

**OBSOLETE WORDS IN URDU
LANGUAGE: A FIELD STUDY OF
NATIVE URDU SPEECH COMMUNITY**

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Abstract

Urdu is a state language of Pakistan. It is a standardized register of Hindustani language and is used as a common language in Pakistan. Urdu is the executive language of six Indian regions. The study aims at investigating that how language is dying out within the language and how the words are obsoleted from Urdu language as well. Population for this research containing speakers who are having Urdu as their first language and they are 11-25 years old, 26-40 years old, 41-55, 60 years old and above. The sample was based on 20 people in each group. The data was collected via wordlist of 60 selected words and then at the end, interviews were conducted to decipher the language contrition in Urdu language. Triangulation approach was applied in data analysis. Data of 65 people was analyzed by using statistical tests in order to draw comparison between the performance of native and non-native speakers of Urdu language. Their motivation was tested as well. Results showed that in native speech community, the speakers with age group of 41-55 years are familiar with a lot of words along with its accurate meanings and usage and the many words along with its correct meanings and correct usage and the correspondence was also agreeable in the group of participants with the age range of 26-40 years. However, the group of 11-25 years old participants were lagged behind in the ratio set by other groups.

The language is not inherited to the coming generation because the parents of this particular age group themselves did not acquire Urdu as their native language. Language is not actually authenticated in modern era that is why it is transforming. There are several words from other languages that are substituting the actual words of Urdu language. Speakers are using those lexis according to their feasibility also. Now it is required is to authenticate the language with its real essence to prove its relic.

Keywords: *Language attrition, obsolete words, lingua franca, language documentation*

1. INTRODUCTION

Urdu is a state language of Pakistan. It is a standardized register of Hindustani language and is historically connected with the Muslim community of Hindustani region. It is also a commonly used language in Pakistan. Urdu is the national language of six Indian states. Proper geographical description of this language is difficult yet its antiquity is unquestionable. However, awareness of Urdu permits people to speak it with multiple users. Urdu is on the fourth number among widely spoken languages in the world after English, Spanish and Mandarin.

Because of the difficulty in distinguishing between Urdu and Hindi speakers in India and Pakistan, as well as estimating the number of people for whom Urdu is a second language, the estimated number of speakers is uncertain and controversial. , Urdu has become native language wherever it is spoken even in Pakistan as well. In Pakistan many changes has occurred in Urdu in and then lately has incorporated and borrowed certain words from local languages such as Pashto, Punjabi and Sindhi. This is a clear indication that many locals who could do some service to their native language failed to come up to the occasion, that means if not properly maintained this language might recede to back drop of history and eventually die. Pakistan is a state that has affected due to colonialism. That is why Pakistan left with no option as a newly established state except to accept the language of great Britain or the language of the majority of the land-Bangla. Urdu was given the priority just because of its emotional association with the high-ups. Though Urdu was documented as a national language yet English was remained as being official language of the country.

Decision went into the favor of Urdu of when it was a matter of choice between English and Bangla. Urdu remained the identity marker during the movement of Pakistan.

This research project aims at bringing to the forefront the phenomenon of language attrition and change in Urdu language. Its main focus is to bring the comparative study of change in Urdu language in native and non native speakers of Urdu.

2. METHODOLOGY

Data collection tools are used for data collection by researchers. These tools assist to gather most reliable and authentic data by using scientific means. In order to pave the ways for getting a lot of knowledge research is one of the most impactful ways to do this. Research is useful to make progress in this epoch and to make a connection with the context. Research makes one capable enough to complete his goal and to resolve the issues” (Mouly 1978, cited in Cohen & Mannion, 1998: 40). The present study is an endeavor to achieve the same.

Urdu language has a lot of varieties, which change with the geographical boundaries. The tools which have been used to collect data for this current study are given below.

1. Word list
2. Interviews

The sample population is selected from the Urdu speaking speech community. These people are those who have acquired Urdu as their first language in native accent. Selected population is divided into three age groups as described under:

Group 1: Native speaker of Urdu language of 10-20 years age

Group 2: Native speaker of Urdu language of 30-45 years age

Group 3: Native speaker of Urdu language of 65 years and above


Each group is further divided into two groups on the basis of income group.

1. Low income group, which has monthly income less than 15,000
2. Middle income group, whose monthly income is higher than 25,000

Each group has 20 respondents where 10 belong to low income group, and 10 belong to middle income group.

Data Collection

In the first phase of data collection, a pilot study was conducted to prepare a word list. Semi structured interviews were conducted from the five members of group 3. The focus of the word list was on the words which are no more in use in the present day communication but were once in use. After the preparation of word list, these words were categorized into lists relating to different areas of daily life, for example:

- Professions
- Relationship
- Customs/ceremonials/rituals
- Clothing
- House hold items 
- Miscellaneous

Although questionnaire are regarded as a very useful tool for data collection yet we followed the foot step of Dorian (1981) who pointed out that interviews are better source of data collection because distributing questionnaire does not ensure authentic answers. There may be fabrication in the responses. Interviews on the other hand provide an opportunity to the researcher to take notes and the on basis of the observation shift according to comfort level of the subject on some particular topics. Interviews combined with observation were conducted for the better and systematic collection of facts. The word list which is provided by group, aged above 65 years of native Urdu speech community is shown to the other three groups for identification. Another interesting fact was discovered during the compilation of word list. The five members of group 3 were aged ranging 65-80 but one member was aged above 90, and contributed some very fruitful information regarding obsolete words. The respondent groups were interviewed. They were shown the word list for the identification then structured questions which were written right in front of each word, were asked from them.

- Do you know/recognize this word?
- Do you know the meaning of this word?
- Use the asked word in the sentence so that the meaning will be clear.
- Do you actively use it in your daily conversation?

Group 1 is selected among the age group ranging 10-20 years. There were 10 members in low income group who were interviewed and all of them were from the labor class but had formal education till primary. While 10 respondents in middle income group were all students. Group 2 is selected among the age group of native Urdu speakers ranging 30-45 years of age. There were 10 members from middle income group and all of them were and working in different organizations. While the members of low income group are also working but as a domestic helper, driver or a house boy while the women are also belong to working class. Group 3 is selected from native speakers of Urdu language. There were ten members who were selected among the age group ranging 65 and above years and five respondents were from the middle income group who were either retired or stay at home grand-parents. While the five respondents from low income group still belong to working class as the gate keeper or gardener. This study was conducted in the area of Multan and the respondents were taken from the urban areas.

3. DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis drives the researcher to draw conclusion of his/her research. It is the core of a research study. It is most important to arrange the scattered and cluttered data for analysis. The results can't be achieved without the data analysis. Poor or in appropriate data can make a research useless.

A word list of 60 words was finalized from native speakers of Urdu language and afterwards it was presented before three groups from distinct urban localities of Multan city. These groups were further divided into two groups.

1. Low income group of native speakers of Urdu
2. Middle income group of native speakers of Urdu

Table 1: *Low income group of native speakers of Urdu*

Age groups	Years	
First age group	10-20 years	10
Second age group	30-45 years	10
Third age group	65 and above	5

Table 2: *Middle income group of native speakers of Urdu*

Age groups	Years	
First age group	10-20 years	10
Second age group	30-45 years	10
Third age group	65 and above	5

The word list provided by the respondents after the pilot study was provided to group 1, 2, and 3 respectively. The responses were recorded carefully and the notes were also taken to add any additional observation by the researchers. Collected data was analyzed quantitatively in order to bring about the significant features of the process of language attrition

Table 3: *Data Analysis of group 1 (10-20 years age) Middle income group*

Participants	Total words	Unknown words	Percentage %	Known words	Percentage %
1	60	38	63.3	22	36.6
2	60	31	51.6	29	48.3
3	60	37	61.6	23	38.3
4	60	29	48.3	31	51.6
5	60	36	60.0	24	40
6	60	28	46.6	32	53.3
7	60	41	68.3	19	31.6
8	60	30	50	30	50
9	60	43	71.6	17	28.3

10 60 24 40 36 60

Out of the ten members from this group, only one member could recognize 36 words from ;word list.

Highest bar of the graph shows the percentage ratio of unknown Urdu words in a native speech community. The second highest shows the total number of words. The highest category is above 70% and lowest is below 28%. So this shows Urdu language is not transmitted well in the age group of 10-20 years in middle income group. There were high numbers of unknown words.

Table 4: *Data Analysis of group 1 (10-20 years age) Low income group*

Participants	Total words	Unknown words	Percentage %	Known words	Percentage %
1	60	38	63.3	22	36.6
2	60	31	51.6	29	48.3
3	60	21	35	39	65
4	60	19	31.6	41	68.3
5	60	28	46.6	32	53.3
6	60	21	35	39	65
7	60	17	28.3	43	71.6
8	60	14	23.3	46	76.6
9	60	28	46.6	32	53.3
10	60	22	36.6	38	63.3

These participants were the member of the group who belong to the native Urdu speech community. In comparison to the middle income group, the ratio of known words is higher than the unknown words in this age group. The highest point of unknown words is 46 out of 60 words and the lowest was 22 out of 60.

Table 5: *Data Analysis of group 2 (30-45 years age) Low income group*

Participants	Total words	Unknown words	Percentage %	Known words	Percentage %
1	60	21	35	39	65
2	60	17	28.3	43	71.6
3	60	14	23.3	46	76.6
4	60	28	46.6	32	53.3
5	60	22	36.6	38	63.3
6	60	22	36.6	38	63.3
7	60	29	48.3	31	51.6
8	60	39	65	21	35
9	60	41	68.3	19	31.6
10	60	32	53.3	28	46.6

This group belongs to native speech community of Urdu language. The participants are ranging from the age of 30-45 years. It is evident that the most of the participants are familiar with the word purely belongs to Urdu language. The ratio of known words is higher than known words.

Table 6: *Data Analysis of group 2 (30-45 years age) Middle income group*

Participants	Total words	Unknown words	Percentage %	Known words	Percentage %
1	60	17	28.3	43	71.6
2	60	21	35	39	65
3	60	24	40	36	60
4	60	29	48.3	31	51.6
5	60	31	51.6	29	48.3
6	60	30	50	30	50
7	60	25	41.6	35	58.3
T8	60	13	21.6	47	78.3
9	60	16	26.6	44	73.3
10	60	19	31.6	41	68.3

This group belongs to native speech community of Urdu language. The participants are ranging from the age of 30-45 years and belongs to middle income group. It is evident that the ratio of known words is higher than unknown words. It is also clear that even in comparison with low income group, middle income group has more retention of knowledge of given words. The highest bar of percentage of known word is 78% while the lowest is 21.6%. Most of the participants are familiar with the word purely belongs to Urdu language. Participants are mostly familiar with the words spoken in daily routine. Though they live in Urdu speech community and their elders acquired Urdu as their first language.

Table 7: *Data Analysis of group 3 (65 and above years age)*

Participants	Total words	Unknown words	Percentage %	Known words	Percentage %
1	60	6	10	54	90
2	60	9	15	51	85
3	60	5	83.3	55	91.6
4	60	7	11.6	53	88.3
5	60	9	15	51	85

This group belongs to native speech community of Urdu language. The participants are ranging from the age of 65 years and above. They all belongs to grandparent generation where all the respondents are either retired or stay at home grandparent. It is evident that the ratio of known words is higher than unknown words. It is also clear that the percentage of known words has stark raise in comparison to unknown words. The highest bar of percentage of known word is 91% while the lowest is 10%. Most of the participants are familiar with the word purely belongs to Urdu language. Participants are mostly familiar with the words spoken in daily routine. Though they live in Urdu speech community and their elders acquired Urdu as their first language.

Table 8: *Data Analysis of usage of the word of all group*

Group name	Usage of the word in %
10-20 low income group	19%
10-20 middle income group	31%
30-45 middle income group	49%
30-45 low income group	54%

65 and above	67%
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In the interviews, one of the question that is asked from the respondents was that “Do you actively use this word in your daily conversation?”. There were several mixed responses to this question but the dominant answer in young generation ages ranging from 11-20 is “NO, Not Exactly”. While the middle age group responded with “Sometimes, yes. But not very religiously.” Accumulative percentage was taken and the data is described in the pie chart form where it is evident from the results that the group of 65 and above actively use the given vocabulary in their daily conversation even to the limit of 67%. While the parent generation (30-45) in middle income group and low income group use it 49% and 54% respectively. The ratio of knowledge and understating of the words in alarmingly low in young generation. They use it 19% and 31% respectively.

4. DISCUSSION

Language is one’s own identity. The present study enabled us to see the nook and corners of the ratio of attrition of the words. The words from the language are getting obsoleted or are not used in its original meaning. While taking the interviews, an interesting thing was observed. The meaning of the words were not described the same way it was asked. For instance, the original meaning of the word نائی/نائین is “the one who used to take the messages/invitation in olden times” while the young generation perceived it as “barber” as it is commonly used in the context of Punjabi language. Same is the case with مانجھا, the original meaning is “a tradition where the to be bride is treated with beauty treatments. While in the modern vocabulary, it is perceived as “the chemical that is used to put on the kite flying rope to make it sharp”. Another example is وظیفہ which actually means “monthly scholarship” but in modern context it is perceived as “Qurani verses that one recites for some specific purpose”. دیوان means “a straight bed for leisure time” and also “the collection of poetry.” The later meaning is used more often in the daily conversations. Last but not the least, is the word شرارہ that means “flames of fire” but in modern context it is a style of clothing that women wear.

5. CONCLUSION

Language is one's own identity. The present study brought us to this point that there is the high ratio of language attrition in Urdu language. Speakers are shifting to other languages for many reasons. It can be economic, social, political or educational as well. There are many reasons of this language change. The language is not inherited to the coming generation. In native speech community, we can observe that the group of speakers between 30-40 years are familiar with multiple words also know them semantically and according to their use. The ratio was not too bad even in the group of people of low income group who are aged 11-20. They belong to the native speech community there may be the chances that they are familiar with the words, even if they are not using it actively yet they know its meanings and usage very well. But in native speech community the group (11-20 years with middle income) know the lowest number of words in comparison to the group (11-20 years with low income).

Another aspect is parent's unacceptability towards their own native language and high reception of English as it is an official and global language. Students are sent to English medium schools where Urdu is strictly prohibited. This phenomenon leads to language shift and eventually language attrition.

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