria for a language'. In order to show that it was not a mere mixture or sub-variety of other Pakistani languages (Urdu, Punjabi, Siraiki), Farsi is linguistically contrasted with them.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

Except for the survey[4] about the people's awareness about Farsi, rest of the collected data is qualitatively analyzed and contains a discussion on and description of different linguistic and social features of Farsi.

3.1 Linguistic features of Farsi as compared with other languages in the same locales

During our field work, we were able to know about 1000 lexical items of Farsi. If we keep in mind the established linguistic notion that only ten percent words out of the lexicon of a language are in use by its best speakers (Chang-sup, 2011), we may assume that Farsi consists of about as many as ten thousand words.

Comparison at morphological level: Farsi has nouns (feminine, masculine; singular, plural), pronouns, verbs (feminine, masculine; singular, plural), adjectives (feminine, masculine; singular, plural), determiners (feminine, masculine; singular, plural), etc of its own. However, it usually borrows adverbs, prepositions, etc from other languages in contact.

In the following table, a few nouns of Farsi are given. They are all names of body parts.

Table 1. Farsi Nouns[5]

Noun (Singular)	Masculine (M)/ Feminine (F)	Plural	English	Punjabi	Siraiki	Urdu
Khombaɽ	M	Khomaɽ	Face	Monh	Munh	Chehra
Nakɽa	M	Nakɽey	Nose	Nak	Nak	Naak
Chamɽri	F	Chamɽian	Eye	Akh	Akh	Aankh
Dhhambɽa	M	Dhamɽey	Tummy	Tidh	Dhidh	Paet
Dambɽi	F	Dambɽian	Tummy	-do-	-do-	-do-
Choochkey	M	Choochkey	Moustache	Muchh	Muchh	Moochh
Reskey	M	Reskey	Pubic hair	Chuan	Bood	Baal
Nejma	M	Nejme	Tooth	Dand	Dand	Dant
Chamki	F	Chamkian	Skin	Chum	Chum	Jild
Chhalka	M	Chhalkey	Breast	Than	Thanɽ	Chhati
Chapti	F	Chaptian	The hole of a hijra after castration similar as vagina	NIL	NIL	NIL
Leekaɽ	M	Leekaɽ	Penis	Laoɽa	Lun	Uzv-e-tanasul
Vatal	F	Vatal	Hips	Bund	Chut	Koolha
Seepo	F	Seepo	Vagina	Phudi	Budi	Farj

It is evident from the above list of some common Farsi nouns that it is not a part of Hindi (and Urdu) with some code words. Code words are usually meant to be hidden but in Farsi there are many words like *nejma,* *choochkey* and *damɽi,* for instance from the above table, which are never forbidden to utter. Similarly, in the languages like Urdu and Punjabi, *nak* (nose) is feminine but in Farsi the word nakɽa is masculine.

A phonological study of the above table will make us notice another difference i.e. Farsi makes frequent use of retroflex /ɽ/ sound (e.g. in Khombaɽ, Nakɽa, Leekaɽ etc.) which is rarely found in the words for body parts in the languages in contact. Also, in these languages, we do not find any equivalent for *chapti* since this is a biological peculiarity found only among the hijras. This feature is also evident in the following table which gives a few more nouns.

Table 2 Footwear and garments

Noun (Singular)	Masculine/Feminine	Plural	English	Punjabi	Siraiki	Urdu
Khalki	F	Khalkian	Shoe	Juti	Juti	Joota
Firka	M	Firkey	Women's wear	NIL	NIL	NIL
Kotki	F	Kotkian	Men's wear	NIL	NIL	NIL
Santli	F	Santlian	Shawl	Chadar	Chadar	Chadar

Urdu, Punjabi and Siraiki languages have no separate words to refer to the clothes of men and women but Farsi does have *firka* and *kotki*. This seems to be so because unlike the men and women of the area who wear only one type of dress specifically designed for them, male and female hijras wear both types. So they are more in need of separate words for dresses than men and women. Then the word *khalki* used for shoes is masculine in Urdu but feminine in Farsi. The data shows that Farsi spoken in the locales of the present study borrows most of its pronouns from other languages that hijras speak though they are not totally absent because Farsi has *hamala* for 'I' and *tamala* for 'you'. Nagar (2008, p. 206-207) in the glossary of her work has given two more of the Farsi pronouns: *humsio* (I) and *ojo* (he/she) that, however, are not used by hijras of the locales of the present study.

Farsi verbs are mostly with the same morphological patterns as those of the languages in contact. Mostly their infinitives end with *na*, for example, vogna (to walk), taankna (to drink), etc. Table 3 gives more examples.

Table 3. Verbs of Farsi

Verbs	Masculine/Feminine	English	Punjabi	Siraiki	Urdu
Vogna	Both	To go or to walk	Janɽa/anɽa	Wanjanɽ/ avanɽ	Jana/ana
Chamna	Both	To understand	Samajhna	Samjhanɽ	Samajhna
Lugiɽna	Both	To die	Marna	Maranɽ	Marna

Table 3 above shows that Farsi has verbs of its own but, morphologically they are similar to those of the languages in contact. The table also shows that the morphology of verbs of Siraiki is not the same as that of Punjabi and Urdu. Here the social variation comes to work because the verbs of Farsi in D. G. Khan are *voganɽ, chamanɽ, lugiɽanɽ*, etc instead of *vogna*, *chamna* and *lugiɽna*, respectively. It means these verbs change their own morphology to keep in pace with the language in contact that is Siraiki in D. G. Khan. These types of varieties influenced by the languages in contact can be found everywhere in the world.

Farsi also has many adjectives of its own. However, unlike English and just like the languages in contact, it does not have comparative and superlative degrees. Some of the adjectives are given as examples in the table below.

Table 4 Farsi Adjectives

Adjectives	Masculine/Feminine	Plural	English	Punjabi	Siraiki	Urdu
Chisa	M	Chise	Beautiful	Sonhɽa	Sunɽha	Khubsurat
Chisi	F	Chisian	Beautiful	Sonhɽi	Sunhɽi	Khubsurat
Sudha	M	Sudhay	Old man	Budha	Budha	Buɽha
Sudhi	F	Sudhian	Old woman	Budhi	Budhi	Buɽhi

Farsi has adjective *chisa* for beautiful male and *chisi* for beautiful female. They are totally different from their equivalents in Punjabi and Siraiki i.e. *Sonhɽa, Sonhɽi* and *Sunɽha, Sunhɽi*, respectively.

However, *sudha* and *sudhi* for old man and old woman are morphologically closer to *budha budhi* of Siraiki and Punjabi.

Farsi also has determiners as given in table 5.

Table 5 Farsi Determiners

Determiners	Masculine/ Feminine	Plural	English	Punjabi	Siraiki	Urdu
Insa	M	*Inse*	This	*Ay*	*Ey*	*Yeh*
Insi	F	*Insian*	This	*Ay*	*Ey*	*Yeh*

From table 5, it can be noticed that Farsi has only demonstratives which work as specific determiners. However, all its contact languages and English have general determiners as well. Then Farsi has different determiners for masculine and feminine genders unlike other languages in comparison which do not have any gender marking on determiners. One more dissimilarity that is important to be discussed is that unlike its languages in contact, Farsi has only two determiners which are gendered and are equivalent to English 'this' and 'these'. They refer to the nouns that are not distant. This may be because Farsi is mostly used in the presence of and against some outsider. The speakers need to refer to these outsiders when they are not away. This also shows how the growth of Farsi is hindered when it is kept secret, and exploited only in some particular contexts. The above data also show that Farsi consists of simple mono or disyllabic words, generally. Farsi seems to be wanting in other parts of speech like prepositions, adverbs and conjunctions perhaps because of its being possessed by hijras for centuries. The same limitation reflects in its not being a written language.

It is interesting to note that Farsi has its own counting but it is not perfect. This counting system is used just for money which is as follows:

Dasola/dasoli (ten rupees)
Adhi vadmi/adhi vadvi (fifty rupees)
Vadmi/vadvi (hundred rupees)
Panj vadmi/panj vadvi (five hundred rupees)
Katka (one thousand)
Nira patt (one hundred thousand)

Farsi does not have any equivalent for an amount more than this. This shows hijras' economic limitations, and Farsi's social impoverishment.

Comparison at syntactical level: Like all languages in contact, and unlike English where S + V + O combine to form a sentence, Farsi follows the general syntactic pattern of S + O + V (subject+object+verb). See the example given in the following table:

Table 6 Farsi Syntax

Language	Sentences
Farsi	*Hamala tamala nal rootha krendi ey.* S O V
English	I (female) love you. S V O
Punjabi	*Maen terey nal piar kerdi wan.* S O V
Siraiki	*Maen teday nal piar krendi aan.* S O V
Urdu	*Maen tum se piar kerti hun.* S O V

This table shows that Farsi is separate but not very different from other languages of the locale because all of them have the same syntactical structure. However, all the three languages in contact make use of *maen* (I) for subject in the above example but Farsi has *hamala*, instead. Now someone may object that Farsi borrows prepositions like *nal* (with) from the languages in contact and thus, on the basis of such evidence, may declare it a mere code, mixture or a sub-unit of any other language. But a careful study reveals that most of these prepositions are shared by all the major languages of the locale as is obvious in the above example. We can also see the close morphology of the verb *krendi, kerdi* and *kerti*. This is also not the problem only with Farsi but again it is shared by all the languages in the region. Hijras from D. G. Khan while speaking Farsi would say *krendi*, due to Siraiki influence, while those from Rawalpindi would use *kerdi* instead under the influence of Punjabi. These changes create two different varieties of Farsi in the two cities of locale.

However, Farsi does not have any obvious influence on Siraiki and Punjabi. This is again because of the private and limited use of Farsi. It can be affirmed that this comparison of Farsi with other languages used by hijras on the basis of linguistic features has, to some extent, proved competency of Farsi as a separate language. Now social aspects would be considered to further define what Farsi is.

3.2 Social features of Farsi

Apart from the linguistic facts presented above, Farsi has also developed some features to have a distinct identity for its speakers. However, Farsi's case is very strange because it is not visible in the society; it is limited to a community, therefore, only hijra community knows that Farsi is a separate language. Sociolinguists have devised different ways to view a language from social perspectives.

We would apply only those which seem appropriate to the nature of the language. We have used, as stated above, the concept of speech community and Bell's seven criteria for language to determine what Farsi is.

Hijra community and Farsi: The notion of language being confusing and misleading the 'sociolinguists prefer to start with the notion of a *speech community* rather than a "language" and they define a speech community as any group of people *who consider that they speak the same language'* (Aitchison, 2003, p. 114; emphasis ours). On the basis of this assertion, power given to speech community by sociolinguists, a speech community has the right to consider what they speak – a separate language. Let us now see what hijra (speech) community has to say about Farsi.

Reema[6], one of our key informants, is a middle aged hijra living as guru with four *chelas* (disciples) in Shams Abad Rawalpindi. When in the start of our field research we tried to learn something of and about Farsi, Reema said:

Extract 1[7]

> *Farsi kia hae? farsi ik zaban haegi jes tarah tusi kuj urdu ich bolde-o, asi punjabi bolde-an esi-tarah farsi vi zaban hae-gi.*
> Farsi <u>what is</u>? Farsi <u>a</u> <u>language</u> <u>is</u> <u>as</u> <u>like</u> <u>you</u> <u>something</u> Urdu <u>in</u> <u>speak</u> <u>we</u> Punjabi <u>speak</u> <u>in the same way</u> Farsi <u>also</u> <u>language</u> <u>is</u>
> What is Farsi? Farsi is a language just as you say something in Urdu, we speak Punjabi, in the same way Farsi is also a language.

Reema gives a comparison of Farsi with the contact languages (Urdu and Punjabi as is relevant in Reema's context). According to Reema's simplistic analogy, Farsi is nothing less than Urdu and Punjabi.

Kiran, another key informant who owns a hijra dance party based in Pathar Bazar D. G. Khan, responded to 'what is Farsi?' rather in emotional tones:

Extract 2

> *Samijh farsi meku tan andi-ay matlab thik-ay farsi samijh hik pashto ay samijh asan bulesun tan tuhaku tan pashto tan nai andi nan samijh sadi aprin hik boli ay*
> <u>Say</u> Farsi <u>me</u> <u>then</u> <u>speak</u> <u>means</u> <u>ok</u> Farsi <u>say</u> <u>a</u> Pashto <u>is</u> <u>say</u> <u>we</u> <u>speak</u> <u>then</u> <u>you</u> <u>then</u> Pashto <u>then</u> <u>not</u> <u>speak</u> <u>isn't</u> <u>understand</u> <u>our</u> <u>own</u> <u>a</u> <u>language</u>
> You can say that I know how to speak Farsi, right, you can say that Farsi is like Pashto, when we will speak it, now you don't know how to speak Pashto, you can say we have our own language.

Like Reema, Kiran also tried to make the point by drawing comparison with another Pakistani language – Pashto[8]. However, it is not exactly what Reema said. First, we discuss the last few words that Kiran uttered i.e. 'we have our own language'. One can easily notice the sense of possession here. But more importantly they call it a language. Secondly, Kiran's proposition that 'you can say that Farsi is a Pashto' is significant as in the hijars' experience, Pushto is used by Pukhtoon businessmen in the D.G. Khan area when they have to say something secret to their fellow speakers of Pushto during business deals. It means that the hijras regard Pushto a secret code language and therefore draw its comparison with their own Farsi which they use between themselves. This point that a language also works as a code, shows that if publicly Farsi is being used as a code, this does not mean that it is not a language or that it is always used to hide things. Therefore, in the hijras' perception, if a developed language like Pashto can serve as a code, why not Farsi ? When asked whether hijras speak Farsi only when there is some outsider around, Nazia (a *chela*, living among a hijra group in Iqbal Town, Rawalpindi) responded:

Extract 3

> *Nai nai hamare guru hum-ko mar mar mar mar ke hamara beṛa gharaq-kr-dete-haen, hamen sab ko ghar men farsi he bolni paṛti hae, na bolen to guru us ke-pas danda hae na hum kese ni bolen gay farsi phir ye hamari apni zaban hae guru bhi sai kehti hae zaban to apni sai hoti-hae chahe jesi bhi ho.*

> ➢ No <u>no</u> <u>our</u> <u>guru</u> <u>us</u> <u>beat</u> <u>beat</u> <u>beat</u> <u>beat</u> <u>by</u> <u>our</u> <u>ship</u> <u>sink</u> <u>us</u> <u>all</u> <u>of</u> <u>home</u> <u>in</u> Farsi <u>alone</u> <u>speak</u> <u>have to</u> <u>not</u> <u>speak</u> <u>then</u> guru <u>hshe</u> <u>has</u> <u>stick</u> <u>we</u> <u>how</u> <u>not</u> <u>speak</u> <u>shall</u> Farsi <u>then</u> <u>this</u> <u>our</u> <u>own</u> <u>language</u> <u>is</u> guru <u>also</u> <u>right</u> <u>says</u> <u>language</u> <u>own</u> <u>right</u> <u>is</u> <u>no-matter</u> <u>type</u> <u>also</u> <u>is</u>

> ➢ No, no our guru may beat us black-and-blue. We all have to speak Farsi at home. If we do not do so, the guru may beat us with a rod. Why won't we speak Farsi? This is our own language. Guru also rightly says one's own language is right no matter what type it is.

Two points are important to note here. First, they speak Farsi even within the confines of their dera which means that they use it not merely as a code. Perhaps the intention of the gurus is (a) to make the new comers proficient in it, (b) to promote a sense of identity and solidarity among the hijras, and, most importantly, (c) to preserve it for the succeeding generations of hijras. Secondly, Nazia's statement 'one's own language is right no matter what type it is' reinforces the assertion made by Cameron and Kulick which considers '…"a language of our own"…as an authentic expression of group identity' (2003, p. 95). However, when Nazia says that 'one's own language is right *no matter what type it is'*, it seems as if Nazia is apologetic for and conscious about the shortcomings of Farsi. Most of them know that Farsi is not as developed a language as Urdu is, yet they think it is a language and that it is good because it is their *own* language.   So hijras insist that Farsi is their *language* but, interestingly, they want to keep it as a language of hijra community alone since this way it can work as a code which is perhaps an existentialist need for a stigmatized and marginalized community.

Bell's seven criteria for language: We have applied Bell's (1976) to further clarify the social aspects and status of Farsi. It consists of the following elements: standardization, vitality, historicity, autonomy, reduction, mixture and de facto norms.

Standardization: Farsi, being a secret variety, is not standardized in the real sense of the word. That is why it varies from area to area in terms of certain parts of speech.

No media or literature uses it. During our field work, we noted that only some gurus have some notebooks where they have got Farsi written for the purpose of keeping it fresh in their minds and to use it while teaching the new inductees how to speak it. Otherwise, it is a language only to be spoken.

Vitality: Farsi has vitality because it has a living community of speakers who exploit it actively wherever they need to do so.

Historicity: It is hard to establish why hijra language is called Farsi since, in the Subcontinent and in Iran historically, this name "Farsi" is used for Persian. The historical link that the hijras try to make with Mughal India and the FARSI (Persian) of that era is the only reference that proves the history of Farsi (hijras language) as being competitive with the history of languages in its contact.

Autonomy: The hijras of both the cities of the locale feel that they speak a language that is different from the other languages of the locales. They are also very possessive about it by claiming that this community alone has all the rights to manipulate it.

Reduction: Farsi has no reduction in its use. It does not seem to be a sub-variety of any other language of the area. Therefore, it is not a dialect of Urdu or Hindi.

Mixture: The common hijras told us that their language Farsi uses words of other languages like Punjabi, Siraiki and Urdu. However, it was generally observed that the gurus try to keep it pure. The notebooks that they maintain to write its lexicon are also meant for not allowing the infiltration of the words of the languages in contact. We can say that though Farsi contains some expressions from other languages, yet its speakers try to prevent it from becoming more impure.

De facto norms: Of course there are "expert" and "poor" speakers of Farsi. Usually the senior hijras are considered to be the good speakers of Farsi while the new initiates are poor users. From the above discussion, we can assume that though Farsi is not standardized and though it borrows some expressions from other languages yet it is not merely a dialect or mixture of other languages.

4. CONCLUSION

Farsi is hidden and queer as many other aspects of hijras life are. However, on the basis of its distinctive linguistic and social features, it is a living language. This language is unique to hijras which is an interesting fact to be explored in future research studies.

NOTES

1. This is one of the most frequently spoken sentences by hijras. This means something between "Keep quiet" and "shut up", and is used usually by some senior hijra for a junior one to stop them from doing anything wrong or revealing any of their secrets to the outsiders. This imperative sentence also seems to have played its vital role of keeping Farsi hidden from the world. In case of the present study, the sentence was uttered by a hijra – a member of the third gender – for another one who was giving us their telephone numbers when one of us was accompanying a researcher in anthropology to have an interview with them at their *dera* (hijras' residence) in Rawalpindi. We later came to know that they use many such sentences, sotto voce. We tried to know about the kind of language to which they were code switching and the reasons for this but they declined to give any information about it. However, a ew more visits helped build rapport among them and eventually they admitted that they had a language that was kept secret.

2. Mirasi is a member of the traditional musical band who performs on marriages and other happy events. They have a vast experience of working with hijras and, thus know much about their internal affairs including Farsi.

3. One of the researchers (Muhammad Sheeraz) was able to learn how to speak Farsi and analyze its features through participant and non-participant observations, group discussions, interviews and information given by key informants.

4. In order to know how much awareness about the hijras' language there is among people, we conducted a survey inquiring about Farsi. Out of a 100 randomly selected people, 99 did not know anything about hijras' Farsi.

5. All of the Farsi words given in these tables I gathered from hijras during participant and non-participant observations using daily diary, field notes and audio recording. They were transcribed in roman alphabets except /ɽ/, which is not found there in English but is very frequently used phoneme of Farsi.

6. All hijra names used in the present study are pseudonyms.

7. In all the extracts from data, the original data were followed by word for word gloss which, in turn, is followed by possible literal English translation.

8. An Indo-Arian language of Pathans of Pakistan, Afghanistan and those living in other countries.

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