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Language Shift

An Analysis of Factors Involved in Language Shift

By Ms. Sana Nawaz (M. Phil) , Ms. Ayesha Umer (M. Phil) , Fatima Anjum (M.A.) ,
& Muhammad Ramzan (M.A.)

University of Sargodha, Pakistan

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I. INTRODUCTION

The incubating globalization has established English language as a standard of communication, inciting the entire world to the extent of leaving no chance of immunity to adopt this standard for better survival and utilitarian benefits in this global community. To cope with this need of hour an ever growing trend of abandoning native languages in favor of English language sprouts. In such a bilingual speech community, the speakers retract their allegiance to the second language. And whenever "a big and a powerful language such as English appears in foreign territory, small, indigenous languages will die" (Jan Blommaert). This language shift so far becomes the initial step of the course of language death.

Language death occurs in unstable bilingual or multilingual speech communities as a result of language shift from regressive minority language to dominant majority language. "A language is said to be dead when no one speaks it any more. It may continue to have existence in recorded form, of course--traditionally in

writing, more recently as part of a sound or video archive (and it does in a sense 'live on' in this way)--but unless it has fluent speakers one would not talk of it as a 'living language' (David Crystal). It is the speakers who determine the future of native language. Owing to the genesis of speakers' outlook and value system, the main determinant of language shift—the attitude towards the mother or native tongue, is evolved. This attitude speaks of speakers' choice of and their aptitude towards their own native tongue, ultimately dictates the future of the language.

Pakistan in lieu of all language diversity is facing this extinction threat to many native languages; this uncertain future of the vernaculars is by dint of language shift. In case of Punjabi the case is severe. It is not just a threat to this language but also to the process of enculturation, the growing of an individual in native linguistic perception, the participation in the history of language production and they know-how of the knowledge and values embedded in it.

II. PROBLEM STATEMENT

Despite the facts that both languages are poles apart from each other in respect of their scripts, sentence structure, and lexicological items, and, as our data shows, majority of the people is not in the favour of this shift, people are heading towards English. Poor result in English at every level also demonstrates the level of difficulty in learning English language but the problem is that this trend is taking rest at nowhere.

III. THEORETICAL CONSIDERATION

Language-shifting is a complex and affected phenomenon, motivated and stimulated by accumulative force of historical, cultural, economic, social and psychological factors. All these factors are interrelated and cannot be analyzed in isolation.

a) *Historio-cultural factors:*

The imperative impact of colonization in our land, decades ago, did identify the frolicsome notion of inferiority complex, the genesis of our sociopolitical, economic and educational setup and the traces of such impact still persist in our culture institution. "The

Author ^α : University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.
E-mail : anayakhan35@yahoo.com

Author ^σ : University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.
E-mail : aishabhoon@yahoo.com

Author ^ρ : University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.
E-mail : star.staronsky.sky@gmail.com

Author ^ω : University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Pakistan.
E-mail : mrbsgd23@gmail.com

linguistic relation between the center and periphery has been and continues to be one of dominant and dominated languages. English was originally imposed on a number of countries in the periphery and has through deliberate contrivance, successfully displaced, or replaced some of the indigenous languages of these countries. The dominance of English has also resulted in the imposition of the Anglo-Saxon Judeo-Christian culture that goes with it so that indigenous cultures have been undervalued and marginalized " (Bisong–Language choice and culture Imperialism). This was Language Imperialism leading to culture imperialism; Lord Macaulay, when announced the English structure of education, the planning was to create a mixed breed, sub continental in skin but English in thought, blood and appearance. This colonial implication did contrive a room for its rule in cultural and social structure of the subcontinent. English became a language of the upper strata of society; a kind of modernized and civilized air was associated with it. This marginalization of the native tongues in the hegemony system of rule and power devised the concept of "linguistic imperialism", which ran parallel to the cultural and geographic imperialism." The study of linguistic imperialism can help to clarify whether the winning of political independence led to a linguistic liberation of Third World countries, and if not, why not. Are the former colonial languages a useful bond with the international community and necessary for state formation and national unity internally? Or are they a bridge head for Western interests, permitting the continuation of a global system of marginalization and exploitation? What is the relationship between linguistic dependence (continued use of a European language in a former non-European colony) and economic dependence (the export of raw materials and import of technology and know-how)?" (Robert Phillipson, "Linguistic Imperialism." Concise Encyclopedia of Applied Linguistics, ed. by Margie Berns. Elsevier, 2010)

In the historical background of Punjab, in colonial era when English culture interacted with indigenous culture and this interaction created a notion of superior and inferior culture owing to their relation with superior colonizer and inferior colonized.

b) Socio-cultural factors:

Besides this, the British constructed a social structure in which an English speaking person enjoyed a privileged position and the others were marginalized. Because nobody wants to be away from center and to be marginalized, so it became a compulsion for Punjabi-speaking masses to venerate English language and consequently to ignore Punjabi language. Our present social structure is a replica of that social structure that was delineated by the British so we see that same treatment with both languages.

Language is an integral part of a culture. We cannot separate a language from its respective culture and vice versa. The British knew this fact so they intentionally portrayed and presented Punjabi culture as uncivilized, crude, unsophisticated and inferior. They made their waiters and servants to wear the dress of Sardars, Chaudharies and Nawabs, specially the turban that is an emblem of prestige. This systematic and organized portrayal of Punjabi culture as inferior left a permanent impact on our collective unconscious and we, quite unconsciously, started to unrelate ourselves with our culture, including language. That imperial experience influenced our collective thinking and made it extremely difficult for us to be out of this influence. We have assumed them, unconsciously but firmly, as superior to ourselves. Did you ever think that why we call Faisalabad as Manchester or Bhalwal as California of Pakistan? Why do we say that Waris Shah is Shakespeare of Punjabi? Why not we say Shakespeare is Waris Shah of English? Think about it.

This urge to disassociate ourselves with our native culture throws some light on the reason behind current popularity of Western dress, food and etiquettes.

c) Economic factors:

According to Marxist point of view, economical factors are the basis for overall social patterns. English language promised and promises financial security. You can get high level jobs only if you know English language. The importance of English for success in any field can hardly be emphasized because it is the language of financial activities. While Punjabi language does not promise you any financial assistance. Karl Marx would argue that this shift from Punjabi to English is totally driven by economic factors.

d) Psychological factors:

As we know that this region, known as Punjab, a homeland of Punjabi people and the birthplace of Punjabi language, had been under the rule of British Empire. This historical fact has cultural, psychological and social consequences which are present here even today and are responsible for this shift from vernacular to foreign language. The British, speakers of English language, were the ruler of the Punjabis, speaker of Punjabi language. This relation of master and slave and analogous relation of master language and slave language and a strong desire on the part of slave to relate himself or herself with masters is a considerable factor in this shift from Punjabi to English among the people of Punjab.

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IV. LITERATURE REVIEW

Dr. Tariq Rehman in his research named "Language policy, Multilingualism and Language Vitality in Pakistan" states the fact of elite's and government's patronage of English language at the cost of native tongues but in the name of efficiency and modernization. "It is understandable that members of this elite had a stake in the continuation of English because it differentiated them from the masses; gave them a competitive edge over those with Urdu-medium or traditional (madrassa) education; and, above all, was the kind of cultural capital which had snob value and constituted a class-identity marker."

The psyche of the native speech communities, he relates to the social hierarchical system where the culture capital of the natives is associated with shame and inferior legacy by the elite, resultantly the natives are embarrassed about their languages. Dr. Saiqa Imtiaz Asif also propounds the synonymous view on the point of language and culture shame in a bilingual or multilingual society in "Shame - A Cause of Language Desertion".

Languages in Pakistan are losing their large reservoir on account of less transfer of this knowledge to the new generation. Language maintenance occurs at two inter linked level ;where Parents adapt their own language use in order to promote desired linguistic competencies in their children and secondly Parents learn new language varieties, or elements thereof, from their children, who have greater access to the new varieties and eventually start to use them at home. This is the type of child-parent language socialization (Childrenas Socializing Agent)

"Every 14 days a language dies .By 2100 more than half of the more than 7000 languages spoken on Earth--many of them yet not recorded – many disappear, taking with them the wealth of knowledge about history, culture, the natural environment, and the human brain." This deduction of the research "Educating Voices Project ", conducted by The National Geographic Society is the consequence of shifting trend among the speech communities.

V. DATA COLLECTION

a) Instrument

Instrument used to collect data was a questionnaire comprising ten questions about the causes, nature and consequences of this shifting phenomenon, along with some space for the respondents of comment freely. This questionnaire was distributed among the people of varying age group with

different educational and social background. Our respondents were mainly from University of Sargodha, including both students and teachers, and then common people from Sargodha, Faisalabad and Lahore.



The sample questionnaire is given here :

Department of English,
University of Sargodha, Sargodha, Punjab, Pakistan.

Dear fellows.

We are conducting a survey to find out the reasons of language shift from Punjabi to English. Please make it authentic by your honest participation. Thank you.

Gender: -----

Age: -----

Education: -----

Year 2012

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1. English language is very necessary for survival in contemporary global community.
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly Disagree
2. This shift from Punjabi language to English language will lead to a cultural shift, from Punjabi culture to English culture.
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
3. Do you think English proficiency ensures better economic security?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly agree
4. Can students develop a better understanding of modern scientific concepts in English language?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
5. Do you speak your native language in your informal gatherings?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree
6. When you see a person speaking English, do you think that he or she is a very learned, civilized and well-mannered person?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

7. Do you think that English dress code is elegant, comfortable and a symbol of social superiority?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

8. Do you think that language shift is positive and for good?
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

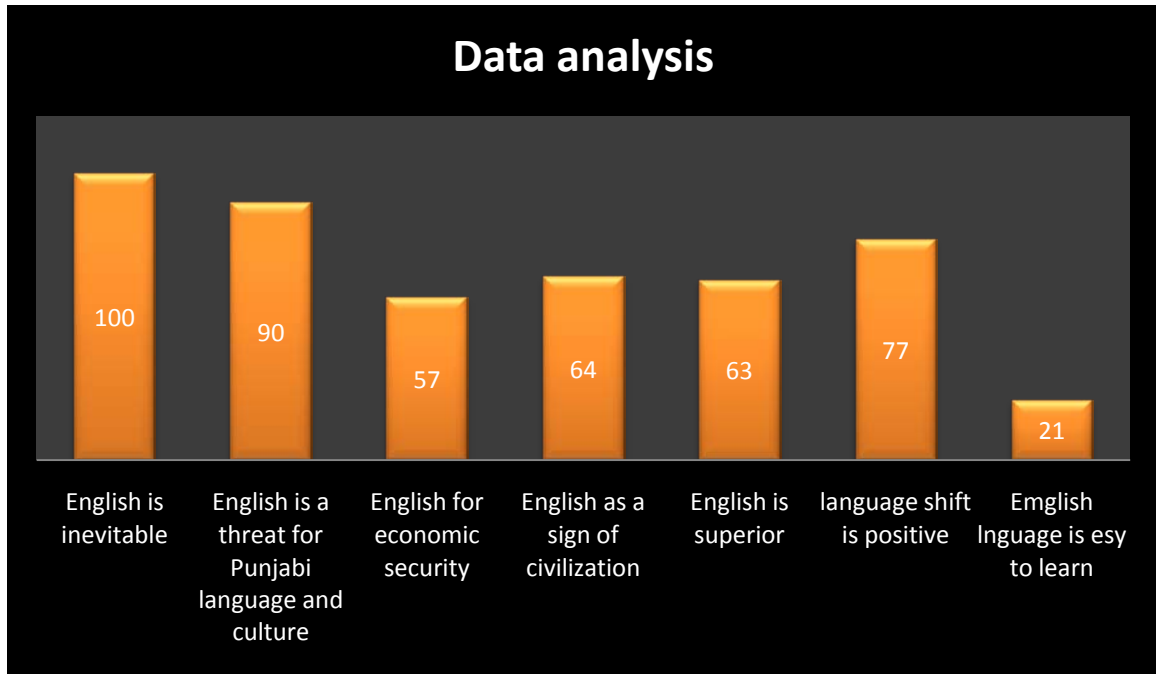
9. English language is very easy to learn for a Punjabi speaking person.
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

10. This desertion of Punjabi language will destroy our identity and the knowledge of Punjabi literature.
 - a) Strongly agree
 - b) Agree
 - c) Neutral
 - d) Disagree
 - e) Strongly disagree

What, according to you, are the reasons of this shifting from Punjabi language to English language? Comment.



b) Data Analysis



The objective of our questionnaire was to ascertain the rationale of language shift. It was designed in such a way as to probe the impetus for abandoning and adopting Punjabi and English respectively.

The findings are very interesting, cementing our hypothesis, and in some cases contradictory.

Our first question was about the inevitability of English language for survival in this global village, both at individual and collective level. And, as was expected, everyone is agreed about its inevitability. As illustrated in the graph, 100% people think that there is no other way to compete in modern world except to equip ourselves with this modern lingual-weapon, English language. What is noticeable in this result is that those who are totally illiterate (certainly we had to explain our questions to them in Punjabi), they are aware with the sheer importance of English.

The response for question No. 2 is in conflict with that of first question in the sense that, although all think that we cannot thrive without English, 90% respondents consider English language as a threat for their indigenous culture. Question No. 2 and question 10 are thematically identical, so response for both is also same, that is 90%.

Question No. 3 relates economic security with English and 57% people opine in affirmation, that English secure economic security in an insecure world.

63% respondents are of the view that speaking English gives one a superior social position. Question No. 6 of the questionnaire probes the relation between English language and notion of civilization. As people usually, in this area, equate English language with knowledge, civilization, mannerism, sophistication and etiquettes.

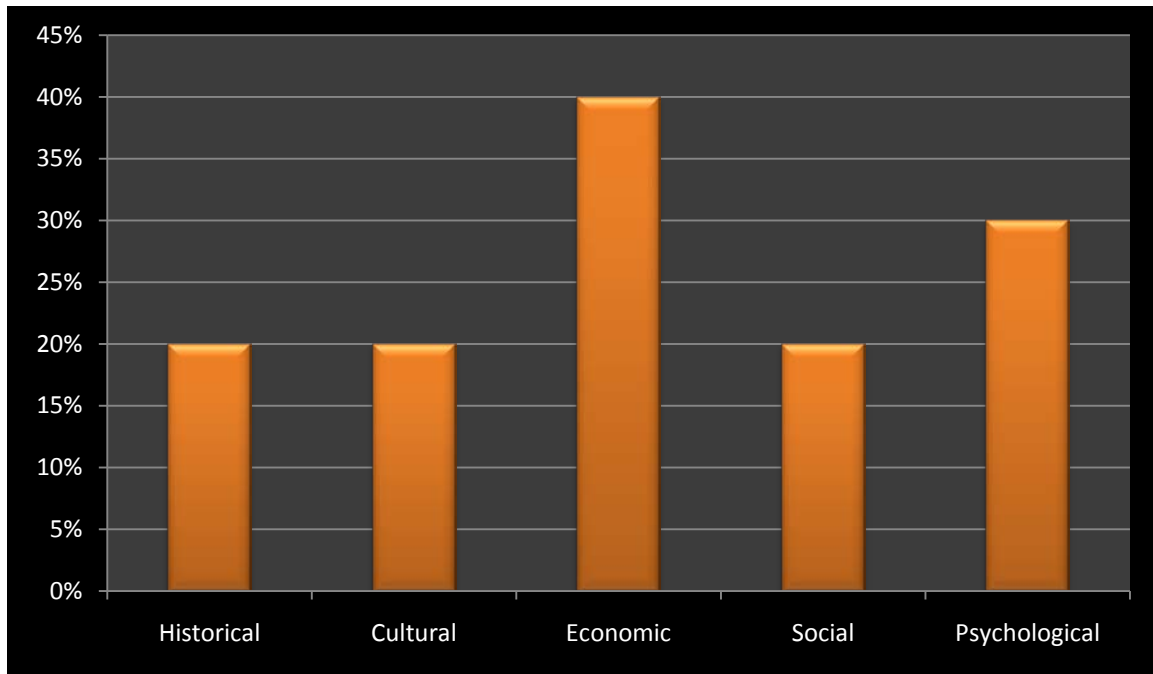
Question No. 7 is intended to check people's view about English culture in general and English dress in particular. 56% people consider English dress code as a symbol of social superiority.

Question No. 8 directly asks the people that whether this shift is positive or negative and interestingly, 77% people are against this shift. When a substantial quantity of people is not in favour of this transference, why is it taking place rapidly? This queer observation throws some light on the complexity and intricacy of this phenomenon.

In response to Question No. 9, 79% people take English as a difficult language to learn for a Punjabi speaking person.

It seems paradoxical that 77% people are against this lingual conversion and according to 79%, it is not easy to learn but, despite of all this, language shift is gaining momentum day by day.

c) Analysis of comments



As we provided space for our respondents to comment and to say something about language shift if they think that these questions do not give ample opportunity to express their views about matter in hand. In accordance with our hypothesis, we asked unambiguously our worthy respondents to name the reasons for their opting of English. The results shown in above graph are actually simplified deduction of our respondent's comments, as they did not mention these factors clearly.

The analysis of the comment section of our questionnaire holds economic factor primarily responsible for lingual conversion. 40% of our respondents see this shift from a Marxist perspective, asserting that it is backed by the fact that English language ensures economic security, opening a wider horizon of well-prospective jobs. This result strengthens the Marxist interpretation of language shift.

Economy's role in language shift is comparatively obvious, but what is striking in this data is the fact that next to economy, comes psychological considerations. According to 30% respondents, speaking English language, reading English literature and newspapers, watching English movies, listening English songs, wearing English dress and behaving in an English manner exerts a psychological effect on others. One of our respondents shared a personal experience with us, telling us that he has never been stopped by security personnels and by traffic police when he is in English dress. But whenever he is in indigenous dress, he is often stopped and interrogated by police. It is because our long experience of subjugation, not only physically but also culturally and

mentally, has affected our collective unconscious, as in Jungian psychology.

The other three factors i.e. historical, cultural and social share equal contribution in promoting English and a corresponding demoting of Punjabi language.

VII. RESULTS

The result of our research is, to some extent, in agreement with Marxist assumption about the formation and function of social mechanism that assumes that infrastructure of society is economy and society creates, shapes, and develops its superstructures according to its economical milieu. The growing social trend of heading towards English can be comprehended by taking economy as shaping agent of social behavior. This line of reasoning leads us to another point that English is not an end in itself. It is, rather, a means towards another end; economic security and this economic security is intricately linked with social prestige, cultural superiority and psychological satisfaction.

VIII. CONCLUSION

The present lingual scenario of Punjab is very complicated. On the one hand, there is a consensus that native language should be saved by giving it its due position because English is a foreign language, endangering our native language and culture. And also it is causing problems for our students as they have to, coercively, learn it. For this, there are seminars, symposiums, discussions, forums and articles, urging the masses to do their part for their language. But, on the other hand, English is escalating in all direction,

taking no notice of the concerns of the natives. In short, when majority is against it, then why is it so popular?

The answer, deduced by our research, is that language shift is a social phenomenon and social phenomena are the result of cumulative work of historical, cultural, social, economic and psychological factors. At present, these shaping elements of society are in such an arrangement that is auspicious for English. Religion is also one of the major shaping elements of a society but on an overall social canvas, its influence is relatively feeble. As we can see that Arabic is religiously sacred language for Punjabis, but Arabic is not enjoying the same position as that of English. Reason is that Arabic fulfills spiritual needs while English can fulfill physical and material needs, and as Maslow propounds in his 'Hierarchy of Needs', physical needs are our immediate concerns. Any language that has economic considerations attached with it, will enjoy superior position.

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