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## Diglossic Situation in Central Punjab: A Case of Urdu and Punjabi Language

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### Abstract

The present case study is an exploratory study, focusing on the status of Punjabi and Urdu languages in Central Punjab, Pakistan. From sociolinguistics point of view, Pakistan is linguistically a rich region having many languages and language varieties. Bilingualism and diglossia are fascinating phenomena in Pakistan. The present study investigates the diglossic situation in Central Punjab analyzing Urdu and Punjabi and concludes that there is a diglossic situation with respect to Urdu and Punjabi in Central Punjab, Pakistan.

**Keywords:** diglossia, Urdu, Punjabi

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## **1. Introduction**

The present study is concerned with the diglossic situation in Central Punjab, Pakistan taking Urdu as a High variety (H) and Punjabi as a Low variety (L). Urdu enjoys a status of High (H) variety and Punjabi, being Low (L) variety, constantly goes behind the curtain. More prestige is given to Urdu than Punjabi in circumstances of prestige. Most of the Punjabi speakers in Central Punjab have the fear of being labeled as low status social class, and some are of the opinion that Urdu is more likeable and that Urdu speaking is encouraged as compared to Punjabi. Although, Punjabi being the mother tongue, is widely spoken at homes, with friends as vernacular, it has been facing strict limits and specific settings as to where and when it should be used. Electronic Media and Print Media, no doubt, promote Punjabi, but as a whole the proportion of media, which serves Punjabi is very small. There are only three Punjabi channels in Pakistan in comparison to ever-growing Urdu channels. Moreover regular viewers and audience of such channels are also less in number as compared to those of Urdu Channels.

Use of more than one language is a global phenomenon. In today's globalizing world, it is estimated that more than half of the world's population is bilingual (Grosjean, 2010).

Communicative purposes and intentions determine the variety or language that may be used in a specific social setting such as home, school, office, etc., which make one language (dialect) used formally and another informally.

Pakistan is a multi-lingual, multi-ethnic, and multi-cultural country where Urdu has the status of national and urban language and Punjabi as a vernacular like many others. Punjabi is gradually losing its educational and social status in the complex socio-political and cultural contexts of Pakistan. Although Urdu is the National Language, it is not given that esteem regarding its national status as is clear from exam results of all Pakistani Universities and Boards, but it does enjoy great prestige when compared to Punjabi.

## **Literature Review**

### **Concept of Diglossia**

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The concept of diglossia was put forward by Ferguson in 1959. According to Ferguson, a diglossia is “a relatively stable language situation in which, in addition to the primary dialects of the language (which may include a standard or regional standards), there is a very divergent, highly codified (often grammatically more complex) superposed variety, the vehicle of a large and respected body of written literature, either of an earlier period or in another speech community, which is learned largely by formal education and is used for most written and formal spoken purposes but is not used by any sector of the community for ordinary conversation”, Ferguson, Charles F (1959).

H and L differ from each other both linguistically and socially. Linguistically, they do so with respect to grammar, phonology, and vocabulary; socially, they differ in function and prestige, as well as in literary heritage, acquisition, standardization, and stability. Both varieties (H) and (L) of diglossia have their own clearly defined boundaries for their occurrence. Trudgill (1974), while examining Greece diglossic phenomenon, states that sometimes political affiliation may also be responsible for different attitudes of people towards the varieties of language. Ferguson’s concept of *diglossia* is a very restricted one, as Hudson (1994) points out that Ferguson’s definition of *diglossia* is specifically associated with two varieties of the same language and it does not account for the other situations present in today’s diverse linguistics world.

## **2.2 Fishman's Concept of Diglossia**

Joshua Fishman presented an extension in Ferguson’s (1959) original but relatively strict concept of diglossia in 1967. He proposed an expansion of Ferguson's definition of diglossia in two respects:

A diglossic speech community is not characterized by the use of two language varieties only. There may be more than two language varieties used within a diglossic community.

According to Fishman (1967), diglossia refers to all kinds of language varieties which show functional distribution in a speech community. Diglossia, as a consequence, describes a

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number of sociolinguistic situations, from stylistic differences within one language or the use of separate dialects (Ferguson's 'standard-with-dialects' distinction) to the use of (related or unrelated) separate languages. Matthews (1997) also has the same opinion. That is, a diglossic situation may be related with two different languages as well as with two varieties of same language. Trask (1999) also derived a similar opinion regarding today's ever-expanding bilingual world, where two languages may and may not be in diglossic situation.

Sociolinguistically, most of the countries of the world can be defined as diglossic societies. But diglossia is not always a simple phenomenon. Sometimes, it is a very complex situation; there may be a diglossia within a diglossia. Linguists have originated terms like polyglossia, overlapping diglossia, and triglossia to adhere to the diverse diglossic linguistics situation of the present globalizing world.

### **Hypothesis**

Hypothesis for the present study is:

**H:** There is a diglossic situation in central Punjab, Pakistan with respect to Urdu and Punjabi.

### **Hypothesis Test**

For the present study, key defining characteristics of diglossia as described by Ferguson (1959) are used to test the hypothesis of the study. High (H) variety means Urdu whereas low (L) variety is used for Punjabi in the study.

Features which make a linguistics situation diglossic as defined by Ferguson are:

- 1. Function.** H variety is used mostly for official purposes whereas the L variety is used in informal situation.
- 2. Acquisition.** H variety is acquired consciously in a clearly predetermined setting whereas L variety is learned unconsciously in a casual way.
- 3. Prestige.** H variety is considered more prestigious with respect to L variety.
- 4. Standardization.** H variety is more standardize with respect to L variety.

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5. **Grammar.** Grammar of H variety is more clearly defined but not in the L variety as much.
6. **Lexicon.** Lexicon of H variety is greater and increasing as compared to L variety.
7. **Phonology.** Phonology of both varieties is different but some features may be overlapping.
8. **Stability.** Diglossic situation is present for a considerable time.

Britto (1991) while discussing Tamil diglossia says that out of these defining features function and acquisition are most significant.

### **Diglossia in Central Punjab**

Central Punjab of Pakistan is dominated with three main languages; Punjabi, Urdu and English. Punjabi is vernacular of common folks' informal discussion, Urdu being the national language and English as lingua franca of elite class. Urdu is considered more prestigious with respect to Punjabi.

The hypothesis is now being analyzed based upon the defining characteristics of Diglossia described by Ferguson (1959) and expanded by Fishman (1967) as already discussed above.

**Function.** H variety is used in formal where L variety is used in informal linguistics situation. Urdu is used in formal contexts like in classrooms, law offices, etc., whereas Punjabi is used in informal contexts like home, with friends', etc. It is obvious from the functional perspective that Urdu and Punjabi are used in different linguistics contexts, Urdu being formal and Punjabi being informal.

**Acquisition.** H variety is acquired consciously in predetermined linguistics settings whereas L variety is learned in casual way. Urdu is being learnt at schools and collages but not the Punjabi. Although being the language of 44.15% (Census, 1998) of the entire population of Pakistan, Punjabi language does not have any primary school textbook for the children and it is an optional subject after High School education. As compared to Punjabi, Urdu is a compulsory subject at

the primary level of education. Punjabi language is being learnt unconsciously but Urdu is learnt consciously as well as unconsciously up to some extent.

**Prestige.** H variety is considered more prestigious as compared to L variety. Prestige is associated with social power. Urdu is associated with educated and social power group whereas Punjabi is normally associated with villagers and uneducated people. Because of these complex social structures, Urdu is considered more prestigious as compared to Punjabi. Now, even people from villages do not want to be labeled as uneducated due to Punjabi language use. Due to prestige, literature in H variety is more abundant and flourishing as compared to L variety. Same situation is prevailing with Urdu and Punjabi.

**Standardization.** H variety is more standardized with respect to L variety. Urdu is more standardized with dictionaries and grammar books in increasing numbers, but this is not the case with Punjabi, where one hardly finds any recent book on its grammar and any modern dictionary of Punjabi in Pakistan. Urdu is more standardized than Punjabi language.

**Grammar.** Grammar of H variety is more clearly defined but not the L variety as much. Urdu grammar is being taught in schools but this is not the case with Punjabi. Grammar of Punjabi is not clearly defined to people and students in schools unlike Urdu.

**Lexicon.** Lexicon of H variety is larger and is ever expanding as compared to L variety. The same is the case with Urdu and Punjabi, where Urdu lexicon is larger but not the Punjabi lexicon.

**Phonology.** Phonology of both varieties is different but some features may be overlapping. This is also true with Urdu and Punjabi languages. Phonology of Punjabi is different from Urdu. But there are certain characteristics which are present in both languages as well.

**Stability.** Diglossic situation is present for a considerable period of time. This is also true for Urdu and Punjabi as well because the diglossic situation in Urdu and Punjabi is a persistent one for a considerable period.

## Conclusion

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From the above discussion and analysis, it is quite clear that the hypothesis of the present study is true, and that there does exist a diglossic situation in Central Punjab, Pakistan with respect to Urdu and Punjabi. Urdu offers the High (H) variety and Punjabi offers the Low (L) variety. This linguistic situation fulfills the criteria set by Ferguson (1959) and further expanded by Fishman (1967) for the description and definition of diglossia.

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