



RESEARCH PAPER

Language Shift and Attitude of Female Students/Teachers towards Punjabi in Sialkot

Muhammad Rashid Hafeez¹ Hana Habib² Sumayya Riaz³

1. Assistant Professor, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
2. MS Scholar, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan
3. MS Scholar, Department of English, GC Women University Sialkot, Punjab, Pakistan

DOI

[http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021\(5-I\)1.3](http://doi.org/10.47205/plhr.2021(5-I)1.3)

PAPER INFO

Received:

February 14, 2021

Accepted:

June 15, 2021

Online:

June 20, 2021

Keywords:

Attitudes,
Domains,
Language Shift,
Perception and
Language Desertion

Corresponding

Author

m.rashid@gcwus.
edu.pk

ABSTRACT

This current paper is aimed to study the attitudes of female university students and teachers towards Punjabi language and its use in different domains. We have chosen mixed method approach of Sequential Explanatory design to conduct our research study. Questionnaire is used to collect data from 240 female students and interviews are conducted with 2 female teachers of Government College Women University Sialkot. It is investigated through these tools that the present situation and use of Punjabi language in Sialkot show slight indication of language shift.

Introduction

Language is a medium which is used for communication. It plays a significant role in developing social relations and social connections. It serves as a tool for conveying one's thoughts, emotions, ideas, views and beliefs to others. Language reflects the identity of its speakers and their culture besides where it is spoken and whose native language it is. As Mandela said, "If you talk to a man in a language he understands, that goes to his head. If you talk to him in his language that goes to his heart."

The purpose of this paper is to know the attitudes of female students towards Punjabi language in general and students studying at Government College Women University Sialkot specifically as we have collected data from this university. Its objective is to examine the use of Punjabi language in different domains and their perceptions towards it and their standpoint about its vitality. This study attempted

to answer the following questions. Is Punjabi language the dominant medium of communication of female university students and what do they think of it? Do they use it in communication? And does the current attitude of female university students give any hint of language shift?

This topic is selected to examine the use of Punjabi language in general and its use in different domains in particular. This study is designed to investigate the perceptions of female university students of Sialkot specifically, which makes it distinctive from other research works.

The total approx. 6,000 to 7, 000 languages are estimated being spoken in the world. (Crystal, 2002). Punjabi language has a position amongst first 20 languages, spoken across the world (Table 1). Pakistan is a multilingual country with a variety of indigenous languages. There are more than sixty languages spoken in Pakistan (Ethnologue, 2003). Urdu is the national language of Pakistan, but in official contexts, English is preferred. Punjabi language is most commonly used by people living in the province of Punjab, Pakistan. Punjab is the most populated and a significant province of Pakistan and it has the largest number of Punjabi native speakers as well as the mother tongue of majority of people living here. The table below shows major indigenous languages along with the percentage of speakers.

Table 1
Top 20 Languages (as mother tongue) of the World

Language	Ranking	Number of Mother Tongue Speakers (millions)
Chinese	1	1000
English	2	350
Spanish	3	250
Hindi	4	200
Arabic	5	150
Bengali	6	150
Russian	7	150
Portuguese	8	135
Japanese	9	120
German	10	100
French	11	70
Punjabi	12	70
Javanese	13	65
Bihari	14	65
Italian	15	60
Korean	16	60

Telugu	17	55
Tamil	18	55
Marathi	19	50
Vietnamese	20	50

Source: Mathews (2003:19)

But it has been observed that from past many years, people are not having positive attitude and perception towards Punjabi language and seem to be avoiding its use in different spheres of life as considering Punjabi to be the language of illiterate people and don't want to transmit it to their next generations. According to Zaidi (2010), Punjabis have not seriously taken any steps to promote their language; as a result, they have underestimated the value of their mother tongue unconsciously.

Table 2
Regional Languages of Pakistan with Percentage of Speakers

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

Source: Census 2001, (Rehman, 2003).

Literature Review

The study of language attitude is not a new area of research. It emerged in the last century and since 1970s it became a prominent field of social sciences research. There are approx. 6,000 to 7, 000 languages spoken in the world. (Crystal, 2002). Language is a source of identity for its speakers and must be taken care of by its users. It is a direct reflection of a culture and its heritage. It is the best way to transfer and pass on traditions, culture, rituals and values to the next generations. But when speakers of a language desert its use then it leads to language death. There are many languages, which are dying out every other day. Due to language desertion and language shift, the last 500 years have witnessed the death of about half of the known languages of the world. (Nettle and Romaine, 2000: 2). It is estimated that 90 percent of the world languages will die in this century since only 600 out of 6,000 languages are considered safe and protected from the threat of extinction (Crystal, 2002).

Much research has taken place around the globe in past many yearson measuring language attitudes, studying the perceptions of people towards their native languages and about language maintenance. Mbori (2008)explored the

relationship between language attitude and language use in the post-colonial context of Rwanda. The users' attitude towards the language decides their preference of one language over the other and also how they relate to these languages.

Habtoor (2012) worked on the issue of language shift as well as language maintenance in Saudi Arabia. The focus of his study was second generation Eritrean immigrant speakers of Tigrinya. The results indicated that the respondents in spite of a limited ability in Arabic language and often translate Tigrinya into Arabic and vice versa. The study also revealed gradual decrease in using Tigrinya while the use of Arabic is on increase.

The research conducted by Kircher (2014) revealed that there was an overall positive attitude towards English more than towards French. Respondents expressed their solidarity with the French language in private while their attitude towards English was more positive than towards French and it was explained by the researcher as social identity of the respondents.

There have been different reasons for language desertion and adopting and favoring one language over another. A lot of research work has been done on Punjabi language and here are some research studies, which are relevant to Punjabi language and its impact and use.

Punjabi speakers do not feel proud of their language rather having negative attitude towards it. Abbas, Jalil and Rehman conducted their research on Punjabi language and found out that the speakers of Punjabi language are ashamed of using it and feel that it is a derogatory language and should not be used in formal situations. (Abbas, Jalil, Rehman., n. d. ,The status of Punjabi language in the province of Punjab, Pakistan)

People living in urban areas are more inclined towards negative perception of Punjabi language and are quitting its use rather than the ones living in rural areas. Social standing also plays a part in it. The abandonment of the Punjabi language among the Punjabi middle-class has its roots in a negative perception and attitudes towards this great language. (John, 2014). He contended that it is easier to express feelings and emotions in either Punjabi or Urdu but Punjabi language does not find much use. (John, 2015). In the Urban areas, Punjabi language is not the dominant medium of communication...they don't consider it important and worthwhile to maintain...as its not economically advantageous and profitable to them. However, in the rural areas, people have a strong sense of association and affiliation with Punjabi language...and is dominant medium of communication. (Riaz, 2004)

Punjabis are in majority and among the literate ones yet they are not well read and taught 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.

Punjabi speakers do not keep their language in good esteem and are not loyal to it, 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. (Nazir, Aftab, Saeed 2013). 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. (Nazir et al. 2013)

Despite being the language of the overwhelming majority group of Punjab and Pakistan, Punjabi is alien in its own homeland. (Zaidi, 2014). Educated parents are also not playing their part in promoting their native language. In Punjab unfortunately, there is a widespread culture-shame about Punjabi...Many educated parents speak Urdu rather than Punjabi with their children. (Rahman, n.d.). The results of the study by Mansoor (2017) also indicate the negative attitude of participants towards Punjabi language and Punjabi-speaking community.

All the above works of research suggest that Punjabi language is in the process of losing its status in many parts of the country and overall being less preferred by its native speakers to use as a medium of communication with their children and in other social and educational contexts. We have chosen to conduct our research in Sialkot with focus on female students to investigate their attitude and use of Punjabi language and to determine the language shift.

Material and Methods

The mixed method approach was selected by keeping in mind the topic and area of study as it includes both quantitative and qualitative research designs and helps in giving more elaborate and thick descriptions. Quantitative approach is rigid, fixed and deductive in nature, hence develops a relationship between the variables. Quantitative method helped in getting data from a larger sample through the use of questionnaire and then the collected data was analyzed, interpreted and presented numerically. Qualitative approach is flexible, open and inductive, thus giving way to rich details and understanding of human behavior. It provides an ample opportunity of observation and interpretation of events, processes and experiences. Qualitative method was used for indepth and more detailed knowledge of the participants' attitudes and their use of Punjabi language through interview technique. The use of mixed method approach gives authenticity and validity to research. (Creswell, 2009).

Sampling

The target population was female university students and teachers. Quantitative data was collected from BS female students through online questionnaire and interviews were taken from female teachers of Government College Women University Sialkot. 240 students completed questionnaire and 2 teachers were interviewed for this research study.

Data Analysis

Attitude towards Punjabi Language; A study of language shift, the purpose of this paper is to know the attitudes of female university students towards Punjabi language. The data is collected in two consecutive phases. An online questionnaire is used in first phase for collection of quantitative data. The results are displayed with the help of piecharts and further interpreted in comparison with the questions asked in questionnaire. It is investigated through this questionnaire and its interpretation that either present situation or use of Punjabi language shows any indication of language shift and what is the current status of Punjabi Language among female university students.

Quantitative Analysis

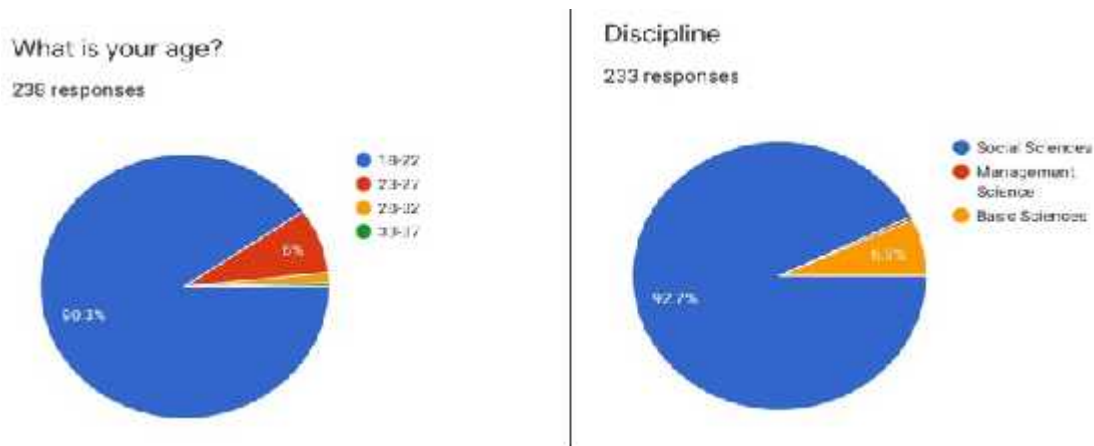


Figure 1: Age and Discipline of Participants

Most of the female students are from Social Sciences Department and their ages are in between 18-22. 50.2% belong to urban areas and rest of them belongs to Sub-Urban and Rural areas.

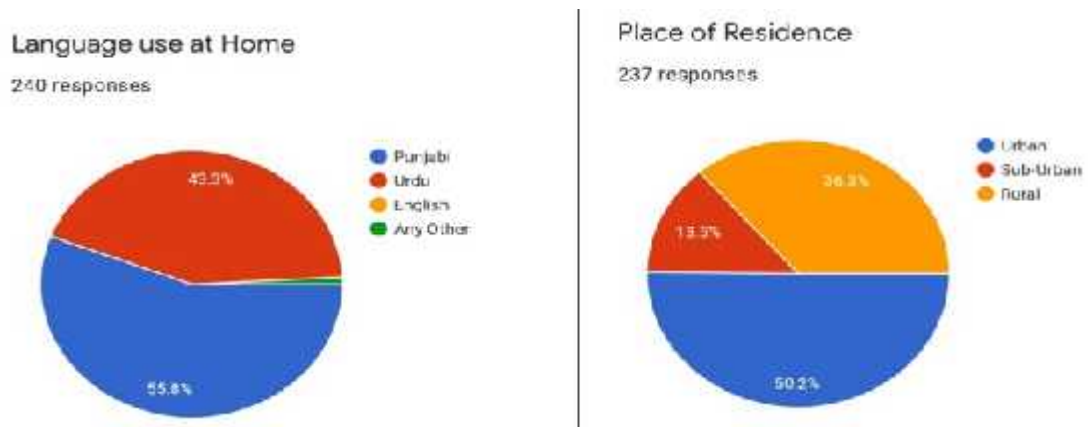


Figure 2: Geographical Location and Language use at home

55.8% students have Punjabi Language as a medium of communication at home and 65.3% of them have Mother Tongue Punjabi. 43.3% use Urdu as medium of communication at home and only 34.35% have Mother Tongue Urdu.

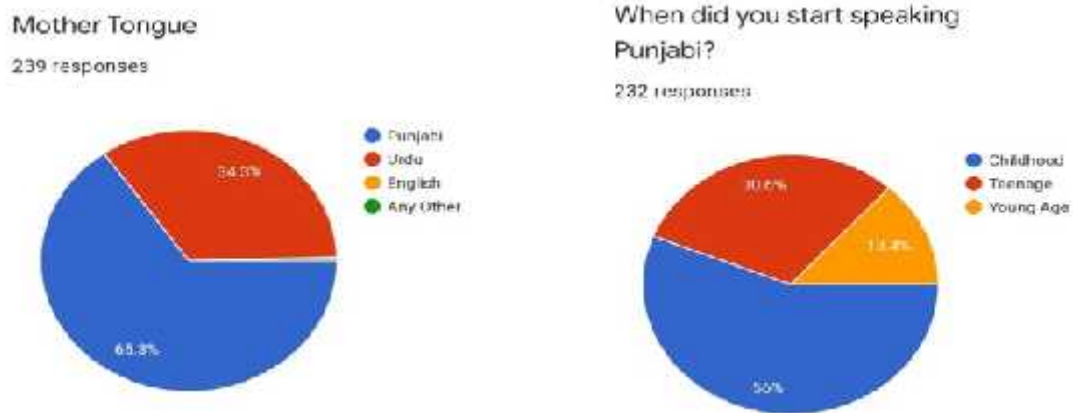


Figure 3: Mother-tongue and period to start speaking Punjabi

56% of students started speaking Punjabi Language in their childhood, 30.6% in teenage and 13.4% in Young age, but when they were asked to answer that which language they find easier to speak the results were astonishing because only 26.4% feel themselves easier in speaking Punjabi Language even when 55.8% of them have Punjabi Language as a medium of communication at homes and 65.3% have Mother Tongue Punjabi. 56% of them started speaking Punjabi Language in childhood. It shows that Punjabi language is not the dominant medium of instruction among the female university students.

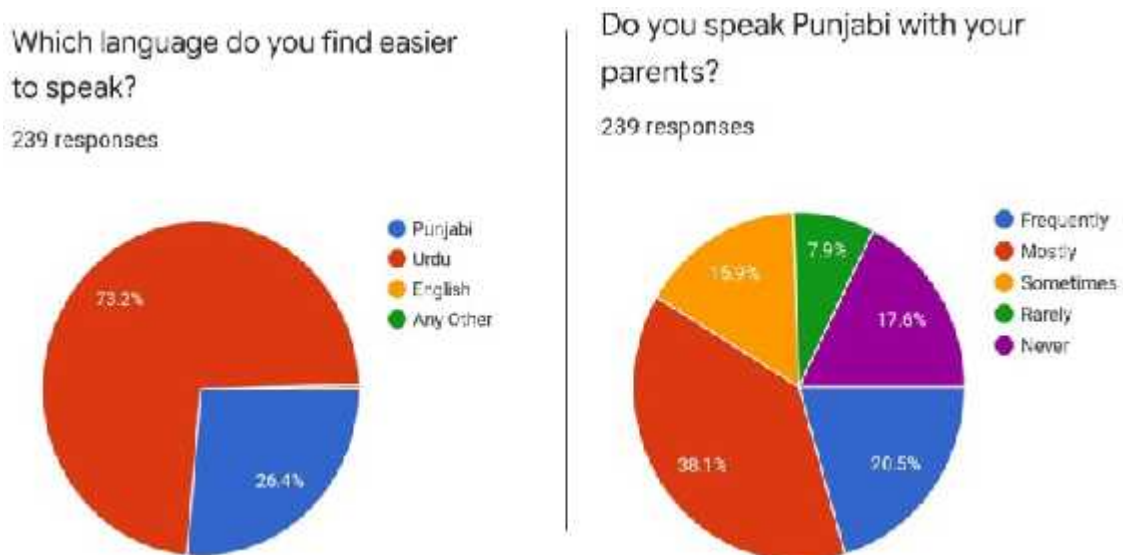


Figure 4: Easier Language and Punjabi with parents

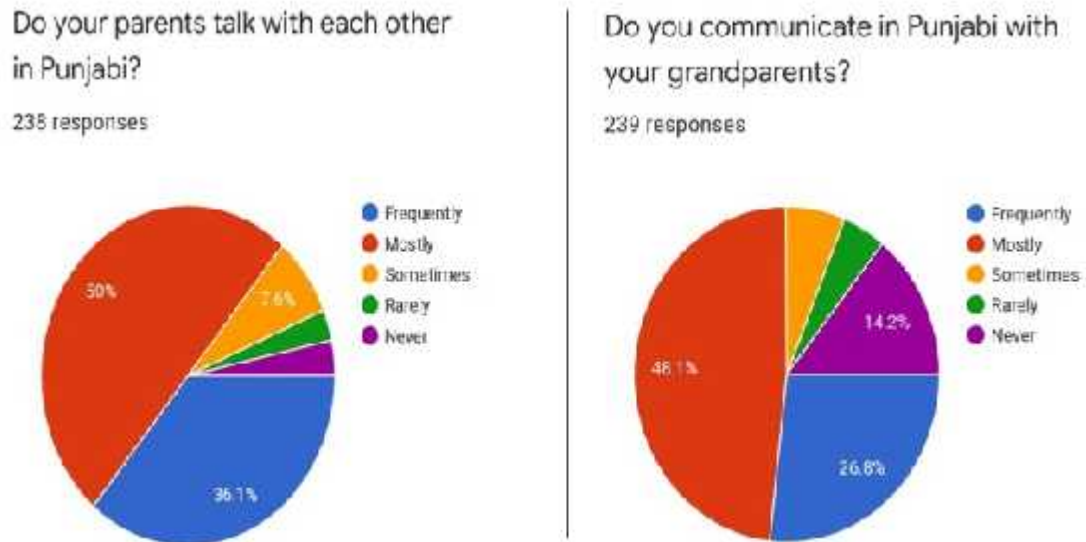


Figure 5: Punjabi Speaking with Parents and Grandparents

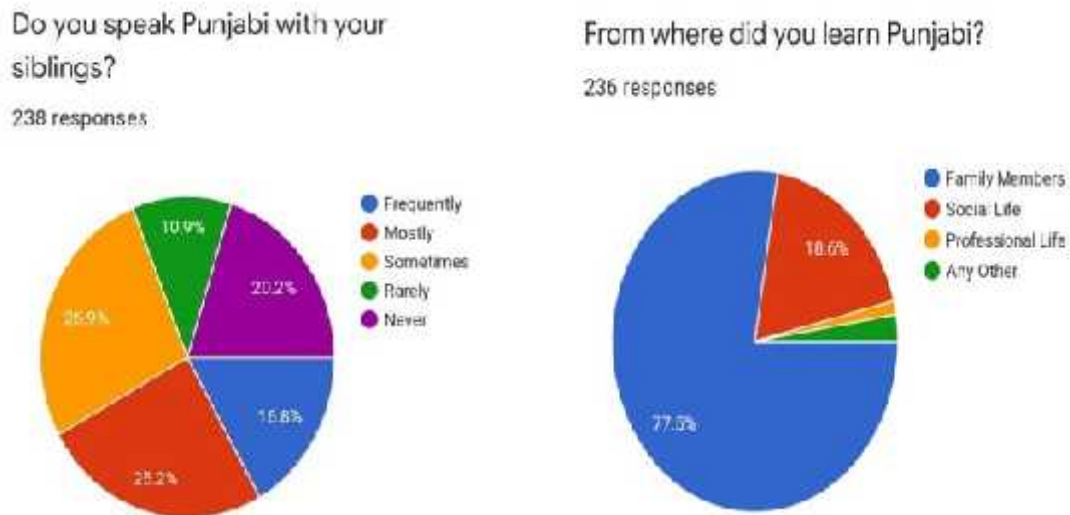


Figure 6: Learning Punjabi and Speaking with siblings

58.6 % speak Punjabi with their parents and 74.9% speak Punjabi with their grandparents. It shows a gap. When they were asked to answer about their parents that do their parents speak in Punjabi with each other, parents of 86.1% of students speak Punjabi but when the question was about the siblings then only 42% students speak Punjabi with their siblings which is somehow a sign of gradual shift because 65.3% have Mother Tongue Punjabi and 77.5% learned Punjabi from home but most of them are not using Punjabi with siblings.

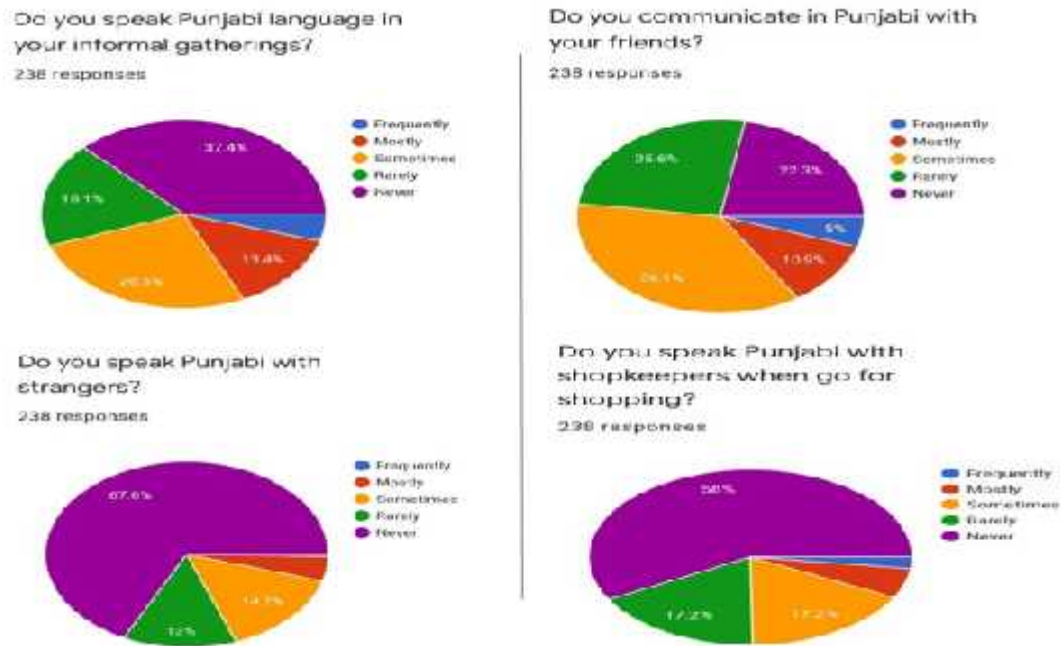


Figure 7: Speaking Punjabi with diverse people

The use of Punjabi language in day-to-day communication and the use of Punjabi Language in formal and informal settings, the results show that only 15.9% speak Punjabi with friends and in informal gatherings whereas only 18% speak Punjabi. When they go outside for shopping most of them avoid speaking Punjabi with shopkeepers. 67.6% never speak Punjabi with strangers. It again shows that whether they are in formal settings or informal mostly they don't speak Punjabi Language, which is sign of Language shift or moving gradually towards Language shift.

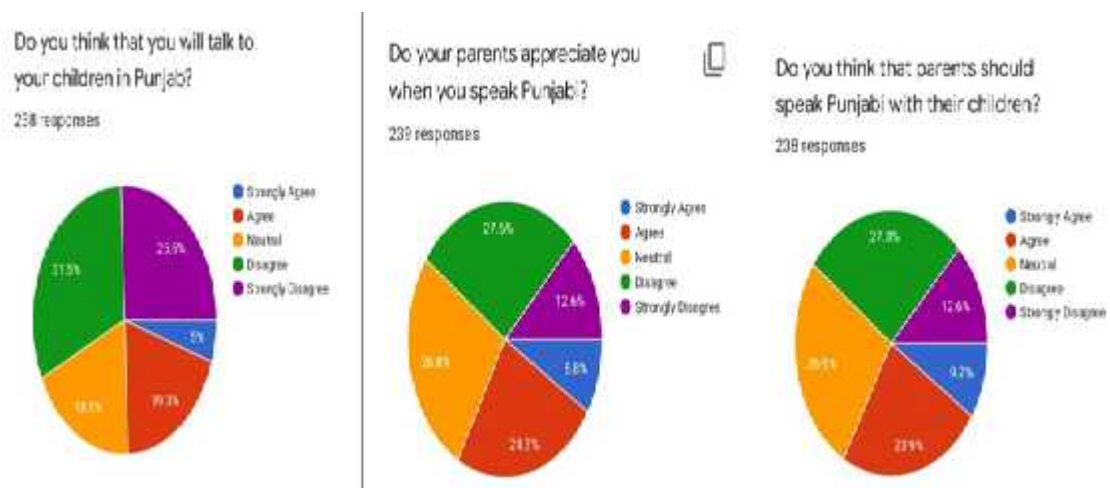


Figure 8: Punjabi, parents, and children

The results show that 65.3% of them have Mother Tongue Punjabi and 56% have as a medium of communication at home despite this only 33.1% students when speak Punjabi they get appreciation from their parents and 40.2% never get appreciation from parents. 33.1% agreed that parents should speak Punjabi with their children while 40% disagreed. When students were asked will they talk in Punjabi with their children only 24.3% agreed and 57.1% disagreed. It clearly shows Punjabi Language is moving towards shift and also 23.1% of them even think that the one who speaks Punjabi is an uncivilized person though this percentage is less but it can't be ignored.

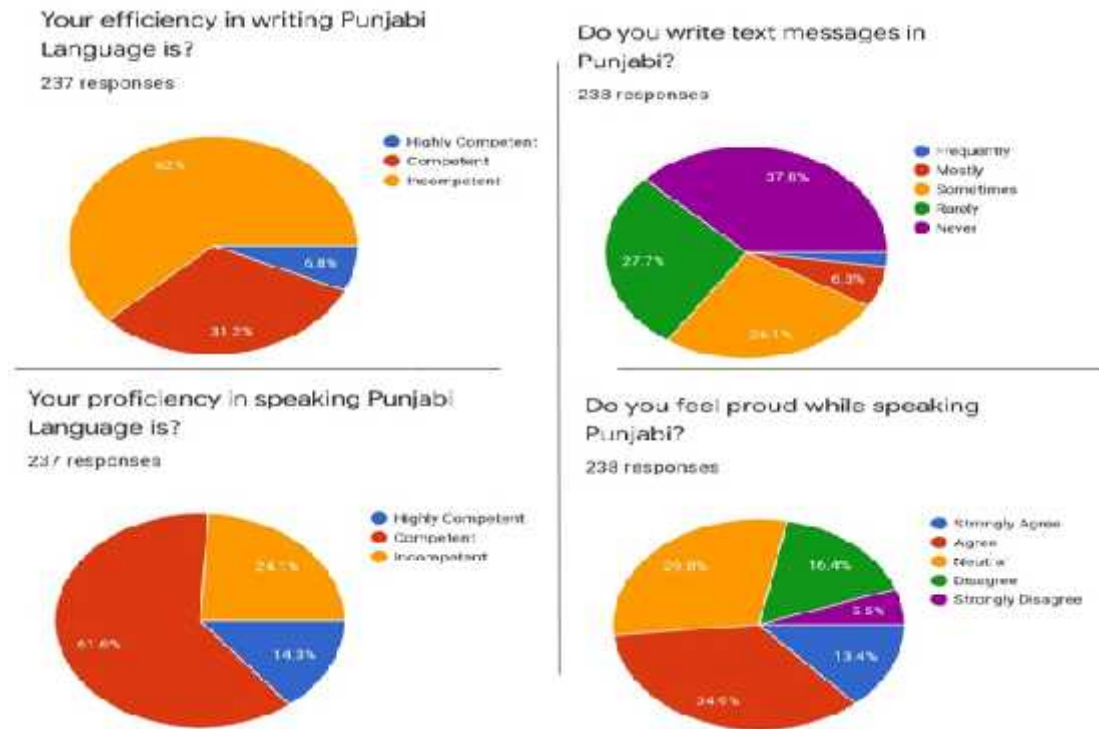


Figure 9: Writing and Speaking Punjabi

62% of students are incompetent in writing Punjabi and only 8.4% write Punjabi in text messages while in reading only 34.2% are good readers, it is because of the reason that Punjabi is not taught as a subject in schools that's why it is difficult for them to read and write Punjabi. But when the question comes about the proficiency in speaking Punjabi Language the results are alarming because 75.9% are competent in speaking Punjabi and 77.3% fully understand Punjabi but they don't use Punjabi in formal and informal gatherings, which show that the current attitude of students is a sign of moving towards Language shift. Results are also confusing because 48.3% feel proud in speaking Punjabi Language but only 18% speaks in formal and informal gatherings.

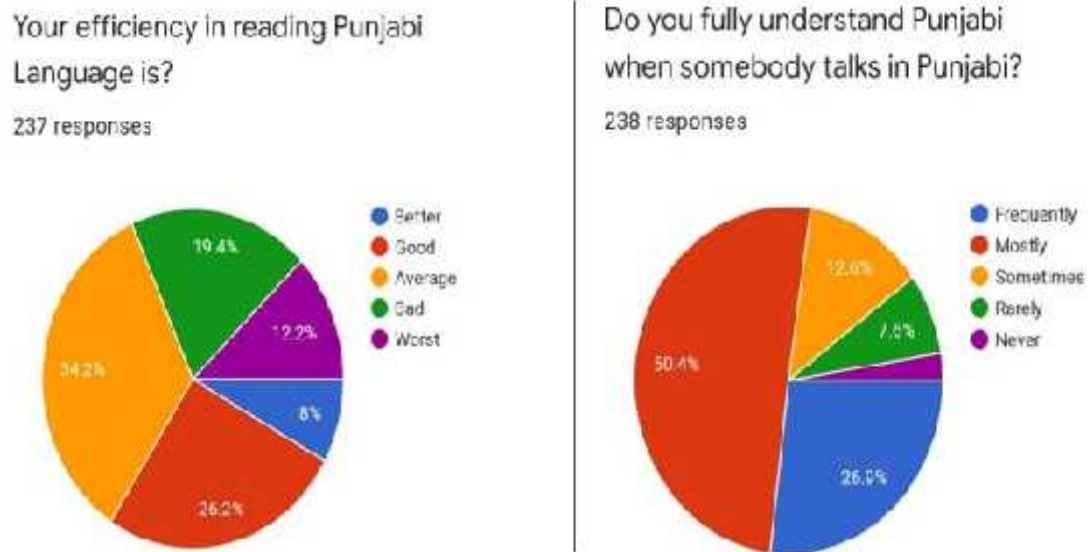


Figure 10: Punjabi Reading & Listening Skills

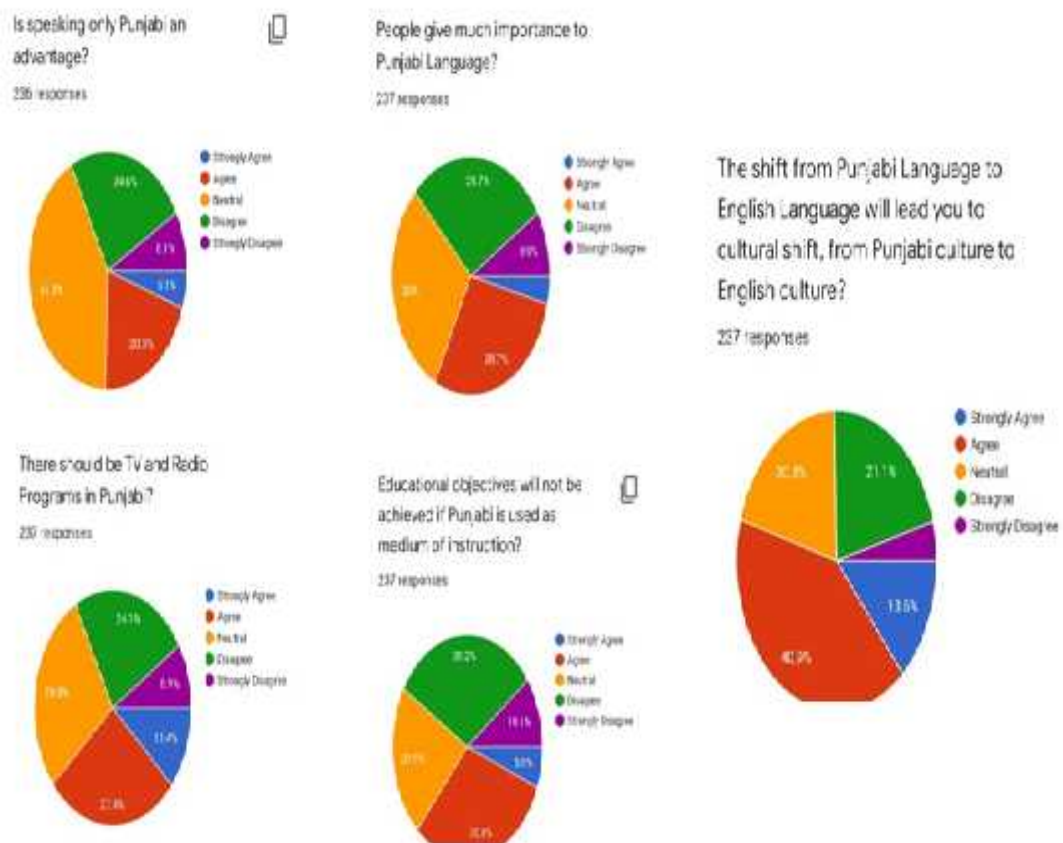


Figure 11: Educational and Cultural Perceptions about Punjabi

When the respondents were asked about the advantage of speaking Punjabi Language, its use in education as a medium of instruction and in media the results show that 51% of them think that Punjabi should not be used as medium of instruction in educational institutes while 41% think that it should not be used because the educational objectives can't be achieved. 25.4% think speaking Punjabi is an advantage while 32.7 think it is not an advantage. Most of them agreed that people don't give importance to Punjabi language and shift from Punjabi to English Language will lead towards cultural shift from Punjabi culture to English culture. It shows that they are not interested in preserving the language and the culture, which is again a sign of Language shift. They are ignoring Punjabi and don't give it much importance because they think that Punjabi Language can't fulfill social and professional requirements.

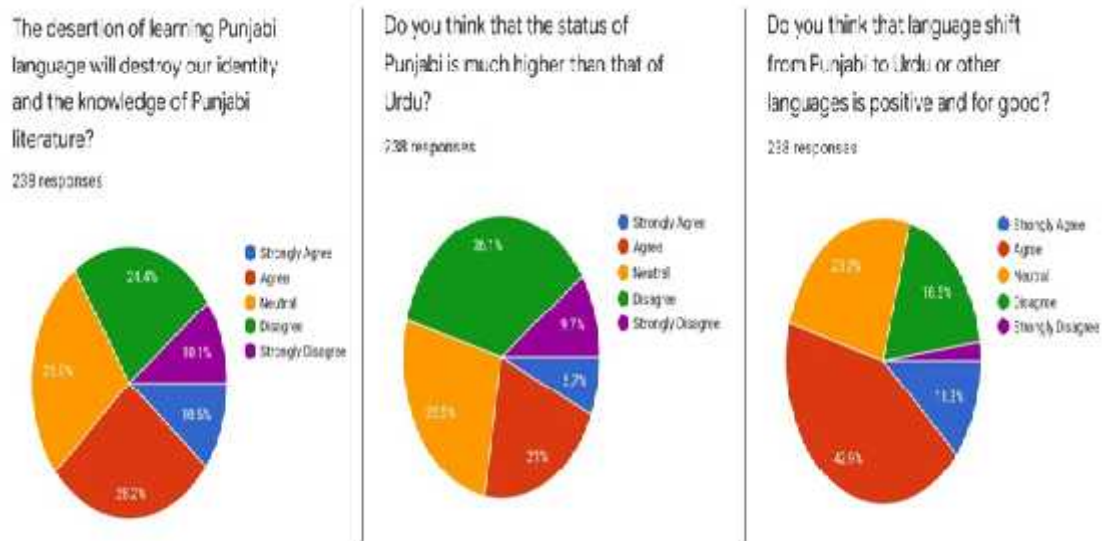


Figure 12: Status of Punjabi Language and Culture

27.7% agreed that status of Urdu Language is much higher than Punjabi and 54.2 think that the shift from Punjabi to Urdu is good. It shows that they are shifting their language from Punjabi to Urdu. 38.7% think that desertion of learning Punjabi will destroy their identity and knowledge of Punjabi literature but 34.5% don't think so, it shows that they are gradually shifting from Punjabi language because they think that Punjabi language can't fulfill the requirements of modern era.

Qualitative Analysis

Qualitative data was collected through semi-structured interviews, in which close ended and open-ended questions were asked. The interviews were taken from 2 female university teachers to know their views about Punjabi language and its use. These interviews gave descriptive insight of the processes and situations, which contributed in developing perceptions. The female university teachers were chosen

for interviews to have a comparison with the young female university students' responses collected through online questionnaire.

The first interviewee was a female university teacher, who is from urban locality. Her mother tongue is a blend of Punjabi and Urdu but Urdu is the dominant language commonly used at home. She rarely speaks Punjabi among friends while sometimes with her parents and siblings. As her attitude towards Punjabi is quite positive yet she asserts that she does not use Punjabi much often. Her opinion is that she comfortably and proudly speaks Punjabi with her friends but people around and her friends don't perceive her positively.

Her response was "I try to communicate in Punjabi with my friends but I don't get positive response from them, that's why I switch back to the language which is being used in our communication."

The students' responses show that they never or rarely speak Punjabi with friends, which somehow relate to this interviewee's opinion. These responses suggest that the use of Punjabi language is also avoided because of face value and how one is being judged and perceived by others.

The same interviewee said that "I never talked with my teachers in Punjabi and it was quite rare that they ever used Punjabi during delivering their lectures". Though she is in favour of Punjabi being a medium of instruction for some subjects till primary level, which is contrary to the students' opinion who strongly disagree with it. She also suggested "Punjabi ko bee as a compulsory subject schools mei parhaya jana chahiye aur universities mei optional subject mai iski choice ko promote krna chahiye". (Punjabi should be taught as a compulsory subject in schools and its choice as an optional subject in universities should be promoted).

She envies the person who speaks Punjabi and wishes to be good at speaking it fluently and freely. In informal gatherings, her use of Punjabi depends on her relationship with the person she interacts with and she never speaks Punjabi in formal situations and settings because Punjabi usage in formal gatherings is avoided and is scarcely acceptable.

She is of the view that our society and policy makers are responsible for limited use of Punjabi and associating the element of shame with it, "mind hi imperialist hain, post colonialism ki wajah sy hum ab tak Punjabi k istemaal ko jahalat samajhtay hain aur is ki bht barri wajah kafi had tk policy makers aur humari society hai" (minds are imperialist and because of post colonialism, we still think the use of Punjabi associated with backwardness and the major reason for it, is our society and to some extent policy makers). She further pointed out that "agar Punjabi schoolon mai parhayi jae aur parhy likhay log iskay istemaal ko endorse karain tou logon kay zehan badalain gy aur Punjabi kay istemaal ko bura nahi samjhain gy" (if Punjabi is being taught in schools and literate people endorse its use

then people's mind will change and they will not consider the use of Punjabi in negative sense).

She believes that there is not actual language shift taking place but the danger of happening so lingers may be in the coming years. As university students' responses show that shift from Punjabi language to English language will lead to cultural shift as well, this interviewee agrees with it, "Because many things come under the umbrella of language, so it will definitely go towards cultural shift too".

She responded to the question of shift from Punjabi language to Urdu or other languages is positive and for good as, "Yes, it is good and positive as 2 languages must maintain and have their separate recognition aur agar istemaal ki domains specified hon tou its ok" (...and if domains are specified for both languages then its ok).

She is in favour of speaking Punjabi with her children and passing it on to the next generation unlike majority of students, who don't want to transfer it and won't like to speak in Punjabi with their children. This point is another indication of language shift as the teacher is above 30 years in age and has positive tendency towards Punjabi whereas the majority of students are around 20 and don't want their children to speak Punjabi.

The second interviewee is a mother of two children and a university teacher as well. Her mother tongue is Urdu but both of her parents can also speak Punjabi and mostly talk with each other in it. Urdu is commonly used in everyday communication at home. She talks with her siblings in Urdu and never talks in Punjabi with her friends or strangers. Although her Punjabi speaking and listening skills are good yet she lacks writing and reading proficiency. Her use of Punjabi in informal gatherings is very limited, and that too depends on the people and situations. For her, "Speaking only one language is not an advantage at all and same is the case with Punjabi, qk ajkal kay dor mai taraqi kay liye aur agay bharnay kay liye Urdu aur English ka bi jann'na zaroori hai" (...because in today's world its essential to know the use of English and Urdu for progress and prosperity).

She responded to the question about status of Punjabi language as, "Its scope is limited aur nayi nasal isko poori tarha say apna nahi rahi" (its scope is limited and the new generation does not own it completely). She remarked that she doesn't impose the use of Punjabi on her children and let them learn it from their grandparents.

The results of the study regarding attitudes towards Punjabi indicate a hint of language shift in Sialkot city from female university students' perspective. This shift is very much in its early stages as it just shows sign of it and might be gradual in the coming years if young learners are going to desert its use and show reluctance and hesitation in speaking and learning it. Punjabi is not a dominant or so to say a preferred medium of communication in different domains though it is the mother tongue of majority of the students but its use is getting limited.

The future researchers can take this study from male university students and teachers perspective. This study can be employed at a larger scale by including students from other universities. Comparative study from rural and urban population's attitudes can also be examined. Parents' can also be included in such kind of research studies as respondents.

Conclusion

The study concludes that somehow Punjabi language is losing its status among the female university students. They are shifting from Punjabi to other Languages because they think they have to move with the modern world and if they speak Punjabi they will be perceived backward. They are ignoring and not using Punjabi language much. Students think that Punjabi is a derogatory language and it should not be used in formal or informal gathering due to this reason they don't feel proud in speaking Punjabi. 65.3% claimed that Punjabi is their Mother Tongue and 55.8% have Punjabi as medium of communication at home but when it comes to speaking socially in their formal and informal gatherings results show that 55.5% don't speak Punjabi language in fact, they feel uncomfortable and perceive its use as impolite. 48.3% responded that they are fluent in speaking Punjabi while on the other hand the usage of Punjabi in social settings is alarming. Parents speak Punjabi with each other but most of them don't like their children to speak Punjabi and consider Punjabi a derogatory language for children. Respondents also don't want that in future their children learn Punjabi language. Majority of the students don't feel proud that they belong to Punjabi language and its culture in spite of this they consider Punjabi an unsophisticated language. It shows lack of concern regarding the future of Punjabi language and the culture associated to it. The results indicate that in near future the maintenance of Punjabi language will be difficult and it is clear that Punjabi is in its initial step of being avoided and gradually moving towards shift.

References

- Abbas, F. & Iqbal, Z. (2018). Language Attitude of the Pakistani Youth towards English, Urdu and Punjabi: A Comparative Study. *Pakistan Journal of Distance & online Learning*, Vol. IV, Issue I, p. 199-214.
- Abbas, F. Jalil, M. K. & Rehman, Z. (n.d.). The Status of Punjabi Language In The Province of Punjab, Pakistan. *The Dialogue*, Vol. XIV, Issue 2, p. 254-264.
- Akram, A. & Yasmeen, R. (2011). Attitudes towards English and Punjabi learning in Faisalabad. *Journal of Academic and Applied Studies*, 1(4), 9-32.
- Crystal, D. (2000). *Language Death*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Ethnologue: Languages of the World.
<http://www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification>
- Gillani, M. Mahmood, M. A. (2014). Punjabi: A Tolerated Language Young generations' attitude. *Research on Humanities and Social Sciences*, 4(5), 129-137.
- Habtoor, H. A. (2013). Language Attitudes of Tigrinya-speaking Parents towards Mother Tongue Maintenance and Their views on Their Children's Shift to Arabic in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia: A Sociolinguistic Investigation. *International Journal of English and Education*. 2(2) 1-16.
- John, A. (2015). *Ideology, language attitude and status of Punjabi in Pakistan*. (Unpublished Doctoral Dissertation). Ball State University, Indiana.
- Kircher, R. (2014). Thirty years after bill 101: A contemporary perspective on attitudes towards English and French in Montreal. *The Canadian journal of applied linguistics*, 17(1), 20-50.
- Mansoor, S. (2017). *Punjabi, Urdu, English in Pakistan: A Sociolinguistic study*. Vanguard
- Mbori, B. J. O. I. (2009). *The interface between language attitudes and language use in a post-conflict context: the case of Rwanda* (Unpublished Doctoral dissertation). University of South Africa.
- Nazir, B. Aftab, U. and Saeed, A. (2013). Language Shift-The Case of Punjabi in Sargodha Region of Pakistan. *Acta Linguistica Asiatica*, 3(2), 41-60
- Nettle, Daniel & Suzanne Romaine. (2000). *Vanishing Voices: The Extinction of the World's Languages*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Rahman, T. (2005). Language Policy, multilingualism, and language vitality in Pakistan. *Trends in Linguistics Studies and Monographs*. Islamabad: Summer Institute of Linguistics.

- Zaidi, A. (2010). A Postcolonial sociolinguistics of Punjabi in Pakistan. *Journal of Postcolonial Cultures and societies*, 1(3), p. 22-55.
- Zaidi, A. (2014). Exiled in its own land: Diasporification of Punjabi in Punjab. *South Asian Diaspora*.
- Zaidi, A. (2016). Ethnolinguistic Vitality of Punjabi in Pakistan: A GIDS approach. *Linguistics & Literature Review (LLR)*, Vol. 2, Issue 1.