

ATTITUDES TOWARDS LANGUAGE VARIATION AND CHANGE: A CASE OF MULTAN DISTRICT

* ¹Ali Ammar, ²Dr. Zia Ahmad, ³Sidra Iman

Abstract

This paper examines the attitudes towards variations in various languages spoken in Multan district of Pakistan in order to find out how linguistic variations and changes are taken by the speakers which are leading to the specific ethnic attitudes towards specific languages. This paper also explores the attitudes of people towards influencing languages, which in the case of our target sample is mostly English. Linguistic variation can also account for social variations. The attitudes of the speakers towards linguistic variation play a major role in accepting social variations (Gumperz, 1958). We developed questionnaire on which participants rated the 15 adjective pairs regarding variations and changes in value, sound and structure on 5-point bipolar semantic differentials by Osgood *et al.* (1957) and applied Attitudes Towards Languages Scale (AToL) developed by Schoel *et al.* (2012) to explore and compare the attitudes of 300 participants via stratified random sampling towards major languages spoken in Multan i.e. Siraiki, Punjabi and Urdu, their influences vice versa and by English. This research also evaluates the hypothesis that if linguistic variations and changes are being welcomed, these may lead to the death of certain languages in the backdrop of extremely influential and officially propagated language.

Key Words: AToL, language change, language attitudes, language death, linguistic variance

Introduction

Multan is a multilingual city located in the Southern Punjab in Pakistan. Majority of the residents are Siraiki speaking people (52%) but the city being the major urban attraction, there are also Punjabi (25%) and Urdu speaking people (18%). In their daily businesses and meetings, there are constant interactions bringing about linguistic changes particularly in the sounds and structure of the languages. Added to this fact is the use of English language at all academic and official levels which is also a major source of changes in the local languages. For researchers on multilingualism and multiculturalism, it is a good breeding ground of data. Therefore, this area is selected to study the attitudes of the people towards these linguistic changes. Being one of the oldest cities of saints

¹PhD Scholar, Institute of Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan, Pakistan

²Associate Professor of English, Institute of Social Sciences, Bahauddin Zakariya University, Multan

³Assistant Professor of English, Pakistan Institute of Engineering and Technology, Multan, Pakistan

in the subcontinent, it also attracts many tourists from adjacent areas who are also a source of influence on languages. Based on mother language bias, there are also ethnic attitudes towards other linguistic communities. Yet these languages are being constantly influenced by each other and English (Grierson, 1961; Wagha, 1990; Latif, 2012).

Holmes (2008) states that a positive attitude towards a language is necessary to make it work as an important part of the socio-cultural identity of a nation. Positive attitude and distinct features of a language are thus major necessary factors for a language to have a socio-cultural status in the mainstream of a nation. Language variation, though a natural process, can also be fought by status and corpus and methodological language planning (Crystal, 2003). The study of the attitude towards language variation hence becomes important to evaluate, understand and recommend as to how the speakers may develop their attitude to preserve their socio-cultural identity. This paper explores how speakers are taking this language variation and change. One sub-objective of this exploration is to evaluate the awareness about language variation in Multan.

Language Variation and Attitude Testing

Sapir (1921) was the first to mention that language variation is common knowledge. Language variation has now become an important topic in sociolinguistics and is being systematically and scientifically studied (Holyk, 2014). Even speakers bring variations in their language for their different communicative needs in different contexts (Meyerhoff, 2009). Variation in language occurs at all levels from phonetics to syntax (Holyk, 2014). Researchers often study linguistic variables and co-variants influenced by various factors. Yet, linguistic variable is the basic unit of study (Wolfram, 2006). Crystal (2003) argues that language change cannot be normally predicted. However, Croft (2000) argues that the change in language exists and that the areas of language that are changing can be identified. Language change starts from language variation (Biber, 1988). Hence, the study of linguistic variables becomes central. Labov (2001) argued that language changes are inherent but later on it was argued that external factors were also greatly responsible for language variation and change (Fasold, 1991).

Studies on attitudes towards language normally focus on two main approaches in psychology i.e. mentalist and behaviourist approaches.

Mentalists define attitude as the response to some internal stimulus (Williams, 1976) while the behaviorists agree that attitude is the response to some social situation that can be observed externally, but one attitude cannot be the basis to predict another in some other situation (Fasold, 1991). However, in these two approaches one important point is common that attitude is the response to some sort of stimuli either produced within the brain or from social setting. Even silence is a response, and not a mild one at all. Petty and Cacioppo (1981) state that attitude is negative or positive feeling about some situation. The studies about the measurement of attitudes are based on the behaviourist as well as mentalist view but most of these are based on mentalist attitude (Appel & Muysken, 1987; Baker, 1992; Bosch & De-Klerk, 1996; Cargile & Giles, 1998; El-Dash & Busnardo, 2001; Gao & Zhou, 2000; Hoare, 2001; Hoare & Coveney, 2000; Hussein & El-Ali, 1989; Ioratim-Uba, 1995, 2001; Lawson & Sachdev, 1997, 2000; Long, 1999; Mgbo-Elue, 1987; Moreau, 1990; Payne, Downing & Fleming, 2000; Pieras, 2000; Thibault & Sankoff, 1999; Woolard & Gahng, 1990; Zhou, 1999). Mentalists argue that attitude falls somewhere between stimulus and response.

Campbell and Stanley (1963) regard attitudes as “acquired behavioural dispositions”. Some attitudes can change and some cannot (Eagly & Chaiken, 1993). Fasold (1991) also argues that the language attitudes should not be limited to the language only but also to its speakers. Hence, language attitude becomes a broader term that also includes the attitude/s towards the speakers of the language. It goes from entity to the speakers. Gumperz (1958), therefore, aptly states that linguistic variation can also account for social variation. Change in language can also influence social changes including culture. Change in language is mostly silent and is realized over a long period of time if understood.

Methodology

Under mentalist approach mainly two methods are adopted to measure the linguistic attitudes of the speakers i.e. questionnaire and matched guise techniques. For the current paper questionnaire is being adopted. Direct questionnaire methods as well as indirect methods have been used to measure the attitudes of the speakers (Gal, 1979; Fishman, 1971; Williams, 1976; Lieberman, 1975; Strongman & Woosley, 1967). For the current research, we have selected the latest Attitude towards

Languages Scale by Schoel *et al.* (2012) as it has been validated and rechecked in various tests (see Schoel *et al.*, 2012).

For this there was an important task of making the speakers understand that there are definite and real changes occurring in their languages. There were two groups of participants based on age differences. One group consisted of youngsters aged between 20 to 30 while the other group consisted of participants aged above 45. The mother tongue speakers were given certain pieces of poetry and prose in pure as well as changed language. They were requested to read those works and then answer the questionnaire based on Attitudes towards Languages Scale (ATOL). The questionnaire consisted of 18 questions five of which assessed the attitude towards value of language change, five for sound and five for attitude towards structural changes. The questions were developed on semantic differentials to be rated through Likert Scale (Osgood *et al.*, 1957). The table for semantic differentials is given below:

Factor 1 (Value)	Factor 2 (Sound)	Factor 3 (Structure)
beautiful-ugly	round-angular	systematic-unsystematic
pleasant-unpleasant	flowing-abrupt	structured-unstructured
appealing-abhorrent	soft-harsh	logical-illogical
graceful-clumsy	smooth-raspy	precise-vague
elegant-inelegant	fluent-choppy	unambiguous-ambiguous

Table 1: Semantic Differentials for Language Attitude Testing (Schoel *et al.*, 2012)

There were also three other questions related to the influencing language and the acceptance of change. All the answers were quantitatively analyzed using SPSS software.

Results and Discussion

The responses to the questions regarding attitudes towards language variation and change were markedly different owing to the differences of age. The youngsters, aged between 20 to 30 years, were more in the positive towards the changes in their mother language in value, sound and structure as compared to the people aged above 45 years. Prior to giving responses they were briefed in detail about the changes in the

value, sounds and structure of their language with examples from the texts written in old condition of the mother tongue and in the latest condition of the mother tongue. This briefing was one of the most difficult tasks of this research work as most of the subjects were not sure of the minute differences in language variation and changes nor of adjectival pairs of the semantic differentials. Therefore, for this research work, a number of group members were chosen to collect the data. Of all the 300 samples of the youngsters, most were positive in value, sound and structural changes in their mother tongue which is precisely summarized in the following table:

Factors	Semantic Differentials	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %
Value	beautiful-ugly	70%	4%	26%
	pleasant-unpleasant	66%	17%	17%
	appealing-abhorrent	52%	28%	20%
	graceful-clumsy	45%	23%	32%
	elegant-inelegant	50%	20%	30%
Sound	round-angular	59%	16%	25%
	flowing-abrupt	55%	15%	30%
	soft-harsh	62%	13%	25%
	smooth-raspy	60%	26%	14%
	fluent-choppy	68%	16%	16%
Structure	systematic-unsystematic	66%	22%	12%
	structured-unstructured	68%	22%	12%
	logical-illogical	52%	23%	25%
	precise-vague	62%	8%	30%
	unambiguous-ambiguous	64%	15%	21%

Table 2: Youngsters' (aged 20 to 30 years) Positive/Negative response percentage towards language change and variation

When asked about the value of language variation in changes, the percentage of responses ranged from 45 % to 70%. 70% of the participants replied that the changes were beautiful, while 66%

considered the changes pleasant, 52% appealing, 45% graceful and 50% elegant. These percentages signify that the changes occurring in the mother tongue are being considered valuable and most of the participants were interested to continue with these valuable additions. Language variation and change, and the value given to changes the youngsters endorsed, also refer to the fact that there would be a continuous acceptability by them. So far as the resistance is concerned, it would be limited to 17 to 32 percent of the young people which is very less as compared to the ratio of acceptability. Such acceptance by the youngsters also accounts for the transfer of the changes to their next generations.

In the responses of the youngsters about attitude towards sound changes and variation in their mother tongue, the percentage varied from 52 to 68, which is still markedly high and denotes majority of their population. The adjective like 'round/angular', 'flowing/abrupt', 'soft/harsh', 'smooth/raspy' and 'fluent/choppy' needed hard work to be explained to the participant with examples. Yet most of the participants were positive about the language variation in sounds. The percentage of the rejection and resistance ranged between 14 to 25 years, which is very less as compared to the acceptability percentage, while 13 to 26 percent of the participants were neutral about this phenomenon. These markedly varied percentages signify that language variation and change at sound level is speedily increasing and is being accepted by the youngsters.

The last factor in the attitude testing towards language variation and change was that of structure. Almost the response percentage was the same. It ranged from 52 to 68 percent of the participants in the positive towards the five adjectival pairs 'systematic/unsystematic', 'structured/unstructured', 'logical/illogical', 'precise/vague' and 'unambiguous/ambiguous', while 8 to 22 percent of the participants were neutral about these changes. The rejection ratio ranged from 12 to 30 percent.

A language maintains its identity and importance for the speakers in the domain of value given to it, sounds that are maintained and the structure that is kept intact. In these spheres, the youngsters of Multan were evidently in the favour of changes and variation in their mother tongue signifying a wide gap in the attachment towards mother tongue. However, the responses of the older participants were completely the opposite. The figure percentages in the negative and positive attitude

differed denoting the persistence of the old remaining attached to their cultural heritage. The same number of educated participants belonging to various occupations in Multan district was asked the same questions. Their markedly opposite responses are summarized below:

Factors	Semantic Differentials	Positive %	Neutral %	Negative %
Value	beautiful-ugly	27%	2%	71%
	pleasant-unpleasant	19%	13%	68%
	appealing-abhorrent	23%	22%	55%
	graceful-clumsy	36%	15%	49%
	elegant-inelegant	35%	10%	55%
Sound	round-angular	30%	6%	64%
	flowing-abrupt	34%	7%	59%
	soft-harsh	28%	6%	65%
	smooth-raspy	16%	22%	62%
	fluent-choppy	17%	14%	69%
Structure	systematic-unsystematic	13%	20%	67%
	structured-unstructured	14%	16%	70%
	logical-illogical	28%	16%	55%
	precise-vague	34%	2%	64%
	unambiguous-ambiguous	26%	9%	65%

Table 3: Positive/Negative response percentage of the respondents above 45 years towards language change and variation

The positive attitude towards language variation and change of sound ranged between 19 to 36 percent, and for structure it went from 13 to 34 percent. However, the negative attitude for the factor of value remained between 49 to 71 percent, for sound between 59 to 69 percent and for structure between 55 to 70 percent while 2 to 22 percent of the participants were neutral in their responses. This situation is quite the reverse of the responses of the youngsters. It can lead to certain important assumptions. The basic implication is that the young are less concerned with language changes as compared to the old ones. Rather,

they are positive about the changes and the globalization of languages. The desire of being part of the greater whole is more visible in the youngsters as compared to the old ones.

Such differences in responses can also lead to the assumption that the awareness of linguistic cultural identity in Multan district comes at a much older age. Many factors like generation gap, educational values, cultural inputs in curricular and co-curricular activities, administrative policies and the like may be held responsible which need to be probed into scientifically in order to ascertain the exact reasons for the making of proper applicable policies to save the change in the cultural identities and ideologies of which language of any area is the carrier. When linguistic variation can lead towards attitude towards ethnic variation (Gumperz, 1958), the aforementioned attitudes of the youngsters can be assumed as the desire to be associated with the universal unified culture where all identities are incorporated into one.

In order to carry the debate further, we also asked three other questions. Question one was related to naming the influencing language. About 65 percent of the total participants named English and the most influencing language on the second position was Urdu. 30 percent participants thought Urdu is the most influencing language and 5 percent of the participants named other regional language like Punjabi and Siraiki to be the influencing language. The second question was related to the likeness of the influencing language: 79 percent of the young participants affirmed that they liked the influencing languages; the likeness percentage of the older participants was at 40. The third question was about the death of mother language and the availability of another language, and the response was strangely similar. 80 percent of the youngsters did not like the idea of the death of their mother tongue while 90 percent of the older participants had the same response. This similarity in response to the death of mother tongue and the availability of other substituting language can point to the assumption that there is still an innate desire of the participants to keep their mother tongue alive, a phenomenon that shows love for cultural symbols.

This situation of attitude towards language variation and change can lead to a big question with certain recommendations. If we have to preserve our cultural identities and ideologies, language being the key element here, there is a lot to be done in the development of attitude of

the speakers. Pakistani linguists, sociologists, scientists of cultural studies and psychologists face a threatening burden and pressure to transform the attitude of the people especially the youngsters. In the wake of the current global challenges for the third world countries, the reformative attitude, policies and steps are the need of the hour.

Conclusion

The current study was conducted to explore and compare the attitudes of the people of Multan towards variation and changes in the mother tongue in order to ascertain whether the regional languages are snailing towards death. The responses of the youngsters clearly indicated the welcoming of the changes while the strong opposition came from the older people aged above 45 years. This explorative study can lead to various assumptions like the slow overshadowing of other languages especially English on the local languages and the acceptance by the young ones. The presence of such attitude among the young ones is also the indicator that such ideas are ready to be transferred to the coming generation which is leading towards cultural change at massive level. At academic level, the assumption can be made about the phenomenon of differences in attitudes due to generation gap. However, with the language changes and variation, being in the continuous process, there is a danger of language substitution leading towards cultural displacement. Reformative steps are to be taken in serious note for the preservation of regional languages by developing them systematically to satisfy the demands of the current vibrant times.

References

- Bailey, C-J. N. (1973). *Variation and linguistic theory*. Washington, DC: Center for Applied Linguistics.
- Biber, D. (1988). *Variation across speech and writing*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Boix, E. (1993). *Triar no és trair*. Barcelona: Edicions 62.
- Campbell, D. T., and Stanley, J. (1963). *Experimental and quasi-experimental designs for research on teaching*. In N.L. Gage (Ed.) *Handbook of Research on Teaching*. (pp. 171-246). Chicago: Rand McNally & Company.
- Cohen, A. (1974). Mexican-American evaluation judgements about language varieties. *International journal of the sociology of language*, 3, pp. 33-52.
- Croft, W. (2000). *Explaining language change: An evolutionary approach*. London: Longman.
- Crystal, D. (2003). *A dictionary of linguistics & phonetics*. Malden/Oxford: Blackwell.
- Eagly, A. H., & Chaiken, S. (1993). *The psychology of attitudes*. Fort Worth, TX: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich.
- Fasold, R.W. (1991). The quiet demise of variable rules. *American speech*, 66, pp. 3- 21.
- Ferrer, R. C. and Sankoff, D. (2003). Identity as the primary determinant of language

- choice in Valencia. *Journal of sociolinguistics*, 7(1), pp. 50-64.
- Fishman, J. A. (1971). *Societal bilingualism: Stable and transitional*. In J. A. Fishman and R. L. Cooper (Eds.), *Bilingualism in the Barrio*. Bloomington, Indiana: Indiana University.
- Giles, H., & Niedzielski, N. (1998). Italian is beautiful, German is ugly. In L. Bauer & P. Trudgill (Eds.), *Language myths*, (pp. 85-93). New York, NY: Penguin Books.
- Grierson, G. (1961). *Linguistic survey of India*. Patiala, India: Language Department.
- Gumperz, J. J. (1958). *Language in social groups*. Stanford: Stanford University Press.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics*. Harlow: Pearson Longman.
- Holyk, S. (2014). *Language variation and grammatical change*. Uzhhorod: Uzhhorod National University.
- Labov, W. (2001). *Principles of linguistic change*. Oxford: Blackwell.
- Latif, A. (2012). *Phonemic inventory of Sirai language and acoustic analysis of voiced implosives*. CRULP Annual Student Report. Retrieved from http://www.cle.org.pk/Publication/Crulp_report/CR03_16E.pdf
- Lieberman, D. (1975). Language attitudes in St. Lucia. *Journal of cross-cultural psychology*, 4 (6), pp. 471-481.
- Meyerhoff, M. (2009). Sociolinguistic Variation and Change. In *Linguistics – encyclopedia of life support systems*, pp.202-224, Retrieved from <http://www.eolss.net/ebooklib>
- Osgood, C. E., Suci, G. J., & Tannenbaum, P. H. (1957). *The Measurement of meaning*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press.
- Petty, R. E., and Cacioppo, J. T. (1981). *Attitudes and persuasion: Classic and contemporary approaches*. Dubuque, IA: Wm C Brown.
- Pieras, F. (2000). *Social dynamics of language contact in Palma de Mallorca: Attitude and phonological transfer*. Unpublished dissertation. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University.
- Sankoff, D., Labov, W. & Kroch, A. (Eds.) (1989). *Language variation and change*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Sapir, E. (1921). *Language: An introduction to the study of speech*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, and Co.
- Schoel et al. (2012). Attitudes Towards Languages (ATOL) Scale: a global Instrument. *Journal of language and social psychology*. SAGE Publications, 32(1), pp. 21-45
- Strongman, K. T. and Woosley, J. (1967). Stereotyped reactions to regional accents. *British journal of social and clinical psychology*, 59(2), pp. 245-265.
- Thibault, P. and Sankoff, G. (1999). Evaluation of the French of English Speaking Montreal Youths by their French Speaking Peers. *Canadian modern language review*, 56(2), pp. 245-281.
- Williams, F. (1976). *Explorations of the linguistic attitudes of teachers*. Rowley, Massachusetts: Newbury House Publishers Inc.
- Wagha, M. A. (1990). *The development of the Sirai language in Pakistan*. Islamabad: Derawar Publications.
- Woolard, K. A. (1992). Language Ideology: Issues and Approaches. *Pragmatics*, 2(3), pp. 235-50.
- Woolard, K. A. and Gahng, T-J. (1990). Changing language policies and attitudes in autonomous Catalonia. *Language in society*, 19, pp. 311-330.
- Wolfram, W. (2006). Variation and Language, an Overview, In *Encyclopedia of language and linguistics*, 2nd ed., pp. 333 – 341, Retrieved from http://www.ncsu.edu/linguistics/docs/pdfs/walt/Language_variation-sgl.pdf