

Interplay between Socio-Economic Factors and Language Shift: A Study of Saraiki Language in

D.G. Khan

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Abstract

Pakistan is among those very few multicultural and multilingual countries which are celebrated for their ethnic as well as linguistic diversity. From the coastal areas of Karachi to the mountainous terrain of Gilgit Baltistan six major and more than 70 minor languages are spoken in various parts of Pakistan. Urdu relishes the position of National Language whereas the official language of the country is English and is mostly used by the power-wielding strata of the country namely the government functionaries, corporate sector, and education sector. The purpose of the study was to find out the interplay between socioeconomic factors and the phenomenon of language shift. The present research is descriptive in which 300 Urdu speaking children of Saraiki families of D.G. Khan District were selected for data collection. A multiple-choice questionnaire was devised and administered to collect the required data. The results insinuated a strong interplay between socio-economic factors and the language shift.

Keywords: Linguistic Diversity, Multilingualism, Socio-Economic Factors, Language Shift, Saraiki Language

Introduction

Language shift, also termed as language transfer, language replacement, and language assimilation, is such a situation where the members of one speech community functionally abandon one language and shift to another socially prestigious language, not necessarily by conscious choice (Garret 2006). The phenomenon of language shift entails a slow but gradual substitution of one language, particularly its communicative functions, by another language which is supposed to fulfill most of the linguistic and social purposes of the speakers of that community in a particular time and clime (Trudgill, 2000). In the event of language shift the language spoken by a minority group declines in performing its functions in comparison with a more prestigious and vibrant language which tends to expand its influence to serve the functions of the minority language. This characteristic tendency of linguistic decline can result in language death and even extinction (Philips, 2006). This grim situation implies that if conscious efforts are not made on the government level and the process of language shift is left unhampered and uncontrolled, it can culminate in language death.

The phenomenon of language shift is largely a down-to-top procedure and is usually an irreversible process. Generally, a linguistic minority that is socially or economically weak and has lower-status shuns to transfer their language to the younger generation and shifts to a language that is socially prestigious, economically robust, and politically dominant and enjoys a higher-status and not the vice versa. High status, social prestige, economic success, and the wider context of usage are associated with the dominant language spoken by a superior group. This dominant group never shifts to the language of a minority group because it has very little or no stimulus and inspiration for them to do so (Holmes, 2001).

The occurrence of language shift may result in loss of language or language death. According to Fasold (1984) language death occurs the time a linguistic group shifts to a new language and their language goes out of use for any communicative function. In this way language death results in language extinction. Language death normally occurs in the speech communities whose members have a relatively low level of linguistic competence. Language death may happen in any language including any of its dialects.

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Culturally, Pakistan is a pluralistic society and cherishes a diversified multilingual, multi-ethnic, and multicultural topography. The total of its population is 207,774,520 (Pakistan, 2017). As regards its ethnic, linguistic, and cultural identity, the population is heterogeneous. Urdu is the national language of Pakistan and Urdu speaking community is very widely distributed across the country in both urban and rural areas. Pakistan has kept English as its official language as it was in United India ruled by the Britons. In addition to English and Urdu, 72 living indigenous languages are spoken across the country (Lewis, 2009) and the number of speakers for each regional language varies significantly. Table 1 given below, indicates the distribution of dominant regional languages of the country and the number of their speakers.

Table 1: *Pakistani Languages along with the number of speakers*

Language	Percentage of speaker
Punjabi	44.15%
Pashto	15.42%
Sindhi	14.1%
Saraiki	10.53%
Balochi	3.57%
Others	4.66%

Source: (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017)

Historical Background of Saraiki Language

Saraiki is believed to be older than even the Sanskrit language because modern linguists have concluded that it was not Sanskrit that was initially spoken in the sub-continent (Fikri, 1967). Historically it is evident that Sanskrit was not spoken by the residents of this area of the world even during the first and second phases of their development. Sanskrit took its birth and came into vogue when the third and the fourth stages of Aryans settlement started in the Sub-continent. Two languages namely Pali and Sanskrit were recognized and used by the people in the age of Asoka as inscriptions on the epitaphs of that age indicate. Historically, linguists differ in their opinion about the demarcation of the Saraiki region. The boundaries of the Saraiki language touch the Balouchi language in the west; in the east, it is bordered by the Hindi dialect of Rajput Ana, and it touches the Sindhi language in the south. Anyhow tracing its origin in the north had always been problematic for the researchers. (Zamin, 1972) .According to Rasoolpuri (1980) Khetrans and Jafar Pathans, residing in the west of Dera Ghazi Khan, speak the Saraiki language. It is also spoken in the areas of Southern Punjab from D.G. Khan in the west, Multan, and Bahawalpur in the east, and Sindh in the South. In the north, its boundary touches Kashmir and constitutes such a vast area that equals the size of Ireland, with a population of almost five million. At present, the Saraiki speaking community is centrally situated in the country as it spans on both sides of the Indus River. It also encompasses some parts of the Chenab and Sutlej rivers and touches Northern Punjab. The boundaries of the Saraiki language intersect the boundaries of Pashto, Balouchi, and Iranian languages because this language is spoken by the people living in the west of Indo Aryan language areas. This language touches the Marwari dialects of Rajasthan in the south. However, it is very difficult to make a clear distinction between the boundaries of Saraiki, Sindhi, and Northern Lahnda dialects alongside the Salt Range. In the same way, its boundaries are not distinct from Punjabi to the east (Gilani, 2013).

Causes of Language Shift

Language is a social construct and for its survival, it is supposed to be transferred from one generation to the other. A language has to face a threat of death or even extinction when its speakers stop imparting it to the next generation and break the continuous chain of language transmission. Pendakur (1990) opines that a language can survive if it is safely passed on to and willingly accepted by the younger generation of a particular language group. Romaine's (1994) Model of Intergenerational Shift shows that in contact language situations, in most of the cases the first generation is chiefly monolingual, the second generation becomes bilingual who is equally fluent in both languages, whereas the third generation is all monolingual in the dominant language. In the multilingual society of Pakistan, though the situation is a bit different yet the changes in the linguistic scene demonstrate analogous patterns. As language is a part of the culture, so maintenance and conservation of the culture and the language should be the utmost priority of the government or society. Despite the best efforts to check this shift, the phenomenon of language shift has continued to occur in almost all the multi-lingual and multi-ethnic societies.

Pendakur (1990) maintains that there are certain social and demographic features of the society or a group that play a decisive role to determine the fate of the language whether it will be maintained or will be replaced with some another dominant language. There can be varied and kaleidoscopic causes of language shift which include social, economic, and political ones.

Economic Factors

The magnitude to which a language may shift directly depends on its capacity to perform powerful functions in society. A language having lesser economic value becomes insignificant to the younger generations (David & Dealwis, 2008). Appel and Muysken (1987) also highlight the fact that almost every study on language maintenance and shift implicates the economic status of the language to be one of the dominant reasons in the phenomenon of shift. The economic factor is not only one of the decisive factors in language shift but also the basis of the overall social pattern as far as the Marxist point of view is concerned.

Urbanization has given a great impetus to the phenomenon of migration of the masses from the smaller towns to the bigger cities to seek better economic prospects. The migrants tend to use the dominant language of that area and discontinue the process of passing on their mother tongue to the younger generation thinking that it would be of no use in that area. Alongside the concept of power attached with the language, the economic factor has ever been associated with the language vitality, and this feature provides the speaker of a particular linguistic community better chances of gratification Vis a Vis the people of other linguistic community (Kulick 1992). As Saraiki language accords no means of better jobs or employment to its users in comparison with Urdu, so they tend to shift their children to Urdu because Urdu is the language of financial activities. Karl Marx would argue that the shift from Saraiki to Urdu is based on economic factors.

Social Factors

To quote Fishman (1968), the study of both language maintenance and language shift should encompass the exhaustive analysis of psychological, social or cultural processes that take place in the speech community which is being investigated, though these processes vary from community to community and nation to nation both in number and degree of impact on the habitual use of a certain language and the extent to which these are pertinent in accounting for the maintenance or shift. Mukherjee (1996) has appraised the whole phenomenon of language shift and maintenance by saying that the number of historical, cultural, social, political, and linguistic factors involved in this process is so large and their interaction is so complex that it becomes impossible to formulate any comprehensive model to explore the process of language maintenance and shift exhaustively. Saraiki is the marginalized language and the Saraiki community feels underprivileged and far from the power center, so they feel obliged to shift their younger generation to Urdu. Particularly the urbanized Saraiki community feels stigmatized and tries to hide their Saraiki identity in public.

Our country inherited a kind social structure from the British in which regional languages are looked down upon. Because nobody wants to be away from the center of power or to be marginalized, so it becomes a compulsion for the Saraiki speaking masses to feel tilted towards their national language Urdu and consequently shift to it. Language is an integral part of a culture and is indispensable for a culture to thrive and flourish. The aversion from the regional language and depiction of its cultures as uncivilized, unsophisticated and inferior, leaves an everlasting impact on the collective conscience of the masses who feel obliged to distance themselves from their culture and language. (Crystal, 2000).

Status of a Language

A language becomes powerful and dominant if it enjoys a good status. Its status is the main indicator of its power. An official or national language always enjoys a great status and maybe a strong reason for the shift from the mother tongue. The dominant languages with a good status affect greatly the other languages because people are prone to learning and using the powerful and dominant language so that they may gain upward mobility and higher status in society. People give preference to the prestigious language over the non-prestigious one for obvious reasons. The language which lacks institutional support i.e. if it is not used in education, media, and offices, is usually abandoned by its users.

For the present article, the Saraiki language has been selected as a case study to examine the interplay between socioeconomic factors and the phenomenon of language shift. The researcher has

endeavored to study the attitudes of the users towards their language, causes, and effects of the shift from Saraiki to Urdu because of economic and social issues.

Research Objectives

The chief motif of the current study was to explore and investigate the impact of socio-economic factors on language shift. Following research objectives were formulated to achieve the target.

1. To determine the impact of economic factors in language shift.
2. To find out the role of social factors in the process of this shift.
3. To investigate the variance of language shift in urban and rural areas.
- 4.

Methodology

This current research was descriptive. The study purported to find the impact of socio-economic factors on language shift. The socio-economic factor was the independent variable with two levels of intensity: first, social factor, and second, economic factor. The dependent variable was the language shift. 300 children from Saraiki families of D.G. Khan District were identified and selected for data collection to meet the objectives. A multiple-choice structured questionnaire was used to collect the data.

The validity and reliability of the questionnaire were measured through expert opinions. More than 80% of items, approved by experts, were included in the questionnaire. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured through SPSS Software while extracting the average value of Chronbach Alpha. In the current research study, the Convenience sampling technique was used for data collection. Appropriate formulas were applied through SPSS software to extract the findings.

Results and Discussion

In the current study, the primary focus was on the socio-economic status of Saraiki families and their impact on the language shift. The process of data analysis was carried out in two steps. Initially, SPSS 21 version software was used to conduct the analysis; Correlation, Independent sample t-test, and Regression Analysis were applied to the data. The results discussed the analysis and interpretation in the light of the objectives of the study.

Table 2: Factor Analysis of the Items of impact of socio-economic factors on language shift

Items	Factor Loadings		
	1	2	3
I generally speak Saraiki at home	.568		
All my friends and relatives always communicate with me in Urdu in social gatherings	.867		
In our society, Urdu is given more honor and importance than Saraiki.	.867		
In social gatherings, people give more attention to me if I speak Urdu instead of Saraiki.	.867		
Earning a livelihood is more important than speaking and maintaining one's mother tongue.	.527		
Urdu is more helpful in interviews for a job than Saraiki.	.476		
Interviewers are biased if we disclose our Saraiki identity	.573		
Our social set up does not encourage Saraiki	.742		
Urdu is more helpful than Saraiki in getting a good job	.697		
Urdu has more market value than Saraiki	.691		
Urdu speaking community is dominant in business and Govt. jobs so we should learn and speak Urdu.	.572		
Saraiki is the mark of identity for the Saraiki community	.556		
It will make no difference if the Saraiki language dies	.554		
Language shift from Saraiki to Urdu is a good and healthy sign			
Saraiki people try to hide their Saraiki identity in public.		466	
At my workplace, I have to speak in Urdu	454		
The Saraiki community should try to maintain Saraiki identity by speaking Saraiki		465	

Table 2 explained the factor analysis of the effect of socio-economic factors on language shift to reveal the inter-item correlation. Exploratory Factor Analysis (EFA) of 22-items of the questionnaire with Principal Components Analysis (PCA) accompanied by Varimax rotation extracted a three-factor structure. This result is consistent with the scale's theoretical suggestions. The two factors of socio-economic and one factor of language shift. EFA were Social factor (1, 6, 22, 8, 2, 7,

3; Cronbach's $\alpha = .721$), Economic factor (4, 9, 5, 18, 10, 11; Cronbach's $\alpha = .751$) and Language shift (14, 15, 17, 16, 12, 21, 20, 19, 13; Cronbach's $\alpha = .657$). Factor loadings of eight subscales range from 0.450 to 0.867.

Further Confirmatory Factor Analysis (CFA) for the instrument revealed tangibly high correlations among the error variances of item 01, 02, 07, 08, 09, 15, 16, and 22. Modification indices showed that the exclusion of these items could be very beneficial to improve the goodness of fit. The CFA's result for remaining items showed that the remaining factors of CFA model absolutely fitted the data (Chi-square goodness of fit = 7.532, $p = 0.033$; CFI = 0.86; NNFI = 0.86; RMSEA = 0.048; IFI = 0.79; RFI = 0.81; NFI = 0.79) while the Cronbach's alpha coefficient of the overall scale was 0.701.

Table 3: Correlation matrix the impact of Socio-Economic factor on language shift

		Mean	SD	1	2	3
1	Social Factor	3.68	0.35	(0.676)		
2	Economic Factor	3.39	0.38	.584**	(0.721)	
3	Language Shift	3.77	0.42	.408**	.401**	(0.657)

** $P < 0.01$, * $p < 0.05$

The numbers shown in the brackets are Cronbach's α (reliability) estimates.

Pearson's correlation matrix reveals a statistically high correlation between different factors including socio-economic factors that affect the language shift. Social factor is significantly correlated with economic factor ($r = 0.584$) and also with language shift ($r = .408$). The economic factor is significantly correlated with language shift ($r = .401$). The results indicated that the economic factor has the most perceptible impact on the process of language shift. It means that economics dominates the linguistic identity and everything else. Social factors like prestige and shame attached to the language are also key factors that play a decisive role in language maintenance and language shift. It is apparent from the results that Saraiki is deemed inferior and language with low social status, so the people try to hide their Saraiki identity in social gatherings and identify themselves with Urdu speaking people. They are given more importance in society if they speak Urdu instead of Saraiki.

Table 4: Location wise Impact of socio-economic factors on language shift– Variables Comparison

Variable	Location	N	Mean	T	P	sig.
Socio-economic	Urban	287	3.87	2.77	.006	.000
	Rural	287	3.41			
Language shift	Urban	287	3.61	2.97	.003	.083
	Rural	287	3.51			

An independent sample t-test was done to find out location wise impact of a socio-economic factor on language shift. The result of this table shows that a significant difference was noticed between urban and rural respondents' socio-economic factors ($t = 2.77$, $p = .000$). Urban respondents' opinion is more significant as compared to rural. The results demonstrated that the ratio of language shift in urban areas is faster and higher than in rural areas. The people of the urban areas are more educated than those of the rural areas, and their attachment with their culture and language is not as strong as that of the people of rural areas. So, the urbanized people readily stop transferring their mother tongue to their younger generation as compared to those living in the rural areas, because people of rural areas seem to be attached to their culture and language more than the people of the urban areas. It also proved that educated and urbanized people give more importance to the economic well-being than to their linguistic identity or mother tongue as compared to the people of rural areas.

Table 5: Impact of socio-economic factor on language shift

Model	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
	B	Std. Error	Beta		
Language shift	.100	.022	.205	4.525	.000

a. Dependent Variable: Language shift

b. Independent Variable: Socioeconomic factor

Table 5 indicates that socio-economic factors significantly impact on language shift of Saraiki families of D.G. Khan District. Socio-economic factors increase the language shift (Beta .205). It is evident that one unit increase in socio-economic ($\beta = .205$, $p < .01$) will cause a 20.5% increase in language shift. It is evident from the results that there is a significantly strong impact of socio-economic factors on the phenomenon of language shift. The languages which afford economic

benefits are more likely to survive and thrive in the world than the languages which offer less or no economic prospects. As Saraiki language has no market value in the present political and economic scenario, it is under a potential threat of shift and even death, though not in near future,

Conclusion

Saraiki, being the 4th largest spoken language in Pakistan, is declining day by day and losing hundreds of speakers because of the more powerful impact of the Urdu language which is posing a threat to the very existence of Saraiki. The phenomenon of language shift is an inexhaustible collective consequence of the congruous design of the language choice (Fasold, 1984). The reasons for a language shift are numerous like lack of prestige, lack of power; want of institutional support, social issues and economic condition of the speakers, stigma or shame attached to the language, etc. Similarly, Saraiki is not being given due importance because the younger generation does not value such a language as has no market or economic value (David & Dealwis, 2008).

Suggestions

As the shift from Saraiki is evident from the results, it is, therefore, imperative to take some tangible measures to either avert or at least slow down this shift. Solid steps should be taken on government as well as the societal level to revitalize and maintain the regional languages including Saraiki. Projects on the state level should be initiated to empower the downtrodden and underprivileged strata of the society, thus strengthening their languages. Moreover, the Saraiki parents should be encouraged to transfer their language to their children as their first language or mother tongue to ensure the sustainability of the Saraiki language. The last but not least, the state should patronize the regional languages, particularly Saraiki, to save them from death and even extinction. Media should also come forward to mitigate this grim situation because the role of media is vital in language shift as well as maintenance. Special programs should be aired for the children because they are easy to be influenced by the media. It should patronize Saraiki along with another marginalized regional language who are facing a threat of shift.

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