

# Language Shift: Attitude of Students Toward the English Language

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## Abstract

The current study examined that language shift from Punjabi to English is a leading cause of extinction of a regional language that may pave the way towards language death. Several studies are available on language shift but limited research is available to explore the attitude of students toward the English language. Thereby, applying quantitative methodology, which includes a questionnaire comprising ten questions using a Likert scale, the current study aims to explore the attitude of students toward the English language. The study highlighted that students are shifting from the Punjabi language to the English language to look more civilized and well-educated. Students have favourable attitudes towards the English language for survival in this current era and the Punjabi language is not enjoying a good status. Students are shifting from the Punjabi language for the sake of a better future and modernity.

**Keywords:** *language shift, Sociolinguistics, Regional language, Attitude towards English Language*

## Introduction

Language shift undoubtedly occurs in all historical periods and geographical areas. Weinreich (1953) defines language shift as “*the change from the habitual use of one language to another*” and argues that sociological aspects of a process should be studied as part of contact linguistics. Language shift is a replacement of a language with any other language. Speakers are shifting from Punjabi language to English language due to some social and contextual factors, this is

known as language shift. Language shift occurs when the speakers of a language feel shame to speak their language then that language is replaced by a high-status language. This shift in language can also occur when people migrate from one area to another. Then people from different backgrounds meet and start to communicate a common high-valued language. Language shift is a constantly dynamic process, that occurs when a community starts to shift from their native language to another prestigious language. In today's era, English is considered a civilized language. It is considered as a language of professionals and educated. In this regard, people are shifting from their mother tongue Punjabi to the English language. Students are shifting from their native language toward the English language. The Punjabi language is considered an old-fashioned language and the language of the forefathers. Young students are moving from their native to the English language, known as language shift. If language shift starts to occur at a large scale, then the shifted language can be an endangered language. This endangered language can soon pave the way towards the death of language.

Language is a tool of communication but people have classified languages as civilized, educated, or status phenomena. English speakers are highly valued in this modern world. That is why communities are shifting from their native language to the English language.

## Literature Review

(Komal, Bashir, and Khan 2022) conducted research in Multan city to know the status of the Punjabi language among its young native speakers. The researcher used the quantitative research approach and applied Fishman's Domains theory descriptively. The results were analyzed by using Microsoft Excel Software. It was indicated that young natives of the Punjabi language do not have a positive attitude towards the Punjabi language. Young natives are not proficient in the Punjabi language. **The Punjabi language is not enjoying good status among its natives. Punjabi natives are not interested in the maintenance of Punjabi language. People are shifting from the Punjabi language. Urdu and English language are considered a prestigious language.**

(Nazir, Aftab, and Saeed 2013) Examined the status of Punjabi language in Sargodha city, Pakistan. Attitudes, causes and effects were discussed in this research to know about the shift of the Punjabi language to any other language. Data was collected via Triangulation (questionnaire and in-depth interview). It was stated that Punjabi speakers are not loyal to their mother tongue. Most of the Punjabis are shifting from the Punjabi language. The day is not so far when the Punjabi language will be an endangered language.

(Zaidi 2016) examined the ethno-linguistic vitality of the Punjabi language in Pakistan. The objective Ethno-linguistic vitality model was applied on this study. It was declared that Punjabi language is an endangered language and it is on the verge of death. In Pakistan, the Punjabi language is facing low status among its natives.

A study was conducted by using a matched guise technique to know the true status of Punjabi language. As Punjabi language is the mother tongue of the majority of the people who are living in Pakistan. Besides this, it is not enjoying a good reputation among its natives. The respondents of this research were required to rate the ten speakers on a seven-dimensional language attitude trait scale. It was concluded that the most reputable language is English, then Urdu and the low-status language is Punjabi. It was recommended that there must be a core focus on the development of indigenous languages like Punjabi (Abbasa, Jalilb, and Hammad Nazir Zakic).

(Bukhari and Dilshad 2020) conducted a study by interviewing 30 students who were Punjabi and Saraiki speakers. Punjabi speakers use the Punjabi language outside classrooms. While the impact of the mother tongue on the English language is neutral. Students do not face any ambiguity in learning the English language. But, at the start, students were hesitant to speak the English language.

(Getie 2020) stated that there are social factors (Native speakers of English, peer groups, and parents of the learner) and contextual factors (classrooms, learning environment) that play an essential role in learning English as a foreign language. Social factors impact student's attitudes positively while contextual factors have negative impacts. Data was analyzed qualitatively and quantitatively after collecting from 103 randomly selected students. It was proposed that physical learning environments must be supportive for better learning of English as a foreign language.

Quantitative research was conducted by (Abbas and Iqbal 2018) to check the status of the Punjabi language in the province of Punjab. An interview was conducted to gather data for the study. It was concluded that the Punjabi language does not meet the requirements of the modern world. It has no value in this era, so Punjabi natives are shifting from their mother tongue.

## **Research Methodology**

### Research Questions:

- 1) Why do students choose the English language over their Punjabi language?
- 2) Why do students have a favorable attitude towards the English language?
- 3) What is the importance of the English language over the Punjabi language?
- 4) What are the factors contributing to the language shift from Punjabi to English?

### Objectives:

- To identify the language shift from Punjabi to English.
- To identify reasons behind language shift.
- To search out the attitude of students towards the English language.

- To analyse factors affecting the regional language of students.

## Data Collection

The whole data is collected from 30 randomly selected students from department of English. The mother tongue of those students was Punjabi language. These students are struggling to move from Punjabi language towards English language.

## Data Collection Tools

A questionnaire comprising ten questions is used to collect data about the causes, attitude, factors, and consequences of the shift in the language. Moreover, as an open-ended question free space is given to the respondents to comment freely. Likert scale is used for the collection of responses. As, agree, strongly agree, neutral, disagree, and strongly disagree. The questionnaire is distributed among both male and female students of English department.

## Data Analysis Tools

The data analysis tool is MS Word. The data is analyzed on the basis of percentage from each respondent with the help of Likert scale.

## Data Analysis and Findings

In the quantitative approach, ten closed-ended questions and one open-ended question were asked via questionnaire. Students commented on this question freely. Each question is analyzed by using the percentage method.

### 1. Do you think the English language is very important in the current global community?

According to the responses, the majority of the respondents are in favor of the English language being crucial in the current global community. 86% of respondents agreed with this statement while 10% disagreed and 4% were neutral. The results show that in answering the above statement, people think the English language is important to learn in this modern era. So, it is mandatory to shift from the mother tongue to the English language.

### 2. The shift from Punjabi to English Language will lead to a cultural shift. Are people moving from Punjabi to English culture?

The results show that, 48.3% respondents are agreed about the statement, 41.4% choose neutral while 10.3 % are disagreed.

### 3. Do you think English proficiency ensures better economic status?

The results show that 73.3% respondents of to this question agreed that the English language ensures better economic status. While 23.3% chose the neutral option only 3.4% of respondents disagreed about this statement. The majority of the students think that the English language ensures better economic status.

#### **4. Can students understand modern scientific concepts in the English language easily?**

According to the responses, 70% of students agreed that they can understand modern scientific concepts easily in the English language. On the other hand, 17% of respondents chose the neutral option and only 13% of respondents disagreed with this statement.

#### **5. Do you speak the Punjabi language in your informal gatherings?**

The results show that 50% of respondents agreed, 40% were neutral, and 10% disagreed with the statement. Students cannot speak the Punjabi language in formal contexts, so 50% try to speak the Punjabi language in informal gatherings.

#### **6. When you see a person speaking English, do you think that is a very civilized and well-educated person?**

According to the responses, 86.7% of respondents chose the agreed, 9.7% chose the disagreed option and 3.6% chose the neutral option. It is stated that when a person is speaking English people considers that person more civilized and well-educated.

#### **7. Do you think that English dress code is elegant and a symbol of superiority than your native dress code?**

The responses show that, 43.4% are agreed, 20% chose neutral, and 36.6% disagreed to the statement. The majority of the respondents think that English dress code is elegant and a symbol of superiority than native dress code.

#### **8. Do you consider the shift in language to be positive?**

The responses show that 55% of respondents chose an agreed option, 40% are neutral to this statement, and only 5% disagreed. Most of the respondents are agreed to the statement that the shift in a language from Punjabi to English is positive.

#### **9. English language is very easy to learn for a Punjabi speaker?**

The responses show that 36.7% of respondents agreed, 33.3% disagreed, and 30% chose the neutral option. Most of the respondents think that the English language is easy to learn for a Punjabi speaker.

#### **10. The neglect of the Punjabi language will destroy our identity and the knowledge of Punjabi literature?**

The responses show that, 70% respondents are agreed, 13.3% were neutral, and 16.7% disagreed. The majority of the responses indicated that yes, the neglect of the Punjabi language will destroy their identity.

**According to you, what are the factors or reasons for the language shift from the Punjabi language to the English language? Comment**

- The English language has become a need of society as in educational institutes, offices and some other places, English has become compulsory.
- The English language is the demand of every institution. The English language is spoken to look educated.
- Basically, the English language is necessary in this era of life and forefathers' language is also important so be loyal and sincere with your traditions.
- Courses, company and interests are the factors that can cause a language shift.
- Our whole education system has shifted toward English guidelines which is the main reason that people are being influenced by English language. It has also become a formal language for communication at the educational institutes and workplaces. That's the reason students are shifting towards English language.
- The English language seems prestigious in our society. The shift from Punjabi to English is due to British colonial rule, globalization, social prestige, educational system, and media influence.
- The English language is a need for survival and good exposure. Social, economic, educational, and technological contexts demand the language shift from Punjabi to English.
- Due to the international demand for the English language, it has a huge influence on the whole world. Community, business and education demand the English language.
- The shift from the Punjabi language to the English language is a worldly requirement. As the world is growing so fast, so it is important to shift from Punjabi language to English language.
- English is an international language and people need to communicate worldwide. So, the English language is the only way to communicate professionally.

*In this way, several reasons are mentioned by the students for the language shift.*

From the analysis of all responses, it is summarized that students are shifting from their mother tongue to the English language. A limited number of students can speak, read, and write Punjabi.

Because students think that the English language is a crucial need to learn in this current global community. The English language is a demand of society. The shift from the Punjabi language to the English language will lead to the cultural shift, from Punjabi culture to English. People are ready for this cultural shift due to the prestige of the English language. This shift can pave the way of Punjabi language towards the death language. The majority of the respondents think that

English proficiency ensures better economic status. If a person can speak English, then that person can get a job easily. English has become a mode of communication at all workplaces. Students are more habitual of the English language. In all educational institutes, the only mode of learning is the English language. They consider that all scientific concepts are easy to comprehend in the English language rather than their mother tongue. Students most of the time speak the English language in their informal gatherings while it is mandatory to speak English language in formal contexts. In today's era, if a person speaks the English language, it is considered that person is well-educated, more civilized, and knowledgeable than others. The English language is treated as a scale to measure the knowledge of a person or student. English attire is taken as a symbol of superiority and elegance. Students always try to wear the English dress code in their formal gatherings so that they can look elegant and superior to others. Punjabi dress code as *shalwar and kameez* is not considered a better option to wear at formal gatherings. Students consider that the shift from the Punjabi language to English is positive and mandatory to survive in current era. The English language is now easy to learn for students because it is the only mode of teaching and learning at educational institutes. It is suspected that this shift from the Punjabi language can destroy the Punjabi identity. In this way, the Punjabi language can soon be an endangered language and it may cause the death of the Punjabi language. Moreover, due to the high usage of the English language in society whether it is an educational institute, workplace or home, the Punjabi language has almost lost its status. The English language is a demand of society to survive in this modern world.

It is recommended that the Government should take some initiatives to save the Punjabi language. It can be done by implementing the Punjabi language as a part of the curriculum. Some courses must be designed in the Punjabi language. Media has to play an important role in saving the Punjabi language by screening creative and engaging content in the Punjabi language. Additionally, parents can play a vital role in the current scenario by teaching their children the mother tongue along with the English language.

## Conclusion

The attitude of students toward the Punjabi language is not favorable. Punjabi language is not enjoying a good status among students, they are shifting from it. Students choose the English language as it is considered a prestigious language and it is crucial to learn and speak the English language to look more civilized and well-educated. In this modern era, the English language is only a mode of learning, teaching, and communication. It is treated as a scale to measure the knowledge of students. English is an international language that is spoken worldwide, for the sake of learning and earning and people are shifting from their mother tongue. So, students are shifting from the Punjabi language to the English language for a better future and survival in this modern era. This shift from Punjabi to English is a significant threat to the survival of the Punjabi language.

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