

Language shift leading to phonemic shift in Pakistan: a case study of Pakistani Punjabi

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<https://doi.org/10.36505/TheLinguisticProceedings/2025/16/01/011/000671>

Abstract

This paper aims to unveil the patterns of language shift, resulting in phonemic shift in Pakistani Punjabi. The risk of endangerment of language and cultural heritage, presupposes risks of exclusive identities. The disturbed identities in particular, the exclusive Punjabi identities will be taken as sample for the study. The individuals for sample have been selected through convenient sampling technique. The Open-ended interviews were conducted to find out phonemic shift of Punjabi phonemes and their effect on individual identity. The results indicated a major shift in the vowel sounds of Punjabi language. The nasalized sounds of Punjabi also deviate, leading to major vowel shift of /æ/. The study will be significant in understanding the phonemic shift in Pakistani, Punjabi language.

Keywords: language shift, phonemic shift, Punjabi language, English, exclusive identities

Introduction

Language is the way through which individuals all around the world communicate. They convey their ideas, emotions and desires (Saussure, 1916). The language system represents the psychological and cultural items of an individual (Kramsch, 2014). The cultures in various regions interact and borrow the patterns from each other. The linguistic items in particular face various changes. One word from the language gets borrowed and the other word gets changed (Kasymova & Lei, 2019). The cultural assimilation sometimes leads to language shift. Language shift refers to a situation where people of a specific community start to use another language instead of their mother language. That new language becomes their vernacular. The vernacular functions as prestigious language (Mufwene, 2020).

Language shift to be the cause of language death has been found out to be the case of colonization. The languages have died owing to the superiority of new language. The individuals do not find the situation to speak their own vernacular (Mufwene, 2020). The historical, cultural, economic, social and psychological factors become the motivation for language shift. Inferiority complex owing to colonization, social privileged conditions imposed by the colonizers, master and

slave relation between the colonizers and the colonized, posed threats to local languages (Nawaz, et al., 2012).

Whorf (1956) maintained language to be the mirror of culture. The linguistic items of a language represent the culture of particular region. The shift of language similarly harbors alienation to particular language. The phonological utterances become distant category of the native language. The shift of distinct /l/ and /n/ sound of Punjabi have been found out to be the cause of shift of mother language from Punjabi to Urdu (Arslan, et al., 2021). The present study focuses on finding out the language shift from Punjabi to English at phonemic level. It administers the concept of language shift, particularly to English language affecting phonemes of native language, particularly of Punjabi language.

Literature review

Language shift leads to language death eventually (Mufwene, 2020). Phoneme being the smallest unit of sound signal bears changes in the native language in the whole process. Punjabi language in Pakistan has seen a major shift in language at sound level. /n/ and /l/ sounds in Punjabi have seen a marked difference owing to prevalence of Urdu language (Arslan, et al., 2021).

The phonological change occurs when the language speaker changes the phoneme distribution of a language. The addition, change or insertion of a sound at a particular place in a word adds to the phonological change. Assimilation, epenthesis, deletion and metathesis have been found out as the major processes responsible for phonological change in a language (Diani, & Azwandi, 2021).

Borrowing has also been considered as one of the reasons of phonological shift leading to language shift. The prestigious language is spoken by the individuals for economic, social and cultural reasons causing them to be averting from their mother language (Kasymova & Lei, 2019).

Verticalization model of language shift has been searched out as the contributing factor to language and identity loss. The loss of local control on local institutions and their interconnectedness causes a shift in the structure of community. (Salmons, 2022). The loss or death of local language is considered as a loss of culture. The otherness creates an identity that is exclusive of native culture (Ulfa, et al., 2018).

The language shift of Punjabi language to English language however, has remained a case to be discussed. The phonological events that possess challenges to Punjabi language and cultural identity lack data. The psychological processes affiliated with language particularly of sense of belongingness to a particular culture especially Punjabi, lags the language shift phenomenon. This paper aims to find out the phonological shifts in Punjabi language.

Pronunciation	English phonemes	Punjabi Ph				
ان کالج دا سٹوڈنٹ آن تے مینوں پینٹنگ دا شوق وا	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Equivalent</th> <th>Realized</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>/æ/</td> <td>/wə/</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Equivalent	Realized	/æ/	/wə/	اے
Equivalent	Realized					
/æ/	/wə/					
میں ٹیک کمپنی وچ جاب کرنا چاہندی وان۔	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Equivalent</th> <th>Realized</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>/ə/</td> <td>/wə/</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Equivalent	Realized	/ə/	/wə/	آن
Equivalent	Realized					
/ə/	/wə/					
کمپیوٹر سائنس	<table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Equivalent</th> <th>Realized</th> </tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td>/r/</td> <td>/ə/</td> </tr> </tbody> </table>	Equivalent	Realized	/r/	/ə/	ر
Equivalent	Realized					
/r/	/ə/					

Methodology

The research implies qualitative research paradigm. The sample taken for the study involves 6 participants divided into two groups. One group belonged to Punjab, Pakistan. The other group belonged to Canada, America. Both the groups had their birth place in Punjab, Pakistan. Open ended interviews were conducted to search out the phonological differences. The phonological utterances were analysed instrumenting Yule's consonant and transcription chart.

Results and discussion:

The results indicated a major shift in Punjabi phonemes uttered by the American speakers. The equivalent /æ/ sound of Punjabi was realized as /wə/ sound. The both the sounds in Punjabi language connote the different words. Similarly, آن equivalent in English /ə/ was realized as /wə/. The ر consonant sound of Punjabi was realized as schwa /ə/ sound of English. Such shift in the utterances of the group 2 (i.e. American) was found owing to the effect of English language. Particularly, the similar sound patterns of vowels of English and Punjabi language caused a merger effect of the sounds.

The present study's acoustic and perceptual data reveal substantial phonemic divergence in the Punjabi speech of "Group 2" participants (American-raised Punjabi speakers), compared to native Punjabi speakers in Pakistan. Notably:

1. The Punjabi vowel traditionally realized as /æ/ by native speakers was frequently produced by many Group 2 speakers as a reduced central vowel, perceptually akin to /ə/ or a schwa-onset sequence, sometimes with a slight glide (perceived as /wə/).

2. Similarly, Punjabi segments corresponding to schwa (inherent or epenthetic vowel in Indo-Aryan abugida writing) were often realized as English-style /ə/ rather than a “Punjabi” vowel.

Conclusion

The phonemic deviations observed among American-raised Punjabi speakers in this study offer a compelling instance of how language contact, bilingualism, and dominant-language influence can reshape the phonology of a heritage language. While existing literature on contact phonology and heritage-language maintenance supports the plausibility of such shifts, your data appear to push the boundaries, suggesting potentially novel contact-induced phonetic/phonological restructuring. Given the sociolinguistic significance of these results — for language preservation, identity, and pedagogy — they warrant further empirical investigation with acoustic analysis and native-speaker perceptual evaluation.

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