Highlighting the Sound Shift in Punjabi Language: A Corpus-Based Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Punjabi language is most widely spoken language of Pakistan (Abbas, Chohan, Ahmed, & Kaleem, 2016). Punjabi is under developed language because of which, upcoming generations are shifting to other technically and digitally developed languages such as Urdu and English. In result of which, the sound shift is being observed in Punjabi language. Sounds which used to be present in the past in Punjabi language are found missing now. This leads to a problematic situation that this sound shift may result in language extinction and sound loss. This study is about the sound change and it has been studied in Punjabi language. On the basis of observation of speech in surrounding, researcher made a hypothesis that those speakers of Punjabi language who acquired Punjabi as L1 are able to produce few distinctive sounds that are not produced by the speakers who acquired Urdu as a mother tongue. For this purpose, a corpus of 2 million words was collected and the words including the sounds |n| ں and |1| ل were particularly shortlisted from the corpus. The speakers from both origins were asked to pronounce these words, the hypothesis was proved and, in result, variations in the pronunciation of sounds were observed. Sociolinguists and Phonologists need to heed on this issue to save Punjabi language from extinction.

Keywords: Punjabi language, Sociolinguistics, sound loss, sound shift, language death

1. Introduction

In this study, the researcher wants to highlight a drastic situation, we, being a native speaker of Punjabi language, are shifting towards more prestigious language in result of which our new and upcoming generations are going to lack sounds and words which are the essence of Punjabi language in Pakistan.

Sociolinguistics is the study of relation between language and society. Similarly, Wardraugh (2006) states that the basic concern of sociolinguistics is to study the relation between society and the language spoken in that society. The major concern of the analysis is to understand the structure and find out how language works in communication. To strengthen up this idea, Hudson (1996) states that sociolinguistics is concerned with the relation of society and language.

While studying the relation between language and society, the basic concerns of linguists and more specifically speaking sociolinguists are to study the notions of languages of society and communities. Languages are termed as the system of codes through which people of that community interact and communicate. These codes are symbols and specific meanings are attached to these symbols and words produced by combining the symbols Wardraugh (2006).

Language gives identity to their speakers. Therefore, Coulmas (1999) states the notions of ethnicity and language are fundamentally synonymous. People attach prestige to their language and have emotional attachment with their languages. Sociolinguists study languages of communities and the variations with in languages.

Variation with in one language is termed as dialect. In this way, Haugan (1966) points out language and dialect are confusing terms. Language is a broader term and dialects are the variations of the language. Language is standard but dialects are variations. Language has proper dictionary, grammar and literature but on the other side dialects lacks these three requirements and standards required to declare that system of codes as language.

Variation with in language can be on the basis of region and class. Regional dialects are on the basis region and social dialects are on the basis of social class. Region varies and class varies dialect varies. Dialect varies on three parameters grammar, vocabulary and sound.

Sociolinguistics further study idiolect. Idiolect is the individual variations. Dialects are group based but idiolects are individual based. On the same three standards: grammar, vocabulary and sounds the variations. While studding language variations sociolinguists study code-mixing and code-switching.

This study was motivated by the hypothesis developed on the basis of observation that the speakers having Punjabi as their mother tongue pronounce few sounds differently from the speakers having Urdu as their mother tongue. Researcher observed the higher tendency of shifting towards Urdu as mother tongue in result of which few sounds are found missing in their speech.

1.1 Research Questions

- Is there are any difference in the pronunciation of ں and ل sounds of Punjabi language?
- Which kind of variations are observed in the pronunciation of ں and ل sounds of Punjabi language by the speakers of Punjabi language?

2. Literature Review

Singh (2015) revealed how a phoneme distinguished from another just because of tone. Five tonemes of Punjabi were selected to analyze occurrence of certain Punjabi words and their variation when they occurred in the initial, medial and final positions of words pronounced by native and non-native speakers. 1500 word were taken to analyze from ten different speakers of both genders. The researcher analyzed 150 words on the basis of acoustic parameters in which attention was paid towards pitch movement. While it was proved that the rise and fall of pitch movement was observed in the change in pronunciation. Hence, there was a significant difference in the patterns of acoustic of tonemes in native and non-native speakers.

Mahmood (2011) studied that borrowing is a habitual phenomenon in communication, the ever-increasing role of English in our life has necessitated borrowing in Punjabi. In Pakistan, three languages existed including: Punjabi, Urdu and English. Such are used in different spheres of life, in which Punjabi and Urdu are widely used languages. The reasons for which these words are borrowed included lexical gap filling of Punjabi speakers and some words are borrowed as they are easy to speak or use. This research investigates the adaptation strategies employed by Punjabi speakers in the production of English loanwords. It concludes that the way of borrowing is systematic and language-specific phonological constraints of Punjabi are mainly responsible for adapting English loanwords, so prediction regarding the pronunciation of English words that are still to be borrowed is possible.

Riaz (2015) viewed Punjabi is a language which is spoken as a mother tongue by a huge number of people in Pakistan. English has a strong impact on the native languages being language of media, technology, and science. Code mixing is a widely used process in Pakistan, even uneducated people use words of English due to many reasons in which impact of media and class awareness is included. The regional language has also a great impact on English language in the process of borrowing and code mixing because the borrowed words go through a make-up caused by the phonetic features of the regional languages. This study reveals that the way in which the occurrence of certain English words by uneducated native speakers of Punjabi in Pakistan differs from standard English pronunciation. Due to first language influence Punjabi speakers pronounce certain English words in a slightly different manner.

Crystal (2009) explained the future of language, and threw light on the three major trends emerged, unique in its implications, which increasingly have primary change in world's linguistic ecology. First, there is the emergence of English as the world's first truly global language, and the dramatic effect this newfound status is having on English itself and on other languages. Second, there is the crisis facing huge numbers of languages which are currently endangered or dying, which - despite fresh initiatives being taken towards preservation and regeneration - will result in the probable loss this century of at least half the world's languages. Third, there is the radical effect on language of the arrival of Internet technology, which has supplemented spoken and written language with a linguistically novel medium of communication, and raised fresh questions about the way language will continue to evolve.

In view of Birahmani (2019), language shift was considered as the subfield of sociolinguistics. Language perspectives play an essential role for the improvement and change of any language. This paper was about the two regional languages Brahui and Sindhi of Pakistan. The major aim of the study was studying the attitudes of Brohi people towards Sindhi and Brahui languages in Sindh. It explores the status of Brahui language through the analysis of attitudes of the community in the context of Dadu, city in Sindh. An interview was conducted in which 20 parents from Dadu city were taken as participants. The data were analyzed thematically. Findings reveal that Brohi people of Dadu city have shifted from Sindhi to Brahui language. They have negative attitudes towards Brahui language but have positive attitudes towards Sindhi language and gave more value to Sindhi than the Brahui language. These negative attitudes have caused a shift from Brahui to Sindhi language. The study recommends several efforts should be taken for the strength of Brahui language in Sindh.

Another study discussed the approach used to develop a Text-To-Speech (TTS) synthesis system for the Punjabi text written in Gurmukhi script. After analyzing a carefully selected Punjabi corpus, we have selected nearly thirty-three hundred syllables out of about ninety-three hundred valid Punjabi syllables. The system is based on a Punjabi speech database that contains the starting and ending positions of syllable-sounds labeled carefully in a wave file of recorded words. The input text is first processed and then syllabified with an automatic syllabification algorithm that has been developed based on grammatical rules of Punjabi language. Then, these syllables are searched in the database for corresponding syllable-sound positions in recorded wave file (Singh, 2006).

Chohan (2018) viewed Punjabi belongs to the Indo Aryan family of languages, and many nations across the world speak it. In Pakistan and India, Punjabi language is being used in the province of Punjab. This language is well known by its divergent dialects in terms of its geographical locations. Shahmukhi is considered a prominent dialect of Punjabi language. Moreover, Punjabi is the 10th most widely spoken language in the world, its importance cannot be denied (Ghai & Singh, 2013). The majority population of Punjab in Pakistan use Punjabi language in their daily routine of life. It is among the 22 languages which have official status in India. Unfortunately, the phonology of Punjabi and its dialects has not been explored as much as some other languages and their dialects. This study is an attempt to explore the differences between Standard Punjabi and Shahmukhi in the domain of their phonology. This research shows that there is almost 80% similarity between the standard Punjabi and Shahmukhi and this study will provide a foundation for the research in the phonology of both the dialects of Punjabi.

3. Methodology

The corpus of 2 million words was collected from different sources such as books, newspapers, poetry, short stories and columns. Word list was developed of the corpus with the help of AntConc. Those words were extracted which contain the above-mentioned sounds ں and ڻ.

Next step, the speakers having Punjabi and Urdu as their mother tongue were asked separately to pronounce these words as they do in their normal speech and the variations in the pronunciations of the words containing the above-mentioned sounds were observed.

4. Results

The hypothesis which was the motivation for the study proved right and the variations in the pronunciation of these above-mentioned sounds was observed. The speakers having Punjabi as their mother tongue were able to produce such distinctive sounds which the speakers having Urdu as their mother tongue were not able to produce. So, the results of the study show that due to higher tendency of shifting towards Urdu language sound loss of Punjabi language is observed in this particular study.

5. Discussion

The above-mentioned notions are the few basic concerns of sociolinguists. Now I want to move towards the particular concern of this study 'language death'. Crystal (2000) stated that language can be declared as dead when no native speaker of that language is alive. Languages do not have any existence without their speakers.

Few reference books since 1980s have given the estimate of 6000 to 8000 languages in the world. The estimation has changed during the recent decades between 3000 to 10,000 languages in the world. These might not be the exact estimations but approximation and the number of languages may vary exactly at present time. Thirteenth edition of Ethnologue reported 6703 in the world.

How many speakers guarantee the life of language is an aspect to ponder. Fluent speakers who can speak, use, understand and communicate in that language are the required standard. 2, 20 or 200 hundred speakers do not set the parameter. The required standard is

fluency and communication. In rural settings, 500 speakers can be considered as optimistically keeping their ethnicity and language alive but in urban scenarios 500 speakers are very few to keep the identity alive. Number of speakers can not only be considered as the standard community in which they are living should also be kept under consideration (Crystal, 2000).

In parts of West Africa, where English and French creoles in particular are attracting huge numbers of new speakers, many local languages are felt to be endangered – even though they are currently spoken by several hundred thousand. Endangered languages are those languages which are at risk. Those languages which are affected by dominant languages and the speakers of those languages keep on shifting to other more dominant and prestigious languages.

This is very surprising that very few languages possess huge number of speakers in the world. The 8 languages (English, Mandarin, Bengali, Hindi, Japanese, Portuguese, Russian and Spanish) have nearly 2.4 billion speakers between them; and if we extend this limit to the top 20 languages, we find a total of 3.2 billion – over half the world's population. Only 4% languages of the world are spoken by the 96% of the population.

A quarter of the world's languages are spoken by less than 1000 people; and well over half by less than 10000. Almost 500 languages possess fewer than 100 speakers; around 1500 have fewer than 1000; and 3340 have fewer than 10000. There are 51 languages with just a single speaker – 28 in Australia, 8 in the USA, 3 in South America, 3 in Africa, 6 in Asia, 3 in the Pacific islands (Crystal, 2000). It is quite surprising that only 6 % people grew up speaking their indigenous language.

A middle position would assert 50% loss in the next 100 years. This is the view independently arrived at by three linguists reported by (Krauss, 1992). 50% is 3000 languages. 100 years is 1200 months. To meet that time frame, at least one language must die, on average, every two weeks or so.

Three levels can be recognized according to common sense classification; safe, endangered and extinct. Krauss (1992) introduced another term moribund; those languages which are no more learnt as mother tongue by the children and upcoming generation. Punjabi can also be termed under the same term more specifically in urban areas. Parents and institutes both tend to promote more prestigious languages rather than the local language Punjabi.

Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language; it is mostly spoken in the Punjab region of South Asia. 88 million people speak this language worldwide (Lewis, 2009), it is almost termed as the 13th most frequently spoken language in the world. Total of 110 million people, 66 million in Pakistan, 44 million in India and many millions in America, Canada and Europe have Punjabi as their mother tongue.

There are two scripts available two write Punjabi, Gurmukhi (in India) and Shahmukhi (in Pakistan). Shahmukhi Script is the basic concern of this research. Shahmukhi is a deviant form of the Perso-Arabic scripts. Script of Shahmukhi Punjabi is very much similar to Urdu Script. Urdu has 37 letters and Shahmukhi Punjabi contains 38 letters. There are 16 vowels, 16 diacritical marks and 49 consonants in Punjabi language (Malik, 2006).

Punjabi is spoken by 44.15% population of Pakistan. 42.51% rural and 47.56% urban population is of Punjabi speakers. Things are changing day by day and people more specifically in urban areas. Punjabi is not being transmitted to upcoming generation and Punjabi is getting extinct day by day in Pakistan.

Kincade (1991) gave further more classification. *Viable* languages have population bases that are sufficiently huge and flourishing to mean that no danger to long-term existence is likely. *Viable but small* languages have more than *c.* 1000 speakers, and these languages are spoken in such communities which are isolated or have a strong internal organization, and they are aware that how their language is a symbol of identity.

Endangered languages: are spoken by the enough people to make their survival a possibility, but only in favorable conditions and with a development in community support; nearly *extinct* languages: are supposed to be beyond the likelihood of survival, because they are spoken by very few elderly people. *extinct* languages: are those where the only fluent speaker died, and there is no chance of any revival.

Wurm (1998) gave the five levels model of status. It consists of *potentially endangered* languages: are economically and socially disadvantaged and suffering under heavy pressure from a dominant languages, and going to lose child speakers; *endangered* languages have a few or no children learning that language, and the youngest good speakers are young adults; *seriously endangered* languages have the youngest good speakers age 50 or older; *moribund* languages have only a bunch of good speakers left, most of them very old; *extinct* languages have no fluent speakers left.

Language maintenance refers to the idea of continuation of that particular variety and language for communication within that specific community and outside the community. This is the realization of the importance of their language and ethnicity. Speakers realize that their language is their identity and they can represent their community and ethnicity with the help of that language.

On the other hand, *language shift* refers to the idea of discontinuing the utility of the local and native language and shifting to more dominant and prestigious language. People replace the language for their social, official and daily usage. This situation leads to *language death,* when speakers shift to other language for communication and do not transmit that language to the upcoming generation. Young learners do not acquire/learn that local language.

Extinction of Cornish in England is example of shift as well as death. Decline of Norwegian language is the example of just shift of language not death. Speaker of that language are still found but do not use that language (Dorian, 2004).

Campbell and Muntzel (1989) elaborated four types of language death. *Gradual death* involves the process in which one language gradually replaces other. People shift from one language to other and gradually leave their language. *Sudden death* is the extinction of a language suddenly without the period of bilingualism, last monolingual speaker dies. This might be due to any natural calamity that suddenly all speakers of language die and consequently language dies suddenly. *Radical death* is due to the political oppression, speakers have fluency but do not use and transmit that language to their children. *Bottom to top death* is the use of language is forbidden in public and limited to specific contexts.

Globalization can be the major cause of language death. Due to globalization people try to mingle and do away with their local identities and try to create one global identity and the same happens with the language. People leave their local languages behind and move towards one global language. The other reasons are economical; speakers have to leave the local and indigenous language and shift towards those languages which can make them economically stable and more prosperous. Demographic reasons are also there behind language death (Giles, 1977).

After giving all this theoretical basis I want to move towards the notion of Punjabi language facing the economical, institutional and demographic pressure of dominant languages such as Urdu and English. Parents of urban areas do not want their off-springs to learn Punjabi language and they keep on teaching them Urdu and English.

Upcoming generations do not acquire Punjabi as their mother tongue. Due to the influence of Urdu as mother tongue, Punjabi is losing its real essence. Being native speaker of Punjabi language, I have observed that adult native speakers of Punjabi language and the speakers of rural areas pronounce few sounds quite differently from the speakers of urban areas having Urdu as their mother tongue.

Sounds for the phonemes |n| ن and |l| ل has two allophones in Punjabi language. Both of these phonemes while occurring at the end of the word give and intonated version and allophone by the native speakers of Punjabi language and adult rural native speakers. Intonated allophones of both of these phonemes are missing in urban areas young speakers of Punjabi language and the speakers having Urdu as mother tongue.

Here I shall provide the list of those words which have different versions with their English translation for better understanding.

Table 1: List of Punjabi words with their English translation

Punjabi	English	Punjabi	English	Punjabi	English
سجن	Friend	سنگل	Chain	دین	Give
مل	Rub	نال	With	پانی	Water
مل	meet	نکل	Leave, go	ملن	Meet
ملن	Meet	کاون	Earn	جین	Live
کھان	Eat	پین	Drink	رون	Weep
پاون	Wear	لاون	remove	پین	Sister

These above given words are the examples which are different in native Punjabi speakers and the speakers having Urdu as their mother tongue. As frequently people of our community are doing away with the Punjabi language and are not transferring to upcoming generation, we may lose these sounds which are the real essence of Punjabi language.

6. Conclusion

Results of the study answered the research questions and showed that variations in the pronunciation of |n| ن and |l| ل sounds appears. Variation in the pronunciation of these sounds has two basic root causes: first one is the variation in the mother tongue. Speakers having Punjabi as mother tongue produce these sounds but the speakers having Urdu as mother tongue do not produce these sounds in their speech. The other cause behind the variation in pronunciation is the aspect of formality.

The limitations of the study can be the dialectal variations. Different dialects may have different variations of sounds. Speakers speaking different dialects of Punjabi produce alternative sounds in the same words. But the point to ponder is that as the ratio of acquiring Punjabi language is decreasing with time. It is leading to critical situation of sound loss which will ultimately result in language death.

Further, an articulatory phonetician can further study by analyzing the two different categories of speakers and can provide the conclusive evidences that how these two categories of speakers vary and their articulatory organs vary in result of which upcoming generations of urban areas are lacking these sounds. If we want to save Punjabi language from getting extinct, we have to save by making these sounds keep on transmitting to upcoming generations and they would keep on acquiring and learning Punjabi language with its real essence.

Researcher is not only advocating the transmission of Punjabi language, but also agrees with the fact that mono lingual is a misfit in this modern multilingual society. Researcher suggests that upcoming generation and young learners should learn all languages for better social, economic and cultural survival.

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