

## LINGUISTIC ETHNOCENTRISM OR LINGUISTIC PLURALISM: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE ATTITUDES AMONG PAKHTOONS

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**Abstract:** Language reflects culture; it is a medium for studying various cultures .It plays an important role in constructing once social world. A community maintains its culture and ethnic identity by retaining their language. What people think about their language has a very serious effect on whether that language has any chance of surviving in this world of multilingual societies. Whether that language gets dominated by other languages interacting with it or dominates them, depends to a great extent on whether its native speakers have a negative or positive attitude towards it.

This study is about the attitude of Pakhtoons towards their language and culture. Pakhtoons are settled in the Gutlibag area of Ganderbal district of Jammu &Kashmir state. They speak a classified language Pashto that belongs to Iranian branch of Indo-European family of languages. The present study analyses the language attitude among Pakhtoons taking in account all sorts of behavior concerning language to be treated, including attitudes towards language maintenance and planning efforts. Moreover language attitude is studied as Pakhtoon's evaluation of the value of a language including its function, social status and development.

**Key Words:** Ethnocentrism, Pakhtoons, Language Attitude.

**Methodology:** The data for the study was elicited from a set of 100 informants belonging to different gender, age, and socio-economic group. The data was collected through a series of interviews where open ended questions were asked. A series of questions on different aspects of attitude were asked from every respondent, which were intended to reveal their attitude towards their mother tongue. All the respondents were the native speakers of Pashto, settled in Gutlibag area of Ganderbal district.

**Introduction:** What people think about their language has a very serious effect on whether that language has any chance of surviving in this world of multilingual societies. Whether that language gets dominated by other languages interacting with it or dominates them, depends to a great extent on whether its native speakers have a negative or a positive attitude towards it. Prestige plays a very important role in the interplay of languages in a multilingual community. Prestige, in turn, depends on different factors like whether a language has an official status, is used to write literature, or is used in mass media.

Liu J. (1990:125) discussed language attitudes in theory and practice. In this article, language attitude is defined as people's evaluation of the value of a language including its function, social status and development. Compared with other attitudes, language attitudes have three features: stability, flexibility, sociability. Attitudes towards a certain language correlate with the function of the language, ethnic identity of the speaker, economic status of the speaker of the language, orthography, population, geography, inter-ethnic relation and religion. 'Generally speaking people have better attitude

towards the ethnic languages with orthography than those who don't have one'.

Pakhtoons living in the Gultibagh area of Srinagar are the native speakers of Pashto. . This community is believed to have migrated in groups for business purposes and settled in low hilly areas of Kashmir from Alai region of Batagram district of Pakistan and Kabul (Afghanistan). Most of them are also proficient in Urdu and Kashmiri. Thus it can be said that Pashto community in Gutlibagh functions in three languages i.e. Pashto, Urdu and Kashmiri. All these languages are distributed along different domains

Pashto is confined to intra-community use and excluded from inter-community use where Urdu and Kashmiri dominate the scene. Even within the community the frequency of its use is observed to decrease from the most elderly to the youngest. Most of the people of the community when interviewed express the opinion that their native tongue should be preserved somehow, but at the same time want their children to concentrate on learning languages like Urdu and English.

In this study language attitudes were investigated in the broadest sense. A series of questions was asked from every respondent which was intended to reveal their attitude towards their mother tongue. The questions, along with a summary of the answers received, are listed below.

### **Is Your Mother Tongue Easy To Learn/ Speak?**

Majority of the respondents agreed that learning to speak their mother tongue is difficult. Except for a few OF and illiterate MF who thinks that their mother tongue is easy to acquire. The reason behind this may be their little or no exposure to other languages (Kashmiri/Urdu). It was also observed that Pakhtoons show a better proficiency in Kashmiri as

compared to the Kashmiri speaking people living in the same vicinity who hardly speak Pashto. This unanimous opinion expressed by the people of the community fits the obvious and generally known linguistic fact that people tend to acquire the ability to speak a language without effort if they are exposed to it on a daily basis. No amount of instruction or teaching can achieve the same effect. This generally known linguistic fact also points to a danger which the native tongue of the community faces. The people are not exposed only to their mother tongue on a daily basis, but also to dominant languages like Urdu, Kashmiri and English. This happens through mass-media and the different kinds of inevitable and necessary interaction with people of other speech communities. The people of the community learn to speak their mother tongue mostly because of their exposure to it at their homes.

**Can You Express Your Thoughts In Your Mother Tongue?**

All the respondents answered this question in the positive. However, it was observed that while the elders of the community rarely switched to other languages when talking to each other, the young members of the community frequently switched to words, phrases and whole sentences from other languages when talking to each other. This might indicate the facility of the elders with expressing their thoughts in their mother tongue and the lack of such facility in the younger members who have to seek help from other languages to express their thoughts. On the other hand, this might also indicate the lack of appropriate words and constructions in the mother tongue needed to refer to novel objects and ideas with which youth are much more likely to be acquainted than the elderly.

**Do You Accept Mixing Other Language Words With Your Mother Tongue?**

All the respondents answered negatively to this question. They do not accept mixing in Pashto. Speaking pure Pashto is of prime importance as Pashto is the identity of Pakhtoons.

It is observed that old informants believe that only pure Pashto should be spoken whereas the youth think that mixing is a good idea. Pure Pashto is also seen to be favored by informants with a high Pashto proficiency, and mixed Pashto by informants with higher Kashmiri proficiency.

However due to social mobility and language contact Pakhtoon also code switch and mix while speaking. The frequency with which these words and expressions are used varies along two dimensions: the dimension of gender and the dimension of age. The frequency decreases from males to females; and from the youth to the elderly.

**Given Opportunity, Would You Be Willing To Learn To Write In Your Mother Tongue?**

Majority of the respondents (both M/F) replied positively and showed their willingness to learn to write their mother tongue. Some expressed willingness to do so because they thought it would enrich their experience. Except for few men who preferred Arabic or English over Pashto. They believed that other languages like English, Urdu and Arabic would not only improve their chances of employment but also will improve their horizon of knowledge. Others expressed the opinion that it would be a waste of time and effort, because it would not in any way improve their chances of getting employed.

**Do You Think That Your Language Is Suited For Such Activities As Business, Schooling, Etc.?**

It was found that most of the respondents had never thought about whether their mother tongue would be up to the task of being employed as an official language or a medium of instruction in schools. Majority of the males responded negatively except for a few OM and YM who responded positively as they think Pashto is better than Kashmiri, Urdu, Pahari. Most of the females think that Urdu is better suited for performing activities like business, schooling etc. While as MF and OF think that Pashto is better than Kashmiri and Pahari. However, they expressed the opinion that using it to do business is possible as long as the party you are doing business with belongs to the same community. In cases where the other party belongs to some other community using the mother tongue is out of the question.

**Do You Think That Other Languages Are Easy To Learn?**

Most of the respondents think that other languages like Urdu, Kashmiri and Pahari are easy to learn. Some old females responded negatively as they believe that languages like Urdu and Kashmiri are difficult to learn. The reason behind this is their illiteracy and lack of social mobility. It was also observed that for the literate sect of the society (M/F) learning other languages was easy. They all agreed that English language is the most difficult to learn except for younger generation. The following table shows the level of difficulty in learning some other language as per the responses obtained by the investigators from the people of the community.

**Table 3.21. Level of Difficulty in Learning Other Languages**

Difficulty level	Difficult	Easy
Kashmiri		
Urdu		
English		
Pahari		

The degree of difficulty of learning a language is directly proportional to the degree of familiarity with it. It means the people of the community find English the most difficult to learn because it is rarely used in their surroundings. Similarly, they find Kashmiri the least difficult to learn because it is used on a daily basis in their surroundings.

**Do You Think That One Language Is Enough For All Types Of Usages?**

Most of the respondents responded to this question in the negative. In their opinion, different languages

are suitable for different settings. Majority of the males and females believe that apart from Pashto, Urdu and Kashmiri should also be used. A few literate males suggested the use of English as well. Some illiterate MF and OF are with the view that Pashto is enough for all types of usages. English and Urdu are suitable for schools and in formal situations. Pashto is suitable for domestic and intra-community use. Kashmiri and Urdu are suitable for inter-community use. The following table matches languages with their suitable settings.

**Table 3.22: Language Match with the Suitable Settings**

Settings Language	Intra-community		Inter-community	
	Formal	Informal	Formal	Informal
Pashto	✓	✓		
Kashmiri				✓
Urdu			✓	✓
English			✓	

**Do You Think That Learning Other Languages Improves Your Knowledge?**

All of the respondents agreed that learning other languages improves knowledge. Majority of the males think that learning Arabic and Urdu improves their knowledge of religious scriptures. Learning Kashmiri helps them to communicate with ease. Learning of English not only improves their knowledge but also provides them with various job opportunities. Moreover knowing more than one language adds to their prestige. The following table shows whether the respondents think their knowledge improves or not by a particular language.

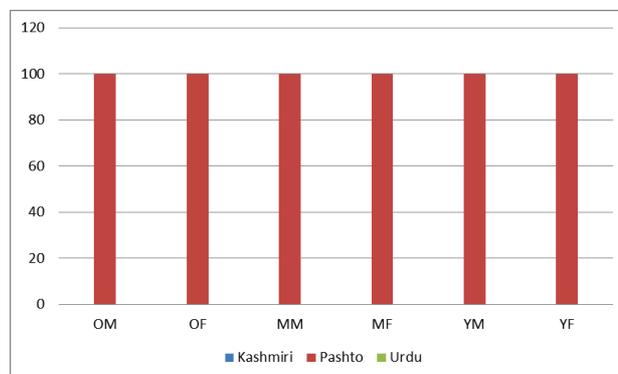
**What Language (S) Do You Want Your Children To Know Well?**

Apart from Pashto majority of the people want their children to learn English, Urdu and Kashmiri. Some respondents also show the desire for learning Arabic and Persian. Besides sticking to Pashto language and maintaining the Pashto identity, the Pakhtoons want their generations to prosper and flourish. English is learnt in order to get suitable jobs. Kashmiri is learnt to interact with the Kashmir's. Arabic is learnt for Islamic purpose. English and Urdu are learnt for formal interactions.

**Do You Prefer To Marry A Person Who Does Not Know Your Language?**

Most of the respondents replied negatively to this question except for few YF and YM who replies positively. The reason may be their increasing social mobility and exposure. It was seen that Pakhtoons show a very positive attitude towards their language. They believe that the younger generation will surely carry forward their language and it will be used for generations. Pakhtoons also believe that no doubt

their younger generation may learn other languages but they will always maintain their identity. They want their children to speak Pashto the same way as they do. It was observed that all the informants consider Pashto as the language they feel most comfortable with. The Pakhtoons prefer to communicate in Pashto in order to preserve their language and maintain their identity.

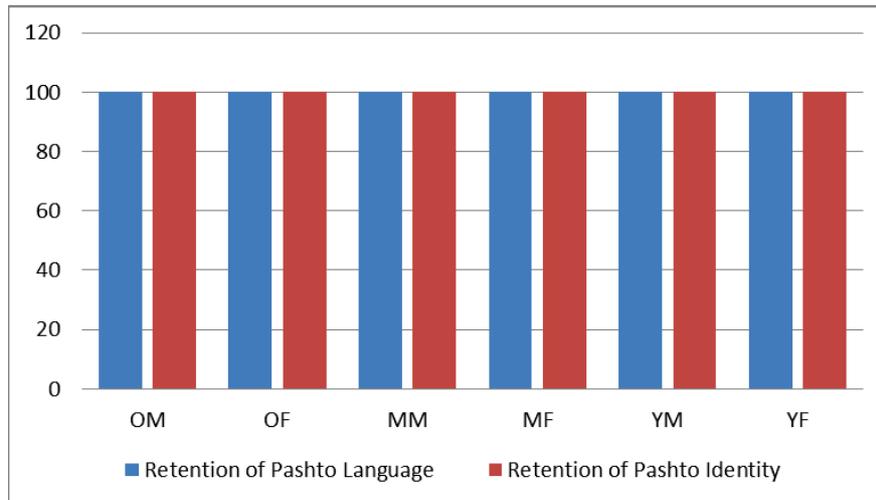


**Fig 3.10. Language Most Comfortable With**

There is an overwhelming response by the informants in favor of retaining Pashto language. This appears to be contradictory to overall linguistic preferences, most of their attitudes and views. It appears that Pashto is the language 'closest to heart' with the informants appearing to have an emotional attachment with it. It is clear that among the all the age groups, nobody wants to give up Pashto language and adopt some other one. When the informants were asked why they do not want to give the Pashto language and adopt some other language. They have gave a simple answer, they are known by their own

language throughout the world, also they told that language comes before religion, and so if somebody wants go close to God, he/she should go close to his

mother tongue, so that they can find the ultimate goal.



**Fig 3.11. Retention of Pashto language and Pashto Identity**

From the graph it is also clear that their view about the retention of their identity is very strong as all the groups have supported the retention of their identity 100%. As per them, their culture, religion and language is their identification, so they do not want to lose it. During the field survey it has been observed that the normal mode of inter-Pakhtoon communication is through Pashto. However there is a shift in language when they converse with Kashmiris where they use Urdu or Kashmiri. In the case of language use, Kashmiri is given the last preference for communication as compared to Urdu and Kashmiri. When we see the linguistic scene in these Pashto communities, Pashto is the language in which majority of the speakers feel most comfortable. But across time, with frequent use and exposure to Urdu, a trend is observed where Urdu seems to be gaining the status of ‘comfortable’ language for quite a number of speakers. As it has been seen during the field survey, these people are more comfortable in Urdu than in Kashmiri. With non-native speakers of Pashto, their first preference is to talk in Urdu rather than in Kashmiri. Among them Urdu has gained an important status because of the belief that Urdu is a language of Islam, which is important here because all the population of Pashto community is Muslim by faith. The belief in favor of Urdu is due to general lack of Arabic proficiency (Arabic proficiency, atleast to some extent is essential for Muslim faith), and because most of the Islamic literature is available in Urdu language and these people feel themselves comfortable with this language. Even in Friday prayers, Imams’ are reciting *Khutba* both in Pashto as well as in Urdu.

It was seen that the family’s occupation plays an important role for speaking the pure Pashto. Families which are having higher job status do not have strong positive attitudes towards speak pure Pashto and the families which are working within the Pakhtoon community have positive attitude towards pure Pashto because they are not having much exposure of other languages. Also, it is clear that in families which have good Urdu fluency, there are chances to speak mixed Pashto because good fluency in Urdu indicates education and thereby borrowing words from other languages which they are incorporating in their own mother tongue. The informants who have more visual exposure in other languages do not claim to speak pure Pashto and their views about medium of instruction are that medium of instruction should be English.

Young generation, speaking mixed variety of Pashto shows an increasing trend which can be attributed to higher literacy among the comparatively younger generations and higher opportunities of exposure to the other languages, be they in the education domain or media, etc. Regarding the media, the past couple of decades have observed a greater expansion in terms of newspapers along with an increase in the number of languages in which they are published. In the television sector, the past couple of years have witnessed a great increase in the number of T.V. channels especially cable T.V. These factors have also had their influence in the comparatively small and cut-off pockets of these Pashto speaking communities, and have influenced, consciously or subconsciously the language choice, linguistic repertoire and linguistic preferences and attitudes of individuals and thereby the community.

It was observed that if a person knows Urdu and Kashmiri as well, he will surely code switch while conversing. This was observed when the Pashto speakers were discussing topics pertaining to science, politics, religion etc. Overall, it can be said that in the Pashto societies in Kashmir borrowing normally occurs. The reason might be the absence of Pashto as the medium of instruction and thereby lack of knowledge of Pashto words in the above mentioned domains.

Hence the attitude of people towards their language and other languages etc. were studied. It was seen

that attitude differs from situation to situation. Apart from having a positive attitude towards their language they also seek to learn other languages like English and Urdu for various purposes. Pakhtoons believe that their language .Pashto is passed down to them by their ancestors and it is a vital symbol to differentiate them from other groups living in the same territory having the same life style. So in a way or so Pakhtoons have somehow maintained their prevalence and continued to be a unique community with their own social, cultural and linguistic identities.

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