



Are Some Dialects of Punjabi at the Verge of Death? A Sociolinguistic Study of Awankari

Ameer Sultan¹, Lubna Umar², Shahid Hussain Mir³

¹ Assistant Professor, Department of English, International Islamic University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: ameer.sultan@iiu.edu.pk

² Assistant Professor, Centre for Languages and Translation Studies, Allama Iqbal Open University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Email: lubna.umar@aiou.edu.pk

³ Lecturer, Department of English, University of Kotli AJK, Pakistan. Email: shahid.mir54@gmail.com

ARTICLE INFO

ABSTRACT

Article History:

Received: July 04, 2023
Revised: August 29, 2023
Accepted: August 30, 2023
Available Online: September 01, 2023

Keywords:

Awankari Dialect
Punjabi
Sociolinguistic

Funding:

This research received no specific grant from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

The purpose of the study is to describe the low prestige feelings of Awankari dialect speakers. The Punjabi language has many dialects but Majhi is considered a standard dialect in Western Punjab. The other dialects like Potohari, Dhani, Shahpuri, Jatki, Ghebi have not achieved prestige and are still considered inferior by the speakers of central Punjab in Pakistan. The study aims to investigate why some people feel low about their dialects and discourage their children to speak their native languages and local dialect. The data was collected from seventy native speakers of Awankari including government servants, businessmen, students and women who have left their native towns and moved to big cities. The study was conducted in a small village Jaba in Tehsil Naushera, Soon Sakesser Valley, District Khushab where these people have gathered on a wedding ceremony. Their mother tongue was Awankari and the data was collected through interview. The paper concludes with speculation about the possible death of Awankari. It also identified the dire need of dialect documentation of Awankari to preserve the language and culture of Soon Sakesser Valley and other areas where people speak this variety of Lahndi.

© 2023 The Authors, Published by iRASD. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial License

Corresponding Author's Email: ameer.sultan@iiu.edu.pk

1. Introduction

Awankari is a neglected dialect of Lahndi (Western Punjabi). The literal meaning of Lehnda in Punjabi is Western. Grierson argued, "The Awans are an important tribe, whose habitat centres around the Western Salt Range, extends into the adjoining portion of Mianwali, Shahpur, and Jhelum... this country in possession of the Awans is known as the Awankari.. the language of tehsil Talagnj (Talagang) is also Awankari or Awanki" (1919, p.449). It is the dialect of the inhabitants of three tehsil of Punjab in Pakistan; Talagang, Lawan and Naushera (Soon Sakessar Valley). Grierson has not mentioned Soon Sakessar Valley in the *Linguistic Survey of India* as the valley was part of District Shahpur. Resultantly, the dialect being spoken in the valley has not been investigated and is not visible in the available literature of Punjabi. He drew a wrong linguistic atlas of Awankari which also needs to be corrected through language documentation of Awankari.

The languages which are not safely transmitted to new generation fall in the category of endangered languages. Punjabi language has many dialects which are endangered. Their native speakers are decreasing and do not speak their native dialects at their workplace in urban centers. Awankari dialect of Punjabi is one of those dialects. The bulk of the Awan tribe is to be found in the Punjab. Tracts in regions such as Khushab, Chakwal and Mianwali are so heavily populated by Awans, that they have long been referred to as Awankari. Awankari existed in Jalandhar and an Awan bara in Hoshiarpur. Numerous Awans live in the major cities of Pakistan such as Lahore, Islamabad and Karachi. The study aims to find out the answers of the

phenomena like modification in Awankari, influence of Punjabi on the dialect and factors contributing towards a modification and language shift.

2. Literature Review

Bahl (1957) writes that Awankari is an Indo-Aryan dialect spoken in Chakwal district of north-western region of Punjab province. He states that it is a dialect of Hindko and he considers it as Lahnda i.e. western Punjabi. Bahri (1942) states, it is a dialect spoken in north-western region of Chakwal where Awankari region exists. Western Punjabi or Lahndi is a less documented language and the number of its speakers are decreasing day by day. There are many reasons behind this downward trend of Punjabi speakers. Most of the Punjabi speakers migrated to big cities for better job opportunities, education and health. Punjabi as a whole is perceived as an inferior language and same is applicable to the peripheral dialects of Lahndi. Therefore, the speakers of Lahndi Punjabi modify their dialect to communicate with the speakers of central and standard dialect. According to Zaidi, "Punjabis feel embarrassed speaking their language; the only topics, as they reported, suitable for Punjabi are gossip, swearing, and jokes"(Zaidi, 2010). The Lahndi Speakers do not speak Punjabi with their children and instead prefer Urdu and English in the urban centres and even in their villages. The medium of instruction in schools also compel the children and their parents to speak Urdu. As a result of this trend, Awankari is fast turning into an endangered dialect of Lahndi or Western Punjabi. Considering that language is not only a tool for communication, but also a tool for exerting power, different linguistic communities have been identified. These different linguistic communities are shown in the linguistic map:

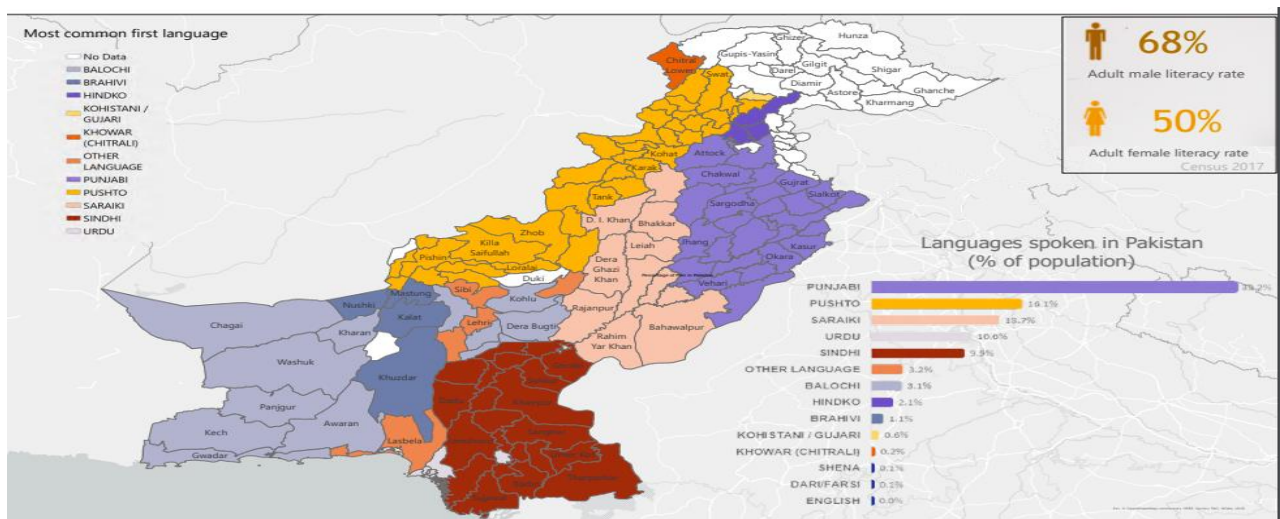


Figure 1: Linguistic Map of Pakistan

Rahman explains that Pakistan has six major and 58 minor languages spoken all over the country, where Urdu is the national language of Pakistan having 11 million people speaking it as their mother tongue (Rahman, 1996). A distribution of the language speakers can be seen in Fig.1. Grimes (2000) states that in Pakistan, 105 million speakers use Urdu as second language. Pakistan is a country of multi-languages and multi-cultures with six major and 57 minor languages (Jan, 2016). The census (1998) depicts the linguistic population in Pakistan as shown in the following figure:

Languages of Pakistan	
Language	Percentage of speakers
Punjabi	44.15
Pashto	15.42
Sindhi	14.10
Siraiki	10.53
Urdu	7.57
Balochi	3.57
Other	4.66

Source: Census 1998

According to the figure given above, total of 44% of people speak Punjabi, however a similar survey conducted by Mathews reveals that Punjabi is the mother tongue of 53% of the Pakistani Population (2003). There are various dialects that are used more such as Shahpuri, Pothohari, Hindko, Malwi, Jangli and Majhi (Masica, 1991). From among the various dialects, many are not in frequent use by its speakers (already mentioned before) primarily because of low prestige attached to Punjabi. Moreover, speakers who are living in urban areas are abandoning it Rahman (1996) altogether for the languages of technology and growth.

Punjabi language is spoken in not only Pakistan, but also in the Punjab region of India. This makes it the most widely spoken language in South Asia and in other regions of the South Asia (Matthews, 1996). The Majhi dialect is primarily spoken in the central and western parts of Punjab, including major cities like Lahore, Amritsar, and Chandigarh. Also, the standard dialect of Majhi Punjabi is used in education, media, literature, and official communication (Masica, 1991). The Malwai dialect is spoken in the Malwa region of Punjab, which also covers parts of both India and Pakistan. This dialect is known for its distinct vocabulary, pronunciation, and intonation patterns. Another dialect, Doabi is spoken in the regions which are located near the Bias and Sutliji rivers with distinct vocabulary and other linguistic features. This dialect of Punjabi is spoken in Haryana and Himachal Pradesh (Singh & Singh, 2015). Pothohari Punjabi is spoken in the Pothohar Plateau region of Punjab which covers parts of the Punjab province of Pakistan. Pothohari closely resembles Punjabi spoken in Azad Kashmir. Other regional languages, including Kashmiri, have impacted this dialect. According to Masica (1991), Saraiki is a distinct tongue that is connected to Punjabi. It is mostly used in Pakistan's Saraiki-speaking regions, namely in the southern Punjab. Although Saraiki has its own unique grammar and vocabulary, some linguists classify it as a dialect of Punjabi. According to Singh and Singh (2015), Hindko is spoken in some portions of Jammu and Kashmir that are administered by India as well as in the Hazara region of Pakistan's Punjab province. Western Punjabi, also known as "Lahnda," is a group of Punjabi dialects spoken in parts of Pakistan's Punjab province, particularly in the Saraiki-speaking areas. These dialects have unique phonological and lexical characteristics (Mansoor, 1993). Each of these varieties of Punjabi has distinctive traits, vocabularies, and pronunciation patterns of its own. The geography, community, and personal preferences of the speakers all have a role in the dialect that is chosen. Despite these differences, speakers of various Punjabi dialects can typically comprehend one another since all dialects have a common grammatical framework. Generally Punjabi speakers lack the sense of ownership about their language and prefer to speak Urdu or English in Pakistan. According to Zaidi (2010), "Punjabis feel embarrassed speaking their language; the only topics, as they reported, suitable for Punjabi are gossip, swearing, and jokes"(p.35). There is an important issue of language prestige which stops Punjabi speakers to speak their language.

2.1. Objectives of the Study

The objectives of the study were

1. To evaluate the transfer of Awankari dialect to the future generation.
2. To get insight about the opinion of Awankari speakers about their dialect.
3. To analyze the frequency of the usage of Awankari dialect at their workplace and big cities.

2.2. Research Questions

The study addresses the following research question:

1. Is Awankari dialect is at the verge of extinction?
2. Do Awankari speakers feel their dialect as a low variety?
3. Are Awankari speakers transferring their mother tongue to future generations?

3. Methodology

The research was conducted to investigate various factors that lead towards a decline in the number of its native speakers, and to find out the rationale behind preferences towards shifting to other dialects and/or other languages by the speakers. It also aimed to find out their preference for the first language of their (future) children. The researchers conducted interviews with the native speakers of Awankari dialect for the purpose of collecting extensive and in depth data. The first part of interview focused upon personal information (Age, Academic Qualification and Job) of the respondents.

1. The process of change of dialect at work place;

2. The process of molding of Standard Punjabi (Majhi dialect) for communicative purposes;
3. The choice of first language for (future) children;
4. Rationale for modifying the dialect in big cities.

4. Results and Discussion

The study aims to investigate why some people feel low about their dialects and discourage their children to speak their native languages and local dialect. The data was collected from seventy native speakers of Awankari including government servants, businessmen, students and women who left their native towns and moved to big cities.

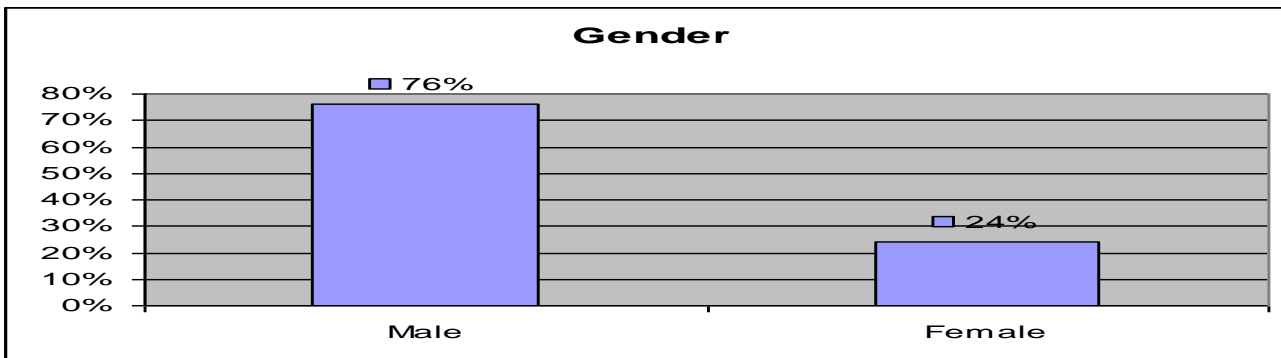


Figure 2: Gender Distribution

Figure 2 shows that 76% of the respondents are male whereas 24% are female. It is difficult to collect data from female respondents in a tribal society. Therefore, the second author of the paper conducted the interviews from the female respondents. The female respondents spent large part of their lives in cities as their fathers, husbands or brothers worked outside their native village and they had chance to communicate with families and female friends during their schooling or social gathering.

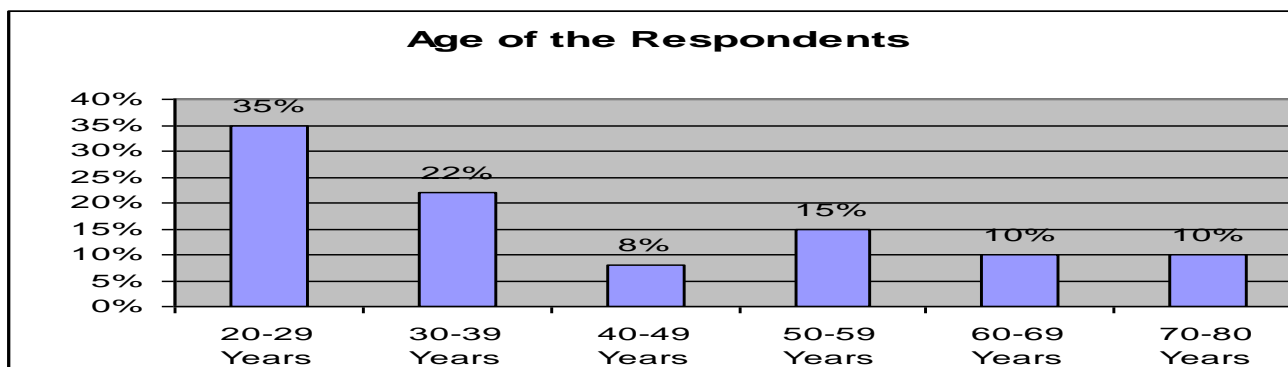


Figure 3: Personal Information

Figure 3 shows that 35% of the respondents consisted of youth mostly in their 20s. They have maximum interaction with other speakers during their stay in the cities. The data shows that 30% of the respondents are in the age bracket of 30 to 49 and they are in their mid-career, whereas, housewives were not working. They were mostly in their middle age so we can expect them to be interacting with the people of their own age group in the cities. The respondents in the age group of 50 to 59 years were comparatively less, only 15%, in the sample and they are those who are at the last stage of their career. The last and senior segment of the sample are the respondents in their 60s and 70s and they were 20% of the sample size. They are consisted of retired individuals from Armed Forces and Police. They have broader experience of serving in different parts of the country and some of them even served in East Pakistan. The result shows that 66% of the respondents have 10 years, 12 years, 14 years and 16 years of education. A small segment of respondents (17%) hold graduate and postgraduate degrees.

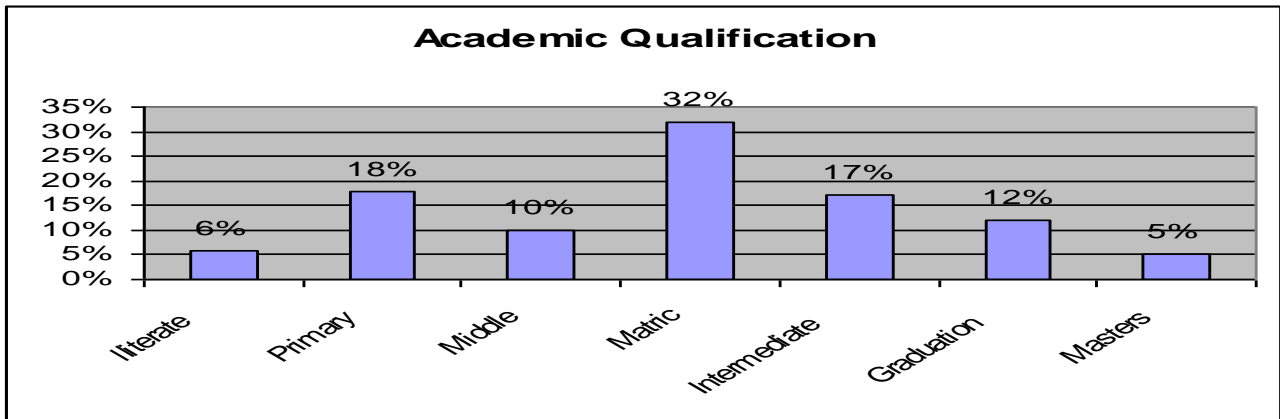


Figure 4: Academic Qualification

The figure shows 28% of the respondents were literate. However, 6% of the respondents were illiterate and could not read or write. It also reflects that there are opportunities in the cities for those who at least of 10 years education. It is very difficult for an illiterate person to get job in the big cities and they don't migrate from their native areas.

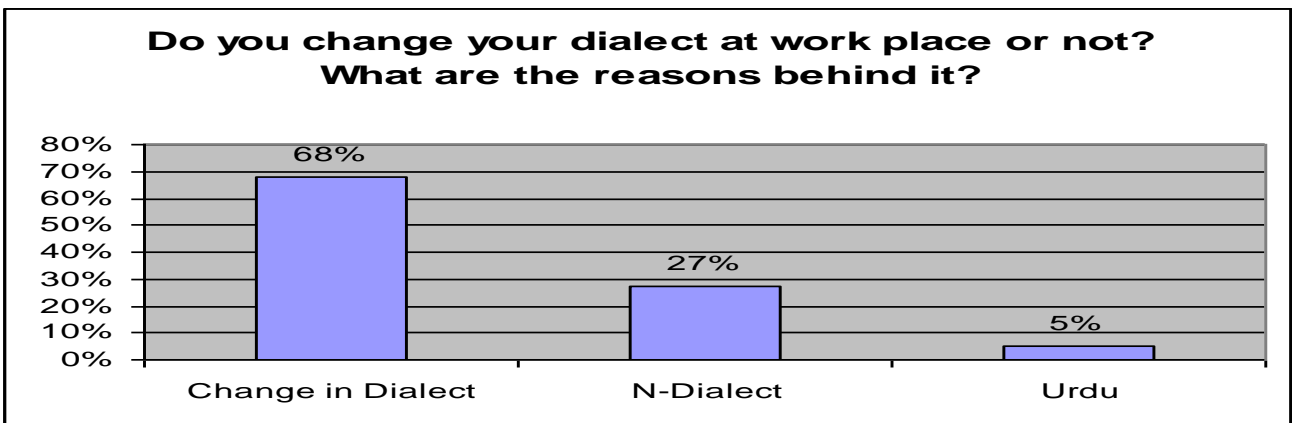


Figure 5: Modification of Dialect in Communication by Awankari Speakers

The respondents showed their preference of changing dialect during their stay in the cities. The above figure shows that a large number of respondents (68%) changed their dialect to communicate with the Punjabi speakers of other dialects. However 27% of the respondents preferred to use their native dialects during their conversation with the speakers of other dialects. It is also worth mentioning that a very small number of respondents (5%) use Urdu language instead of using Punjabi language. The results show that a large number of Awankari speakers feel low about their dialects and prefer to change their dialect and mostly conform to the dominating dialect of Punjabi in the cities.

The second part of the question was open ended and the researchers asked about the reasons behind modification of dialect for communication with the speakers of Majhi dialect. It is a qualitative data 10% of the respondents were of the view that skilled and competent people use their own dialect. A small portion of the respondents (10%) thought that it is not appropriate to speak Urdu at Village in the same way Awankari is not suitable at workplace. A fair number of respondents expressed their love for their dialect and said "We love our dialect but it is not suitable to use in the big cities. A small segment of the sample (8%) were of the view that people make fun of their dialects at their workplace so they avoid to use their dialect at workplace. They expressed it by saying "we change dialect to successfully adjust in the new environment."

The results of figure 6 show the domination and superiority of Majhi dialect as the Majhi speakers do not mould or modify their dialects while communicating to the speakers of other dialects.

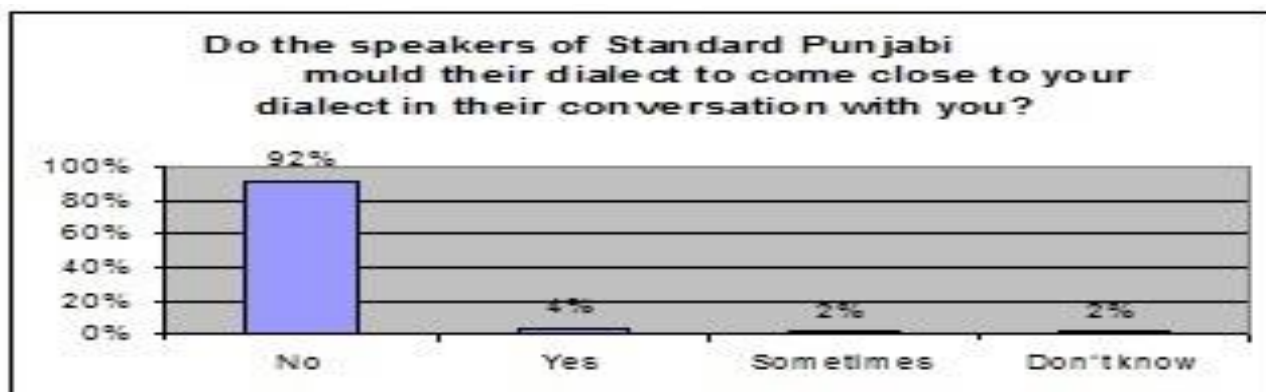


Figure 6: Modification of Dialect in Communication by Majhi Speakers

This behaviour of Majhi speakers compels the speakers of other dialects to use Majhi dialect in their communication during their stay in the cities and it is difficult for them to communicate in their own dialect at their workplace. It is also evident that they feel it appropriate to encourage their children to speak Urdu or English.

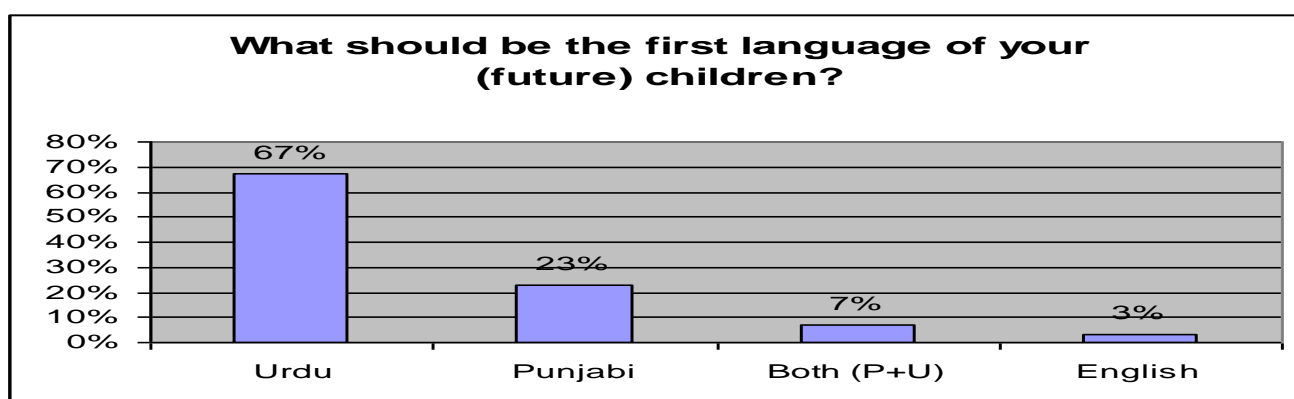


Figure 7: First Language of the future children

It is evident from the above figure that a large number of the respondents want Urdu as a first language of their future children. Figure 7 shows that a significant number of respondents (23%) hope that their future children will learn Awankari or Punjabi as a first language. However a small number of participants desired to teach Urdu and Punjabi to their future children. The data also reflects a deep desire for most people to adopt English as a first language of their future children as it is the need of the day being the language of technology and growth.

4.1. Significance of the Study

No significant work has been done on the Awankari dialect in the available literature. It is a dialect of a neglected and backward area of Punjab. The study provides orientate the readers and researchers to a dialect and it also covers the issue of prestige of local dialects. Such studies pave the way for future researchers who want to work on Awankari. It also speculates an alarming situation that the speakers of Awankari are reluctant to use their own mother tongue. The language without written record is at the risk of extinction and the present study emphasises the need for dialect documentation of Awankari dialect. It also reflects that not only languages but some dialects of Punjabi are also at the verge of death.

5. Conclusion

The current study investigated the causes of the dialectal death of Punjabi and the elements that lead to its dialectal imbalance before drawing a conclusion. The study comes to the conclusion that there are many different causes for language death, the process through which a language stops being spoken and ultimately goes extinct. The following are some of the most typical causes of language deaths: Assimilation into a dominant culture or linguistic group: When a community undergoes assimilation, they may stop speaking their own tongue in favour of the dominant one. There is ample evidence of this in the current study as a majority of natives feel the need to shift their children to a language of prestige and growth instead of remaining

stuck to their native language. Moreover, the study concludes that Political, economic, or societal factors may be at blame for this. Economic factors: Areas with a majority language spoken tend to have more economic prospects. People may switch to speaking these languages in order to get access to economic progress, employment, and education. It can be seen that 68% claim to change their dialect to suit their environment. Moreover, Government initiatives that encourage the use of a certain language in the classroom can hasten the loss of a language. A language may not be learned by younger generations if it is not taught in schools. Technology and media: The ubiquity of media, entertainment, and digital communication in a given language might hasten the demise of that language. As a more commonly spoken language provides easier access to these resources, people may decide to switch to it in their everyday life. In addition, communities may progressively acquire the language of their new surroundings when they move and settle in areas where their original tongue is not spoken in order to communicate successfully. Small speaker populations: Due to a lack of intergenerational transmission, a language that is only used by a relatively small number of individuals is at risk of extinction. A language may go extinct if there aren't enough speakers to transmit it on to the following generation. Language stigma: A language's loss may be caused by stigmatisation. When a language is linked to inferior status or prejudice, people may refrain from speaking it in public or educating their kids in it such as 67% of people preferred Urdu for their children.

On the other hand study also concludes that a language may have trouble maintaining itself if it doesn't have government support, formal recognition, or documentation. Strong institutional backing increases the likelihood that a language will flourish. In addition, study shows that as the world's populations become more interconnected, languages like English, Spanish, and Mandarin gain importance. As a result of their difficulty competing on a global basis, minor languages may become marginalised.

References

- Bahl, K. (1957). A note on tones in western Punjabi (Lahanda). *Indian Linguistics, 18*, 30-34.
- Bahri, H. (1942). *Phonetics and Phonology of Awankari* (PhD thesis Oriental College), Punjab University, Lahore,
- Grimes, B. (2000). Pakistan in ethnologue: languages of the world. In: Dallas, Texas: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Mansoor, S. (1993). Punjabi, urdu, english in Pakistan: A sociolinguistic study. (*No Title*).
- Masica, C. P. (1991). The Indo Aryan Languages.
- Matthews, S. (1996). Development and spread of languages. *The Atlas of Languages*.
- Rahman, T. (1996). Language and politics in Pakistan. (*No Title*).
- Singh, A., & Singh, P. (2015). Punjabi dialects conversion system for Malwai and Doabi dialects. *Indian Journal of Science and Technology, 8(27)*, 1-6.
- Zaidi, A. (2010). A postcolonial sociolinguistics of Punjabi in Pakistan. *Journal of postcolonial cultures and societies, 1(3)*, 22-55.