

AIPS Junior Fellowship Report
Grant Period: February-July 2013
Location: Lahore

With the AIPS grant I was able to travel to Lahore and conduct five months of my dissertation research. My project focuses on the ties between the cinema industry and national language politics, for which I take a two-fold approach. First I am working to understand vernacular Punjabi language within the diverse linguistic landscape of Pakistan; what are the ways its unique position complicates the established scholarship in linguistic anthropology on language attitude and ideology? Second, my research investigates the connections that emerge from the deep and complex relationships between the Punjabi language and the aesthetics, representations, solidarities, and social commentaries found in Punjabi popular cinema. Integrating these two areas of focus, my project then explores the structure of and attitudes about the cinema industry as they are co-constructed with ideologies of language, ethnicity, and social class.

The first two months of the fellowship period were largely spent networking and conducting semiformal and informal interviews of directors, actors, writers, and others. These interviews were both audio and video recorded and represent hours of valuable data on the the film industry—its history and decline, its present situation, and other issues. I visited film studios and also spent time collecting rare films on disc and going to the cinema when possible. Additionally, I was lucky enough to participate in and record a round-table discussion organized by Dunya News which brought together nearly a dozen senior film industry members to talk about why the cinema industry has gone into decline (*'industry ka zawaal'*) and what can be done about it. I was also lucky enough to visit the Central Film Censor Board in Islamabad and speak with some of the bureaucrats working there. All of this provided new insights into the way ideas about this film industry are connected with larger discourses of nation and national culture.

The following three months, from May onwards, represent perhaps the most fruitful segment of the research in terms of ethnographic data. It was during this period of time that I began my participant observation research at Evernew Studios, working with Punjabi film director Parvez Rana. When I met him and described my project, he offered to make me a sort of unofficial assistant director on his film which was to begin production shortly. I began regularly spending time at the film studio, meeting and building rapport with a group of professionals who not only work together but can be found almost daily sitting in the studio courtyard, drinking tea and smoking cigarettes, and passing the hours with gossip, political discussion, storytelling, and detailed commentary on film and filmmaking. During this period of time the film's shooting was delayed, which although initially a setback, soon proved to be even more instructive, providing me with an opportunity to understand more about the way films are financed and produced, and the relationships between cinema hall owners, producers, studios, and directors. This part of my research

has also been invaluable in helping me find spaces of resistance to the hegemonic discourses about the film industry, and in particular about Punjabi films. Different factions with very different philosophies became apparent. Within the Punjabi film industry there exist a variety of worldviews and approaches to filmmaking and cultural production.

My time in Lahore has helped me develop my project in two unexpected directions as well. I have begun to delineate a cinematic geography of the city, documenting cinema, language, and urban space in Lahore. I spent time mapping the various cinema halls and then taking photographs and collecting other observational data, such as the number of films playing, the composition of the audience, language of films playing, and language in advertising. This section of my research surveys cinemas across the city, but is particularly focused on the area around Lakshmi Chowk, where most of them are concentrated. Lakshmi Chowk is a working class area and the cinemas tend to be older, less well-maintained, and less advanced in terms of screening technologies (for example, I was amazed to discover that in one cinema the projector in use appears to date back to the 1930s). By contrast, cinemas in middle and upper class neighborhoods such as Gulberg, Cantonment and Defence Housing Authority usually have air conditioning, digital projection, and advanced sound systems. There is obviously a difference in ticket price, but moreover the connection with language and social class is clear: Punjabi films play regularly in Lakshmi Chowk while the upper class cinemas almost invariably screen English or Indian films; even Urdu-language Pakistani films are rarely shown there.

Second, the opportunity to scrutinize film language has highlighted a major dearth in the linguistic literature on Punjabi, namely that there exists very little reliable, current information regarding dialect variation. Most of the extant research either dates from the colonial period or is oriented towards Punjabi in India. While any sort of large-scale, comprehensive dialectological or descriptive grammatical work is outside the scope of my doctoral research, I was able to develop a starting point for pinpointing some linguistic features that vary across dialects of Punjabi and understanding their social valences. I began by comparing what literature there is with data from the participant observation and interview research, for instance pinpointing key grammatical or phonetic features in speech (e.g. tonality, verb copula formation) that vary from place to place, or eliciting metalinguistic commentary on dialect variation. This laid the groundwork for a subproject within my research, a small yet highly valuable perceptual dialectology study. This subproject focuses specifically on what linguistic features are salient for native speakers, and what kinds of social meaning these features have. This data will build a foundation for understanding issues of language and regionality and how these emerge and inhere in cinema performance.

Finally, in addition to accomplishing my research goals, this fellowship also afforded me the chance to present my research in a variety of forums, including the Council for Social Sciences in both Islamabad and Lahore, and receive wonderful feedback from and network with Pakistani academics. Additionally, I had was able to present my work and conduct a series of workshops on social science research with students at Foreman Christian College University and Sargodha University; of these I can say that the students' responses to my work was in some ways even more thought provoking and productive

than that of the academics. The fellowship experience overall has strengthened and developed my project in unexpected and fruitful ways, and I am deeply grateful to the AIPS for this opportunity.