

Zabaan



An interaction of local communities in northern Pakistan

A newsletter from the Frontier Language Institute

Issue 1 (Winter 2004/05)

Dear reader,

You are holding in your hand the first issue of Zabaan, a newsletter from the Frontier Language Institute (FLI). This is primarily a forum for interaction between the communities of northern Pakistan. Instead of being a tool for promoting any one language, it is meant to be a voice for the multitude of languages in this part of the country. These languages—along with their people, cultures and traditions—are valuable treasures as well as effective means of communication. They deserve promotion.

To encourage communication between communities as well as relating to a wider audience, we have chosen to produce this newsletter in Urdu and English, a section for each. The content of the English section will not be identical to the Urdu one. We will not routinely translate from one language to the other, but instead let these two sections “live their own lives”.

Above all, we want to hear from you, the speakers of all these local languages. We want to know what is happening in your community, in relation to language and culture:

- "This is happening in my community" - some highlights
- "This is our language/cultural society" - a brief introduction
- "My linguistic/cultural findings" - a short article
- "Could you please help me explain ...?" - a question needing input from other readers
- "I've got a great idea!" - an idea worth sharing

In short, there will be no newsletter without your contribution. You may write in English or Urdu, but we would prefer your contribution in electronic format, though we understand if that is not possible for all. Let this all be done in an atmosphere of mutual sharing and learning, and we hope this open

forum in itself will encourage the continued use and pride in the mother-tongue for a long time ahead.

The editors

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FLI Highlights

➤ December 2003: Discovering the Sound System of my Language. (Peshawar)

This course was the first in the one-year Discovery Program. The course itself ran for two weeks and was followed by a practical field assignment.



The main subjects covered were phonetics and phonology, with the aim of helping local researchers analyze the sound systems of their languages, a skill needed to create alphabets and develop good principles for writing. Nine languages from the region have been represented in this ongoing training.

➤ **March 2004: Issues in Language Development. (Besham)**

This interactive three-day workshop—co-arranged with the Indus Kohistan Cultural and Literary Society—gathered language activists from three language communities in the Indus valley. Some of the topics touched upon were the linguistic landscape of northern Pakistan, language attitudes, the benefits of mother-tongue literacy, and how to start a language project. Opportunity was given to the participants to reflect on their own situation and formulate plans for language promotion in their communities.

➤ **April/May 2004: Methods for Language Research. (Peshawar)**

This two-week course was the second in the one-year Discovery Program. Like the previous course it was followed by a field assignment phase. The aim of this research methods training was to help local researchers carry out data collection and documentation of their languages and cultures. This is meant to build a solid foundation for mother-tongue literacy and local literature development.

➤ **July 2004: Writers' Workshop. (Drosh)**

This workshop—co-arranged with Anjuman-e-Taraqqi-e-Palula—gathered participants from two language communities in lower Chitral. The aim was to encourage local writers to write in their own languages and also to test out two new alphabets.



During this time, fourteen stories were planned, drafted, revised, proofread, and finalized.

➤ **September/October 2004: Discovering My Grammar. (Peshawar)**

This course was the third in the Discovery Program, followed by a practical field assignment.



The main subjects were morphology and syntax, aiming to help local researchers observe patterns and analyze their own languages. These skills will be needed when laying a foundation for literacy programs and developing local literature.

➤ **Acquisition of library and research resources:**

FLI is growing a library, specialized in linguistics, anthropology and language/culture documentation, with special reference to this particular region. We have also been able to provide computer space and some software research tools to be used by a few local researchers.

➤ **Resource development and the setting up of a key terms committee:**

FLI is continuously developing training curricula and translating them into English and Urdu. A key terms committee has also been created to establish appropriate Urdu terms to be used in the FLI training and materials (with specific reference to linguistics and cultural research).

➤ **Launching of its own website www.fli-online.org:**

Recently FLI launched its own website with information on FLI and the languages of northern Pakistan.

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Unity in Diversity

PAKISTAN IS A WEALTHY COUNTRY. Among its national treasures are its languages, and there are over 60 of them. Language is not only for communication purposes, it is the carrier of a people's culture and history. It gives people their identity and it projects their worldview. Associated with so many languages in one country are many challenges.

When faced with these two facts, 1) that Pakistan has a wealth of language, culture and tradition and 2) that significant problems in communication and understanding confront the people of Pakistan, people often have the mistaken belief that they must choose one of two solutions. They must either invest in the many languages and cultures of Pakistan at the expense of national unity, or pursue a policy of one language for one country, at the risk of losing the identities of the individual language communities. The truth is no one needs to choose between **the diversity of languages** and **one unifying language**. Both a unifying language and a diversity of languages can exist simultaneously. There can be unity in diversity.

In Pakistan, different languages serve different purposes. Urdu, the national language is used in government offices, educational institutions, and in newspapers. A regional language, like Pashto, is often used in the marketplace, in the madrassa and in many offices. Local languages such as Hindko, Gawri, Torwali, Palula, Wakhi and Balti, just to name a few, are used in people's homes and with other people also living in the same area. One's mother-tongue is crucial for one's identity. With it an individual can truly communicate the matters of his heart. Your mother-tongue represents who you are and no other language will communicate so clearly the ideas, concepts and dreams of your heart and mind.

The Frontier Language Institute has as its goal to facilitate the production of all types of literature in the languages of Pakistan. It has held several workshops in which this topic, among others, was discussed. The participants of these workshops have been in full agreement with one another in regard to this issue.



Unity and diversity can both be promoted and Pakistan can become stronger and healthier as a result. During one of the discussions, some of the participants suggested some metaphors which helped us understand not only the importance of these languages, but also how they relate to each other and depend upon one another.

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One metaphor likens the languages of Pakistan to the human body. Urdu functions as the head, but the body has many other parts as well. For a person to remain healthy and able to function well, he or she must take care of the whole body, not just the head. Another likened the multi-lingual situation to an onion with many layers, but together they make up one onion. Another metaphor was a garden. The beauty of a garden is seen best in its variety of colours, shapes and sizes of plants and flowers. Pakistan is both a wealthy and a beautiful place.

Even so, there are those who have reservations on both sides of this issue. Some are very wary of one unifying language, fearing that it can become an oppressive tool. One of the exercises we did during our workshop was to give participants an opportunity to brainstorm together and prepare some statements aimed at relieving these fears. Following are the results of their discussions.

1. One unifying language does not automatically mean that the local languages cannot be developed and promoted.

This can be illustrated by looking at what has been happening around the world.

In March 2000, the Moroccan government announced a timetable to begin primary school courses in Berber, and that Berber research centres would be set up in universities (Ostler 2001).

The British government recently ratified the European Charter for Regional or Local Languages, which grants protection to the smaller languages of the kingdom—Irish, Gaelic, Welsh, Scots and Ulster Scots (Ostler 2001).

Switzerland, a small but prosperous and highly developed country in the middle of Europe, has as many as four official languages: German, French,

Italian, and Rhaeto-Romance. Some 70% of the population is German-speaking, but the people have not chosen it or any other language to serve as the only official language of the country. At the same time, none of these languages has been perceived by other nationals as a threat to the unity and identity of being Swiss.

Europe is in the midst of a historic unification process. One might assume that an important goal of this unification would be to eradicate the small local languages so that the greater unity of Europe can be promoted. The charter of the Council of Europe does in fact state that one of its primary goals is a greater unity between its members. However, in order to achieve this goal, it has included the following statement in its charter: “The protection and promotion of regional or local languages in the different countries and regions of Europe represents an important contribution to the building of a Europe based on the principles of democracy and cultural diversity within the framework of national sovereignty and territorial integrity (Majewicz 1998).”

2. Local and national languages serve different purposes.

The primary purpose for a national language is to provide a means for communication between the speakers of various languages within the country. Within their home and community, people use the local language because it is the language they know best and can most effectively communicate in. For some, this might be Urdu, but for most, it is not.

3. Government officials can implement their projects and policies when one language has been selected for official business.

4. One language can also help build national unity/consensus when everyone is motivated to learn to speak, read and write it.

Just as there are some who are wary of one unifying language, there are also some who see the diversity as divisive and destructive. Participants also brainstormed this perspective and developed some ideas to address these concerns.

1. The diversity of languages is a gift from God.

“And among His Signs is the creation of the heavens and the earth, and the variations in your languages and your colours: verily in that are Signs for those who know (Quran 30:22).”

One participant also referred to a truth found in the Hadiths: “One who gives up his language gives up his faith.”

2. Insight from different perspectives due to differences in traditions, values and understanding can be extremely valuable and sometimes even fun.

No one person or culture has all of the right answers. We can all learn a lot more about the world in which we live, including the part of it that is nearest to us, if we are willing to humble ourselves and learn from each other.



3. The unique features of a specific culture can be developed to attract tourism

4. Just as the extinction of plants and animals has dire consequences for mankind, when a language becomes extinct, one cannot measure the effect of its loss.

5. Humans by nature are unique and different.

Humanity is a diverse race and this is reflected in the many diverse cultures. This fact cannot be hidden. Instead we should celebrate our difference. In doing so, we can live together in harmony, communicate with each other more effectively, learn from each other, and preserve the natural beauty of Pakistan—these natural treasures—for generations to come.

Wayne Lunsford, Executive Director, FLI

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