

## Language Attitude of the Pakistani Youth towards English, Urdu and Punjabi: A Comparative Study

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### Abstract

The current research aimed at comparing the language attitude of the Pakistani youth towards English, Urdu and Punjabi in a linguistically competitive environment. These languages play significant role in the country and are important in their own way. The objectives of the current research were to explore the integrative and instrumental motivation towards these languages, to analyze the social prestige of these languages and their importance in the global perspective. The study adopted the mentalist approach and employed questionnaire as research instrument in the quantitative paradigm of research. The data was collected from a sample of 445 respondents and was analyzed in SPSS through descriptive and inferential statistics. The study concludes that the respondents attach integrative motivation with Urdu and Punjabi while the instrumental motivation and sense of superiority is attached with English language. The study demands changes in language planning in education with the purpose to create environment for balanced development of all languages and positive attitude towards indigenous languages.

**Keywords:** Language attitude, language policy, instrumental motivation, integrative motivation

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## Introduction

The aim of the current research is to compare the language attitude of the Pakistani youth towards English, Urdu and Punjabi. English is an international language as well as the official language in the country. Being the legacy of British colonizers, it remains active in all important power spheres (Manan & David, 2014). Even after seventy years of decolonization, English is widely used for the executive, legislative, and judicial purposes (Ansari, Mehmood & Mangool, 2015; Rahman, 2003). It is considered a status symbol and is spoken widely by the highly influential portion of the population. English is considered a social capital and various institutes that teach English language mark the inevitable role of English in the country. English is also used as a medium of instruction in education sector (Soomro, 2016). It is considered the passport to bright future (Umrani & Bughio, 2017) as it is the language of power and prestige.

Urdu is included in the study because Urdu is national language as well as the lingua franca of the country. One year after the independence of Pakistan (1947), Urdu was designated the sole national language of Pakistan (Bughio, 2014; Ali, 2011). Urdu as the national language of the country is the representative of national identity of the people of Pakistan (Manan & David, 2014). It is the native language of the people who migrated from India to Pakistan at the time of partition of the Indo-Pak subcontinent. Since they were educated, they dominated the bureaucracy of Pakistan despite their numerical weakness (Rahman, 2006). Although Urdu has less than 8 percent L1 users as native speakers (The Bureau of Statistics, the Government of Pakistan, 2017), its importance is enormous. It provides a common means of communication for the people hailing from different linguistic backgrounds (Kothari, 2015). It is also used as medium of instruction in educational institutes besides its role as a lingua franca in the country (Javed, 2017).

Punjabi is the mother tongue of majority of population in Pakistan and the provincial language of the province Punjab (Manan & David, 2014). Punjabi is linguistically very rich language as one's expression with variation of tonal or written emphasis can lead to dozens of locutions and abundance of means and it is also called wit-packed language (Zaidi, 2010). Unfortunately, the Pakistani youth have a dismissive rather derogatory attitude towards their mother tongue. All their activities whether they are professional, intellectual or the cultural activities, take place in national i.e. Urdu or international language i.e. English language (Khokhlova, 2014). The irony of the situation is that

despite being the most literate group of the country, the Punjabis are quite illiterate in their mother tongue and this situation is referred by Zaidi (2015) as linguistic Schizophrenia.

### **Review of Related Literature**

The area on language attitude studies emerged in 1970s and since then, it has become an important area of research in social sciences. This area of research received enormous attention by the experts from the disciplines like psychology, sociology and linguistics as the survival of a language depends on the extent to which the members of that linguistic community use that language or what they think about the language (Rourke, 2005). It is believed that if the speakers of a language have positive attitude towards their language, its growth is guaranteed and if the speakers express or hold negative attitude towards their language, its future is jeopardized. Language attitude studies determine whether or not language shift is taking place in any multilingual scenario. Language shift is the process that automatically pushes the non-dominant or under privileged languages to the point of extinction. The total number of languages in the world is estimated to be 7000 and, it is also said that two languages die every month so the situation is quite alarming (Crystal, 2000; Headland, 2003).

As mentioned earlier, the construct of language attitude has been widely explored and various disciplines have tried to define the concept from the canons of their respective discipline. According to Dornyei (2003) attitude concerns evaluative responses to a particular target (e.g. people, institution, situation etc). They have their roots in the minds of human beings, and produce the rational deliberation of facts – they can be traced back to our past or sometimes exhibited by the important people that live around us in communities. For this reason, they are rather persistent and consistent to change. Crystal (2000) defines it as the feeling which people have about their own language or for other languages. One of the latest definitions in use is the one presented by Garret (2010) who defined language attitude as disposition and an evaluative orientation towards a social object such as language. Various theorists have identified various components of language attitude but some of the common components are integrative motivation or solidarity, the importance of a language, instrumental motivation and the social prestige.

## Research on Language Attitude Across the Globe

The area of language attitude studies has been widely explored across the globe. The researcher has tried to summarize some of the relevant and recent researches in the field. The relationship between language attitude and language use was explored by Mbori (2008) in the post-colonial context of Rwanda. The study revealed that there are competing languages in each of the domains of language use in Rwanda. The preference of one language over the other is punctuated by the users' attitude towards the language and also determined by how the users relate to one another. The study by Khan (2011) conducted on three generations of Pakistani immigrants in Manchester concluded that the community had opportunities and access to the resources of their heritage languages, but the competence of three generations varied. The findings showed that English was the dominant and preferred language of communication and language shift was taking place over time. Habtoor (2012) explored 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 findings showed that the respondents possess only 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. Rodriguez, Boggess and Goldsmith (2012) conducted matched guise experiment on high school students in Galicia in order to assess the implicit language attitudes of the learners. The findings revealed that the respondents held different attitudes towards standard and non-standard Galician. Speaking the non-standard variety of Galician was not encouraged and certain stigmas were attached to it. Speaking Spanish language in Galician accent was also not approved by the respondents. The research conducted by Kircher (2014) revealed that there was an overall positive attitude towards English more than towards French. In terms of solidarity, they expressed their solidarity with the French language in private while their positive towards English was more positive than towards French and it was explained by the researcher as social identity of the respondents. In the same year, Mazrui (2014) examined and identified the signs of language shift emerging in Zanzibar, Tanzania. The findings of this doctoral research conducted by using questionnaire survey reveal that English is replacing Swahili in the domains of education and both ministry of education and the majority of population are in favour of English as medium of instruction.

## **Research on Language Attitude in Pakistan**

Turning to the scenario in Pakistan, the language attitude always remained relevant and important research area. The readers find studies on Pashto, Siraiki, Punjabi as well as other small languages like Torwali and Shina. The study on the language attitude of Pashto speakers and its relationship with language policies was conducted by Khan (2013). He concluded that the participants were in a process of losing their mother tongue gradually. They showed the preference for Pashto only for their affiliation with their Pashtun identity. The research by Asifa (2010) on the Siraiki speakers is ground breaking as she argued that the Siraiki language is a source of ethnic identity for its speakers. The Siraiki speakers feel threat to their language and identity and are trying to develop an ethno-national consciousness in order to resist the assimilation of their ethnic group and language. The most recent study conducted in the area is on the speakers of Shina language. This research by Nazir, Nafees and Nafees (2017) proposed that the lack of any official status of Shina, its teaching and the absence of this language from social and electronic media has led to its declining importance and use.

There are studies (Nazir, Aftab, & Saeed, 2013; Gilani & Mahmood, 2014; John, 2015) on Punjabi language that show that the use of Punjabi language is on decline because of excessive importance and use of Urdu and English language. Nazir, Aftab and Saeed (2013) examined the linguistic scenario and the social mechanism which poses threat to the sustainability of Punjabi on a broader scale. These findings were further reinforced by Gilani and Mahmood (2014). Their research concluded that Punjabi is a tolerated language as it is neither promoted nor proscribed. The recent of the researches on the language attitude towards Punjabi is the doctoral research of John (2015). He contended that it is easier to express feelings and emotions in either Punjabi or Urdu but Punjabi language does not find much use. The results of the study by Mansoor (2017) also indicate the negative attitude of participants towards Punjabi language and Punjabi-speaking community. The study of Punjabi language was even rejected by the students as they consider this language of no use in this modern era. It is important to note that most of these researchers do not use comparative model. Though they propose the link between the gradual decline of local languages like Siraiki, Punjabi, Shina etc. and the importance of Urdu and English but there are

no such studies available. The current research uses a comparative model to draw insightful findings based on comparison of the language attitude towards Urdu, Punjabi and English.

### **Statement of the Problem**

English, Urdu and Punjabi are very important languages in the country, but the problem is that they are competing with each other for dominance. Both Urdu and English are the languages of education and are promoted in various spheres of life. It has been observed that the language policies in education in Pakistan (Language Policy, 1973, 1989, 2007, 2009) have been designed as to promotion of Urdu at the cost of other indigenous languages like Punjabi, Sindhi etc. English was also supposed to be replaced by Urdu but unfortunately it has gained more influence over the time. This theorizes the need to conduct research to analyze the language attitude of Pakistani youth to these languages by collecting empirical data. Thus, the current research aims at comparing the attitude of the Pakistani youth towards English, Urdu and Punjabi.

### **Research Objectives**

The objectives of the research are:

- To explore the integrative and instrumental motivation towards English, Urdu and Punjabi languages.
- To investigate the perceptions of the youth to the global importance of English, Urdu and Punjabi languages and the sense of superiority attached to these languages.
- To analyze the social prestige of English, Urdu and Punjabi languages as perceived by the youth of the country.

### **Research Methodology**

There are two approaches to explore the area of language attitude namely behaviorist and mentalist. The current study adopted the mentalists approach to investigate the language attitude of Pakistani youth. The mentalist approach considers attitude as mental state of readiness and it cannot be studied directly so, it must be studied indirectly by drawing inferences from the responses, self-reported data or introspection of the subjects.

### Sampling for the Current Research

The site of the research was Lahore as it is a metropolitan city as well as the second largest city of the country. Lahore is also the educational hub and most of the universities of the Punjab province especially the private universities are located in Lahore. The data was collected from the students of five randomly selected universities and the details are given below:

Table 1

*Sample Size and its University Wise Distribution*

S #	Name of University	Category	No.	%
1.	The University of the Punjab	Public	93	20.90%
2.	The University of Lahore	Private	89	20.00%
3.	The Imperial University	Private	81	18.20%
4.	The University of Education	Public	88	19.78%
5.	University of Management and Technology Lahore	Private	94	21.12%
	Total		445	100 %

The data was collected from a sample of 445 respondents from five universities mentioned in table 1. The sample was selected from 2 Public sector (the University of the Punjab and the University of Education) and 3 private sector universities (the University of Lahore, the Imperial University and the University of Management and Technology). The selected sample comprised 181 students from Public sector while 264 students from private sector universities. The quantitative approach and the use of questionnaire as a research instrument is considered suitable when large scale groups are involved, and the study requires analyzing data at macro-sociological level. The suitability of the questionnaire was also justified by the fact that the sociolinguistic questionnaire surveys are an efficient means of collecting data from larger samples within a short time (Nardi 2003). Another reason for using questionnaire was to quantify the findings in order to meet the requirements of the comparative study.

## Design of the Questionnaire

The first section covered the collection of the demographic and linguistic information of the respondents while the second section of the questionnaire was developed on Likert scale and comprised questions on five dimensions of language attitude i.e. the importance of language in the context of globalization, the solidarity towards the language, the social prestige of the language, the instrumental reasons for learning of these languages and language as a source of creating inequality. Every dimension of this section of the questionnaire contained three items and the respondents were asked to give their responses on every item three times for three languages. The research instrument was pilot tested which led to minor changes in the questionnaire. Pilot testing also served to validate the research instrument.

## Procedure for Data Analysis

Once the data was collected through questionnaire, it was entered into SPSS (Statistical Package for Social Sciences Version 21). In order to analyze the data, descriptive statistics and inferential statistics were employed as the main method for data analysis.

## Results and Findings

The first section of the questionnaire comprised the questions related to the demographic and linguistic information of the respondents. Table 2 gives details about the demographic information of the respondents.

Table 2

### *Demographic Profile of the Respondents*

	Male	Female
Gender	229 (51.5%)	216 (48.5%)
Geographical Background	Urban	Rural
	270 (60.7%)	175 (39.3%)

The details given in the table 2 shows that there were 229 males (51.5 %) and 216 females (48.5%) while the geographical background of the respondents shows that there were 270 respondents out of 445

respondents (60.7 %) who hailed from the urban background while 175 respondents (39.3 %) who belonged to the rural areas. The language wise language proficiency in four areas of language skills are presented in table 3 that serves to draw a comparison among the four proficiencies of three languages involved in the current study.

Table 3

*A Comparative study of the Mean score of proficiency in three languages*

Language Skill	Urdu	English	Punjabi	Overall
Speaking	4.26	3.07	4.14	3.82
Reading	4.29	3.76	3.10	3.72
Writing	3.89	3.51	2.71	3.37
Listening	4.38	3.49	4.22	3.79
Overall	4.21	3.46	3.54	

Table 3 shows that there was similarity in the rating of speaking and reading skill of Urdu language; there was similarity in the rating of writing and listening skill of English language while there was similarity in the rating of speaking and listening skill of Punjabi language. The weakest skill in Urdu language was writing skill with the mean score 3.89; the weakest skill in English language was speaking skill with the mean score of 3.07 while the weakest skill in Punjabi language was the writing skill with the mean score 2.71. Among all the proficiencies or skills on all three languages, the weakest among all skills was the writing skill in Punjabi.

The second section of the research instrument developed on Likert scale comprised of attitudinal statements on the five dimensions of language attitude. The five dimensions of the questionnaire were global importance of the language, the solidarity towards the language, the social prestige of the language, the instrumental reasons for learning of these languages and language as a source of creating superiority. The paired sample statistics was applied to analyze the significant differences in the perceptions of the respondents across three languages. Table 4 shows the descriptive and inferential statistics on the responses given by respondents on these five dimensions of the questionnaire.

Table 4  
*Dimension Wise Analysis of the Questionnaire*

Dimension	Statistics			
Globalization		Punjabi	Urdu	English
	Mean Score	2.60	3.56	4.33
	SD	0.69	0.67	0.55
		Punjabi-Urdu	Urdu-English	English-Punjabi
	t value	-24.694	-19.057	37.694
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Integrative Motivation		Punjabi	Urdu	English
	Mean Score	4.28	4.37	2.81
	SD	0.56	0.69	0.79
		Punjabi-Urdu	Urdu-English	English-Punjabi
	t value	-2.286	28.024	-30.684
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.023	0.000	0.000
Social Prestige		Punjabi	Urdu	English
	Mean Score	2.97	4.20	4.35
	SD	0.87	0.59	0.75
		Punjabi-Urdu	Urdu-English	English-Punjabi
	t value	-26.220	-3.261	21.395
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.001	0.000
Instrumental Motivation		Punjabi	Urdu	English
	Mean Score	2.66	4.02	4.48
	SD	0.93	0.68	0.76
		Punjabi-Urdu	Urdu-English	English-Punjabi
	t value	-26.091	-9.056	26.376
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.000	0.000
Inequality		Punjabi	Urdu	English
	Mean Score	2.92	3.94	3.95
	SD	0.87	0.73	0.74
		Punjabi-Urdu	Urdu-English	English-Punjabi
	t value	-19.777	-.132	17.180
	Sig. (2-tailed)	0.000	0.895	0.000

The dimension of globalization comprised three items which were 1) this language connects us with the rest of the world, 2) this language is a source of broadening horizons and 3) this language is a global language. The statistics show that there existed significant differences in the

responses towards three languages as the p value was less than 0.05 for all three comparisons i.e. Punjabi vs Urdu (t value = -24.694, value of sig. = 0.000), Urdu vs English (t value = -19.057, value of sig. = 0.000) and English vs Punjabi (t value = 37.694, value of sig. = 0.000). The respondents showed highly positive attitude towards English (MS = 4.33, SD = 0.55), positive attitude towards Urdu (MS = 3.56, SD = 0.67) while their attitude towards Punjabi (MS = 2.60, SD = 0.69) was not positive.

This dimension of solidarity which is also called integrative motivation by researchers also contained three statements and these were 1) I need this language in sharing community feelings, 2) with the help of this language, I can make friends and 3) this language is a source of strong community connection. The overall mean score was calculated from these items on this dimension and then paired sample t test was applied. The respondents expressed positive attitude towards both Urdu (MS = 4.37, SD = 0.69) and Punjabi (MS = 4.28, SD = 0.56) while their attitude towards English (MS = 2.81, SD = 0.79) was not positive. The comparison of Urdu vs English (t value = 28.024, value of sig. = 0.000), English vs Punjabi (t value = -30.684, value of sig. = 0.000) and Punjabi vs Urdu (t value = -2.286, value of sig. = 0.023) all yielded significant values as p value was found to be less than 0.05 for all three comparisons.

The dimension of social prestige comprised three items; 1) the knowledge of this language is a matter of social prestige, 2) this language is representing my identity as a modern man and 3) this language earns me respect in my community. In order to analyze the responses, the overall mean score was calculated, and paired sample t test was applied on the dimension of social prestige. The dimension of social prestige showed significant differences across all three comparisons i.e. Punjabi vs Urdu (t value = -26.220, value of sig. = 0.000), Urdu vs English (t value = -3.261, value of sig. = 0.001) and English vs Punjabi (t value = 21.395, value of sig. = 0.000) as the value of significance was 0.05 for all comparisons. The highest social prestige was recorded for English language (MS = 4.35, SD = 0.75) representing high positive attitude; the respondents showed positive attitude towards Urdu (MS = 4.20, SD = 0.59) while the attitude towards Punjabi language (MS = 2.97, SD = 0.87) was not positive.

The dimension of instrumental motivation comprised of three statements and these were 1) this language ensures me better jobs 2) this language is a source of economic advantage and 3) this language is important for my future career. The mean score was recorded on all three statements and then calculated to obtain overall mean score to be

processed further. The respondents showed highly positive attitude towards English (MS = 4.48, SD = 0.76), positive attitude towards Urdu (MS = 4.02, SD = 0.68) while their attitude towards Punjabi (MS = 2.66, SD = 0.93) was not positive on the dimension of instrumental motivation. All three p values for the comparison of Punjabi with Urdu (t value = -26.091, value of sig. = 0.000), Urdu with English (t value = -9.056, value of sig. = 0.000) and English with Punjabi (t value = 26.376, value of sig. = 0.000) were less than 0.05 and thus there existed significant differences across all comparisons.

The dimension of language as a source of creating inequality and superiority contained three statements which were 1) this language is a source of leaving me out of the race of life 2) this language is a reflection of literacy and 3) this language makes me distinguished from the rest. The overall mean score on this dimension was calculated and paired sample t test was applied to compare the responses towards three languages. On the dimension of language as a source of creating inequality and superiority, the respondents showed equally positive attitude towards Urdu (MS = 3.94, SD = 0.73) and English (MS = 3.95, SD = 0.74) while Punjabi (MS = 2.92, SD = 0.87) was rated low. There existed significant differences in the comparison of Punjabi with Urdu (t value = -19.777, value of sig. = 0.000) and English with Punjabi (t value = 17.180, value of sig. = 0.000) while the value of difference was not significant for the comparison of Urdu and English (t value = -.132, value of sig. = 0.895).

## **Discussion and Conclusion**

The respondents considered English as the global language and asserted its importance in the global perspective. They showed negative attitude towards Punjabi by rating it as least important in the global scenario while their attitude towards Urdu was neutral. The study reinforces the role of English in the international linkage as proposed by Manan and David (2014). The respondents awarded high social prestige to English and Urdu language while Punjabi language was not given much prestige. The respondents rated the English and Urdu quite high as compared to Punjabi. The respondents expressed highly integrative motivation towards Urdu and Punjabi while English was rated low on integrative motivation. This shows that the respondents expressed solidarity towards Punjabi by accepting its covert prestige. This study reinforces the finding of the study by Kircher (2014) that people show solidarity in private to their languages if not publically.

The respondents attached most instrumental motivation to English language, Urdu also possessed instrumental motivation, but Punjabi language was not reported to have any instrumental motivation. The findings reinforce the earlier study by Umrani and Bughio (2017) that English possesses high instrumental value. The responses on the dimension that language is a source of creating inequality and sense of superiority were concentrated on Urdu and English. The respondents considered that Urdu and English mark superiority of their speakers while Punjabi does not have any such characteristics. Rahman (2006) also proposed the similar issues that English has become the elite language and local languages have been pushed to inferior place.

This study revealed similar findings like Kircher (2014) that the people tend to show solidarity to their language in private but they give more importance to English as it is an international language. The study is important to reinforce the perception like earlier studies (Zaidi, 2010; Rahman, 2006; Khan, 2013 and John, 2015) that English and Urdu have obtained enormous importance while the importance of indigenous languages has been downplayed. The study is very implicative as it demands serious changes in language planning which leads to create a balanced development of all languages and positive attitude towards indigenous languages.

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