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Language Attrition and its Impact on Culture – A Case of Saraiki in Dera Ghazi Khan Region

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Abstract

Language attrition is primarily the loss of language and subsequently the loss of culture and identity. A number of languages have become extinct, and many languages of the world are near extinction. This study analyzes the impact of language attrition on Saraiki and its culture in the D. G. Khan region. This research takes into consideration two domains of language use: home and university. Paradis's (2004) Activated Threshold Hypothesis (ATH) supplemented with Bot, Lowie & Verspoor's (2007) Dynamic Systems Theory (DST) has been adopted as a theoretical framework. The mixed-method approach has been used, and a sample of 100 respondents was selected from the target population. The respondents were instructed to define certain Saraiki vocabulary items, and their responses were recorded. The findings show that socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political and socio-demographic factors are responsible for the language attrition of Saraiki and the subsequent impact on the culture of the speakers in the selected locale.

Introduction

The loss of a language is basically the loss of culture and identity linked with that language and its speakers. In fact, the attrition of local or indigenous languages and the spread of few dominant languages is a worldwide phenomenon. Almost 65,000 languages are spoken in the world today, and many of them will become extinct in the near future, while almost 70 to 90% are likely to become extinct in the current century. Pakistan is a multilingual, multiethnic and multicultural country where approximately 74 languages are spoken; among them, 66 are indigenous, whereas 8 are non-indigenous languages. Hence, many languages in Pakistan are already extinct, and some of them are near extinction (Janjua, 2005). The attrition of a language mainly occurs due to some political, lingual, socio-cultural, socio-lingual and socio-economic factors, and these factors are also responsible for promoting linguistic diversity. The preservation of language or languages in various ethnic groups, especially in multilingual societies, is essential for cultural identity and heritage. The loss of a language means the loss of culture as well as identity. Now, the question is: how, why and on which grounds attrition of a language takes place? The first question is: how attrition of a language takes place? The answer to this

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question is that the new generation does not speak that language; the impact of bilingualism and the socio-political factors cause language attrition. The second question is: why the attrition of a language takes place? The answer to this question is based on the intention to mould the cultural and linguistic identity of any nation by authoritative or political dominance. And finally, on which grounds the attrition of language takes place? The dominance of an international language, the socio-political dominancy of a specific social class and the cultural, lingual identity loss of any specific nation by the authoritative control are the main reasons which lead to language attrition (Ravindranath, 2009). The basic impact of language loss is on the culture and identity of the speakers of that language since linguistic imperialism has its impact on cultural loss in terms of the influence of a dominant language on minority languages. In this way, language loss may occur due to political dominancy, socio-cultural change and migration. On considering the attrition of Saraiki vocabulary under the influence of dominant languages (Urdu or English) in the D. G. Khan region, it is not difficult to observe that bi/multilingualism, which has become a necessity in the modern world, is a major cause of the attrition of Saraiki vocabulary items. Language is a system for enacting social and cultural norms through which self-identity and social group membership is constructed. In other words, language portrays our identity and socio-cultural norms. So, the study supports the view that the attrition of a language is the attrition of culture as well as identity (David, Ali & Baloch, 2017) and seeks to explore the state of the Saraiki language in the D. G. Khan region.

Statement of the Problem

Due to ongoing socio-economic, socio-lingual and socio-cultural changes, the minority languages become vulnerable to attrition, particularly their vocabulary items. The main concern of the study is how language attrition has an impact on culture and correspondingly how culture is influenced by the loss of language.

Objectives of the Study

The study tries to meet the following objectives:

i. To review the socio-linguistic and socio-political factors responsible for language attrition.
ii. To analyze the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors concerning the targeted speech community responsible for the loss of indigenous language vocabulary as well as culture.
iii. To trace the factors responsible for the attrition of Saraiki vocabulary items and their impact on indigenous culture in the selected region viz. D. G. Khan.

Research Questions

Following research questions were formulated to achieve the research objectives:

i. What are socio-political and socio-linguistic factors responsible for the loss of Saraiki language and culture in the selected region?
ii. How are the socio-economic and socio-cultural factors contributing to the loss of Saraiki language vocabulary as well as culture in D. G. Khan?

Literature Review

Language is a basic instrument for the expression of thought; it is an arbitrary system articulated by vocal symbols and used to express desires, thoughts and emotions. The loss of a language has long been linked with the loss of cultural as well as self-identity. Ravindranath (2009) argues that the loss of any indigenous language in any region of the world is somehow the result of colonialism in that area. Crystal (2019) argues that English is a borrower language because many languages in the world, especially Urdu, Saraiki, and other indigenous languages, have borrowed some vocabulary from the English language because of the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism. Nazir, Aftab & Saeed (2013) have worked on Punjabi language shift in the Sargodha region and state that the reasons for the shift are: lack of prestige, lack of power, lack of institutional support and linguistic shame. Erwin (2001) states that language shift is basically carried out to gain certain social or authoritative incentives, and bilingualism is used as a utilitarian approach. Abbasi & Zaki (2019) explored the phenomenon of

language shift in third-generation Gujarati and Sindhi speaking communities. They argue that language shift and language loss is due to urbanization and multilingualism. David, Ali & Baloch (2017) worked on language shift and maintenance in the Sindhi language and state that language shift in some ethnic groups in Sindh is due to the strong influence of L2 and the use of the second language to maintain social status in the society. Park (2018) is of the view that language attrition is due to linguistic diversity in a social context, and it occurs because of contact with other languages. Language shift results in language attrition. Schmidt & Kopke (2007), working on a psycholinguistic model of speech production and the concept of Universal Grammar, argue that the main cause of language attrition is bilingualism which occurs due to certain linguistic, psychological and social factors. Kopke (2007) further argues that language attrition is basically the crossroad of the brain, mind and society. Rabbani & Lohat (2020) explored the language shift and maintenance of the Punjabi language in the Sahiwal District and argued that the basic factors in language attrition are socio-economic and educational as speakers give priority to social and economic factors rather than their ethnic, linguistic identity. Harlig & Burghardt (2020) argue about language attrition and prevention of attrition by promoting retention. Most of the researchers worked on language shift and language maintenance, but none of them has worked on language attrition and its impact on culture especially focusing on the attrition of Saraiki language in the D.G. Khan Region. Therefore, this study is going to explore this neglected aspect of research in the field. This paper will explore Saraiki language attrition and its impact on culture in D.G. Khan Region.

Theoretical Framework

For this study, Paradis's (2004) Activated Threshold Hypothesis (ATH) has been adopted. In connection with the neurolinguistic theory of bilingualism, Paradis's (2004) states that linguistic items have a threshold that changes on the basis of frequency and recency of use. When one language is selected, the other language is inhibited, and the activation threshold of the selected language is subsequently raised. The procedures involved in Activated

Threshold Hypothesis are: to check the linguistic diversity of the speakers, to check the acquisition time, to check the recency of language, usage of targeted language, exposure of languages and factors (i.e., literacy, age, gender, typological proximity between languages, attitudes and motivation towards L2 and L1) that are causing language attrition. The stages and levels on which language attrition occurs are lexical levels, phonological level, grammatical level, semantic level and syntactic level Paradis's (2004). By applying Paradis's Activated Threshold Model, a mixed method approach has been adopted. In the backdrop of Paradis's work, another theory providing support in this research is Dynamic Systems Theory (DST). Biot, Lowie & Verspoor (2007) propounded DST and claim that language is a dynamic system in all respects. Basically, this theory studies the system of SLA and L1 attrition as DST states that a person learns a new language mainly because of motivational factors; SLA always occurs due to interaction with other members in the society and the main factor that promotes this learning is the socio-economic factor. So, socio-economic, socio-political and socio-demographic factors also play a critical role in the attrition of a language and always pave the path for the learning of L2. For the present study, a sample of 100 respondents was selected from home and university domains (university students at the tertiary level). The respondents were asked orally to tell the meaning of certain Saraiki vocabulary items, and their responses were recorded.

Research Design

Research tools were developed keeping in view certain geographical factors and to gather a variety of information regarding demographic, sociological and political factors as well. The central dialect of the Saraiki language has been the focus of the study. Language shift and language loss were studied from home and university domains. The prime focus of this research was the attrition of participants' first language. L1 of all the participants was a central dialect of the Saraiki language. The factors under consideration are: How attrition of L1 causes attrition of culture? How L2 causes attrition in the language and culture of L1?

Research Sample

The respondents were selected from the following domains:

1. Home Domain: Language use with mother, father, siblings and close relatives.
2. University domain: Language use in universities (Tertiary level of education-BS).

Table 1

Total No. of respondents	Respondents from the Home domain	Respondents from the University domain
100	50	50
	L1 is Saraiki Language (Central dialect)	Students at tertiary level (BS) with Saraiki as L1

A total of 100 respondents were selected from home and university domains and an oral discussion was held between the respondents and the researcher to collect the data about language attrition and its impact on culture. It was also noted how L2 played its role in the attrition of culture and L1.

Procedure

A mixed-method approach has been adopted in this study. The data have been collected from two domains: home and university domain. A list consisting of 25 words has been prepared regarding the vocabulary items from Saraiki, and respondents were asked about the meanings of those words. The list of words was made keeping in view the linguistic aspects of the central dialect of the Saraiki language. The respondents were asked orally to tell the meanings of the words.

Analysis

A survey was conducted at home and university domains. Meanings of different words of the Saraiki language were asked, and the responses were recorded properly. The sample of 100 students was selected from the targeted population whose L1 was the central dialect Saraiki. The analysis of shows the results as under:

Table 2

Saraiki Words	Transliteration	Meaning	Correct Responses	Incorrect Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses	Percentage of Incorrect Responses
سہرا	Sehra	Haar for Dulha, Dulhan	22	78	22%	78%
بوڈا	Boda	Last top branch of the tree	17	83	17%	83%
پَتھاری	Pathari	Sitting place around a hearth in winter	15	85	15%	85%
مُخبّا	Mukhabba	A hotpot	25	75	25%	75%
اپاپی	Apapi	Poor	12	88	12%	88%
بوڑ	Borr	Curry	19	81	19%	81%
کویلی	Kawaili	Ant	21	79	21%	79%
وݨ	Varnn	Tree	9	91	9%	91%
ایانَاں	Ayannra	Childish	11	89	11%	89%
کُرلاٹ	Kurlaat	Complain	27	73	27%	73%
وگوڑ	Wgoor	Dispute	2	98	2%	98%
کجا	Kujajja	Uneducated	35	65	35%	65%
بوچھݨ	Bocharn	A Wrapper	10	90	10%	90%
بھبھوش	Bhabhoosh	Dirty	17	83	17%	83%
گھوٹ	Ghoot	Groom	32	68	32%	68%
ڈاج	Daaj	Dowry	22	78	22%	78%
کنوار	Kunvaar	Bride	24	76	24%	76%

Saraiki Words	Transliteration	Meaning	Correct Responses	Incorrect Responses	Percentage of Correct Responses	Percentage of Incorrect Responses
وتّہ سٹّہ	Watta Satta	Exchange	15	85	15%	85%
کھمڻ	Kheemarn	Lighting	12	88	12%	88%
نماشاں	Nimashan	Evening	36	64	36%	64%
وتھ	Vith	Distance	31	69	31%	69%
ودھیک	Wadheek	Unfair	20	80	20%	80%
وربینڑاں	Warheenrran	Death Anniversary	10	90	10%	90%
پچھاڑوں	Pichaaron	Back Side	32	68	32%	68%
ہیلک	Helak	Habitual	20	80	20%	80%
پلوتا	Paloota	Curse	30	70	30%	70%
ٹرڑا	Tarr'ra	Obscene	12	88	12%	88%

Results and Findings

Data analysis shows that the frequency of wrong responses is higher than that of correct responses. For example, 78% of respondents provided the incorrect answer, whereas only 22% responded correctly for the word *Sehra*. 83% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas 17% of respondents responded correctly for the word *Boda*. 85% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 15% responded correctly for the word *Pathari*. 75% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 25% responded correctly for the word *Mukhaba*. 88% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 12% responded correctly for the word *Apapi*. 81% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 19% responded correctly for the word *Borr*. 79% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 21% responded correctly for the word *Kawaili*. 91% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 09% responded correctly for word *Varnn*. 89% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 11% responded correctly for the word *Ayannra*. 73% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 27% responded correctly for the word *Kurlaat*. 98% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 02% responded correctly for the word *Wagoor*. 65% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 35% responded correctly for the word *Kujaja*. 90% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 10% responded correctly for the word *Bocharn*. 83% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 17% responded correctly for the word *Bhabhoosh*. 68% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 32% responded correctly for the word *Ghoot*.

78% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 22% responded correctly for the word *Daaj*. 76% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 24% responded correctly for the word *Kunvaar*. 85% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 15% responded correctly for the word *Watta Satta*. 88% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 12% responded correctly for the word *Kheemarn*. 64% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 36% responded correctly for the word *Nimashan*. 69% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 31% responded correctly for the word *Vith*. 80% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 20% responded correctly for the word *Wadheek*. 90% of respondents responded incorrectly, whereas only 10% responded correctly for the word *Warheenran*. 68% of the respondents responded incorrectly, whereas 32% responded correctly for the word *Picharon*. 80% of the respondents responded incorrectly, whereas 20% responded correctly for the word *Helak*. 70% of the respondents responded incorrectly, whereas 30% responded correctly for word *Paloota*. 88% of the respondents responded incorrectly, whereas 12% responded correctly for the word *Tarr'ra*. The correct answer percentage of *Nimashan* is at a higher level, while the incorrect answer percentage of *Wagoor* is at the highest level. These results show that the frequency of incorrect meaning percentage is higher than that of correct meaning percentage. There are some factors that are causing the attrition of minority languages, such as socio-economic, socio-political and socio-demographic factors.

Discussion

Language creates a link between culture and society; it can be said that language has the power of transforming socio-cultural identity. Pakistan is a multilingual country, and many languages are spoken here on a daily basis. So, linguistic diversity and linguistic variation are the main causes of language attrition in a bilingual or multilingual society. And linguistic variation occurs from community to community, ethnic group, social class, nationality and region. Language is dynamic, and it exists inside a society. As society changes, the language also changes. To a very extent, language is dependent on socio-economic and socio-political factors. Language and culture are hybrid; they are ever-evolving and changing with the changes in society due to which language and culture rely on the context. Similarly, language always depends on social class, geographical location, religion, sexual orientation, gender, and ethnicity (Wright, Boun & Garcia, 2015). Language attrition is basically the loss of language, and loss of a language means the loss of culture as well as identity. The manifestations of language attrition are: attrition is a reversal to the acquisition, and attrition occurs only within ten years of emigration.

Crystal (2019) argues that English is a borrower language because many languages in the world, especially Urdu, Saraiki and other indigenous languages, have borrowed some vocabulary from English because of the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism. As far as the phenomena of bilingualism and language attrition are concerned, the socio-political factors and colonialism have very important roles. With the advent of the British Raj in the sub-continent and approximately on the whole world, the world became the colony of England, and the English language took the advantage to its fullest to affect the national and regional languages. The assimilation of the English language into regional and national languages produced a kind of amalgamation. In colonialism, a strong authoritative socio-demographic factor impacted both the languages and cultures. The results of this study show that colonizers exercised linguistic control over national and regional languages to control the colonized states effectively. On the other hand, the bilingual education system in Pakistan and the

amalgamation and assimilation of different languages posed a serious threat to regional languages and cultures. It is obvious that all this is done due to political dominancy and economic control of English-speaking countries.

However, the major point this study brings to light is that globalization has also changed the perspective of the world. A single global language (lingua franca) is emerging to meet the whole setup of the world, and the learning of that language has become a necessity to meet the demands of the academic and professional spheres. Under such circumstances, the phenomenon of language shift becomes a norm. In most cases, the attrition of language is due to socio-economic factors also. Moreover, migration can be a major cause in this respect. The migration of one linguistic community from one demographic area to another due to poverty or other political or social factors causes the attrition of the regional language of that community. Therefore, the demographic factor is one of the most important factors concerning the attrition of language because the linguistic majority of any demographic area forms a strong political and social dominance (Fill & Penz, 2018).

However, attrition promotes a sense of isolation and loneliness, and a person feels him/herself not as a member of society but as an individual. Language attrition can be discussed in two ways: as a processor as a phenomenon. It is a process when an individual learns a foreign or a second language; his/her contact with the first language becomes less frequent, and this is due to a change in the person's linguistic behavior. As a phenomenon, attrition consists of two stages: pre-attrition stage A and attrited stage B, and the difference between A and B is called the process of attrition, whereas the whole process is called the phenomenon of attrition. Now, the question is, what are the factors that are causing language attrition in the given scenario. The factors are: firstly, the sociolinguistic variables such as gender, age and education; secondly, attitude and motivation towards L2 or bilingualism; lastly, the length of time lapsed by an attritor and the contact with L1. In this context, language attrition is the reverse of language acquisition and occurs within ten years of immigration (Schmidt, 2007).

The other factor that is under-review is that the attrition of language takes place when the new generation is not speaking that language or the new generation is not teaching their children about that language (Wright, Boun, & Garcia, 2015). The present study highlights that the new generation of Saraiki speakers is rapidly assimilating the words from dominant languages (Urdu and English). Bilingualism, socio-political and socio-economic factors are contributing towards assimilation in the Saraiki language. It goes without saying that the socio-political and socio-economic are the major factors contributing towards the attrition of Saraiki vocabulary. The root cause of this issue is bilingualism which has become a need because of globalization as the world has now become a global village. That is why the knowledge of a global language has become essential. Under the impact of globalization, bilingualism and multilingualism are promoted, thus leading to the attrition of regional languages. The other factor that this study focuses on is attitude and values that are associated with any specific regional language, as the regional or minority languages are mostly associated with less dominant groups either socially or politically. Moreover, the regional languages are often associated with lack of education, unemployment, assimilation of foreign culture, illiteracy and poverty.

Sometimes, a foreign language or L2 influences the first language. This language may be Urdu or English or any other language that has some sort of authoritative impact, and it is used for communication as a lingua franca. L1 is acquired, and L2 is generally learnt, but both require a social context. In fact, it is a language that makes humans 'social beings' on this globe (Harlig & Burghardt, 2020).

Kandler, Unger & Steele (2010) argue that the negative impact of bilingualism on minority languages is due to language shift and language attrition. The present study is mainly concerned with the process of language shift as it intends to figure out: How do the speakers of a language shift to another language? The answer to this question is the influence of socio-political factors that influence a specific regional language in a specific demographic area. It is basically the transfer of one speech community from one language to another language.

The basic factors affecting language shift are: social, economic, political and demographic. All of these factors make bilingualism a necessity. When speakers of a minority language become bilinguals, they prefer to mix the words of the dominant language in their native language, which becomes the cause of attrition and, later on, language shift.

Another factor that is under exploration is: how language attrition impacts the culture? The answer is that with every language-specific heritage, identity and civilization are interlinked, and this heritage, identity and civilization contain norms, behaviors, attitudes and customs of that civilization. In this way, culture and identity are directly linked. Language attrition has a severe impact on culture and identity because the loss of a language means the loss of culture as well as identity. The only way of sustaining cultures is through language maintenance.

Farisiyah & Zamzani (2018) strongly advocated the concept of language maintenance. The attrition of language can only be stopped by the maintenance of language. Now, the question is: how can a language be maintained? The answer is that a language can be maintained easily by continuously using the language without shifting from one language to another language. The present study argues that through frequent use of that language and by providing some sort of institutional support to the language, it can be maintained. The basic factors in the attrition of a language are: socio-political, socio-economic and demographic. If a language is maintained, its culture can also be maintained as language loss is directly associated with the loss of culture and identity.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Language is a medium of communication, and through language, we share our linguistic, cultural, and social identity. A language is also a tool for transforming socio-cultural identity. With the emergence of globalization and multilingualism, the attrition of regional languages is on the cards. There are certain factors that are contributing towards the attrition of language, such as socio-economic, socio-cultural, socio-political and some demographic factors too. In Pakistan, along with socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-economic factors,

colonialism and multilingualism also played their role in the attrition of regional languages, the Saraiki language being one of them. Similarly, the assimilation of different cultures and languages into Saraiki also changed the vocabulary and culture of the Saraiki language. In Pakistan, our educational institutes are promoting the concept of multilingualism even at the tertiary level of the educational system. So, bilingualism causes language attrition which in turn causes attrition of culture. Language shift basically operates due to globalization and the socio-political dominancy of a particular group. If a specific community stops speaking a language or they do not teach their children their native language, then obviously, the attrition of language will take place. In our education system, multilingualism is promoted to deal with the upcoming socio-political and socio-economic challenges. Moreover, the idea of modernization is connected with the English language because it promotes the concept of social dominancy. The dominancy of the English language is highly strong as it dominates the whole linguistic, socio-cultural, socio-economic and socio-political scenario of the world and especially of the sub-continent. The

assimilation of the English language into regional languages, as well as national language, produced a sort of amalgamation.

In short, modernization and globalization have affected the vocabulary of almost every language spoken in Pakistan, the Saraiki language being one of them. Hence, the basic step required on urgency is to promote the concept of language maintenance. The basic steps required to control the attrition of a language are the regular use of the language by the users of that language and also providing some sort of institutional support to the language. In the absence of such efforts, the loss of their language is damaging the peoples' sense of identity, their norms, behaviors and heritage, which uproots their entire culture. Therefore, the loss of a language means the loss of culture as well as identity. It can be concluded that bilingualism and multilingualism are the major causes of language attrition. This study is limited to discuss and analyze the attrition of the Saraiki language and its impact on culture in the D. G. Khan region, but further work can be done on other minority languages spoken in different regions. The factors pertaining to age and gender can also be studied in relation to the attrition of L1.

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