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Phonological Variation in Perso-Arabic Words in Urdu

Somana Fatima, M.A. (English), Ph.D. (Sociolinguistics)

Abstract

Data on Perso-Arabic words was collected from 50 Urdu speakers in Lucknow, Aligarh (Uttar Pradesh) and New Delhi, India. Data is then categorized and analysed in the scale of gender and age groups. Male and female and three age groups formed part of the scale. Presentation of data is done in the form of tables and charts. It was found that age group 1 (from 15-25 years of age) is very much carefree in using the Perso-Arabic words. Age-group 3 (50 to 70 years of age) tended towards perfection in their pronunciation. And age group 2 (26 to 49 years of age) they are in between carefree attitude and standard usage of Perso-Arabic words. Due to over-generalization, Urdu Speakers tend to exhibit phonological variation in Perso-Arabic words in their speech.

Profile of Urdu

“There were certain political and socio-cultural influences which favored and prepared background for the evolution of Urdu in India. Its proper development started, only when Muslim entered Delhi from Punjab in 1193 A.D., and made the city capital of their empire. It has adopted certain elements from Arabic and Persian Languages, example phonological features, grammatical features and a considerable part of lexicon.” (Beg: 1966)

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Phonological Variation in Perso-Arabic Words in Urdu

The same Khadi Boli style of Urdu is termed by P.B.Pandit in *India as a Sociolinguistic Area* (Pandit :1977: 57) as ‘the Northern lingua franca’. In course of its development, the Khadi Boli style of Urdu was known by various names such as Rekhta, Zaban-i-Delhi, Zaban-i-Dehlavi, Zaban-i-Hindustan, Hindostani, Hindustani, Zaban-i-Urdu-i-Mu’alla, Urdu-i-Mu’alla, Zaban-i-Urdu or simply Urdu, besides being known as Hindi or Hindavi (Hindawi).’

The study of language maintenance and language shift is concerned with the relationship between change and stability in habitual language use, on the one hand, and ongoing psychological, social and cultural processes, on the other hand, when populations differing in language are in contact with each other (Fishman, 1972).

The Sound Patterns of Urdu

Standard Urdu has fifty-six segmental and supra-segmental sound features in which 48 are segmental and 8 are supra-segmental sound features. Segmental phonemes include thirty-eight consonants (including two semi-vowels) and ten vowels (including two diphthongs). The supra-segmental features are nine: three pitches, three terminal contours, two junctures and the process of nasalization (Beg, 1988, p. 13).

The consonants may be grouped into two broad divisions: the stops and the continuants. The stops present six way contrasts in point of articulation—the lips, the teeth, retroflex, the palatal, the velar, the uvula and four ways contrast in manner of articulation in respect of voicing aspiration. Uvular consonant, however, does not show any contrast in manner of articulation (Khan, 1996, Dissertation).

There are six consonants, eight-fricatives, one lateral, two nasals, one trill, two flaps and two frictionless continuants. The fricatives show fine-way contrast in point of articulation—the lip teeth, the alveolar ridge, palate, velar and glottis, and two –way contrast in manner of articulation with regard to voicing, except /h/ which is voiceless. The nasals have a two way contrast in position—the lips and the alveolar ridge. (Beg, 2000)

The vowels are ten in number including two diphthongs. The vowels /i/ and /u/ are high; /a/ is low; /I/ and /U/ and /e/ and /o/ are high-mid; /ə/ is central. Two are diphthongs. Three parts of the tongue—front, central and back, and five degrees of tongue—high, low-high, high-mid, mid and low—are necessary to make the distinctions among the vowels. The vowels may be rounded or unrounded according to the tip-position. The supra-segmental features are: nasalization; open juncture; terminal contours, being level, rising, falling, and pitches low, mid, high.

Given below are all the consonants and vowels with the manner of articulation and point of articulation (Beg, 1979):

p	voiceless bilabial stop
ph	aspirated voiceless bilabial stop
b	voiced bilabial stop
bh	aspirated voiced bilabial stop
t	voiceless alveolar stop
th	aspirated voiceless alveolar stop
d	voiced alveolar stop
dh	aspirated voiced alveolar stop
t	voiceless retroflex stop
th	aspirated voiceless retroflex stop
d	voiced retroflex stop
dh	aspirated voiced retroflex
c	voiceless palatal stop
ch	aspirated voiceless palatal stop
j	voiced palatal stop
jh	aspirated voiced palatal
k	voiceless velar stop
kh	aspirated voiceless velar stop
g	voiced velar stop
G	aspirated voiced velar stop
q	voiceless uvular stop
m	bilabial nasal
n	alveolar nasal
l	alveolar lateral
r	alveolar trill
r	retroflex flap
rh	aspirated retroflex flap
f	voiceless labio-dental fricative
s	voiceless alveolar fricative
z	voiced alveolar fricative
s	voiceless palato-alveolar fricative
z	voiced palato-alveolar
x	voiceless velar fricative
g,	voiced velar fricative
h	voiceless glottal fricative
v	labio-dental semi-vowel
y	palatal semi-vowel
I	high front short vowel
i	high front long vowel
A	mid central vowel (short)

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a	low central vowel (long)
U	high back short vowel
u	high back long vowel
e	mid front vowel
o	mid back vowel
æ	front low
ai	diphthong
au	diphthong

Changing Trends in the Use of Urdu

Nowadays, people use the language only for utility. Today, Urdu language use has shifted from the expressive way to the utilitarian way. The main changes, which can easily be seen in Urdu Phonology, are the frequency and kinds of use of the Perso-Arabic words (Beg, 1988, 13).

Perso-Arabic Sounds Affected by the Changing Trends in the Use of Urdu

Perso-Arabic sounds f, z, z, x, G, q (Beg, 1988, Urdu Grammar) are more prone to this type of change of globalization. The changes which the researcher has seen in the field are —

1. Change of /q/ → /k/ and sometimes change of /k/ → /q/ due to over generalization. (Change in Perso-Arabic)
1. Change of /x/ → /kh/ and sometimes change of /kh/ → /x/. (Change in Perso-Arabic)
2. Change of /G/ → /g/ and sometimes change of /g/ → /G/. (Change in Perso-Arabic)
3. Change of /q/ → /x/. (Change in Perso-Arabic)

Variation in /q/ → /k/

Note: In the tables, U stands for standard Urdu and FU stands for Field Urdu.

Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
مقدمة	/muqAdma/	/mukədma/	‘suite’
لقمة	/luqma/	/lukma/	‘morsel’
مقبول	/maqbul/	/makbul/	‘popular’
فجعي	/qæcI/	/kæcI/	‘scissors’
قنمة	/qIma/	/kIma/	‘chopped flesh’
تقدير	/taqdIr/	takdIr/	‘fate’
نقصان	/nuqsan/	/nuksan/	‘harm’
نقشا	/naqša/	/nakša/	‘map’

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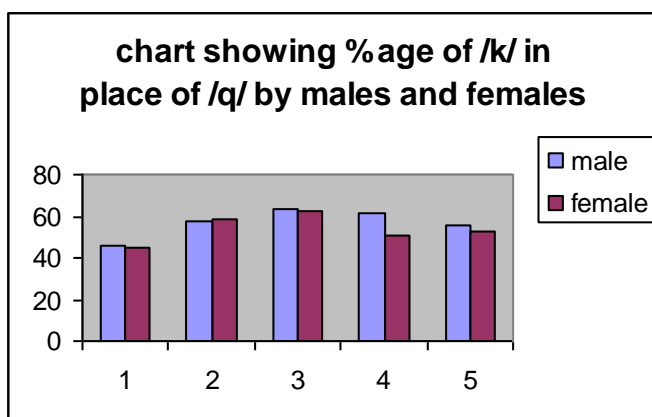
اقرار	/Iqrar/	Ikrar/	‘admit’
اشتياق	/Ištiaq/	/Ištiak/	‘fondness’
مشتاق	/muštaq/	/muštak/	‘desirous’
وقیعة	/vaqEa/	/vakEa/	‘event’
عقد	/Aqd/	/Aqd/	‘marriage’
واقعة	/vaqeAtən/	/vakeAtən/	‘factually’
تعلق	/taAlluq/	/taAlluk/	‘concern’
قانون	/qanun/	/kanun/	‘law’
قاتل	/qAtl/	/kAtl/	‘murder’
وقت	/vAqt/	/vAkt/	‘time’
قلب	/qAlb/	/kAlb/	‘heart’
قدر	/qAdr/	/kAdr/	‘value’
قلم	/qAlAm/	/kAlAm/	‘pen’
قیامة	/qAyamAt/	/kAyamAt/	‘day of judgement’
معقول	/maqul/	/makul/	‘suitable’
مزاق	/mAZaq/	/mAZak/	‘joke’

In the field, the researcher finds that educated people of the society pronounce /k/ in place of /q/. When the researcher asked some individuals for the reason behind their patterns of use, they said that their focus is on the utility of language, and that they use such variation in order to consume less time during conversation. In addition, they also declared that this variation is also in fashion now. In other words they find the pronunciation of /q/ somewhat cumbersome. In place of /qAdr/, they said /kAdr/ and /mAzak/ in place of /mAZaq/.

I tested and used only five words to identify possible variation in this regard. So, a detailed analysis may show more specific patterns of distribution of /k/ in place of /q/.

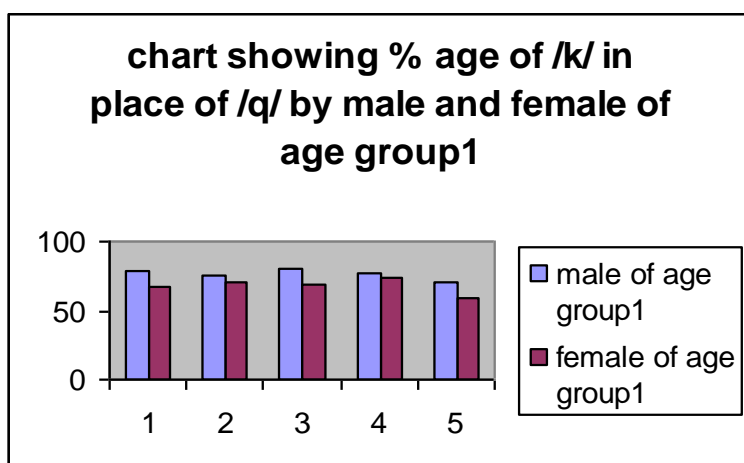
Researcher finds that 43 per cent of males pronounce /mukAdma/, 58 per cent of males pronounce /lukma/, 61 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 63 per cent of males pronounce /vakEa/ and 56 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field whereas 45 per cent of females pronounce /mukAdma/, 59 percent of females pronounce /lukma/, 62 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 51 per cent of females pronounce /vakEa/ and 53 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field.

In other words, it seems that many females still prefer to use the original /q/ in the newly adopted /k/.

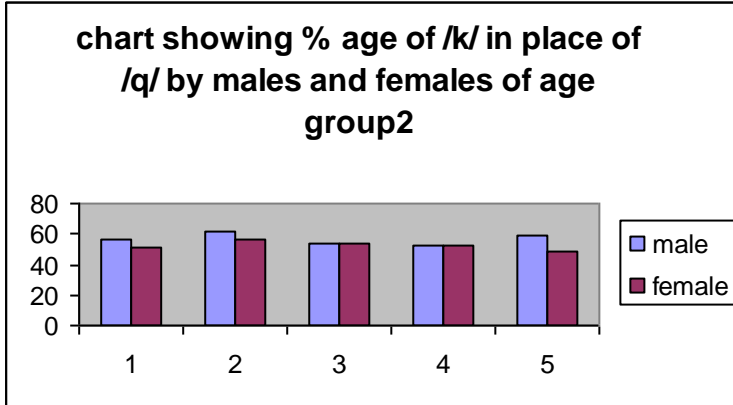


1. /mukAdma/ 2. /lukma/ 3. /kAcI/ 4. /vakEa/ 5. /Akd/

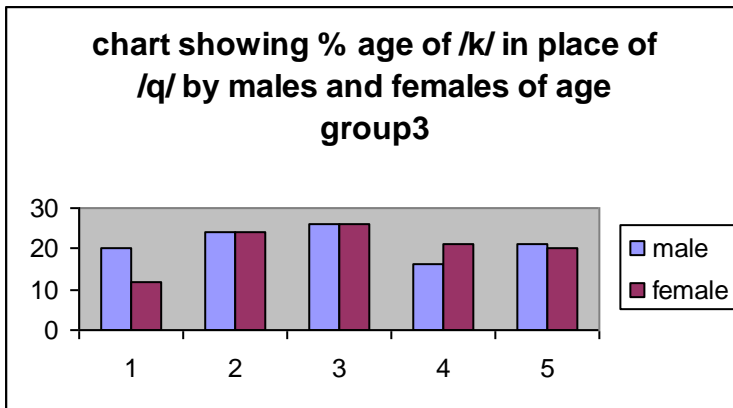
Researcher finds that 72 per cent of males of Age group1 pronounce /mukAdma/, 69 per cent of males pronounce /lukma/, 67 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 65 per cent of males pronounce /vakEa/ and 73 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field whereas, on the other hand 61 per cent of females of Age group2 pronounce /mukAdma/, 54 percent of females pronounce /lukma/, 55 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 51 per cent of females pronounce /vakEa/ and 53 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field.



Researcher finds that 56 per cent of males of Age group2 pronounce /mukAdma/, 62 per cent of males pronounce /lukma/, 51 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 45 per cent of males pronounce /vakEa/ and 43 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field whereas, on the other hand 51 per cent of females of Age group2 pronounce /mukAdma/, 44 percent of females pronounce /lukma/, 55 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 51 per cent of females pronounce /vakEa/ and 53 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field.



Researcher finds that 22 per cent of males of Age group3 pronounce /mukAdma/, 29 per cent of males pronounce /lukma/, 27 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 25 per cent of males pronounce /vakEa/ and 23 per cent pronounce /Akd/ in the field whereas, on the other hand 11 per cent of females of Age group3 pronounce /mukAdma/, 24 percent of females pronounce /lukma/, 25 per cent pronounce /kAcI/, 20 per cent of females pronounce /vakEa/ and 19 per cent pronounce /əkɗ/ in the field.



But sometimes, /q/ is used in place of /k/ in the field by the respondents.

Variation in /k/ → /q/ due to over-generalization

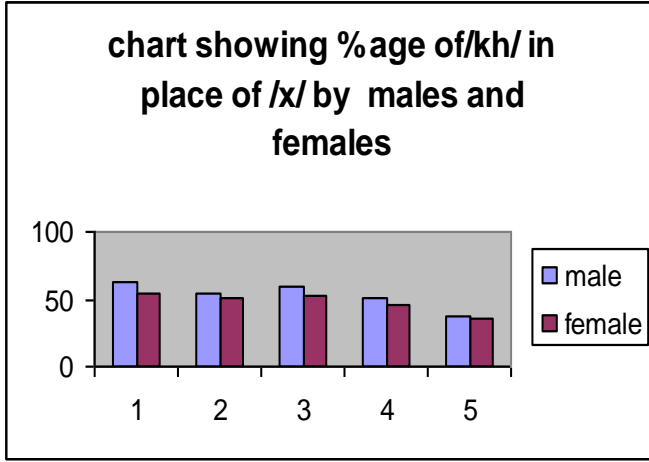
Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
کبوتر	/kAbutAr/	/qAbutAr/	'pigeon'
کاغز	/kaGAz/	/qaGAz/	'paper'
ہلکہ ہلکہ	/halke-halke/	/halqe-halqe/	'slowly'
کمرہ	/kAmra/	/qAmra/	'room'

Researcher in the field finds that sometimes in place of /k/ respondents speak /q/. When the speakers were asked for the reason behind it, they said that they do this because “It is chalta hai” “It is current and acceptable as a matter of convenience”. Utility of an expression for an occasion is considered more important than any effort to use a variation that is considered elegant. Utility appears to be defined as comprehensibility of the expression. The elegance in expression is not the current focus, it appears.

Variation of /x/→ /kh/

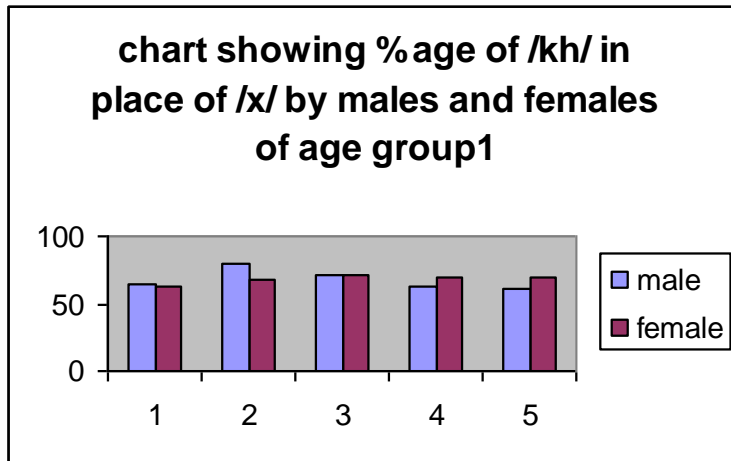
Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
خاويند	/xavInd/	/khavInd/	‘husband’
خاص	/xas/	/khas/	‘specific’
خالص	/xallIs/	/khallIs/	‘pure’
اخري	/axri/	/akhri/	‘at the end’
آخر	/axIr/	/akhIr/	‘at the end’
خورافات	/xurafat/	/khurafat/	‘controversy’
خار	/xar/	/khar/	‘thorn’
خبر	/xAbAr/	/khAbAr/	‘news’
خود	/xUd/	/khUd/	‘self’
شاخ	/shax/	/shakh/	‘branch’
سيخ	/cix/	/cikh/	‘cry’
اخبار	/Axbar/	/Akhbar/	‘newspaper’
تنخا	/tAnxa/	/tAnkha/	‘salary’
خان	/xan/	/khan/	‘khan, a surname’
خانقي	/xangI/	/khangI/	‘domestic’
خوش خط	/xuřxAt/	/khuřkhAt/	‘good-writing’
خوشال	/xuřhal/	/khuřhal/	‘prosperous’
اختيار	/IxtIar/	/IkhtIar/	‘authority’
مختار	/muxtar/	/mukhtar/	‘with authority’
زخمي	/zAxmI/	/zAkhmI/	‘wounded’
درخشا	/dArAxřã/	/dArAkhřã/	‘bright’

In the field, researcher finds that 62 per cent of males pronounce /khurafat/ in place of /xurafat/, 54 per cent of males pronounce /shakh/ in place of /shax/ whereas 52 per cent of females pronounce /cikh/ in place of /cix/ and 45 per cent pronounce /khan/ in place of /xan/. For the pronunciation of other words, please see the graph below.

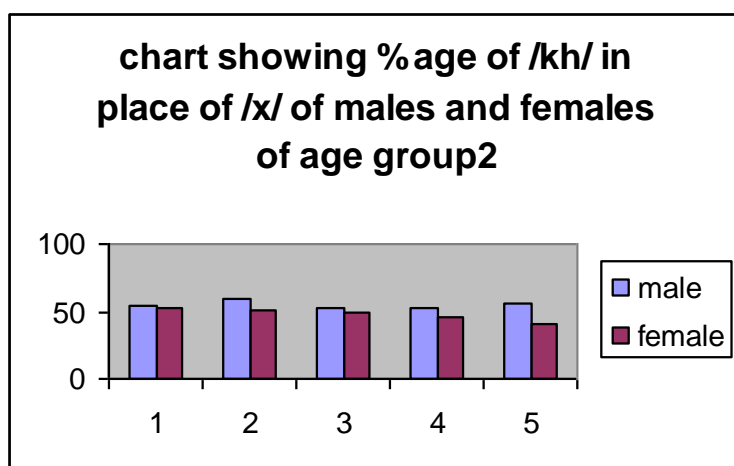


1. /khurafat/ 2. /shakh/ 3. /cikh/ 4. /khan/ 5. /zəkhmI/

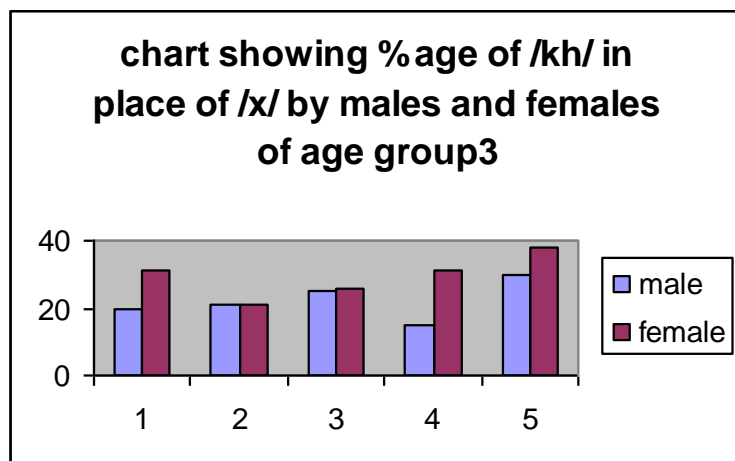
65 per cent males of age group 1 pronounce /khurafat/ in place of /xurafat/, 79 per cent of males pronounce /shakh/ in place of /shax/ whereas 72 per cent females of age group 1 pronounce /cikh/ in place of /cix/ and 69 per cent of females pronounce /khan/ in place of /xan/. More details are shown in the graph below.



55 per cent males of age group 2 pronounce /khurafat/ in place of /xurafat/, 59 per cent of males pronounce /shakh/ in place of /shax/ whereas 50 per cent of females of age group 2 pronounce /cikh/ in place of /cix/ and 45 per cent of females pronounce /khan/ in place of /xan/.



20 per cent males of age group 3 pronounce /khurafat/ in place of /xurafat/, 21 per cent of males pronounce /shakh/ in place of /shax/ whereas 26 per cent of females of age group 3 pronounce /cikh/ in place of /cix/ and 31 per cent of females pronounce /khan/ in place of /xan/ and 38 per cent of females pronounce /zəkhmi/ in place of /zəxmi/.



But the researcher finds that 15 per cent of respondents in the field pronounce /xan/ in place of /khan/ due to over-generalization and hyper-correction.

Variation of /G/→/g/

Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
غوسلخانا	/Guslxana/	/gusAlxana/	'bathroom
غور	/Gaur/	/gor/	'need'
غم	/GAm/	/gAm/	'grief'

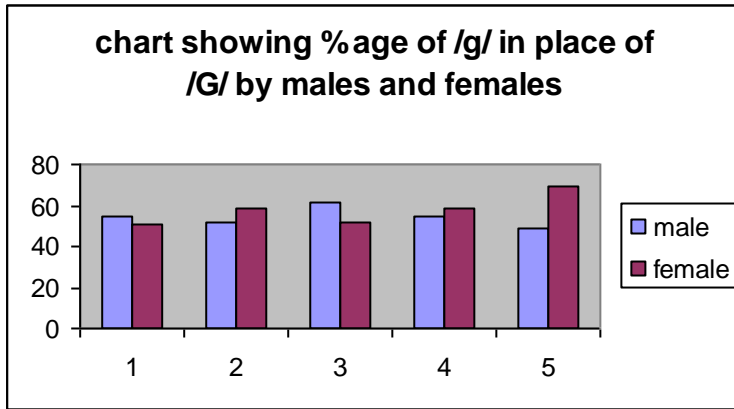
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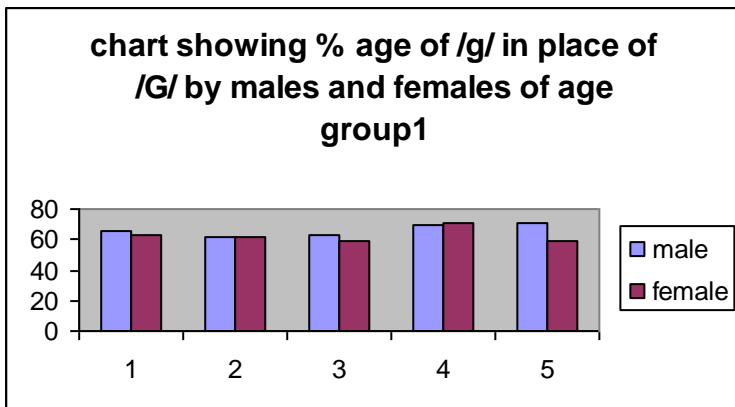
داغ	/daG/	/dag/	‘spot’
داغا	/dAGa/	/dAga/	‘deceit’
مورغ	/murG/	/murg/	‘bird’
غوبارا	/Gubbara/	/gubbara/	‘balloon’
نغم	/nAGme/	/nAgme/	‘song’
غیلاف	/GIlaf/	/gIlaf/	‘cover’

In the field, researcher finds that 55 per cent of males pronounce /nagme/, 52 per cent of males pronounce /gIlaf/, 61 per cent of males pronounce /dAG/, 55 per cent of males pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 61 per cent of males pronounce /murg/ but, on the other hand, 51 per cent of females pronounce /nagme/, 59 per cent of females pronounce /gIlaf/, 52 per cent of females pronounce /dAG/, 59 per cent of females pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 69 per cent of females pronounce /murg/.

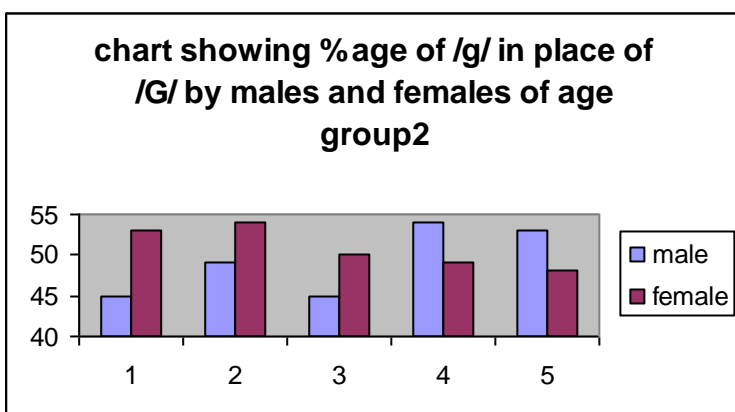


1. /nagme/ 2. /gIlaf/ 3. /dAG/ 4. /gusAlxana/ 5. /murg/

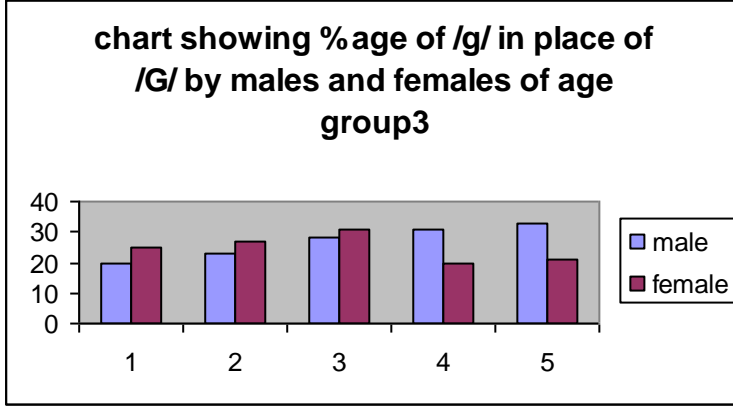
In the field, researcher finds that 65 per cent of males of Age group1 pronounce /nagme/, 61 per cent of males pronounce /gIlaf/, 63 per cent of males pronounce /dAG/, 70 per cent of males pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 71 per cent of males pronounce /murg/, but, on the other hand, 63 per cent of females of Age group1 pronounce /nagme/, 62 per cent of females pronounce /gIlaf/, 59 per cent of females pronounce /dAG/, 71 per cent of females pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 59 per cent of females pronounce /murg/.



In the field, researcher finds that 45 per cent males of Age group2 pronounce /nagme/, 49 per cent males pronounce /gIlaf/, 45 per cent males pronounce /dAg/, 54 per cent males pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 53 per cent males pronounce /murg/, but, on the other hand, 53 per cent females of Age group2 pronounce /nagme/, 54 per cent females pronounce /gIlaf/, 50 per cent females pronounce /dAg/, 49 per cent females pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 48 per cent females pronounce /murg/.



In the field, researcher finds that 20 per cent males of Age group3 pronounce /nagme/, 23 per cent males pronounce /gIlaf/, 28 per cent males pronounce /dAg/, 31 per cent males pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 33 per cent males pronounce /murg/. On the other hand, 25 per cent females of Age group3 pronounce /nagme/, 27 per cent females pronounce /gIlaf/, 31 per cent females pronounce /dAg/, 20 per cent females pronounce /gusAlxana/ and 21 per cent females pronounce /murg/.



Variation of /g/→/G/ due to over-generalization

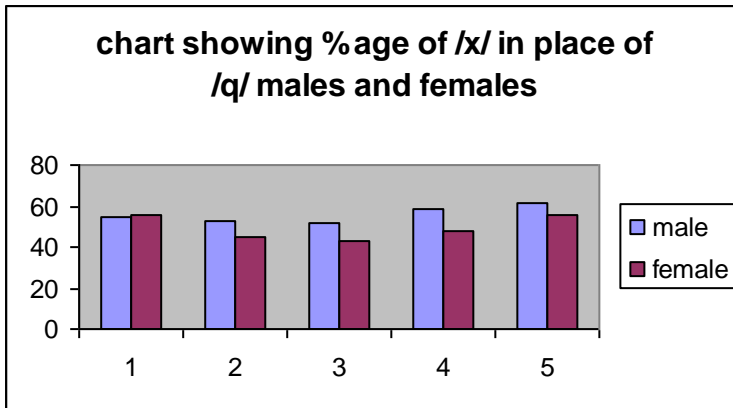
But researcher also finds that some of the respondents pronounce /G/ in place of /g/. For example, /nIGalna/ and /Goya/ but the percentage is only 23 to 35 males and females.

Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
نکلنا	/nIgAlna/	/nIGAlna/	'to swallow'
کویا	/goya/	/Goya/	'as if'

Variation of /q/→/x/

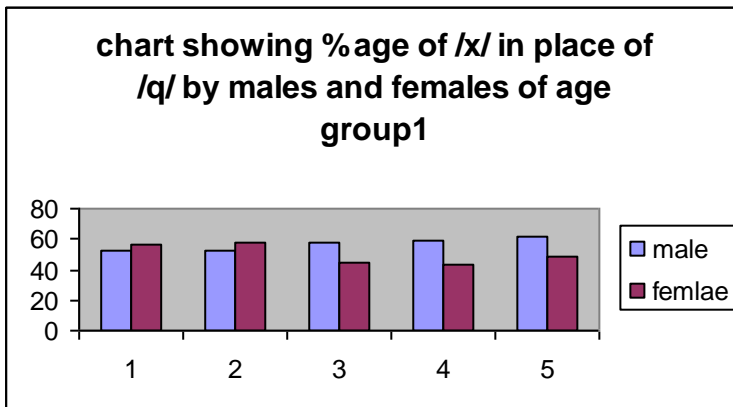
Word	Urdu	F. Urdu	Gloss
وقت	/vAqt/	/vAxt/, /vaxAt/	'time'
بندوق	/bAnduq/	/bAndux/	'revolver'
طباق	/tAbaq/	/tAbax/	'big plate'
بولاق	/bulaq/	/bullax/	'a nose pendent'
مزاق	/mAZaq/	/mAZax/	'joke'
فرق	/fArq/	/fArax/	'difference'
فقیرنی	/fAqirni/	/fAxirni/	'a female beggar'

Researcher in the field finds that 55 per cent males pronounce /vAxt/, 53 percent pronounce /mAZax/, 52 per cent males pronounce /bullax/, 59 per cent males pronounce /fArax/ and 61 per cent pronounce /fAxirni/. On the other hand, 56 per cent females pronounce /vAxt/, 45 percent pronounce /mAZax/, 43 per cent females pronounce /bullax/, 48 per cent females pronounce /fArax/ and 56 per cent pronounce /fAxirni/.

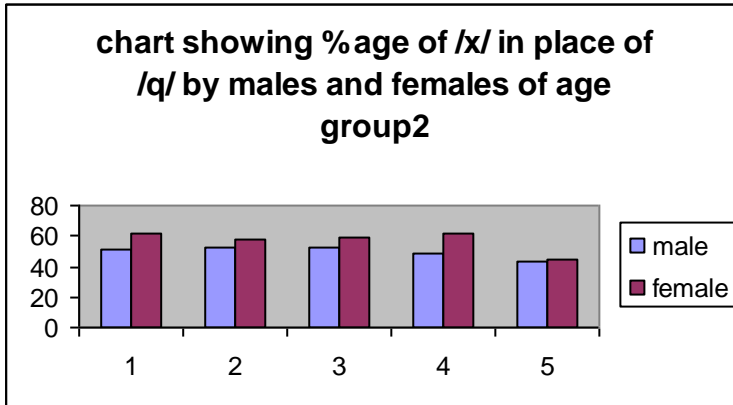


1. /vAxt/ 2. /mAzax/ 3. /bullax/ 4. /fArax/ 5. /fAxirni/

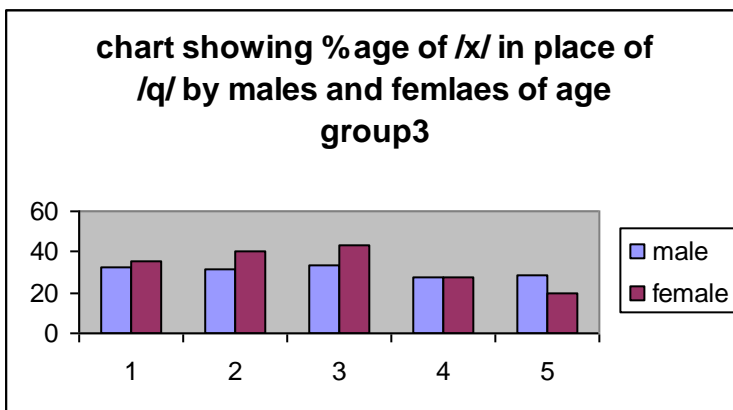
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Conclusion

Researcher finds drastic variation in the use of Perso-Arabic words in the field among the native speakers of Urdu. Age group 1 speakers are very much different from Age group 3 speakers in using the Perso-Arabic words because they are more inclined to the “chalta hai” sort of attitude and focus more on meeting current context needs. Age group 2 is in between both the attitudes of age group 1 and age group 3. This age group has more perfection than age group 1 and less perfection than age group 3. They are more towards perfection and standardization but age group 3 is most perfect in all the three age groups. The reason could be they are the oldest people and these people read Urdu literature, poetry and Urdu newspapers. Their belief is that Urdu language is the sweetest language and they are very much attached to their language. Age group 1 is more prone to changing society and they

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have gone or are going to English Medium Schools, watching MTV, V channels serials like Roadies, etc. They are adopting the language of the media. But age group 2 is not into these serials but they are not so close to Urdu literature, poetry and newspapers. Therefore, their attitudes towards Urdu are favorable but less favorable than age group 3 speakers.

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Somana Fatima, M.A., Ph.D.
Assistant Professor of English
Community College
Shaqra University
Al-Quwaiyah
Ar-Riyadh
Kingdom of Saudi Arabia
Somanafatima17883@gmail.com

Language in India www.languageinindia.com

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Somana Fatima, M.A. (English), Ph.D. (Sociolinguistics)
Phonological Variation in Perso-Arabic Words in Urdu

