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**The Decline of the Punjabi Language in Pakistan:  
Sociolinguistic, Educational, and Digital Factors Among  
Younger Speakers**



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**Abstract**

This paper will look into the degradation of the Punjabi language in Pakistan by looking at the sociolinguistic, educational, and digital influences that alienate the language in the minds of younger generation speakers. The study reveals that language preferences are influenced by social prestige, power systems, and poor intergenerational transmission. These trends are examples of larger social inequalities as opposed to mere language abandonment. Based on the mixed-method research design, comprising surveys and digital discourse analysis of IIUI students, the authors discover that Urdu and English are perceived as high-status languages, but Punjabi is commonly perceived as informal or joking in the online community. Using the Theory of Language Shift by Fishman (1991) and the Theory of Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu (1991), the study reveals that language preferences are influenced by social prestige, power systems, and poor intergenerational transmission. Even though the Punjabi language is popular, it has little academic, professional, and digital significance, decreasing its upward mobility. The paper gives special emphasis on the importance of more effective educational inclusion, digital representation, and institutional support to promote the symbolic value of Punjabi and stimulate the use of this language.

**Key Words:** Punjabi Language Shift, India, language shift, linguistic capital, sociolinguistic attitudes, digital discursive analysis, language prestige, marginalization of the regional language.

### **1. Introduction**

The most effective means of communication is language. It values socialization, embodies power and authority and communicates the culture. It also plays fundamental roles in the shape of individual as well as group identities to allow individuals to manifest their racial, ethnic, and social associations. Pakistan is a multilingual country, with Urdu being the national language, English being the official and prestigious language, thus giving little room to the regional languages, which still find it difficult to exist. This regional trend is a reflection of the universal problem of language endangerment; Crystal (2000) estimates that of the “60–90%” of the

languages in the world will have died out during this century, “one language every two weeks” is the rate at which languages are dying. Although Punjabi is the most spoken regional language, it is excluded in the cultural, educational, and media spheres and thought to be a “low-prestige language”. This decline is caused by a number of sociolinguistic and educational factors. The growth of urban migration promotes the use of Urdu and English that are considered to be socially and professionally desirable. At the domestic level, parents tend to limit the use of the Punjabi language, which they link with backwardness. Schools do not sympathize much or provide curricular room to Punjabi and feed the notion that Urdu and English are languages of sophistication and achievement. According to Shah (2013), “the educational system in Pakistan has historically prioritized Urdu and English, neglecting regional languages like Punjabi”. Therefore, young generations see Punjabi as casual and not so useful in terms of academic or professional progress. In spite of the fact that previous researches had covered the language shift using the survey and interviews, they did not cover the interactions how the Punjabi language is presented in the modern digital space. Punjabi is also used jokingly or ironically even in serious conversations on the social media, which forms social opinion on the language as a “comic” or informal language. This paper will fill this gap by practicing a mixed methodology that involves both surveys and Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA) to analyze personal language practices and online portrayal of Punjabi.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of this study are to investigate the sociolinguistic and educational aspects that lead to the degradation of Punjabi. It also aims to investigate the way Punjabi is symbolized and perceived in online and social media. Furthermore, the study seeks to examine the attitude of Punjabis in IIUI students in terms of the Theory of Language Shift by Fishman and the concept of Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu.

### **Research Questions**

1. Why do sociolinguistic factors that have contributed to the demise of the Punjabi language in Pakistan exist?
2. What are the perceptions and practices of IIUI students as regards the use of Punjabi during their everyday communication?
3. What is the social and digital media representation of Punjabi and what is their

image?

### **Significance of the Study**

The paper is relevant as it does not only explore the downward trend of Punjabi use in daily and academic life but also explores the influence of the digital media on its meaning to people a dimension that was not undertaken in earlier studies. Through the theoretical frameworks of Fishman and Bourdieu, the study gives a more in-depth explanation of the influence of linguistic prestige, symbolic power, and generational attitudes on language shift. The results will be used to continue the work of enhancing the educational presence of Punjabi, digital presence, and culture value thereof.

### **Literature Review**

The decadence of Punjabi should be examined in the larger frame of endangered languages of the world. “The irreversible loss of unique culture, historical and ecological knowledge”, which is illustrated by UNESCO (2003), proves the fact of the inseparability between the process of linguistic decline and the loss of culture. This tendency can also be observed in Pakistan as a “multilingual country”, in which Urdu and English receive figurative privilege, and in which Punjabi is becoming more and more restricted or informalized. As demonstrated by Kanwal et al. (2024), Punjabi is a language with a restricted amount of “linguistic capital” (Bourdieu, 1991) and this feature makes it one of the languages of lower statuses among young people. The Pakistani educational system is considered to be one of the most powerful factors that led to the downfall of Punjabi. This institutional discrimination strengthens societal beliefs that Urdu and English open a way to socioeconomic mobility, whereas Punjabi does not offer much academic or professional benefit. According to Bourdieu (1991), this hierarchy can be explained by his concept of linguistic capital when languages related to institutional power have more social, cultural and economic value. Research indicates that children are not supposed to use their native language but learn Urdu or English because in such a way Punjabi language is identified with “rural” or “uneducated” identity. Linguistic stigma is supported by the derogatory term “paendu” that is defined by Shah (2013) as used to describe Punjabi speakers.

Evidence on shifting linguistic loyalty is found in the Pakistani surveys carried out locally. Nazir et al. (2013) discovered that the “Punjabi speakers are not so loyal to their language” and they are actively shifting to both Urdu and English. Hameed

(2022) found out that children are mostly urged by their mothers to speak English or Urdu instead of Punjabi, and it leads to the displacement of the language in the new generation. All these sources put forward a unified opinion that linguistic prestige is a matter of social power and is in line with the argument of Bourdieu on linguistic prestige and that the issue of family transmission weakens language shift as proposed by Fishman.

Modern researchers also stress that digital media form new lingual ideologies. According to Androutsopoulos (2013), today the language of media is “more conversational and vernacular”. But to Punjabi, this prominence is not always the same as prestige. Punjabi is often employed humorously, ironically or in memes in Pakistani digital spaces, making it less serious and cementing the stereotypes that it is a “comic” or a “low-status” language. This dynamic is indicative of Bourdieu in that capital of symbols is relative: Punjabi can be prevalent on the web, but its use tends to be linked with the informal. These trends in the media reflect the views of Fishman that when language has no functional domains, particularly the new ones, then its decline becomes rampant.

### **Research Gap**

Pakistani literature mostly relies on surveys, interviews, and observations, the areas of most research are mainly oriented on perceptions by speakers. These practices disclose attitudes but not the way Punjabi is practiced, presented, and understood in the modern digital spaces. According to scholars, digital media is a very important factor in the formation of language ideologies, which is still a neglected aspect of research in relation to Punjabi. This vacuum drives the current paper that uses both quantitative surveys and Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA) to bridge the gap between self-reported attitudes and actual media representations.

### **Research Methodology**

The proposed study is a mixed-methods one that explores the extinction of the Punjabi language in Pakistan which involves both quantitative and qualitative strands of a convergent-parallel research design. These strands are integrated with the help of the Theory of Language Shift by Fishman and Theory of Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu.

**Respondents and Data gathering (Quantitative)**

The information was collected as a structured questionnaire to twenty two Punjabi-speaking female students of the International Islamic University Islamabad (IIUI). Such a group was chosen since the university students hold a central position in influencing new trends in linguistics in the modern world. The questionnaire was divided into six parts some of which focused on the use of language in various areas, the attitude towards Punjabi, Urdu, and English language, the role of the media, and the preferences towards education. The online survey was sent using Google Forms.

**Data Analysis (Quantitative)**

The quantitative data were computed by using descriptive statistics like frequencies and percentages. These trends were later explained by Fishman framework particularly domain shift and decreasing intergenerational transmission.

**Data Collection and Analysis (Qualitative)**

The qualitative part involved a Digital Discourse Analysis (DDA) of the Punjabi representation on the internet, such as on social media, memes, posts, and videos. Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA), following the Bourdieuian notion of linguistic capital, was applied to the analytical discussion of how Punjabi is symbolically represented either as an elite code, or as a comic, rural, and nostalgic code and how these representations support or undermine language hierarchies.

**Ethical Considerations**

The ethical considerations were strongly followed, making sure that it was all voluntary, confidential, and academically sound and responsible, in referencing the digital sources.

**Findings and Discussion**

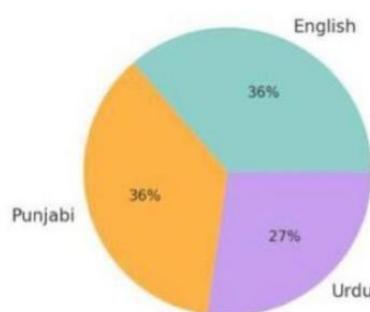
The results are based on a survey and digital discourse analysis of a small sample of the concerned population to provide a holistic view of the deteriorating sociolinguistic position of Punjabi among young speakers at IIUI.

**Research Question 1: The Sociolinguistic and Educational Factors**

The quantitative findings indicate the presence of language shift. The majority of students indicated that they spoke Urdu more than Punjabi in their day to day interactions especially at home. English, its turn, overtakes educational and academic contact, which shows its prestige and the fact that it is associated with international

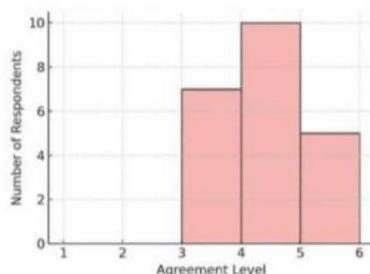
mobility. These trends are closely associated with the Theory of Language Shift created by Fishman that proves the fact that Punjabi is slowly losing its positions in the major functional spheres (home, education, business communication), thus, the chances of trans-intergenerational transmission diminish. This shrinkage undermines the practicality of Punjabi.

## **LANGUAGE USED AT HOME**



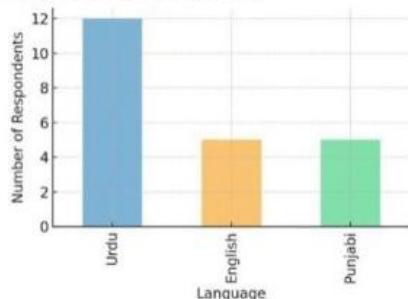
### **Research Question 2: Perception and Practice between IIUI students**

#### **PUNJABI AS PART OF CULTURAL IDENTITY (1-5 SCALE)**



Although the participants had little functional use of it, they had a high level of emotional attachment to Punjabi and often valued it as a significant symbol of cultural identity. Nevertheless, this symbolic association does not get converted to active language practice. The overwhelming choice that students made was to use English as the mode of instruction in future generations.

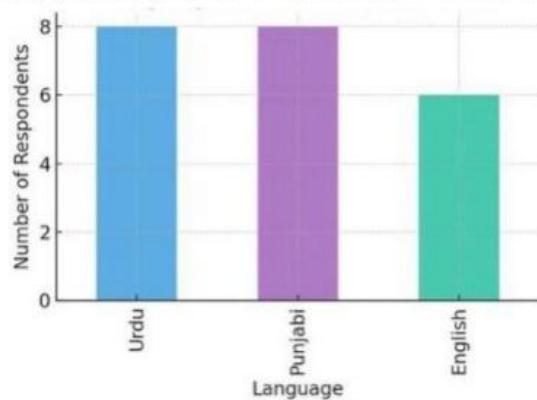
## **PREFERRED LANGUAGE FOR CHILDREN'S EDUCATION**



The Theory of Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu can be used to understand that this contradiction: though the Punjabi language has cultural value, it does not have the symbolical and economic capital that Urdu and English have. Consequently, students identify themselves with the languages that give them more academic and professional portability despite the fact that they are proud of their linguistic heritage. This observation concurs with the Bourdieuan perception of linguistic behavior that is based on prestige. This change is further enhanced by the impact of the media and globalization. Several respondents concurred that international online platforms reduce the demand of the Punjabi language by favoring the English-dominated material. These prestige hierarchies are being absorbed more by younger people, only to make Punjabi less relevant in current situations.

**Research Question 3: Digital Representation and Image Shaping.**

## **LANGUAGE USED ON SOCIAL MEDIA**



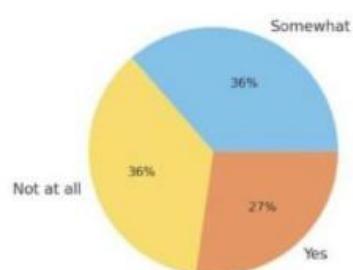
The qualitative discourse analysis explored how Punjabi is framed and appreciated in the present day digital media. It was observed that there is a steady trend whereby

Punjabi is used in humorous, mimicry, or informal use. These representations also strengthen stigmatized images of Punjabis as a low-status code, as opposed to the rational, educated ones of Urdu and English. The notion of symbolic capital by Bourdieu is especially applicable in this case: the constant categorization of Punjabi as something humorous or unsophisticated pulls down its status and impairs its status in serving as a language of intellectual or professional communication. The discourse analysis, however, also helped to identify some cases of counter-narratives that are working against these reductionist images. As an example, digital platforms use Punjabi to unite families divided through the Partition of 1947, and present the language as a tool of emotional expression, compassion, transnational identity. In this respect, the Punjabi language is regained symbolically as the language of remembering, unity, and cultural affiliation. The music videos also show that the culture of Punjabi can be adapted to various cultures, though it is best when combined with the English aesthetics and promoted to other countries.

#### **Discourse Analysis: The Punjabi in the Media and Public Discourse**

In order to supplement the survey results, discourse analysis has been carried out of a few media texts, advertisements, social media contents, and television programs. It was aimed at investigating the construction, the representation, and the valuation of Punjabi in the discourse and to identify the ideological frameworks underlying such representations. The analysis is based on the idea of linguistic capital proposed by Bourdieu according to which language is considered as a kind of symbolic power, and the theory of language shift by Fishman who highlights the degradation of languages as they lose the sphere of functionalities and intergenerational transfer.

### **PERCEIVED IMPACT OF GLOBAL MEDIA ON PUNJABI UTTERANCE**



**Punjabi in the Popular Music: the Modernization or Marginalization?**

The situation of the Punjabi in popular culture is a complicated issue, as the Punjabi music video “Pakistan” by Mankirt Aulakh (DJ Flow, 2022) demonstrates. Outwardly, the Punjabi music is glamorous, modern and young with a vibrant worldwide presence via YouTube and social media. Further examination of discourse, though, shows that the majorities of successful Punjabi songs are transnational and aimed at the diasporic market and usually are mixed with English lyrics and western aesthetics. This trend is in line with the theory of linguistic capital proposed by Bourdieu because the economic and cultural value of Punjabi can be acknowledged only when it is mediated with global and English dominated arenas. Punjabi is still somewhat prestigious, and is frequently eaten as, at a local level. Leisure instead of a solemn culture. In Fishman’s terms, this not only does it show a shift in domain, but also in artistic media, Punjabi is thriving, but not able to maintain intergenerational transfer within families or education, which shows symbolic presence but deteriorates in functionality.

**Social Media and Linguistic Stigma**

A good illustration of Punjabi being ideologically constructed online is the viral. Report by DesiBlitz (2023), the title of the report is “Korean YouTuber ‘Mocks’ Pakistanis in Punjabi”. The use of Punjabi in this case was an attempt at humor and as a device of parody among the non-native speaker. The internet feedback and news coverage has shown that Punjabi is commonly regarded as the essence of comic exaggeration, loudness, and country-side naivety. This depiction reveals a certain linguistic stratification in which Urdu and English are considered as a synonym of education and sophistication, and Punjabi is a language of unsophisticated or primitive conduct. Using Bourdieu, the discourse in this case strengthens the inequality in linguistic capital- Punjabi has no symbolic value in the high-end world or in the urban areas. At the same time, the theory by Fishman assists in understanding why these social stigmas are discouraging the younger generations to learn Punjabi as a home language, hastening the process of language shift between Punjabi and Urdu or English.

**The Discourse of Celebrities and Selective Legitimization**

The ARY News article, “Babar Azam delivers famous Punjabi dialogues in viral video”

(2023) shows that the image of Punjabi has been presented in an ambivalent manner in the popular culture. The fact that national sports icons speak Punjabi in entertainment, is being hailed as a joke or “relatable”, but rarely as an intellectual or authoritative language. This is a selective form of legitimization, which shows Bourdieu concept of symbolic capital: Punjabi is able to become temporary value when it is connected with the status of celebrity but is not accepted in the institutional sphere. It is never celebrated when it is used in academic or official communication but rather when it is done as entertainment. In this way, the cultural capital of Punjabi is made situational, which supports the point by Fishman that the situation where a language is restricted to a smaller area is capitalized. When it becomes part of the informal domains, it gradually becomes dead and loses functional prestige.

### **Digital Revival and Identity of Community**

On the other hand, the digital media can also be a place of language resistance and cultural reconstruction, as it is shown in the YouTube channel Punjabi Lehar. The medium of language that has re-united more than 200 families that were divided in Partition is this medium, which is the Punjabi. It is characterized by compassion, nostalgia and transnational solidarity. In this case, Punjabi is used as a form of belonging and emotional capital, directly. Disarming the arguments that it is outmoded. In the Bourdieuian framework, Punjabi Lehar re-establishes the symbolic power by placing the Punjabi as a language of human relation into the context of low prestige. In the eyes of Fishman it revives the genetically and cross-border communication, and represents the reverse phase of language shift, with community initiatives that enable linguistic continuity despite non-institutional help.

### **TV and Linguistic Hierarchies**

Punjabi is also commonly used in humor and political satire in Pakistani television, especially in such shows as “Khabarzar” (on Aap News). The use of Urdu and Punjabi alternation has a semiotic role: the former language means rational comment and power, whereas the latter means humor, emotion, or populism. This media separation in language is indicative of Bourdieu, in the idea of the “legitimate language”. Urdu takes the institutional legitimacy position and Punjabi still serves as the language of entertainment. This framing recreates the symbolic inequality and supports the idea that Punjabi cannot be discussed “seriously”. According to Fishman, this can be

translated to the loss of functional domains because the use of Punjabi is confined to informal registers, and this is adding to its endangerment.

### **Theoretical Frameworks Synthesis**

On the whole, the results obtained indicate a complicated relationship where Punjabi as a cultural icon still exists, but as a working language, it is falling.

- The model of language shift by Fishman describes the way in which this duality is a cause of linguistic decay: symbolic persistence in a language in the absence of actual use means it is eroded as being transmitted between generations.
- Bourdieu framework explains why this downward trend continues with an in-depth understanding of how deeply embedded the linguistic hierarchies that advance Urdu and English as the language of power, prestige, and opportunities are.

The congruent data are, therefore, indicative that the decline of Punjabi is not only a linguistic process but a sociopolitical one which is influenced by the institutional policies, global media influences, education systems and prestige systems based on classes.

### **Conclusion**

This paper has explored the death of Punjabi language in Pakistan by examining the sociolinguistic, educational, and digital issues which affect the use of the language by the younger speakers. Based on the Theory of Language Shift by Fishman (1991) and the Theory of Linguistic Capital by Bourdieu (1991), the study has revealed that the marginalization of Punjabi is well entrenched in the aspects of structural power relations, prestige hierarchy, and institutional neglect. The mixed-methods approach made the situation much clearer: the survey results indicated that the usage of Punjabi, both in everyday life and in school, was decreasing, whereas the digital discourse analysis demonstrated that Punjabi is represented as funny or uncomplicated, which supported its low status symbol. The results depict an impressive difference between cultural attachment and linguistic practice. The contradiction here is indicative of the argument put forward by Bourdieu that the distribution of symbolic capital is what dictates linguistic behaviour, and it is in the reduction of functional domains that Fishman provides the model that explains the direct effect of linguistic shift. In the research paper, it is concluded that Punjabi is presently only alive as a cultural pride

and not a language of communication. The key to its future liveliness lies in the careful and planned interventions that are directed towards boosting its symbolic and functional worth. In the absence of such institutional, educational and digital support, Punjabi will eventually find itself on the path of functional loss, even though it maintains a high level of emotional meaning to the speakers of the language.

### **Recommendations**

Still relying on the results of this research, the following recommendations are offered to contribute to the revival and sustainable development of Punjabi language in Pakistan. Punjabi should be adopted in formal education as a compulsory or optional subject at primary and secondary education as well as an academic subject at the tertiary level, and Punjabi language classes, literature classes, and training programs should be part of the reform in the curriculum. The key to making Punjabi language more visible and relevant in the modern youth culture is to increase the amount of Punjabi language content available on the digital platform, including podcasts, documentaries, and social media channels, and government media organizations and non-governmental institutions must also take steps to popularize Punjabi content not limited to comedic or stereotypical depiction, but that can be used in the education, intellectual, and professional setting. Cultural agencies, university and literary societies ought to hold Punjabi festivals, poetry recitations, theatre and writing competitions that are literary, and the use of Punjabi at home should be encouraged to other families, which will further aid intergenerational transmission. Academies and translation centers and institutes of Punjabi language would help preserve linguistic work and scholarship, and the policies must guarantee its presence in the marketplace signage, broadcast, and official communications to raise its symbolic capital. Digital technologies, including Punjabi language apps, AI translator software, and distance learning platforms can make the language modern and more accessible to the younger generations. Collaborative cultural and educational interaction with Indian Punjab could support cross-border learning and revitalization and would help the Pakistani Punjabi regain their high status and recognition through collaborative cultural and academic interaction with the Indian Punjab.

These suggestions highlight that to rejuvenate Punjabi, efforts at the multi-level through educational institutions, media houses, policy makers and Punjabi speaking

communities should be consistent. With the increase in the symbolic prestige and the practical scope of Punjabi, one can potentially change the existing course and guarantee its further applicability in the multilingual context of Pakistan.

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