ABSTRACT
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A LINGUISTIC APPROACH FOR TESTING URDU LANGUAGE SKILLS

Introduction:

The thesis entitled "A Linguistic Approach for Testing Urdu Language Skills" is an attempt to discuss the theoretical application of the knowledge of linguistics to the construction of various tests for testing language skills with special reference to the Urdu Language. In this study, attempts have been made to critically examine the present method of testing Urdu language skill and presenting linguistically oriented techniques for the same. The analysis of question papers of various classes shows that the existing method of Urdu language testing is highly traditional and the evaluators have no or very little knowledge of linguistic approaches to testing. Linguistics is a modern discipline which has revolutionized the teaching and testing of languages. The knowledge of linguistics can be used in every aspect of language teaching. The language testing can also benefit considerably from the linguistic know how.

The data has been collected from three prestigious schools of Aligarh, viz., Aligarh Public School, Zakir Husain
Higher Secondary School and S.T. High School. The data consists of question papers from class I to VIII. These papers belong to 1st semester, Half yearly and final examinations of all the classes. This work is divided into six chapters covering almost every aspect of Urdu language testing.

Chapter I:

It is introductory in nature. It deals with some basis aspects of linguistics and language teaching and the relationship of linguistics with language teaching and testing. Efforts have been made in this chapter to discuss some basic techniques and problems in phonological and grammatical study of language. The role of linguistics in language teaching and language testing has also been emphasized in this chapter. It also deals with the importance of testing and evaluation in language teaching. Types of various tests, their characteristics and requirements have also been discussed at length in this chapter.

Chapter II:

This chapter deals with Urdu language testing. In this chapter the present state of Urdu language testing has been discussed citing examples from the actual question papers.
of Urdu which cover the pattern of testing reading comprehension, structure of language, lexical skill, formal grammar, writing and composition etc. The shortcomings of Urdu language testing have also been discussed in this chapter. The methodology adopted in these schools for Urdu language testing have also been fully discussed. The question papers of various Classes have been analysed in this chapter to point out the limitations of the existing pattern of the Urdu language testing.

The analyses of present Urdu question papers show that these schools have adopted very old and traditional methodology of language testing. The existing techniques which are used by these schools are very outdated. The demerits of these procedures are that the teachers concern use subjective type questions very frequently and since subjective questions are not considered reliable and standard test, it is not fruitful to use these tests frequently. Moreover, present Urdu testing have no set pattern of testing which can cover all the aspects of language. Besides, no weightage is given to oral testing. The major portion of tests cover the writing skill.
Chapter III:

This chapter deals with the testing of listening comprehension. Listening comprehension is one of the four basic skills required to master a language. Comprehension can be described as the careful hearing of language. It implies understanding and recognition of sounds and grammatical patterns of language. It is actually the preparation for speaking, because one who does not listen cannot understand the language and eventually cannot speak. So by listening comprehension, it is meant the understanding pronunciation, grammatical structure, recognition of vocabulary and grasping the meaning of words in target language.

The role of listening comprehension in language learning and various problems of auditory comprehension have been discussed in this chapter. Different techniques for testing listening comprehension have also been discussed in this chapter. Efforts have also been made in this chapter to discuss the testing of comprehension of sounds, the testing of comprehension of grammatical structures and the testing of comprehension of meaning with separate techniques and procedures. The testing of the above aspects of language involve different kinds of techniques and procedures. These have been fully elaborated in this chapter with suitable examples from the Urdu language.
Chapter IV:

The next skill which follows the listening comprehension is the speaking skill. It deals with the testing of speaking skill. Speaking is an important language skill. It is one of the four basic language skills. The aim of teaching speaking is to enable the students to converse fluently and correctly. Speaking correctly does not involve only the correct pronunciation but also to speak correct grammatical sentences and to use right and proper words. It also involves the ability to communicate at the normal conversational speech. The aim of teaching speaking is to enable the learners to use the signalling systems of pronunciation, stress, intonation, vocabulary and grammatical structures of target language at a normal rate of delivery, as the native speakers of that language use, at normal communication situation.

In this chapter, the role of speaking in language learning has been discussed. Attempts have also been made in this chapter to discuss various techniques and procedures for testing speaking skill. Various techniques have been proposed for testing the production of speech sounds and their sequences with reference to the Urdu language. Testing speaking skill also covers the testing of the production of lexical units, and
grammatical structures. Various techniques have been proposed for testing these aspects of speaking also, with reference to the Urdu language.

Chapter V:

This chapter deals with testing reading skill. Since reading is one of the four basic language skills, separate attention should be given to this skill in both teaching and testing. To read means to grasp the language by its written form. As Lado (1961:223) is of the view, "reading in a foreign language consists of grasping meaning in that language through its written representation". There are three stages in reading viz. Recognition, structuring and interpretation. Recognition means firstly that the student must recognise written characters for what they stand and then he also be aware about the systematic connection between speech and the written language. By structuring, is meant that the student should be able to understand the structure of words and sentences of the foreign language. He must be able to connect the written symbols to what they stand for. He should know as to how the written symbols of the target language are decoded. At this stage the students learn to interpret phonological, morphological and syntactic structures i.e. understanding their meanings.
Reading is an activity which involves the identification of graphic symbols. So far as Urdu writing system is concerned, it has 36 graphemes. Most of which change their shapes when they are written in connected form. The reading habit of Urdu therefore, entails the visual identification of not only the separate graphemes but also there are a number of diacritical marks which are used specially for the beginners. Testing of the reading skill of the Urdu language presupposes the identification of the whole orthographic system of the Urdu language. The testing of reading comprehension is based on the total acquisition of reading skill.

In this chapter, the importance of reading comprehension has been emphasised. It is an important skill which has to be tested with great care. No much attention is paid to this skill in traditional approach. In present testing pattern of the Urdu language the questions are generally asked about central theme of the poem or lesson which the learners have read long back. Sometimes questions are also given relating to the theme of the paragraph, but paragraph is not given in the question papers.

For testing reading comprehension, two major techniques i.e. cloze test and multiple choice test have been discussed in this chapter with reference to the Urdu language. Separate tests of these types have also been constructed.
Chapter VII:

This chapter is devoted to testing of writing skill. Writing is one of the four basic language skills. A person cannot be an expert of a language without having mastered the four basic skills, i.e. listening comprehension, speaking, reading and writing. Writing is visual representation of speech. As Lado (1961:248) suggests, "writing a foreign language as the ability to use the language and its graphic representation productively in ordinary writing situations". By writing a language means the ability to use structure, lexical items, their conventional representation in ordinary writing. In other words writing involves practical activity of making graphic symbols such as graphemes, allographs and diacritical marks. In this chapter, the process of writing, purpose of writing and analysis of writing have been discussed. Efforts have also been made to discuss the elements of Urdu writing system such as graphemes, allographs, diacritical marks, and phoneme-grapheme correspondence with reference to the Urdu language.

Urdu writing system offers special learning problems. Since this writing system consists of 36 graphemes. Most of which assume different shapes while written in connected form. Urdu spelling shows many complications because some of its phonemes correspond by more than one graphemes. In Urdu, there
is no one-to-one relationship between speech and writing. This discrepancy between speech and writing poses many problems in teaching the writing skill. Specially the teaching of spelling.

In this chapter, various techniques have been suggested for testing the writing skill such as completion technique, which involves completion and combination of grapheme and allophraph. Another technique for testing writing skill involves spelling i.e. where to use which grapheme. Efforts have also been made in this chapter to construct various tests to exemplify these techniques for testing writing skill with reference to the Urdu language.

**SUMMARY AND CONCLUSIONS:**

As pointed out earlier, the present method of testing Urdu language skills is based on traditional patterns. The teachers who construct tests in these schools hardly adopt linguistic techniques as they are not well-versed in linguistic science. As a result of which these tests tend to become non-standardized tests. Moreover, in the present method of testing due weightage is not given to testing listening comprehension and speaking. As listening comprehension and speaking are important language skills, they need special attention. Without having mastery over these skills one cannot be considered to have learnt the
language. These skills, therefore, need to be given special attention, and at least some kind of tests should be constructed to test these skills especially at the primary level.

Linguistics contributes much to language testing. Language testing comprises the testing of all the language skills viz., Listening (comprehension), speaking, reading and writing. It is not that under language testing only these skills are tested, but a comprehensive language testing covers all the levels of linguistics such as phonology, morphology, syntax, lexicon, grammar and semantics and without the knowledge and application of linguistics these areas cannot be tested properly. A linguistic approach to language testing, therefore, is an approach which makes use of the theoretical knowledge of linguistics. For instance testing the listening and speaking skills, the knowledge of the phonological system of the target language is essential. Only then appropriate tests can be constructed and the required skill can be tested properly.

The present study not only contributes to our understanding of the linguistic approach for testing Urdu language skills, but also to our understanding of the theory of testing in general. It can also be used as a model on the basis of which language tests can be constructed to test various skills of Urdu/Hindi language effectively.