

From Persian Courts to Punjabi Streets: Vernacularization and the Linguistic Reorientation of the Khawaja Sira Community

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Abstract

This qualitative research focuses on examining how the Khawaja Sira community in Sheikhpura, Pakistan, has evolved linguistically over the years, shifting from the historically used Persian language in Mughal courts to the modern Punjabi street language. The investigation follows this path in a diachronic sense, which anticipates the historical and sociolinguistic movements of the community throughout the years. The study assumes a dual methodological approach, combining semi-structured interviews with twelve respondents from two generations and a critical examination of historical documents, media images, and other primary sources. Through questioning the ideological underpinnings of language and its indexical uses, the research paper aims to explain how language shift forms the identity construction in this marginalized community. Results show that socio-political side-lining, the instability caused by colonialism, post-decolonization linguistic-nationalism, and economic forces all culminated in a notable replacement of Persian and formal Urdu by Punjabi. This change of language is not only a shift in the repertoire but also a historical shift for the Khawaja "Sira communities, marking their transition from status in the Mughal Empire to marginalization in modern society. Furthermore, these changes are documented and influenced by media images, including films, television dramas, and social media information, which determine the social and cultural positioning of the community. In the final analysis, this study contributes to a larger body of knowledge on how language practices are used as indicators of social status, resistance, and belonging, thus bringing light to the complex interaction between language, power, and identity in marginalized groups.

Keywords: Khawaja Sira, Vernacularization, language ideology, Indexicality, Punjabi, Persian, Linguistic reorientation

1. Introduction

The Khawaja Siras community of transgender women, eunuchs, and intersex are a specific and complicated place in the South Asian society. Their roots lie in ancient times, when they were usually worshiped and admired and held important social positions. Khawaja 'Siras under the Mughal Empire worked in royal courts as the guards of royal harems, as the administrators and close advisers to emperors, thus offering services which were not only appreciated but also necessary in the running of the Mughal royal machinery. Their courtly functions were very noble, and thus, the scope of their language reflected their nobility. Persian, the language of administration, culture, and intellectual discussion, was widely spoken by the Khawaja Sira people, as well as the Urdu and local dialects. Their linguistic affiliation was symbolized by the use of Persian, especially, and hence, their association with the civilized and urban aristocratic life enhanced their social and linguistic status.

Nevertheless, the collapse of Mughal authority, the rise of British colonization, and the subsequent nation-building efforts resulted in a radical change in the social and linguistic relations among the Khawaja Sira people. Their decline in terms of royal patronage to a more marginalized position started in the 18th century with the fall of the Mughal Empire. These changes were further accelerated by British colonial rule, which began in the middle of the 19th century. The English language, being made the language of administration, law, and education, supplanted Persian, the historic courtly language, and in effect removed one of the primary signs of the aristocratic position of the Khawaja Sira people. According to Rahman (1996), the replacement of Persian as the language of power by English in colonial India produced ripple effects on an area whose identity and status were linguistically pegged on the old regime. This not only changed the social status of the Khawaja Siras but also the language they used to identify themselves, as the Persian language was losing relevance and being replaced by English and local languages.

The settlement of India and the resultant nation-building processes, such as the formation of an independent Pakistan, transformed the verbal and social topography of most of the communities, including the Khawaja Siras. The shift from Persian-speaking courts to the streets of Punjab meant a change in social status, identity, and geography. The deprivation of courtly status and demotion to elite positions in society led to a linguistic reversal, as Khawaja Siras became increasingly associated with lower social classes. The fact that they had replaced their cosmopolitan language with Punjabi, the regional language, was an embodiment of their loss of prestige. The process of vernacularization can also be seen as a result of their identity crisis against the background of their marginalization. The former identity indicators of prestige did not receive the same salience in the new socio-political environment.

The study examines the vernacularization process, which, according to Pollock (2011), refers to the transformation of a vernacular language into a means of literary culture and political expression, often at the expense of a cosmopolitan language. This is the process for the Khawaja Sira community in Sheikhpura, where Persian and formal Urdu are replaced by Punjabi, particularly the street dialect, reflecting their current social standings. The transition to Punjabi is not just a change of language, but of social and cultural definition. The fact that Khawaja is being adapted into the Punjabi language, which is often used by the working-class population, represents an even more wide-ranging change in their place in society. The language they used to communicate also changed as their elite status lost ground, reflecting the evolving social realities of the community. The Punjabi street language today forms a part of Khawaja Sira identity and is a sign of their perseverance and resistance against the overwhelming forces of mainstream cultural and linguistic elements that have tried to marginalize them.

Through this vernacularization, this study seeks to shed light on how the twin concepts of language and identity relate to each other, specifically on the communities that have traditionally been marginalized. The process of changing Persian and formal Urdu to Punjabi among the KhawajaSira community not only involves language change but also reflects the socio-political and cultural shifts that have influenced their lives throughout the centuries. This paper will discuss how these linguistic changes have influenced this community's self-perception and social status in modern Pakistan, providing insight into the dynamic relationship between language, power, and identity.

1.1 Research Objectives

This study aims to:

- Report on the linguistic shift of the Khawaja Sira people in Mughal and the modern age.
- Name the socio-political and economical factors that make a language change.
- Analyse the role of language ideology and indexicality in identity construction.
- Discussion of media portrayal of Khawaja Siras and their effects on language.
- Compare the differences in the use and attitude of languages between generations.

1.2 Research Questions

- What has changed in the linguistic repertoire of the Khawaja Sira community since the Mughal age till now?
- What are the major causes of the vernacularization in this community?
- How do ideologies and indexical practices of language influence generations of Khawaja Siira?
- What has been the media documentations and influencing practices in language?

2. Theoretical Framework

2.1 Vernacularization

The process by which vernacular languages were legitimized as a means of cultural and political expression is known as vernacularization, as theorized by Pollock (2011). This process commonly replaces cosmopolitan languages associated with power and prestige. According to Pollock (2011), vernacularization does not merely mean a change in language but a shift in the very notion of how language relates to place, culture, and political community. Vernacularization processes in South Asia have been closely related to the transformation of power structures. The case of Persian displacement by Urdu and regional languages in and after colonialism is a good example of the reaction of linguistic hierarchies to political changes. In the case of the Khawaja Sira people, vernacularization is loss and adaptation - loss of elitist linguistic capital and adaptation to live in changed social conditions. The work by Schieffelin et al., (1998) extends the idea by underlining that vernacularization is never technical or neutral, but it is always the subject of power projects, whether it is a resistance, accommodation, or a transformation process. This is an important

perspective in determining how Khawaja Siras' language preferences express their negotiation of marginal status.

2.2 Language Ideology

Language ideology is defined as the cultural beliefs and values of the people concerning the structure and the use of the language (Kroskrity, 2004, p. 498). According to Woolard and Schieffelin (1994), language ideologies are expressed as spoken or unspoken representations that construct the intersection between language and human beings in a social world. These ideologies are never apolitical and are always filled with political and moral interests (Irvine & Gal, 2000, p. 35). In the case of the Khawaja Sira population, language ideologies are on several levels:

External ideologies: The society's beliefs on the linguistic activity of the community as a signifier of their otherness and marginality.

Internal ideologies: members of the community hold their own views on which languages and registers demonstrate authenticity, tradition, or modernity.

Ideologies of hierarchy: The discursive distinction between the high culture of Persian/Urdu and the low culture of Punjabi street slang.

Silverstein (1979) points out that language ideologies are important in social and linguistic analysis because the ideological representation of language within speakers is a rationale-driven system of belief that warrants specific linguistic practices. This framework sheds light on the rationalization of linguistic options by Khawaja Siras to address social positioning.

2.3 Indexicality

Indexicality, as theorized by Silverstein (2003), refers to the way linguistic forms indicate or refer to social meanings that are not contained in the referential content. According to Duranti and Goodwin (1992), linguistic forms can indicate social information, including social identities, relationships, acts, activities, stances, and affect. In the case of the Khawaja Sira, linguistic features represent a number of social meanings:

Historical indexicality: The adoption of Persian or Urdu word indicates the relation to the past of the court.

Spatial indexicality: Punjabi vernacular indicates the social positioning of the street level.

Indexicality of identity: There is indexicality of identity in relation to KhawajaSR identity.

Register indexicality: Code-switching indexes the identities and power relations in the situations. According to Bucholtz and Hall (2005), identity is constructed in indexical processes in which ideological links between linguistic forms and specific social categories

are made. This theoretical framework allows us to see how Khawaja Siras negotiate, construct, and resist assigned identities through the use of language.

3. Literature Review

3.1 Khawaja Siras in the History of the Mughal Courts

Khawaja sira, by this time being referred to in historical works as hijras or khwajasara, held a very high position of power and prestige during the Mughal period. According to Hinchy (2019), harems of the empire employed the hijras as their guardians, who had significant political power and means. Persian, the language of the Mughal administration and high culture, was essential for their courtly activities. According to Lal (1994), the khwajasara of the Mughal court were not servants; they were significant players in politics, often amassed considerable wealth, and influenced access to the emperor. Their language skills in Persian were a sign of belonging to the elite circles, distinguishing them from ordinary people who performed within the bazaars.

3.2 Colonial Disruption and Criminalization

The colonization of the Khawaja Sira by the British significantly changed the position of the Khawaja Sira people. In 1871, the Criminal Tribes Act designated hijras as a criminal tribe, making them a subject of surveillance and criminalization (Hinchy, 2019, p. 112). This marginalization in laws was coupled with language marginalization since Persian was no longer the language of administration. The linguistic policies of the colonial government, which promoted English and undermined Persian, were catastrophic to the communities whose social capital depended on the previous linguistic order. The Khawaja Sira community, denied courtly roles and made criminal, had their lingual capital decadentized.

3.3 Pakistani Contemporary Social Position.

Khawaja Siras are intensely marginalized in modern Pakistan, even though they were legally recognized in 2009, and they have since been afforded protective legislation (Khan, 2016). As it is reported by Majid et al. (2023), transgender individuals in Pakistan are discriminated against in education, employment, healthcare, and social engagement, and many of them end up begging, engaging in sex work, or performing at weddings and celebrations. Such marginalization in the economy is presented in the language practices. According to Azhar (2018), the language use of transgender communities in Punjab is also trending towards economic activities at the street level, with the Punjabi vernacular replacing Urdu and English in various areas of application.

3.4 Marginalized Community Language and Identity

According to Gavriilidou et al., (2017), language is among the strongest instruments with which marginalized groups may form alternative identities and oppose the dominant discourses. To the Khawaja Sira people, language is a symbol of marginalization and a tool of resistance. Studies of transgender lingo around the world present convoluted trends of lingo innovation and assimilation. According to Kulick (2000), the travestis in Brazil adopt unique forms of language that, at the same time, mark femininity, marginality, and solidarity in the society.

3.5 Media Representations and Linguistic Influence

Media imagery is vital in defining how communities of marginalization are perceived and how they speak. Hossain (2020) discusses the representation of Khawaja Siras in Pakistani cinema, highlighting the use of transgender characters as comic relief through exaggerated feminine linguistic expression and Punjabi vernacular to emphasize their otherness. But in recent media productions, we can find more subtle attempts. A sympathetic role of a transgender person was observed in the Pakistani drama serial “*Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* (2016)”, but the language use was stereotypical (Manzoor et al. 2022).

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design

This paper uses the qualitative approach, applying both in-depth interviews and historical textual and media reviews. According to Creswell and Poth (2018), qualitative research is defined as a method for studying and understanding the meanings that individuals or groups attach to social or human issues. This is considered to be suitable for exploring the complex interaction of language, identity, and social change among the Khawaja Sira community.

4.2 Research Setting

The study was conducted in the Sheikhupura district of Punjab, Pakistan, which has a population estimated at 3.5 million. The proximity of Sheikhupura to Lahore (40km) and its historical significance as a city from the Mughal era make it an ideal location to examine the linguistic continuities and changes in the Khawaja Sira community.

4.3 Sampling Strategy and Participants

The Khawaja Sira community at Sheikhupura was chosen using purposive sampling to choose 12 participants. Patton (2002) defines purposive sampling as a methodology whereby an in-depth study is done with information-rich cases (p. 230). The respondents were separated into two generations.

Cohort 1 was the initial sample consisting of six participants aged between 50 and 70 years, and were known as the elders. This generation has lived in pre-digital Pakistan and can remember how people used to speak in the past. The majority of this generation has also experienced major political shifts, including martial law and democratization.

The second cohort, Cohort 2, incorporated six participants aged between 18 and 30 years old, referred to as young adults. This generation grew up during the digital era and was more exposed to the media. They reflect modern linguistic activities and the changing identity constructions in modern society.

4.4 Data Collection Methods

4.4.1 Semi-Structured Interviews

Each participant was given semi-structured interviews (60 to 90 minutes) that were done in their favorite language (Punjabi or Urdu). According to Kvale and Brinkmann (2009), semi-structured interviews offer the option to standardize questions for comparison, while also providing flexibility to delve deeper into answers.

The questions used in interviews explored different dimensions of the participants' language experience. They paid attention to individual linguistic backgrounds and repertoires to comprehend past language usage. Also, the questions will bring forth the perceptions of language change, asking participants to describe how they felt the language usage changed over the generations. Language ideologies and attitudes were also investigated in the study, which examined the participants' beliefs and opinions concerning language. Moreover, the interview covered language use in various social situations, e.g., how the participants had to alter their language depending on the context or audience. Lastly, the effects of media consumption on language use were analysed, focusing on how exposure to various media sources impacts the participants' language practices.

The historical study used different sources to follow the linguistic culture of the Khawaja Sira community. It contained works from Mughal times that mentioned the community and their use of language, providing information about their past existence and activities. There were also reports and legal works on the administration during the colonial period, in which the community was viewed and recorded by the British. The post-independence government reports and policy documents were also examined to determine the changing status and treatment of the Khawaja Sira community in relation to the development of Pakistan. Lastly, academic historical reports were considered to gather academic views on the linguistic and social history of the community over time.

4.4.2 Media Analysis

The media analysis concerned different types of media that involve or are connected with the Khawaja Sira community. It encompassed the analysis of the Pakistani film industry from the 1970s to the present, with a special focus on films featuring the characters of Khawaja Sira,

to see how they are represented in popular culture. Television dramas and talk shows have also been examined, and the authors showed how the community is represented in these shows. Also, the news media coverage was analyzed to determine how the Khawaja Sira community has been represented in mainstream media. Lastly, the content on social media that people create and discuss about the community was reviewed to learn how the community presents itself and how it is viewed online.

4.5 Data Analysis

A thematic analysis was used in accordance with the six-phase model proposed by Braun and Clarke (2006): familiarisation, initial coding, development of themes, reviewing the themes, definition of the themes, and writing a report. The method facilitates the process of identifying, analyzing, and reporting tendencies in data.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

The rights of the participants were safeguarded by obtaining ethical approval before the research began. Since the Khawaja Sira community is vulnerable, several ethical factors received particular attention. Informed consent was given, and all participants were informed of the research's purpose. All data collected was done anonymously and confidentially, so the identity of the respondents was not violated. The subjects were informed that they could withdraw from the study without any penalty. The study also emphasized respectful and non-judgmental interviewing to provide a safe and encouraging atmosphere for the participants. Besides, community consultation was conducted on the research framing and dissemination to ensure the research aligned with the community's interests and concerns.

4.7 Limitations

This paper admits that there are a number of limitations that can impact its results. The sample size is also small ($n = 12$), and this restriction prevents a broad generalisation of the findings, as it might not be a sufficient representation of the diversity in the Khawaja Sira community. Those results may not be applicable to other areas of Pakistan, where the culture and language might also differ. The textual analysis is based on historical sources from colonial and elite perspectives, which might have distorted or ignored some elements of community practices. Last but not least, the positionality of the researcher as a foreigner to the community can impact how the data is interpreted, potentially affecting the interpretation of the participants' experiences and their representation.

5. Findings and Analysis

5.1 HLP: The Persian Court Legacy

The study of historical sources and the accounts of the elders shows that the influence of the Persian language was still very strong on Khawaja Siras into the twentieth century, although Persian was officially supplanted as an administrative language in 1837.

Participant 1 (age 68) remembered: My guru would teach us some words and phrases in Persian. These were the words of our ancestors who were in the courts, she said. It was by the use of such words that we understood that we were not ordinary people-- we had history, we had culture.

This is a testament that aligns with historical records. As observed by Lal (1994), despite the fall in Mughal dominance, language markers defining their court associations, such as Persian words for ranks, rituals, and social hierarchy, continued to be used in hijra communities.

Older respondents indicated that they were aware of Persian-origin terms to denote:

- Classification in the society (nayak, chela, dai).
- Rituals (reet, dastoor)
- Formulae of blessing and cursing (dua, baddua).
- Aesthetic/cultural ideas (adab, tameez, tehzeeb)

Participant 3 (age 62) clarified: When I was young, the elders used to speak differently. I did not understand what they said — Persian words, Urdu words. They claimed that words were powerful. When you blessed somebody in Persian, it carried more. When you swore in Persian, they were trembling with it.

However, this linguistic capital had begun to decline in the middle of the twentieth century. As Rahman (2002) explains, the linguistic hierarchies developed during colonialism, where English was the supreme language, Urdu in the middle, and regional languages at the bottom, marginalized both Persian and the populations linked to it.

5.2 The Transition to Punjabi Vernacular

All the respondents, irrespective of age, said that Punjabi is the most common language of day-to-day communication among the community. However, a significant difference in Punjabi usage between generations emerged.

Participants of older age explained how it was gradually changing:

Participant 2 (age 65): "During my childhood days, we used to speak Urdu in the dera [communal living place] at home. The Punjabi was on the street to deal with the customers. However, gradually, even at home, the Punjabi became more widespread. The younger girls did not want to speak Urdu. That sounded funny, too fancy, they said.

Participant 5 (age 58): "The world is different. No one was concerned with Persian or official Urdu anymore. We had to speak Punjabi to survive, to earn money. When you are dancing at weddings or begging at the traffic lights, you need something that people recognize at first sight.

The young respondents were quite unfamiliar with the Persian heritage:

Participant 7 (age 24): "Persian? I don't know any Persian. Why would I? That's ancient history. We are Punjabis since we reside in Punjab. It's practical."

Participant 9 (age 28): street language- Punjabi with our own flavor. We have developed our own language, known among people as the Khawaja Sira language. It is neither pure Punjabi nor pure Urdu; it is our mixture.

This testament is what Silverstein (2003) refers to as the indexical order, or the process through which the forms of language turn into an index of the social identities. The Punjabi

Khawaja Sira style, characterized by specific intonation patterns, vocabulary, and code-mixing, has evolved into an indexical signifier of community identity.

5.3 Motives of Vernacularisation.

5.3.1 Socio-political Marginalisation

The criminalisation of the community by the colonialists, followed by its social marginalisation, broke down the traditional structures of knowledge transmission. Participant 4 (age 66) described the situation after independence: No one was interested in us. We lost our place in society. When pushed to the periphery, your language too gets marginalised.

The relationship of social and linguistic marginalisation is well established. Bourdieu (1991) states that linguistic capital is not equally shared in society, and the less powerful ones speak less prestigious forms of the language.

5.3.2 Economic Necessity

Furthermore, economic survival was a key motivator highlighted by all participants.

Participant 8 (22 years old): "Speaking at crossroads or at weddings when you are begging people, you must speak the language that makes the difference. Punjabi works. Street Punjabi with a feeling, with drama - that is the way people react.

Participant 10 (age 26): "We all live on performance, whether it is dancing, blessing, or cursing. We must talk melodramatically, emotionally. Punjabi helps us to express more. Formal Urdu is not touching; it is hard and dry.

This aligns with the results of Gal (1979), who conducted a study revealing that language shift is most often economically motivated, with speakers engaging in linguistic varieties that can open access to economic resources.

5.3.3 Educational Exclusion

Additionally, the majority of participants were also poorly educated, with only three out of twelve having completed primary school. Lack of education restricted exposure to formal Urdu, cutting off chances of learning Persian.

Participant 11 (age 21): "I did not attend the school. Teachers would not accept us, and students will scoff at us. I would not learn to speak proper Urdu or English. I speak the language I learned in the street- Punjabi.

According to the records of Kausar et al., (2024), transgender people in Pakistan are discriminated against in educational institutions, and 71 per cent of them report harassment that compelled them to stop their studies.

5.3.4 Generational Rupture

Another major discovery is the break in the language flow between generations. Conventional guru-chela (teacher-disciple) modes of teaching language and culture have been undermined.

Participant 1 (age 68): "In the olden days, a guru would teach her chela all of that, how to speak, as well as how to dress, as well as how to act. Today, young girls are taught through television and social media. They have no reverence for the ways of the old."

Participant 9 (age 28): The elderly want us to talk the way they used to talk, but the times have shifted. We have to adapt. We acquire education through one another, through the media, and through the street.

Such a break in the generations corresponds with the concept of intergenerational dislocation described by Fishman (1991), when the process of interrupting the transmission of minority languages leads to rapid language shift.

5.3.5 Media Influence

Moreover, the media emerged as a source of influence on the linguistic practices of all younger participants, though this influence was ambivalent.

Participant 7 (age 24) reported:

In films and plays, they always show us conversing in a particular manner: very Punjabi, very dramatic, using some expressions. They want us to speak like that, so we sometimes do.

Participant 12 (age 19) noted:

Everything has been transformed by social media. Now we are able to create our own content and present ourselves the way we are. However, Punjabi is most effective even online. It is more like us, more real.

5.4. Ideology and Construction of Identity through Language

Within this context, the respondents expressed complicated and even conflicting ideologies of language.

5.4.1 Nostalgia for Lost Prestige

Elderly participants showed nostalgia for the language habits that are associated with a higher social status.

Participant 3 (age 62) observed:

When we spoke Urdu, people believed we were well-educated and well-bred. Today, when we talk Punjabi street language, they believe that we are vulgar and uneducated. We lost respect by losing our language.

This indicates the concept of iconization as described by Irvine and Gal (2000), where linguistic elements that index social groups transform into iconic representations of the necessary nature of these groups.

5.4.2 Authenticity and Street Credibility

The younger participants related the Punjabi vernacular to resistance and authenticity.

Participant 8 (age 22) stated:

It is real to speak Punjabi, authentic. Had I talked fancy Urdu, they would assume that I am making an attempt to be what I am not. This is what we are- street people, survival people.

Participant 10 (age 26) added:

“Our Punjabi is our identity. It's raw, it's real, it's powerful. We are not acting like good society ladies. We Khawaja Siras have our own language, our own style.

These descriptions demonstrate Bucholtz (2011) idea of authentication, where speakers use linguistic resources to build identities perceived as authentic in specific social situations.

5.4.3 Strategic Code-Switching

A few respondents showed advanced code-switching behaviors wherein they used dissimilar varieties of language as it suited them.

Participant 6 (age 54) explained:

When I address educated ones, NGO workers, I use Urdu. When I am at a wedding, I speak in Punjabi. I get confused about everything when I am with my community. It relies on the circumstances and what I wish to accomplish.

The present strategic use is consistent with the markedness model presented by Myers-Scotton (1993), which suggests that speakers make rational decisions about language varieties based on the social meanings they wish to index.

5.5 Media Representations and Linguistic Stereotyping

The review of Pakistani media showed that the coverage of Khawaja Sira and their language habits has had stable tendencies.

5.5.1 Cinema (1970s-1990s)

The traditional depiction of Khawaja Sira characters in early Pakistani films was as comic relief. The study of movies, including *Maula Jatt* (1979) and *International Gorillay* (1990), revealed the following characteristics:

- Women overemphasized linguistic characteristics.
- Punjabi-dominant dialogue.
- Stereotypical expressions and words.
- Linguistic transgression to a comic effect.

Khan (2016) notes that such representations solidified the transgender person stereotypes and presented them as comedic through the use of words that were simultaneously feminine and vulgar.

5.5.2 Television (2000s-present)

There has been an aspect of growth in the representation of television dramas:

The Khawaja Sira character of *Khuda Mera Bhi Hai* (2016) was sympathetic, spoke standard Urdu, and was not portrayed with stereotypical language, unlike the language representation in previous productions.

The linguistic representations were less overt in the article *Dil Na Umeed Toh Nahi* (2021), with Khawaja Sira characters code-switching to Urdu or Punjabi according to the social situation.

5.5.3 News Media

Their standard Urdu reporter narration was usually reported in Punjabi or a colloquial Urdu version. Such framing of language makes the community an other even during sympathetic reporting.

5.5.4 Social Media

The last few years have seen Khawaja Siras producing their own content in the media. The retrospective of the TikTok and YouTube content showed:

- Punjabi language use is mostly dominant.
- Invention of a unique style of lingo and catchphrases.
- Mischievous antics in stereotypes.
- Employment of words to declare agency and presence.

Participant 12 (age 19) remarked:

Anywhere on TikTok, I speak Punjabi since the videos get watched. However, I also show our power, our sense of humor, and our culture. It is not a question of being ashamed; it is a question of being proud of who we are.

6. Discussion

6.1 Vernacularization as Loss and Adaptation

Linguistic change of the Khawaja Sira people signifies the loss and adaptation. The replacement of Persian and official Urdu represents a loss of the language capital and historic prestige. The acceptance of Punjabi vernacular, in its turn, refers to adaptive resilience and pragmatism towards changed social and economic conditions. The theory of vernacularization, according to Pollock (2011), argues that such a process is never mere decline but, to a large extent, it entails the creative usage of new language resources as a means of conveying identity and resistance. This creative adaptation can be seen in the development of a unique intonation, vocabulary, and affective performance in the form of the Khawaja Sira Punjabi.

6.2 Ideology of Language and Social Positioning

The language ideologies portrayed by the participants involve complex social positioning negotiations. The nostalgia of the old participants of Persian and Urdu can be explained by internalisation of linguistic hierarchies, which make them markers of culture and respectability. They feel a loss of prestige, which is similar to the marginalisation of the community. Conversely, the fact that the younger participants support Punjabi vernacular as authentic and authoritative is consistent with the idea of oppositional identity construction by Bucholtz (2011), whereby stigmatized linguistic practices are strategically applied and used as indicators of resistant authenticity. This generational deviation is an indication of changing approaches to negotiating marginality.

Nevertheless, linguistic authenticity is forced over social legitimacy because of the stigmatisation of Punjabi vernacular in the larger Pakistani society. Bourdieu (1991) notes that those who own stigmatized linguistic varieties are usually in a situation of a twofold bind; by claiming to be real, they maintain their marginalisation, whereas by taking prestigious varieties, they are thought to be inauthentic.

6.3 Indexicality and Indexicality Performance

The results shed light on the way indexical processes work in the construction of identity. Certain linguistic characteristics, such as phonological, lexical, and pragmatic, are now indexical of Khawaja Sira identity. These attributes are not only enforced in media stereotyping but also tactically utilized by members of the community. This complexity can be explained with the help of Silverstein (2003) idea of indexical order. First-order indexicality entails a direct connection between language forms and social situations (e.g., Punjabi vernacular indexing street l.e.c. activities). These forms are ideologically linked to associations (e.g., Punjabi vernacular indexing vulgarity, authenticity, or resistance). Third-order indexicality is meta-pragmatic indexicality and strategic manipulation of these associations. The participants were highly aware of the third-order indexical and used different forms of language consciously to achieve a particular social impact. The practice confronts the naive accounts of linguistic loss or decline, and shows complex transactions of identity and agency.

6.4 Media as Site of Struggle

Media representations become important points of resistance to language practices that are contested, stereotyped, and sometimes defied. The stereotyping of language and social stigmatization have been caused by the consistent depiction of Khawaja Siras using exaggerated Punjabis as comic characters. However, the ongoing shift towards more subtle representation and the introduction of media created by community members can indicate that linguistic reclamation is possible. According to Bucholtz (2011), the media may be used as tools of linguistic subordination and means of language resistance (p. 276).

This duality is seen in the TikTok phenomenon of younger Khawaja Siras. Though they mostly adhere to stereotypical linguistic practices, they also position themselves to declare agency, demonstrate talent, and subvert stigma through the platforms. This echoes the idea of grassroots literacy as coined by Blommaert (2010), in which new media technologies are used to create alternative discourses that challenge existing representations (p. 193).

6.5 Theoretical Implications

The study is relevant to the theory of vernacularisation as it shows how this process is carried out among the marginalised population experiencing various types of exclusion. In contrast to classical instances of vernacularisation where a body of cosmopolitan languages is replaced by a body of regional literatures, in the Khawaja Sira case, the elite languages are replaced by the stigmatized vernaculars in circumstances of social marginalisation (Pollock, 2011). This highlights the need to include aspects of power disparities in vernacularisation models and understand that vernacularisation can be a process of cultural affirmation or a force of language reorientation through social marginalization.

The results also contribute to the literature on language ideology and indexicality in the marginalised context. The tactical use of stigmatized language varieties as icons of genuine identity is illustrative of what Harnetty (1991) refers to as fractal recursivity - oppositions in one tier of social organisation are replicated in other tiers. The contrast between prestigious and vernacular languages overlaps with contrasts between communities that are included and

those that are excluded, between respectable and authentic, and between assimilation and resistance.

7. Conclusion

The linguistic reorientation of the Khawaja Sira community, with the replacement of the Persian courtly language by the Punjabi street lingo, is traced in this research due to the intricate multifaceted process of vernacularisation, which is conditioned by the socio-political marginalisation, economic need, and exclusion in education and generational break as well as media influence. The paper shows that language change in this community cannot be viewed solely as linguistic change; it needs to be placed in the context of broader processes of social change, power dynamics, and identity formation.

The loss and adaptation of Persian by Punjabi is symbolic. Although the community has lost linguistic capital related to courtly prestige, it has developed interesting linguistic activities that are pragmatically relevant to economic necessity and are proudly resistant to authenticity. The language ideologies indicate the differences between the generations: the older ones speak about the nostalgia of the lost prestige, and the younger ones value the authenticity of the vernacular.

The analysis of media emphasizes the importance of representation in the development of linguistic practices and stereotypes. The historically established linguistic stereotyping was supported by mainstream media, but new forms of media created by communities provide opportunities for stigma defiance and agency.

7.1 Implications

This study highlights two key implications for policy. First, inclusive educational policies should be implemented to ensure Khawaja Siras can access diverse linguistic resources without abandoning vernacular practices. Second, language rights must be recognized as fundamental human rights, and community-driven language study must be supported, not stigmatized.

For the community, the study identifies the crucial role of intergenerational dialogue for sustaining language and culture in changing times. Efforts to document Persian and Urdu traditions may support preservation and strengthen cultural identity among community members.

This study shows that new frameworks are needed to examine how vernacularisation reflects power imbalances and externally imposed linguistic changes. It also suggests that researching the linguistic practices of other marginalised groups can help develop more robust theories of language change under social isolation.

7.2 Future Research

- Further research ought to:
- Carry out longitudinal research on the linguistic variation over time.
- Compare the linguistic practices in the other Pakistani cities.
- Research into the linguistic aspect of Khawaja Sira rituals and ceremonies.

- Study online linguistic behaviours more thoroughly.
- Research into opportunities for language revitalisation and heritage conservation.

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