

Danger of Cultural Silence: A Study of Pahari Attrition in Pakistan

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Abstract

Pahari is a minority language in Pakistan. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan language family and has some similarities with Punjabi, Siraiki and Hindko languages. Since the dawn of new developmental phase back in 1950s and 1960s, the influence of Urdu has increased because of the growing interaction of Pahari people with Urdu speaking people in the cities. To observe this phenomenon of language shift, interviews from the community members were conducted besides the recording of natural conversations of three generations in four families. Participant observation method was used to come close to the community members to ascertain true opinion about the use of language. Moreover, interviews from school teachers were also conducted. The study concluded that language is shifting to Urdu and adequate measures need to be taken for its maintenance and revival.

1 Introduction

Language shift is a growing problem in South Asia where a number of indigenous languages are spoken. One factor which is common in one way or the other among all these languages is the erosion occurring in all these languages. Therefore, the issue of language shift (LS) and language maintenance (LM) gained immense importance in the early part of 1960s due to the loss of many precious languages of the world. According to Ethnologue report (Lewis, 2009), 6,909 languages exist in the world. Among these, 473 languages are at the threshold of their death (Ibid). There are many other calculations which show much bleaker picture of the situations of languages around the globe. It is also estimated that within each fifteen-day period, one precious language disappears from the scene of the world forever leaving no history behind. Given this situation, it is also guessed that approximately 5000 languages will

have no existence on the planet earth at the end of the present century (Dalby, 2003). The present predicament poses threat to the regions where different minority languages are spoken. It happens especially in the areas where local languages are not powerful and they can hardly compete with the languages which are politically and economically strong ones (Rahman, 1996).

Pakistan is also located in one of the multilingual places on the globe. It is estimated that 77 languages are used for the purpose of communication. Seventy two languages are local languages (Lewis, 2009). The local and regional languages are spoken by large groups of people; even then people tend to renounce these languages being under the influence of the languages of power like Urdu and English (Abbasi and Asif, 2010).

Pahari is a general name which is employed for a group of Indo Aryan dialects and languages spoken in the lower ranges of the Himalaya. The word pahar in Pahari,

Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi means hill while Pahari means the people living in these mountains or the language these people use. Pahari languages are included in the northern zone languages (Grierson, LSI- IX): However, this study is related to the Pahari variety called Pahari-Potwari or DhondiKairali. It is basically spoken in Murree hills and its adjacent areas.

2 Review of literature

Literature and material on language shift and language maintenance is in abundance as with the passage of time, it achieved a great popularity and became a focus of research. Some indigenous languages have died with the elimination of their speakers through genocide or any other calamity. Secondly, many lost their existence because they were not documented and described. Weinreich (1953:68) defines language shift as a "change from the habitual use of one language to that of another". It means the number of speakers comes down in a downward movement, the speakers lose their proficiency and the language use decreases in every sphere of life (Baker and Jones, 1998). In this way, the minority languages shift their sympathies to the majority languages. The process of shift is sometimes so intense that the speakers of the weaker languages relinquish their local language completely (Rasul, 2006). According to Baker (2011) in the forthcoming century around 50 to 90 percent languages of the world will either die or will be on the threshold of death.

Fishman (1991) observes this language shift from the perspective of intergenerational language transmission. He believes that this kind of transmission is necessary to maintain a language. Media has a great impact on the people when they choose a language for themselves. Children are especially affected by the onslaught of media. When media projects the majority language, the children also tend to go to the majority language.

As there are seventy two local languages in Pakistan (Lewis, 2009) the medium of teaching and learning is Urdu and English in schools. Both the languages have power and esteem (Abbasi and Asif, 2010). In this situation, it looks hardly possible that a language like Pahari could get its status and maintain itself. Consequently, the coming generation tends to speak Urdu and English.

3 Participant observations

In order to study language shift and decline process, I have selected four families according to their income. I recorded the natural conversation of these families to understand what language or languages they use when they interact with each other. The conversation was recorded in the evening when they got together. It was one hour recording of each family. Later I listened to the conversations and transcribed the understandable utterances. It was a study which was limited to the rural areas. Murree city is basically inhabited by the migrants from Kashmir, Khyber-Pakhtoonkhwa and central Punjab. Therefore, I limited my study to the rural areas. Moreover, most of the population of Pahari speaking people lives in rural areas (PC. Ashfaq Abbasil¹)

I also interviewed four school teachers. They were two males and two females. I tried to ask them about the use of Pahari in schools and how Urdu and other languages are spoken. I also asked them whether they supported Pahari as a subject and as an important language. I have adopted descriptive method in the analysis of my data.

The interviews were basically open ended and taken in informal style. The purpose was not to put the interviewees under pressure, but to elicit the hidden information as much as possible regarding their language and also their attitude towards the other languages such as Urdu, English et

4 Analysis and Results

During my visit to different households for recording and interviews, I tried to choose those families which had three generations in one household. It was difficult for me to find joint families whom I can request for interview and recording. The purpose was to ascertain and understand the rate of decline in Pahari language from grandparents to parents and children generation. According to the general perception I have dealt with 50 years and above as grandfather, 25 to 50 as father while up to 25 as children/adolescent generation. There were four grandparents, 7 parents and 9 children who were interviewed. Their families have also been observed and

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recorded for detailed observation. The general tendency of the high income family is as below. The families are

shown with the income from high to low (Mostly the round numbers have been used for facility).

Table 1. Family No. 1 According to income (Use of Pahari)

Generation	Grandparent	Parent	Children
Grandparent	100 %	95%	25 %
Parent	100 %	85%	55%
Children/Adolescents	70%	50%	15%

Table 2. Family No. 2 (Use of Pahari)

Generation	Grandparent	Parent	Children
Grandparent	100 %	100	55 %
Parent	100 %	95%	70%
Children/Adolescents	80%	90%	30%

Table 3. Family No. 3 (Use of Pahari)

Generation	Grandparent	Parent	Children
Grandparent	100 %	100%	85 %
Parent	100 %	95%	80%
Children/Adolescents	90%	85%	50%

Table 4. Family No. 4 (Use of Pahari)

Generation	Grandparent	Parent	Children
Grandparent	100 %	100%	100 %
Parent	100 %	100%	90%
Children/Adolescents	98%	92%	75%

In the given tables it is clearly evident that Pahari usage decreases as the income level increases. With the growing income, people also develop their social networks and they develop their relations with other communities too. Therefore, in order to communicate with other people

Urdu is abundantly used. When the income and networks increase and cross the seas, English replaces Urdu. So as is clear from the given tables, the income factor is the key factor which determines the choice of language. But the most

vulnerable part of the society is children and youth. They adopt the new language according to the school's demands and other cultural demands. Grandparents are least affected however as the income grows they have to talk to their grandsons/daughters in Urdu to some extent.

Below are some of the excerpts from the conversations of the family members. I recorded these and also observed during my stay there with these families. Though I have not discussed the role of gender in the selection of language, I observed that females were more inclined to the national language or language of communication and media. On the other hand the males of these families were not found to be ambitious in the use of Urdu as a preferred language in their households. As the age grows the people tend to speak Pahari and as the age comes down, the people were found to be speaking Urdu and leaving Pahari. Their interest in Pahari evaporates with each new generation. There are many factors playing their role in this shift such as the limitation of the Pahari language which cannot be used to communicate with the people of other areas. Secondly, it is not a language which can give jobs and may be helpful in the job interviews. Conversely, the speakers of this language develop a so called accent which makes their Urdu and English a little twisted. These and some other allegations are leveled against the choice of Pahari as a language to be used in the family. One grandfather said:

"Assanniouladisaraincchordita, tussirPaharini gal kamay o" (Our new generations have left everything, you are just talking about Pahari language). His wife said, *"nikkaykakaran, zamiwichakalabnana, tan bacharaynoukriankarnay ta bazaran a gashnain"* (What should our sons do, they do not find anything from the land, therefore they go to the bazaars and find their jobs). In these two excerpts, it becomes evident, that the complaint that the grandfather has against his sons is rebutted by his wife. She seems to be in favor of what they are doing. That is why she says that whatever they are doing is good. It indirectly means that she also supports their use of language too.

One father belonging to higher income group started talking to me in Urdu. All his family was using Urdu for communication. Only the grandfather and on certain occasions some other family members were using Pahari. I also noticed that they were trying to do this because I was there with them. The mother introduced her daughter to me *"Baita, slam karo, Uncle hain, shake hand karo"* (son, greet him, he is your uncle, shake hand with him.) So she used the words like *shake hand*. So there are

some elements of code mixing found in their conversations.

Though people in the village try to speak Urdu at least with their children, they are hardly able to speak Urdu in totality because the culture of Murree is different from other cultures. So its vocabulary is different. So during the conversation I found that they were borrowing words and phrases from Pahari even when they were speaking Urdu.

Mother: *Bachopna homework kar lo*

(Children! Do your homework)

Boy: *abikhailnaydainma, madoghay ma jakakhailnaywalahu*

(Let me play first, I am going to play in the field)

Mother: *kal bi tum na both time wastekiatha*

(You wasted your time yesterday too)

In the given excerpt, mother and son are talking to each other. This conversation is in Urdu but it has mixed words from Pahari and even from English. However as the income level comes down, the rate of speaking and using Pahari increases. In fact, the high income families send their children to English medium schools where they use Urdu in their daily conversation. Their parents also try to follow and teach them Urdu for their better future.

Interviews with the teachers

Interviews of the school teachers also show a variety of views. Here again gender plays a very important part. The female teachers of the schools are highly in favor of Urdu and English. They did not support Pahari at all. They rather opined that it was unnecessary to train the children in Pahari. It has no use in the modern world when it comes to communication, jobs and other benefits. Therefore I found that in schools, where the female teachers were teaching had an Urdu speaking environment. The children are even advised not to use Pahari during recess time. I observed that out of shame, the children do not use Pahari even when they are playing with each other in school.

As far as male teachers are concerned, there are two categories, the old servicemen favor Pahari. They used Pahari when they came into the service. They were found complaining that the standard of education had gone down due to the imposition of Urdu and English because the children are not able to bear this load. They were against the policies of the government to declare English as a permanent subject from the first class and an Urdu medium environment. On the other hand, the new

teachers who were inducted in the recent past had different views. I found them enthusiasts regarding their ambition to bring about a change in the school systems. They also were in favor of Urdu in the school premises. I also observed more use of Urdu by the female teachers even in their privacy and staff room even though they all had Pahari background. It shows their likeness for this language. On the other hand, male teachers started talking in Pahari whenever they are in their personal company.

Conclusion

From the discussion it becomes clear that Murree is a place which is losing its local and indigenous language slowly and gradually. The difference can be observed in the attitude of the three generations. Intergenerational language transmission is not properly taking place due to many reasons which include migration to the cities, growing education, growing awareness and futuristic approach by the parents regarding their children. Pahari is preserved only in those areas where education rate is low; consequently the people have no ambitions for themselves and for their children. It is also maintained in the areas where people have less income resources; therefore they mostly rely on household things such as cattle and their own crops, vegetables etc. These families also are restricted and have less chances of developing their strong networks which might give them an impetus for educational development. The region also plays a role in this maintenance and shift phenomenon. People living in far off areas and having less contact with the city life, have maintained the language because of their isolation, while those living in cities or in suburban areas have either shifted to Urdu or resort to code-mix and code-

switch a lot. If this attitude continues uninterrupted without any effort to maintain Pahari and no measures are adopted to protect this language, it will die very soon. Moreover, no serious attempt has been made to document and describe this language so far. This needs to be done to safeguard this language along with its culture for the future generations.

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