

## Colloquialism in Hindi Urdu



**A.R. Fatihi** <sup>1</sup>

*Aligarh Muslim University, India*

A colloquialism is an informal expression, that is, an expression not used in formal speech or writing. Colloquialisms can include words, phrases, or sometimes even an entire aphorism. Aphoristic collections, sometimes known as wisdom literature, have a prominent place in Urdu cultural tradition. The tradition started with the collection of Hadith ( prophet's saying) in Islam. The aphoristic tradition in Urdu was further strengthened by Sufis to whom aphorisms are commonly attributed. Aphoristic collections also make up an important part of the work of some poets and authors, such as Iqbal and Ghalib. Some poets and writers employ a style of compressing ideas and thoughts into brief couplets, many one (*misra*) sentence long. We can refer to these as aphorisms.. Some linguists consider aphorism as a compressed poetic genre in itself. Aphorisms typically make extensive use of such devices as alliteration, anaphora and rhyme. Consider, for example, the aphorism " muft hath aye to bura kya hai--- Ghalib" , which has persisted in common usage despite objections to its communicative value. Whatever the value of its message, the phrase is in fact a masterpiece of oral-poetic art." Muft hath aye to bura kya hai" contains emphatic repetition of the consonants "t". In a number of cultures, such as tribal societies throughout the world, the ability to spontaneously produce aphoristic sayings at exactly the right moment is a key determinant of social status. However, aphorism is only one of the many categories of colloquialism and has not been analysed in this paper.

This paper builds upon an earlier article by the author ( Fatihi 1992, Imtiaz and Fatihi 2000) and attempts to extend and contextualize some of the themes originally introduced in the earlier piece. It was originally contended that despite its communicative value slang and colloquialism is a problematic speech behavior. Colloquialism are viewed by psycho linguists as going beyond "only words" and amounting to sinister and threatening instruments of domination producing coerced or compulsive behavior on the part of victims. The effects of "colloquialism", "slang", and "hate speech" have been viewed as harmful in the sense that they are not mediated by an individual's cognitive and judgmental processes but rather supposedly by-pass such processes and undermine the

---

<sup>1</sup> Dr. A.R. Fatihi is a Professor of Linguistics, Aligarh Muslim University, India  
Email: fatihi\_ar@rediffmail.com

critical intellect. Irrational and sub-cognitive, the effects of slang sexual stimulation, emotionally disturbing and provocative hate speech, are not viewed primarily as expressions of ideas but rather as somewhat provocative forces which produce psychic disequilibrium and wear away self-control. The alleged irrational and sub-cognitive quality of these communicative behavior and their consequent threatening or irrational effect on the recipients of communications are said to disqualify these verbal behaviors from the “free speech” and “free exercise.” Originally, slang and colloquialism like argot designated the speech of people involved in the criminal underworld, hooligans, bandits, criminals, etc. Therefore, their vocabulary carried very vulgar connotations, and was strictly rejected by speakers of “proper” language. Other groups developed their own slangs, in general, groups on the margins of mainstream society who were excluded or rejected by it.

Despite their irrational and subcognitive quality slangs and colloquialism are part of communicative behavior. Dictionaries often display these colloquial words and phrases with the abbreviation “colloq” . Colloquialisms are often used primarily within a limited geographical area In some areas, over use of colloquialisms by native speakers is regarded as a sign of substandard ability with the language. However, in the mouth of a non –native speaker, they are sometimes taken as signaling unusual facility with the language as they may be more difficult for non-native speakers to understand. A colloquialism can sometimes make its way into otherwise formal speech, as a sign that the speaker is comfortable with his or her audience, in contrast to “slang”, and “hate speech” which if used in formal speech is more likely done so consciously for hate effect. Slang is the non-standard use of words in a language of a particular social group, and sometimes the creation of new words or importation of words from another language. Slang is a type of sociolect aimed at codifying the language. Slang initially functions as encryption, so that the non-initiate cannot understand the conversation. It functions as a way to recognize members of the same group, and to differentiate that group from the society at large. Slang terms are often particular to a certain subculture, such as drug users, rickshaw wallahs and street dwellers . Slang generally implies playful, informal speech.

From communicative point of view the use of colloquialism is simply a way of circumventing social taboos. The mainstream language tends to shy away from explicitly evoking certain realities., colloquialism and also the informal forms of street language, permit one to talk about these realities in a special language stripped of the usual connotations in the normal register. Colloquial expressions are particularly rich in certain domains, such as sexuality, violence, crime and drug. There is not just one colloquialism, but many varieties – or dialects – of colloquial expressions. Different social groups in different times have developed their own colloquialism. The importance of encryption and identity vary among the various street language, which however profane and uncivil, still comes from the heart of streets of urban cities. Thus if we look around us we will find a genre of street phrases that populate the verbal behavior of an average day in all civilisations. It is the language of choice and is the only accepted form of communication in places. The high and mighty accents of the world have had to enshroud themselves in the high walls of civil society and four walled enclosures of civil languages. The high

variety of a language is reputable as it is the chosen medium of knowledge, literature and information. Despite its disqualification from “free Speech” the communicative value of the street language and the freshness it contains within the short sentences remain intact. Numerous colloquialism pass into informal mainstream speech, and thence sometimes into mainstream formal speech. Colloquialism constantly renew its process of expression, and specifically its vocabulary. The existence of dictionaries of slang and colloquialism, of course, reveals the effectiveness of these words.

### **Use and purpose of colloquialism**

Colloquialism is often particular to a brief period of time, with common usage ranging from decades to only a few months. Colloquialism widely used and understood at one time, may not have the same connotations later. The elderly are a group of people who have the most problems with this colloquial form of language. For example, in English a good thing may have been “swell” in the 1930s 1940s and 1950s, “groovy” in the 1960s, and “cool” in the 1970s. And although the term “cool” may still be accepted today, swell and groovy have fallen out of favor. This fluid quality is typical of colloquialism, since it changes more rapidly than other parts of language. Another mean by which colloquialism is quickly extinguished is a word's passage into standard speech, at which point it ceases to be slang and colloquialism even though the word itself may still be used in the same context. For instance, the English language has long used phrases like "hot-tempered" or "heated debate", and in contrast the word cool came to mean something akin to "calm". This usage became popular in the 1950's, and by the 1970's had evolved into a slang term along the lines of groovy. The modern use of the word is something in between, often meaning "alright" or "inoffensive" (non-heated). Such non-standard uses have caught on so heavily that even prestigious sources like Roget's Thesaurus reaffirm them, and will likely soon become standard definitions. An historical example is the English word swart (derived from the Norse svart or swart), which originally meant "black". It soon evolved into a slang term (among poets) for any "dark" shade. Today, the English word swarthy means "very dark brown"; this is considered the standard use of the word, and the older definitions have passed almost entirely into disuse.

Colloquialism and Slang are often used to with regard to semi-taboo subjects, such as “drunkness” “sexuality” The listing of a colloquial expression is determined by its use beyond that of the localised employment of a few friends; in due course these localised expressions may gain greater popularity and achieve expanded regional, national or even global recognition, however it is only at that time that they are included as colloquial expressions. We should be aware that there is a large volume of slang we encounter through the media such as television, film and press, which invariably increase our reference points but genuinely remain outside of personal use. These media promoted expressions may in due course be adopted into our repertoire, and as such, when they can be confirmed as in use, then they are listed as slang. With repeated exposure, via film, television and music, the volume of “Bombaiya” slang we hear in and around Delhi is vast, but a large percentage is still to make inroads into the forefront of Delhi wallahs repertoire.

## **Dialect and regionalisms**

Hindi –Urdu has pronounced regional variations. However the now common migratory habits of people weaken the strength of regionalisms and widen the locality of use. Consequently the boundaries of colloquialism, slang, hate- speech and regional dialects use is becoming increasingly blurred and making the task of regional notation more difficult. Additionally there is a further relationship with regional tongues, in that many slang expressions and colloquialisms have their root in dialect. For example:

*Abe sale, kyon time ki khoti kar rela hai? Cut to cut baat karne ka, apne ko faltu babbak karne ka aadat nahin hai. Jo kuch kehna hai, jaldi kar aur phoot le.*

In this example, the Hindi/Urdu sentences are studded with Marathi and some English. Bambahiyaa Colloquialism may be objectionable to conservatives, but it can be argued that it has a rhythm, and conciseness of its own. The conciseness, incidentally, may come from the use of clichés and colloquial phrases such as '*cut to cut baat karne ka*' (to speak concisely or briefly) and '*time ki khoti*' (waste of time). The colorful phrases in Bambahiyaa colloquialism also convey what is known as a 'street sensibility' and a sense of condescension for courtesies. Moreover, Bambahiyaa colloquialism is not normally spoken by upper-middle class people. It is more associated with the marginal and/or poor young. It relates to mainstream Hindi/Urdu the way Cockney relates to English

## **Informal expressions**

Our everyday conversations may or may not utilize colloquialism itself but street language often has a relaxed quality that comes from our use of informal expressions, or colloquialisms. They are a colorful part of standard “civilized” language whose informal qualities are very much related to slang.

## **The ephemeral nature of colloquialism**

A majority of colloquialism falls by the wayside after its parent scene or fashion has lost momentum and interest has waned. The ephemeral nature of colloquialism is all too easily forgotten without some form of documentation which is one of the purposes of slang and colloquial dictionaries.

## **The colloquialism arena**

It is noteworthy that a huge proportion of current Urdu slang and colloquialism originates from just a few areas, such as sex, and sex related areas. This area is dominated by and important to adolescents and younger generations; indeed colloquialism known to be coined by senior citizens is rare at best.

The gay and lesbian scene has for many years proffered an immense amount of colloquialism,( *chikna:* , *doga:na:* ) but 'straight' society's prejudiced views and acceptance of homosexuality, and lesbianism do not unveil a once private and discreet

language. The very fact that homosexuality and lesbianism has been persecuted for so long reinforces one of the very reasons colloquialism is developed and resorted to, as a means of communicating freely and secretly, which in itself helps as a means of identification and exclusion. The Urdu poetic tradition of **Rekhti** discovers some of the lesbian colloquialism in Urdu.

*Raat kothe pe teri dekh li chori anna  
Kali upper thi chadhi niche thi gori anna  
Chati chati se yun na mal meri  
bhatni aisa na ho dukhe teri ( Rekhti)*

*jo dogana bujhade chal meri  
to to londi main ho rahun teri  
sun ke ye baat ji men khush ho ker  
who hui niche main hui uper  
boli nich ki ae dogana jan  
main tere is ragadne ke qurban (Rekhti)*

*bagh men kal gai thi main baji  
nazer aya ye wohan tamasha baji  
yani ik simt ko wohan kambakht  
ek do randian hain zere darakht  
ek ke upper ek hilti thi  
ek yun dusri se milti thi  
kabhi ye munh ko us ke chumti thi  
gah who chati uski tolti thi (Rekhti)*

It is as though through the myriad of changes, someone from within still relates to these words as though they are called from the past. Even now one can overhear these colloquialism in its natural environment on the street of urban cities and lanes of small villages.

### **The Classes and the Masses**

Although this form of language ( Slangs and Colloquial expressions) originates primarily from the lower class areas it is found to be extremely popular with the cool young upper class elites. This phenomenon can be accounted to the nature of numbed rebellion that is found in the various upper classes of the world. Thus when we see the Young Elites of university campuses mimicing these street phrases we can relate them to the upper class whites in the US trying hard to imitate their poor black counterparts from the ghettos. However these rich pretenders are easily identifiable with their Anglo-Urdu accent. One of the secrets of these phrases is that they cannot be translated with the entire concept of the line. To understand them one has to be a native or someone who have been exposed to it for a considerable amount of time. For example let's look at some of these Urdu colloquial expressions.

*Kutti Ciz*

This street colloquialism refers to someone who is cunning, shrewd or “ Done you over” as the British would say. An interesting use of this word has recently arisen in the campus communities.

“*Chalo Chalo Patli gali pakaro*”

This particular statement dates back to the 80s and has its roots in the Bollywood’s cheap and nonsensical comedy. The statement is used for an ultimate refusal. The idea of a “Patli Gali” or a narrow street comes from the structural development of the old city areas within Delhi, Lucknow, and Hyderabad.

“*Abay kiya sathiya gaya hay*”

In Hindi Urdu “saTh” literally means “sixty” but connotative meaning in this colloquialism is ‘insane’ and thus this sentence would translate into English “ Are you Insane”. However its use has become slightly sophisticated over the years, where the word “sathiya” has taken on some form of coolness on the street. Therefore someone foolishly brave will be considered an apt recipient of the title “sathiya gaya hai”.

*Harami Chiz*

In Islam we are all aware of the word *haram*, refers to illegitimate act and things and the doer of *haram* as the verb will have it, becomes a *harami*. *Harami* is another other street adaptation of someone who is cunning, or shrewd

“*Chuutiya*”

It is difficult to describe the inference of this slang with the particular female genitalia. This is a highly potent adaptation of the word “stupid”. Again over the time this has also become a highly used word. In literature this word goes back a few centuries and feature in various biographies and memoirs of great men. A number of other colloquial expressions like *Chutiya* ‘stupidity’ has been derived from the original colloquialism.

*Piece/ Katto/ Chikna*

These colloquialisms are basically a young man’s reaction to seeing a beautiful young woman.. These colloquialism are cheap and cheerful word for every day admiration and essentially means well.

*Mamun or mama*

The word “Mama” originates from the word “Mammoo” which basically means Maternal Uncle. Increasingly however it is, used by the street maestros to refer to each other.

### **Communicative Meaning of Colloquialism:**

If speakers are to be able to cooperate, they need to build a common understanding of the situation evoked by each participant's utterances. Clearly, this cannot be achieved simply by interpreting the content of the other's utterance in a simplistic way, using something like the approach of Compositional Semantics which sees the meaning of an utterance as the product of its individual signs and their combinations. For example, "*woh बहुत kutti ciz hai* " would be assumed to carry some meaning in which notion of dog is combined with someone. However, utterances carry not only a semantic but also a social and pragmatic force, which depend on the situation in which it takes place. From this perspective, "*woh बहुत kutti ciz hai* could mean " he is very shrewd" " he is very intelligent" " he is very cunning" or any number of other meanings. However, since by definition these types of meaning are implicit, we must posit some mechanism by which hearers come to acquire the message intended by the speaker, and on which the speaker depends when generating the utterance. In the context of interaction via language at work, this becomes a matter of the speakers' ability to reach a common understanding. This mechanism is generally known as inference, a concept which is central to a number of current linguistic theories seeking to model this process.

### **Implicit meanings of colloquialism**

We can immediately distinguish two types of implicit meaning. The first concerns the inferences which can be made about the propositional content of the utterance. This can depend on the hearer's ability to make inferences on the basis of semantic relationships, reference terms, or the lexicon

The resources which language users call on to make such inferences and to come to a shared understanding with their interlocutor are to be found in the context or knowledge (their "common ground" in Clark's terminology) which they believe they share. This is typically a vast store of general knowledge and beliefs about the physical world, social conventions and language, together with more specialized knowledge - being part of the same social community, being present at the same location, having heard the same build-up to the current point in the conversation and so on (cf. Clarke and Wilkes-Gibbs, 1986). The second type of implicit meaning conveyed in an utterance concerns the illocutionary force of that utterance, or in crude terms, what the speaker is trying to do with the utterance.

To conclude we can say that a theory which seriously deals with the collective construction of meaning of colloquialism would have to take into account two major elements, firstly the representation of interlocutor and secondly the feedback loop between the interlocutors and their grounding process. In other words, it would consider both/all interlocutors as acting constantly and simultaneously on the interaction process.

**References:**

- CAHOUR, B. & PARIS, C. (1991), *Role and use of user models*, Proceedings of IJCAI '91, workshop "Agent modeling", Sydney, Australia
- CAHOUR, B. & SALEMBIER, P. (1996), *Cooperation and cooperator modeling*, CSCW journal (Kluwer), vol 5, No. 2-3.
- CLARK, H.H. & SHAEFER, E.F. (1989), *Contributing to discourse in Cognitive Science*, 13, 259-294.
- CLARK, H.H. & WILKES-GIBBS, D. (1986). *Referring as a collaborative process in Cognition*, 22, 1-39.
- CLARK, H.H. (1996), *Using Language*, Cambridge University Press.
- FATIHI, A.R. (1992), *Taboo Words in Hindi- Urdu* in On koul edited SALR Journal.
- FATIHI, A.R. & HASNAIN, I.H. (2005), *Socio Communicative Approach to Slang* in Koul and Hasnain (Eds) Linguistics Theoretical and Applied IILS Delhi.
- GOODMAN, B. & al (1994), Proceedings of the International Conference User Modeling'94, Hyannis, USA.
- GRICE, H.P. (1975), *Logic and conversation* In Cole P. and Morgan J.L. (Eds) Syntax and semantics, vol.3, N.Y.: Academic Press.
- KARSENTY, L. (1994). *L'explication d'une solution dans les dialogues de conception*, PhD Thesis, University ParisVIII.
- SACKS, H., SCHEGLOFF, E.A. & JEFFERSON, G. (1974), *A simplest systematics for the organization of turns-taking for conversation*, Language, 50, 696-735. SCHEGLOFF E.A. & SACKS H. (1973), *Opening up closings*, Semiotica, 7(4), 289-327.
- SCHUTZ, A. (1962), Collected papers, 3 vol., La Haye: M.Nijhoff. (trad.fr.: *Le chercheur et le quotidien*. Paris: Méridiens-Klincksieck, 1987)
- SEARLE, J.R. (1969), *Speech acts: an essay in the philosophy of language*, Cambridge University Press (trad.fr.: *Les actes de langage*, Paris: Hermann.1972)
- SEARLE, J.R. (1992), *Conversation reconsidered* In Searle J.R. et al (Eds) On Searle on conversation. Amsterdam; John Benjamins Publ.Cie.