

# LANGUAGE SHIFT – THE CASE OF PUNJABI IN SARGODHA REGION OF PAKISTAN

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## Abstract

This paper examines the linguistic scenario of Punjabi (second major language in Pakistan after Urdu) in Sargodha and the social mechanism which poses threat to the sustainability of Punjabi on a broader scale. It deals with the attitudes, causes and effects of the language shift from Punjabi to other languages due to prestige, modernity and social mobility issues. Triangulation (Questionnaires from n=80 and In-depth interviews from n=3) was used in order to observe the trends of shift. The findings exhibit that Punjabi speakers are not so loyal to their language, Punjabi language shift is a real not perceived phenomenon and a day may not be far away when Punjabi will be considered endangered language in Pakistan.

**Keywords:** Punjabi; Language Shift; Language Loyalty

## Izveleček

Članek razpravlja o jezikovnem scenariju pandžabščine (po urdščini drugem najbolj razširjenem jeziku v Pakistanu) v mestu Sargodha ter socialnih mehanizmih, ki v širšem smislu ogrožajo njuno ohranitev. Raziskuje splošno vedenje, razloge in posledice uporabe drugih jezikov namesto pandžabščine, katere vzroki so prestiž, modernizacija in socialna mobilnost. S triangulacijo (vprašalniki in intervjuji) smo preverili trende omenjenih sprememb. Rezultati kažejo, da materni govorci pandžabščine niso zvesti svojemu jeziku, da se ne zavedajo postopnega omejevanja rabe tega jezika, in mogoče ni več tako daleč dan, ko bo pandžabščina v Pakistanu razglášena za ogrožen jezik.

**Ključne besede:** pandžabščina; jezikovni premiki; zvestoba jeziku

## 1. Introduction

Weinreich (1953) defines language shift as “*the change from habitual use of one language to another*” and argued that even sociological aspects of the process should be studied as well. Language shift is a long process influenced by plethora of factors more of which are sociological in nature. (Swadesh, 1948) Language shift is mostly a slow and gradual process in which cultural and linguistic attitude of a group of people counts a lot in changing stable linguistic situation to the favor of one or more governing languages (Falk-Bano, 1986). The term “Punjabi Language Shift” as we are using it does not denote to the absolute migration of Punjabi language speakers to other languages but most often it is shift in domains of language use with particular set practices.

### 1.1 Punjabi in Pakistan

Pakistan is a multilingual country with rich linguistics heritage. Its national language is Urdu while official language is English. The table below explicates the percentage of speakers using regional languages.

**Table 1:** Pakistani Regional Languages  
(Source: Census, 2001, p. 107, taken from Rehman, 2003)

Languages	Percentage of speakers
Punjabi	44.15
Sindhi	14.10
Siraiki	10.53
Urdu	7.57
Balochi	3.57
Others	4.66

In order to render the current size of the Punjabi speaking population, one has to determine the definition of “Punjabi” first, and this in turn depends on the definition of “language”. Ethnologue lists not one but three languages that are called “Punjabi”: Western Punjabi, Eastern Punjabi and Mirpur Punjabi. On the other hand, if we use the criterion of mutual intelligibility, it can be grouped into a whole chain of language varieties together and give it a convenient label, such as Greater Punjabi. Restricting ourselves to Pakistan, this would probably include Hindko of Peshawar, Kohat, Attock, Hazara, and Azad Kashmir, Pahari of the Murree hills, Mirpuri in Azad Kashmir, Potohari spoken in the plains around Rawalpindi, the different Punjabi varieties spoken in central Punjab, and the forms of Siraiki to the South and West of that.

## 1.2 The Site

Sargodha is located in Northern Punjab. It is twelfth largest city of Pakistan and is famous for citrus fruits. It is known as “city of eagles”. District Sargodha lies between two rivers, Chenab and Jehlum. It is bounded on the North by District Jehlum, on the South by District Jhang, on the North East by District Mandi Bahaudin, on the South East by District Hafizabad and on the West by District Khushab. According to the 1998 census of Pakistan, the district had a population of 2,665,979, of which 27.96% lived in urban settlements. According to the Punjab Education Department’s figures, Punjab’s average literacy rate was around 44 percent in 2003, Sargodha has 46.3 percent while female literacy rate in Sargodha is 32.66 percent. Why we selected this site? It was selected because of convenience to researchers, emotional attachment with motherland and the ease of access.

## 2. Language Shift – Causes

Language is supposed to be passed on from one generation to the other for its survival and is posed to threat when either speakers of a community stop imparting it breaking the continuous chain of language transmission. Grosjean’s (1982) model of intergenerational shift shows that the first generation is mostly monolingual in the home language, the second generation is bilingual in the home language and the language of the dominant society, and the by the third generation, the speakers are all monolingual in the language of the dominant society. Though the situation is a bit different in multilingual Pakistan, the changes in linguistic scene manifest analogous patterns. Furthermore, development and maintenance of any language is prior and of grave importance for the language to sustain and endure. There are several causes of language shift which are social, economic and political in nature.

### 2.1 Economic Factors

Economy is one of the factors leading to Punjabi language shift. Urbanization has led to migration of people from urban areas to the rural ones for search of better jobs and professional opportunities, due to migration they tend to use the language of that area they have migrated to and do not pass on their c mother tongue because it would be of no use in the area they have migrated. Related with economic factor is the concept of Power associated with language. Rehman (2003) defines it as “quality which enables the users of a language to obtain more means of gratification than the speakers of other languages.” Simply put Punjabi won’t be able to bring employment to its speakers as unlike Urdu and English, it is not the language of offices.

## 2.2 Demographic Factors

Language requires speakers for its survival; it is quite evident that larger the size of a community (using one language), the more are the chances of language survival, vitality, sustainability and vice-versa. If the speakers of a language die out and it's not being transferred to the next generations then the language suffers from loss. The elder members of a community may be *fluent* and *language loyal* but their children and grand children may not necessarily be that much *fluent* and *language loyal*.

## 2.3 Status of Language

Power and dominance comes with status. The status of a language determines how powerful it is. An *official* or *national* language may be the reason of shift from local languages and even the mother tongue. The more dominant languages have severe effects on all other languages because people tend to learn and use the language that is more powerful in order to gain mobility and higher status in the society. Moreover, another important factor is that which language is considered more reputable and influential. People will prefer to speak the prestigious one over the non-prestigious one for obvious reasons. The languages that lack institutional support (non-usage in education, media and offices) are usually the one that are cast off by their users.

## 3. Research Methodology

The research was performed using both qualitative and quantitative methods i.e. survey method and interviewing. This combination of methods was mandatory to generate a complete picture of Punjabi linguistic scenario. Survey was done through questionnaires (including both open and close ended questions) in which a total number of 80 participants (both male and female) took part. The number of both young and elder participants was 20. Similar was the case of females, 20 participants from both young and elder generations. The age limit was specified within two categories i.e. 18-25 and 45-80. The reason for specification of age limit was to analyze trends of language shift between different age groups by comparison and contrast. Questions were included regarding habitual use of language in several domains and with several people e.g. with parents, in market. In addition to these, several opinion based poll questions were included regarding the prestige, transmission, education policy, maintenance, and last but not the least, effects of other languages on Punjabi. Moreover, in-depth interviews were set up with two speakers – each from one category. These interviews were then transcribed and coded in data analysis phase.

## 4. Data Analysis

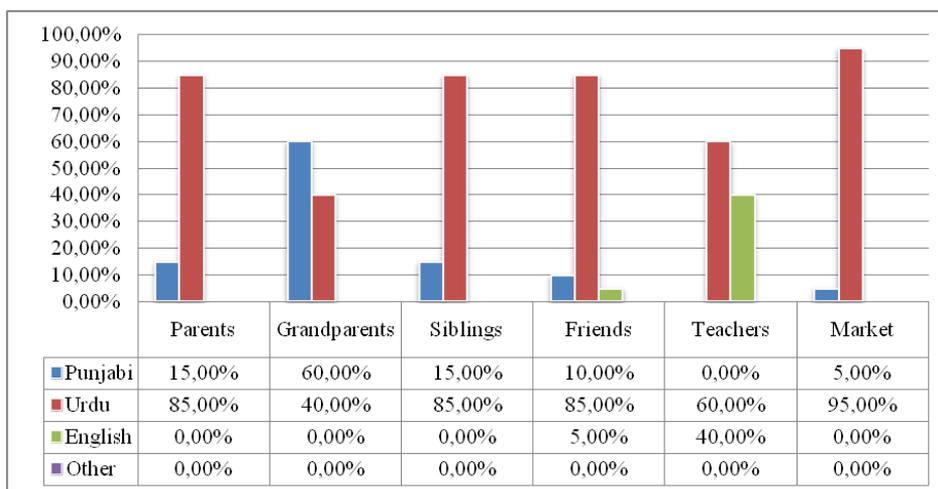
In this section, first of all the analysis of questionnaires will be presented. After this, coded answers from interviews will be provided and a combined picture will be drawn.

### 4.1 Gender/ Age and Language Shift

The questionnaires were analysed firstly according to variable of gender and then of age. As discussed in Research methodology, out of sample size of 80, 40 (20 each from Age group 1 and 2) are female. In age group, the population is evenly distributed i.e. 40 each. Frequency was generated and results were tabulated for display purpose.

#### 4.1.1 Female Speakers from Age Group 1

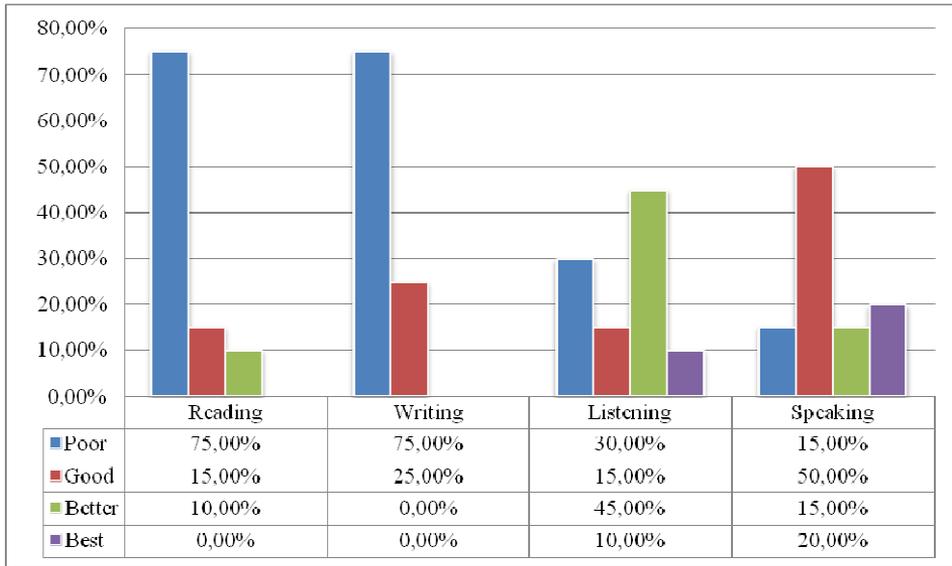
Figure 1 presents information regarding use of language by young female speakers in different domains and with people of different age groups. Clear shift is to be seen from Punjabi to other languages especially Urdu (85% with parents, 40% with grand parents, 8% with siblings, 85% with friends, 60% teachers and 95% at market). The speakers tend to use Urdu in most of the domains, with most of people, except for the grandparents. Moreover, they tend to use English with their friends (5%) and within educational institution with teacher (40%) but still usage of Urdu prevails within educational institutions.



**Figure 1:** Language use in different social contexts (young female speakers)

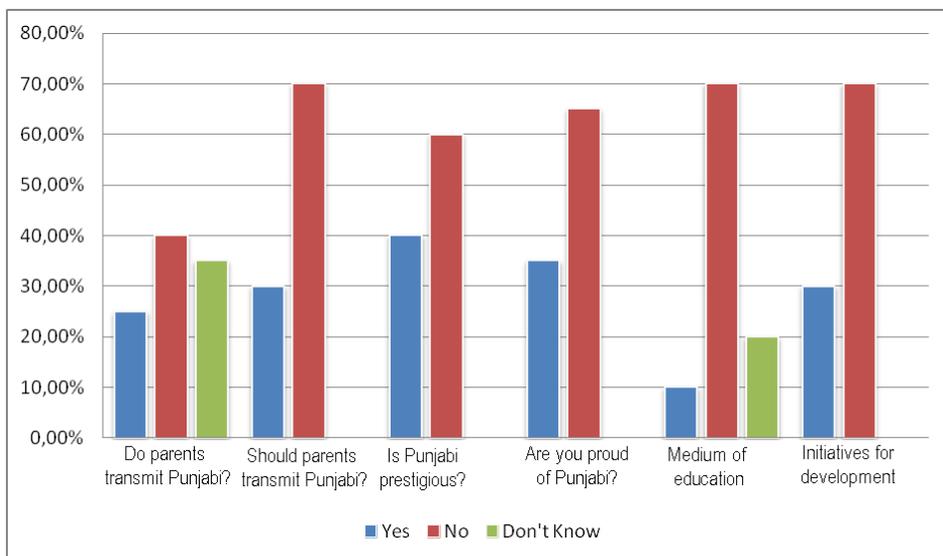
Figure 2 shows trend of proficiency of speakers in Punjabi. It is observed that they have relatively good listening abilities because they have been hearing that from their parents and speaking to some extent as well. On the other hand, reading (25%) and writing abilities (25%) were relatively poor (as the data collected via questionnaires

exhibit) because they did not have much exposure to Punjabi. The most important issue was the lack of different registers/styles in Punjabi speakers’ speech. Code mixing is more common and often they switch altogether to Urdu when they cannot find vocabulary item.



**Figure 2:** Punjabi language proficiency (young female speakers)

Figure 3 shows the results of several poll questions based on the opinion of the participants regarding transmission, prestige, social importance, maintenance and last but not the least, educational policy with respect to Punjabi.



**Figure 3:** Opinion on Punjabi (young female speakers)

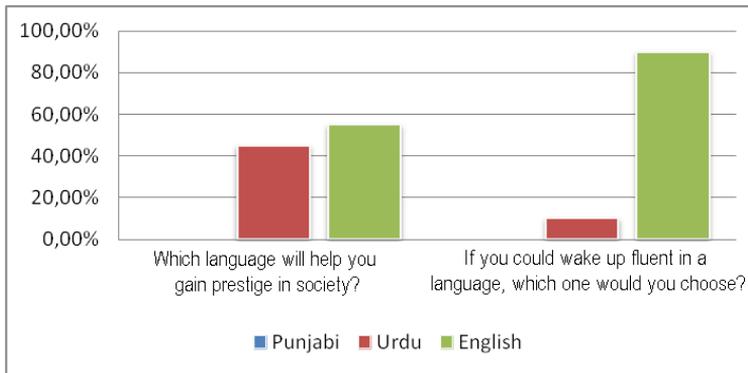
The results clearly show that most of the young participants i.e. 40% that took part in survey were of the view that Punjabi is not being transmitted by parents to the next generation while in the same context 70% think that it should not even be transmitted to children by the parents. Contrary to this, a minority of 25% participants were of the view that it is being transmitted and in the same context 30% of them think that Punjabi should be transmitted to the children by their parents. While 35% answered that they do not know whether Punjabi is being transmitted to the younger generations or not.

Prestige is another matter of significance when it comes to language. The results show that 60% of the participants think that Punjabi is not a prestigious language and 65% are not even proud of being Punjabi speaker. On the other hand, 40% of the participants think that Punjabi is a prestigious language and 35% of them are proud of being Punjabi speakers. The reason for considering Punjabi to be non-prestigious is that “*it has been associated with Sikhs which were considered enemies*” (Zaidi, 2010). Moreover, it is considered as language of abuse, villagers and illiterates, as illustrated below.

“When two Punjabis verbally fight, the one who does not have a sister, wins by default.” (Punjabi Tips #12, Facebook, <https://www.facebook.com/youngteacherz>)

For a long time, sociolinguists and educational linguists have been of the view that education should be provided to children in their mother tongue (Rahman, 2002). The results of survey show that 70% of participants believe that Punjabi should not be used as the medium of education, 10% were of the view that it should be used while 20% answered that they do not know whether it should be or shouldn't be used for educational purposes. Moreover, most of the participants i.e. 70% think that initiatives are not being taken for the development of Punjabi while 30% think the other way.

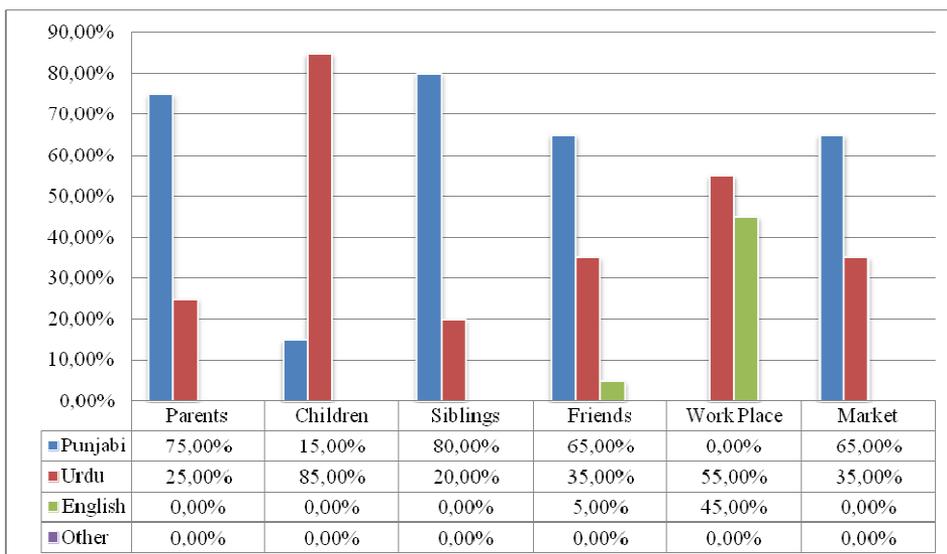
Participants were asked in the questionnaire about *language that they think would help them gain prestige in society*, the results show incredible shift to Urdu and especially to English as 55% opted for English, 45% for Urdu and 0% for Punjabi. Moreover, another question was asked regarding *which language they would wish to be fluent at*. 90% expressed that they would like to be fluent at English while 10% opted for Urdu, with Punjabi again at 0%.



**Figure 4:** Prestige value of Punjabi, Urdu and English (young female speakers)

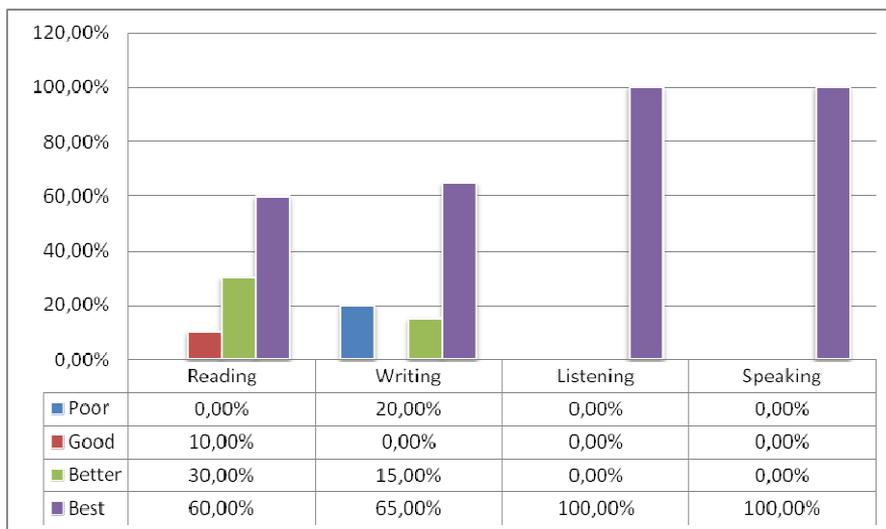
### 4.1.2 Female Speakers from Age Group 2

Figure 5 includes information regarding use of language by elder female speakers in different domains and with people of different age groups. It is clearly seen that they maintain to use Punjabi within most of the domains (75% with parents, 15% with children, 80% with siblings, 65% with friends and 65% at market place). There is exception of usage of Punjabi with the children (to a great extent) and in workplaces (totally), as the employer may restrict the employee from using certain language and force one to prefer another one. This shows that English proves to be an important factor for determining the social mobility because those having good command of English are preferred over other individuals.



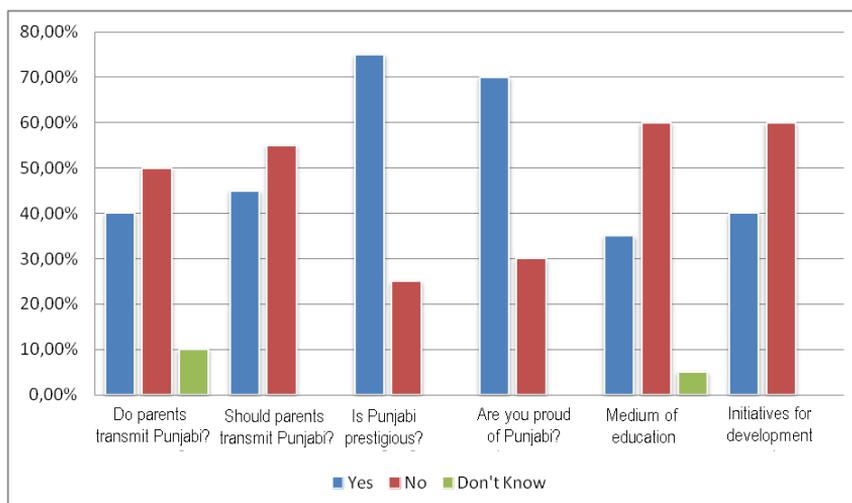
**Figure 5:** Language use in different social contexts (elder female speakers)

Figure 6 shows the proficiency levels of the speaker in Punjabi. It is observed that the elder speakers have relatively better reading and writing abilities as compared to younger ones. Moreover, elder speakers have excellent listening and speaking abilities in Punjabi. The reason behind this high proficiency level is that they have been using it throughout their life.



**Figure 6:** Punjabi language proficiency (elder female speakers)

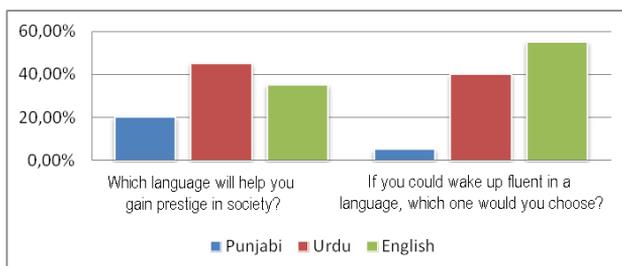
Figure 7 show the results of the same poll based questions, as asked in the case of young female speakers. It was observed that 40% of them think parents are transmitting Punjabi, 50% think they do not transmit it while 10% don't know. Moreover, 45% were of view that it should be transmitted to children while 55% believed it should not be.



**Figure 7:** Opinion on Punjabi (elder female speakers)

Regarding the matter of prestige, 75% think it is prestigious language and 70% are proud of being Punjabi speakers. On the other hand, 25% think it is not prestigious while 30% are not proud of being Punjabi speakers. A greater level of language loyalty is to be seen in the case of elder speakers as compared to the younger ones. Similarly as in case of young speakers, shift is also observed in elders ones but not to that greater scale as compared to young speakers. 35% of them think it should be used as medium of education, 60% think it should not be and 05% do not know. Moreover, 40% of elders were of view that initiatives are being taken for Punjabi while 60% do not think likewise.

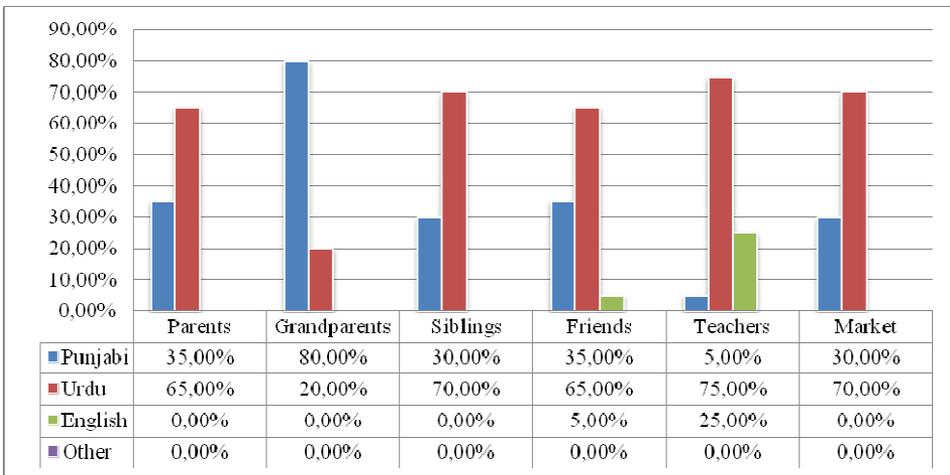
Elder participants were also asked in the questionnaire about *language that they think would help them gain prestige in society*, the results (as in Figure 8) show shift to Urdu and English but was less as compared to be in case of young speakers as 35% opted for English, 45% for Urdu and 20% for Punjabi. Moreover, another question was asked regarding *which language they would wish to be fluent at*. 55% expressed that they would like to be fluent at English while 40% opted for Urdu, with Punjabi at only 05%.



**Figure 8:** Prestige value of Punjabi, Urdu and English (eder female speakers)

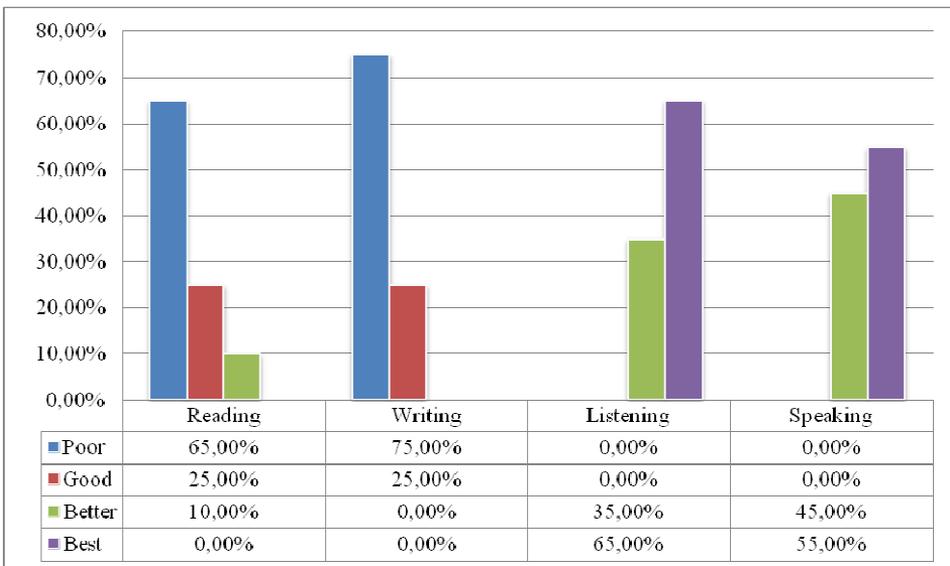
#### 4.1.3 Male Speakers from Age Group 1

Figure 9 includes information regarding use of language by young male speakers in different domains and with people of different age groups. Shift is to be observed from Punjabi to Urdu but it is somewhat on a lesser scale than that in case of young female speakers. The reason for this may be that females tend to use more prestigious language as compared to males. Still, the speakers tend to use Urdu in most of the domains, with most of people, except for the grandparents (with them Punjabi is used). Moreover, they tend to use English with their friends and within educational institutions (to a great extent) with teachers, but still the use of Urdu prevails. In additions to this, the comparison of male and female data shows that female speakers tend to use English (within educational institutions) more than the male speakers, English being considered a more prestigious language.



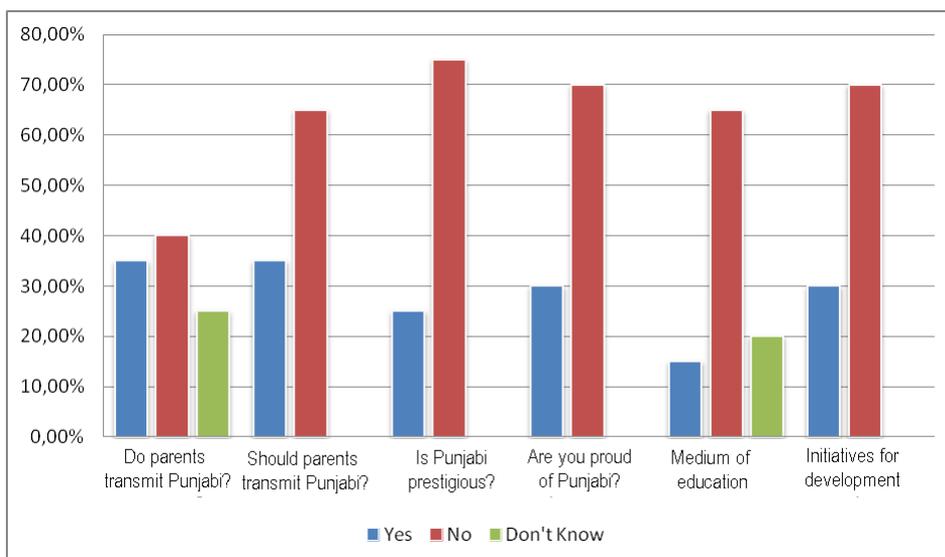
**Figure 9:** Language use in different social contexts (young male speakers)

Figure 10 shows trend of proficiency of speakers in Punjabi. The results show that as female speakers, male speakers are also not that much skilled in reading and writing Punjabi but they have excellent skills in listening and speaking Punjabi. The comparison between data from male and female participants show that the ability of males to speak and listen Punjabi is much better than that of females, this may be because males tend to use Punjabi regularly (even if on a smaller scale) in several domains.



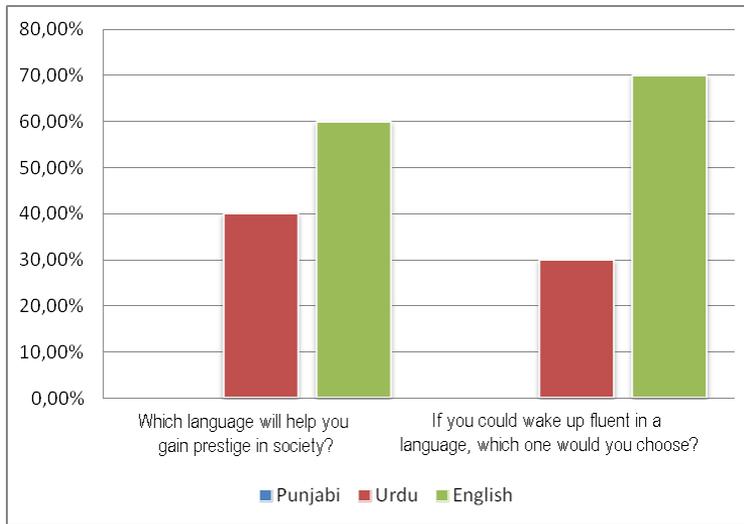
**Figure 10:** Punjabi language proficiency (young male speakers)

Figure 11 shows the result of the poll questions added in the questionnaire. It was observed that 35% of them think parents are transmitting Punjabi, 40% think they do not transmit it while 25% don't know. Moreover, 35% were of view that it should be transmitted to children while 65% think it should not be. Regarding the matter of prestige, 25% think it is prestigious language and 75% are proud of being Punjabi speakers. On the other hand, 75% think it is not prestigious while 70% are not proud of being Punjabi speakers. Similarly, as in case of young female speakers, shift is also observed in young male speakers. Question was added regarding the use of Punjabi for educational purposes. 15% of the participants think it should be used as medium of education, 65% think it should not be used. The reason for not selecting the use of Punjabi for educational purposes may be that it lacks that prestige as it is considered to be the language of abuse and is not considered fit for educational matters. A more amazing fact is that in some schools students have to pay fine if they speak Punjabi within the domains. Moreover, 30% of participants were of view that initiatives are being taken for Punjabi while 70% said the efforts are negligible.



**Figure 11:** Opinion on Punjabi (young male speakers)

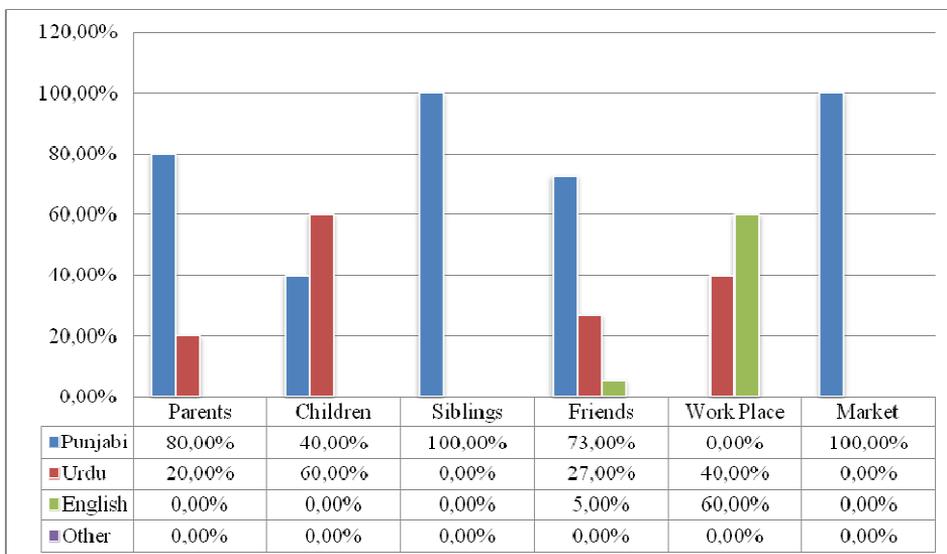
Participants were also asked about *language that they think would help them gain prestige in society*, the results show incredible shift to Urdu and especially to English as 60% opted for English, 40% for Urdu and 0% for Punjabi. Moreover, another question was asked regarding *which language they would wish to be fluent at*. 70% expressed that they would like to be fluent at English while 30% opted for Urdu, with Punjabi again at 0%, as shown in Figure 12.



**Figure 12:** Prestige value of Punjabi, Urdu and English (young male speakers)

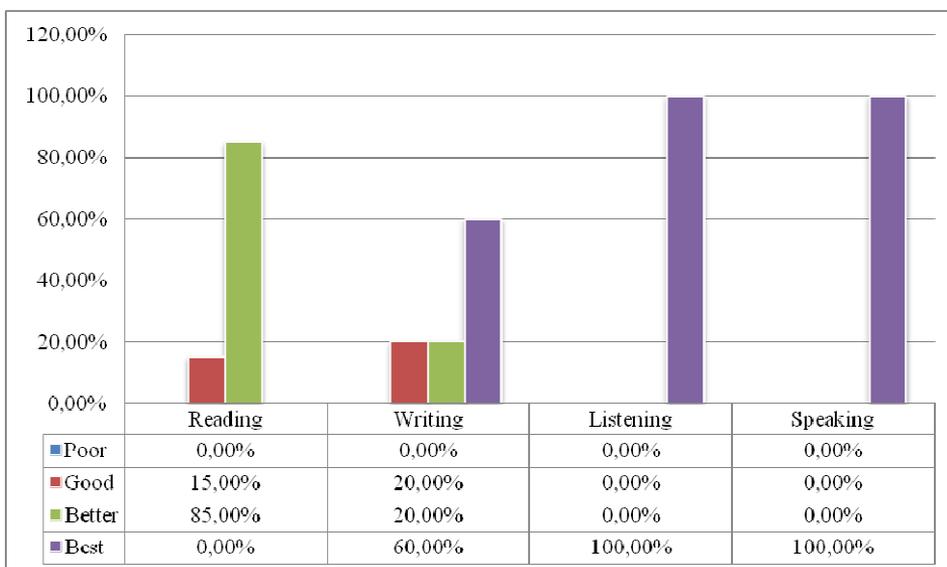
#### 4.1.4 Elder Male Speakers from Age group 2

Figure 13 includes the figures containing information regarding use of language by elder male speakers in different domains and with people of different age groups. It is clearly seen that they maintain to use Punjabi within most of the domains. There is exception of usage of Punjabi with the children (to a great extent) as 40 % of them use Punjabi while 60% use Urdu. Shift is seen in the use of language within workplaces. 40% of the participants use Urdu while 60% of them use English. The reason for shift is that employers may restrict the employees from using certain language and force one to prefer another one. This shows that English proves to be an important factor for determining the social mobility because those having good command over English are preferred over other individuals.



**Figure 13:** Language use in different social contexts (elder male speakers)

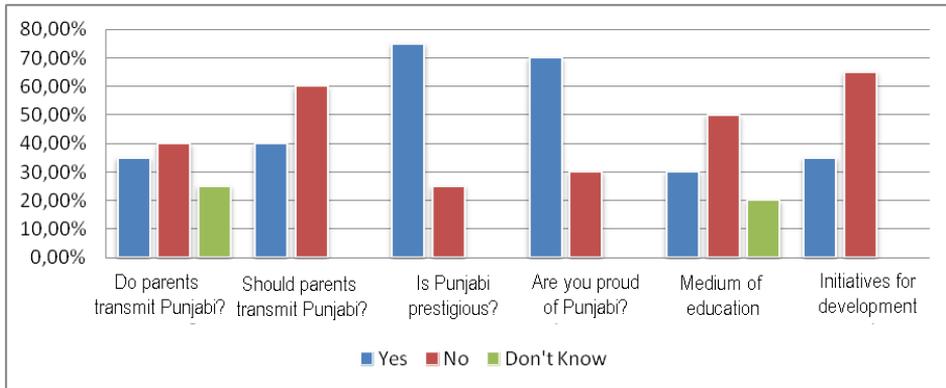
Figure 14 shows the proficiency levels of the speakers in Punjabi. It is observed that the elder speakers have relatively better reading and writing abilities as compared to younger ones. Moreover, elder speakers have excellent listening and speaking abilities in Punjabi. The reason behind this high proficiency level is that they have been using it throughout their life because of being loyal to their mother-tongue.



**Figure 14:** Punjabi language proficiency (elder male speakers)

Figure 15 show the results of the same poll based questions, as asked in the case of young male speakers. It was observed that 35% of them think parents are transmitting

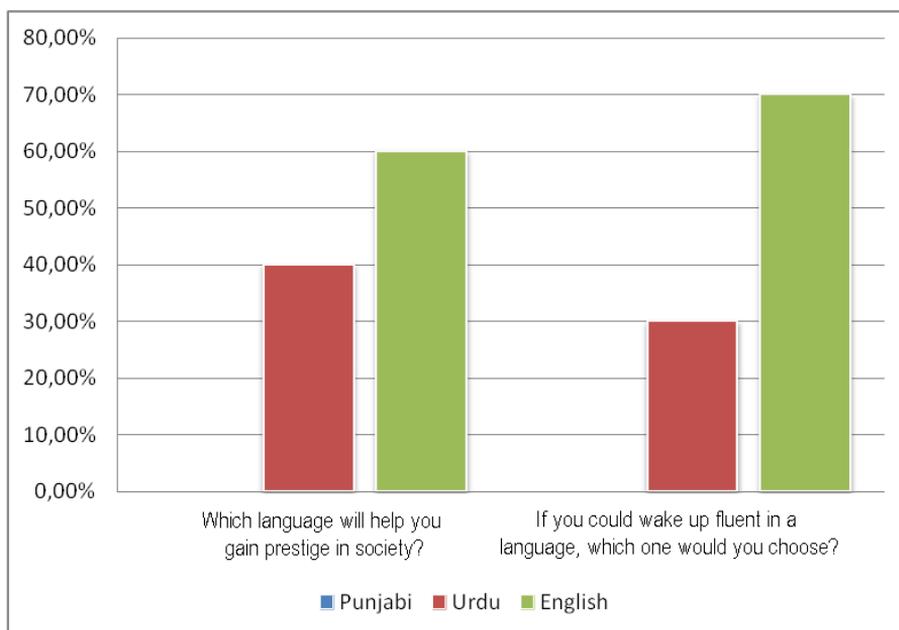
Punjabi, 40% think they do not transmit it while 25% don't know. Moreover, 40% were of view that it should be transmitted to children while 60% think it should not be.



**Figure 15:** Opinion on Punjabi (elder male speakers)

Regarding the matter of prestige, 75% think it is prestigious language & 70% are proud of being Punjabi speakers. On the other hand, 25% think it is not prestigious while 30% are not proud of being Punjabi speakers. A greater level of language loyalty is to be seen in the case of elder speakers as compared to the younger ones. Similarly as in case of young speakers, shift is also observed in elders ones but not to that much greater scale as compared to young speakers. 30% of them think it should be used as medium of education, 50% think it should not be and 20% do not know. Moreover, 35% of elders were of view that initiatives are being taken for Punjabi while 65% do not think likewise.

Elder participants were also asked in the questionnaire about *language that they think would help them gain prestige in society*, the results in Figure 16 (as in Figure 8) show shift to Urdu and English but was less as compared to be in case of young speakers as 65% opted for English, 40% for Urdu and 20% for Punjabi. Moreover, another question was asked regarding *which language they would wish to be fluent at*. 70% expressed that they would like to be fluent at English while 30% opted for Urdu, with Punjabi at 0%.



**Figure 16:** Prestige value of Punjabi, Urdu and English (elder male speakers)

## 4.2 Semi-Structured Interviews

In order to establish validity of data, Interviews (semi-structured) were conducted. For this one informant from each age group was selected and several questions were asked regarding the Punjabi language and its current scenario in Pakistan. The speakers were identified from the original group and the two were selected who had quite divergent point of views about the status of Punjabi in the eyes of its speakers.

Speaker A is a male, 45 years of age (Age group 2) living in urban locality of Sargodha and a teacher by profession. Speaker B is a male, 18 years of age (Age group 1) and belongs to rural side of Sargodha region while studying at University.

### 4.2.1 Do you think Punjabi is a prestigious language?

For Speaker A, the answer was “Obviously yes, I’m of the view that Punjabi is a prestigious language. It has rich literature and a very historic and strong background. It’s a sweet language to speak. The problem here in Pakistan is that we consider Punjabi to be language of abuse and lower class (villagers). Young ones should meet the experienced elders in the struggle to find out how sweet and prestigious Punjabi really is.” For Speaker B, the answer was an emphatic “No”. He elaborated further by saying, “Nobody, if given choice, would like to learn Punjabi. I believe that schools should strictly enforce No Punjabi policy as Punjabi causes accent problems for speakers when they use English later on.”

#### 4.2.2 Which language do you think helps people gain prestige in society?

In the words of Speaker A, “Urdu is the right choice as it is national language and symbol of pride and honor.” Let us quote Speaker B, to him it is

“English obviously, Don’t you see all these academies for English, Ielts Toefl, Language courses. Why they are for? To teach English like goras’. If we have adopted their dresses why are people ashamed of adopting their language?”

Notice the train of thought of young speaker from Age group 1. There is no doubt that English is global language and mandatory for communication but he depicts most of the youngsters of his times who consider sticking to their mother tongue as remaining “paindos” [uncultured]

#### 4.2.3 Should Punjabi be used as a medium of education?

The answer was in affirmative by speaker A. Supporting his view point he cited the example of Sindh where primary focus is on Sindhi language. Speaker B believed that it’s impossible to use Punjabi as medium of education for Punjabi lacks scientific vocabulary and “sophisticated” expressions.

Speaker B: Aj tak Urdu main to parha nahi sky science, bat ap kr rahy hain Punjabi ki. Bhai aisa kaisay hoska hai?

[We have been unable to use Urdu for scientific Education. How is it possible to use Punjabi when Urdu has failed. It is quite impossible, brother]

#### 4.2.4 What effects do you think other languages are having on Punjabi?

The question was asked because Urdu and English are dominating linguistic scene of Pakistan. It is quite obvious that giving more status to one language gives the very language power and prestige. The powerful language will tend to be used in the important domains of society such as media, education and movies. Speaker A, in this regard, opined that due to the more powerful and more prestigious languages, Punjabi is being marginalized, being rather slowly murdered at their hands. For Speaker B, the effect is positive and it must be continued till Punjabi “absorbs more vocabulary and becomes a standard language”.

### 5. Field work Findings

The main variable considered for this research was Age and the findings show that the trends of shift are more evident in young speakers who tend to use Punjabi less than the elder speaker and prefer Urdu and English over Punjabi though some of them speak Punjabi with elders such as parents and grandparents. In informal settings like hanging out with friends, preference is given to Urdu language over Punjabi as Punjabi lacks prestige. Modern Punjabi speaker has inculcated Punjabi linguistic shame that is

hard to be dispelled of and this is the reason why young speakers are not loyal to their mother tongue. Most of the young speakers are of the view that Punjabi should not be used as a medium of education because not everyone has that much receptive and productive ability in Punjabi. This speaks volumes about the future of Punjabi in multilingual Pakistan.

Elder speakers use Punjabi nearly in all the domains of life. Sometimes with children too but not in most cases as, due to changing trends of society, they do not want them to learn Punjabi. Elder speakers may switch to languages other than Punjabi for sometime in certain special circumstances (teaching in school, talking to people who cannot understand Punjabi) but they prefer using Punjabi in normal circumstances. It must be noted that their writing competency in Punjabi is also not as good as in Urdu or English – the languages they have learnt in formal settings. Elder speakers consider Punjabi prestigious and it is an honor for them to speak it. For them, it is instrumental to express thoughts and ideas. It must be promoted as medium of education so that its survival and development is ensured. They are of the view that language should be taught to children in order to ensure the continuous transmission through generations.

The study findings show the signs of language shift, but they also exhibit signs of hope for Punjabi. Language attitudes expressed in these interviews showed that (a) speakers are aware of Punjabi attrition, (b) members want to try to keep Punjabi alive, (c) elder speakers are more loyal to their language, and (d) it is usually the youngest children who have weak affiliation with Punjabi. They know just the most “imperfect” registers of language and are mostly “semi-speakers”.

## **6. Conclusion**

Punjabi being the second most spoken language in Pakistan is declining and losing hundreds of speakers day by day due to more powerful languages which pose a threat to the existence of Punjabi. Language maintenance and shift are the long-term, collective consequences of consistent patterns of language choice (Fasold, 1984). The phenomenon is far beyond language attrition as a huge majority of speakers are shifting their loyalties to Urdu. The reasons of shift are numerous like lack of prestige, lack of power, lack of institutional support, linguistic shame etc. It is, therefore necessary, to start projects for the development of Punjabi and moreover parents should teach their children the language as mother tongue (at least the Punjabi families) in order to ensure the sustainability of language.

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