

The Status of Punjabi Language In The Province Of Punjab, Pakistan

Furrakh Abbas* Muhammad Kashif Jalil[†] and Zakaur Rehman[‡]

Abstract

The current research aims at exploring the status of Punjabi language in the province of Punjab. The Punjabi linguistic community has the largest population in the country with its majority concentrated in the province of Punjab. Despite being the native language of the majority, the Punjabi language finds limited and minor articulation in the lives of its native speakers. The recent issue in this regard was the issuance of notice by the famous national level private school to ban its use in school premises calling it foul language. Such initiative by the school heated up the dying debate about the status of Punjabi language and its acknowledgement at various levels. The current research investigates the status of Punjabi language in the opinion of Punjabi native speakers by using interview as a research instrument. The data was collected from a sample of 20 participants selected through purposive sample. The findings reveal that the participants expressed doubts to the need of maintaining Punjabi language as it carries no meaning to maintain Punjabi language. The participants described the lack of academic value of Punjabi and used the adjectives like dismal and miserable future to refer to Punjabi language. They argued that if serious initiatives by the government and the native speakers of Punjabi to promote Punjabi are not taken, its future seems to be in jeopardy.

Introduction

The current research aims at exploring the status of Punjabi in the province of Punjab. The Punjabi linguistic community has the largest population in the country with its majority concentrated in the province of Punjab. Despite being the native language of the majority, the Punjabi finds limited and minor articulation in the lives of its native speakers. Punjabi language is rich in literature (Singh, 2012) as well as

* Furrakh Abbas, PhD Scholar – UMT, Lahore Pakistan

[†] Muhammad Kashif Jalil, Assistant Professor, NUML, Lahore Pakistan

[‡] Zakaur Rehman, PhD Scholar – UUM, Malaysia

linguistically very rich language as one's expression with variation of tonal or written emphasis can lead to dozens of locutions and abundance of means (Zaidi, 2010) and it is also called wit-packed language.

The problem is that instead of feeling pride in using their native language, the speakers of Punjabi language feel that it is a derogatory language and should not be used in formal situations. Punjabis are illiterate in their own language and it is impossible for them to read or write their mother tongue. According to Zaidi (1990) just 2% people can read or write Punjabi. It is also a sad fact that the Punjabi native speakers have lack of reading and writing proficiencies in their mother tongue. The irony is that on one hand Punjabis are quite illiterate in their mother tongue yet they are the most literate group in the country. Zaidi (2015) refers to this situation as linguistic Schizophrenia.

There are various studies that talk about the lack of promotion of Punjabi in educational sector in Pakistan (Rahman, 2005; Asher, 2008). There is hardly any school where Punjabi is taught or promoted and neither is there any newspaper in the Punjabi language published in the country. According to Zaidi, (2015) if any journalistic venture is initiated in Punjabi language, it is short-lived. The Punjabi themselves have made no serious efforts to promote their language; consequently they have unconsciously undermined their mother tongue (Zaidi, 2010). Unfortunately, there is widespread culture-shame about Punjabi language. The educated parents prefer to speak Urdu rather than Punjabi with their children. Punjabi language is also considered indecent and vulgar language by some, no other than Punjabis themselves again. The only use that Punjabi fits in is its use for cracking jokes and informal communication (Zaidi, 2010). Such linguistic attitude of the Punjabi speakers can also be attributed to the language policies that have not justified the promotion of indigenous languages. The language policies of Pakistan (Language Policy, 1973, 1989, 2007, 2009) have been designed as to promotion of Urdu at the cost of other indigenous languages.

The recent issue in this regard was the issuance of notice by the famous national level private school (October 2016) to ban its use in school premises calling it foul language. This notice resulted in a lot of activism by the activists of the Punjabi language as they raised a lot of protest and agitation to this act. Certain editorials were published by the analysts and critics on the emerging issues and they highlighted the need to show solidarity to Punjabi as a language and to promote it. Siddiquee (2016) urged the need to explore the language attitude of the Punjabi

native speakers to dissect the social realities which has resulted in such devaluation of the Punjabi language. The current study focuses on the situation from the perspective of Punjabi native speakers.

Literature Review

Among the research conducted on the status and the language attitude of Punjabi speakers, Mansoor (1993) is very notable. Results of the study indicated negative attitude of participants towards Punjabi language and Punjabi-speaking community. She presents the reasons of such a language shift as the low ethnolinguistic vitality of the Punjabi language community, lack of official and educational use of the language and institutional support especially of media. According to Abbas Zaidi (2010), Punjabi has never been allowed to grow in any political era as there has been very little debate on Punjabi culture in Pakistan. Akram and Yasmeen in 2011 showed that the people have more positive attitudes towards English language as compared to Punjabi language. Their study has confirmed low economic, social and educational value of Punjabi language. The study also revealed stereotyped notions getting attached to Punjabi language such as Punjabi was the language of illiterate and indecent people.

Nazir, Aftab and Saeed (2013) examined the linguistic scenario of Punjabi in Sargodha and the social mechanism which poses threat to the sustainability of Punjabi on a broader scale. The study indicates that Punjabi speakers are not loyal to their language. Punjabi language is declining day by day and hence, a threat of existence is faced by Punjabi as the majority of the Punjabi speakers are shifting their loyalties towards Urdu. A very recent research conducted by Gilani and Mahmood (2014) has also validated the previous researches done by Akram and Yasmeen (2011) and Nazir et. al (2013) i.e. the negative attitude of Punjabis towards their own language. The study has indicated that a language shift has been taking place in Pakistan as Punjabi language is shifting towards Urdu. Gilani and Mahmood (2014) draws the conclusion that Punjabi is a tolerated language as it is neither promoted nor proscribed.

The recent of the researches on the language attitude of Punjabi speakers is the doctoral research of John (2015). The findings reveal that Punjabi language does not find much use in the lives of Punjabi speakers. The respondents still consider the Punjabi language a part of their identity but held mixed opinion about the status of Punjabi as some were convinced about its high status while other said that it is low. Some of these researches relevant to the topic hypothesize that the native speakers

of Punjabi look down upon their language. Instead of feeling pride in speaking their native language, they feel that it's a derogatory language and should not be used in formal situations. This theorizes the need to conduct the research to analyze the language attitude of the speakers of Punjabi to find out the ground realities by collecting empirical data from the speakers in a linguistically competitive environment. This research will contribute to a better understanding of the situation and identification of the factors that have led to the lesser use of Punjabi language by its speakers.

Research Methodology

The current research is qualitative in nature and employs interview as a data collection method from the participants of the study. Thus, in order to explore the status of Punjabi language in the province of Punjab, an interview protocol was designed. Since the study was delimited to the opinion of the educated youth, the inclusion criterion was that the participants were university students within the age range of 20 to 35 years. A sample of 20 participants from four universities (two public and two private) was selected using purpose sampling technique. Keeping in view the equal representation criteria, 5 participants from each university were selected. The data collection was personally administered by the researchers. Since the research aimed to explore the language attitude towards Punjabi, all the participants who expressed their opinion were the native speakers of Punjabi language. The research instrument was validated by using expert validity criteria. A panel of four socio linguists participated in the process of validation. The suggestions and improvements recommended by the experts were incorporated and the interview protocol was finalized. The final version of semi structured interview protocol comprised questions on the aspects like the importance of the language, perceptions about its speakers, cross linguistic influences, maintenance of that language, parents reaction to its use, the academic value of the language and the future of that language.

Results And Discussion

The interview protocol required the respondents to express their opinion on various questions related to Punjabi language. These questions were related to the themes of instrumental and integrative value of the Punjabi language, the perceptions about the users of Punjabi language, the issue of maintenance and preservation of Punjabi language, its academic value,

the linguistic transformations taking place in Punjabi and the future of Punjabi language.

In response to the question related to the importance of Punjabi language, the participants expressed doubts about the importance and utility of Punjabi language. They thought that Punjabi is of no use and it does not have any effect on their career or anywhere in their life. Some of the views expressed by the participants are:

- ⊆ The issue is that Punjabi is considered the language of the poor class and it is not given any status. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi is the regional language, it does not have any international scope, that's why there is no use of Punjabi language. ⊇

The participants contended that Punjabi has no standard or place in the lives of Punjabi native speakers and it is not a prestigious language. This is also the reason that the people do not feel pride in using it; they are rather ashamed of using it. The use of Punjabi has been constrained to some limited informal and insignificant purposes. The participants expressed that

- ⊆ It (Punjabi) would be only useful if it was a prestigious language but in the current scenario it does not seem to have any use. ⊇
- ⊆ It seems as if the Punjabi community feels ashamed of using their mother tongue which is quite strange. ⊇
- ⊆ In our context and culture, we have started considering it inferior and we feel embarrassed when using Punjabi language. ⊇

There were a few interviews where the participants held positive opinion about Punjabi language but within certain constraints. Those who talked about the importance of Punjabi language related it to culture and the rich tradition of Punjabi literature. The participants exhibited their views as:

- ⊆ Punjabi is a rich ancient language with rich literature and folklores. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi is very important to understand culture and poetry. It is also helpful in understanding history. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi language is rich in folk literature and culture. ⊇

So far as the perceptions about the speakers of Punjabi were concerned, the participants thought that they were considered illiterate as well as

Paindoos. There was a sense of inferiority attached to Punjabi language and its speakers as expressed in the views of the participants of the study:

- ⊆ The people who speak Punjabi are considered illiterate in our society. ⊇
- ⊆ The people who speak Punjabi are the people who live in the villages. ⊇
- ⊆ They are generally considered less educated and sometime uncivilized. ⊇

There were some participants who appreciated the people who speak Punjabi language. They thought that speaking mother tongue gives you sense of identity and you feel attached to your roots. It is also an act of promoting your language and your culture. The participants showed their positivity as:

- ⊆ They (those who speak Punjabi language) are great people as they stick to their norms and language. ⊇
- ⊆ They know the real worth of their language and have a sense of identity in them. ⊇
- ⊆ They are good people because they are showing a sense of attachment to their culture. ⊇

With reference to the maintenance and preservation of Punjabi language, the participants expressed doubts to the need of maintaining Punjabi language as it carries no meaning to maintain Punjabi language. The difficulties to maintain it are enormous because its speakers are ashamed of using it. The participants voiced their opinion as:

- ⊆ There is no need to maintain of Punjabi language rather national identity should be focused. ⊇
- ⊆ I think there is no need to maintain Punjabi language in this global village. ⊇
- ⊆ People feel shame in speaking Punjabi language. ⊇

The participants who expressed the need to maintain Punjabi language were those who saw a clear relationship between Punjabi language and their identity. The participants related the issue of maintaining and preserving the Punjabi language to rich tradition of Punjabi literature. In this regard, the legendary works like HeerRanjah, Kalam e Bahu and the poetry of Bulleh Shah etc were mentioned. They agreed that there are serious difficulties in maintaining and preserving Punjabi language. They were convinced that the Punjabi language should be preserved whatever the difficulty or the cost be. The participants asserted themselves saying that:

- ⊆ There is no identity without language so we cannot maintain the Punjabi identity if Punjabi is no more. ⊇
- ⊆ The identity can be maintained by promoting Punjabi language only. ⊇
- ⊆ The identity of Punjabi community is directly related to its use in the society otherwise it will result a loss in society. ⊇

The need to maintain and preserve Punjabi language has been created as a result of its decreasing use under the influence of Urdu and English. The people consider that English is an international language while Urdu is a language used widely in the whole country. So the importance of Punjabi is not visibly observed by the people as the participants spoke:

- ⊆ In the presence of a strong language like English and the national language Urdu, it becomes difficult for Punjabi to survive. ⊇
- ⊆ In this linguistically competitive environment it has becomes to difficult Punjabi language. ⊇

The participant believed that in order to preserve and maintain Punjabi language there is a need to hold seminars, to create awareness about Punjabi culture and to make it a compulsory subject in education. The implementation of Punjabi language in education sector will result in the promotion in Punjabi language and its ownership. The participants gave suggestions like:

- ⊆ To promote Punjabi language, we have to adopt it and Punjabi department should be created in our education institutes. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi should be used as medium of education and government should introduce the policy of Punjabi education as compulsory subject. ⊇
- ⊆ There is a need to create awareness among the Punjabi community by holding seminars. ⊇

With reference to the impact of Urdu and English on the Punjabi language and culture the participants said that the Punjabi has not remained pure. Many linguistic transformations have taken place in Punjabi language imperceptibly. The Punjabi language has lost its purity and has become adulterated. There are many phonological and lexical changes that have taken place. Referring to the linguistic influences on Punjabi, the participants said:

- ⊆ The impact is that Punjabi had not remained pure under the influence of English and Urdu. ⊇

- ⊆ Linguistic influence is also there that many words from Urdu and English have penetrated in to Punjabi language. The Punjabi language has lost its essence and purity as a result. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi is changed under the influence of Urdu and English. Its vocabulary and structure have changed. ⊇

The participants argued that the people prefer to use either Urdu or English instead of Punjabi language. They also related it to the ever decreasing use of Punjabi in our community. The value of Punjabi language has gone seriously down in the views of the participants as they expressed their views as:

- ⊆ The Punjabi language has almost finished because of English and Urdu. It is on the verge of death. ⊇
- ⊆ One influence is that coexistence of all these languages have resulted in ranking of these languages. ⊇
- ⊆ The situation is that most of the people, student and teacher community do not use Punjabi. The parents do not teach their children Punjabi. ⊇
- ⊆ People prefer to speak Urdu or English instead of Punjabi nowadays for prestige. ⊇

With reference to the academic value of Punjabi language, the participants were not very affirmative. The participants described the lack of academic value of Punjabi and related it to lack of its market value and scope. They did not feel the need to teach it or to implement it in the educational sector. This lack of value of Punjabi is expressed as:

- ⊆ Punjabi as a subject is not practical so preference must be given to Urdu and English. ⊇
- ⊆ Punjabi is not used academically and is of no academic use. ⊇
- ⊆ There are no such reasons except to learn it in order to communicate with your grandparents like Dada, Dadi, Nana, Nani etc. ⊇

Those participants who favored the teaching of Punjabi language related it to cultural knowledge and rich literary tradition of Punjabi language. These participants called it a rich ancient language and stressed its teaching as it is the language of the majority in Pakistan. They told that:

- ⊆ In order to preserve LokVirsa and to understand the message of Punjabi Sufi tradition which is rich part of culture knowledge, Punjabi must be studied. ⊇
- ⊆ The only reason I would like to study Punjabi language is to understand the rich Punjabi literary tradition. ⊇
- ⊆ The study of Punjabi language will help me understand the local folklores, the rich Punjabi heritage and the history of the language and my people. ⊇

The participants who raised their voices to claim better academic value of Punjabi language discussed the issue of identity and solidarity in this respect. They believed that there is a need to assert the academic value of Punjabi language by incorporating it in the domain of education. They feared that if it is not taught, it will die. The participants regretted this situation in expressions like:

- ⊆ The non-teaching and non-use of Punjabi language will lead to its extinction. ⊇
- ⊆ I think we should study this language so that it may not vanish from society one day. ⊇
- ⊆ Since the statistics show that the people are using Punjabi less and less, there is a dire need to teach Punjabi language. ⊇

To the future of Punjabi language, the participants were not optimistic; they used the adjectives like dismal and miserable future to refer to Punjabi language. They assessed the current situation and described that the use of Punjabi is on decline. If serious initiatives to promote Punjabi are not taken, it will die out slowly as per perceived by the participants. The participants expressed their apprehensions as:

- ⊆ Punjabi is going to be obsolete and the future of Punjabi is in danger. ⊇
- ⊆ It has a dismal future or no future as with the rapid increase instead of Urdu and English, Punjabi is becoming an endangered language. ⊇
- ⊆ There seems to be serious doubts as to the future of the Punjabi language with the presence of Urdu and English language, this language is losing its importance and its recognition. It has gone in oblivion. ⊇

Being the native speaker of Punjabi language, the participant showed some solidarity by adding that the future of Punjabi is concentrated in the belief system of its speakers. They said that if Punjabi has to secure its

future, its speakers must take up the responsibility. The participants expressed their opinion as:

- ⊆ If the speakers start believing that Punjabi is a good language, they will start using it and giving it honour and this may improve the prospects of Punjabi language. ⊇
- ⊆ If you give privilege to your language it will become your identity. Otherwise if we keep humiliating this language, it will ultimately become extinct. ⊇
- ⊆ For the time being, it seems to have no future until and unless serious efforts are taken in this regard. ⊇
- ⊆ We cannot be sure about its positive future unless we start using and promoting it. The adoption of Punjabi as the national language or giving it the status of official language will be positive step in this regard. ⊇

Conclusion

It can be concluded from the study that the Punjabi speakers have started believing that the people who use Punjabi language are illiterate and belong to rural areas. Thus, under the influence of Urdu and English, the use of Punjabi is on decline which may ultimately lead to a situation of language shift. The Punjabi native speakers hold quite negative attitude towards their mother tongue as they feel the least need to maintain and preserve their language. The only motivation to preserve their language was created because of the rich mystic and romantic tradition of Punjabi literature. The respondents expressed serious doubts as to the future of Punjabi language and unless the speakers of this language do not take serious initiatives to promote it, its future seems to be in jeopardy.

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