



RESEARCH PAPER

Colonial Impact on Regional Languages in Sindh: Exploring the Status of National and Official Languages of Pakistan

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ABSTRACT

Language loss among youth is a causal threat to the enrichment of society, identity, and cultural stability across the colonial societies of the world. In the context of empirical analysis and policymaking, ethnographic systems are still unexplored in the humanities discipline, even though multilingualism is advantageous and mobilized to act in an ethical manner towards a stable environment. Yet, some languages enjoy the status of dominance and hierarchy in multilingual settings across the globe, including Pakistan, due to their colonial impact. The study adopts semi-structured interviews from 20 participants from Karachi and Hyderabad setting of the Sindh, Pakistan, considering the urban and Rural settings of the context. Participants reflect on responses with colonial impact, which has its dominance on the regional languages of Pakistan.

KEYWORDS Language Shift, Regional Languages, English as Dominant Language, Multilingualism, Linguistic Capital, Urdu As Lingua Franca

Introduction

In the global world, some languages have gained the status of dominant languages (Rehman, 2010). These dominant languages threaten the linguistic plurality in different colonial communities, including Pakistan.

In Pakistan, having a multilingual background, 74 languages are spoken with a rich linguistic culture. However, the official language is English in Pakistan (Shamim, 2011). Other than that, Urdu has gained national prestige for many reasons. The national and official languages widely influenced the language contact situation, and they marginalize the regional languages (Mustafa, Z. 2010). Furthermore, Pakistan is socio-economically and linguistically stratified into rural and urban areas, where access to education, language, and capital is significantly different (Rehman, 2002). In the results, the language shift among youngsters is drastic in urban domains. Indigenous languages are being affected among new generations (Crystal, 2003). As a result of language shift, language loss, and language death of Aboriginal languages is alarming for the cultural stability in multilingual settings.

The changing attitude of different communities includes various factors that prevent Aboriginal language speakers from communicating in their heritage language. Consequently, speakers of regional languages changed their journey from their mother tongue to a new language after independence (UNESCO, 2010; Fishman, 1991). In Pakistan, this trend is particularly visible among new generations, where intergenerational transmission of local languages is weakening (Rahman, 2002). The study explores the distinct language situation that addresses the issue of domination

of the English language and language loss in Sindh, and the research study further investigates the other dominating language/ languages in Sindh, i.e., Urdu.

Regional languages act as the pillar of the state; they carry the values, cultural and linguistic diversity (David, 2001). Despite the significance of language and culture, the value is given to the national and international languages in every domain of life, including higher education in Pakistan. Ali, R (2026) says that the national and official language has taken the power of the dominant language in Pakistan because speakers of regional languages attain the hegemonic language for communicative competence. David (1998) explicitly elaborates that these language attitudes and language changes are more frequent in multilingual language speakers who come into contact in different situations of the urban areas. In rural areas of Pakistan, Urdu and English (the official and national language) have not reached wider use of communication yet; the linguistic scenario is intact with regional languages, but the linguistic scenario is disturbed in urban areas due to the hegemony of English and Urdu.

Recent and former researchers have discussed the imperialism of the English and dominating languages and language loss, eminently Phillipson (1992); Kangas (2000); Gramsci (2022); Fontana (2002); Fairclough (2013), Crystal (2003), Ngugi (1993), Fishman(2001), and Grosjeans's (1982). In this context, very little work has been done on language domination and language shift in Sindh province of Pakistan. The subsequent point of this study is to figure out whether ELT practices language shift in Sindh is from home or educational sectors, which agencies foster the status of languages in youngsters to learn and carry forward to being part of the global capital. Furthermore, the researcher needs to contribute to the current work on the hegemonic role of dominant language/ languages that encourage language loss driven by clearing up genuine life attitudes.

Literature Review

Bourdieu's Theory of Practice: History and Current Teaching Trends

Bourdieu's theory of practice becomes the theoretical foundation of the study, exploring language practices in urban areas of Sindh. This also helps in investigating how some languages emphasize domination and marginalization (Mohanty, A. K. 2019). It clearly enhances the distribution of power with the domination of dominant languages and how, in a multilingual society, only dominant languages are encouraged to support success and development (Shamim, 2011). Ethnic groups, diversity of regional languages are in loss at different syntactic loss (AA Shah et al. 2022). AA Shah et al. (2022) explained that there is a complex mechanism between the educational sector and social identity in Sindh, Pakistan. They elucidate the language policies that determined the official and national language status in Pakistan after independence, highlighting the impact of colonialism, yet language loss is unexplored throughout their study.

This way, the impact possesses a system of habitus addressed matrix of dispositions constructed in objective conditions. Therefore, the study is linking the education, social structure, with its rules and dominant scheme policy for the

language shift among youth in Sindh, Pakistan. According to Bourdieu (1991), the academic field builds unconscious learning and ideas. Therefore, the habitus and cultural capital are needed (Bourdieu, 1977).

The massive influx of English and Urdu motivates other language speakers to own dominant languages of the dominant group. Even British colonization spread its wings of language to safeguard only the dominant language and diminish the importance of other languages.

Furthermore, the study illustrates those social and material conditions, accumulating the entire historical context and structuring the society, shaping the milieu under investigation.

Language is not simple practice of transferring thoughts, but it is used as a status and power connotation over time in certain political and social contexts (Shamim, 2011). In this connection, the critical review of the section provides an overview of Bourdieu's theory of practice. His theory of practice and concept of social life engage with activities/games, active involvement without consent.

Recent studies found in Bourdieu's Theory of Practice further collaborate with this idea, explaining that individuals' performance is guided by *habitus*, which consists of internalized dispositions developed through social experiences. These dispositions influence how the youth of Pakistan perceive situations and make decisions in everyday life, associated with their language choice (Tan & Liu, 2022). At the same time, actions become possible with the promotion and structural construct of the social environment or fields who supports and induce those policies in power relations (Nair, 2024).

Relating Bourdieu's theory to the practice of dominant languages among youth of Sindh, Pakistan, the critical analysis of the teaching of the English language trends in Pakistan.

English Language Trends In Pakistan

English Language Teaching (ELT) is mainly followed today as more than a neutral pedagogical practice; rather, it is deeply associated with power, economy, and knowledge production in the global system. Researchers (Crystal, 2003; Kachru, 1983; Philipson, 1992) identify that the global expansion of English depicts the continuation of colonial structures in contemporary forms. Recent studies describe ELT as carrying "academic coloniality," where Western norms continue to dominate teaching practices, teacher identity, and learning expectations in postcolonial contexts (Daffri & Taibi, 2023). The notion reveals linguistic imperialism, where English is understood through education systems in ways that sustain global imbalance and reinforce the dominance of English-speaking nations (Zeng & Yang, 2024).

From a postcolonial view, this governance is not only historical but also institutional. Educational policies, teacher training programs, and curriculum standards mostly promote native-speaker ideologies, marginalizing local

languages (Anwar et al., 2025). Empirical studies from Global South show that English-medium education continues to privilege Western epistemologies. In results, sustaining symbolic and cultural hierarchies established during the colonial period (Wang et al., 2025). Other than that, the current decolonial studies find that ELT still operates within unequal global knowledge systems, promoting the Global North in research production, pedagogy, and assessment practices (R'boul, 2024).

This situation can be theoretically illustrated through Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Practice, particularly the concepts of habitus, field, and capital. From this perspective, ELT functions as a field where power relations determine whose linguistic practices are legitimized. Educators and youth learners produce a habitus shaped by historical and institutional conditions, including colonial legacies, which influence how they perceive "good English" and legitimate knowledge (Calhoun, 2003). Language becomes a form of symbolic capital. And, English proficiency is linked to academic success, social mobility, and institutional recognition. Bourdieusian studies cover the fact that unequal access to linguistic capital provides structural disadvantages for non-native speakers, sustaining global hierarchies in English learning contexts (Wang et al., 2025).

Therefore, ELT cannot be separated from colonial history and global power relations. It activates a dynamic space where colonial legacies are continuously reproduced through institutional practices.

Theoretical Framework

The study is based on Pierre Bourdieu's Sociological Theory of Practice and Habitus as a theoretical framework. Bourdieu (1991) conceptualizes the language hegemony and loss of the connection of Habitus, which he introduced in his concept of 'cultural capital'. He propounds the term "capital" with the thought of material concept and its relationship with society and culture. It also has a symbolic representation. He does not confine "capital" to money. He collectively addresses the symbolic behaviours, and psychological aspects. These three forms of capital altogether work to change society from one mode of life to another. It drifts from material capital to symbolic and cultural forms to justify and cover inequality.

Material and Methods

Research Design

The research methodology employed is qualitative, i.e. semi-structure interviews. The present study manifests the structure of the research and demonstrates the meagre parts of the research design, including the brief data about respondents, context of the study, and methods of the study.

Participants

The sample comprises 20 participants distributed between Karachi (10 participants) and Hyderabad (10 participants), and all are youth associated with public and private institutions. The participants also represent diverse cultural backgrounds, and all speak more than one language. Each participant is chosen from different families (e.g, Memon, Shaikh, Brohi, Pathan, and others, reflecting the ethnolinguistic diversity of Sindh. In terms of mother tongue, Sindhi is the is considered the regional language of Sindh, followed by Urdu, with smaller representations of other aboriginal languages (e.g, Memoni, Brohi, Punjabi, and Saraiki). This linguistic diversity highlights the multilingual ecology of the study context, which is significant for understanding language loss and identity formation among learners even after the independence of Pakistan from the British Empire and the sub-continent.

Data Collection Tools

The study adopts open-ended questions for interviews, aiming to elicit data comprehensively. The data is analyzed as the respondent pertain their views and they will be reassured of the anonymity of the results.

Data Analysis Techniques

Semi-structured interviews are recorded. The interviews last for 15 to 20 minutes.

Ethical approval

The research topic is informed to the participants. They are also given consent forms, highlighting that their privacy will remain secure with the researchers. The interviews are audio-recorded, maintaining anonymity as the top priority. They are also informed of their rights, and they may withdraw at any point in the interview.

Results and Discussion

The research study achieved a substantial amount of data. The analysis is carried out into themes from the participants' Responses.

Theme 1: Maintaining Mother Tongue at Home: Emerging Multilingualism

Most of the participants expressed their language practice in their mother tongue at home. Some speak mix language too, and few deny speaking their mother tongue; those are Punjabi, Memon, and Sindhi speakers who live in Karachi and Urdu-speaking areas.

Responses of the participants

A female participant from Karachi said:

"I speak Sindhi and English. I am a mother, and my daughter is pursuing her early education at the City school. City School is considered a reputed school of Karachi, where my kid only gets exposure when she is fluent in the English language. So this is one of the reasons we speak English and Sindhi".

The response shows its continued cultural and emotional importance. However, this blended use with English as dominance reflects a multilingual domestic environment.

A participant from Hyderabad stated,

"Mostly Sindhi and English. We are comfortable with our mother tongue more than any other language."

The response of the participant shows that while mother tongue remains central, it is no longer used in isolation; mixing occurs to some extent at home domain.

A female participant from Karachi is a Memon, she said:

"I never spoke Memoni since the beginning, hence I cannot speak fluently in it although I do have good listening skills in Memoni, my parents just spoke to me in Urdu, and that just became the norm. I speak English/Urdu mixed with my sister, though, because it's easier than speaking purely in Urdu".

This response suggests that home language practices are becoming increasingly hybrid. These casual habits are rooted in education and are shaped by teaching English. It is also due to urban interaction and changing linguistic needs.

Female participants from Hyderabad said:

"I sometimes speak Urdu at home because my cousins speak Urdu at home".

She speaks in her mother tongue as well, which is revealed, but she switches from her mother tongue to Urdu because her cousins speak Urdu; this reflects the causal effect is transferred from one family to another, and its impact is social.

Theme 2: Language Shift and Intergenerational Loss

A specific pattern of language shift from regional languages to Urdu is found in the participants' responses. It is especially evident among the younger generations of Sindh, who are affiliated with private institutions, and their families have moved to urban settings.

For example, A participant from Karachi shared,

"I never spoke Memoni since the beginning... my parents just spoke to me in Urdu, and that became a habit."

While further inquiring about the originality of that participant, we come across that the family has moved to Karachi from the rural area of Sindh for better opportunities.

The participant said,

"We shift from Sukkur. Over there, my baba feels that we don't get a good education, and he is serious about my brother's and my career. He wants to see us in good jobs".

This shows that parental language and career choices are for better opportunities for the children. The father decided to move to an urban setting because urbanization legitimizes mobility for some people and marginalizes others. This social setting strongly influences language transmission from a regional to a certain dominance.

In short, the shift of local language to some dominant language like English is also leading to vocabulary-level language loss, where younger speakers understand their mother tongues but cannot actively use or retrieve full lexical items.

This partial competence reflects weakening intergenerational continuity, particularly in urban households where Urdu dominates daily communication.

Theme 2: Language Shift and Intergenerational Loss

English is increasingly becoming part of local settings, such as the home. It is due to its association with education policies and better opportunities. A female participant from Hyderabad said,

"I have studied in one of the best private schools of Hyderabad... I only get exposure to English and Urdu. So, I can't write in Sindhi..... I am fluent in English, so we speak English and Sindhi."

These participants demonstrate the example of English hierarchy and how English extends beyond classrooms into domestic life to support academic success. It is evident that the Local families actively integrate English to enhance children's proficiency.

The findings indicate that English acts as symbolic capital, linked to prestige, schooling, and future opportunities. Furthermore, it reshapes traditional home language limits in urban Pakistani contexts of Sindh.

Discussion

The findings reveal that mother language practices in Sindh are increasingly multilingual, shaping social disparity and language loss. It has educational and urban influences due to colonial impact from the time of independence from the British Empire. While mother tongues remain emotionally significant. Urdu acts as a *lingua franca*, and English is gaining dominance in domestic communication.

The overall scenario reflects intergenerational language shift and gradual vocabulary loss in regional languages, particularly Sindhi and Memoni. Along with this, parental decisions, schooling in English-medium institutions, and urban migration strongly influence language choices. English emerges as symbolic capital linked to education and mobility, while Urdu functions as a linking language. Therefore, enjoys the status of national language. Overall, language use at home is no longer stable but dynamically negotiated within changing socio-cultural contexts.

Conclusion

This study sums up that language practices in home domains in Sindh are undergoing a significant transformation. On the other hand, regional languages are being replaced or mixed with Urdu and English due to education systems, urbanization, and aspirations for better social opportunities. The findings reveal that there is emerging regional language loss at the vocabulary level, which is threatening cultural sustainability in multilingual societies like Pakistan. In light of Bourdieu's theory, English is perceived as a valuable form of symbolic capital, while Urdu dominates as a functional medium of communication. These shifts open up the broader sociolinguistic changes where language alternation is affected by opportunity structures and identity negotiation. It raises the concerns about the long-term sustainability of regional linguistic heritage.

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