

DIGITAL ORTHOGRAPHY AND LINGUISTICS IDENTITY: THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPLICATIONS OF ERRONEOUS URDU CAPTIONS IN DIGITAL MEDIA

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Abstract

Social media platforms have played a significant role in which Urdu is being recognized more frequently through different means especially through captions and subtitles that help people to better understand the concept and language the person is trying to convey. Despite this, a serious issue is arising that people are using many incorrect Urdu captions, which frequently cause orthographic errors. These errors are due to the automated transcription system or human errors. Such orthographic inaccuracies lead to many problems that affect the correct or officially accepted Urdu language. These types of errors may cause people to not understand the Urdu language clearly and people would find it difficult to write standard Urdu language in real life after reading those misspelled Urdu subtitles and captions. If these types of errors keep spreading, it could reshape the Urdu language, and people would normalize it and accept it as official over time (Karan, 2020). This research reveals the social as well as linguistic effects of these erroneous Urdu subtitles and shows how people perceive such mistakes and how these mistakes ruin the identity of the Urdu language. Also, how these errors affect the revival of the Urdu language in the future. By doing content analysis of those captions and with the help of surveys of Urdu speakers, this research would lead to uncovering how these inaccuracies in spellings affect people's better understanding of the Urdu language and portray the wrong image of standard Urdu on social media, and change people's attitude towards the Urdu language. (Edwards, 2019) The results of this research would contribute to sociolinguistic theory and also provide more knowledge regarding digital reading and writing for better understanding and promote efforts related to orthographic standardization.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Orthography, Erroneous, Linguistic Identity, Urdu language.

Introduction:

Orthography indicates the power and social identity of a language. (Wardhaugh, 2019) Urdu is a language that is deeply connected to its cultural roots and is rich in literature as well. Urdu also represents national pride. The accuracy in orthographic errors shows the authenticity of a language and helps people to read and understand the language properly. (Faleye, 2021) The intensification of social media platforms that include YouTube, TikTok, and Facebook provides extraordinary exposure to the Urdu language. Consequently, the Urdu captions used on these platforms contain an inaccurate form that corrupts the standard orthography. Here arises a very important question, particularly related to younger speakers who are consuming erroneous Orthographic errors on social media platforms daily, which can affect their writing as well as their understanding of the Urdu language.

Background:

Urdu covers the largest linguistic space in South Asia. Urdu is the medium that represents culture, also functions as a bridge language, while the verbal use of the Urdu language stays strong, but its Orthography is struggling because the institutes are less consistent, and also struggling in reading and writing practices. Nowadays, when social media is used widely, it influences the writing style worldwide, and now the subtitles under videos are used as a means to learn a language and provide more exposure to cultural values (Seifart, 2021). On the other hand frequent appearance of non-standard forms could deeply affect the literacy practices and identity of a language. Analysis of orthography highlights that spelling in writing is not just standard practice but also develops the identity and shapes the language as well as validity (Jaffe, 2012). In addition, minor importance was given to the Urdu digital Orthography and to

captions specifically.

Research Questions

1. How do orthographic inaccuracies in Urdu captions affect comprehension and literacy practices among Urdu speakers?
 2. What sociolinguistic consequences do these deviations have for perceptions of Urdu's authenticity, identity, and symbolic value?
 3. How do speakers evaluate the role of standardized orthography in sustaining the future vitality and revival of Urdu?
- ### Research Objectives
1. To identify and categorize common orthographic inaccuracies in Urdu captions across digital platforms.
 2. To investigate the cognitive and linguistic effects of such inaccuracies on reader comprehension and confidence.
 3. To examine attitudes of Urdu speakers toward orthographic standardization in digital spaces.
 4. To provide recommendations for policy and pedagogical interventions aimed at ensuring orthographic integrity.

Statement of problem

Social media is full of orthographic errors it's our responsibility as a linguists to pay attention to this matter because the frequent repetition and appearance of wrong Urdu captions on social media endangers the Identity and Urdu literacy by normalizing those errors and also affects on comprehension of the Urdu language by not paying attention to these orthographic errors in accuracies it will result as decline in revival of Urdu language and destroy the identity and ruin the prestige of standard Urdu in educational as well as social platform.

Significance of the study

This research would definitely play a positive role by contributing to sociolinguistics and in reading and writing practices. (Roberts, 2017) It would also help the future development of the Urdu language by correcting orthographic errors. This could lead to providing information to content creators or digital producers on how necessary it is to use standardized Urdu in digital platforms. It also dominates the function of captions and subtitles, which are significant in literacy and cultural transmission. (Spolsky, 2021)

Literature review

This section of research includes the previous studies on how different people talk about digital literacy practices, spellings in writing, digital Identity, and the Urdu language. Also, how are these ideas related to my research topic? A lot of writers and researchers explore how the use of different spellings in their writing shows their identity and how digital media evolves language use. Some researchers also uncovered this aspect of how people learn language from digital captioning, which could also cause a lot of problems, such as learn the wrong language from erroneous subtitles, or they get confused about whether it's the right language or not. Further, this section consists of four main ideas:

1. Orthography and Ideology

In a language, accurate use of spelling and writing is known as orthography. The correct use of spellings in writing also represents the Identity set of ideas and their educational background. (Seeba, 2007) describes the orthography as a social act. Through the way of writing words, people can observe how they identify themselves in society. For instance, a lot of people in our society use short forms and non-standard spellings to look more stylish and social. On the other hand, for the sake of looking more qualified and professional, some people use formal and standard writing. (Jaffe, 2012) explains that spelling reflects social norms, power, and cultural identity. And most of the time, people go against the accurate rules by breaking them to portray themselves as Independent and to be a part of the social community. (Eckert, 2020) That means to show the identity of any individual, the writing style and the use of spelling during writing are very important, social media is full of Urdu captions and subtitles.

People frequently use wrong spellings, and sometimes they also use Roman Urdu. It might not be due to their carelessness; they might do this on purpose to show their identity on social media. So Sebba and Jafee clearly explain that the mistakes and errors we see on digital media regularly are not always random they could portray the identity as well as social meaning.

2. Digital language practices

(Androutsopoulos, 2015) investigated how digital media transformed the writing style of people over time. He explored that social media encourages people to use a variety of languages and spellings in different new ways and styles. Different social media platform, such as TikTok, YouTube, etc, becomes a source for people where they change their writing styles for the sake of fun, and they also use informal language.

He considered this a writing network where people use language throughout the world and feel connected through their writing styles (Honkanen, 2023). As a result, the standard language becomes weak and people start using new rules or non-standard language. That's why on social media, it has become very common, and people start normalizing these types of errors and non-standard forms.

Also, most people are not even bothering to stop them from using these erroneous spellings, due to which these language changes are becoming permanent on social media. In the case of the Urdu language, these variations are very visible on different platforms. People are frequently using mixed languages (Urdu and English) and a lot of more wrong versions of the Urdu language. (Urua, 2004) Some of them also omit a few letters and change the spellings as well. That's the reason the difference between the accurate and inaccurate Urdu language has become unrecognisable.

So most of the errors in Urdu subtitles we observe during scrolling are due to this specific style of using spellings. While writing on digital media, these types of inaccuracies on social platforms illustrate how Urdu writers are reconstructing their language identity.

3. Urdu orthography and standardization

Urdu itself is a very rich and beautiful language but there is no specific and complete standardized version that everyone can agree on. For this reason, there are a lot of varieties of the Urdu language and errors are also common. As (Rehman, 2011) and (faruqi, 2014) mentioned, there is a huge influence of Persian and Arabic on the development of the Urdu language, and other regional and political impacts were also present there. The Urdu language had one or more similar meanings if the diacritic was not used correctly. It was very tough to rely on a specific standard form. But over time this problem was solved. People started accepting standard Urdu which has specific rules. Our institutes are also using them and that is now officially followed in formal writings too.

Although on social media, people are not paying attention to this standard Urdu and keep using the wrong spellings and mix Urdu with Roman Urdu, which creates uncertainty. These types of errors are considered "digital Orthographic errors". These errors are considered minor errors but they have a huge impact on the standardized language. This could lead to a long-lasting impact on the language's respect and identity. These inaccurate forms also disturb the new Urdu learners. Hence, now it is essential to raise awareness among people on digital media to use the correct and standardized Urdu language to keep the accuracy of the language dominant and prominent. In this way, we can preserve the Urdu language from decline.

Captions and literacy

(Díaz-Cintas, 2021) & (Remael, 2024) both observe and alert that if captions and subtitles contain incorrect spellings and inappropriate forms, then people may perceive the wrong context and meaning, or sometimes they may be unable to understand even a single word. Therefore, correct captions and subtitles should be used. Nowadays, the dominant part of our society is the youth. They often use digital media, and obviously, they are consuming a lot of Urdu from those erroneous Urdu captions. They appear over and over again, due to which they assume them to be correct. People consider captions a very minor thing, but they

have a huge influence on learners who are learning the Urdu language through them. There is no in-depth study that analyzes how these incorrect Urdu subtitles affect the understanding. Research methodology

Research method

This study is based on a case study. The data includes 25 screenshots from TikTok and YouTube that contain incorrect Urdu spellings and a variety of errors. The data collection tool is an open-ended qualitative questionnaire that shows the perception of different people about the orthographic errors.

Research design:

This study includes a qualitative method. The tool that was used to collect the data was a pre-designed questionnaire that contained open-ended questions. This study helps to collect the qualitative information from participants, which includes their personal views and experiences towards orthographic errors in subtitles on social media. Also, collect samples of the videos from TikTok and YouTube that contain erroneous orthographic errors. By using purposive sampling, 10 participants were selected, and all of them belonged to an educational background and were aged between 23_40.

Theoretical Framework

Introduction to theory

The theory of "standard language ideology" was given by James and Lesley Milroy (1999). Ideology is the set of beliefs that people have about certain things they which explains why people have an accepted belief that there is always one proper variety of a language that is considered standard language. That variety is viewed as the prioritized version of all of the other inferior varieties and everyone should use the standard version.

In a society, those who use standard form are considered educated, and that form is related to power, high status, and identity. (seeba, 2007) According to this theory, if any changes are observed in a language that are deviated from the standard variety, it would be considered an inaccurate form of language. These variations include spelling mistakes, syntactic errors, and a lot more. Different educational institutes preserved the standard Urdu as compared to social media. People are using different languages on media platforms like slang and mixed language, and Roman Urdu during communication which affects the standard language very badly.

Relevance to digital orthography

With the passage of time, we are observing more and more errors and non-standard forms on TikTok, YouTube, and other apps. People are using them unconsciously without paying any attention, because they are also consuming those erroneous forms frequently from these apps. This theory is related to my problem, which is the digital orthography of the Urdu language, because the use of standard language could maintain the prestige of any language, including the Urdu language, and also prevent it from orthographic errors. For example, when we see a word from the Urdu language in a caption that is written as جائینگے instead of جائیں گے, if it is used in formal writing, it would be considered a non-standard form.

Language as a symbol of national identity

The standard form of language is considered the cultural identity of a society or country. (Mendoza-Denton, 2018) For instance, people connect the standard Urdu language to Pakistan because it becomes an identity of the Pakistani people. If the Urdu language is written correctly in captions and subtitles throughout the world it would maintain the standard identity of the Urdu language

Data analysis

Introduction to data analysis:

This data analysis is divided into two main parts:

1. A dataset of 25 screenshots from various platforms that include TikTok and YouTube. These screenshots contain clear examples of how orthographic errors are used on social media.

2. The second part includes open-ended questionnaires through which the participants give their reviews about the inaccurate use of spellings on digital media.

This analysis is aligned with the framework which is "standard language ideology (Milroy,1999) and with the literature review as well. This analysis of screenshots reveals how changes in spellings transform the Urdu language in digital settings.

Analysis of screenshots



Figure 1.1

1- Caption: کبے کی رونق، کبے کا منظر:

The orthographic deviation in this caption is found in the repeated word “کبے”, which is a nonstandard spelling of the term that was intended “کعبہ”. This substitution mirrors the impact of contemporary digital writing practices, in which phonetic approximations and nonstandardized spelling patterns are valued more highly than standardized ones. Such deviations are easily found in the social media setting, where speed and simplicity are more important than prescriptive correctness. These examples show the variation in ways of writing spellings, depending upon the individual. The screenshot is at first sight a glittering mixture of sacred and contemporary. However for the linguist, it becomes a rich text, exposing the tensions implicit in the process of representing a traditional religious form in the fluid, often unstandardized, space of digital media. The screenshot’s textual elements, particularly the Urdu phrase "KABAY KI RONAQ KABAY KA MANZAR," are not merely a vehicle for information but a site where linguistic identity is actively negotiated, contested, and performed.

The orthographic deviation in this caption is found in the repeated word “کبے”, which is a nonstandard spelling of the intended term “کعبہ”. This substitution reflects the influence of digital writing practices, where phonetic approximations and informal spelling conventions are prioritized over standardized forms. Such deviations often occur in social media contexts, where speed and simplicity take precedence over prescriptive correctness. These examples illustrate how different individuals use different ways to write spellings. Applying Milroy and Milroy's (1999) "Standard Language Ideology", this is one example of the tension between traditional linguistic power and the changing norms of digital communication. The writer's choice shows that the users are not careless by any means, rather they are actively negotiating between standard forms and expressive flexibility provided by online spaces as a part of a redefinition of Urdu orthography in digital contexts.

Furthermore, the orthography is not standard. The word "KABAY" is a phonetic translation of "Ka'bah" (کعبہ), which, in standard English transliteration, is usually translated "Kaaba". This is a choice of a local, spoken pronunciation over an established, internationally recognized spelling. This is a very important detail, since it represents a conscious violation of established norms.



Figure 1.2

2- Caption: ہیرات سے خود کو کبھی دیکھا ہے

In this caption, the word “ہیرات” is an unorthodox spelling of “حیرت” (meaning “amazement”). The orthographic substitution has been a phonetic simplification in the spoken language of digital Urdu, where users often substitute more complicated letters with an easier letter which is more similar in appearance. Such spelling adaptations are common in online writing, where the focus is more on convenience and speed and readability than on correct spelling.

Sociolinguistically, the use of “ہیرات” in this instance shows digital writers how to use orthography strategically to create an individual online identity. From the point of view of Milroy & Milroy's (1999) SLI, standard forms are related to authority, prestige, and formal literacy, but this deviation reveals that nonstandard forms may have social meaning and a communicative function. Here, the digital writer plays upon prescriptive norms and expressive imperatives, reinforcing the notion that online Urdu is a site of linguistic innovation and identity construction. Behind these “errors” are people, designers, social media managers and everyday users, that are trying to connect, to share emotion and to express identity.



Figure 1.3

3- Caption: کہاں پل سیرات اور کہاں یہ پل

The deviation in orthography in this caption is seen in “سیرات”, a nonstandard reading of “صراط”. This is not a mundane word, this is an extremely significant theological concept in Islam, referring to the bridge all souls must cross on the Day of Judgment. Its presence even in a comedic context has a cultural and religious weight. Therefore, its non-standard orthographic

treatment is much more revealing than the mere mistake in a common noun. The replacement of س for ص is an example of a phonetic simplification often found in informal digital writing, where ease of typing and ease of understanding are important to the creators of such writing and prescriptive correctness is not.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, this orthographic choice is used as a marker of identity in the digital discourse of Urdu. Milroy & Milroy's (1999) "Standard Language Ideology" describes standardization as a social construction linked to prestige and authority; however, the like "سیرات" highlight deviation and demonstrate how users resist the norms and employ language as a form of individual and identification with the practices of the informal community. The adaptation of digital orthography to accommodate this role in contemporary linguistic identity on the internet is thus highlighted by the writer's choice.



Figure 1.4

4- Caption: "بچیاں آٹھ گئی ہیں بیلین بجا رہی ہیں"

As consider orthography as a social act that show the identity of people on social media (seeba, 2007) The error therefore serve as the evidence how digital users negotiate their identity, linguistic convenient and normative pressure while producing the written urdu online. The main orthography error is in the word "بیلین" which is a non-standard and phonetically inappropriate form under the influence of English orthography and pronunciation patterns. In the Standard Urdu language, the expected form would be as per the conventional phonological and morphological rules of the language, however, the spelling used here is a deviation having been influenced by a quick and informal way of digital communication. This instance is consistent with Milroy and Milroy's (1999) notion of Standard Language Ideology in which such departures from orthography are seen as departures from an established and "correct" linguistic norm. From this perspective, however, the use of "بیلین" is not just a spelling mistake, but rather a sociolinguistically meaningful act that points out tensions between prescriptive expectations and the fluid, hybrid writing practices prevalent in multilingual digital settings.

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Figure 1.5

5- Caption “میں ایک گھنگر بندہ ہو تیرا”

The word “گھنگر” is a blatant orthographic mistake, as it replaces the normal word “گنہگار” which has the quoted semantic meaning of "sinner" or "wrongdoer". This deviation is characteristic of a phonologically simplified and non-standard construction that seems to derive from informal digital writing practices, in which users would commonly make use of approximate spellings rather than fixed and traditional orthographic practices.

Following the Standard Language Ideology, such non-standard spellings are understood as violations of the "correct" and socially sanctioned form of Urdu language and this helps reinforce the ideological conception that legitimate language must follow established and permanent norms (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). The existence of “گھنگر” thus becomes not just a technical error, but a manifestation of the multifaceted interplay between linguistic authority, digital informality and the performance of identities in online spaces. This one slip in the digital communication environment clearly demonstrates how digital communication environments encourage alternative and hybrid forms of Urdu that disrupt prescriptive expectations while revealing emerging patterns of language use in modern times.



Figure 1.6

6- Caption “اتنی تفلک ہے”

The word “تفلک” represents a clear orthographic error, as it incorrectly replaces the

standard Urdu form “تکلیف” which conveys the meaning of “pain,” “difficulty,” or “distress.” This deviation illustrates a phonologically influenced restructuring of the word, characteristic of informal digital writing practices, where users often rely on approximate spellings rather than standardized orthography. This ideology represents the standard variety not as any variety among many, but as the only “correct” and “legitimate” variety, stigmatizing all other varieties as “deficient,” “corrupt,” or “lazy.”

According to **Standard Language Ideology**, such non-standard forms are interpreted as violations of socially sanctioned norms, reinforcing the ideological perception that the standard variety of Urdu is inherently correct and authoritative (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). According to (Androutsopoulos, 2015) various platforms give space to people to use different spellings in many new ways, and because of that, these errors are now very common. Beyond a simple spelling mistake (تفلیک) underscores the tension between prescriptive norms and flexible and user-driven practices that characterize digital communication. It shows us how the writers in online spaces bargain with linguistic convenience, expressive immediacy and performance of identity, and at the same time challenge the traditional expectations of correctness.

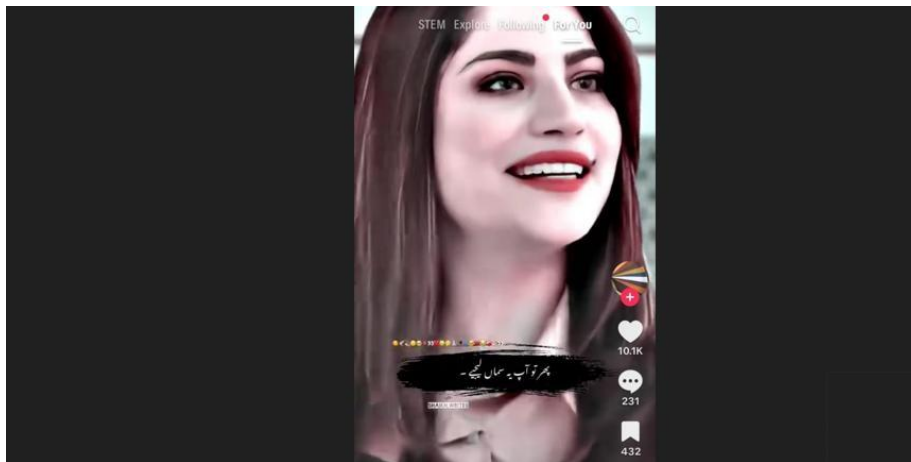


Figure 1.7

7- Caption “پھر تو آپ یہ سماں لیجیے”

The word “سماں” is an obvious typographical mistake, as it incorrectly substitutes the standard Urdu word “سامان” which describes the sense of “items” or “goods.” This deviation reflects phonologically based substitution as well as letter omissions. (Urua, 2004) also discuss the matter of omission that people omit words as well to change their writing style. This is an orthographic deviation that shows a very common aspect of the digital Urdu, where phonologically similar spellings of words and omission of some letters are adopted in order to make typing the words easier and in case of informal communication. Such deviations are not just accidents but are part of the larger digital orthographic practices, which highlight the process of adaptation of written Urdu to the constraints and affordances of online platforms.

From the point of view of Standard Language Ideology (Milroy & Milroy, 1999), this error illustrates the conflict between prescriptive norms of standard Urdu and the reality of everyday writing in digital media. The use of the wrong form “سمان” indicates non-standard, informal linguistic identity, which corresponds to the practices of users who prefer speed, accessibility and colloquial pronunciation to conventional correctness. At the same time, this deviation may be interpreted as a sign of lower linguistic prestige as far as it goes by the audience adhering to standard norms, which may be seen as the social and ideological implication of such digital orthographic errors. (Urua, 2004) From the perspective of **Standard Language Ideology** (Milroy & Milroy, 1999), this error demonstrates the tension between prescriptive norms of standard Urdu and the realities of everyday digital writing. The incorrect form “سمان” signals a non-standard, informal linguistic identity, aligning with the practices of users who prioritize speed, accessibility, and colloquial pronunciation over conventional correctness. At the same time, this deviation may be perceived as a marker of reduced linguistic prestige by audiences who adhere to standard norms, indicating the social and ideological implications of such digital orthographic errors.



Figure 1.8

8- Caption: "تو یار مت کرو نا مجھ سے بہس"

It has an orthographic mistake in the word “بہس” which is a non-standard way of spelling the correct form بحث (discussion/argument). This error represents a deviation of a phonological nature, common in informal communication via the digital environment, in which users usually focus more on facilitating the typing process and increasing the similarity with spoken language than on respecting the usual orthography.

According to the Standard Language Ideology framework (Milroy & Milroy, 1999), such deviations are regarded as non-standard, and might be regarded as incorrect by traditional language norms, but they must at the same time be seen as the adaptive practices of language users in digital environments. such deviations are regarded as non-standard and possibly incorrect from the perspective of traditional language norms, but they are at the same time highly visible examples of the adaptive practices of language users on digital platforms. The orthographic mistake is not a simple typographical mistake, but is entrenched in the sociolinguistic patterns of users of the digital medium who are more concerned with speed, ease, and phonetic approximation than with adherence to codified norms.

From a sociolinguistic perspective, however, this orthographic choice is also a marker of digital linguistic identity. By using the non-standard spelling “بہس” the user's individual constructs an informal, conversational persona that is in line with the norms of digital discourse communities. This practice shows how digital media is a place of identity negotiation through the user balancing standard language expectations and contextual and expressive needs (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). Consequentially, such errors are not accidental but indicative of larger trends in the adaptation of Urdu to digital communication as well as highlighting the interaction between standardization, identity and technology-mediated language use.



Figure 1.9

9- Caption: جس تریکے سے پانی پی رہا ہے نا

The caption features the orthographic deviation , **تریکے** which should be spelled **طریقے** (method/way). This variation reflects phonologically-driven simplification commonly observed in digital contexts, where users prioritize typing convenience and phonetic approximation over adherence to prescriptive norms. The substitution demonstrates how digital communicators often reproduce spoken forms in written texts, blurring the line between oral and written registers. Such practices reveal the tension between standardized orthography and the emergent conventions of informal digital writing (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, the use of **تریکے** serves as a marker of informal identity, signaling a relaxed, conversational style that resonates with the norms of digital media communities. The deviation also illustrates the adaptive strategies employed by Urdu speakers to negotiate between linguistic correctness and pragmatic constraints, such as speed and ease of communication. (Eckert, 2020) explains that people don't follow the standard rules and present themselves as independent. Thus, even a single lexical mistake in digital media can serve as an important site for examining the negotiation of language identity and the sociolinguistic dynamics of Urdu in online spaces.

This interplay between phonetic spelling and social identity underscores the dynamic nature of orthographic practices in online spaces, highlighting how errors simultaneously challenge standardization while performing identity work (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

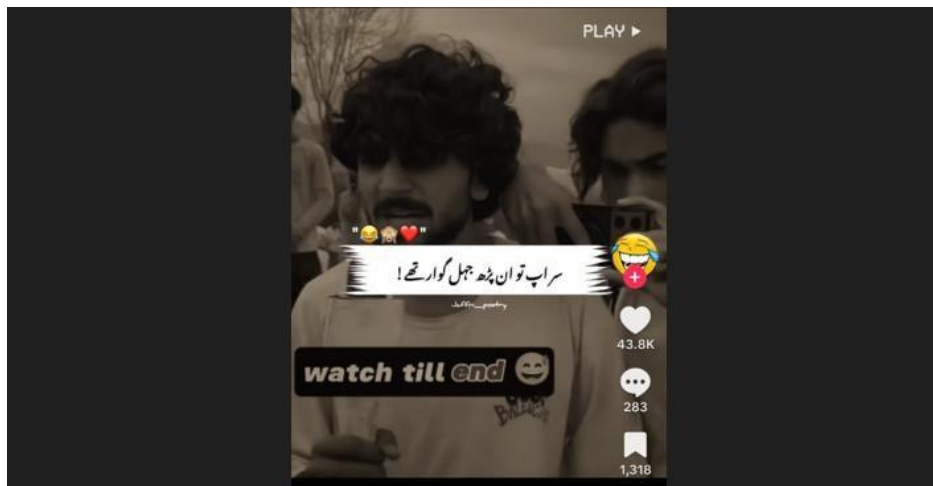


Figure 1.10

10- Caption: سر اپ تو ان پڑھ جہل گوار تھے

An alternate non-standard spelling is **جہل** which is a phonetic simplification and omission of the long vowel from the normative spellings **جابل**. This orthographic choice illustrates the tendency of the user to regard ease of input to be a more important consideration than conformity to prescriptive norms, to the point that forms often end up looking very much like speech rather than complying with prescriptive norms. According to the Standard Language Ideology such deviations are considered as incorrect, however they show the flexibility of digital literacy practices, whereby traditional rules of writing are adjusted to fit informal settings of communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, the use of **جہل** adds to the creation of a casual and approachable persona, highlighting spontaneity and conversational intimacy. The spelling deviation may also be an index of membership into digital peer networks, in which non-standard forms are socially acceptable and even expected. By using a phonologically-based orthography, users assert their autonomy in their linguistic expression, and this shows how identity is actively negotiated in digital discourse communities, at the same time as challenging standardization (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.11

11- Caption: میڈم اگر اب اندی ہو تو اب ائیے گا آپ کی آواز سن کے

The caption has **اندی**, instead of **اندھی** (blind) showing the effect of the auditory perception on the choice of orthography in the online communication. Users tend to reproduce spoken forms instead of following more normative writing conventions, in part due to cognitive shortcuts and in part because of the affordances of digital typing environments. This deviation is an example of the conflict between the standard practices of literacy and the pragmatic requirements of informal digital expression (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, using **اندی** is an informal and conversational way to speak and follows the norms of digital communication. The choice conveys immediacy and relatable, focusing on the user's interaction with an interactive and informal audience. Such practices help to show how the use of orthographic errors are not simply accidents, but functional means of constructing identities, enabling the user to move between what is expected by the dominant language and the communicative needs demanded by a particular context

(Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

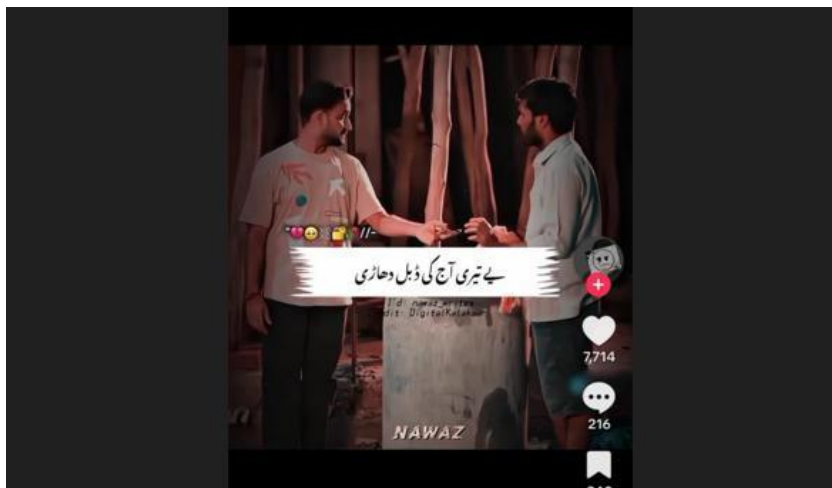


Figure 1.12

12- Caption: یہ تیری آج کی ڈبل دھاڑی

In this instance, دھاڑی substitutes for دیہاڑی (daily wage), highlighting phonetic simplification and colloquial representation in digital writing.. Users tend to prefer forms which are close as possible to pronunciation, often at the cost of morphological and orthographic accuracy. This is a general trend in informal writing in Urdu over social media where expediency and ease of expression often take priority over following prescriptive norms (Milroy and Milroy, 1999).

The sociolinguistic implications of this substitution are great. By using دھاڑی, the user builds a conversational and familiar tone that is indicative of membership in informal online communities. The deviation also shows the interaction between language identity and digital media, where the orthographic flexibility is employed to preserve social alignment, expressiveness and personal style within the fluid norms of online Urdu communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.13

13. Caption: مجھے نہیں پتا تھا کی تمہاری اتنی چھوٹی سوچ ہے

The word چھوٹی replaces چھوٹی (small/little), reflecting phonetic approximation in digital orthography. Such deviations frequently arise from users' reliance on auditory perception and cognitive shortcuts when typing relatively quickly, and in the process illustrate the conflict between prescriptive spelling and practical communication needs. While in other traditional frameworks of literacy, this would be considered an error, in the digital discourse it is a tool of expressivity and immediacy (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically this orthographic decision creates an informal and expressive persona, which focuses on conversational tone and conformity to peer norms. It does, however, illustrate the way in which errors can act as markers of identity, which digital communicators can use to convey nuance, tone and personality. Rather than a deviation from the norm that is purely accidental, the deviation from چھوٹی points to larger processes of adaptation and negotiation in representation of Urdu in the online spaces (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

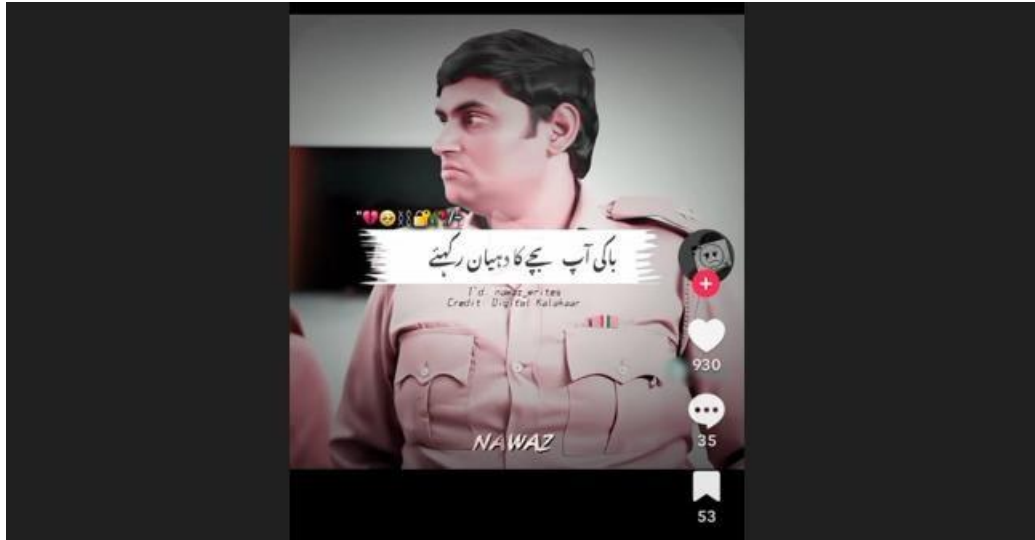


Figure 1.14

14- Caption: باکی آپ بچے کا دہیان رکھئے

Here, باکی replaces the standard باقی (rest/remaining), demonstrating phonetic simplification common in digital typing. This orthographic adaptation may be the result of users' dependence on the auditory similarity or to reduce cognitive load in composing the message rapidly; While the form does not adhere to the norm, it is part of a larger pattern of informalization in online Urdu orthography, in which spelling norms are flexibly negotiated (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

From a sociolinguistic point of view, the use of باکی is an index of conversationality, and social sameness with digital communities. It indicates an attempt by the speaker to keep a friendly, approachable tone while vice versa working within the affordances of a technology mediated communication environment. These deviations emphasize the role of orthographic practices, which are part of the construction of digital linguistic identities, and which involve this balancing act between efficiency and standardization (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.15

15. Caption: اندھیرے اور اکیلے پن سے ڈر لگتا ہے

The non-standard spelling اندھیرے replaces اندھیرے (darkness), illustrating the impact of auditory perception and phonological approximation on digital writing. Such deviations are an indicator of a dialogue between the spoken and written forms in the case of informal online activities where ease of typing and informality in tone will often override prescriptive orthography (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically the choice to use the orthography is a marker of personal and expressive identity. It presents a relaxed, narrative style, indicating alignment with informality norms in digital rather than formal literacy. The deviation illustrates the way digital users balance between the established rules and the social pragmatic needs by resorting to spelling as a way to demonstrate tone, personality and social belonging in online Urdu discourse communities (Milroy and Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.16

16. Caption: تمہارے لڑکا نکم ہے

The word نکم replaces the standard نکما (useless/ineffectual), highlighting morphological reduction and phonetic simplification in informal writing. This decision of orthography is the

outcome of cognitive and typographic shortcuts common in online text production, thus revealing a tension between standardization and efficiency. Standard Language Ideology would see this as incorrect, but it represents adaptive strategies as digital communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

In the terms of sociolinguistic identity, **نکم** performs in a function of creating a conversational, casual persona. The deviation expresses informality and immediacy and shows the importance of spelling errors in peer relationships and identity achievements. Digital users make use of these orthographic variations to effect social alignment and expressive nuance, reaffirming the notion that non-standard forms are not only communicatively strategic but also accurately strategic.

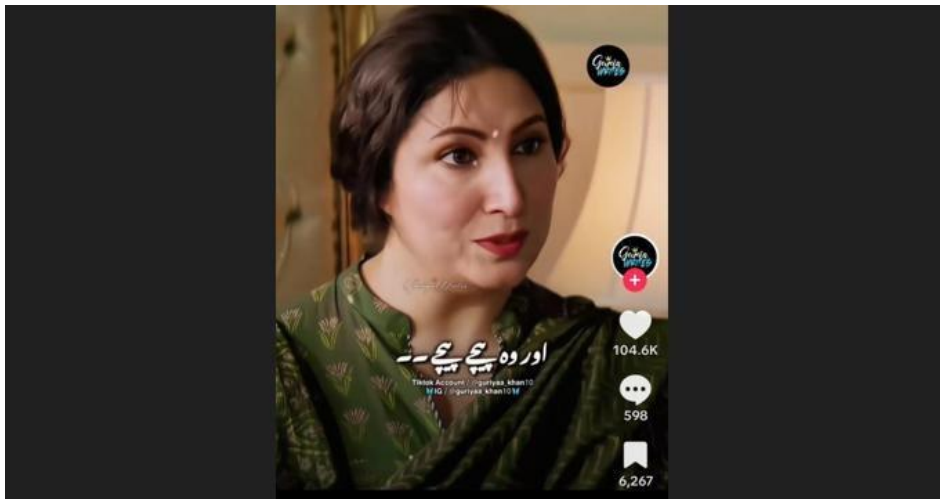


Figure 1.17

17. Caption: اور وہ پیچے پیچے

The substitution **پیچے پیچے** for **پیچھے پیچھے** (behind) exemplifies vowel simplification and orthographic approximation driven by phonology. This deviation represents user's effort to reproduce pronunciation which streamlines typing yet is at odds with prescriptive norms. According to Standard Language Ideology, such forms are not standard, but prove to be adaptive linguistic practices in digital communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, the use of **پیچے پیچے** signals casualness, immediacy, and conversational alignment with digital discourse communities. - Digital discourse communities.). It expresses informality and involvement and demonstrates how Urdu users in the digital domain balance orthographic convention by integrating with practical and expressive needs. The choice is a negotiation on one level between phonetic realism as such, typographic convenience, and the construction of social identities in the context of textual interaction on the internet (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.18

18. Caption: ایک کلو پنڈی بھی کر دینا بھیا

The word **بھیا** is used instead of the standard **بھنڈی** (okra), reflecting orthographic deviation influenced by phonetic resemblance. such errors frequently arise from hurried

typing and casual and oral-like digital writing practices. From the point of view of Standard Language Ideology this is a non-standard substitution but, in the pragmatic approach to the user, it exemplifies a particular strategy for communicating with certain elements of the communicative situation in which communication speed and the phonetic intuition of the user take precedence over the prescriptive correctness (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, using **بھیا** works as a marker of informality, humour and conversational tone. The deviation is related to bringing the user into line with the norms of digital discourse in the peer community, signalling the meaning of familiarity and playfulness. This example illustrates how digital orthography enables speakers to negotiate social and linguistic identity at the same time, using non-standard spelling as a tool to reach their audiences while at the same time ensuring their own individual expressivity (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.19

19. Caption: ہاں بڑا ہو جائیگے تو کام کریں گے

This caption contains two non-standard forms: **جائیگے** instead of **جائیں گے** and **کریں گے** instead of **کریں گے**. Both the errors are instances of influence of phonological simplification and morphological reduction in the informal digital Urdu writing. While conventional orthography places the emphasis on accurate representation of vowels and consonants, ease of input and approximate auditory representation are often the main concerns of users, especially in fast, casual online communication (Milroy and Milroy 1999).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, these deviations are functional in order to create a conversational and approachable persona. The forms are indicative of informality, adherence to digital peer norms and casual tone. By breaking away from prescriptive standards, the user is showing a negotiated balance between linguistic rightness and social expressiveness, exhibiting how non-standard orthography in digital contexts becomes a tool for identity construction and relational positioning (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Table 1.1

Types of errors	Wrong forms	Correct forms
Omission of letters	کبے اندی دھاڑ ی	کعبے اندھی دیہاڑی
Mixing spellings	بیلین	گھنٹی
Addition of spellings	ک ڑا دو کھ ی بھولا	کھ ڑا دکھ ی بھلا

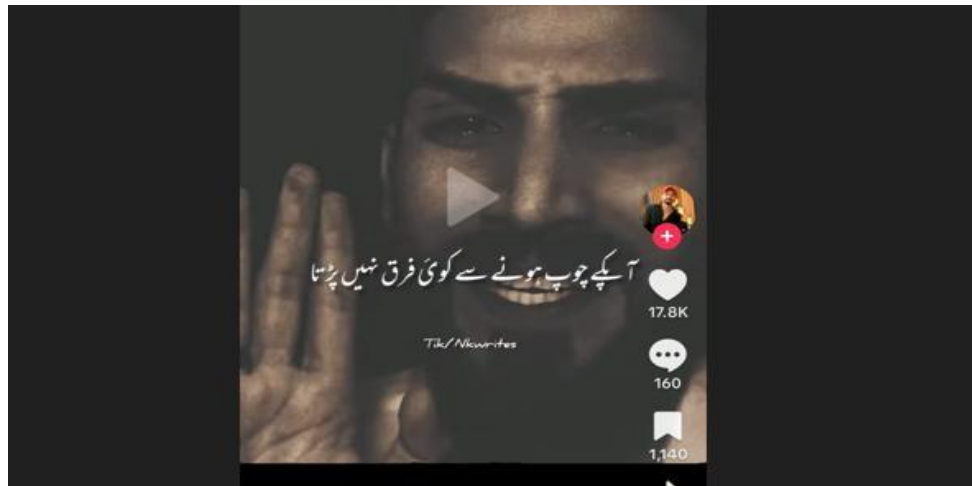


Figure 1.20

20. Caption: آپکے چوپ ہونے سے کوئی فرق نہیں پڑتا

The word چوپ replaces چپ (silent), exemplifying vowel misrepresentation in digital orthography. Such substitutions are frequently motivated by phonetic approximation and typographical convenience or borrowing from spoken registers. Whereas Standard Language Ideology would imply that this is an error, this fact of continued existence in informal digital contexts points to a much more general pattern of flexible, adaptive literacy practices (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, the use of the form of the verb, چوپ, implies a casual, conversational tone and creates an informal persona. By moving away from the prescriptive standard, the user places himself or herself in the mores of online discourse among peers, where the exact use of orthography is of lesser importance than expressivity and engagement. This example shows that errors are not random but functionally serve to negotiate identity, tone and relational alignment within spaces of digital communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.21

21. Caption: کوئی کڑا ہے میری جناب میں

The orthographic substitution کڑا for کھڑا (standing) reflects both simplification and the omission of the aspirated consonant. Such deviations are typical of digital communication, where prescriptive standards are often over-ridden by rapid typing and phonetic-based spelling. Standard Language Ideology defines this as a non-standard form, but this mistake is also the

result of an adaptive strategy of informal and conversational expression (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

From a sociolinguistic perspective, کڑا is a feature of casual tone, and alignment with informal digital discourse communities. The fact that this deviation shows the interplay between linguistic norms and social identity shows that users take advantage of the flexibility of the orthography to convey their personality, intimacy and immediacy whilst still retaining engagement with their audience (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

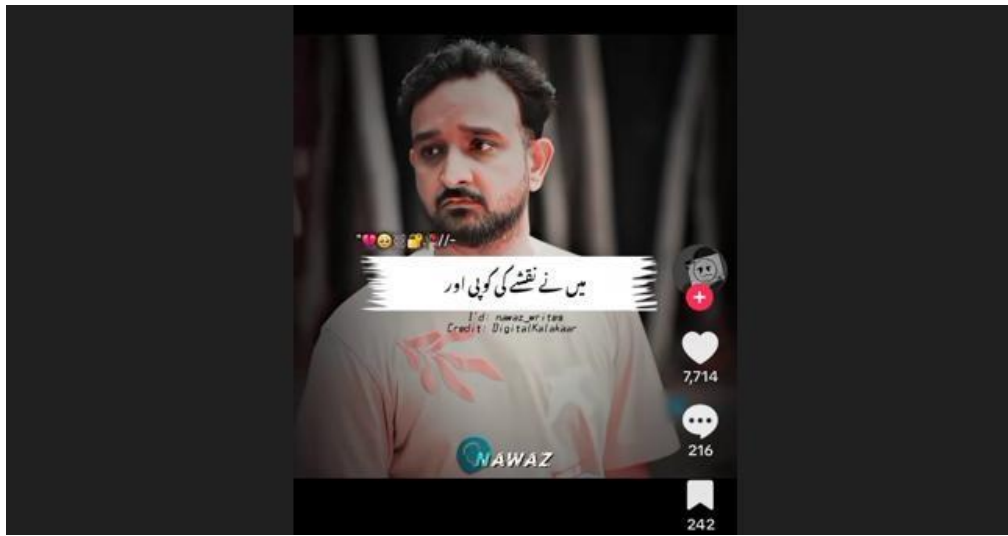


Figure 1.21

22. Caption: میں نے نقشے کی کوپی اور

The spelling کوپی substitutes for the standard کاپی (copy), reflecting phonetic approximation and typographic adaptation. Users often make such variations in digital contexts out of convenience, auditory similarity and informality of register. While this would be regarded as incorrect in standard orthography, the substitution helps to illustrate how more practical communication needs and user-driven conventions affect the writing of Urdu on the Web (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, کوپی is used to express informality and conformity to peer-driven digital norms. The deviation plays its part in the construction of a relaxed and approachable persona as well as how digital orthography mediates identity, tone, and social positioning. It emphasizes the larger process of the negotiation and adaptation of standard forms in technology-mediated communication (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Table 1.2

Type of errors	Wrong form	Correct form
Variation in style	ہیرات	حیرت
	باکی	باقی
	کوپی	کاپی
	اندہیرے	اندھیرے
	نکم	نکما



Figure 1.23

23. Caption: اور بیوفا نکلا

In this caption, **بیوفا** replaces **بے وفا** (disloyal), reflecting the omission of the diacritic **ے** and a vowel simplification. Such deviations indicate difficulties in digital Urdu orthography, such as the shortcomings of input systems and informal practices of typing. Standard Language Ideology would say that this is wrong, but as well shows the functional adaptation of written forms to online communication contexts (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, the use of **بیوفا** has the undertone of casualness, emotionality and conversational intimacy. In using a non-standard form, the user negotiates identity, expression needs and audience perception, in line with the dynamic interaction of standardization and informal forms of digital writing. Such examples show that errors in online Urdu are purposeful markers of tone, affect, and digital social identity (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.24

24. Caption: آپ اتنا دوکھی کیوں ہے

The caption contains **دوکھی** instead of the standard **دکھی** (sad), illustrating vowel insertion and phonetic simplification. This deviation is a great example of how informal digital writing can favor the sound of the words and not the proper spelling. Standard Language Ideology sees such forms as non-standard, however they remain so because they are easy to input and follow the patterns of conversational speech (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

From a sociolinguistic point of view, **دوکھی** is an informal, expressive orthographic

option that is used to express emotion and tone. The mistake creates a loose persona and fits in digital mores where audience interaction and immediacy are of paramount importance. This is an example of how online Urdu orthographic deviations are intertwined with identity construction, expressive nuance and social positioning in digital discourse (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).



Figure 1.25

25- Caption: بھولا دیں گی تم کو بھی ذرا صبر تو رکھو

The word **بھولا** is a non-standard form of **بھلا** (good/fine), reflecting phonetic adaptation and informal spelling practices. Such deviations show the influence of spoken forms on the digital orthography, in which the users often reproduce the pronunciation patterns for simplicity or expressivity reasons. While prescriptive norms would find this wrong, it shows the adaptable and flexible nature of digital Urdu (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Sociolinguistically, the use of **بھولا** has the effect of demonstrating a casual, friendly tone, which indicates that the user is connected with informal communities of discourse. The orthographic choice serves as a marker of digital identity and is a trade-off between social expressiveness and the practical limitations of online communication. This example supports the broader sociolinguistic finding that there are communicative, social and identity-related functions to non-standard orthography in digital Urdu, beyond its error manifestation (Milroy & Milroy, 1999).

Table 1.3

Types of error	Wrong form	Correct form
Short forms	گھنگر	گنہگار
	سما ن	ساما ن
	جہ ل	جاب ل
	بیچے	بیچھے
	تریکے	طریقے

Questionnaire responses:

Analyzing Erroneous Urdu Captions through the Lens of Standard Language Ideology

Drawing on the questionnaire responses, this section explores how erroneous Urdu captions in digital media can be interpreted through the theoretical framework of Standard Language Ideology (SLI). As James and Lesley Milroy (1999) explain, SLI represents a pervasive belief system that privileges a single, idealized variety of a language as inherently correct and authoritative, while devaluing other varieties as mistaken, careless, or impure. This ideology constructs a symbolic hierarchy between prestige and stigma, often linking linguistic correctness with morality, education, and social worth. The responses collected from participants vividly demonstrate how this ideology operates in the digital Urdu landscape, shaping perceptions of accuracy, readability, and identity.

1. Impact on Accuracy and Clarity

Most participants agreed that inaccurate Urdu in subtitles compromises both meaning and communicative precision. Respondents noted that spelling or grammatical errors lead to confusion and lower the perceived standard of the language. This belief closely reflects SLI's core premise: that deviation from the codified norm endangers clarity and comprehension (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). Yet what is particularly revealing is that participants did not view "clarity" as purely functional. It was also moralized. To them, the "correct" form is not just clearer but more respectable, showing how linguistic standards become intertwined with broader notions of order and integrity.

2. Readability of Erroneous Subtitles

Responses regarding readability reveal a subtle tension between practical understanding and ideological discomfort. Some participants admitted they could still grasp meaning despite errors, while others such found the experience frustrating and disruptive. This divergence suggests that while comprehension may remain intact, readers often experience dissonance when encountering non-standard forms. As the Milroys argue, individuals internalize the prestige form as the legitimate norm, making any deviation feel uneasy or "wrong." The instinctive act of "instantly catching the error," even without reacting publicly, illustrates how deeply such norms are embedded in linguistic perception.

3. Influence on Personal Writing

Several respondents reflected on how repeated exposure to erroneous subtitles occasionally affects their own Urdu writing. This concern embodies a central anxiety within SLI that non-standard forms are somehow "contagious" and capable of corrupting the prestige variety. Within this ideology, language is perceived less as a living, adaptive system and more as a delicate artifact that must be safeguarded against decline. Such worries underscore how strongly prescriptive norms have been internalized: digital media is not merely a platform for communication but is viewed as a site of linguistic contamination.

4. Pervasiveness of Orthographic Errors

Participants unanimously acknowledged that orthographic mistakes are now widespread across social media. They attributed this to casual writing habits, the prevalence of Roman Urdu, and the fast-paced nature of digital exchange. They gave suggestions to point out the mistake in comment section and should react on such mistakes instead of ignoring them. Also institutes should focus on lexical level on syntax and morphology as well. Interestingly, this normalization of error can be read in two ways. From an ideological standpoint, it undermines the authority of the standard form. Yet from a sociolinguistic perspective, it reflects the natural evolution of language in decentralized, unregulated environments. As the Milroys observe, linguistic standards are maintained through institutional control, and digital platforms by their very nature diffuse that control, allowing new norms to emerge organically.

5. Standard Urdu and Cultural Values

Participants offered mixed views on whether maintaining standard Urdu supports cultural identity. Some respondents felt that preserving standard forms "sets a standard" and upholds cultural continuity, echoing SLI's close association between linguistic purity and moral or cultural authenticity.

Others, such as some participants were suggesting that digital culture has already redefined norms of expression and identity. This ambivalence reveals a moment of ideological transition where traditional assumptions about the relationship between language and culture are being renegotiated in the digital sphere.

6. Generational Divide in Error Production

Many respondents attributed the higher frequency of orthographic errors to younger users, citing their greater exposure to English, less formal Urdu education, and extensive use of social media. This generational framing is a recurring pattern in language complaint discourses influenced by SLI, where older speakers are portrayed as custodians of tradition and the youth as agents of decay. However, the younger speakers are simply adapting Urdu to fit digital contexts, creating new communicative norms that challenge conventional definitions of “correctness.”

7. Normalization of Errors on Social Media

The mechanisms through which non-standard forms become normalized were described in diverse ways from careless “copy-paste” behavior to deliberate stylistic choices intended “to sound cool,” as one respondent phrased it. From the standpoint of SLI, this process represents a dangerous erosion of linguistic discipline. Yet, linguistically speaking, it demonstrates the creative adaptability of users in a rapidly changing medium. In digital communication, visibility, humor, and social belonging often carry more value than adherence to orthographic precision, granting non-standard forms a kind of informal legitimacy.

8. The Perceived Decline of Standardized Urdu

A sense of pessimism was evident in many responses concerning the future of standardized Urdu. Participants feared that persistent exposure to errors might lead to a collective forgetting of correct spellings and forms what some called a “decay” or even “death” of the standard. This fear epitomizes the apocalyptic narrative embedded in SLI, which interprets linguistic change not as natural evolution but as decline. Anna Baker’s description of Urdu as an “endangered language” captures this emotional dimension: for many, deviation from the standard feels like cultural loss rather than adaptation.

9. Frequency and Nature of Errors

Respondents consistently reported encountering numerous orthographic mistakes, offering examples such as failur for fult or the use of numerals like “3” to represent “پ.” These tangible examples illustrate how non-standard practices circulate in everyday digital writing. While SLI would categorize them as ignorance or negligence, a descriptive linguistic perspective might recognize them as practical adjustments to technological limitations particularly Urdu’s complex script and inconsistent keyboard support.

10. Perceived Global Image

Many participants expressed concern that incorrect Urdu subtitles project a negative image internationally, undermining the language’s prestige and cultural value. This belief strongly resonates with SLI’s linkage between linguistic correctness and collective dignity (Milroy & Milroy, 1999). As one respondent noted, “every language should be used in its correct form.” Such views reflect how deeply language standardization becomes entangled with national pride and cultural representation on a global stage.

11. Preservation and Standardization Strategies

Proposed remedies focused on educational and institutional reinforcement. Participants emphasized the need for Urdu instruction that prioritizes accurate spelling, grammar, and exposure to standard forms. These solutions mirror SLI’s traditional reliance on top-down interventions to restore order and authority. Interestingly, this desire for institutional oversight also reveals nostalgia for older modes of linguistic regulation schools, print media, and formal training that are increasingly eclipsed by the democratizing influence of digital spaces.

Taken together, the questionnaire responses reflect a deep-seated anxiety about the status of Urdu in digital communication representing an anxiety firmly shaped by Standard Language Ideology. Participants consistently assessed linguistic variation through a prescriptive lens, equating deviation with decline and informality with threat. Yet beneath this concern lies a broader story: the digital transformation of Urdu is not simply a process of decay but one of dynamic adaptation. The findings highlight the enduring tension between the ideological pursuit of stability and the sociolinguistic reality of change between protecting a standard and participating in a living, evolving linguistic culture.

Findings and discussion

The findings show that most people find it difficult to write the Urdu language in real life after reading Erroneous Urdu Captions on social media, and it is very common on digital media that people start normalizing it without paying any attention to these errors. They feel that the use of standard Urdu subtitles maintains its cultural values. The findings also indicate that, compared to the older generation, the younger generation is not connected to their roots, and there is less use of the Urdu language in institutes because the focus is on English influence. They consume orthographic errors through digital media so that's why they are more into orthographic errors.

Findings also reveal that people forget the correct usage, and they also don't bother to correct it anymore. They will be more familiar with these errors, and gradually, it might cause the decay of standard Urdu in the future. The findings also suggest ways to preserve the Urdu language by pointing out mistakes and using the correct forms on digital media subtitles and captions, as well as teaching syntactic and morphological rules, patterns, and focusing on writing forms in institutions, specifically for our younger generation.

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that inaccuracies in the Urdu language on digital media significantly impact the reading and writing style of individuals, as they become accustomed to these distorted forms when exposed to them. It could also affect the way of understanding the Urdu language. This problem not only causes these effects it also ruins the identity and prestige of the Urdu language all over the world. Due to these errors, people are reshaping the Urdu language which impacts the authenticity of the language. The solution for these problems could be to evaluate and identify the errors and raise awareness to stop using them immediately. It could be a contribution to a better future for the Urdu language. If most people took this step for the future of Urdu there would be a great change. Also, it's the responsibility of our educational institutes to focus on the basics of the Urdu language so that everyone becomes proficient in the Urdu language.

On social media, the immediate reaction is to point out the errors and the improvement by those reactions would be a step toward the preservation of Urdu. The correct use would cause no confusion. Overall, the research objectives are also accomplished because the most common errors are identified and the reasons behind them are also understood. By the results of this study, it is recommended that the institutes should encourage students and youngsters to use correct forms not only in academics but also on different social media platforms. It is recommended that future researchers collect more data from different resources and compare the writing style of the older generation with the younger one to identify whether these errors are more common now than before.

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