

# A Sociolinguistic Study on the Diminishing Features of the Punjabi Lexicon

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## Abstract

This sociolinguistic study strives to bring to light the linguistic changes that seem to have occurred over a few decades in the Punjabi lexicon in Pakistan. The researchers have adopted two research strategies for underlining the assumed changes. This study has tried to get insight into the diminishing features of Punjabi lexicon by juxtaposing the current Punjabi lexicon with the lexicon used in the old Punjabi movies and songs. This has involved gleaning lexical items which are no longer used in the current public discourses from the old and famous Punjabi movies (Heer & MirzaSahiba) and their songs. To further substantiate the findings of the study, the researchers got a questionnaire filled by 110 educated Punjabi speakers who aged 40-50. In the questionnaire, the respondents were asked about their opinion regarding the perceived changes in Punjabi lexicon of public discourses that have occurred over the past few decades. The findings of the study reveal that there have occurred noticeable changes due to social, educational, industrial and technological advancement, and particularly the spread of electronic media in the Punjabi community in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** linguistics, sociolinguistics, Punjabi, Uduisation, lexical changes, discourse, public discourses

## 1. Introduction

### *1.1 Nature of Language*

Language is a universal characteristic of human beings. It is the faculty for communication through speech sounds. A language is a means of communication which is specific to a society. Thus, a language becomes an integral part of the culture of that society. Human beings are distinguished from other animals just because of an attribute i.e., language. The comprehension of the nature of language helps us to understand humanity as it is language that characterizes the human life and its power. The features of human language are not present in other species. The element of creativity in human language shows that it is modifiable and flexible to create new words and sentences. Thus human language is extendable. Language and society are interrelated. The culture of society always reflects in language and meaningful social relationships continue through the use of common language. Thus a language gives sense of relativity to a community. It transmits the culture of a language to the next generation.

### *1.2 Regional Languages of Pakistan*

Pakistan enjoys unity in diversity as Pakistan is a multi-lingual country. Many regional languages and numerous dialects are spoken by the people here. Ahmad (2011) claims that there are five major native languages and 58 languages in Pakistan. The major regional languages have been shown in the following figure along with their respective area where they basically originate from.

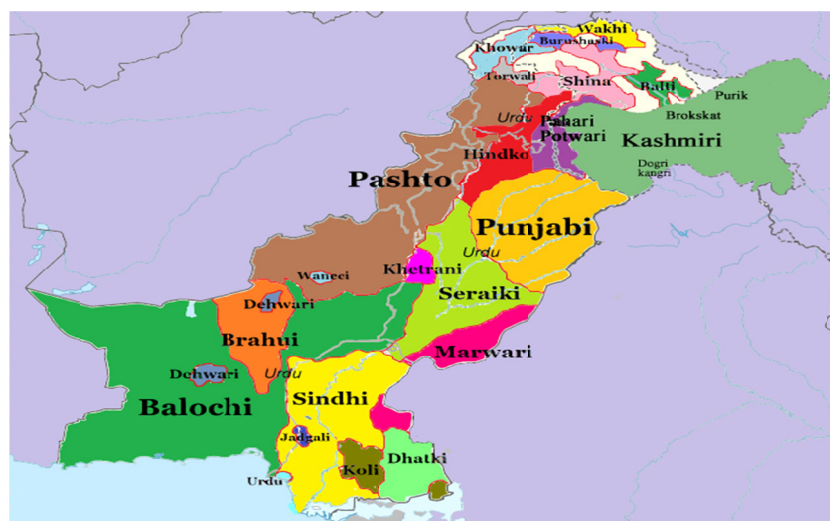


Figure 1. Regional languages of Pakistan

Source: Retrieved from <http://pakembjordan.pk/languages-currency/>

These regional languages of Pakistan boast of rich literature. They contribute to the culture of the land with their poetry, folk songs and the spiritual quotes of their saints. These languages foster unity and harmony among the people of Pakistan by cultivating and generating love, respect and adherence to the ideology of the Land.

### 1.3 Language Shift with regard to Punjabi Language

Punjabi is an ancient language. Punjabi belongs to the Indo-Aryan family of languages (Shackle, 2003). It is a language spoken and understood in the Indo-Pak subcontinent. This language is not only used in these two countries but also in U.K, U.S.A, U.A.E and Canada (Sibtain, 2011). Majority in Pakistan uses it as its mother tongue. According to 1981 census, Punjabi is the commonly spoken language by 60.43 percent Pakistanis. But Punjabi is undergoing the process of change due to the influence of Urdu language on its lexicon level. Certain lexical items and features of Punjabi language have almost diminished from the public discourse as a result of the process of Urduisation. The social, educational and technical advancement in milieu accounts for the diminishing of the features of Punjabi lexicon. In the urban areas of Punjab, the process of language shift with regard to Punjabi language is also happening. In the Figure 2 given below, all the district of Punjab have been shown where the Punjabi language is undergoing the process of shift in the form of Urduisation. There are many factors which have contributed in diminishing various lexical items of Punjabi language.

The media have played a pervasive role in our culture in the Urduisation of the Punjabi language. There has occurred a major shift with regard to Punjabi language particularly in the urban areas Punjab. This shift is in the form of the Urduisation of the certain lexical features of the Punjabi language. We come to know about a glaring decrease in the percentage of the Punjabi speaking people when we have a look at the figures quoted in the census conducted in different years in the past. For instance, the census of 1961 records that there were 67.60% speakers of the Pujabi language. The number of the speakers of this language decreased when it was recorded 48.17% in the census of 1981 and it was further decreased to 44.15% according to the census of 1998. This shift with regard to Punjabi language has been illustrated in the following tabular and graphical form.

Table 1. Census year and percentage of Punjabi speaking people

Census Year	Punjabi Speaking People (%)
1961	67.60
1981	48.17
1998	44.15

Table 1 shows that in almost four decades, the percentage of the Punjabi speaking people has decreased gradually because of certain factors and this decline has been illustrated in the Figure 2 given as follows:

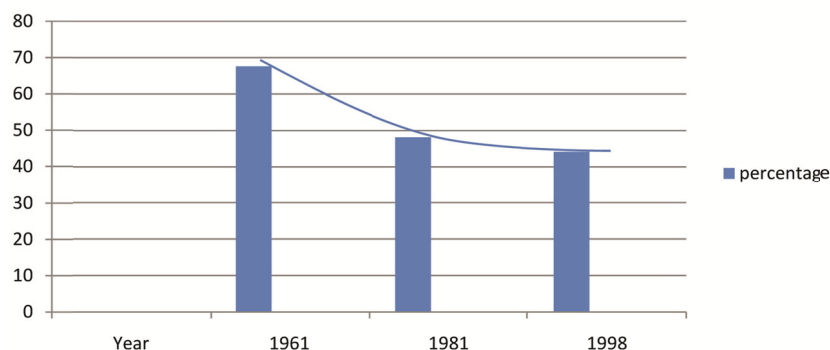


Figure 2. The declining percentage of the Punjabi speaking people in Pakistan

The curve in Figure 2 shows how the use of Punjabi language decreased with the passage of time.

#### 1.4 Research Question

This study has tried to make probe into the question whether Punjabi language is changing due to certain factors and losing its purity or not.

## 2. Literature Review

In spite of its being the language of the main of the population of Pakistan, Punjabi language has imbibed various lexical items from the national language i.e., Urdu. Zaidi (1990) asserts that most of the Pakistani Punjabis use Urdu in preference to Punjabi. He further claims that Punjabi spoken by them is excessively marked with Urdu lexical items. Since Punjab succumbed to the British, its language had to bear the brunt of colonization. Punjabi language has always been a victim of social, political and economic circumstances even before the partition of India.

Lishandi & Refnaldi (2013) maintain that regional and social variation causes variation of language which is reflected in language shift and language change. This language change results in the form of morphological, phonological, semantic and syntactic shift and change. Winford (2003) claims that language shift is a process of change from the weaker language to the dominant language. It is a process in which a community abandons its native language in favor of larger and dominant language with more chances of growth. Language shift is a process of displacing one language for another. In this process, the number of speakers decreases and the speakers gradually decrease the use of their indigenous language in major domains. Ravindranath (2009) explicates the process of language shift when he claims that the use of language is stopped through a process which is triggered by certain factors and the attitude of its speakers. Among all these factors, the role of media can't be ignored. Media is leading the masses to the homogenization of cultures.

Nawaz et al. (2012) have analysed the factors involved in language shift. They have ascertained that historio-cultural, socio-cultural and psychological factors which have paved the way for the decreased use Punjabi in favour of English. They have also concluded that language shift is a social phenomenon.

Ghani et al. (2013) conducted a study on “Urduization” of Parent-child Communication in the Non-Urdu Speaking Families” to get insight into the factors which have brought about a change in the linguistic behavior of the people particularly of those who speak regional languages as their mother tongue. They have conducted their study in Bahawalpur (Pakistan) through a questionnaire based survey. In this study, the researchers have brought to light that Urdu has become the language of family communication among the educated native speakers of Saraiki and Punjabi in Bahawalpur. A very relevant issue in the Urduisation of the regional languages particularly Punjabi and Saraiki raised in this study is that there appears to be no intergenerational transfer of these languages owing to certain factors. The present study renders an answer to the question why people speaking regional languages of Pakistan interact with their children in Urdu at home. The results of this study show that mostly people speak Urdu with their children because they think it is their national language. Urdu is also considered a source of unity as it harmonizes people and fosters convenience in interpersonal communication. The people who have moulded their attitude pro-Urdu consider Urdu and English superior languages and the languages which are the symbol of education. Another factor behind the change of parent-child communication in the non-Urdu speaking families are the intermarriages between the people who speak different languages.

Barirah et al. (2013) have found out the causes which have played their role in making this shift with specific reference to Punjabi in the Sargodha region of Pakistan. They claim that economic, demographic and the status of language are the most significant factors which have caused the shift in Punjabi language in this particular area. They have also concluded that the more dominant languages have posed a threat to the existence of Punjabi because of the linguistic shame felt by its speakers and the absence of institutional support.

Akmal (2013) has conducted a sociolinguistic study of Punjabi language usage in Multan. He explicates the causes which have contributed in the sacrifice of the Punjabi language at the altar of Urdu. According to the researcher, the elite of Pakistan raised the slogan of Urdu as a language of Muslim identity and it caused a number of social problems as the diversity of languages present in the country was suppressed in favor of Urdu. While elaborating the factors involved in the Urduisation of Punjabi, he maintains that the people began to pay more attention to English and Urdu with the passage of time and economic stability and thus Urdu became a privileged language. A shift from regional language, Urdu and official language, English was made by the people as they considered them the prestigious languages because of the changed socio-economic scenario. It has also been analyzed in this study that the state-run schools have played a crucial role in the projection of Urdu. The role of Urdu as the medium of instruction has encouraged the Punjabi speakers to sacrifice their regional languages. This study also concludes that media, economic rise, socio-economic status, religious scholars and their rhetoric in Urdu, linguistic shame, inter-community marriages, and the notion of progress and futuristic approach of the parents have also encouraged the Punjabi speakers of Multan to pay respect to Urdu.

Zaidi (2002) makes an elaborate and comprehensive analysis of the postcolonial sociolinguistics of Punjabi in Pakistan and finds out that it has been in trouble since the very inception of Pakistan. Rehman (2002) also seems to second this stance when he maintains that Punjabi was associated with the Sikh community and this perception developed an attitude of negligence towards this language. Mirza (1985) also substantiates his thesis (stance) about the sad plight of the Punjabi language by pointing out the governmental approach towards.

Zaidi (2002) rounds off his discussion with the note that the Punjabi language has very little economic status in Pakistan. These socio-economic and socio-cultural factors have also contributed in this respect as it has never enjoyed state patronage in the history of Pakistan. In spite of the fact that the Punjabis are more than any other ethnolinguistic group, Punjabi is going to be a minority language. He also laments that Punjabi does not also enjoy any institutional support whatsoever. Even the education policies in Pakistan have never acknowledged the real status of the Punjabi language.

Akram & Yasmeen (2011) have also studied different attitudes towards English and Punjabi and have found that the Punjabi language which has a large number of native speakers is socially neglected and has been marginalized. They have conducted their study in different educational institutes of Faisalabad (Pakistan). Their study has explored that the Punjabi language has low economic, social and educational value and its learning is not a guarantee of a good job as this language has never been a bread winning language. Moreover, it has also become a cultural shame for the people. That's why the people are hesitant to own this language.

Smith & Pryce (2013) round off their study by maintaining that media especially television is also an important factor in language change. They claim that linguistic diffusion occurs rapidly because of engaging with a favorite TV programme as it plays the role of an additional expediting factor.

### **3. Research Methodology**

The present research is quantitative and qualitative in nature. This study consists of a questionnaire and a list of gleaned Urduised lexicon of Punjabi language.

#### *3.1 Questionnaire*

On the quantitative level, the data collected through questionnaire consisting of nine items have been analyzed in the tabular form and the same data have been given percentage, too. The questionnaire was designed so that the research question might be corroborated. While on the qualitative level, some of the issues raised in the questionnaire have been discussed qualitatively.

#### *3.2 A List of Gleaned Urduised Lexicon of Punjabi*

The theoretical framework of the present study is the Punjabi Old movies and songs of the sixties and seventies and the data consist of the words (of the Punjabi language) which are no more the features of the current public discourse. All the words have been gleaned from the above mentioned sources which constitute the corpus of the study. The list containing these gleaned Urduised Lexicon of Punjabi has been arranged into different categories. The Urduised lexical items have also been given with their English equivalent in the list.

*Urduised Lexicon Belonging to Culture*

Sr. No	Punjabi Lexicon	Urduised Lexicon	English
1	بچ	بہانہ	Excuse
2	سیوا	خدمت	Entertainment
3	جنج	بارات	Wedding Procession
4	مٹیاری	عورت	Woman / Maiden
5	کڑی	لڑکی	Girl
6	نار	عورت	Woman
7	مسیت	مسجد	Mosque
8	بٹی	دکان	Shop

*Urduised Lexicon Belonging to Dress*

Sr. No	Punjabi lexicon	Urduised lexicon	English
9	بوجا	جیب	Pocket
10	کھپسا	جیب	Pocket
11	مڑاسا	نقاب	Mask
12	صافہ	رومال	Bandana
13	پولا	نرم	Shoe
14	پولہ	جوتا	Soft
15	چہتر	جوتا	Shoe
16	ونگان	چوڑیاں	Bangles
17	جگہا	قمیص	Shirt

*Urduised Lexicon Belonging to Relations*

Sr. No	Punjabi lexicon	Urduised lexicon	English
18	انگ ساک	رشتہ دار	Relatives
19	بھرا	بھائی	Brother
20	بیلی	دوست	Friend
21	پووا	پھوپھی	Paternal Aunt
22	پپو	باپ	Father
23	خضم	شوہر	Husband
24	بان	بم عمر	Age fellow
25	بانی	ساتھی	Companion
26	گوانڈی	پڑوسی	Neighbor

*Urduised Lexicon Belonging to Body*

Sr. No	Punjabi lexicon	Urduised lexicon	English
27	آنے	آنکھ	Eyes
28	بلہ	بونٹ	Lips
29	پیڑ	درد	Pain
30	دھون	گردن	Neck
31	سنگھی	گلا	Throat
32	گاٹا	گردن	Neck
33	کھرک	خارش	Skin Infection
34	ماڑا	کمزور	Weak
35	ہنجو	آنسو	Tears
36	کال	قحط	Famine
37	نونہ	ناخن	Nail
38	مڑھکا	پسینہ	Perspiration
39	پھٹ	زخم	Wound

*Urduised Lexicon Belonging Miscellaneous Categories*

Sr. No	Punjabi lexicon	Urduised lexicon	English
40	تاس	پھر	Then
41	خچرا	چالاک	Clever
42	دھرتی	زمین	Land
43	بھاگ	قسمت	Luck
44	وچھوڑا	جدائی	Separation
45	سنجے	ویران	Deserted
46	مت	عقل	Wisdom
47	بوڑمت	بے وقوف	Foolish
48	بوکر	جھاڑو	Broomstick
49	واٹ	فاصلہ	Distance
50	تالنگ	آرزو	Desire
51	ول	طرف	Direction
52	نکی	چھوٹی	Small
53	پینڈا	فاصلہ	Distance
54	وڈھی	رشوت	Bribery
55	وانگ	طرح	Like
56	چنگا	اچھا	Good
57	ویہاڑ	رویہ	Behavior
58	ٹونہگا	گہرا	Deep
59	نیرے	پاس	Near
60	مخول	مذاق	Joke
61	سٹ	پھینک	Throw
62	کھیندا	ٹکراتا	Hits
63	جگ	دنیا	World
64	سج	نمٹ	Deal
65	کھینا	ٹکراتا	Hit
66	ڈاڈھی	بہت	Much
67	پہٹی	تختی	
68	نویں	نئی	New
69	سدراس	خواہشاں	Desires
70	نٹھ	دوڑ	Run
71	پٹھی	الٹی	Opposite
72	جندرا	تالا	Lock
73	دیوا	چراغ	Lamp
74	سول	کائٹا	Thorn
75	سنجا	ویران	Deserted
76	حیاتی	زندگی	Life
78	باہ	آہ	Sigh
79	ٹرجانا	چلے جانا	Go
80	لیک لانا	بدنام کرنا	Slander
81	قول	وعدہ	Promise
82	ٹوہ	بند	Close
83	ونڈ	تقسیم	Divide
84	مورکھ	بے وقوف	Foolish
85	تک	دیکھ	Look
86	ککڑ	مرغا	Cock
87	ٹکرے	ٹکڑے	Pieces
88	باڑا	منت	Please
89	موچھا	ٹکڑا	Piece
90	لیکھ	قسمت	Luck
91	بکل		Armpit
92	جند	جان	Life
93	پلیکھا	غلط فہمی	Misunderstand
94	لیک	بدنامی	Dishonour
95	بووا	دروازہ	Door
96	چاکری	نوکری	Job
97	سونہ	قسم	Swearing
98	پاسا	طرف	Side
99	نمانی	بے چاری	Helpless

100	کر لانا	رونا	Weeping
101	سدھر	تمنا	Wish
102	چھیتی	جلدی	Hurry
103	اوکھا	مشکل	Difficult
104	تتی	گرم	Hot
105	بھل	بھول	Mistake
106	شدائی	پاگل	Mad
107	کداں	کیسے ہو	How are you
108	ڈیگر	عصر	Late afternoon
109	لوہڈا	ظہر	Afternoon
110	ڈھوئے	بند	Closed
111	گجھے	گہرے	Deep
112	ٹکر	روٹی	Bread
113	کھڑکے	کھلکے	Whole heartedly
114	جھل	برداشت	Tolerance
115	ویڑھ	صحن	Coutyard
116	لج	لاج	Honour

#### 4. Results and Discussion

In order to substantiate the hypothesis, the researchers got a questionnaire filled by the educated Punjabi speakers. This questionnaire consisted of nine items. The response to these questionnaire items from the respondents has been computed question-wise and the results have been given in the table as follows:

Table 2. Results of the questionnaire

Question	Response	Percentage
1. Which language do you speak with your children?	Punjabi	36
	Punjabi & Urdu	40
	Urdu	23
2. Which language do you speak with your spouse?	Punjabi	55
	Punjabi & Urdu	25
	Urdu	20
3. Do you think that the Punjabi language your grandmother and grandfather or grand uncles and grand aunts spoke was different from the Punjabi language spoken these days in your family?	Yes	75
	No	25
4. Do you think that there have occurred changes in the language of Punjabi public discourses over three or four decades?	Yes	91
	No	09
5. Do you think the spread of education has Urduised Punjabi language?	Yes	93
	No	07
6. Do you think media has influenced language of Punjabi public discourses?	Yes	87
	No	13
7. What would you say about the role of urbanization in changing the language of public discourses in Punjabi culture?	Yes	96
	No	04
8. Do you think economic conditions have affected changes in Punjabi lexicon of public discourses?	Yes	78
	No	22
9. Do you thin migration after the partition influenced Saraiki language in any way?	Yes	74
	No	26

The first question “Which language do you speak with your children?” has varied response. For instance, it reveals that out of 110 respondents 36% speak Punjabi, 40% speak Punjabi and Urdu while 23% speak Urdu with their children. The analysis of the second question “Which language do you speak with your spouse?” of the questionnaire shows that 55% of the respondents speak Punjabi, 25% speak Punjabi and Urdu whereas 20% speak Urdu with their spouses. The analysis of the data collected through the first two questions shows that 36% educated Punjabi speakers speak Punjabi with their children while 55% of them speak the same language with their spouse. It can easily be inferred that the majority avoids speaking Punjabi with their children. To get insight into the issue if there has occurred any change in the Punjabi language spoken in the past and that of the present day, 75% of the response is in the affirmative while 25% is in the negative. Ninety-one percent of the respondents have claimed that there have occurred changes in the language of Punjabi public discourses over the

three or four decades whereas 9% of them disagreed to this opinion. This study has also made probe into the fact that Punjabi language has been Urduised owing to various factors including education. To this end, 93% of the respondents have given their response in the affirmative while 7% of them opined in the negative.

The present study has also strived to find out the role of media in diminishing the features of Punjabi language. In this respect, eighty-seven percent respondents have answered that media has influenced the language of Punjabi public discourse. Thomas et al. (2004) believe that the more the access of the people to media is widening the “more programmes are dedicated to the voice of the ordinary people”. They have also claimed that the media are a powerful site in the process of producing and maintaining dominant discourse. Media also play a very crucial role in establishing a dominant discourse by making use of specific linguistic choices and in representing things in a particular way. Same is the case in our scenario where the lack of Punjabi programs on electronic media and the rarity of print media in Punjabi language is also leading to the language shift. So the impact of media on the Urduisation of communication in Pakistan is quite defining and decisive. Media is projecting the image of Urdu and English as prestigious languages of the masses. The television and film idols also show an inclination towards Urdu and English.

In response to the role of urbanization in changing the language of public discourses in Punjabi culture, 96% of the respondents say that urbanization has greatly changed the language of public discourses in Punjabi culture and 4% of them seem to disagree with this opinion. It has also been tried to find out if economic conditions have affected changes in Punjabi lexicon of public discourses. Seventy-eight percent respondents substantiate the hypothesis that economic conditions have brought about changes in Punjabi lexicon of public discourses and twenty-two percent think that the economic conditions have nothing to do with the changes occurred in the Punjabi lexicon. Seventy-four percent of the respondents think that migration after the partition has influenced Punjabi language in one way or the other whereas twenty-six percent of the respondents believe that it is not so.

The list comprising of the diminishing features of Punjabi lexicon shows that lexical items related to culture, dress, relations, body and various other fields of life have been Urduised because of those factors which have exercised a pervasive effect on the discourse used by the educated Punjabi speaking people of Pakistan. These factors include media, urbanization, spread of education and better economic conditions. Apart from these aforestated factors, other factors like age, culture, social culture, time, loss word and social status are no less pervasive in their effect in language shift and lexical change. Lishandi & Refnaldi (2013) consider age, culture, social culture and time such factors as cause lexical change. Their study has found out that loan words and borrowing words also bring about lexical change. Moreover, loss word is also one these factors. The findings of the present study have been corroborated by those of the study conducted by Lishandi & Refnaldi (2013).

## 5. Conclusion

After analyzing the data collected through questionnaire and by juxtaposing the current Punjabi lexicon with the lexicon used in the last four to five decades, the researcher has found out that the Punjabi language has changed to a great extent. The lack of the governmental interest towards it is also has also played its role in diminishing the lexical features of Punjabi. It is also a lamentable fact that Punjabi does not enjoy any institutional support whatsoever. Even the education policies in Pakistan have never acknowledged the real status of the Punjabi language. This study has also explored that the Punjabi language has low economic, social and educational value and its learning is not a guarantee of a good job as this language has never been a bread winning language. Moreover, it has also become a cultural shame for the people. That's why the people are hesitant to own this language. Owing to the afore stated factors, it can safely be concluded that Punjabi language is undergoing the process of Urduisation and thus losing its purity as a result of its diminishing lexical features.

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