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The Meeting Place

Radio Features in the Shina Language
of Gilgit by Mohammad Amin Zia

Text, interlinear Analysis and English Translation
with a Glossary

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Preface

Shina is an Indo-Aryan language of the Dardic group which is spoken in several dialect groups in Northern Pakistan. The variety spoken in the fertile valley of the Gilgit River is known as Gilgiti Shina, as the greatest number of speakers live in and around Gilgit town. While Gilgit is a multicultural and multilingual place, Shina is the language used in the homes of the majority of the inhabitants. Most speakers use Shina as a spoken language, especially for private purposes, while Urdu is the first choice as a medium for writing and as a lingua franca current throughout Pakistan. Shina as a literary language has a comparatively short history. The first attempts to establish Shina as a literary language as well as to develop a script to represent the Shina sounds were made in the 1960s¹. Shina is used for poetry², but most speakers of Shina would even today find it easier to read and write poetry in Urdu than in their native language. In the 1980s, which is the period concerned in the texts collected in the present book, the – in most cases fragmentary - knowledge of Urdu and other languages was mostly restricted to men with a higher education and those working outside the local marketplace who would frequently communicate with speakers of other languages than Shina. Literacy (in Urdu) was only insufficiently developed, especially among the older generation³. There was no television yet, and the radio broadcasts in Urdu would not be understood by many Shina speakers. Participation in social discourse was accordingly possible on a limited scale only. In this situation, the role which radio broadcasts in Shina played for the development of a regional cultural and social identity of Shina speakers can hardly be overestimated.

According to R. Kohistani and R. Schmidt⁴, “Radio Pakistan began broadcasting in Shina from Rawalpindi in 1949 and from Gilgit in 1979.” The shift from Rawalpindi to Gilgit allowed an increase of proximity to local and regional situations. From 1984 on, Radio Gilgit broadcast a new weekly series of one-act radio plays or radio features in the Shina language. The name of the programme was *bayáak*, i. e. “The Meeting Place”, its author was Muhammad Amin Zia. Each radio feature would be 25 minutes long, and it could be received within a radius of some 10 miles around Gilgit. The author was himself an inhabitant of Gilgit which guaranteed that local issues were not merely included as a

1 Buddruss 1983.

2 G. Buddruss: Shina. Muhammad Amin Zia: An meine Lebensgefährtin, in: G.-D. Sontheimer ed., Südasien-Anthologie, (Beiträge zur Südasienforschung, 140), Stuttgart 1993; A. Degener: Golden Gilgit. A Poem in the Shina of Gilgit, in: Journal of Asian Civilizations, XXXI, 2008, 241-252; M. Amin Zia: Sáan, Rawalpindi 1974.

3 Buddruss 1983, 234 “Für die Stadt Gilgit ergab eine eigene Stichprobe von 1980, dass etwa 5% der Bevölkerung lesen und schreiben können. Der Anteil der Jugendlichen ist dabei deutlich höher als der der älteren Generation.“

4 R. Kohistani/ R. L. Schmidt: Shina in contemporary Pakistan, in: Lesser-Known Languages of South Asia, ed. by A. Saxena and L. Borin, Berlin/ New York 2006, 140.

means to provide some local colour for the sake of entertainment, but that the radio features voiced actual concerns of Gilgit citizens. There is thus a high measure of authenticity. At the same time it is obvious that the extent to which the general public enjoyed access to the local radio broadcast was limited. Radio Gilgit was never a non-commercial, independent radio station but was part of the official policy of Radio Pakistan which was fostered by the state, the final authority remaining the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting whose task it was to organize and direct the media according with the intentions of government. *The Meeting Place* was not a live programme, there was no question of listeners directly communicating with the producers. The author prepared a hand-written script written in the variety of Arabic script used for Urdu, but modified to suit Shina phonology. The speakers used these manuscripts during the recording; they were not kept afterwards. It is possible that the script was sometimes amplified or modified during performance⁵. Despite limited access the popularity *The Meeting Place* enjoyed was overwhelming. This is certainly due both to the themes and to the entertaining, often humorous way in which they are presented. Various discourse strategies used by the participants and the argumentative style of the characters are subject of a separate paper by A. Degener⁶. Every programme features two main characters: Taaĵ, a young man with progressive views, and the traŋpha or village elder with a more conservative outlook. The dialogue takes place on the village common, in Shina called *bayáak*, which is the usual place for everybody to meet and talk and is also the name of the programme. Besides Taaĵ and the traŋpha, there is a third character: Máaştar Sáap, the schoolteacher. The radio features consist of discussions between the opponent parties. The discussions focus on problems of everyday life, on current controversies and tensions in the community of Gilgit. How seriously the messages of *The Meeting Place* were taken, may be seen from an anecdote told by G. Buddruss⁷: “In one of his plays Amin Zia had slightly ridiculed the shortcomings of the refuse disposal in Gilgit. This was taken ill by some Gilgit dustmen, who vowed revenge. Two days later, Amin found a huge stinking rubbish heap in his courtyard piled up there at daybreak by his angry listeners.” The programme in question will be found as *bayáak 4* in this volume. Inhabitants and visitors to Gilgit may judge for themselves whether the message of this radio feature is still relevant today or not.

The radio features are a unique testimony to the evolution of Shina literature. The texts that had until then been published in Shina were of a different genre. They included poetry, proverbs, and short non-literary texts, but no texts in colloquial language. The *Meeting Place*, on the other hand, even though it was not a live programme with spontaneous interaction, uses a highly colloquial style which testifies to the state of the language as it was spoken in the 80s. There is a high percentage of Urdu loanwords, and also some instances where Urdu syntax seems to have had an influence. This reflects

5 See Buddruss 1983, 237, and Degener 2010, 7 fn. 7.

6 Degener 2010.

7 G. Buddruss: German Linguistic Research in the Northern Areas of Pakistan, in: Neuere deutsche Beiträge zu Geschichte und Kultur Pakistans (Schriftenreihe des Deutsch-Pakistanischen Forums, 10), 1993, 38-49.

common usage, but was also in accordance with the policy guidelines of Radio Pakistan “Majority of programmes from each radio and TV station should be in Urdu. However regional languages should be given reasonable representation in proportions presently maintained by the various stations of PBC and PTVC. In these language programmes, use of commonly understood Urdu word and expression, Urdu programmes from regional stations may reflect local intonations and style and borrow words from the regional languages wherever effectively and usefully possible.”⁸ M. A. Zia, the author of the radio features, was born in 1945. He worked as a high school teacher for many years, and is currently professor at the Karakorum University Gilgit. He is the author not only of the radio features, but of books of poetry in Shina and Urdu, a collection of Shina proverbs⁹ and of a Shina grammar in Urdu. Recently he published a Shina Urdu dictionary containing 15,000 lemmata¹⁰. The present edition of *The Meeting Place* owes much to the author’s kind cooperation.

After G. Buddruss acquired the manuscripts of seven *bayáak* episodes, he and M. A. Zia went through them in numerous meetings which took place over a period of several years from 1985-1990. The modified Urdu script which Zia had used for his scripts was fairly satisfactory as far as the representation of consonant phonemes was concerned. The vowels, however, were not sufficiently differentiated. No taped material of the recordings was available. For a start, G. Buddruss made a phonological transcription of the texts which then became the basis of long discussions with M. A. Zia. Since at that time there existed neither a dictionary to speak of nor a grammar of Shina (the grammatical sketch by G. Bailey from 1924¹¹ was of only limited help), it would not have been possible to understand the texts without the help of a native speaker. That the native speaker was at the same time the author of the radio features made work much easier. G. Buddruss wrote glosses in Urdu or English for all words or passages which were linguistically difficult. After 1990 G. Buddruss was not able to continue his work on the radio features. His transcription, however, along with the glosses provided the starting point for the joint editory work of Buddruss and Degener which started in 2008. Our procedure was to read the texts together, to translate them into German and to discuss any difficulties which had not yet been solved. Later on we decided to publish the book in English rather than in German so as to allow a larger number of people, including educated speakers of Shina, to learn about this substantial contribution to the beginnings of Shina literature. As the radio features use colloquial language, they contain linguistic features which have not been described in any grammar or grammatical sketch¹² of the Shina language. In particular, the

8 Policy Guidelines 1985, quoted from Shahjahan Sayed: Radio Pakistan. (Medien + Kommunikation, 11), Münster 1988, 397, retaining the original spelling.

9 Sawéenoo moórye, Islamabad 1978.

10 Šinaá-Urdū luḡat, Gilgit 2010.

11 Grammar of the Shina (Šinā) Language, London 1924.

12 Besides Bailey’s grammar of 1924, there is now M. A. Zia’s grammar of Gilgiti Shina in Urdu: Šinaa qaa’ida aur graaimar, Gilgit 1986, sections on nominal and verbal morphology in Radloff/ Shakil 1998, analyses of Shina phonology Radloff 1999, and Radloff 2003, and the grammatical sketch contained in Degener 2008. A study of the finite verb in Gilgiti Shina is currently being prepared by C. Radloff.

texts abound in discourse particles and interjections, the exact function of which is not always clear and which are not easy to translate into another language. A. Degener tried to define the functions of the more common particles, analyzing the context of their occurrence, the preferences of particular characters to use them, and their place within the syntactic structure. As a result of this research we have, rather than sticking to word by word renderings, attempted to convey the spirit in our translation into idiomatic English where the same sense would be expressed by different means. The free translation is complemented by the interlinear translation of the Shina text so that readers will be able to follow the original wording without difficulty.

It is a pleasure to thank our American friend Carla Radloff, herself an excellent expert of Shina, who was kind enough to read through our translations and make useful corrections and improvements in our English renderings.