

Language ideologies and verbal art in Pakistani cinema: the Punjabi *barhak*

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This paper investigates the verbal dueling style, *barhak*, prevalent in Punjabi cinema in Pakistan. Although Punjabis are the largest and most powerful ethnic group in Pakistan, Urdu and English, rather than Punjabi, are the preferred languages of cultural and political elite. Punjabi on the other hand, is considered to be the ideal language for speech genres such as jokes and insults¹. A set of stereotypes thus exists about Punjabi; that it is the language of the backwards, the rural, the crude; that it is, above all, 'loud.' This converges with the discourses around Punjabi cinema, also heavily denigrated by the cultural elite of the Pakistani state as the purview of the uncouth.

I argue that the *barhak* itself is the emblematic linguistic form of the Punjabi film; as a speech genre it can be broadly described as a shouted verbal duel between hero and villain that takes place as a prelude to or throughout a fight scene, and which indexes a particular kind of Punjabi identity (Ayres, 2008), one that is pointedly rural, hypermasculine, and proletarian. In analyzing and describing the *barhak*, I use it as a lens to address a set of larger questions about language in Pakistan and language in cinema. Ultimately, this paper hopes to address the ways in which Punjabi cinema opens up spaces of resistance against the Urdu-dominated linguistic and cultural hegemony.

I. Punjabi in Pakistan: marginalization, hegemony, and spheres of usage

The case of Punjabi in Pakistan is thus unique in the scholarship on language ideology given that it does not represent a minority language or that of an oppressed group; the language may be marginalized in certain ways but Punjabis themselves often enjoy a relative position of power in Pakistani society. Obviously a group of approximately 80

¹ As for example the proliferation and massive popularity of parody videos dubbed into Punjabi, often Hollywood movies (e.g. Shanghai Knights, dubbed into Punjabi as "Butt te Bhatti") or political speeches (Osama bin Laden, George W. Bush, Barack Obama, various Indian celebrities, and Pakistani politicians such as Parvez Musharraf and Nawaz Sharif), as well as the humorous use of Punjabi on political satire shows such as "Hum Sab Ummid Se Hain."

million speakers will be too complex for the simple equation that being a Punjabi automatically guarantees one a place of privilege, but they are the largest ethnic group and have traditionally made up the majority in the army and bureaucracy (Ayers, 2008, p. 920). While other ethnic groups, such as Sindhis, Pathans, and Balochis, place a high value on linguistic identity and language promotion for solidarity reasons, this has not been the case in Punjab (Rahman, 1998, 2002). Furthermore, the Punjabi elite themselves have continued to be a driving force behind the ideological supremacy of Urdu (Ali, 2004, Zaman, 2002). More recently the issue of Punjabi language has been productively analyzed in Bourdieuvian terms by Alyssa Ayers (2008), who argues that the linguistic capital of Punjabi is negligible compared to that of Urdu, which has played a much greater role in official domains, domains of power, since the colonial era.

When the East India Company annexed Punjab in 1849 after the defeat of Ranjit Singh and the fall of the Sikh Empire, the imposition of new forms of governance and particularly of new systems of land tenure and agriculture (most importantly the development of the canal colonies) was a swift transformation that simultaneously imposed Western-derived legal and governmental structures while at the same time conserving those local traditions which would best serve the purposes of the colonial state, creating a pervasive dichotomy between the modern/public and the traditional/private (Talbot, 2007). A similar situation was to arise in the sociolinguistic landscape of Punjab. Although there was debate on the governmental and administrative usefulness of the Punjabi language versus Urdu (cf. Rahman, 2007), ultimately Urdu was adopted by the colonial government as the language of administration in Punjab. Farina Mir (2010) explores a variety of reasons that this decision was made, including the facts that there was no standard, central, written form Punjabi and thus it was not considered a 'real' language by many orientalists; that the British officers were already fluent in Urdu and it was more efficient to capitalize on these skills than to train them in a new language; and that the British associated Punjabi closely with the recently defeated Sikh state. Mir argues that "the most important [reasons] are those related to consolidating colonial rule: using experienced administrative personnel, facilitating Punjab's integration into Company territories, and supporting native intermediaries. British fears of a Sikh resurgence and the conception of Punjabi as a Sikh language surely played their part as well." (2010, p. 52-53) Thus a diglossic situation came to rise in Punjab, where Urdu was aligned with the official domains of state and Punjabi was relegated to the home, the personal, and local religious traditions (in particular Sikh and Sufi traditions).

Mir thus concludes that Punjabi occupies a very different set of domains than Urdu; and that "when colonial language policy drew vernaculars into the state apparatus in the early nineteenth century, Punjabi continued to function largely as it historically always had, at the margins of state discourse." (2010, p. 185) This situation, I argue, has remained in present-day Pakistan, particularly given the early 20th century Muslim nationalism that held Urdu up as the language of Muslims in South Asia, and which led to the creation of the Pakistani state with Urdu as its official language (cf. King, 1994), even though it has never been the mother tongue of the majority of Pakistanis, and such stringent language policy played an important role in the tensions between East and West Pakistan and the independence of Bangladesh in 1971. As Christopher Shackle argues (1970), "In view of the identification of the Muslims with Urdu as an essential part of their identity, it was inevitable that there should have been an overwhelming demand for Urdu to be declared the national language of the new Islamic state." (p. 243) Punjabis themselves, while enjoying a position of relative power, participate in perpetuating policies, institutions and

discourses that marginalize Punjabi—subjugating their own ethnolinguistic identity in order to keep a firm hold on the reins of power in the postcolonial Muslim state. As Tariq Rahman (1996) writes, “Urdu serves to extend the power base of the ruling elite” (p. 209) no matter their ethnicity. That is to say, because Punjabis already have power, embracing their regional identity would only weaken their claims to national identity, and by the same token Punjabis who are excluded from domains of power (e.g. the working classes) thus embrace Punjabi at the risk of further exclusion from these domains.

The state marginalization of Punjabi has led to the perpetuation of a series of stereotypes about the language among the cultural elite in Pakistan—this in stark contrast to its position in India where it is the official language of the Punjab state government and widely used for official domains such as education, government, and media. In Pakistan it is often thought of as vulgar and coarse; it is the preferred language for swearing, insults, and jokes, but little suited to the refinement of elite urban life. Its literature is “dismissed with a grudging recognition of [Waris Shah’s] ‘Hir’, but otherwise as a collection of rustic crudity, suitable only for Sikhs” (Shackle, 1970, p. 248). It is also thought of, even by Punjabis, as a language tied to lower socioeconomic status, rural populations, and a limited economic future (Mansoor, 1993). Above all, my own informants characterized its difference with Urdu as one of formality, and ‘loudness,’ a concept I will return to later in this paper. It is important to note that there have been, since the inception of Pakistan, various literary and cultural movements focused on Punjabi and on *Punjabiyyat* (‘Punjabi-ness’), which have been suppressed or supported to various degrees by the Pakistani state over time (Rahman, 2002, p. 199-209, Ayers, 2008). Significantly, though, these have been “slowly growing out of the work of an urban cultural and political elite—fluent in Urdu and English as well—some of whom have maintained comfortable positions of power for some time.” (Ayers, 2008, p. 919). By and large these movements seek to reclaim an idealized version of lost Punjabi literary glory, further marginalizing what is perhaps the most significant and populist site of linguistic production in postcolonial Punjab—the cinema.

II. Language and cinema in Pakistan

The Lahore-based Punjabi film industry—known colloquially as ‘Lollywood’—is a key site of Punjabi-language cultural production in Pakistan. According to Mushtaq Gazdar (1997), at its zenith Pakistan was one of the top ten film producing countries in the world, with an average output of around 80 films per year (p. 1). This number accounts for films made in Punjabi as well as in Urdu, Pashto, and other languages. Although Punjabi-language films have been made in Pakistan almost since its inception, it was not until the late 1970s that Punjabi-language films became the majority of those produced, or that their genre conventions were so strongly solidified. As Ayers writes, at this time Punjabi cinema “rose to a position of market dominance, primarily through the iconic revenge-seeking peasant-warrior “Maula Jat,”² played by Sultan Rahi (1938-96), who, by the mid-1990s, so overdetermined the aesthetic, linguistic, and narrative content of Punjabi cinema as to embody the genre.” (2008, p. 927)

Yet these changes were not just the result of a surge in the popularity or acceptance of Punjabi language and culture, but were instead informed by class struggles within the

² dir. Yunus Malik, 1979

turbulent political climate of the time; it is no coincidence that 1979, the year *Maula Jatt*³ was released, was also the year that saw the military coup of the brutal Islamist dictator Zia ul-Haq and the deposition and execution of populist prime minister Zulfikar Ali Bhutto. According to Ali Khan and Ali Nobil Ahmad, Punjabi cinema production overtook that of Urdu cinema as the latter declined due to the loss of East Pakistani film markets (with the 1971 independence of Bangladesh), the introduction of videocassette technology and subsequent influx of pirated Indian films, and the strict censorship laws that came about during the “Islamization” movement of dictator Zia ul-Haq (2010, p. 153-154). As the Urdu-speaking urban middle class moved their entertainment of choice away from cinema towards television and video, filmmakers began catering to working class Punjabis—the largest common denominator of film consumers. The films that were made during the 1970s through the 1980s were primarily what Ahmad and Khan refer to as “natural horror,” a style of action film characterized by themes such as rape, revenge, and vigilante justice. For Ahmad and Khan, “what is perhaps most striking is its deeply ambiguous relationship [of cinema] with the Pakistani nation-state. Put simply, the popularity of vernacular action films underlines the way in which class in Pakistan is lived, experienced, and constructed through language and ethnicity.” (2010, p. 154)

Popular notions about the Punjabi language—that it is crude, rural, backwards, and invariably loud—resonate inextricably with the onscreen portrayal of Punjabis and Punjabi culture. The films are loud, rough, violent, predominantly set in rural settings (or if in urban settings, then often revolve around the lives of gangsters and thugs—for a time in the 1990s gangsters were a major source of film financing). They appear in stark contrast to many Urdu films, which historically tend towards social dramas featuring smooth-talking heroes and elegant heroines, although there have been some Punjabi films that try to break this mold (in particular some of the recent films of Syed Noor and Shahzad Rafique). Recently, technological innovations in Indian films are often used to highlight the crudeness of local Punjabi films, which are by and large still shot on 35mm. Yet clearly the Punjabi action film had to have an intense appeal to be so successful for so long. I argue that one of its primary appeals is the speech form known as *barhak*; and that by understanding *barhak* as an aesthetically-pleasing reappropriation of popular stereotypes about (particularly working class) Punjabis and their language, cinema becomes a productive site to understanding the intersection of language ideology, social class, and ethnicity in Pakistan.

III. Maula Jatt, Noorie Natt and the state

In film, the *barhak* can be described as an artful style of verbal dueling, challenge, and insult that features loudness and shouting, the use of exclamatories (“oye!”), and invokes discourses of courage, strength, honor, kinship and caste ties, piety, and revenge. It can be characterized as a ‘masculine’ genre, but is also performed by women, playing into stereotypes of the rough-and-tumble “Jatti” who stands in stark contrast to the weeping, passive heroines of Urdu cinema. The *barhak* serves the important narrative function of heightening tension before a fight—generally the hero and villain will exchange verbal blows before they physically attack each other—and it also can prolong the conflict even

³ While a modified IPA scheme has been adopted in the transcription below, film titles have their own set of transliteration conventions, which I have maintained rather than retransliterating according to my own schema.

after the physical fighting is done. Maya Singh's Panjabi Dictionary of 1895 defines the verbal form thus: "BAṘHKANĀ v. n. To roar (as a bull), to speak in a gruff, hoarse tone." (1895, p. 100) Gazdar's definition of baṛhak in film is rather more specific: "The verbal brawl called barrak [sic], in *Punjabi slang*, is the hallmark of the movie...a high-pitched, full-throated, threatening yell, a sort of warming up, a prelude to a brawl.... [it is] a part of Punjabi life and culture. It is a bold challenge to the opponent." (1997, p. 134, emphasis mine) Tellingly, a perfectly useable Punjabi lexical item is relegated to the category of 'slang' here. The sort of verbal art featured in the baṛhak is of the kind denigrated both by the Urdu-speaking cultural establishment as well as the champions of the Punjabi movement; it embodies all the stereotypes of the former, which the latter would like to forget.

While baṛhak contributes a great deal over time to 'Filmi Punjabi,' a register discussed in detail below, the example I present here is from *Maula Jatt* itself. Although not technically the first Punjabi action movie of its type, it was a genre-defining megahit and some of its dialogues are still recognizable even to Pakistanis who have never seen a Punjabi film. In this two-minute scene, protagonist Maula Jatt (played by Sultan Rahi) and his archenemy Noorie Natt (Mustafa Qureshi), having just had their fight broken up by the police, are being treated in a hospital—conveniently, in adjacent beds. The camera alternates from wide shots of the entire room to mid-shots of each of the characters as they take their turns at speaking, with a consistent pattern of shot-reverse shot. Additionally, at certain points an echo effect is added to the actors' voices. I have organized the lines in the transcription according to the actors' pauses and intonation as well as turns at talk.

(1) Scene from *Maula Jatt*

Maula: 1) *laughs (with echo effect)*

Doctor: 2) Əqəl kəro Məliya

3) tənū xun di botəl ləgi həi ε

Use your brain, Maula/you're hooked up to a bottle of blood!

Maula: 4) Mənū cʰəddə daktər!

5) Ehnū do botlā xun diyā ɔr la de!

6) Es ləi

7) kɪ eh diyā ragā vɪc inna xun ja nəi rɪha

8) jinna meri əkkh di lali vɛx ke

9) xʊfɪ ho gɪya

*Leave me alone, Doctor!/Bring him two more bottles of blood!/Because/there isn't even as much blood going into his vein/as from looking at the redness in my eyes/has dried up*⁴

Noorie: 10) Ts ts!

11) Daktər sahəb!

12) Eh noʔ eh de sɪr tō vɔr ke

13) həspətəl de os cʊɾə nū de de a

14) jɪhne

15) eh di laʃ nū mʊrde xane le jaɳa ε

⁴ (i.e. from fear)

Psst!!/Doctor Sahab!! Wave these banknotes over his head/and give them to the hospital sweeper/who'll/have to take his corpse to the morgue.

Maula: 16) *laughs (with echo effect)*

17) Oye ehnū pagəl xane le ja ke bijli de j^həṭke ləvao oye
Take him to the madhouse and have someone give him electric shocks!

Noorie: 18) *laughs*

19) Oye ba-vəzu ho ke rəvī soṇeya!
 20) Mərən tō bad
 21) ikk ikk boṭi nū kən ṽṽsəl devəga?
Oh pretty boy⁵, keep yourself in a state of ritual purity!!/After you die/who is going to wash every little chunk of you?⁶

Cop: 22) Bəkvəs bənd kər oye!

23) Te əṛne əṛne bryan lɪk^hṽao.
Hey, quit your nonsense!!/And each of you make your statements.

Maula: 24) Koi pərana bryan pərḥ ke dəss de sab bəhadər!

25) Eh apī səməj^h jayega
 26) kɪ Jətt ne sɪrf aj tək k^həṛək kita ɛ
 27) te hən
 28) cənn di cədi nū k^həṛək te k^həṛək rɪha!
Just read out any old statement, my brave man!!/He'll understand by himself/that up til now Jatt has only made a noise./And now he's roaring at the full moon itself!

Police: 29) Hm!

30) Tū apṇa bryan dəss oye!
Hmph! (to Noorie)/You, give me your statement!

Noorie: 31) Sɪrf lɪk^hṇa i nəi, yad vi rək^hṇa ɛ t^həṇedar sahəb!

32) Əggu tō eh mere pɪṇḍ ave te rəbb da vāsta i
 33) ehnū tū goli nə mari oye...
 34) eh piddi mē~ ap marṇi ɛ
Don't just write it down, remember it too, Mr. Policeman!!/From now on if he comes to my village then for God's sake/if you don't shoot him/I'll kill this little insect myself.

Joel Sherzer has argued that “socially and culturally, verbal dueling focuses on the boundary between the literal and the play...It tests and protests the boundaries of social relations and taboo topics.” (2002, p. 64) This exchange is notable for its invocation of discourses of piety, honor, and courage, mostly through the artful use of indirect threats and comparisons. For instance, Noorie never simply says he is going to kill Maula; rather he compares him to a sacrificial goat (line 12-15) telling the doctor to wave the banknotes over Maula's head as is done to sacrificial animals in order to remove the evil eye. Traditionally the money is then given away to the needy with the notion that it carries misfortune away with it (a ritual called *sadqa*). He paints a picture of Maula as stupid,

⁵ *Soṇeya* (lit. ‘beautiful-Msg.VOC’) is Noorie Natt’s sarcastic, condescending way of addressing his enemies.

weak, unfortunate, and of course, about to die. Later (line 19-21) Noorie invokes another notion of piety; Islamic funeral practices prescribe a specific ritual of washing the corpse and nobody will care to do it for a thousand times on every little chunk of his body, so Maula should constantly be in a state of having performed ritual ablutions as one does before prayers (Punjabi *vəzu*, Arabic *al-wuḍūʿ*) to make the ritual corpse-washing unnecessary after death. Finally, Noorie directly compares Maula to a tiny insect he is going to crush (line 34). All of these are artful invocations of cultural notions and practices that are highly pleasurable to a Punjabi audience and hallmarks of the *baṛhak* genre.

Additionally, the notion of loudness—again invoking the discursive stereotype of Punjabi as ‘loud’ language—is foregrounded in three important ways. First and most noticeably, an echo effect is used in two separate instances when Maula laughs (line 1, line 16); it is not present when Noorie laughs, and seems to index that Maula (as the hero) ultimately is more powerful and will overcome Noorie. Even in the hospital bed he radiates power sonically and linguistically. His use of the term *kʰəṛak*, then, is also particularly salient. *Kʰəṛak* is an onomatopoeic term denoting a particular type of noise, such as wood loudly striking or scraping against wood or metal. It also has obscene sexual connotations—its causative verb form *kʰəṛkaṇa*, literally ‘to cause to strike or knock,’ can also be used to mean rough, violent sex. In the first instance (line 26) Jatt has ‘only’ (*sirf*) been making a *kʰəṛak* sound, implying, that although he is making noise he hasn’t done anything. But in the next line (27), the form is reduplicated intensifying its’ meaning, now he’s making that sound again and again (*‘kʰəṛak-ing and kʰəṛak-ing’*) at the ‘full moon,’ i.e. the zenith of all adversaries, which is to say that Noorie is his absolute nemesis, the strongest enemy he has ever faced.

Kʰəṛak and *baṛhak* are both sound symbolic forms (as noted above, *baṛhak* denotes the roaring sound of a bull). Both are important terms in the vocabulary of Punjabi cinema. *Baṛhak* is an important metalinguistic term, descriptively referring to its emblematic verbal art genre. It exists as a verb (*bəṛhəkṇa*), yet is often found in the compound verb form *bəṛhək/bəṛhəkā marna* (lit ‘to strike a *baṛhak* or *baṛhaks*’). The verb *marṇa* ‘hit/strike,’ is a semantically rich one, its resonances including both a violence (it can also be glossed as ‘kill’) and sounding, as in *siṭi marna* ‘to whistle’. Additionally, *kʰəṛak* is often used to metaphorically represent the violent actions of film characters. Take for instance, the proliferation of film titles using the term: *Jatt da Kharak* (*‘kʰəṛak of the Jatt’*), *Gujjar da Kharak* (*‘kʰəṛak of the Gujjar’*), *Kakay da Kharak* (*‘Kakay’s kʰəṛak’*), and even simply *Kharak*. One way of understanding their extensive usage is the relationship of noise or loudness to power and violence. Following Anthony Webster (2009), I look to David Samuels’ notion of ‘feelingful iconicity,’ an “emotional attachment to aesthetic forms” (2004, p. 11). Inasmuch as the semantico-referential content of language is often privileged (both by scholars and in the ‘common sense’ notions of speakers) over its poetic and aesthetic functions, attention toward those functions can be seen as resistance (Webster, 2009, p. 53). In foregrounding, in a playful, aesthetically pleasing way, the supposed loudness and violence of Punjabi, *baṛhak* creates a space for the audience to enjoy the felt attachment to a particular brand of Punjabi identity—the rural, the underclass, the hypermasculine, the vulgar—that is otherwise widely denigrated in Pakistani society.

But not only does this exchange, capitalizing on exaggerated qualities of loudness that play into the stereotypes of Punjabi, allow the audience to have a pleasurable reappropriation of these stereotypes, it also helps position the audience in solidarity with

Maula and Noorie rather than the bourgeois agents of the state. Following Keith Basso's account of 'Whiteman' joking practices among the Western Apache, verbal playfulness, while on the one hand seemingly antagonistic, on the other indexes certain kinds of intimacy between interlocutors. Maula and Noorie, while enemies, are of equal status and share a common set of social values; they are denizens of the same world. The audience here is 'in' on the joke, aligning them with the protagonist and antagonist rather than the outsiders: the doctor and the policeman. By coding the conflict as playful, the *barhak* exchange serves as a demonstration that Maula and Noorie are enemies on equal footing; the policeman and the doctor, symbols of the bourgeois state, do not engage in *barhak*. They serve merely as a stage for the protagonist and antagonist to continue their fight. Here it is important to note that often in Punjabi films such outsiders (particularly higher agents of the state such as judges and politicians) are often portrayed as speaking Urdu rather than Punjabi, demonstrating both their outsider status and their alignment with official domains of the state.

IV. Conclusion: Filmi Punjabi, Register and Resistance

Richard Popp (2006) connects Bourdieu's notion of 'linguistic marketplace' with media consumption, arguing that "media texts act as a resource from which individuals can draw speech patterns—and the cultural capital with which they are linked." (p. 7) In investigating the *barhak*, this paper has tried to address the sorts of cultural knowledge and linguistic and social values that emerge in a cinematic context, with the understanding that these filmic texts continuously circulate and reproduce the ideologies held within them—again, I offer the example that many Pakistanis who claim not to watch Punjabi films, or that they have never seen a Punjabi film, will nonetheless recognize some of the more famous dialogues from *Maula Jatt*. Asif Agha's work on register, emblem, and cultural value, (2003, 2005) is useful in contextualizing the kind of social work that *barhak* can perform. I look particularly at his notion of enregisterment, "whereby distinct forms of speech come to be socially recognized (or enregistered) as indexical of speaker attributes by a population of language users." (2005, p. 38) This is a highly productive concept for addressing the social valences of the different varieties and styles of Punjabi found in cinema, and can help in understanding the role that cinema plays in creating and perpetuating the meanings attributed to certain kinds of language. Agha writes that cultural value is "a precipitate of sociohistorically locatable practices...which imbue cultural forms with recognizable indexical sign values and bring these values into circulation along identifiable trajectories in social space." (2007, p. 190) Here the notion of register is key because it is a particular kind of Punjabi with particular qualities that is deployed in cinema and thus associated with certain social identities and values. These qualities can then be appropriated and circulated by a wide variety of audiences and for a wide variety of means. While *barhak* can be analyzed more narrowly as instances of verbal duel as above, its features (particularly loudness, sound symbolisms, yelling and interjections, and so forth as described above), it is also a style that informs much, if not most, film language outside of verbal dueling—there is very little place for the soft-spoken, the sensitive, the urban, or the 'refined' in most Punjabi films! I argue that *barhak* has thus become enregistered as indexical of supposed attributes of Punjabis in genera, and rural Punjabis in particular: that they are (for better or worse), loud, crude, rough, and hypermasculine. Throughout post-*Maula Jatt* era of Pakistani cinema, the *barhak*-inspired register, which I am calling 'Filmi Punjabi', became the major discursive mode of Punjabi cinema.

If *Filmi Punjabi* is indexical of certain speaker attributes, it is also indexical of a shared cultural past. Punjabi can be said to be a pluricentric language, that is, there is no one particular standard, but there are a number of centers (Lahore, Amritsar, Patiala, Faisalabad, Multan, Rawalpindi, and so on) which have their own local variants. There are at least five main dialects, yet *Filmi Punjabi* seems to denote no particular geographic location. When I pressed my informants about this (members of the filmmaking community in Lahore), they would patiently tell me that it wasn't Lahori Punjabi, or Multani Punjabi, or anything like Indian Punjabi, but rather it was "regular" Punjabi; the Punjabi "that most people could understand." Ironically this often means that the lexical and grammatical forms bear greater similarity to Urdu than anything else (for example, future tense formation and loss of the voiced-aspirate to high-tone change). However, there is a vested interest in leaving Punjabi geographically unmarked (except where it serves to index character origin as required by the narrative): it creates an idealized Punjab that further destabilizes the control of the state and hearkens back to a pre-Partition, perhaps in some ways even pre-Islamic, time. (Ayers, 2008, p. 238) In contrast to Rosina Lippi-Green's study of accent in Disney cartoons (1997), Barbra Meek's investigation of 'Hollywood Injun English' (2006) or Jane Hill's discussion of 'Mock Spanish' (1995), *Filmi Punjabi*, while like the others a way of performing certain nonstandard identities, seems by and large to create a space for (likely proletarian) audience to enjoy a reappropriation of stereotypes about themselves, and revel in ethnic and class solidarities that do not emerge in many other media contexts. Like the popular tradition of *qissa* (Punjabi folk poetry that circulated widely in print form in the nineteenth and early twentieth century), cinema has historically "embodied the historical imagination of a broad cross-section of the Punjab, and that imagination...was far more open-ended and complex than a narrowly communalist interpretation can account for." (Mir, 2010 p. 25) The resistance-based interpretation I have offered is anti-state, arising out of class struggle; however, the wide proliferation of parodies of film language—for example in television comedy (Kirk, 2012)—suggest that the register of *Filmi Punjabi* is available to be appropriated in both positive and negative ways, as resistance by those who would resist but also as further stereotyping and denigration by those who want to align themselves with the Urdu- and English-speaking cultural hegemony. As Joel Sherzer (1987) has argued, "it is especially in verbally artistic discourse such as poetry, magic, verbal dueling, and political rhetoric that the potentials and resources provided by grammar, as well as cultural meanings and symbols, are exploited to the fullest and the essence of language-culture relationships becomes salient." (p. 296) By understanding *Filmi Punjabi* as both verbal art and symbolic register, we can better understand the possibilities it opens up for identification and resistance, alignment or rejection among its audiences. Even though Punjabi may not be an official language of the political domain as Urdu, English, or other regional languages such as Sindhi and Pashto are, it is itself a site for political contestation.

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