ABSTRACT
        Despite similarities between Hindi and Urdu and
mutual intelligibility, at least on the spoken level, slight
grammatical differences between the two languages do exist. The
treatment of gender provides an example of such differences.
Explanation of the actual differences in gender usage can be based on
a synchronic, linguistic level as well as on a diachronic, cultural
level. First-year students learning these languages, unless
well-versed in linguistics or literature, probably do not need to
receive such explanations for learning purposes. Such linguistic and
cultural complexities are more easily understood by second-year
students who have been exposed to other exceptions in Hindi and Urdu
grammar and to Indian culture in general. (VM)

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Some Cultural and Grammatical Aspects
of Gender in Hindi and Urdu

For most American students who, by accident of birth live in
an overwhelmingly monolingual environment, the notion of grammatical
gender is often confounding and perplexing. Gender is, they reason,
a matter of sex: what is sexually male is "masculine"; what is
sexually female is "feminine." Hence, when they come upon feminine
nauta, "sailor" in Latin, or neuter Mädchen, "girl" in German, they
tend to back away in a mild daze, slightly confused.

While we are a bit beyond the explanations of gender given by
language teachers of a generation ago ("What is large and tough is
masculine; what is small and delicate is feminine"), the student is
not greatly helped in his understanding of grammatical gender with
the statement "That's the way it is." In any event, the student
must memorize the gender of every noun. If in this process he is
made to understand that sexual and grammatical gender, while some-
times coterminous, are not synonymous, the student will have
accomplished no mean task.

Gender is a grammatical feature of Hindi and Urdu, the language,
or languages, spoken on the Indian subcontinent by some 240 million
people, thus making it/them the third most widely spoken language/
languages in the world after Chinese and English.[1] These languages

as we shall call them, the subject of a great deal of political and religious controversy in India and Pakistan, are mutually intelligible on the spoken, vernacular levels.[2] In their written forms, particularly in their literary aspect, the two languages diverge widely. Hindi, written in the Devanagari script, looks to Sanskrit for its intellectual and literary vocabulary, as well as its literary images and modes of expression. Urdu, on the other hand, is written in a modified Persio-Arabic script, usually called Nastaliq, and goes to Persian and Arabic for its intellectual vocabulary and literary images. Slight grammatical differences also exist between these two languages, differences which are quite minimal, in fact, given the large numbers of speakers of each language and the relatively underdeveloped mass media in these two countries. One such grammatical difference between Hindi and Urdu appears in each language's treatment of gender. This difference, while slight, can be looked at from both a synchronic as well as a diachronic point of view in explaining it to students. It is to the context of one problem of grammatical gender in these two languages which we shall address ourselves in this paper.

In standard Hindi and Urdu, our concern in this paper, there are gender markers in the verb. There must be an agreement between the subject of the sentence and the verb in certain direct constructions. For example, if one were to say: "We go to the market," one would have to know the gender of "we" in order to utter the sentence. If "we" is masculine, the sentence would be:

ham baazaar jaatee haiN[3]

The glosses for this utterance are: ham = we; baazaar = market,
jaa- = root of the verb "to go"; -t- = mark of the present participle;
-ee = masculine plural marker; haiN = are, consisting of hai plus
nasalization (a plural marker in the verb "to be" and in other verb
constructions). As with nearly all Hindi sentences, this utterance
follows a subject-object-verb pattern.

If "we" is feminine, the sentence would be:

ham baazaar jaatii haiN

with the difference that instead of jaatee we have jaatii, the
feminine marker in the present participle. Thus,

ham baazaar jaatee haiN

ham baazaar jaatii haiN

A Hindi speaker would translate these utterances as "We [masculine]
go to the market" and "We [feminine] go to the market," respectively.
An Urdu speaker, however, would react differently. He would translate
ham baazaar jaatee haiN as "We [masculine or feminine] go to the
bazaar." The utterance containing the feminine form, ham baazaar
jaatii haiN, would be considered incorrect or, worse, "inelegant"
Urdu, or not Urdu at all, but rather Hindi.

Let us consider another example. The statement "We understand"
or "We do not understand" can be rendered idiomatically into Hindi
in either the masculine or feminine forms, depending on the sexual
gender of the speaker. In addition, the statement is rendered in the
past tense in Hindi, as opposed to the present of English:

samajh gaee   and   nahiiN samjhee

We (masculine) understood.   We (masculine) did not
                                                     understand.

The glosses for these utterances are: ham = we, but understood and
not stated; samajh = root of the verb samajhnaa, "to understand";
gaee = the inflected form of jaanaa, "to go," used here as part of a
compound verb construction indicating, among other things, emphasis
on the action of the main verb samajhnaa and a carrier of tense and
gender; ga- = the past participial stem of jaanaa; -ee = the masculine
plural marker; nahiiN = negative particle. (It should be noted that
a vowel deletion occurs in the negative form samjhee, as opposed to
samajh in the positive utterance; because of the negative particle
one cannot use a compound verb construction as in the affirmative;
this is a minor point of grammar and does not in any way change the
point we wish to establish here.)

In addition, the statements can also be made by women, requiring
feminine grammatical gender, thus changing the forms above to:

samajh gaiiN   and   nahiiN samjhiiN

We (feminine) understood.   We (feminine) did not
                                                       understand.

with -ii- in gaiiN and samjhiiN as feminine markers and -N, nasaliza-
tion, as a plural marker. Thus,

samajh gaee   and   nahiiN samjhee
samajh gaiiN   and   nahiiN samjhiiN

These forms, however, apply only to Hindi and not to Urdu. The
Urdu speaker would admit the masculine forms for both men and women

speakers; the feminine forms would carry with them the same negative connotations as did _jaatii_ in our earlier discussion.

At this point it is important to note that these differences in masculine and feminine forms occur only in the first person plural forms of the verbs. Both Hindi and Urdu have identical masculine and feminine forms of the verb in the remainder of the paradigm. For example:

I go.	maiN jaataa huuN (masculine)
	maiN jaatii huuN (feminine)
You (informal) go.	tum jaatee ho (masculine)
	tum jaatii ho (feminine)
He/it goes.	vah jaataa hai (masculine)
She/it goes.	vah jaatii hai (feminine)
You (formal) go.	aap jaatee haiN (masculine)
	aap jaatii haiN (feminine)
They go.	ve jaatee haiN (masculine)
	ve jaatii haiN (feminine)

Similarly, the past tense of verbs involving direct constructions shows the same masculine-feminine distinctions in both Hindi and Urdu. We have already noted that only in the first person plural forms would Urdu disallow a feminine utterance such as _samajh gaiiN_.

The logical question arising from this discussion is a simple "Why?" Why does Hindi recognize sexual gender as a determining factor in the first person plural, while Urdu does not? Why does Urdu insist on only masculine plural markers in the first person plural,

even though a woman is referring to herself and other members of her sex? Why should Urdu speakers consider the use of the feminine gender in this context as substandard or inelegant Urdu, or Hindi? Is this a phenomenon and idiosyncrasy of Urdu or is there an explanation for it? Two explanations can be given, both of which throw light upon the linguistic process involved here. The first is a synchronic, linguistic explanation of the problem; the second, a diachronic, cultural definition.

Linguistically speaking, the difference between the first person plural of Hindi and Urdu can be looked at in terms of linguistic universals. First, if there are two genders in natural language, these will be masculine and feminine; of these two, masculine is the more neutral. This is demonstrated by the fact that in languages with gender, the masculine is generally used in speaking of addresses of mixed gender. The all-inclusiveness of the pronoun "we" allows such usage. In the context of Hindi and Urdu, we must also note that speakers--both men and women--will also use han jatee haiÏ, the first person plural form, when referring to themselves in the singular. An explanation often given for this usage is more philosophical than linguistic: the individual person speaking wishes to obliterate himself into the larger underlying cosmic force of the universe (the aatman-brahman distinction of Indian philosophy). While this explanation might have some philosophical substance to it, this phenomenon is best discussed and understood linguistically as a problem of neutralization. In this particular instance, Urdu has

neutralized gender distinctions in the first person plural, whereas Hindi has not. In the case of the singular first person addresser referring to himself or herself in the first person masculine plural, we have further evidence of neutralization in both languages.

Because Hindi does not neutralize as extensively as Urdu in this particular context does not mean that Hindi is free of neutralization. For example, consider the so-called necess*itive*, or obligatory aspect in both Hindi and Urdu. These are characterized in English by the use of "must" or "have to." For example, the expression mujhee jaanaa hai. This would be rendered as "Going is necessary for me" or, in less crabbed English, "I have to go." The glosses for this statement are: mujhee = the oblique, or indirect, form of maiN, "I" plus the postposition ko, which combine into the portmanteau form of mujhee; jaanaa = the infinitive form of "to go"; hai = "is." Jaanaa here retains its form with a masculine -aa ending.

Consider the utterance mujhee saarii xariidnaa hai. Glosses here are: saarii = sari, with its gender marker -ii, indicating that it is a feminine noun; xariidnaa = the infinitive form of "to buy," with -naa the infinitive marker with a masculine singular ending. While the utterance is grammatical in Hindi, translating roughly as "I have to buy saris," it is not grammatical in Urdu, which requires the application of an additional gender agreement rule. In Urdu the infinitive xariidnaa must agree in gender with saarii, thus giving mujhee saarii xariidnii hai.

With saarii in the plural, saariiaaN, -aaN the plural marker of marked feminine nouns (i.e., ones ending in -ii), Hindi does not again require any gender or number agreement:

mujhee saariiaaN xariidnaa hai

This translates as "Buying saris is necessary for me," or "I must buy saris."

Urdu, on the other hand, applies an additional gender agreement rule as well as a number agreement rule to generate:

mujhee saariiaaN xariidnii haiN

which translates also as "Buying saris is necessary for me," or "I must buy saris." One notes here that an agreement rule between the direct noun, saariiaaN, and the infinitive, xariidnii, is operative; in addition, there is number agreement between saariiaaN and the copula, haiN. Thus, the contrasts in the two languages are as follows. In the singular:

mujhee saarii xariidnaa hai (Hindi)

mujhee saarii xariidnii hai (Urdu)

And in the plural:

mujhee saariiaaN xariidnaa hai (Hindi)

mujhee saariiaaN xariidnii haiN (Urdu)

Here we see that it is Hindi which neutralizes the masculine-feminine gender distinction, as well as the singular-plural distinction. Urdu, on the other hand, requires additional rules to generate its forms, which retain these distinctions of number and gender.

When teaching students these two points, the teacher can speak
of what is the predominantly Urdu pattern and what is the predominantly
Hindi pattern.   Linguistic evidence in the dialects of both languages
seems to suggest that both languages are moving in a direction toward
neutralization of gender distinctions, though not necessarily in
exactly the same constructions.[4]   However, since one is striving to
teach what is basically a standard language, it is necessary to speak
in terms of these irregular synchronic patterns as they exist in the
standard language.   Theoretically, however, there will be a time
in which these irregularities will pass out of the languages and will
be treated as irregular diachronic phenomena.

And in mentioning diachronic phenomena, let us look at the second
manner in which these irregularities can be explained.   This is what
we shall term a cultural explanation, and it requires that we go back
into the history of these two languages.   The term "Hindi" as it is
used today refers to that language based on a dialect known as Braj
Bhasha spoken in the middle and upper Doab, that area between the
Ganges and Jumna rivers (do = two; aab = river) in Northern India.[5]
While there are a number of dialects in this general area, among them
Bundeli, Kanauji and Bangaru, it is the Braj Bhasha dialect as spoken
in the general vicinity of the city of Mathura, a great center of
Krishna worship, that serves as the main, though not exclusive, basis
for the standard form of this language.

Urdu, on the other hand, developed in India, particularly in the
southern, or Deccan, area of the country as a result of the coming

of the Muslim invaders from outside India.   When the forces of these
armies came into contact with the indigenous peoples whom they con-
quered, a lingua franca sprang up and eventually became known as
Urdu.   This language possessed a substructure based on the Khari
boli dialect of Western Hindi, with a linguistic superstructure
borrowed from the languages of the various invaders, including Turkish,
Persian and Arabic.   In fact, the word urdū itself is Turkish for
"camp" and is related to our English word "horde," for it was in the
invaders' camps that this lingua franca came into being.   Large
blocks of vocabulary were borrowed, as were a number of phonological
items, including the so-called "Persio-Arabic" sounds: f, x, z, ġ
and q, which did not exist in the indigenous dialects prior to the
coming of the Muslim invaders.   Very quickly, however, Urdu outgrew
its utilitarian usage as a lingua franca and gained currency both as
a court language and literary language, first in the courts of the
southern Muslim kings, then later in the north among the various
rulers, including the Moghul emperor and the court at Lucknow.   By
the middle of the seventeenth century, Urdu was firmly established
as a literary language of considerable prestige; by the nineteenth
century it eventually replaced Persian as the court language of the
Moghul kings and was given patronage by the British rulers.   Hence,
Urdu came to hold a place of great prestige among the vernacular
languages of India, both literarily and as a lingua franca, but now
as a lingua franca such as French was in Europe during the eighteenth
and nineteenth centuries in Europe.   In fact, one commentator even

refers to Urdu as the French of India.[6]   It is then in the context
of this prestige that Urdu speakers would equate certain grammatical
structures as substandard or as Hindi. However, the point of prestige
is only a partial answer to the larger question at hand. The remainder
of the answer lies in the cultural heritage of the Muslim invaders
who gave Urdu its birth and prestige. Urdu is the product of a mixed
Indian and Muslim culture. As the language of conquerors who
eventually settled permanently in the country, Urdu was emulated by
the upper echelons of the indigenous population, which was in the
main Hindu. It is on the basis of this fact that currency has been
given to the inaccurate and fanciful notion that Hindi is the language
of Hindus and Urdu the language of Muslims. It should be pointed out
that there are Hindus who have written and continue to write in Urdu,
and there are Muslims who have written and continue to write in Hindi.
It should also be understood that in the past the terms "Hindi" and
"Urdu" have been used interchangeably, even synonymously, by both
Hindus and Muslims and are, as such, rather vague and imprecise in
their meaning.[7]

But there is still another aspect of these two cultures which
explains the use of the masculine gender by both men and women in
the first person plural. Muslim culture was and still is basically
homo-social. That is, the sexes are segregated in this society, the
men with men, the women with women. In the higher levels of Muslim
society women were confined to separate quarters, even within the
same family. When these women left their homes they were required

to wear a burqā, a head-to-foot veil, a Muslim invention which
resulted from an overzealous reading of Muhammad's injunction in
the Koran which required women to be covered from the neck down.
Social and cultural gatherings also exhibited segregation. Men
could attend freely; women of quality, if they were allowed at all,
were required to sit in rooms screened off in such a way as to allow
the women to look out but to prevent the men from looking in. Because
this custom was practiced by the rulers, Hindus of upper-class
families also adopted pardah (literally, "curtain" or "veil").
While this custom is not as prevalent as it used to be, it still
exists in various areas in India. Until recently, classrooms in
universities with large numbers of Muslim students were specially
partitioned to allow the women to sit apart from the men. The
important point, however, is that it was the speech of men--more
specifically, the speech of men among men--and not the speech of
men and women that became the standard for Urdu.

Another phenomenon which reenforced this situation also existed
in Urdu literature. Early Urdu literature was in many respects a
carbon copy of Persian, in both form and content. One distinction,
however, is that Persian has no grammatical gender, whereas Urdu
does. Hence, when Urdu had to make allowances for gender in poetry,
it opted to incorporate masculine grammatical gender to the exclusion
of feminine grammatical gender in the literary language. This, of
course, could be looked upon as part of this larger phenomenon of
neutralization within the language. As a result, however, Urdu poetry
may strike the uninitiated Western reader at first glance as thor-
oughly homosexual, for both lover and beloved are referred to as masculine.

This is not the case, however.   Just as good Persian poetry, par-
ticularly the _ghazal_, a very intricate genre of lyric poetry, was
required to be read on two levels--a mystical and a mundane--so too
did Urdu poetry.   Hence, the Urdu _ghazal_ can be read on a purely
physical, sexual level and also on a mystical, spiritual level on
which God is portrayed as the lover and the poet as the beloved (or
vice versa).   Both lover and beloved, however, are referred to in
the masculine gender, more by poetic convention than by sexual
preference.   Analogues to such a phenomenon can be found in Western
poetry rather easily, and the distinctions of _eros_ and _agape_ are just
as operative here as they are in Urdu.

Conclusion

The explanations of the grammatical phenomenon involving gender
in Hindi and Urdu set forth herein are valid for a scholarly meeting
such as we have here with ACTUAL.   However, the question of giving
these explications to first-year language students of Hindi and
Urdu (these structures are introduced during the first semester of
the first year of study) is debatable.   If a teacher has students
who have a firm grasp of linguistics, he can very effectively give
the linguistic discussion of this problem with the certainty that
what has been said will be understood.   If one has students with a
basis in literary studies, the cultural explanation of the phenomenon
can be easily understood.   If one is very lucky, he might have a
student or students conversant in both fields and can offer both
explanations.

However, in teach' first-year language students—all undergraduates—at Oakland U versity, I have not presented either of these explanations when discussing the grammatical structures involved. I have found them, by and large, incapable of grasping the implications of what is being said. They invariably end up being very confused. My approach has been to demand that they learn the patterns simply because "That's the way it is." I have found that discussion of these linguistic and cultural complexities are best understood when students have had some exposure to other "exceptions" to Hindi and Urdu grammar and to Indian culture in general, usually by their second year of language study. Students with such exposure tend to feel more at ease with the notion that all questions, both grammatical and cultural, need not have a Right Answer but can, instead, have several or even many answers.

Footnotes

[1] Figures regarding the number of speakers of these languages vary widely. As of June 1968 the number of speakers of Hindi was set at 181 million and of Urdu at 55 million; however, Rajasthani, often considered a dialect of Hindi, was listed as having 17 million speakers. See Hindustan Year-Book and Who's Who, 1971, ed. S. Sarkar (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1971), p. 162. In 1964 estimates were 158 million for Hindi and 53 million for Urdu. See Hindustan Year-Book and Who's Who, 1964, ed. S. Sarkar (Calcutta: M. C. Sarkar & Sons, 1964), p. 357. The increase of Hindi from 158 to 181 million and of Urdu from 53 to 55 million during the same period suggests the unreliability of such figures.

[2] For an excellent discussion of these levels of language, see John J. Gumperz and C. M. Naim, "Formal and Informal Standards in the Hindi Regional Language Area," International Journal of American Linguistics, XXVI, No. 3 (July 1960), 92-117, in the issue "Linguistic Diversity in South Asia: Studies in Regional, Social and Functional Variation," ed. Charles A. Ferguson and John J. Gumperz.

[3] The transliteration scheme used here is approximately that devised by C. M. Naim in his Readings in Urdu: Prose and Poetry (Honolulu: East-West Center Press, 1965), pp. 203-209. -N in this scheme indicates nasalization.

[4] Professor Vasant Khokle has indicated to me that the most productive area in which to seek answers to these questions concerning

neutralization in both Hindi and Urdu would be among the dialects
of these standard languages.

[5]Khari boli, it should be pointed out, was also used as a basis
for what is referred to today as standard Hindi. This dialect has
served as the basis for the writings of the eminent Hindi poet
Jayashankar Prasad (1890-1937), a large corpus of whose writings
will be presented in English translation in a special issue of Mahfil,
A Quarterly of South Asian Literature in late 1973. This special
issue will be guest edited by Professor Shreeprakash Kurl of the
University of British Columbia.

[6]See Ahmed Ali, "Introduction to Urdu Poetry," Pakistan, II, No. 2
(Autumn 1948), 26.

[7]Among the vaguest and most imprecise uses of these terms,
together with that of "Hindustani," were those by Mahatma Gandhi.
In an attempt to keep the Indian subcontinent whole after independence
from Britain, he subsumed Urdu under the rubric of Hindi with some
rather catastrophic results for Urdu, among them the identification
of Urdu as a language used exclusively by Muslims. For an explication
of Gandhi's stand on the entire language question prior to independ-
ence, see D. G. Tendulkar, Mahatma: Life of Mohandas Karamchand
Gandhi, IV (1934-38) (New Delhi: Publications Division, Ministry of
Information and Broadcasting, Government of India, 1952), 22-23,
81-86ff.