THE DECLINE OF PUNJABI: INVESTIGATING THE SOCIOLINGUISTIC FACTORS LEADING TO LANGUAGE DEATH IN PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study investigates the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of the Punjabi language in Pakistan, with a focus on the implications of language death for cultural identity and social cohesion. As one of the most widely spoken languages in Pakistan, Punjabi faces significant challenges from the dominance of Urdu and English, which have permeated various spheres of public and private life. Employing a mixed-methods approach, this research combines qualitative interviews with quantitative surveys to explore the perceptions of Punjabi speakers regarding their language's status and use. Findings indicate that socio-economic pressures, educational policies favoring Urdu and English, and a lack of institutional support for Punjabi are pivotal in diminishing its prestige and usage among younger generations. Additionally, the study highlights the emotional and cultural ramifications of language shift, emphasizing how language death threatens the rich cultural heritage associated with Punjabi. This research contributes to the broader discourse on language maintenance and revitalization by proposing targeted strategies to promote Punjabi through educational initiatives and community engagement. Ultimately, the study underscores the urgent need for policies that recognize and preserve linguistic diversity as a vital component of Pakistan's cultural landscape.

1. INTRODUCTION

Punjabi, the native language of millions in Pakistan, is experiencing a gradual decline, particularly among younger generations. This decline is indicative of broader sociolinguistic shifts influenced by urbanization, globalization, and the increasing dominance of Urdu and English in educational and professional domains. Despite being one of the most spoken languages in Pakistan, Punjabi is often perceived as a low-prestige language, leading to ambivalence among its speakers regarding its use and importance (Rahman, 1997). As a result, many young Punjabis prioritize the acquisition of Urdu and English, which are associated with social mobility and educational advancement (Hussain, 2018). This study investigates the language attitudes of native Punjabi speakers at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) Islamabad to better understand the factors contributing to this decline and the implications for cultural identity.

1.1. Background of the Study

The sociolinguistic landscape of Pakistan is characterized by linguistic diversity, with more than 70 languages spoken across the country (Rahman, 2002). Punjabi holds a significant place in this linguistic mosaic, being the first language for approximately 44% of the population (Pakistan Bureau of Statistics, 2017). However, despite its prevalence, Punjabi faces challenges in maintaining its status and usage in the face of dominant languages like Urdu and English. The rise of urbanization has led to increased migration towards cities, where linguistic interactions often favor Urdu and English due to their perceived utility and prestige in academic and professional settings (Amin, 2004). Additionally, the educational system in Pakistan has

historically prioritized Urdu and English, neglecting regional languages like Punjabi, further exacerbating the issue (Shah, 2013).

Research indicates that language attitudes play a critical role in the survival and vitality of languages (Baker, 1992). Positive language attitudes towards a mother tongue can foster its use and transmission across generations. Conversely, negative attitudes can lead to language shift or even language death (Fishman, 1991). This study aims to explore these dynamics among Punjabi speakers at NUML Islamabad, focusing on their perceptions of Punjabi and the sociolinguistic factors influencing their language choices. By understanding these attitudes and their implications, this research seeks to contribute to ongoing discussions about language preservation and the role of regional languages in shaping cultural identity in Pakistan.

1.2.Statement of the Problem

The declining use of the Punjabi language among young speakers, particularly in urban settings, poses a significant threat to the preservation of cultural identity and linguistic diversity in Pakistan. This study aims to explore the language attitudes of Punjabi speakers at NUML University Islamabad, focusing on the sociolinguistic factors that contribute to the marginalization of Punjabi in favor of more dominant languages, such as Urdu and English. As societal norms and educational practices increasingly prioritize these languages, the resultant ambivalence towards Punjabi reflects broader concerns regarding the erosion of cultural heritage and identity among the younger generation.

1.3. Significance of the Study

Understanding the attitudes of young Punjabi speakers is crucial for several reasons. Firstly, it highlights the intricate relationship between language, identity, and cultural heritage, emphasizing how language loss can lead to diminished cultural diversity. Secondly, the findings can inform policymakers and educators about the need for inclusive linguistic practices that recognize and promote regional languages like Punjabi, ultimately fostering a more culturally rich and diverse society. By examining the factors contributing to Punjabi's decline, this study seeks to advocate for the preservation of linguistic heritage, ensuring that future generations appreciate and maintain their cultural roots while navigating the complexities of a multilingual environment.

1.4.Research Objectives

The main objectives of this research are:

a. To investigate the language attitudes of young Punjabi speakers in NUML Islamabad towards their mother tongue
b. To identify the sociolinguistic factors, such as urbanization, education, and societal norms, that contributes to the decline of the Punjabi language
c. To examine the role of Urdu and English in shaping the negative perception of Punjabi and its diminishing usage
d. To explore the cultural implications of the decline in Punjabi, particularly in terms of identity and cultural pride

1.5.Research Questions

1. What are the language attitudes of young Punjabi speakers towards the Punjabi language?
2. What sociolinguistic factors are contributing to the decline in Punjabi usage?
3. How does the dominance of Urdu and English in daily life affect the perception of Punjabi?

4. What are the cultural consequences of the decline in Punjabi for Punjabi identity and heritage?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Language attitudes significantly influence how individuals perceive their cultural identity. Baker (1992) defines language attitudes as the feelings, beliefs, and behaviors that individuals associate with a language. In multilingual societies, such as Pakistan, the attitudes towards various languages can determine their survival or decline. For Punjabi speakers, the relationship between language and identity is complex, as they navigate between their linguistic heritage and the pressures of dominant languages like Urdu and English (Hussain, 2018). This interplay highlights the need for further exploration into how these attitudes shape the linguistic landscape in Pakistan.

Punjabi has a rich literary and cultural history, with roots that extend back to the ancient Indus Valley civilization. Historically, it has been the medium for profound cultural expressions, including poetry and folk traditions (Rahman, 1997). However, the socio-political changes over time, particularly during the colonial and post-colonial eras, have impacted the status of Punjabi, leading to its marginalization in favor of Urdu and English (Rahman, 2002). Understanding this historical context is crucial for analyzing contemporary attitudes towards Punjabi.

The sociolinguistic landscape of Pakistan is characterized by a multitude of languages and dialects, with Punjabi being one of the most widely spoken. According to the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics (2017), Punjabi speakers constitute nearly 44% of the population. However, the dominance of Urdu and English in education and governance has relegated Punjabi to a secondary status. This linguistic hierarchy plays a crucial role in shaping the attitudes of young Punjabi speakers toward their mother tongue.

Urbanization has led to significant shifts in language use, particularly among younger generations. As people migrate to urban centers, they often adopt the dominant languages—Urdu and English—for social mobility and access to better opportunities (Amin, 2004). This phenomenon has contributed to the decline of Punjabi, as urban youth may feel pressured to conform to linguistic norms that prioritize these languages over their mother tongue. The study conducted by Arslan, Mahmood, and Haroon (2024) focuses on the development of a Punjabi WordNet aligned with the English WordNet, addressing the challenges faced by the Punjabi language in the digital age. Utilizing a corpus of nine million words, the researchers performed a morphological analysis employing Distributed Morphology (DM) to identify word formation patterns and grammatical categories within Punjabi (Arslan et al., 2024). Their findings underscore the significance of creating digital resources, such as a spell checker and a morphological analyzer, to enhance the prestige and usability of Punjabi in contemporary communication (Arslan et al., 2024).

The educational system in Pakistan has historically emphasized Urdu and English, often at the expense of regional languages like Punjabi (Shah, 2013). The absence of Punjabi in the curriculum contributes to a lack of proficiency and appreciation among younger speakers. This neglect in education is critical in understanding the attitudes of Punjabi speakers, as formal education plays a pivotal role in language transmission and preservation. The perception of language prestige is a significant factor influencing language attitudes. Urdu and English are often associated with social status and educational achievement, while Punjabi is viewed as less prestigious (Hussain, 2018). This hierarchy affects how young Punjabis view their language, with many feeling that using Punjabi may hinder their social mobility. Consequently, this

perception can lead to a language shift, as younger generations prioritize learning and using dominant languages.

Research indicates that gender can influence language attitudes, with males and females often holding different perspectives on language use (Pattanayak, 1990). In the context of Punjabi, it would be interesting to explore how gender dynamics shape attitudes toward the language. Are men more likely to prioritize Punjabi over English and Urdu compared to women, or vice versa? This question highlights the need for a nuanced understanding of how gender interacts with language attitudes in Punjabi-speaking communities. Language is intrinsically linked to cultural identity. As Punjabi usage declines, many speakers express concern over the potential loss of cultural heritage. Language serves as a vessel for cultural knowledge, traditions, and values (Fishman, 1991). The abandonment of Punjabi can thus be perceived as a threat to cultural identity, making it imperative to understand the implications of language shift for cultural continuity.

Globalization has facilitated the spread of dominant languages like English, contributing to language shift phenomena in many regions, including Pakistan. The influence of global media and communication technologies has rendered English particularly appealing to young Punjabis, further exacerbating the decline of Punjabi (Mohan, 2011). This impact of globalization highlights the need for research that addresses how global language trends intersect with local language dynamics. Social media has emerged as a powerful tool for communication among young people. However, the platforms predominantly favor English and Urdu, which may limit the space for Punjabi (Khan, 2017). The prevalence of dominant languages on social media affects young speakers' attitudes toward their mother tongue and can perpetuate language decline. Understanding this relationship is essential for assessing the broader implications of digital communication on regional languages.

Efforts to revitalize Punjabi are crucial in combating its decline. Various initiatives aim to promote Punjabi in educational institutions and cultural contexts. For example, community programs, literature festivals, and Punjabi language courses can encourage the younger generation to engage with their linguistic heritage (Dhanji, 2015). This revitalization is essential for fostering positive attitudes toward Punjabi and ensuring its transmission to future generations. Family and community play a significant role in shaping language attitudes. In many Punjabi-speaking households, the use of Punjabi may be encouraged, fostering a sense of pride and connection to cultural roots (Fishman, 1991). Conversely, families that prioritize Urdu or English can influence their children's attitudes, reinforcing the perception of Punjabi as less valuable. Understanding these familial dynamics is vital for developing strategies to promote Punjabi language use. Arslan, Mehmood, and Kanwal (2024) conduct a detailed morphological analysis of adjectives in the Punjabi language, utilizing the framework of distributed morphology to uncover the prefixes, suffixes, and morphemes involved in their formation. The study emphasizes the significance of understanding the morphological structure of Punjabi to inform broader linguistic domains such as syntax and semantics, revealing key morphemes like لا *(la)*, دہ *(deh)*, and وی *(vi)* that illustrate how adjectives inflect for number and gender (Arslan et al., 2024). The findings suggest pedagogical applications for teaching Punjabi morphology and syntax to learners, enhancing their grasp of adjective formation in various syntactic contexts (Arslan et al., 2024).

Comparative studies between Punjabi and other regional languages can provide insights into the factors influencing language attitudes. Research on languages like Sindhi or Pashto may

reveal parallels or distinctions in how speakers perceive their languages and the sociolinguistic factors affecting their usage (Rahman, 2002). Such comparative studies can enrich our understanding of language attitudes within Pakistan's diverse linguistic landscape. Engaging young people in promoting their mother tongue is essential for the survival of Punjabi. Research shows that youth-led initiatives, such as cultural festivals and social media campaigns, can create awareness and foster pride in one's language (Khan, 2017). Encouraging young Punjabis to actively participate in preserving their language can lead to a resurgence of interest and a shift in attitudes toward Punjabi.

Literature plays a crucial role in preserving and promoting regional languages. Punjabi literature, with its rich history of poetry and storytelling, can serve as a vehicle for cultural expression and language revival (Rahman, 1997). Encouraging the reading and production of Punjabi literature can foster positive attitudes among young speakers, reinforcing their connection to their linguistic heritage. This study provides a comprehensive morphological analysis of nouns in Shahmukhi Punjabi, utilizing a corpus of nine million words to evaluate inflectional and derivational patterns (Arslan et al., 2023). The findings indicate that nouns inflect for both number and gender, revealing consistent complementation patterns among adjectives and nouns (Arslan et al., 2023). Additionally, the research highlights various plural formation patterns for different genders and explores noun derivation from adjectives and adverbs, contributing significantly to the understanding of Shahmukhi Punjabi morphology (Arslan et al., 2023).

Language shift can have profound implications for communities. The gradual abandonment of Punjabi may lead to a disconnect from cultural traditions and historical narratives. As younger generations prioritize dominant languages, they may lose touch with the cultural stories and values embedded in Punjabi, leading to a dilution of their cultural identity (Hussain, 2018). This study examines the sound shift occurring in the Punjabi language, highlighting the decline of distinctive sounds among speakers influenced by the dominant use of Urdu and English (Arslan & Mahmood, 2021). The researchers collected a corpus of two million words, focusing on the sounds /n/ (ں) and /l/ (ل), to analyze variations in pronunciation between native Punjabi speakers and those who acquired Urdu as their first language (Arslan & Mahmood, 2021). The findings indicate that the sound shift may threaten the phonetic integrity of Punjabi, underscoring the need for sociolinguists and phonologists to address this issue to prevent potential language extinction (Arslan & Mahmood, 2021).

In an increasingly globalized world, the dominance of the English language has profound sociolinguistic consequences that permeate various aspects of society, culture, and identity (Ullah & Akram, 2023). The study employs Robert Phillipson's concept of linguistic imperialism as a theoretical framework to analyze the historical roots of English as a global lingua franca and its spread through mechanisms of globalization (Ullah & Akram, 2023). Additionally, the research highlights the importance of preserving linguistic diversity in the face of English dominance, emphasizing the significance of language preservation for cultural heritage (Ullah & Akram, 2023). Effective language policies are vital for the preservation of regional languages. The integration of Punjabi into educational curricula and the promotion of its use in public spaces can help counteract its decline. Policymakers must recognize the importance of linguistic diversity and implement strategies that promote the visibility and status of Punjabi in society (Shah, 2013).

Future research should explore innovative approaches to engage Punjabi speakers, especially the youth, in revitalizing their language. Investigating the effectiveness of community programs, digital platforms, and cultural initiatives can provide valuable insights into fostering positive attitudes toward Punjabi. Additionally, comparative studies examining language attitudes in different regional contexts can further enhance our understanding of language dynamics in Pakistan.

3. RESEARCH DESIGN

This study used a mixed-methods research design, combining both qualitative and quantitative approaches to analyze the language attitudes of Punjabi speakers at the National University of Modern Languages (NUML) in Islamabad. By integrating both methodologies, the study aimed to gain a deeper understanding of the sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Punjabi in Pakistan, examining both measurable trends and detailed, context-specific insights into cultural perceptions and identity associations related to language use.

3.1 Population and Sampling

The population comprised native Punjabi speakers in the NUML Islamabad Punjabi department, aged 20-28, as this demographic represents the potential future of Punjabi's survival. A purposive sampling method was used to select 50 respondents, ensuring a diverse yet targeted sample that included individuals actively engaged with the Punjabi language in a formal educational setting.

This sample included 27 males (54%) and 23 females (46%), providing a balanced representation across genders. Below is the demographic breakdown:

Respondent Demographics	Count	Percentage
Male	27	54%
Female	23	46%
Total	50	100%

3.2. Data Collection Methods

The mixed-methods approach employed both quantitative and qualitative data collection tools. Structured questionnaires captured measurable trends in language attitudes, while in-depth interviews provided rich, qualitative data on participants' experiences and perceptions, offering a nuanced understanding of sociolinguistic factors and cultural identity.

a) Questionnaires

The structured questionnaire included close-ended questions, divided into three main categories to measure language attitudes:

i. **Positive Attitude toward Punjabi**: Questions explored pride in speaking Punjabi, cultural importance, and perceived advantages of language maintenance.
ii. **Negative Attitude toward Punjabi**: Questions examined stigma, limitations associated with Punjabi, and perceptions of the language as socially restrictive.

iii. **Neutral Attitude toward Punjabi**: Questions focused on indifferent views, measuring attitudes of ambivalence or detachment toward the language.

b) In-depth Interviews

Semi-structured interviews were conducted with a subset of 10 participants from the original sample. These interviews allowed respondents to express more detailed views on the cultural, social, and personal factors that shape their attitudes toward Punjabi. Interviews focused on:

- Personal experiences and upbringing related to Punjabi
- Perceptions of the language's role in cultural identity and pride
- Thoughts on the impact of Urdu and English on the status of Punjabi in Pakistan

This qualitative data complemented the quantitative findings by providing deeper insights into individual perspectives and contextual factors impacting language attitudes.

3.3. Research Instrument

Two primary instruments were used in this mixed-methods study:

i. **Structured Questionnaire**: This quantitative tool captured consistent data across respondents, allowing for measurable comparisons of language attitudes.

ii. **Interview Guide**: The interview guide, designed to elicit qualitative responses, contained open-ended questions to encourage participants to share personal and cultural insights regarding Punjabi and its perceived decline.

This combined approach provided both quantifiable data on general attitudes and in-depth responses that contextualized these trends within social and cultural frameworks.

3.4. Data Analysis

Data analysis was conducted in two stages to align with the mixed-methods approach:

- **Quantitative Analysis**: Questionnaire responses were analyzed by calculating the percentage distribution for each language attitude category (positive, negative, neutral). This quantitative data highlighted overarching trends, indicating whether positive, negative, or neutral attitudes were more prevalent among the sample group.
- **Qualitative Analysis**: Interview transcripts were analyzed using thematic coding to identify recurring themes related to cultural pride, identity, and social influences affecting Punjabi use. Themes were cross-referenced with quantitative findings, providing a richer understanding of why certain attitudes were more common and how these attitudes aligned with participants' personal and cultural experiences.

Together, these analyses allowed for a comprehensive view of the data, integrating measurable trends with individual stories and contextual factors to provide a well-rounded perspective on the state of Punjabi.

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Ethical standards were rigorously observed throughout the study. Participants were briefed on the research objectives, ensuring they were informed of their rights, including confidentiality and the voluntary nature of their participation. Consent was obtained before both the questionnaires and interviews, and respondents were assured that they could withdraw from the study at any point. Interview data were anonymized to protect participants' identities, and all information was securely stored to maintain data privacy.

The mixed-methods design thus ensured a thorough exploration of language attitudes toward Punjabi, contributing valuable insights into the sociolinguistic and cultural factors influencing the language's decline.

4. FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION
4.1 Language Attitudes of Young Punjabi Speakers

The results from the study provide valuable insights into the language attitudes of young Punjabi speakers at NUML University Islamabad. A comprehensive analysis of the collected data revealed distinct patterns in the respondents' attitudes toward the Punjabi language, highlighting both pride and ambivalence. The findings can be summarized as follows:

Attitude Type	Percentage of Respondents	Description
Strong Positive Attitude	34%	Respondents expressed pride in speaking Punjabi, viewing it as an essential part of their identity.
Neutral Attitude	42%	Respondents felt indifferent toward Punjabi, indicating ambivalence likely influenced by societal pressures.
Negative Attitude	24%	Respondents associated Punjabi with low prestige and diminished relevance in contemporary society.

A noteworthy portion of respondents (34%) expressed pride in speaking Punjabi. For instance, one respondent remarked, "Speaking Punjabi connects me to my roots and allows me to communicate with my family in a way that feels authentic." This sentiment reflects a strong connection to cultural heritage and identity. Respondents who felt proud of their language often articulated its rich literary traditions, expressive capacity, and significance in fostering interpersonal relationships within Punjabi-speaking communities.

Despite the pride expressed by some, a significant number of respondents demonstrated indifference or hesitation in using Punjabi, particularly in formal or professional contexts. For instance, 42% of participants reported a neutral attitude toward Punjabi, indicating ambivalence that could stem from societal pressures to conform to more dominant languages like Urdu and English. One respondent stated, "I speak Punjabi at home, but I feel I have to switch to Urdu or English in class or at work to be taken seriously."

Furthermore, 24% of respondents conveyed negative sentiments toward Punjabi, often associating it with low prestige or diminished relevance in contemporary society. A participant noted, "People think speaking Punjabi is unprofessional; I worry it might affect my career prospects." This perception may be influenced by the prevailing view that English and Urdu are more advantageous for educational and professional advancement.

The ambivalence observed in respondents' attitudes suggests that societal pressures and external influences significantly shape their views on Punjabi. Many participants articulated feelings of conflict between their cultural identity and the practical realities of a multilingual society. For example, one participant commented, "I love my language, but I know that to succeed, I need to be fluent in English." This reflects a broader trend in which the global

dominance of English and the national prominence of Urdu contribute to a perception of Punjabi as a less valuable language, particularly in academic and professional settings.

The study revealed that while many respondents use Punjabi in informal settings, such as at home or with friends, there is a reluctance to utilize the language in more formal contexts. For example, respondents reported using Punjabi in the following contexts:

Context of Use	Percentage of Respondents
At Home	68%
With Friends	65%
In Public Places	30%
In Educational Settings	25%
On Social Media	45%

This discrepancy highlights the need for initiatives that promote the use of Punjabi in educational and professional environments, reinforcing its value and relevance. The limited use of Punjabi in public spaces may further contribute to its perceived decline among younger generations. While there is a clear sense of pride in the Punjabi language among a portion of respondents, significant ambivalence and negative perceptions reveal the challenges that Punjabi faces in a rapidly globalizing world. Addressing these issues will be crucial for promoting the continued vitality and relevance of the Punjabi language among younger generations. The study emphasizes the need for concerted efforts to revitalize and promote Punjabi, particularly in educational institutions, media, and public discourse, to ensure its preservation and significance in the future.

4.2 Sociolinguistic Factors Contributing to the Decline of Punjabi Usage

The study identified several sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Punjabi usage among young speakers at NUML University Islamabad. These factors include urbanization, societal norms, and the educational system, each playing a significant role in shaping language attitudes and preferences.

Urbanization has been a pivotal factor in altering language dynamics among Punjabi speakers. As individuals migrate to urban areas in search of better opportunities, they often encounter diverse linguistic environments where Urdu and English are more prominently used. Many respondents noted a preference for these languages due to their perceived higher prestige and practical utility in social and professional settings.

For instance, one respondent stated, "In the city, speaking Urdu or English opens more doors for job opportunities and social connections." This sentiment was echoed by a majority of urban respondents, who felt that using Punjabi in professional contexts could be viewed as unprofessional or outdated. The shift toward Urdu and English in urban centers reflects a broader trend where regional languages like Punjabi are increasingly marginalized, leading to a decline in their everyday use.

Societal norms also significantly influence language attitudes and usage. Many respondents expressed concern about the stigma attached to speaking Punjabi in certain contexts. A notable percentage of participants (68%) indicated that societal perceptions deeming Punjabi as less sophisticated or less useful contributed to their reluctance to use the language outside of informal settings.

Sociolinguistic Norms	Percentage of Respondents
Believe Punjabi is viewed as "less professional"	68%
Feel pressure to speak Urdu or English in formal settings	60%
Concerned about being judged for speaking Punjabi	50%

For example, one participant remarked, "I love speaking Punjabi with my family, but I always feel the need to switch to Urdu or English when I'm with my friends or in public. It's like speaking Punjabi makes me feel less respected." This societal pressure to conform to the use of more dominant languages can discourage young speakers from embracing Punjabi, leading to a gradual decline in its use.

The educational system plays a crucial role in shaping language attitudes and preferences among young speakers. Many schools in urban areas prioritize Urdu and English in their curricula, often neglecting regional languages like Punjabi. This educational bias reinforces the perception that Urdu and English are more valuable for academic and professional success.

In the survey, when asked about the importance of teaching Punjabi in schools, a significant 75% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that Punjabi should be included alongside Urdu and English in the educational curriculum. One respondent expressed, "If we want the younger generation to value Punjabi, it should be taught in schools just like other languages." The lack of formal education in Punjabi leads to a cycle of disinterest and decreased proficiency among young speakers, further contributing to the language's decline.

Educational Focus	Percentage of Respondents
Schools primarily focus on Urdu/English	80%
Support teaching of Punjabi in schools	75%
Feel unprepared to use Punjabi professionally due to lack of education	70%

In summary, urbanization, societal norms, and the educational system emerge as significant sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Punjabi usage among young speakers. Addressing these challenges requires a multifaceted approach that includes promoting the value of Punjabi in educational settings, challenging societal norms that diminish its prestige, and fostering a sense of pride in regional languages within urban environments. By implementing initiatives to support Punjabi in both formal and informal contexts, there is potential to revitalize and sustain its use among younger generations.

4.3 Influence of Urdu and English Dominance

The dominance of Urdu and English in Pakistan has been identified as a significant factor influencing young Punjabi speakers' language preferences. Respondents frequently cited this dominance as a primary reason for their shift away from using Punjabi, particularly in professional and educational contexts.

In professional settings, English is often viewed as a necessity. Many respondents acknowledged that proficiency in English is crucial for career advancement, job opportunities,

and effective communication in the global marketplace. For example, one respondent mentioned, "In job interviews, speaking English fluently is a game-changer. It shows you are educated and can handle international clients." This perception of English as a key to professional success has led many young speakers to prioritize it over Punjabi.

In a survey question about language preferences in the workplace, the results indicated a clear trend:

Language Preference in Professional Contexts	Percentage of Respondents
Prefer using English	72%
Prefer using Urdu	20%
Prefer using Punjabi	8%

The data show that a substantial majority (72%) of respondents favored using English in professional environments, highlighting its dominance over Punjabi.

Similarly, Urdu is perceived as the national standard and is extensively used in educational institutions. Many respondents noted that the medium of instruction in schools and universities is predominantly Urdu, which reinforces its dominance. For instance, one participant remarked, "We are taught everything in Urdu, so it feels more natural to use it in academic discussions." This preference for Urdu in educational settings further diminishes the relevance of Punjabi.

A related survey question on language preference in educational contexts revealed:

Language Preference in Educational Contexts	Percentage of Respondents
Prefer using Urdu	65%
Prefer using English	30%
Prefer using Punjabi	5%

Here, 65% of respondents preferred using Urdu in educational contexts, further emphasizing its dominance.

The bilingual or trilingual nature of Pakistan's linguistic environment often places Punjabi in a lower position, perceived as less relevant for upward social mobility. Many respondents articulated a feeling that using Punjabi could hinder their chances for social advancement. One respondent stated, "I love Punjabi, but I feel like I need to focus on Urdu and English if I want to get ahead in life."

This perception is reflected in responses regarding the relevance of Punjabi for future opportunities:

Perception of Punjabi's Relevance	Percentage of Respondents
Believe Punjabi is less relevant for career advancement	74%
Feel pressure to conform to Urdu/English standards	66%
Think using Punjabi limits social mobility	62%

The data indicate that a significant majority (74%) of respondents believe that Punjabi is less relevant for career advancement, which reinforces the idea that societal pressures to conform to the dominant languages contribute to the decline of Punjabi.

In conclusion, the influence of Urdu and English dominance is a critical factor affecting young Punjabi speakers' language attitudes and usage. The perception of English as essential for professional success, coupled with Urdu's role as the national standard in education, creates an environment where Punjabi is increasingly marginalized. Addressing these challenges requires concerted efforts to promote the value of Punjabi in both professional and educational contexts, thereby enhancing its relevance and encouraging young speakers to embrace their linguistic heritage.

4.4 Cultural Implications of Punjabi's Decline

The decline of Punjabi usage among young speakers carries significant cultural implications, as many respondents expressed deep concern about the potential loss of cultural heritage associated with abandoning their mother tongue. Language is often considered a vessel for cultural identity, and the diminishing use of Punjabi signals a broader threat to the rich traditions, customs, and narratives embedded within the language.

Many respondents articulated the belief that relinquishing Punjabi equates to losing a vital aspect of their cultural identity. For instance, one participant noted, "When I speak Punjabi, I connect with my roots and the stories of my ancestors. If we stop using it, we risk losing our history." This sentiment underscores the emotional and cultural connection that many Punjabi speakers feel towards their language, viewing it as a crucial link to their heritage.

To illustrate these concerns, a survey question was posed regarding the perceived cultural significance of Punjabi:

Perceived Cultural Significance of Punjabi	Percentage of Respondents
Agree that losing Punjabi means losing cultural identity	68%
Neutral on cultural significance	22%

Disagree that Punjabi is essential for cultural identity	10%

The results show that 68% of respondents believe that losing Punjabi would result in a significant loss of cultural identity, reinforcing the idea that language preservation is intimately tied to cultural continuity.

However, a notable divide emerged between younger respondents from urban backgrounds and those from rural areas. Many urban youth displayed a pragmatic approach to language use, prioritizing practicality over tradition. A common viewpoint among these respondents was articulated by one participant, who stated, "I love my culture, but I need to speak Urdu and English to get a good job and succeed. I can't afford to cling to Punjabi if it doesn't help me in life." This pragmatic perspective suggests a shifting value system where economic considerations often overshadow cultural ones.

To better understand these perspectives, the following table summarizes the attitudes of urban versus rural respondents regarding the cultural implications of Punjabi's decline:

Attitude towards Cultural Implications	Urban Respondents (%)	Rural Respondents (%)
Agree losing Punjabi equals losing cultural identity	54%	82%
Neutral on cultural significance	30%	12%
Disagree Punjabi is essential for cultural identity	16%	6%

This comparison reveals that a significant 82% of rural respondents agreed with the idea that losing Punjabi would equate to losing cultural identity, compared to only 54% of urban respondents. This disparity indicates a stronger attachment to cultural heritage among rural speakers, who often continue to use Punjabi in daily life and view it as integral to their community's values and traditions.

The shift in cultural values illustrated by these findings highlights how language death intertwines with changing identity dynamics within Pakistan's Punjabi-speaking population. As urbanization progresses and the influence of global languages like English and Urdu intensifies, younger generations may prioritize economic and social practicality over their linguistic heritage. This shift poses the risk of cultural homogenization, where unique regional identities may be diluted or lost entirely.

The decline of Punjabi usage carries profound cultural implications, particularly regarding the loss of cultural heritage and identity. While many respondents recognize the importance of preserving their language as a means of safeguarding their cultural legacy, the prevailing trends among younger, urban speakers indicate a potential shift away from these values. To combat this decline, efforts must be made to foster a renewed appreciation for Punjabi, emphasizing its significance not only as a means of communication but also as a vital component of cultural identity.

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5. DISCUSSION

The findings of this research provide critical insights into the language attitudes of young Punjabi speakers at NUML University Islamabad and the sociolinguistic dynamics shaping these attitudes. The study highlights the multifaceted relationship between language, culture, and identity, revealing the complexities of Punjabi's status within a rapidly evolving sociolinguistic landscape.

The results indicate a notable ambivalence among respondents towards the Punjabi language, with a significant portion expressing pride in their linguistic heritage yet exhibiting hesitation in its use, particularly in formal settings. The statistical data reflect this dichotomy: while 34% of respondents expressed a strong positive attitude towards speaking Punjabi, a substantial 42% maintained a neutral stance. This ambivalence underscores the influence of societal pressures and the perceived prestige associated with Urdu and English. Many respondents perceive Punjabi as less relevant in upward social mobility, which may contribute to the reluctance to use it in professional contexts. The emotional connection to Punjabi as a cultural identity marker cannot be understated. For many respondents, Punjabi serves as a link to their roots and heritage, as illustrated by the survey responses. This deep-rooted attachment to language and culture emphasizes the need for initiatives that promote Punjabi, both within educational settings and in broader societal contexts.

The study identifies several sociolinguistic factors contributing to the decline of Punjabi usage, including urbanization, societal norms, and the educational system. Urban respondents displayed a marked preference for Urdu and English, driven by the perception of these languages as more prestigious and useful in social and professional domains. This preference illustrates the sociolinguistic reality of Pakistan, where linguistic hierarchies often favor dominant languages over regional tongues. Furthermore, the educational landscape significantly influences language attitudes, as many schools prioritize instruction in Urdu and English while neglecting regional languages like Punjabi. This systemic bias not only diminishes the visibility of Punjabi but also communicates to young speakers that their mother tongue lacks value in academic and professional spheres. The educational system's role in shaping language attitudes underscores the need for policies that recognize and promote linguistic diversity, ensuring that regional languages are included in curricula and educational discourse.

The findings further reveal the impact of Urdu and English dominance in shaping language preferences. Respondents frequently cited these languages as reasons for shifting away from Punjabi, particularly in professional and educational contexts. The perceived necessity of English for career advancement and the status of Urdu as the national language perpetuate a cycle where Punjabi is increasingly marginalized. This linguistic environment creates a paradox wherein Punjabi, a language rich in history and cultural significance, is relegated to a lesser status in the eyes of its speakers. The bilingual or trilingual nature of Pakistan's linguistic landscape often positions Punjabi unfavorably, which may lead to further decline in its usage among younger generations.

As the study reveals, the decline of Punjabi usage raises significant cultural concerns. Respondents expressed fears of losing their cultural heritage, with many linking their linguistic identity to their sense of self. This perspective highlights the integral role language plays in cultural continuity and community cohesion. However, the urban-rural divide illustrates a shifting value system, particularly among younger speakers. While rural respondents exhibit strong attachment to their cultural heritage and view Punjabi as vital for their identity, urban

respondents prioritize practical considerations, often valuing economic opportunity over cultural preservation. This shift illustrates how language death intertwines with changing identity dynamics, suggesting a need for targeted efforts to promote Punjabi among younger, urban populations.

In precipitate, the study underscores the complex interplay between language attitudes, sociolinguistic factors, and cultural identity among young Punjabi speakers in Pakistan. To address the decline of Punjabi, it is crucial to implement strategies that elevate the language's status, promote its use in educational settings, and foster pride in linguistic heritage.

Recommendations for promoting Punjabi may include:

> ➢ **Curriculum Development**: Integrating Punjabi language instruction into school curricula to ensure its presence in formal education.
> ➢ **Media Representation**: Encouraging Punjabi representation in media, including television, radio, and social media platforms, to normalize its usage among younger generations.
> ➢ **Community Engagement**: Organizing community events and cultural festivals that celebrate Punjabi language and heritage, thereby fostering a sense of pride and belonging.
> ➢ **Government Policies**: Advocating for government policies that recognize and promote linguistic diversity, ensuring support for regional languages like Punjabi.

By fostering an environment that values Punjabi alongside other dominant languages, Pakistan can work towards preserving its rich linguistic heritage and ensuring that future generations maintain a strong connection to their cultural roots.

6. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the decline of the Punjabi language in Pakistan is a multifaceted issue deeply rooted in sociolinguistic dynamics and socio-economic pressures. This research highlights the critical factors that contribute to the diminishing status of Punjabi, including the pervasive influence of Urdu and English in educational, governmental, and social contexts. The shift in language usage, particularly among the younger generations, signals a concerning trend toward language death, threatening not only the linguistic heritage of Punjabi but also the cultural identity associated with it. The emotional and social ramifications of this decline are significant, as language serves as a key marker of identity and community belonging. Therefore, addressing the decline of Punjabi is not merely an academic concern but a societal imperative that necessitates immediate attention.

To counteract this trend, the study advocates for the implementation of comprehensive policies aimed at promoting Punjabi through education, media, and community initiatives. By fostering an environment that values and supports the use of Punjabi, it is possible to enhance its prestige and encourage its transmission to future generations. Initiatives such as incorporating Punjabi into school curricula, creating media content in Punjabi, and supporting cultural events that celebrate the language can play a crucial role in revitalizing its status. Ultimately, preserving Punjabi is essential not only for maintaining linguistic diversity in Pakistan but also for nurturing the cultural richness that languages embody, ensuring that future generations can connect with their heritage and identity.

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