

SINDHI LANGUAGE VITALITY IN URBAN SETTINGS: INVESTIGATING PATTERNS AND SPEAKER CHOICES

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Abstract

This study examines the intricate dynamics of language maintenance and shift among young Sindhi-speakers in Sanghar. This qualitative research explores the ways in which community attitudes, institutional practices, and intergenerational language transmission affect language choices and patterns. The survey data reveals a clear shifting from Sindhi to Urdu and English in a number of social strata and focus group findings add to this effect. Though Sindhi language continues to be commonly used language in homes; due to social pressure, urban migration and official status, its use in the public sphere is restricted. Patterns of contextual code-switching, emotional attachment to Sindhi, and growing concerns over its waning intergenerational transmission are revealed by thematic analysis. The participants' strong desire to maintain Sindhi as a cultural identity marker in spite of the dominance of Urdu and English highlights the necessity of inclusive language policies and community-driven revitalization initiatives. In addition to providing insights for maintaining linguistic diversity in the face of sociocultural change the study advances an understanding of language practices in multilingual societies.

Keywords: Sindhi, Vitality, Youth, Urban, Sanghar, Language maintenance, Shift, Urdu, English

1 Introduction

Language shift and maintenance are important sociolinguistic research topics especially in multilingual settings where languages compete for speakers, social status, and usage domains. The term language shift describes the process through which speakers of one language switch to using another frequently more dominant language as their main communication tool (Haque, 1983; Mansoor, 2004). The symbolic value associated with the more prestigious language as well as perceived social or economic advantages are typically the driving forces behind this change. The established linguistic hierarchy in Pakistan positions Urdu and English as languages of opportunity and power by elevating them to positions linked to governance socioeconomic mobility and resource access. Due to their perceived lower value in terms of contemporary economic and social capital regional languages like Sindhi are frequently at risk due to this hierarchy (Ansari, 2005). The forces of urbanization globalization and the predominance of Urdu and English in educational institutions and professional fields have created additional pressures for Sindhi speakers especially those who live in urban areas. According to Abbasi, David and Ali (2023) these factors have exacerbated the language shift particularly among the younger generation who frequently see fluency in Urdu and English as essential for integration into larger societal networks and upward mobility (Ansari, 2005). The linguistic environment that families and individuals encounter when they migrate to urban areas emphasizes English as a sign of elite status and educational advancement and Urdu for interethnic communication.

As a result speakers gradually switch to Urdu and English for practical social and economic interactions which reduces the amount of Sindhi that is passed down to future generations (Rahman, 2010). The deliberate attempts made by a community to preserve its language usage in the face of outside influences that might discourage it are known as language maintenance. Such activities as using the language at home, developing educational materials in the language,

engaging in cultural activities that promote the use of the language could fall under it. While people of Sindh use language to express themselves, many of them also regard language maintenance as a way to maintain a cultural identity and existence in society and in the larger Pakistani society in general (Mustafa, 2011).

This paper focuses on the Sindhi speaking community of Urban Sindh where the language shift and language maintenance phenomena are common. It examines how the situation influences Sindhi speakers to shift to either Urdu or English, although at the same time, they try to maintain the importance of Sindhi language as their core cultural asset. In an effort to bring out these two conflicting tendencies into focus, this article engages in the exploration of decisions, attitudes or social practices as related to linguistic integration/expulsion in Sanghar; intending to keep Sindhi as a lively language with cultural importance. This research on language change and preservation presents the broader implications of language change and maintenance, showing the connection between the choices, social relations, cultural association and the preservation of Sindhi language in Urban context of Sindh, Pakistan. This study aims to explore the phenomena of language shift and maintenance in Sanghar, focusing on intergenerational transmission, institutional practices, and community attitudes.

2 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The shifting patterns of language use within a community are reflected in the dynamic linguistic phenomena known as language shift and maintenance. A language shift happens when a community gradually switches to a different language frequently as a result of political social or economic pressures. On the other hand language maintenance refers to a community's attempts to keep its language alive in spite of outside influences (Fishman, 1964). The domain theory developed by Fishman (1965) serves as the basis for research on language shift and maintenance. Fishman contends that consistent use of a language within particular social domains like the home places of worship and cultural customs increases the likelihood that it will be preserved. According to his theory intergenerational transmission is necessary for language maintenance in these domains if a language is lost in any of these the community is more vulnerable to language shift. For example if a dominant language like English or Urdu is used in formal domains like government and education and a minority language is only used in informal settings like the home the minority language may gradually be replaced. In multilingual societies this theoretical viewpoint has been crucial in examining the effects of domain-specific usage on language retention especially in settings where linguistic pressures favor more economically advantageous or dominant languages (Holmes, 2013).

3 LITERATURE REVIEW

Panwaha, Lone and Muhammad (2019) analyze the ways in which Sindhi mothers and their children's language use are shaped through such urban settings relying on qualitative data and interpretative approaches. As established from the findings, educated Sindhi mothers prefer to use both Urdu and English for their children's learning and socialization attributes due to the status associated with those languages. The study revealed that in line with the cultural norms of Sindhi mothers, they have to choose between the customs of their culture and so called worldly standard of living a conflict which is a hallmark of cognitive dissonance. The authors argue that so-called cognitive enslavement that is instigated by urban environment contributes to language shift by making Sindhi mothers to prefer to raise children in dominant languages. This pattern needs to be counted as one of the most vivid examples of interactions between the variables of the socio-economic status, language, and identity in multilingual communities.

David et al. (2020) explored the use and attitudes of the Sindhi diaspora in Malaysia, the concept of language shift is extended. Practicing other ways besides the use of language this paper aims to have an understanding of how the older Sindhi women embrace their identity. This study reveals that cultural customs even in the Diaspora affiliated to Sindhi identity exist among the Sindhi people. Cultural customs can serve as a substitute for language for Sindhi community living overseas in order to preserve ethnic identity and group cohesion. By showing that cultural practices can be just as important in maintaining identity as language shift in diasporic communities this study adds to the body of knowledge on language and identity.

The daily linguistic preferences of Sindhi speakers in multilingual environment in Karachi are examined in the work of Abbasi, David and Zaki (2020). Based on Fishman's domain model the study determines language preferences in a variety of contexts and discovers that younger Sindhi speakers commonly use English and Urdu in social and educational contexts. Significant numbers of the younger generation prefer the other tongue even in familial contexts. This study advances the knowledge of language choice in urban contexts especially when there is competition and coexistence of multiple languages.

Abbasi David and Ali (2023) highlight the complex nature of cultural identity in the face of linguistic changes by arguing that identity markers outside of language are essential to sense of belonging among Sindhi youth by examining intergenerational linguistic patterns among Karachi's transplanted Sindhi speakers. The use and blending of languages in everyday interactions between younger and older generations is their main focus. They document through semi-structured interviews and a qualitative case study that older Sindhi speakers primarily speak Sindhi while younger Sindhi speakers prefer Urdu and English in social and academic contexts. According to the study urban environments foster a multilingual atmosphere where language mixing is common. Since younger Sindhi speakers associate Urdu and English with upward mobility and urban integration this generational divide reflects larger socioeconomic and cultural factors. The results demonstrate the difficulties of maintaining language in multilingual urban settings by showing a slow but discernible drop in young peoples' Sindhi proficiency. The study also looks at the effects where the use of both languages weaken its ones in question in this case, the fact that Sindhi language use is adopted creates questions for future generations as to whether it will be used.

4 RESEARCH DESIGN

This study employs qualitative approach as qualitative research offers a deeper understanding of human behavior interactions and viewpoints than quantitative research which is more concerned with numerical data and statistical relationships. A questionnaire survey is used to get instances about the common language choices and patterns among young Sindhi speakers. An overview of participants language use for a range of conversation topics with a variety of interlocutors and across different domains is collected through the survey. The survey is adapted from David et al. (2017) and Khan (2014) In accordance with Fishman (1971) domain model and the particular research questions of this investigation the questions have been adjusted.

Though close ended the survey is a supplementary tool in this study which was followed by interviews. The open-ended questions in the interview protocol which draws from Merriam and Tisdell (2016) provide the in depth understanding about participants' perspectives on language shift and maintenance which is the main objective of the study. The study offers deep contextualized insights into the intricate dynamics of language maintenance and shift among young Sindhi speakers in Sanghar by combining data from surveys and interviews. To find trends

and connections both within and between datasets the coded data is put through a thematic analysis process (Braun & Clark, 2006). Methodological triangulation is used in this study to compare results from semi-structured interviews and survey. This method offers different perspectives on the research questions so as to view the linguistic activity comprehensively. These include validation complementarily and exploration as the three objectives of triangulation. This is how the validity of the obtained results is ensured – by comparing the results of the different approaches validation (Cohen et al. 2000).

5 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

5.1 Language Choices in Different Domains

The findings suggest depending on whether they are at home chatting with friends studying conducting business or even experimenting with politics, young speakers of Sanghar switch between Sindhi Urdu and English. It feels more like a balancing act between their perceptions of themselves their ability to communicate clearly and the social credit that each language confers. It is neither random nor a fixed habit. Approximately 88 % of those surveyed stated that they speak Sindhi at home most of the time it's almost as if it's the language of comfort the one that carries the taste of family stories and strangely enough the one that immediately connects them to their heritage. In his work (1991; 1996) Fishman observed that private and religious contexts frequently serve as guardians for minority languages which is essentially consistent with this direction. The home remains a sort of safe haven for Sindhi according to David Ali and Baloch (2017) despite national policies that push Urdu and English more. Thus, in Sanghar young people use Sindhi at home as a genuine heartfelt expression of cultural depth and familial ties as stated by a participant, "In home, fewer people understand English and therefore I speak only Sindhi as my parents would find it easier to communicate in Sindhi."

In academic domain, only a small percentage of respondents 46% said they still use Sindhi in formal academic contexts while the majority said they use both English and Urdu. Since the majority of textbooks lectures and tests are given in English and Urdu this strong preference for these languages seems to result from both institutional practices and the symbolic importance these languages have. These findings align with Memon (2018) who noted that local languages in academic or formal settings are usually marginalized. Many students in Sanghar, for instance, come to believe that speaking English or Urdu is essential for academic success. "During university, and as a result of taking classes in English and sometimes Urdu, I use English as well as Urdu" stated participant C. This perception reinforces a linguistic hierarchy, where Sindhi is viewed as less prestigious. However, a different pattern emerges in commercial settings like local markets, banks, and government offices, where language use can vary in unexpected ways.

Similarly, English and Urdu are more prevalent on digital platforms as over 80% of respondents stated they use one or both of these languages when posting or leaving comments on websites. On the other hand Sindhi frequently serves as a symbol of identity and heritage than for everyday communication. However, code switching is a common practice. It was pointed out by one of the participants, "Sometimes, while interacting I begin the sentence in Sindhi, and complete the same in English, especially while referring to something related to studies or concerning something that is more related to the modernization". Some concepts particularly those that are academic or contemporary seem more clear or recognizable in Urdu or English. In their study David and Zaki (2020) noted that code-switching is not only a useful way to fill in vocabulary gaps but it also has a big impact on how people define and express themselves in a multilingual environment.

5.2 Language Maintenance amid Linguistic Hierarchy

The framework and underlying language policy of Pakistan's educational system are among the most important factors influencing the language preferences of Sindhi youth. Classroom instruction, evaluation, and official correspondence are primarily carried out in English or Urdu from elementary school through university. The findings confirm Memon (2018) that there is hierarchy of languages in Pakistan, where English is given higher status, Urdu get second highest rank being the symbol of national unity. However, the local languages like Sindhi are marginalized. This policy produces two outcomes; first, students internalize the notion that proficiency in Urdu and English is a requirement for both career and academic fulfillment. According to Participant F, "there is an imperative thinking if a person uses the Sindhi language; the person must be illiterate. That is why when speaking in interviews or any other professional situations one has to shift to English or Urdu." Second, the transmission of Sindhi from generation to generation is weakened by its marginalization in schools. Children's literacy and even spoken proficiency may stagnate if they don't receive formal Sindhi schooling which makes many people see Sindhi more as a home language than a tool for education or the workplace.

Furthermore, this marginalization is made worse by the dearth of educational resources in Sindhi. Students who might prefer Sindhi are forced to switch to languages that provide them with resources because textbooks test papers and digital learning platforms are often unavailable in Sindhi. Sindhi is denied prestige as a result of this institutional neglect which also limits its functional domains to cultural and personal settings. Participant A stated, "In our classes, sometimes if one uses Sindhi language in front of the teacher he/she does not like it." The findings align with Abbasi et al (2023) that socio-economic context leads to marginalization of regional languages. People prefer English in formal domains consider it as the symbol of prestige and status. As one of the participant said, we all know that speaking good English helps us, stand out in job interviews when discussing social mobility. This practicality feeds a positive feedback loop; the network of Sindhi speakers decreases, as the speakers switch to English and Urdu which affects the vitality of Sindhi.

The study findings showed that 30% of participants only used Urdu in academic settings (compared to 12% who used Sindhi and Urdu and 46% who used both English and Urdu). Sindhi speakers in use Facebook, Instagram, and TikTok with mostly English and Urdu content. Just 2% of respondents to the survey said they used Sindhi on social media while 50% of respondents used both English and Urdu and 38% used English only. Findings also revealed though the use of Sindhi declines in the public domain but the symbolic value is passed down from generations. Participants frequently mentioned their sense of belonging to their mother tongue and preserving their language in private domains. These findings align with David et al. (2020) who stated that using the best way to preserve a language is to revive the cultural practices and tradition. Participants also made it apparent that they felt conflicted between their practical needs in modern life and their emotional devotion to Sindhi. Participant D stated, "It will be good if there is more Sindhi content on social media platform such as memes or trending videos that youth enjoys."

5.3 Sense of Identity and Language preservation

The conflict between the ideological backing for Sindhi and its diminishing everyday usage permeates participants attitudes and actions illustrating what Fishman (1991) called symbolic loyalty in which speakers affirm the importance of a language despite not using it frequently in practice. According to the survey, a startling 78 % of participants deemed Sindhi preservation to

be extremely important highlighting the symbolic importance of Sindhi to their sense of identity and belonging. However, when asked to explain how they actually use the language on a daily basis participants acknowledged that Sindhi has become less prevalent in many settings where people interact with the public. Urdu or English are the most often used languages by students in academic writing and class discussions two areas that are generally recognized as crucial for future employment opportunities. Participant 2 observed, "I used to write poems and stories in Sindhi language earlier after joining university, experiencing urban lifestyle I have left this practice long ago". The institutional practices serve to further the idea that Sindhi is only useful for ceremonial or nostalgic purposes.

Digital media is another setting outside of the classroom where Sindhi finds it difficult to compete. Just 2% of students use Sindhi on social media according to survey data, most prefer English or a combination of English and Urdu. Participants explained this by pointing out that there is a dearth of Sindhi content on the internet such as cartoons memes music videos and the like which denies the language a place in the digital realms that are heavily influenced by youth culture. This disparity reflects and feeds a cycle: young speakers are less likely to use Sindhi online if there is no engaging content available and content producers have no audience or motivation to create Sindhi content, if there is no online presence. According to David et al. (2020) who observed that diasporic communities can use digital media to maintain language use, Sindhi speakers in Sanghar also confirm that culturally relevant youth-focused digital content has the potential to revitalize Sindhi.

Family is still a crucial area for transmission between generations but there are challenges for Sindhi in this domain too. Despite the fact that many parents take pride in speaking Sindhi and use it at home the majority of participants observed that their younger siblings or cousins are becoming less likely to use Sindhi preferring Urdu or English even in their own homes. At family get-togethers my elders speak Sindhi but the children respond in Urdu because they find it to sound modern according to study participants. This generational change emphasizes how Sindhi's normative standing is eroding even in the very cultural environment that ought to support it. As mentioned by the Participant A, "If parents speaks Sindhi proudly, their children will also follow the same and learn the importance of the language." As a result, the home environment alternates between being a place of preservation and a place of change based on the attitudes that adults set as an example and the preference of dominant languages among children. This is also suggested by Ali et al. (2021) the language can be preserved with the cultural preservation such as using non-linguistic markers which support ethnic identity.

6 Conclusion

This paper focuses on the linguistic choices, patterns and language shift and maintenance of young Sindhi speakers in Sanghar, to understand how young Sindhi speakers adjust to their multilingual environment. By carefully analyzing survey data and focus group interviews this research identifies the influence of sociopolitical context on language choices. The findings of this study suggest that the use of Sindhi in formal and professional contexts has significantly declined although it is still widely used in the home to strengthen family bonds and transmit culture. Although Sindhi has emotional and symbolic significance, it lacks the institutional backing and recognition required to prosper outside of the private sphere. Young Sindhi speakers' psychological and emotional ambivalence toward their mother tongue is a crucial study finding. They display a strong sense of pride in Sindhi as a symbol of their cultural identity and affiliation. However, they naturally prefer Urdu and English due to the benefits associated with these

languages. The study suggests that although it is under pressure from institutional neglect, socioeconomic shifts, and the allure of dominant languages; Sindhi is not dying. The difficulty is in establishing circumstances that allow them to coexist with English and Urdu not as a lesser language but as a fully recognized component of their linguistic repertoire without having to make a decision.

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