

**LANGUAGE SHIFT AND MAINTENANCE: THE CASE STUDY OF HINDKO COMMUNITY IN PESHAWAR, PAKISTAN**Dr. Zulfiqar Ali<sup>1</sup>, Ms. Hafiza Kainat Ibrar<sup>2</sup>, Dr. Tariq Khan<sup>3</sup>**Original Article**

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**Abstract**

*The current position paper examines the linguistic scenario of Hindko (the second major language after Pashto in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province) in Peshawar and the social mechanism which poses a challenge to the sustainability of Hindko on a broader scale. It deals with language attitude and language shift from Hindko to other languages due to social, economic and political factors. This study uses a quantitative research approach since the primary data source came from the survey conducted through a questionnaire. A 23 item questionnaire was administered to 75 participants using the strategy of stratified random sampling to collect data on language use, its choice and attitude towards it. The age limit was specified into two groups, i.e. 16-25 and 26-40, and the number of participants from both the groups consisted of 40 and 35, respectively. The rationale behind the age limit specification was to observe the trend of language shift between different age groups by comparison and contrast. The study results show that a considerable number of young participants tend to shift from Hindko to other dominant languages in the community due to social mobility issues*

**Keywords:** Language Shift, Hindko, Multilingual, Linguistic Minority, Medium, Communication**1. Introduction**

Pakistan is a multilingual country with a diverse set of linguistic groups. The national language of Pakistan is Urdu, while the official language is English. Ethnologue lists several regional languages spoken in Pakistan, including Pashto, Sindhi, Punjabi, Balochi, Hindko and Saraiki. According to Ethnologue, Hindko speakers are scattered into different parts of

Pakistan, and they constitute an estimated population of 3,690,000. Before the existence of Pakistan as a sovereign state, Sanskrit was used for Hindu scriptures; however, Prakrit was used as a medium of communication by the common masses. The latter developed into many dialects; thus, it was widely used in Northern parts of South Asia. Hindko is closely related to Prakrit; it also shows immediate

relation with Punjabi and the Lahnda sub-group of Indo-Aryan languages.

Furthermore, Hindko in Pakistan is divided into a northern and southern dialect depending on regional differences ("Hindko point", 2014). Ethnologue explores the distinction between the Northern and Southern dialects of Hindko. The northern dialect is primarily spoken in the Muzaffarabad district and Hazara division (Mansehra and Abbottabad districts), including Indus and Kaghan valleys. On the other hand, Southern dialect is spoken and understood in Kohat, Peshawar and Attock districts to south Hazara. The southern dialects are widely intelligible throughout the dialect network than the northern dialect. According to the CIA World Factbook, 2 Percent of Pakistan's entire population speaks Hindko as a first language.

Hindko is considered the notable linguistic minority of Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, represented in one-fifths of its total households. According to the 1998 census of Pakistan, out of a total of 3 million Hindko speakers in Pakistan, 6.9 per cent reside in the Peshawar district. It is observed that a common code of interaction in government offices and market places includes Pashto and Urdu. In public sector schools, a common tool of communication is Urdu, while the private sector prefers to use English. A minority regional language such as Hindko is limited to home domain and family interactions. A specific generic name does not recognise Hindko speakers; however, they identify with the larger social groups. In Hazara districts, Hindko speakers are called 'Hazarawal' while in Peshawar, they are termed as 'Hindko-wans' or 'Kharay' by the Pashtun community.

Language works as a system in society, while its use depends upon the speakers and the context. The growing force of globalisation has led to an increase in language contact. When people learn to use and communicate in society's dominant language, language shift

occurs because the dominant language is associated with status, distinction, and social achievement (Holmes, 2013). A language shift occurs when a socially powerful language is favoured instead of one's first or native language. Gaillardet (2017) believes that language shift is the result of interaction between different languages in the community. Holmes (2013) claims that a language's status in the community determines its use in the public sphere. Significant factors contributing to language shift or replacement include: societal forces and individual attitudes towards the language. Negative attitudes towards a less prestigious language lead to language replacement, while positive attitudes help maintain it. Conventionally, the dominant language is widely used in the community; however, the less prestigious one is maintained longer when it is a significant symbol of 'ethnic identity'.

According to Meyerhoff (2006), almost all the world nations are either bilingual or multilingual since it is the need of the modern-day world. The term 'Hindko language shift' refers to the fact that Hindko speakers are shifting to Urdu and English in several language use domains. It is assumed that Hindko speakers of Peshawar prefer to use 'Urdu' in almost all the domains since it is associated with the high prestige value. Language shift tends to be slower when the attitude towards the first language is positive. Slavik (2001) found that negative attitudes towards a language accelerate the process of language shift. Political and social factors influence language choices, which affects the attitudes towards language users and their uses. Bichani (2015) argues that there is a strong correlation between a group's language and identity since identity influences language attitudes and choices. Speakers of a less prestigious language, as a rule, avoid to identify themselves with their group.

The present study aims to investigate language shift in the Hindko community of Peshawar. It attempts to reveal the social factors which contribute to language shift in several domains of language use. The study results will demonstrate the correlation between factors of language shift and the individual attitudes towards their native language.

## 2. Literature Review

### 2.1. Speech Community

Nordquist (2018) defines Speech Community as a group of recognised people sharing the same language, speech traits, and similar ways of explicating a discourse. However, he does not restrict a community to just one language, but more languages as the increasing influence of globalisation demands every community to utilise several languages for communication; thus, it promotes the formation of a multilingual speech community in which speakers can efficiently interact in three or more languages.

### 2.2. Language Choice

Since this study's design is to investigate language shift about language use in several domains and with various speakers, there is a focus on language choice. Scholars have identified several factors influencing language choice in multilingual speech settings. Thus, it is essential to investigate the features of language use and choice.

The concept of domain in language use refers to the context of communication. A domain involves: the purpose of the interaction, the relationship between the interlocutors, the topic of conversation, and the particular setting of language use (Holmes, 2013, p.22). The setting of language use refers to the context or place of speech events such as beach, church, home, school, workplace, etc. Domains are sometimes regarded as 'institutional contexts' where one language is more likely to be chosen than another depending on purpose and topic of interaction (Adams, Matu, & Ongarora, 2012). In multilingual communities, a minority

language is usually limited to the home domain with a restricted number of speakers since the community's dominant languages are more often used by people (Brenzinger et al., 2003). The interlocutors greatly influence language choice in a conversation. Gaillardet (2017) found out that the young generation prefers to use minority language to interact with their parents and grandparents in the home domain, whereas society's dominant language is used for communication between siblings. Discussing a particular topic also affects language choice in any of the language domains. Lawson and Sachdev (2004) extrapolated in their study that Bengali, a minority language, was used for discussing topics related to family matters while English was mostly used for exchanging views about school issues. Berardi-Wiltshire (2017) believes that the home domain's language is associated with a 'high degree of intimacy', and such a context involves the use of a minority language in the case of multilingual communities. Each domain appears to possess some domain-specific features and characteristics that determine language choice; thus, speakers tend to shift to the language of the majority linguistic group of the community in some situations.

### 2.3. Language Shift and Maintenance

As this study attempts to analyse the phenomena of language shift in a minority linguistic group, providing scholastic views on language shift and maintenance is a prerequisite. According to Hickey (2010), language contact in multilingual communities initiates the process of language shift. In the phenomenon above, a minority language is gradually replaced by another language in a minimum of one domain of life (Potowski, 2013), an example of which can be seen in the shift from Persian to English in Portland, Oregon (Gaillardet, 2017). On the other hand, 'language maintenance' is a term used to describe a situation when a speech community prefers to maintain its language in some or all domains despite the competition with the

dominant languages (Pauwels, 2004). Tsunoda (2006) claims that when confident speakers in the community use a given language, usually the elder members, but it is no longer transmitted to the young generation, so it may cause language shift and eventually language death. Holmes (2013) believes that young people are likely to shift faster to the dominant language of the community in a contact situation compared to the old ones. Tandefelt (1992) highlights four significant language shift types: total, partial, macro and micro level shifts. The first refers to a gradual yet continuous process of language shift in a community. The second indicates a complete shift and no point of return to a particular language. Macro-level shift refers to the whole community's shift, and a micro-level shift indicates an individual's linguistic behaviour (Cited in Bichani, 2015).

#### **2.4. Language Shift Studies**

A significant number of language shift studies focused on the contact situation between ethnic minority and majority linguistic groups. Bichani (2015) argues that language shift is usually the result of pre-migration and post-migration experiences. However, language shift is not always the result of migration. Holmes (2013) explains that political, social and economic changes in a community can initiate linguistic changes too, one consequence of 'language shift' (p.55). Masruddin (2014) inferred that Bhasa, a socially dominant language in Indonesia, is supplanting the minority language Wotunese in all the domains of language utilisation of the 'Woto' community. In multilingual communities, a dominant language is likely to be used more when compared to a minority language since the former is associated with high status and prestige value (Nordquist, 2019). Data collection in language shift studies involves several methods depending upon the circumstances faced by a community. Pauwels (2004) talks about several data collection tools concerning language shift and maintenance studies. Questionnaires and

participant observation techniques are utilised to indicate language shift operation in a community. Surveys conducted through questionnaire help obtain information about patterns of language use, choice, proficiency and attitudes towards a particular language.

#### **2.5. Factors Influencing Language Shift**

Fishman (1991) indicates four significant types of 'dislocation' as influential causes behind language shift in a community: physical, demographic, social and cultural dislocation. Each type is briefly described below.

##### **a. Physical and Demographic Dislocation**

According to Fishman (1991), the first type refers to an individual's movement or a community from one country to another or from a village to an urban area. Physical dislocation usually occurs through immigration or urbanisation, requiring people to adopt the majority group's language. Holmes (2013) claims that people living in urban areas rapidly shift to the language of a socially dominant group, whereas resistance to language shift can be observed in rural areas. Both physical and demographic dislocation adversely affects the whole of a linguistic community, resulting in cultural, economic and linguistic modifications. Fishman (1991) claims that "physical and demographic arrangements have cultural (and, therefore, language-in culture) consequences" (p.58). Among other demographic factors, intermarriage between groups can also accelerate the process of language shift (Holmes, 2013).

##### **a. Social Dislocation**

Social dislocation is generally associated with the contact between majority and minority ethnolinguistic groups, where the minority group is often disadvantaged. Fishman (1991) claims that members of a socially dislocated group are faced with several risk factors such as: their status in the community and limited access to educational and economic facilities (p.59). Holmes (2013) states that status, prestige and

social success are the features of a dominant ethnolinguistic group in a community. Thus, in multilingual communities, a minority linguistic group usually adopts the language of a socially dominant group for attaining success and status in society (Wardhaugh & Fuller, 2015).

### **b. Cultural Dislocation**

Cultural dislocation indicates a situation where a socially dominant group overpowers a minority ethnolinguistic group's values and traditions and thus exercises its hegemony. Fishman (1991) highlights that even in democratic communities, a minority group experiences scarce opportunities to practice their own culture and utilise their language for day-to-day communication; thus, such a group's language and culture are endangered. He further vindicates that cultural and educational institutions in democratic communities are governed and controlled by the most potent group eventually, and minority groups remain under the majority group's influence in the community. Holmes (2013) believes that a minority language can be maintained longer through strong institutional support. Institutions such as: education, law, administration, religion and media are pivotal in determining the success or failure of maintaining an ethnic minority language in a democratic community.

Other factors affecting language shift are gathered under an umbrella term known as 'Ethno-linguistic vitality' ,which is discussed below:

### **c. Ethno-linguistic Vitality**

The concept of ethnolinguistic vitality deals with the relationships between different groups in a community. Giles, Bourhis and Taylor (1977) define a group's vitality as its ability to behave actively and distinctively in intergroup situations. When a group is well aware of its existence as an entity compared to other groups in a community, it can maintain its language and cultural values. Ethno-linguistic minorities usually fail to maintain their identity and hence cease to exist as a distinct social

group. Holmes (2013) mentions that the probability of the language maintenance of an ethnic minority can be projected by measuring its ethnolinguistic vitality. The prominent factors that determine a group's ethnolinguistic vitality include the status of the group, demographic situation, and institutional support.

Giles et al., (1977) state that the social, economic and linguistic status of an ethnolinguistic group is determined by the attitudes towards it and is closely related to the degree of its vitality. The more status and prestige value a linguistic group appears to have, the greater vitality it can be said to possess as a distinct entity in the community. The vitality of an ethnic minority can also be estimated by analysing the group's size and distribution, which pertains to demographic assessment. The demographic factors affecting a group's vitality is split into two primary elements: group distribution and a group's number of factors. Giles et al. (1977) are of the view that a concentrated group possesses greater feasibility of maintaining its vitality as a collective entity than a scattered ethnic group.

Furthermore, five factors subsumed under the size aspect of the group include: the absolute number of the group, birth rate, mixed marriages, immigration and emigration. Yagmur (2011) considers 'institutional support' as a significant element in maintaining a group's language and culture. Institutional support refers to the degree of formal and informal support a group receives in various institutions, like: education, mass-media, government services, industry, culture, religion and politics (Giles et al., 1977). Dimensions of the ethnolinguistic vitality theory determine a group's strengths and weaknesses, which helps to figure out the degree of a group's vitality. Yagmur (2011) classifies a group's vitality into three significant degrees: low, medium and high. Groups having low vitality rapidly experience 'linguistic assimilation' whereas high vitality groups presumably maintain their language and cultural values in multilingual communities.

### **2.6. Language Attitudes**

Cherry (2019) defines attitude as a set of ideas, beliefs, emotions and behaviour towards a particular person, object or situation and they

are formed as a result of erstwhile experiences. Bichani (2015) pinpoints that attitudes are based on cognitive, affective and behavioural aspects. Holmes (2013) claims that attitudes to a language indicate the attitude towards the users of language and language in various settings. Meyerhoff (2006) believes that our attitude to a language determines our behaviour with the speakers of that particular language. Holmes (2013) states that people are highly motivated to acquire and use a second language in multilingual settings when they feel positive towards their speakers. Todor and Degi (2016) describe an aspect of language attitude studies by claiming that in multilingual communities, each language is associated with a different status and value due to the social, cultural, political and economic factors. Kuncha and Bathula (2004) discovered that social, political and economic considerations lead immigrant communities to form a positive attitude towards the dominant ethnolinguistic group. Holmes (2013) believes that a positive attitude towards the dominant ethnolinguistic group is one factor that displaces the minority language (mother tongue) over time. Researching attitude is a complex task since attitude is psychological. Bichani (2015) claims that a language attitude researcher sought to consider a difference between reported and observed attitudes since several factors can affect the former.

### 3. Methodology

Following are the methodological outlines employed for conducting the study: (a) source of data; (b) construction of questionnaire; (c) questionnaire distribution; (d) research approach; and, (e) analysis technique.

#### 3.1. Source of Data

Data for the study are derived from a primary source since the researchers distributed questionnaires to the population sample. It was essential to collect data through a survey to meet the requirements of the study. That provided direct and first-hand insight into an event taking place in society.

#### 3.2. Questionnaire Construction

All the participants in this study were asked to fill out a questionnaire that included questions about language use and choice and language attitude. Some previous studies (such as

Mugaddam, 2006; Hudyma, 2012; Bichani, 2015 etc.) proved that questionnaire is a useful instrument in language retention studies. All the questionnaires were printed on two double-sided pages, and they contained plain text with no images. The questionnaire comprised only close-ended questions since the research's main focus was to find out language use in several domains and speakers' attitude towards the language. This strategy was helpful to obtain data required for research analysis.

The questionnaire was constructed in three major sections: at first, participants were required to provide demographic information; the second section included questions related to language use in various domains; and, the third part consists of opinion-based statements. Questions related to domain analysis were adopted from Nazir et al.'s (2013) research on the case of Punjabi in the Sargodha region of Pakistan. Language attitude statements were adopted from Frank's and Gessner's (2013) guide to language policy and planning for B.C first nations communities. Language promotion and preservation questions were based on the assumption that language retention patterns can be improved by personal, community and governmental efforts (Holmes, 2013). The questions were adapted and modified to meet the demands of the present study.

#### 3.3. Questionnaire Distribution

Subjects for this study were chosen voluntarily via the distribution of questionnaires to Hindko speakers only. A 23 item questionnaire was administered to 75 participants using the strategy of stratified random sampling. The age limit was specified into two groups, i.e. 16-25 and 26-40, and the number of participants from both the groups consisted of 40 and 35, respectively. The rationale behind the age limit specification was to observe the trend of language shift between different age groups by comparison and contrast. The population is divided into two groups that are relevant and appropriate in the context of this research. Within the groups above, every subject had an equal chance of being selected as a participant of this study.

#### 3.4. Research Approach

This study uses a quantitative research approach since the primary data source came

from the survey conducted through a questionnaire. Quantitative research helps to find out information about a sample of the population. Pauwels (2004) mentions that language shift and maintenance research should be executed by following a quantitative data collection approach and analysis. Quantitative research relies on data that can measure and observe the results, which helps answer the research questions.

### 3.5. Analysis Technique

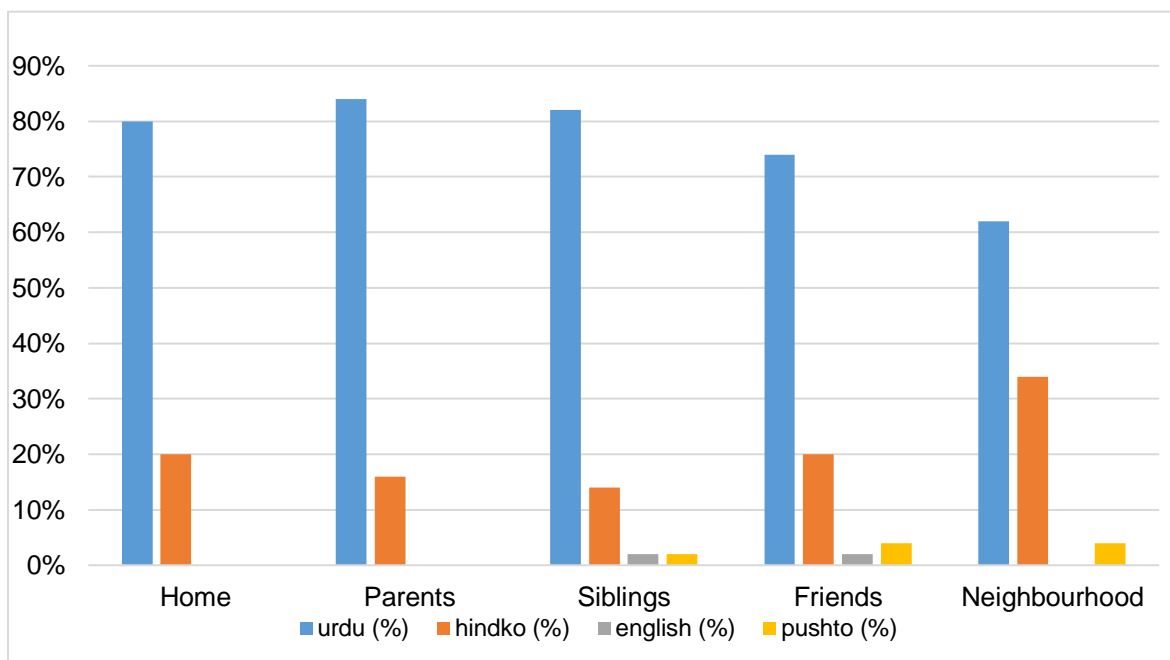
Data collected through questionnaires were tabulated and analysed using Microsoft Excel. The questionnaires were analysed according to the variable of age, as discussed in the research methodology. Each question's result was generated in the form of a percentage, and the graphs were drawn for display. Results of questionnaires from two age groups, i.e. 16-25

and 26-40, were processed separately to indicate the distinction between frequencies of language shift between both the groups.

## 4. Results and Discussion

### a. Domain Analysis (Age group 16-25)

Figure 1 illustrates information regarding the language used by speakers in several domains and with various interlocutors. A clear shift can be observed from Hindko to different languages, especially Urdu (80% in home, 84% with parents, 82% with siblings, 74% with friends and 62% in the neighbourhood). As compared to Urdu, Hindko is used only 20% in the home domain, 16% with parents, 14% with siblings, 20% with friends and 34% in the neighbourhood. Speakers from the age group 16-25 tend to use Urdu in most situations, abandoning their mother tongue.



**Figure 1: Language use in different domains**

Figure 2 represents the percentage of Hindko used by speakers in several domains compared to other dominant languages existing in society. The data's statistical analysis shows that speakers tend to use other languages rather than Hindko in almost all social contexts. Pushto and Urdu are the two dominant

languages spoken in market places, i.e. 58% & 42%, respectively. 84% of participants reported that their medium of education at primary and secondary levels was English, while the other 16% reported Urdu. 54% Urdu and 46% of English are used in school-related conversations with teachers and friends.

Moreover, participants reported that English is the only language used for writing official

letters. 52% Urdu, 46% English while 2% Pushto is utilised for official conversations.

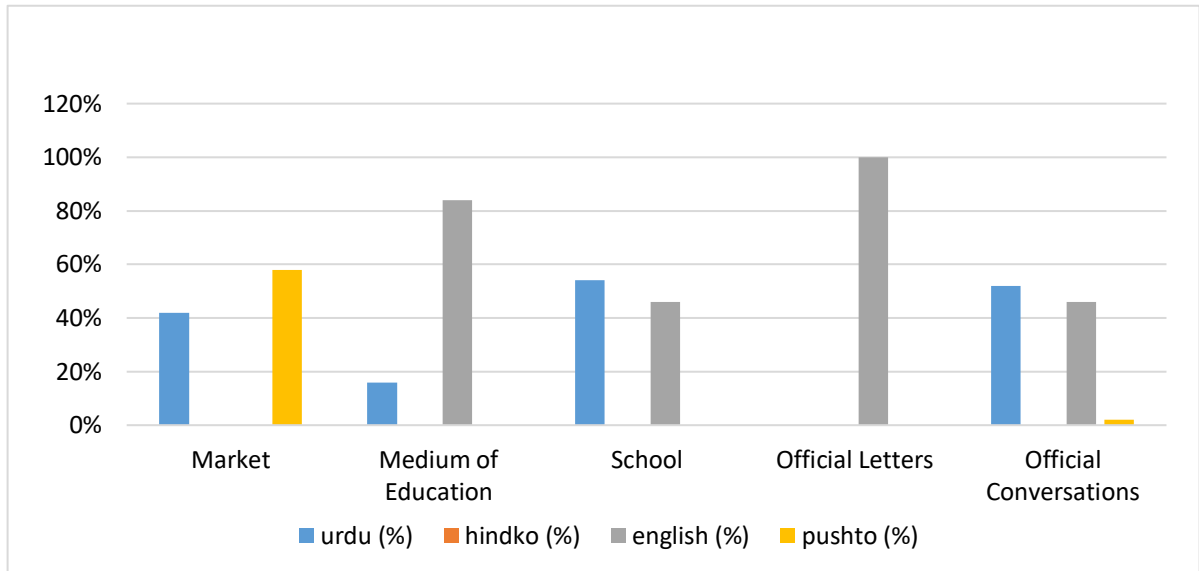


Figure 2: Language use in different social contexts

**b. Attitude Analysis (Age group 16-25)**

Figure 3 shows participants' response to several poll based statements regarding attitude to language. Questions were asked regarding transmission, language use,

communication in different languages, preference for mother tongue and job opportunities.

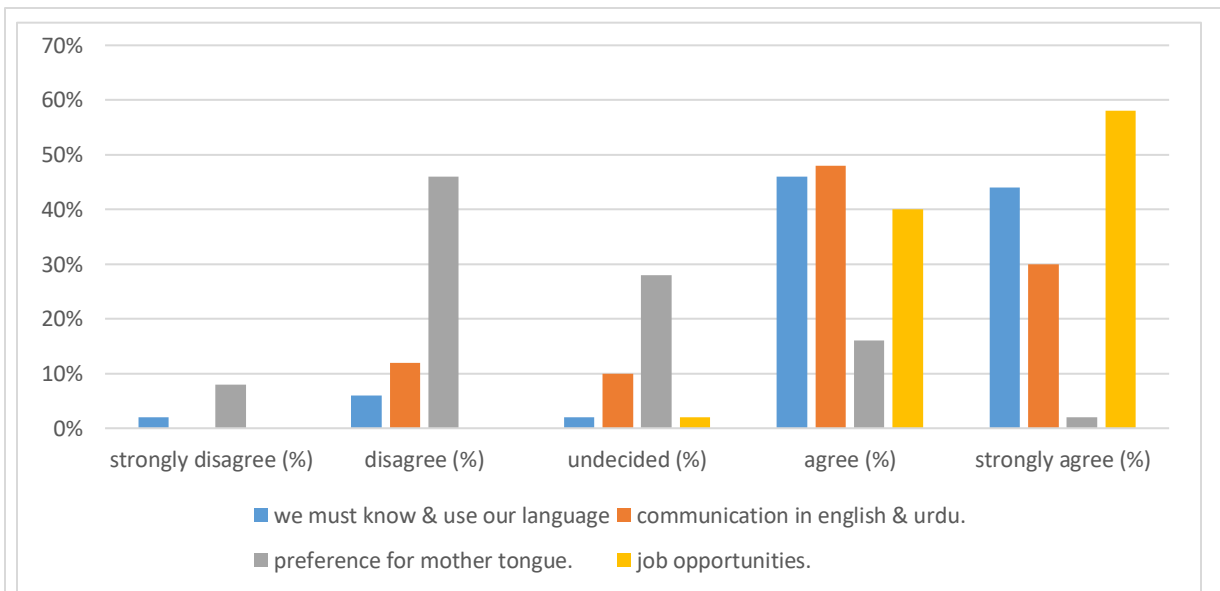
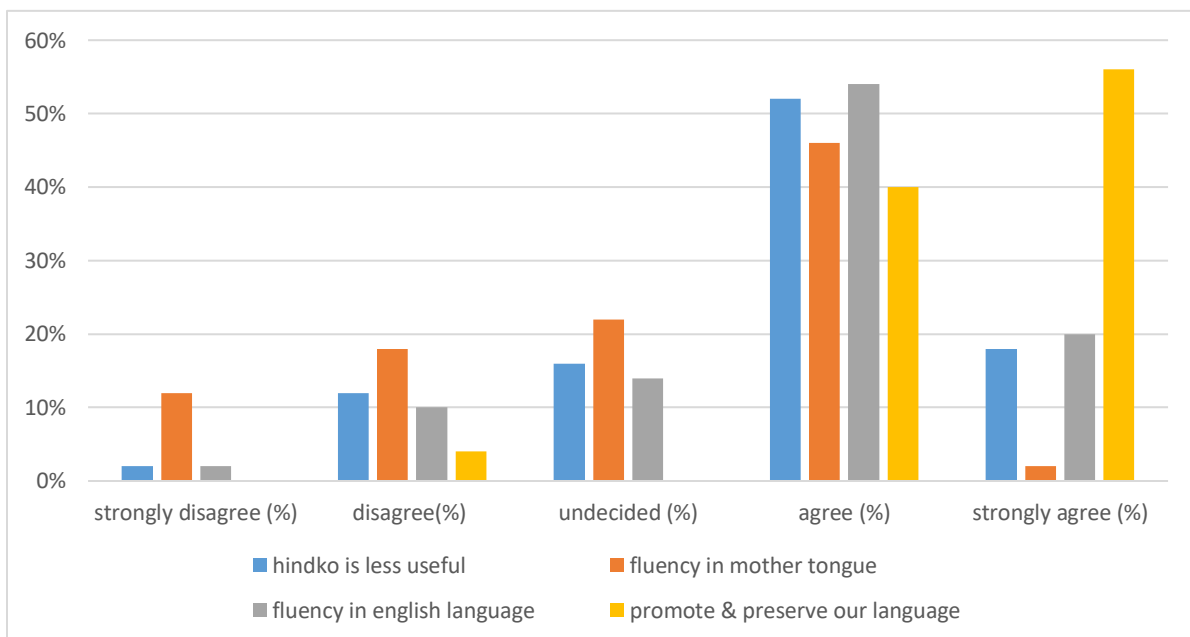


Figure 3: Attitude to language

The survey results indicate that 46% of participants agreed to the statement that Hindko should be used. Similarly, 44% of participants strongly agreed to the same statement. 48% of participants agreed that English and Urdu's communication looks more sophisticated, 30% strongly agreed, while only 12% disagreed. Besides, most participants, i.e. 46% disagreed with preferring Hindko in most domains, while 28% responded that they did not decide whether or not to prefer Hindko.

According to 58 % of the participants, English offers more advantages in seeking good job opportunities, while 40% agreed at the same time. Figure 4 shows some other opinion-based statements related to various languages spoken in the society and their overall impact on the Hindko linguistic group. In this context, participants were asked questions related to the status of the Hindko language compared to dominant languages in society.



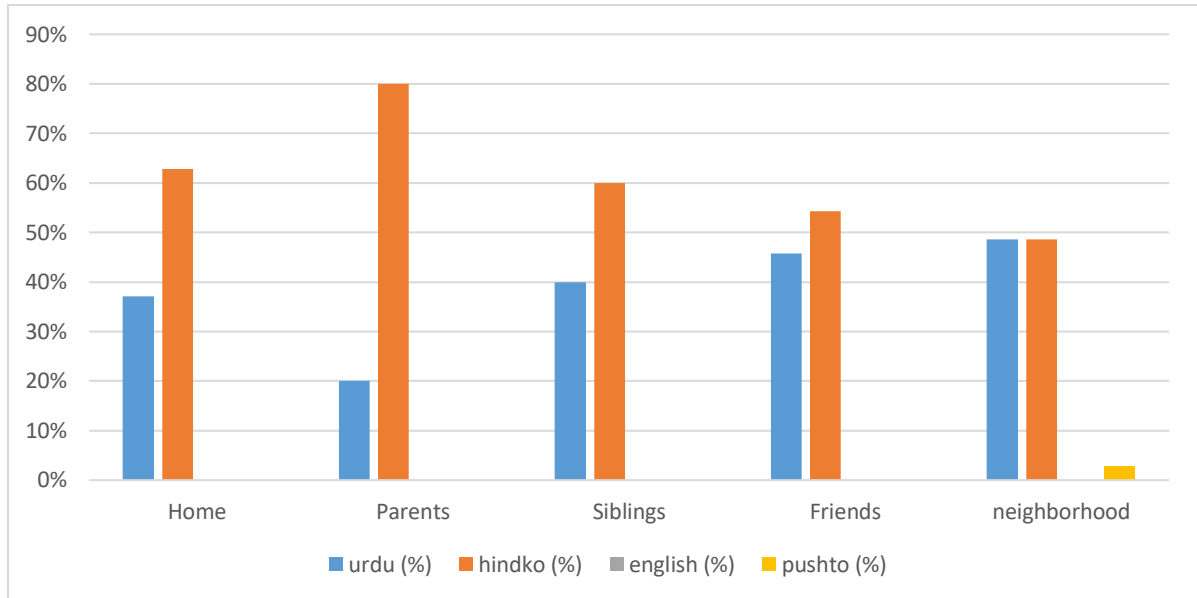
**Figure 4: Opinion based statements**

In this scenario, 52% of participants agreed that Hindko is less valuable than English and Urdu, while 18% strongly agreed. Simultaneously, 46% of the participants reported that they would be embarrassed if they did not speak their mother tongue fluently, while 54% linked comparable opinion with the English language. Moreover, 56% of the participants strongly agreed that they must promote and preserve

their language, while 40% agreed to the same statement.

#### c. Domain Analysis (Age group 26-40)

Figure 5 demonstrates data concerning languages' use by 26-40 age speakers in various domains and with different individuals. Shift from Hindko to Urdu can be observed, but it is somewhat on a lesser scale than speakers of age 16-25.

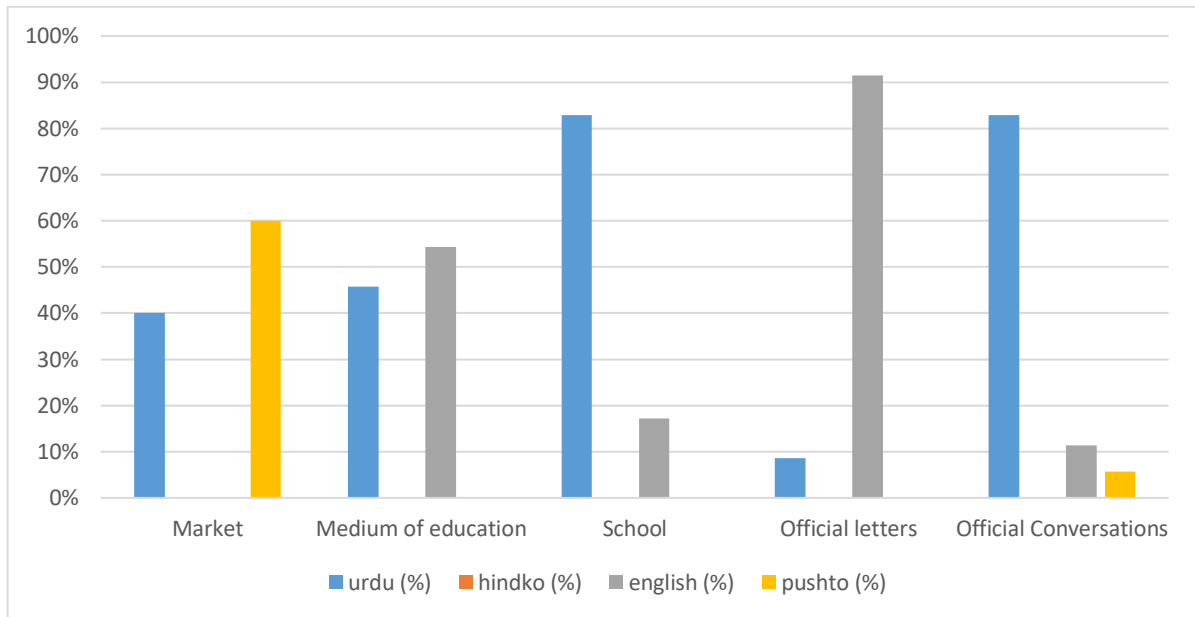


**Figure 5: Language use in different domains**

In answer to the first question, 63% of respondents reported that they use Hindko for everyday communication at home, while 37% reported Urdu as the home domain language. It can be observed that elderly speakers maintain the Hindko language as compared to teenagers. Urdu is estimated to be used at 40% with siblings and 20% with parents. The percentage of the shift to Urdu increases as we move from home domain to friendship and neighbourhood, i.e. 46% and 49%, respectively.

Figure 6 shows languages used by speakers in various social contexts and with different

members of society. The apparent shift can be observed from Hindko to other languages in several domains such as market, school, and office. In market places, 60% Pushto, while 40% of Urdu is used for interaction. 54% of participants reported that their medium of education at primary and secondary levels was English. Similarly, in the school domain, common languages of interaction are Urdu and English, i.e. 83% & 17%, respectively. Furthermore, for this age group, 83% of official conversations occur in Urdu, while 11% in English.



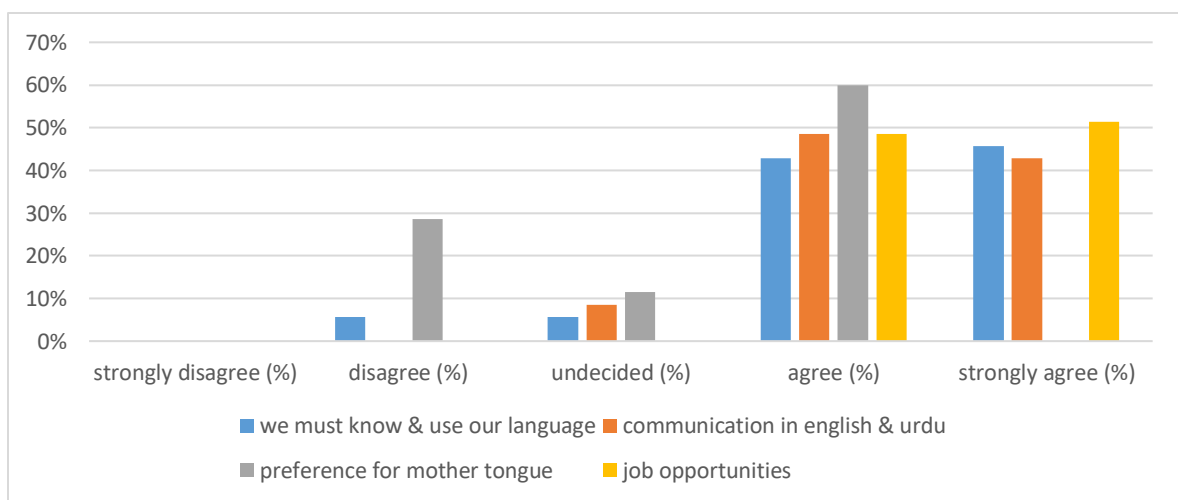
**Figure 6: Language use in different social contexts**

**d. Attitude Analysis (Age group 26-40)**

Figure 7 indicates respondents' attitude towards some poll based statements regarding attitude to language. Statements regarding language use, transmission, preference for mother tongue, and job opportunities were included in the questionnaires' attitude section.

The study results show that 46% of individuals strongly agree that they must know and use their mother tongue, while 43% agree with the

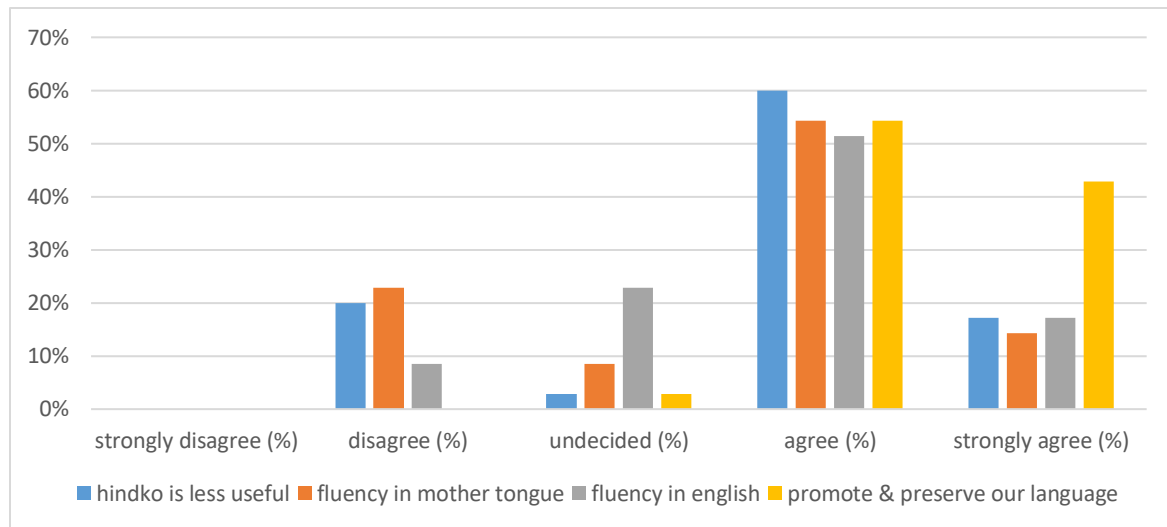
same statement. On the other hand, 49% agree that English and Urdu's communication looks more sophisticated, while 43% give strong consent. In response to another statement, 60% agree to prefer their mother tongue in several domains, while 29% disagree. Moreover, 51% of respondents strongly agree that English offers more advantage in seeking opportunities, while 49% agree.



**Figure 7: Attitude to language**

Figure 8 illustrates a comparative analysis of respondents' attitude towards various languages in society. As the data indicate, 60% of the participants agree that Hindko is less useful to know than English and Urdu, while 17% strongly agree. 54% reported that they

would be embarrassed if they did not speak their mother tongue fluently, while 51% possessed similar views about English. Furthermore, most of the participants, i.e. 54% agree that the Hindko language must be promoted and preserved.



**Figure 8: Opinion based statement**

## 5. Discussion

The primary variable considered for this study was age, and the results exhibit that trend of language shift from Hindko to other dominant languages of the community are more apparent in adolescents and youth than in adults. Young speakers prefer to use Urdu in most domains such as family, friendship and neighbourhood, whereas they prefer English in schools and offices. It is observed that young speakers are not encouraged to use their mother tongue even in the family domain. Moreover, this age group experiences no opportunities to use Hindko in any language use domain. On the other hand, adults maintain Hindko with family and friends, while using Urdu in the neighbourhood, educational and official settings. More aged speakers do require to shift under a few circumstances concerning

the growing demands of society. Holmes (2013) claims that in multilingual communities, young speakers are likely to shift faster to the community's dominant language compared to adults.

Most of the people who participated in this research reported that knowing and using the language is crucial for community members. On the contrary, young participants felt that Hindko is less useful to know than English and Urdu and thought that English and Urdu's communication looks more sophisticated. Since participants seem to possess a positive attitude towards English and Urdu, these two languages are likely to be used in each domain. However, it is observed that people possess a positive attitude towards their language; they tend to adopt dominant languages due to societal factors for day-

to-day communication. Young participants reported that they feel more embarrassed if unable to communicate in English fluently. However, they do not feel the same for their mother tongue. Both young and aged participants believed that a community must make efforts to promote and preserve the language. The study results indicate clear signs of a shift; however, individuals can promote and preserve the language by ensuring its transmission to future generations.

## 6. Conclusion

As the second most spoken language in the Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province of Pakistan, Hindko is declining and losing its speakers slowly and gradually due to the presence of dominant languages. Language maintenance and shift are the results of continuous patterns of language use. Shift to other languages may cause language attrition as several speakers are shifting their loyalties to Urdu. The shift's reasons are several, i.e. lack of language use, lack of prestige, lack of power, lack of institutional support, etc. Therefore, it is necessary to take initiatives for the growth of Hindko, and parents should transmit the language to children to guarantee the sustainability of language.

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