

Workshop on Urdu Language Instruction (Report)

A WORKSHOP on Urdu language instruction was held at the University of Pennsylvania during the weekend of 24–25 January 2003. It was co-sponsored by the American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS), the Berkeley Urdu Language Program in Pakistan (BULPIP), the South Asia Language Resource Center (recently established with funding from the U.S. Department of Education's Title VI Program, with the head office in Chicago and the main programs at Penn) and Penn's South Asia Studies Center. The last two were also sponsors of a similar workshop on Hindi language instruction which was held in conjunction. Thirty scholars registered for the Urdu workshop, representing sixteen universities.

The program ran from 2:00 P.M. on Friday to 6:00 P.M. the following day. The opening and closing sessions were held jointly with the parallel Hindi workshop for the purpose of exploring possibilities of collaboration and other synergies. Some participants, who teach both Hindi and Urdu, were also able to move between the other sessions that were held separately. The remainder of the Urdu workshop was divided into three sessions. The first, on Friday afternoon, reviewed existing materials and discussed their current use, with the aim of identifying the most important needs. The second session, on Saturday morning, was devoted to presentations of current projects. After lunch, the task of the third session was to create a mandate for further work.

Throughout the discussions special attention was given to the importance of the opportunities offered by the World Wide Web, which makes collaboration from different geographical locations so easy and could have enormous advantages for a field that has suffered so much from fragmentation. The need for better teaching materials was felt at every level, but especially at the intermediate and advanced levels. Many participants expressed the need for materials selected from actual speech and writing that deals with everyday matters familiar to the student, with modern vocabulary. The materials should enable students to use the language in

the situations familiar to them. At the advanced level especially it is necessary to develop living vocabulary to facilitate the proficiency that is desirable for modern life. Another concern was the need for standardization of courses: where should students be at the end of one year's instruction? how should first and second year courses be coordinated? and second year onward? There was general agreement on the importance of this type of coordination among the various centers of instruction.

The Workshop ended with the formulation of the following recommendations:

1. Establish an American Association of Teachers of Urdu with a listserv and a website. Such an association would give Urdu more visibility in the language-teaching field and facilitate cross-fertilization with, e.g., Arabic, Persian and Turkish instructors, who have similar associations.
2. Form workgroups to develop improved materials for instruction under the following headings:
 - a) Elementary (First Year) Urdu
 - b) Intermediate (Second Year) Urdu
 - c) Advanced Materials
 - d) Grammar Teaching Modules
 - e) A database of Urdu texts, with hypertext links to useful annotations on both grammar and culture.
3. Seek ways to work with more acceptable *nasta'liq* fonts on the Web.
4. Seek ways to resolve problems of copyright that arise from the use of published materials on the Web.

The American Institute of Pakistan Studies (AIPS) will now work to coordinate the application of these recommendations. It is hoped that the workgroups can be brought together in the late spring in order to assess progress and facilitate further discussion and planning.

In the meantime, a similar but smaller workshop will be held in early March focusing on the other major languages of Pakistan, especially Baluchi, Panjabi, Pashto, Sindhi and Siraiki. □

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