

LANGUAGE IN INDIA
Strength for Today and Bright Hope for Tomorrow
Volume 10 : 9 September 2010
ISSN 1930-2940

Managing Editor: M. S. Thirumalai, Ph.D.
Editors: B. Mallikarjun, Ph.D.
Sam Mohanlal, Ph.D.
B. A. Sharada, Ph.D.
A. R. Fatihi, Ph.D.
Lakhan Gusain, Ph.D.
K. Karunakaran, Ph.D.
Jennifer Marie Bayer, Ph.D.
S. M. Ravichandran, Ph.D.

**Official Ways to Subjugate Languages –
School Setting as a Cause of Pahari Dhundi-Kairali Decline**

Muhammad Gulfraz Abbasi, M. A., Ph.D. Scholar
Zafar Iqbal Khattak, M. A., Ph.D. Scholar

Abstract

In the study of language shift and maintenance, school has an important role to play. Language taught in schools represents both a tendency of the community and the policy of the government toward a certain language. School is a place where most of the times the new generation is purged of the local native languages.

Pahari Dhundi-Kairali or Dhundi and often known and used as Pahari (Abbasi et al, 2010: 207) is an indigenous language of Murree and its adjoining areas in Pakistan. This language has also been silently declared an outcast in the governments as well as private schools.

This paper looks at the outlook of the teachers regarding their/and their students' use of Urdu, English and Pahari languages in schools. We notice that Urdu is viewed as a prestigious language whereas Pahari is not considered a valuable language enough to be taught and used in the so-called disciplined environment of school.

Introduction

The role of school in language decline or maintenance is vital in the indigenous communities. There are so many articles of research and dissertations (e.g. Stroud, 2003; Sinha, 2009; Abdi,

2009; Asif, 2005) which have taken up the school setting wholly or partly to know what part it plays sociologically and psychologically, either for language preference or for creating a class system among the languages. School is considered a place in the indigenous societies as having a status of great respect and prestige. Teachers enjoy a respectable position in the society.

Not in the very distant past, most of the people used to be illiterate and would get the services of teachers for writing and reading letters, preparing any other legal document, etc. In the colonies there was a system of subjugation and people had to do what they were suggested and instructed. Similarly, the concept of government was very powerful.

So, the government schools, which were established in the beginning of the British rule in the sub-continent, had a powerful role. So, despite the opposition of the local population for the colonial masters and their schemes, the school kept on increasing its importance and stature for the local population. So, the schools and other educational institutions have been having a significant impact on the minds of the people in developing and creating a stereotypical point of view such as prestigious language and bizarre language. Since the gap between the elite class, middle class and lower class is increasing day by day, the gap among the languages regarding their respective prestige is also increasing.

The Role of Schools in Language Decline

The role of school in the maintenance or shift of a language is instrumental. It is mostly in schools that the preference for one language is imbued among the children. In Pakistan, the minority languages are dying out mostly because of the outcast status given to them in the schools vis-à-vis Urdu and English.

This attitude has its definite impact on other domains of language usage.

The family, an important domain is also affected and converts to the use of Urdu to be in harmony with the schools. The schools' policies of using Urdu compel the parents to shift to Urdu for the betterment of their children's lot in their careers.

During our observation and interviews, we noticed that many parents had the excuse of using Urdu instead of Pahari with their children just because of the demand of the same by the schools. They believed that their child would be embarrassed in the school if he/she could not speak Urdu properly. The mushroom growth of private schools made it mandatory for each student to command Urdu if he/she has to progress in school.

Rahman (2005:28) divided the institutions in Pakistan as

- (a) English medium schools
- (b) Vernacular medium school
- (c) Madrassas [Religious Seminaries]
- (d) English language teaching Institutions and

(e) Institution of higher education.

He further divided the English medium schools into three types:

- (a) State influenced elitist public schools
- (b) Private elitist schools and
- (c) Non-elitist schools.

The other important category of schools is the state governed public schools. The elite institutions are very rare and are available to only those who have plenty of resources like politicians, officers of civil and military bureaucracy and top businessmen.

There is one more category, often forgotten while discussing the elite in Pakistan. The ‘pirs’ [shrine holders] have become one important upper class tier. They, out of their wealth gotten through offerings of the pious, have become very strong, and most of them have become feudal lords. They have a kind of their own mini-states as other feudal lords do. They give education to their children in the elitist schools and prepare them for being rulers and politicians.

Non-elitist schools are large in number and people who want good and quality education send their children to these institutions. These are not English medium schools in real sense. They, no doubt, adopt the syllabus of the elite English medium schools, but most of their teaching takes place in Urdu. It is because of the fact that these schools cannot hire the services of highly educated teachers out of their meager resources which they generate from the low middle class. Urdu medium schools are the State-governed public schools and most of their teaching takes place in Urdu. These government schools used to adopt local language as the medium of instruction around twenty years ago. Then change came in schools’ policies and hence the use of Urdu as a medium of instruction.

In Murree there are Christian missionary schools, elite schools, cadet colleges, and a few military schools besides a sizeable number of government schools.

Interview Pattern and Participants’ Detail

In this study, we interviewed eleven teachers, five male and six female teachers from different schools. The interview participants were selected from the government schools and common private schools. The logic behind this selection was to cover the largest population of this area. We did not interview the teachers of elite schools because these schools are so small in number and a small fraction of population joins them. Secondly it is established fact that they promote English. So there is no space for regional languages in these institutions. The purpose was to get the first hand knowledge of the role played by the schools in bringing about a shift in the use of language. The detail, of the teachers who were interviewed, is given in the following table:

Teachers	Gender M/F	Education	School/Level Govt/ Private	School type	Medium of Instruction
----------	---------------	-----------	-------------------------------	-------------	--------------------------

Teacher 1	M	B. A. (PTC)	GPS	B	U
Teacher 2	M	B. A. (PTC)	GPS	B	U
Teacher 3	M	B. A. (PTC. B. Ed)	GMS	B	U
Teacher 4	M	B.A(B. Ed)	GPS	B	U
Teacher 5	M	Intermediate (PTC)	GPS	C	U
Teacher 6	F	M.A. (B. Ed)	GCHS	G	U
Teacher 7	F	B. A. (B. Ed)	PPS	C	E
Teacher 8	F	Intermediate	PPS	C	E
Teacher 9	F	Intermediate	PMS	C	E
Teacher 10	F	B. A. (CT)	PHS	C	E
Teacher 11	F	B. A. (B. Ed)	PMS	C	E

M= Male, F=Female, G=Government, P=Private and Primary, M=Middle, H=High, S=School, B=Boys, C=Combined, G=Girls, U= Urdu medium, E=English medium.

Compulsory Use of Urdu in the Classroom

Media of instruction in schools generally cast a lasting impact on the minds of the students in creating a sense to differentiate different languages spoken in the home and in the society at large. In this regard the policy of schools about the use of one or two languages as the total source of instruction is indeed worth investigating.

During our discussion with the school teachers, all agreed on the point that Urdu is the medium of instruction and it is compulsory for the teachers to use Urdu inside and outside the classroom. Urdu is the medium in which the syllabus of the government schools is designed except the compulsory English course. But there is a dichotomy in the English medium schools where the syllabuses have been designed in English and these are supposed to be taught in English but, quite ironically, Urdu is used for teaching purposes. The teachers themselves are of the opinion that Urdu and not any other language should be used by the teachers. If they used English, that would be better, but if it is not possible, Urdu is the best alternative. A female teacher (10) said:

hamara kam ha students ki Urdu theek karana takay wo sahih zaban bol sakain (It is our duty to correct the Urdu of the students so that they could speak correct language.)

Another female teacher (11) said:

agar kai ghalti say Pahari ka word muh sa nikal jai, to bari sharmindagi hoti ha (if by chance, I happen to utter a Pahari word during my speech, I feel ashamed).

The views of the teachers regarding the use of Urdu for teaching purposes and other communication are indeed telling. Only two male teachers, (2) and (4), said that they sometimes

used Pahari to teach a difficult concept because children did not pick that point in Urdu. When we asked why it was so that the children did not get the concept in Urdu he (2) said:

bat ye ha ka garun ka mahol sahih nai ha, bacha bachara kia karain, ghar ma Urdu boli jati ho to bachay samjain na, ziada tar waldain unpar hain (what I want to say is that the environment of the home is not conducive for the children. We cannot blame the poor children; children can only understand if Urdu is spoken in their homes, most of the parents are illiterate).

Here, the teacher who is in favour of using Pahari in the classroom does not do so because he likes Pahari but because he wants to facilitate those students who do not learn Urdu in their homes. His statement shows that he does not recommend those parents at all who use Pahari with children. We observed in the schools that female teachers used Urdu with each other even when they were together outside the class in informal settings, while they could communicate in Pahari. Male teachers mostly used Pahari and Urdu when they were on their own.

Language Policy for the Students

Language policy of the school determines the use of language by the students. Students are generally much impressed by their teachers and their schools. As a result the language preferred at school usually invades in the home domain too and the home domain has to accept it advertently or inadvertently.

All the teachers gave one answer and that was the preference of Urdu to Pahari in schools. They all believed that Urdu is the school's policy and Urdu should remain the policy of the schools because of the fact that Pahari cannot give them the power to come up to the level of other students. Female teachers were more enthusiastic about the use of Urdu and shunning of Pahari.

A female teacher (7) said :

baccha agar Pahari bolain to un ka accent kharab ho jata hay. (the accent will be distorted if children speak Pahari).

Not to speak of schools, during our ethnographic observation of the families and interviews, we heard so many people saying that Pahari had the disadvantage of distorting the Urdu accent and that was why they avoided it to keep their children's Urdu intact and pure. Upon our further inquiry the said female teacher gave some examples where the children had developed some Pahari nasal sounds in Urdu.

A male teacher (4) complained that children sometime started speaking Pahari when there was no teacher around. Similarly a female teacher (10) while commenting on the occasional use of Pahari by the students during break time blamed the parents for all that :

Kuch waldain bacchun ko tameez nai sikhatay (some parents don't teach manners to their

children).

She was, in fact, referring to the use of Pahari during school. She was of the view that lack of manners leads to the occasional use of Pahari. We have seen that in the government schools in the countryside Pahari is intact around school and in the playground. While in the private schools Pahari is hardly seen even in the playground. When we asked a child why he did not speak Pahari, he said that he was afraid of speaking Pahari lest anyone should complain to the teacher of his use of Pahari. When we asked him if he could speak Pahari, he nodded. Many children have the knowledge and practice of Pahari but the suffocation of the school environment does not favour them to learn and practice it.

Students' Speech in and Outside the Classroom

The students have to get themselves settled in the school environment which demands that Urdu be spoken in schools. The constraint of Urdu is a bit relaxed in government schools while it is strictly observed in the private schools. Most of the teachers of government schools say that students usually don't have much knowledge of Urdu when they are admitted to schools.

According to a teacher, the situation was worst in the past when students were not at all literate in Urdu but now things have changed and a lot and parents pay attention to the language of their children. In the government schools the beginners take sometime to adjust themselves to Urdu language but they are soon trained. These are usually poor children who cannot afford private schools. These low income families usually have Pahari language in their homes, because they are not much status conscious nor do they have many contacts outside. On the other hand, the children who come to the private schools belong to relatively well to do families. Urdu is mostly used in this kind of families. When these children join schools they don't feel any problem in adjusting to Urdu language because of their prior familiarity with it. In the private schools students consistently use Urdu in the classrooms. Sometimes it happens that student switches to Pahari and he has to feel sorry for that. A teacher (9) of private school said:

bachay kabi kabi Pahari ka lafz bol jatay hain (children sometimes utter Pahari words) and about the consequences of that switch she said: bachay hansnan sharuh kar daita hain aur wo khud hi sharmindagi mahsoos karta ha (children start laughing at him and he is himself ashamed).

From the conversation with the teachers it transpired that children switch to Pahari and especially they tend to bring Pahari lexical items into Urdu. Teachers correct their Urdu mistakes but mostly they are laughed at by other students and by the teachers themselves too. The shame felt in this way helps [as they say] in the correct use of Urdu.

During our observation of the school environment, we came to know that in the context of the government schools, the students mostly used Pahari in the playground. If they happened to talk to teacher they switched to Urdu but when they were alone, they used Pahari. In the case of private schools, the students spoke Urdu even in the playgrounds. We observed in the private

schools that teachers gave long lectures on ethics, morality and use of language in the assembly session at the start of school and in the last period when again students were addressed while they were all sitting and listening attentively. The students in this way not only imbibe a deep sense of moral sense which they practice in their homes, but also, tend to use Urdu in the playground and among their friends.

Teachers' Speech in and Outside the Classrooms

Teachers both male and female use Urdu in the classrooms. But the female teachers are more particular in this regard. We observed that female teachers used Urdu all the time even when they were all alone by themselves. In the staff room they spoke Urdu and their Urdu was much better than the Urdu of male teachers as far as fluency and accent was concerned.

The reason for this is the effort and fondness with which the female try to learn Urdu. There must be some gender based sociological and psychological reasons behind this phenomenon which requires separate discussion.

On the contrary, the male teachers at once switched to Pahari when they came back to the staff room. Most of our discussion with the male teachers was in Pahari and they took a great interest in it. While most of our conversation was in Urdu during our interaction with the female teachers. This was partly because of the difference of level of formality with them but most importantly, the female teachers were more tuned to speaking Urdu instead of Pahari.

The Question of Language Maintenance

During our interviews with the teachers we found a strong gendered opinion regarding the use of Pahari or otherwise. Our female interviewees were mostly of the opinion that Urdu should be kept as the language of the homes and society because it was a national language and a lingua franca. Moreover, they believed that Pahari was a limited language and it had no utility. Even these teachers believed that Pahari had a very bad effect on Urdu accent. They were in favour of speaking Urdu with the children right from the beginning. They were more progressive in this regard. When we inquired if Pahari should be kept intact or not, they replied that it might be kept intact, if one liked but as a general rule they would not recommend it. From our observation we guessed that for them, good manners meant speaking Urdu and bad manners meant speaking Pahari.

The situation with the male teachers is a bit different. They believed except for a few opposite opinions, that Pahari should not be eliminated. They were in favour of Pahari Urdu bilingualism with English as an extra ability. A male teacher (3) said that he used Pahari in the home with his children. But he also said that his wife disliked his use of Pahari with children. She was in favour of Urdu for intra family interactions.

Conclusion

The study concludes that school plays an important role in language decline in this part of the world. It officially supports the prestigious languages which are associated with elite identity. The middle class and the lower class try to imitate the manners of the upper class and so follow the prestigious languages instead of their indigenous languages. Pahari of Murree is also affected by the schools' policy to implement Urdu and English as the media of instructions. Elite English medium schools promote only English; private English medium schools promote Urdu and English, while government schools promote Urdu. So, when the child is in school, he or she has to speak Urdu or English. The use of English is, however, restricted but the use of Urdu is strongly enforced. During the observation and interviews in schools, it appears as if Pahari is no more than nuisance and disturbance in schools. If the same kind of treatment is meted out to Pahari language in Murree, the future generations might not be able to know what kind of language Pahari was after two generations.

The need of the hour is that the indigenous Pahari language may be given due status and the indigenous speakers may be made aware of this phenomenon. Government should also play its role in implementing the native languages as the media of instruction. Once the people come to know that learning other languages apart from their indigenous language increases the cognitive faculties, they would start learning their indigenous languages.

Thus, we need additive bilingualism instead of subtractive bilingualism. So it is not only the matter with Pahari language of Murree but such a situation is prevalent in all the indigenous societies of Pakistan. There should be refresher courses for the teachers in which they may be taught how to use their indigenous language. If the school starts playing its role in implementing indigenous languages, the loss to our native languages might not be as severe as it presently appears. Pahari language being one of the indigenous languages of Pakistan is replete with immense cultural traits of its community. If the language dies, the loss will be colossal. There is still time, with the correction of the school policies and the awareness of the indigenous community, Pahari can be maintained and its status can be restored.

References

- Abbasi, M. G., et al. (2010). Dilemma of Usage and Transmission - A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Dhundi-Pahari in Pakistan. *Language in India*, 10 (197-214).
- Abdi, K. (2009). Spanish heritage language learners in Canadian high school Spanish classes: Negotiating ethno-linguistic identities and ideologies. Unpublished masters thesis. University of British Columbia.
- Asif, S. I. (2005a) *Siraiki: A sociolinguistic study of language desertion*. Unpublished PhD thesis, Lancaster University, UK.
- Rahman, T. (2005). Passports to privilege: The English-medium schools in Pakistan.

Peace and security in South Asia, 1(1) 24-44.

Sinha, S. (2009). Code Switching and Code Mixing Among Oriya Trilingual Children – A Study. *Language in India*, <http://www.languageinindia.com/april2009/codeswitching.pdf> pp. 274-283.

Stroud, C. (2003). Postmodernist Perspectives on Local Languages: African Mother-tongue Education in Times of Globalisation. *International Journal of Bilingual Education and Bilingualism*, 6 (1): 17-36

Muhammad Gulfraz Abbasi, Ph.D. Scholar
Bahauddin Zakariya Univesity
Multan
Pakistan
gulfrazabbasi@gmail.com

Zafar Iqbal Khattak, Ph.D. Scholar
Bahauddin Zakariya Univesity
Multan and
Abdul Wali Khan Univesity
Mardan
Pakistan
aburohaan2004@hotmail.com