



Exploring Sindhi Parents' Preference of Communicating with Children in English at Home: A Case Study of Sindhi Families Based in Karachi South

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Abstract

This study aims to focus on a class of Sindhi's parents' population that communicate with their children in English language at home. The participants for the study were 10 Sindhi's parents comprising both male and female who have children aged from 1 to 8 years based in Clifton, Zamzama, and DHA, Karachi. The study employed a descriptive qualitative approach. The data was collected through open-ended interviews and the personal observation of the researchers. The result shows English as a preferred language according to the parents' belief that it will help their children not only get admission in the prestigious schools but ultimately will receive higher education in Pakistan and abroad and eventually get highly paid jobs and settlement anywhere in the world. This study is based on Pierre Bourdieu's (1977) theory of habitus focusing on its field (capital) and doxa, their internal belief that is related to parents' expectations that early acquisition of English language helps their kids to achieve both cultural and symbolic capital which provide positive results in achieving the Institutionalized, embodied, and objectified habitus.

Keywords: *Mother tongue, Sindhi, Communication, Children, Families, Language shift, Cultural capital*



Introduction

It is a natural phenomenon that when a certain group of speech community takes shifts from their mother tongue to other tongue as a symbolic power, they lose their own language and culture both. Indigenous languages have experienced lots of shifts in Pakistan due to the different language policies coming up time and again due to political influences. Right from the colonial rule English language has been considered the language of prestige and symbol of elite class. Many generations migrated to Europe and America shifting their language the new one. Some of them returned back to Pakistan and brought newly adopted language with them. Thus, the status of the language has been decided by the power of elite influence. Pakistan is a multilingual country having more than 73 languages spoken by the different speech communities. It has four provinces: each having dominant language of its own. Punjab has Panjabi as dominant language. Balochistan has Balochi, KPK has Pushto, while Sindh has Sindhi as official and dominant language. According to census conducted in 2017, Sindhi is the third language of Pakistan and one of the oldest languages of Sub-continent with a rich culture, vast folklore and extensive literature and is one of the major languages of Pakistan, spoken in the province of Sindh approximately by twenty million native speakers. Rehman (1998) says that anybody who learned Sindhi in Sindh province, is sure to get jobs easily. There was a time when Sindhi language enjoyed high status in the country.

Sindhi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken widely in Sindh, with 52.4% of the population using it. Urdu and Punjabi are the second and third most spoken languages, respectively. The Sindhi language held a stronger position in Sindh before partition. It is taught as a subject in educational institutes, schools, and universities, and is also used at the lower levels of administration, judiciary, and journalism. The language is also used in low-level administration, judiciary, and journalism. Sindhi, the dominant language in Sindh, has lost its utilitarian value before partition. Despite its prestige in education, Sindhi speakers have a deep emotional attachment to the language. However, with the growing influence of English as a symbolic power, many Sindhi speech communities are adopting English as their first language due to international job market requirements and education needs. This has led to their children becoming monolingual and abandoning their mother tongue entirely.



The dominance of English in Pakistan has negatively impacted local languages and cultural identity, as it is seen as a license for socioeconomic advancement and higher education. Elites proficient in English have better social survival opportunities. Parents in Pakistan often prioritize English communication with their children, neglecting the native Sindhi dialect. English is seen as a symbol of prestige, honor, and instrumental functionalities like education and jobs. Early English medium school systems, such as Karachi Grammar and Beacon House System, have prevented Sindhi language shift, leading to monolingualism in social and advanced education domains. The upper middle and elite class in Pakistan prioritize monolingualism, preferring English over their mother tongue for educational and social mobility. This preference is primarily driven by the desire for English as a speech community in specific areas of Pakistan. The speakers have abandoned their mother tongue in favor of English, with Sindhi being a well-documented language. Research shows that several languages have been threatened by English hegemony, and language policies in Pakistan are also responsible for language shifts due to political agendas.

Bourdieu's Theory of Habitus

Pierre Bourdieu's Habitus theory suggests that knowledge, acquired through initial learning, is unconsciously influenced by surroundings. Bourdieu's capital theory categorizes capitals into economic, cultural, and symbolic. Economic capital is related to industrial domains, while cultural capital is related to education and knowledge. Symbolic capital deals with an individual's power in society. These capitals can determine an individual's social stratification structure and social behavior patterns. Habitus theory highlights the importance of Cultural Capital, which includes institutionalized, embodied, and objectified resources. These resources significantly impact social mobility and success. Objectified resources include an individual's clothing, knowledge, skills, and experiences related to culture and society. Additionally, doxa, or internalized societal presuppositions, is a crucial concept in Habitus theory. These presuppositions are deeply rooted in attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors acquired through socialization and experiences.

The doxa is a naturalized vision of reality, influenced by learned beliefs and values. It informs an agent's actions and thoughts within a specific field, such as production, circulation, appropriation, and exchange of goods and services. Bourdieu's field covers the domains of



knowledge, status, and competitive positions in the struggle to accumulate, exchange, and monopolize power resources, which he calls capital. Bourdieu's concept of field refers to a structured social space with rules, domination schemes, and legitimate opinions. Fields in modern societies include arts, education, politics, law, and economy. Cultural capital, related to intangible assets like competencies, education, intellect, style of speech, dress, and social networks, is a crucial aspect of practice theory. Bourdieu believes that culture plays a vital role in power, with more capital an individual has, defining culture capital as familiarity within society, also known as 'high culture'.

Significance of the Study

The study will address the issue of Sindhi language's preservation and its importance of maintenance. This will also help in further research regarding the issue of death of regional languages. This study will also receive the attention of the policy makers, stake holders, and educationist to develop the awareness among the people regarding the importance of regional languages especially mother tongues which are crucial for cognitive development of their children.

Statement of the Problem

Sindhi language is decreasing its number of speakers especially in the South region of Karachi. Parents prefer to communicate in English with their children right from their birth in order to achieve Culture Capital and also for the purpose to enjoy all the perks of elite society ignoring the future of Sindhi language preservation.

Ethical Consideration

Ethical issues are properly considered. The names of the respondents have not been revealed.

The names of schools are also not indicated. Only localities are mentioned.

Research Question

What are the reasons behind Sindhi parents' preference of communicating with their children in English at home?



Literature Review

Literature review of various scholars show that family environment and first language acquisition both play a vital role in developing cognitive faculty of the young children.

Therefore, the study has taken up two aspects regarding the English language adaptation and parental attitudes towards the mother tongue. Marjoribanks (1972); Wallberg (1972); Kellaghan (1977); Burns, agree that there is a relationship between home environment and learning.

Hameed, Ansa (2022) suggests the formulation of certain policies as well as the broadcasting of some awareness programs for the common public especially mothers to promote and continue the use of local dialects at home. They should be made aware that children have tendencies to learn and absorb more than one language. We need to motivate mothers to maintain the usage of mother tongues if we, as a nation, do not want to leave a legacy of ‘zombie languages’ for our future generations. Bourdieu (1990) views that children of well-to-do families get more facilities which add to their learning objectives while children coming from lower social status and poor income face difficulties to develop themselves as they suffer from lack of necessary support of parents who have no educational outlook. He relates this relationship to parental occupational status, parental involvement and parental learning management programs.

Pakistan, being a multilingual country, the language order is in place of the following: 1: English, 2: Urdu and 3: local dialects (Rahman, 1996). In the Provinces of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Sindh; Sindhi language and Pashto language is spoken informally and perceived to be individuality markers. Whereas, in Province of Punjab, unfortunately, there is a wide culture-shame about Punjabi language and is stigmatized. Mostly peer groups, parents and teachers combine to humiliate students about Punjabi language; it is forbidden for the students to use it especially in the elite classes. Parents speak in English and Urdu rather than Punjabi (Rahman, 1996).

Language is a valuable gift, the transmission of language from one generation to another may be seen as the transmission of culture. It has long been known that history and culture heavily affect the language of that specific population (Jiang et al., 2022; Ghahderijani et al., 2021; Khan et al., 2021; Menon et al., 2014). Kurd, Shehla, and Saima (2022) believe that language depends on the speaker; if the speaker of a language has a negative attitude towards his language, the future of that language is threatened. The study of Language attitude showed that in multilingual societies,



language shift takes place if the attitude is not favorable towards a language. Language shift is the procedure which automatically impulses the under privileged or non-dominant languages to its extinction. Broadfoot (2008) claims that the learning pace at an early age is extremely fast and flexible allowing children to acquire a wide range of new knowledge. This is how the teaching and learning of other languages, such as English becomes important, since the acquisition of it at home becomes mandatory and children are facilitated by being given their capacities to process and maintain new knowledge through English language.

Philominraj, Andrew, Rajeeva Ranjan, Roderigo Arllano Saavidra, Claudio Andres Ceron Urzua (2022) retrieved 16 studies from corpus and from the web of science database published between 2016 and 2021 in different EFL contexts were analyzed and found three themes: Family, Parenting style and family influence on language learning.

Bonci (2008) identifies that most of the parents are not aware of the importance they play in their child's education and even play a limited role in their child's learning. He holds multiple variables responsible for which effect the impact of the family and home environment, such as: socio-economic status, level of parental education, family size, etc. But at the same time these parental attitudes and behaviour, specifically parents' involvement in home learning activities, are crucial for children's achievement and can overcome the influence of other factors.

Blake (1981) examined the relationship between children's academic achievement and parental understanding. He found that parents of high achievers showed significantly greater understanding of their children than did parents of under-achievers. The results also indicated that parents of high achievers were significantly more accepting of their children than were parents of under-achievers.

Research Methodology

This qualitative study involves purposive sampling of extensive narrative data which consists of interviews of 10 participants to dive deep into the phenomenon. Interviews were analyzed and narratives were formed to know the phenomenon. The purposive sampling helps the researcher to select the participants based on his/her knowledge and experiences and experiences which serve the purpose (Monette, Sullivan & Dijong, 2011).



Population and Sampling

Ten parents(10=n) aged between 30 to 37, eight females(mothers) and two males(fathers) were selected for open-ended interviews protocol. The parents were randomly selected in the first place, from different phases of DHA, Zamzama, and Clifton, Karachi. The selected participants were requested prior to the day of the interview protocol and were requested to spare some time from their busy schedule as mostly they were working people. The purpose of the selection of the samples from multiple localities was undertaken so that the demographical variation on the responses could be figured out and the validity could be maintained.

Instrumentation and Data Collection Method

Open-ended interview protocol is conducted to find out the phenomenon. Each of the respondents were asked ten questions for the study. The time of the interview for each participant was 45 minutes. Responses were analyzed and are presented in the study in a comprehensive manner.

Findings and Results

The data shows that parents and specially mothers are responsible for using English as a power language. The participants provided the following reasons for not using Sindhi language as the mother tongue.

One of the respondents said...

The environment as well as the era I am living in needs me to communicate with my kids in English language. Specially in the schools, we have witnessed that some children who speak in Sindhi language are bullied by their peers. As a result, they become less confident which ultimately effect their performance in the schools. Moreover, children's admission selection in the required schools is made on the basis of their English proficiency and communication skills and even the schools take up those kids who can describe the events and objects in English language. The schools even take interviews of the parents to see their English language proficiency so that the parents can also help the children in home tasks.

Another one gave the reason that.....

It is the demand of the school where they are studying. The admissions are confirmed on the basis of the children's English communications and names of the objects which the children are



required to mandatory know at the time of the admission. Even the names of the shapes and colors are to be known in English.

One of the participants gave her views that

Mother tongue is not beneficial in the long terms as they need English language to grow internationally. Even the admissions in the higher education institutions standardized tests and high fluency in English is required. And again, I would mention that the whole education discourse and interactions with the teachers and instructors are held in English.

One of the mothers said,

‘English communication skills with good accent are the keys of success in careers of any sort. Even in our country English is the most required language in every domain of life. Even my own Sindhi proficiency is not perfect as I was put into convent school. Therefore, the entire interaction takes place in English at home among the siblings and of course, the kids are not exceptions. Again, Urdu is our preferred language for the communications in the other domains as second language.’

One of the respondents viewed...

‘Even I do not have good grip on my own language i.e. Sindhi though, therefore, I consider English as my mother tongue. But I would say that English is the highly demanded language in the global market. We cannot deny its importance and validity as it is the means of getting the required goals even job and settlement issues abroad.’

Other participants gave these reasons....

‘We have to cope up with the society pressure as people in our circle make fun of our mother tongue accent. Therefore, I make sure that my kid has full control over his accent and fluency while interacting in English.’

Another respondent claimed

‘English enhances the personality of a person. Speaking in English is the demand of our circle we are surviving in. Who speaks in Sindhi nowadays? Everyone is instrumental in the



achievements of the goals and pursues them whatever means they think are suitable to help them reach their destination.’

Another one viewed that

‘Our kids have to go abroad for higher education and survive in the social set up where English communication skills are required not only for social mobility and work place environment but in terms of professional requirement as well.’

One of the parents said....

‘Well, English language is a license for achieving the better job opportunities in the local and global market. By the way, who interacts in Sindhi nowadays. We, parents in our circle speak mostly in English and obviously, the kids, they also do that. They have to survive in the society where English is required in every step of life.’

Another respondent viewed that.....

‘Communication skills are the keys to earn and maintain a high-level job with good packages of salaries. And of course, English is the key to success in every field of life and in fact, in every domain both locally and internationally. Our kids do participate in cultural shows and know about Sindhi culture and love Sindhi attire but when it comes to interaction in Sindhi our generation don’t have competence over Sindhi language as we even don’t know the names of the everyday items and objects in Sindhi. Therefore, our kids even consider English as their first language.’

The data clearly indicates that mothers have preferences for the usage of English language in domestic settings in the place of Sindhi language. They consider it a socially acceptable norm in their domain to be able to survive globally. If they prefer to use a local language, they will be limited to the local jobs. However, they set their own reasons to give value to one of the languages over other, by using it. On the other hand, mothers also have strong personal reasons to not use a language or a dialect. The data clearly indicates that mothers do not care about the importance of the local languages or dialects. Thus, they are responsible for the Sindhi language shift to English language causing it massive threat of being minority language.

Hence, that is the reason Sindhi parents are prioritizing English as a dominant language, even ignoring their first language. Moreover, the adoption of the English language has resulted in



making their kids monolingual which deviate the children from enjoying the cognitive and cultural benefits. Furthermore, the children use their thinking capacity in English which is their dominant language keeping away from their cultural values and heritage. Therefore, there is a dire need to make efforts to preserve Sindhi Language and maintain its identity and save it from dying which is one of the oldest languages of Sub-continent with a rich culture, vast folklore and extensive literature and is one of the major languages of Pakistan, spoken in the province of Sindh approximately by twenty million native speakers.

Thus, it complies with Bourdieu (1991) theory that power is involved in taking on English and rendering it as a mother tongue and that parents assume that early acquisition of English language helps their kids to attain both cultural and symbolic capital which will provide positive results in achieving the Institutionalized habitus which will show up through the influence of the social groups on the personalities of the individuals who belong to those institutions. Embodied habitus will result in when they will consider themselves the part of that set up which they have internalize from the institutionalized groups, and finally, objectified habitus will exhibit itself from their clothing, jewelry, art, books, and other object which will become the symbol of their identity. Hence, it is a great possibility that this generation by ignoring their mother tongue and roots of their origin has totally internalize symbolic capital which embodies itself in their entire personality and outlook and finally, institutionalized difference will show up in perusing the Bourdieu's (1991) cultural capital in the society at large.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Language can be preserved only through the transfer from generation to generation and through language to language to let the language live and survive. However, the sign of its extinction can be detected if the parents who are the custodian of the mother tongue replacing it with the foreign language then local language definitely, meets its deteriorating position and eventually vanishes and new language comes up as the dominant language.

Parents' role is considered vital in terms of saving local languages. As mothers spend more time with their children and therefore have more capacity for survival of mother tongue. Thus, mothers should be educated about the importance of the first language at the community and state level. Moreover, they should not take their dialect and accent for granted which is the beauty of that language. Rehman (2003) states that those well-educated class of parents take their



language. Rahman (2003) states that “the less powerful indigenous languages of Pakistan are becoming markers of lower status and culture shame”. Above all when a language loses its ground it loses its culture with it and is a threat to the integrity of the communities. Kermizi (2015) states that language loss is not just about language; it is the loss of a whole culture and society.

Thus, the state should also come forward bringing out some policies which can work in different dimensions to give proper space to the local languages and set up some awareness programs. This is a proven fact that children have got the capacity of being multilingual and can learn English after learning their mother tongue. Therefore, the parents should consider it a priority to maintain their mother tongue along with the other tongue resulting in saving Sindhi language for the future generations.

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Appendix

Questionnaire

Following open ended questions were constructed to elicit responses from the participants.

1. What are the reasons of communicating with your children in English instead of Sindhi?
2. Do you think that Sindhi is being considered as less important language? How do you comment on that?
3. Do you think it societal pressure which is compelling you to communicate with your children in English?
4. Instead of making your children monolingual by making them speak in English why not bilingual speaking Sindhi at home as well?
5. What are your own views about Sindhi language and how important is this language?
6. How are you viewing future of Sindhi language in the area you are living in?
7. Language and culture are interrelated. Do you think you are isolating your children from Sindhi culture while keeping them away from Sindhi language?
8. Countries like France, Italy, Turkey, Germany, and there so many others which are stuck to their languages and are far ahead in education and other fields and have made progress in every aspect of life. Do you think we can also go ahead with our regional languages making progress the way they have done it? How do you see this scenario?
9. Do you have any societal compulsion to communicate in English with your kids? What sort of pressure do you face?
10. What are your personal views regarding the adoption of English?