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**HISTORICAL DEVELOPMENT OF PUNJABI LANGUAGE IN PRE-/ POST-
INDEPENDENCE PAKISTAN AND THE FUTURE PREDICTIONS**

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Abstract

The current research aims at tracing the historical development of Punjabi language before partition and after partition. Before partition and formation of independent Pakistan, there were two groups of Punjabi speakers namely Punjabis living in Western Punjabi which is now part of Pakistan and Sikhs living in East Punjab which is now part of India. Punjabi language was adversely affected by the arrival of the British in the subcontinent and their language policies to undermine the indigenous languages. The Muslim of the United India also did not like it for its association with Sikh identity. After the formation of Independent Pakistan, Punjabi language was not given due importance. It was neither given any official status nor implemented in education sector, consequently pushing it to oblivion. The speakers of Punjabi language have a dismissive rather derogatory attitude towards their mother tongue. Different research and theoretical studies have implicated the need to emphasize the importance of Punjabi language otherwise the future seems to be in jeopardy.

Introduction

Punjabi language is not only spoken in Pakistan and India but it is also spoken in the countries like Canada, United Kingdom, United States of America and all other countries wherever Punjabi immigrants are present (Singh & Lehal, 2006). In the subcontinent, there are two major groups who use Punjabi as their mother tongue; the Sikhs of East Punjab in India and the Punjabis living in West part of the Punjab province in Pakistan. Punjabi language has the status of official language in Punjab, a state of India. Gurmukhi script is used to write Punjabi language in Indian Punjab which is also called eastern Punjab while the script that is used to write Punjabi language in Pakistani Punjab which called

western Punjab is called “Shahmukhi” (Kumar & Josan, 2010). Talking about the residents of eastern Punjab who are Sikhs, they are very particular about their language and use it with prestige and pride. The Sikhs are very particular about their language and use it with prestige and pride. According to a common perception of Sikh community, if a Sikh is not able to speak Punjabi, he is considered to be a fake Sikh. This is the reason many Sikhs who belong to diaspora international community and have never been to the place of origin India, even they can speak Punjabi language with a good deal of proficiency (Zaidi & David, 2015).

Coming to the Pakistani Punjabis, Punjabi is the mother tongue of majority of population in Pakistan and the provincial language of the province Punjab (Manan & David, 2014). The Punjabi speaking community dominates the power spheres like army and bureaucracy. Unfortunately, this dominance is not reflected in the status of their language. Nobody other than the Punjabi themselves are responsible for not promoting their language. As said by Zaidi (2010), they do not use it in formal settings, so it only performs insignificant functions like informal interactions. The current low status of Punjabi language can be best understood in the perspective of historical insights.

Punjabi language before independence of Pakistan

Muslims ruled India for quite a long time before the British came and colonized it. During the Muslim rule, Persian was the official language of India and was used widely in the domains of power like administration and judiciary. At that time, all the local languages of India were developing as some of them such as Punjabi were also the medium of instruction. With the arrival of the British, the situation changed as they started to establish their control. They considered language as a powerful tool for this purpose, so they overhauled the educational policy of India by replacing Persian with English as the official language and also made English as the medium of instruction and the language of administration. English emerged as the language of elite (Kachru, 1983) with wide circulation of English newspapers. According to Brass (2005), the British also used Urdu as replacement for Persian and other local languages of the North Indian States.

With the conquest of the Punjab province, they replaced Punjabi with Urdu language as they declared Urdu as the official language of the Punjab province. The British aimed at destroying the indigenous languages and using English to consolidate their position. The British caused serious damages to Punjabi language by implementing Urdu in education and administration while pushing Punjabi in the background. They didn't even consider Punjabi an independent language and with this, they tried to tarnish even the culture of Punjabi speaking community and their unique identity (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018). According to Ngugi wa Thiong'o (1986), the colonizers used language as the source to enforce the spiritual subjugation.

The next step was to institutionalize English language and Lord Macaulay declared English as the language of the elite and the ruling class. He established the superiority of English language and culture by advocating its teaching and

implementation. When the two-nation theory gained popularity, the Muslims considered Urdu (Perso-Arabic script) as marker of their Muslim identity while Hindi (Devangari script) emerged as a symbol of Hindu identity. This Urdu Hindi controversy led to further aggravation of the situation as Punjabi language was pushed back also because it (Gurmukhi script) was considered the identity of the Sikhs (Zaidi, 2010). It was only left for the Sikhs to promote the Punjabi language and its literature, so they introduced it in oriental colleges. The Muslims have deserted Punjabi language and made Urdu as marker of their identity during the Pakistan movement.

Even before the birth of Pakistan, the Punjabi language has been suffering socially, politically and economically as a language (Rahman, 2011). It never gained any opportunity to progress and prosper in the united India which was ruled by the Mughal emperors and they promoted their language, Persian, in the domains of power. Urdu was at an advantageous position as it had close linguistic proximity between Persian, mutual intelligibility with Hindi and semantic affinity with Punjabi (Zaidi, 2010). When the British decided to abolish Persian language because of its Mughal association, they decided to replace Persian language with Sindhi in the province of Sindh, but did not replace Persian with Punjabi in the province of Punjab. Urdu was their preferred choice and they asserted their decision by presenting the argument that Punjabi was not an independent language; rather it was a dialect of Urdu with low social value. Their decision was rooted in the social criteria for evaluating the language as they evaluated Punjabi language on the basis of socio-political grounds (Zaidi, 2001). Had they evaluated Punjabi on linguistic merits, they would have valued the rich literature of Punjabi language both in prose and poetic forms. There was significant literature published in Punjabi language over the vast period of time; Heer Ranjha is one of the many immortal love stories written in Punjabi language (Singh, 2012). Unfortunately, the high literary value of Punjabi language was compromised against its low political value.

Punjabi was also at disadvantage of its association with Sikh identity and that was the reason the Muslims in the united India also never acknowledged its worth on political grounds (Zaidi, 2010). During the Pakistan movement the simplest divide of languages was reflected in asserting Hindi as identity marker of Hindus; Muslim identity was associated with Urdu while Punjabi was considered representative of Sikh identity.

Punjabi language in post-independence Pakistan

Even after the formation of Pakistan, Punjabi language was not paid much attention and was pushed to the background. There was no prestigious status given to Punjabi language despite repeated efforts by numerous activists like Taseer and Faqir (1948). Despite the efforts to promote Punjabi language and literature, it could not become popular and remained deprived of any support from the government. During the first few years of the regime of Ayub Khan, the organizations working for the promotion of Punjab language were banned on account of the political concerns. Mirza (1985) argues that any act of supporting Punjabi language and literature was seen with suspicion as well as

considered anti-state at that time. The case of banning *the Punjabi Majlis* was a glaring example of victimization of Punjabi language by the action of banning it by the government.

Later on, the situation started to change in 1962 as the government has taken some initiatives to promote Punjabi language by encouraging Punjabi publications (Riaz, 2011). It was decided to teach Punjabi as a subject from 6th to 12th class as well as broadcast Punjabi programs from Radio Pakistan. The translation of the Holy Quraan and establishment of Punjabi department in Punjab University in 1970s provided space for the Punjabi organizations like Majlis Mian Muhammad, Punjabi Adabi League, Majlis Shah Hussain, Punjabi Society, Majlis-e-Bahu and Majlis Waris Shah. The purpose of all these initiatives was to create sense of ownership among Punjabi language speakers to feel pride in their language.

The Punjabi community in Pakistan is numerically the largest community of Pakistan comprising 44.15% of the whole population of the country (The Government of Pakistan, 1998). It has been observed that the major institutions of the country have been dominated by the Punjabi speaking population with large majority (Zaidi, 2011). Statistically speaking, approximately 80% of the army and 55% of the bureaucracy hail from Punjabi linguistic background. The other ethnolinguistic groups have often accused Punjabis for occupying the mainstream power circles for their benefit at the expense of the other groups. Ayres (2008) accuses the Punjab province and the Punjabi speaking community for capturing the national institutes by means of nepotism and patronage networking. This power and dominance of Punjabis does not find its reflection in the status of their language and they themselves have been responsible for this situation.

Despite being the language of majority in the country, Punjabi language has not been given any official status (John, 2015). This lack of official patronage has also contributed to the present miserable condition of the Punjabi language. It is urgently required that the Punjabi language is given some official status, if not at national language, at least at the level of Punjab province. According to the article 251 of the national constitution, the legislation can be done at the provincial level in order to promote provincial language and the provincial assembly may recommend measures for the teaching and the use of languages besides the national language of the country. The Punjab province may follow the example of Khyber Pakhtoonkha province where a bill to declare five local languages as the languages of education has been passed (Abbas, Jalil, Zaki & Irfan, 2020). No such steps to promote Punjabi language have been taken so far in this regard.

The current insignificant status of Punjabi language can be majorly attributed to the people who are its speakers (Riaz, 2011). The Punjabi population did not show any serious concern towards promoting their language from the very early days of independence of Pakistan in 1947 till date. Urdu despite being minority language was able to achieve the status of national language of the country in 1948 even in the presence of Bengali and Punjabi – the significantly majority languages. The speakers of Bengali language raised their voices while on the

other hand Punjabi population did not show any resistance to this decision. Since the Punjabi occupied the centers of power and they were also well represented in the army and bureaucracy, they invested in making themselves mainstream strong group. Unfortunately, in the process of gaining power, the Punjabis did not pay attention to their language and deserted it (Zaidi, 2011).

With reference to intergenerational transmission of Punjabi language, the educated parents prefer to speak Urdu rather than Punjabi with their children (Zaidi, 2010). There are many urban families who are in the process of losing their mother tongue Punjabi as they consider it less prestigious. They prefer to interact with their children in Urdu language because of its prestigious language. There are so many changes even in Punjabi language taking place under the influence of Urdu (Din & Ghani, 2017). The apprehensions are that a good number of families will ultimately lose Punjabi language in generations to come. The pragmatic value of a language is very important in convincing people to use it widely for various functions. Since the Punjabi language does not help you in your career or in getting good jobs, its pragmatic value has gone down. This is also become a weakening factor thus pushing Punjabi language to in significant and non-formal linguistic functions in life. Zaidi (2010) also contends that Punjabi language is associated with low level jobs or no jobs.

Despite being the provincial language of biggest province in the country (Hussain, 2018), the Punjabi language remains absent in education system of the province. The province of Sindh initiated to teach Sindhi language in schools and the same was the case with Pashto in the province of Khyber Pakhtoonkha. According to Rahman (2002) in the province of Sindh, there are 36,750 schools where the medium of instruction is Sindhi and the province of Khyber PakhtoonKha there are 10,731 Schools where Pashto language is used as a medium of instruction. Another fact about these two provinces is that both these languages, Sindhi and Pashto, are taught as a compulsory subject in these provinces. On the other hand in the province of Punjab which is the largest province of the country with the largest community of the country, there is not a single school where Punjabi is used as a medium of instruction and Punjabi is taught as a subject (Rahman, 2011).

Unfortunately, Punjabi was not implemented in schools and thus remained absent in the education sector. There are various studies that talk about the lack of promotion of Punjabi in educational sector in Pakistan (Zaidi & David, 2015). They contend that there is hardly any school where Punjabi is taught or promoted. The only level where Punjabi is taught and that too as an optional subject is college level so it is not supported at any institutional level in education sector (Khokholva, 2014; John, 2015). Rammah (2002) refers to the statistical data that only 60 % Punjabi L1 speakers commonly use Punjabi language in household but now the ratio is decreasing day by day. The Punjabi language is associated with lack of literacy and education (Zaidi, 2010). Thus, the lack of support from educational institutes is one of the major reasons for downplaying the role of Punjabi language. If at all, the Punjabi is to be reclaimed, the most important step is to implement in the educational sector.

There is urgent need to introduce Punjabi as a subject in the schools of the Punjab province.

According to Zaidi and David (2015), there are various incidents that provide evidence to the proposition that the Punjabi community itself has been responsible of shaming their mother tongue. Shah (1997) relates a very important story in this regard when it was decided to declare Punjabi the official language of Punjab province in 1990. When the resolution for the said initiated was moved, Islami Jamhoori Ittehad, which earlier claimed to have been the champion of the cause when in opposition, spoiled the whole resolution when in power. The Punjabi themselves have made no serious efforts to promote their language; consequently, they have unconsciously undermined their mother tongue as described by Zaidi (2010). He further argues that the Punjabi language is also considered indecent and vulgar language by some, no other than Punjabis themselves again. The only use that Punjabi fits in is its use for cracking jokes and informal communication.

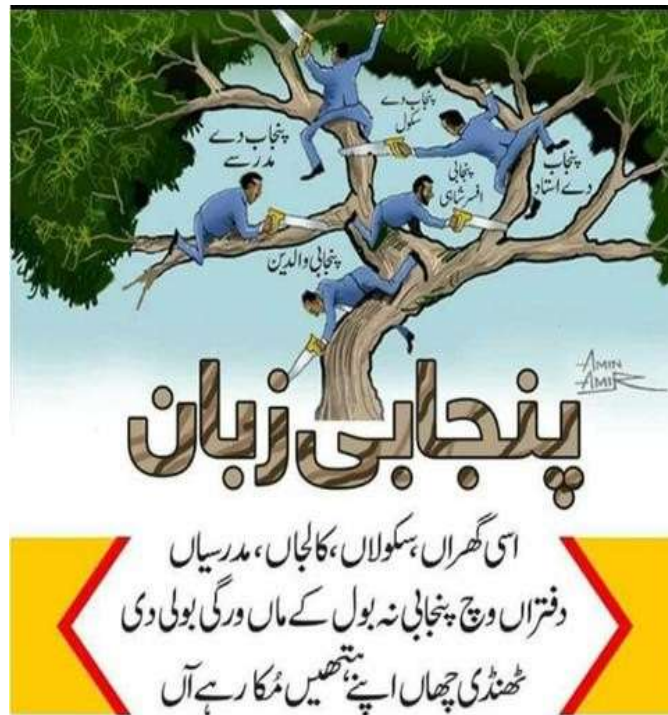
The native speakers of Punjabi in Pakistan have started looking down upon their language over the last few years. Instead of feeling pride in using their native language, they feel that it's a derogatory language and should not be used in formal situations (Zaidi, 2010). It has been observed that people tend to shift their language to another if their language has low social status or they think of their language to be socially low. Similarly, a language with high status will be maintained. The status of Punjabi language is low on economic and social ground (Zaidi & David, 2015) so language shift may take place in the Punjabi speaking community. According to Din and Ghani (2017), it has been observed that the Punjabi language has diminished from public discourse and this language shift is clearly visible in urban areas. Another ridiculous fact is that all activities of the Punjabi community whether they are professional, intellectual or the cultural activities, take place in national or international languages that means either they take place in Urdu or English language (Khokhlova, 2014). The only use that Punjabi fits in is its use for cracking jokes and informal communication (Zaidi, 2010). The reasons for that may be there are innumerable swear words as well as double intenders commonly found in their language. Punjabi language is also considered indecent and vulgar language by some, no other than Punjabis themselves again.

The Punjabi language has lost its significance slowly and gradually mainly because of the social attitude of its speakers. Khokhlova (2014) describes that the speakers of Punjabi language have a dismissive rather derogatory attitude towards their mother tongue. Unfortunately, there is widespread culture-shame about Punjabi language. Zaidi (2017) reiterated the situation by saying that the Punjabi language is being exiled from many domains of life by its speakers.

Future predictions about Punjabi language

The current sorry state of the Punjabi language can be credited to the Punjabi schools, the teachers, the parents as well as to the Punjabi Bureaucracy. Though in general, the Punjabi speakers have played the most significant role in downplaying their language, yet some activists have been trying to give Punjabi

its justified place. They have been involved in a long struggle to achieve some status for their language. It was the result of their struggle that in 1960s, it was allowed to be taught as optional subject in the schools. But the language policies devised afterwards have not recognized any value of Punjabi language. These circumstances resulted in decline of importance and use of Punjabi language. In the words of Zaidi (2017), the Punjabi language has become alien in its own land where its numeric majority is well-established. This is high time that the Punjabi language must be given importance otherwise its future seems to be in jeopardy as is shown in the picture which sums up the story of Punjabi language in a convincing way.



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