

I am a young Hindko speaker, and I want to speak my language: Language Shift or Maintenance in a Multilingual City

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Abstract:

Karachi, a multilingual city with diverse cultures and indigenous communities, hosts a range of communities migrating from northern and rural areas. Upon settling in the city, many parents desire their children to attend English or Urdu medium schools to facilitate broader communication. Previous studies have indicated that indigenous communities in Karachi are shifting towards Urdu and English in these multilingual settings. Women, often the primary caretakers and language transmitters at home, play a significant role in maintaining native languages alongside male parents. This study investigated whether young female Hindko speakers are preserving their native language or shifting to Urdu and English. A qualitative case study was conducted, with data gathered from five female Hindko speakers through purposive and snowball sampling. Semi-structured interviews were used, and the data was analyzed using thematic analysis. The results revealed that the Hindko speakers maintain their language in multilingual settings due to strong ties to their geographical and cultural roots. Their language patterns showed that Hindko is primarily maintained within the home domain, with speakers switching to other languages based on the social context. Furthermore, participants preserved their cultural identity through a deep connection to cultural values. These female Hindko speakers also employed strategies to raise awareness of their language use within the Hindko community. They are actively promoting the language on digital platforms and through various indigenous language projects.

Keywords: Language shift, Language maintenance, Multilingual city, Hindko, Karachi

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Introduction

Karachi, a culturally diverse city, has hosted a variety of communities since the time of Partition. Urdu serves as the common lingua franca across many of these communities, while English is primarily used by the upper class and as a medium of instruction in educational institutions (Zaidi & Zaki, 2017). Additionally, Sindhi is the official language of the Sindh province (Abbas & Bidin, 2022). In this multilingual context, while Urdu, English, and Sindhi dominate, various indigenous communities also speak their languages. However, many of these communities are shifting towards Urdu and English, as noted by several researchers (Ali, 2017; Ali, 2015).

Speakers of ethnic languages such as Balochi, Punjabi, Pathan, and Seraiki have migrated to Karachi over the years in search of economic opportunities. For example, Dhatki speakers have shifted to the city to establish businesses (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Jhatial & Khan, 2021). Other indigenous communities, including Burushaki speakers (Ali, 2018), Shina, Hindko, and Khowar speakers (Abbasi et al., 2023), have moved to the city to access better educational facilities and opportunities. These communities also benefit from educational quotas in public sector universities (Ali, 2015).

In addition to migration for economic and educational reasons, many communities have sought better social mobility, which Karachi offers as an economic hub (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019). However, despite the potential for upward mobility, the migration of some communities has not yet led to significant changes in their social status. Natural disasters, such as the 2005 earthquake, have also prompted migration, with Kashmiri speakers, for instance, moving to Karachi in the aftermath (Kiani et al., 2019).

Moreover, Karachi has become a destination for internal migration, with Sindhi, Seraiki, and Dhatki speakers moving to the city in search of better educational, economic, and social prospects. Karachi's superior educational and institutional facilities have made it a prime location for such communities (Abbasi et al., 2021; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019). Hindko speakers, an indigenous community, have similarly migrated to the city for economic, educational, and business opportunities (Veesrio, 2021).

Hindko is spoken by approximately 4.24% of Karachi's population, with the majority residing in District East, as per the 2017 Census (Rahman, 2021). Despite their migration, many Hindko speakers in Karachi continue to adopt Urdu as the lingua franca and English for educational purposes (Ali, 2015; Ali, 2017; Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Abbasi et al., 2022). However, some members of the Hindko community, particularly women, have maintained their mother tongue within the home domain (Abbasi et al., 2023). This raises an important question: Are Hindko speakers in Karachi maintaining their heritage language or shifting towards Urdu and English? Previous studies suggest that minority and indigenous communities are gradually losing their mother tongues, making it crucial to explore the linguistic patterns and strategies employed by the Hindko community in Karachi.

Research Objective

To examine language shift in female speakers of the Hindko language in the multilingual city of Karachi.

Research Question

What is the language shift or maintenance scenario among female Hindko speakers in a multilingual city?

Literature Review

Cities are spaces for multilingualism and cultural diversity where many communities migrate and indigenous languages are spoken. Previous studies have reported that speakers are shifting to other languages in cities due to state policy. Asim and Zaki (2022) explored the language ideologies in the contemporary era from 2000 to 2020 as embedded in the official language policy documents of Pakistan. English and Urdu occupy the central position in the education system of Pakistan. The local languages have minimal space in the ideological construction of the language framework in Pakistan. Hence, Punjabis in Islamabad, Lahore, Multan, and Faisalabad (Haider et al., 2021; Nazir et al., 2013; Komal et al., 2022; Riaz et al., 2011) and Sindhis in Karachi (Abbasi et al., 2021) are shifting to Urdu and English. Likewise, indigenous language speakers in the cities Hindko in Peshawar and Muzaffarabad (Ali et al., 2021 Kiani et al., 2020); Dhatki (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019), Gujarati (Abbasi & Zaki, 2019), Memoni (Ali, 2017),

Kashmiri (Abbasi et al, 2022), Burushaki (2018) and Khowar (Abbasi 2023) speakers are also shifting towards Urdu and English in Karachi. Therefore, the present study explores whether the Hindko community maintains or shifts from their mother tongue to other languages in comparison to the available literature on language shifts in cities.

There are various social, educational, economic, political, and religious reasons for language shift from indigenous languages. The social reasons for the language shift include peer pressure, stereotypical behaviour, shaming and the lack of prestige. As a result, the younger generation regards their mother tongue as a symbol of illiteracy (Haider et al.,2021; Nazir et al., 2013; Komal et al., 2022, Riaz et al, 2011). Similarly, Jhatial and Khan (2022) also reported that social groups stereotype their language and consider it as a backward language. They associate Dhatki with illiteracy because it is the language spoken in villages. Education policy is another reason for communities to shift to majority languages. Punjabis shift to Urdu and English as they are institutionalized, and mother tongue education is not facilitated (Haider et al.,2021). Hassan and Murtaza (2022) also reported that Muhajirs shifted to the English language due to educational opportunities in the city of Karachi. Similarly, the economic reasons for language shift include ideology.

Punjabi speakers associate themselves with Urdu and English, which provides them with social prestige and economic standing (Haider et al.,2021). Hence, the Punjabi imagined identity enables them to associate with the elite (Kanno & Norton, 2003), who speak English and Urdu and consider Punjabis a marginalized community (Haider et al.,2021). Jhatial and Khan (2022) also reported that economics is one of the core reasons for not learning the Dhatki language, as the language offers no opportunities in the city. There are political reasons for language shift in cities as well. Punjabis have adopted the language policy of the state which promotes Urdu and English (Haider et al.,2021). Alizai (2021) narrated that Balochi, Brahui and Pashtu speech community members developed negative perceptions of the majority Punjabi language due to political reasons. These political reasons include Operation, state prejudice and hegemonic power enjoyed by the Punjabi elite in the federal government. Above all, some community members are not facilitating the language transmission process. The Punjabis are not transmitting the language to the younger ones due to the status of the Punjabi language, negative attitudes, and behaviour of the community. Code-switching patterns are common, while Punjabi is used in the media as a tool of humour

(Haider et al.,2021). Jhatial and Khan (2022) also reported that Dhatki speakers who migrate to cities do not transmit their heritage language. Some of the Dhatki speakers were determined to transmit their heritage language as one of the participants in Jhatial and Khan's (2022) study said, "I will unhesitatingly pass on Dhatki to my children first since the legacy of my mother tongue is what something I hold a lot of regard for." (p.71). All these factors and processes, as well as gender, play a key role in language maintenance, shift, and transmission of a language (Panhwar, 2019).

Compared to male speakers, women tend to be more sensitive to language behaviours and often play a pivotal role in language maintenance. As primary caregivers and the first source of language transmission to children, women significantly impact whether a language is maintained or shifted (Pavlenko, 2001). In many cases, when women adopt or shift to the dominant language, a broader language shift occurs within the community (McDonald, 1994). Haider et al. (2021) observed that female Punjabi speakers in Karachi were more likely to shift to the dominant language, Urdu, and began to disown their ethnic identity at a higher rate than male Punjabi speakers. Similarly, Panhwar et al. (2019) reported that Sindhi children in Karachi have become multilingual and have increasingly adopted urban cultural norms over their local ones.

In contrast, some female speakers of indigenous languages, such as Khowar, have managed to maintain their language. According to Abbasi et al. (2023), Khowar-speaking women in Karachi have been able to preserve their language at home, with their parents and siblings, within the neighbourhood due to close-knit social networks and in educational settings when interacting with other native Khowar speakers. This contrast highlights the complex dynamics of language maintenance and shift, particularly the central role of women in preserving their heritage languages.

David (2023) reviewed the status of Sindhi speakers across the Sindhi Diaspora. Sindhi Hindus have reportedly shifted from the habitual use of Sindhi to other languages (Daswani & Parachani, 1978; Daswani, 1989, David 2000,2001a 2001b; Dewan, 1989; Detramani & Lock, 2003, Ivengar, 2013; Thapan, 2002). Given the available literature, David (2023) explored the different strategies of revitalization employed by Sindhi linguists, social media websites, and online interviews with two participants. The findings showed that the Sindhi Hindus are using different strategies to promote the Sindhi language. These include websites, telefilms, TV shows, magazines, folk music, and literature. Also, the Sindhi language is being taught virtually and public awareness messages

through videos are created to promote the Sindhi language. Sindhi women are especially creating videos on social media platforms to encourage the Sindhi language among mothers and children. Similarly, Aggarwal's (2020) detailed work on Sindhi identity provides a sense of belonging to the Sindhis all around the world. Comparatively, Sindhi Muslims are shifting to Urdu and the English language, maintaining their heritage culture (Abbasi et al, 2021).

Ali (2021) examined the status of the Hindko language in the urban city of Peshawar. Data was collected from two groups comprising 75 participants: 40 participants aged 16 to 25 years and 35 participants aged 26 to 40 years. The study's findings revealed that the younger group demonstrated a stronger tendency to shift towards dominant languages due to various social factors. The language use patterns of Group I indicated that 80% of participants used Urdu at home with parents and siblings, while only 20% used Hindko. Similarly, 62% of participants, along with Pashto and Hindko, reported using Urdu in their neighbourhoods. Additionally, participants reported using Urdu (52%) and English (42%) as the primary mediums for official correspondence and education. The attitudes of Hindko-speaking participants highlighted a preference for communication in English (58%) and Urdu, which they perceived as essential for job opportunities. Notably, 46% of participants held negative perceptions about their mother tongue, agreeing that it is not used in most social domains. Moreover, 52% of participants believed Hindko is less valuable than other languages. In contrast, responses from Group II indicated a comparatively lower degree of language shift. These findings suggest that the younger generation is gradually moving away from their mother tongue, as they do not perceive any significant social advantage in maintaining its use.

Kiani et al. (2020) explored language shifts among Hindko and Kashmiri speakers in Muzaffarabad. Data was collected from 10 families (five Hindko-speaking and five Kashmiri-speaking) using questionnaires and interviews. The findings revealed that while parents strive to maintain Hindko and Kashmiri within the home domain, children are gradually shifting toward other languages, often at the expense of their mother tongue. Among Hindko-speaking children, Urdu is increasingly acquired due to its role as a lingua franca and a language of wider communication. The language choice of Hindko speakers in Peshawar varies depending on the linguistic proficiency of the interlocutor. Participants reported using both Urdu and Hindko according to the speaker's language competence in a given interaction. In marketplaces, Urdu is

preferred, while Hindko is predominantly used in social gatherings. On social media platforms, however, Urdu dominates, with Hindko being virtually non-existent on platforms like Facebook. Furthermore, the proficiency of Hindko speakers was found to be lower than that of Kashmiri speakers, as they struggled to produce complete utterances in Hindko.

Haider et al. (2021) explored language shifts among Punjabi students in Islamabad. Data was collected using semi-structured interviews, natural conversations, and TV shows. The findings revealed that Punjabi students tend to disown their Punjabi identity due to social, political, and economic factors. Similar trends were observed in Riaz et al.'s (2011) study conducted in the urban settings of Islamabad, where participants regarded Punjabi as a less prestigious language. Comparable results were reported by Komal et al. (2022) in urban Multan, where the younger generation perceived Punjabi as a “useless language” and shifted to Urdu and English.

Nazir et al. (2013) also explored the attitudes and factors influencing language shift among Punjabis in Sargodha. Their mixed-method study revealed that parents were more inclined to maintain the Punjabi language, while the younger generation displayed a shift toward dominant languages. Likewise, Gilani and Mahmood (2014) investigated the status of the Punjabi language in Faisalabad and found that young Punjabis were not proud of their linguistic identity. John (2015) further reported that young Punjabis in Lahore's urban environment held negative attitudes toward the Punjabi language.

Overall, the use of Punjabi is declining among youth in urban areas such as Islamabad, Multan, Lahore, Faisalabad, and Sargodha. The younger generation is gradually shifting to Urdu and English, which are seen as languages of prestige and broader communication.

Alizai (2021) investigated the social and political factors contributing to the language shift among Punjabi speakers in Baluchistan. Data was collected from 25 participants using a qualitative approach. The findings revealed that the majority of communities in Baluchistan, including Balochi, Brahui, and Pashto speakers, displayed negative attitudes toward the Punjabi language. The social behaviours of these communities have pressured Punjabi speakers to shift toward Urdu. Additionally, members of the Punjabi community have culturally assimilated with Baloch culture, as evidenced by their adoption of traditional Balochi attire. The study also highlighted a decline in the language proficiency of Punjabi speakers in Baluchistan over the years. As a result, Punjabi

speakers are increasingly shifting to Urdu, leading to a gradual loss of their cultural heritage, which is at risk of not being transmitted to future generations.

Jhatial and Khan (2022) examined language shift and maintenance patterns among young Dhatki and Marwari speakers residing in Hyderabad. Using a qualitative approach, data was collected from 20 participants (10 Dhatki and 10 Marwari). The findings revealed that participants primarily used Dhatki and Marwari within the home domain. However, educational institutions and modern technology were identified as key drivers of the language shift toward Urdu and English.

Comparatively, a study by Abbasi and Aftab (2019) on Dhatki speakers in Karachi indicated a further reduction in the use of Dhatki in the home domain. The shift to Sindhi, Urdu, and English was attributed to the dominant status, social recognition, and greater opportunities associated with these languages.

Panhwar et al. (2019) explored the language attitudes of Sindhi mothers in Karachi toward their native language, Urdu and English. Through interviews, data was collected from five multilingual, educated, and professionally active Sindhi mothers. The findings revealed that social, psychological, and cognitive factors influenced the language preferences of Sindhi mothers for their children. Four of the mothers reported that their children had trilingual language competence, while one mother stated that her children primarily spoke Urdu and English, as the parents communicated in these languages at home. It was also observed that children were gradually deviating from Sindhi culture and adopting the urban culture of Karachi.

In contrast, Abbasi et al. (2021) emphasized the importance of cultural maintenance as a means of preserving mother tongues in a diverse, multilingual city, highlighting the role of cultural continuity in safeguarding linguistic heritage.

Abbasi et al. (2023) explored language shift and maintenance by investigating language use in various domains. The study focused on 20 young male and female participants (10 male and 10 female). The findings revealed that female participants maintained the Khowar language at home, in educational institutions, and in their neighbourhoods. In contrast, male Khowar speakers maintained their native language at home but shifted to Urdu and English in the neighbourhood as well as in social and educational domains. Both male and female Khowar speakers reported a shift

to Urdu in the workplace. This study highlights the language use patterns of Khowar speakers and identifies the social and cultural factors influencing these patterns.

Ali et al. (2021) and Kiani et al. (2020) conducted studies on the Hindko language in Peshawar and Muzaffarabad, respectively, and found that young participants in urban areas are shifting to Urdu. Both studies revealed that participants held negative attitudes toward their mother tongue, viewing Hindko as a language lacking social prestige and value in society. As a result, the present study aims to explore the language practices, experiences, and values attached to the Hindko language by its speakers in Karachi, assessing whether the language is being maintained or gradually replaced.

Research by Panhwar (2019) emphasized the critical role women play in maintaining mother tongues. However, more recent studies suggest that women are increasingly shifting to other languages due to negative societal attitudes (Haider et al., 2021). Interestingly, some Sindhi women have taken an active role in documenting and promoting the Sindhi language through websites, social media, and awareness videos, which aim to preserve the language across the diaspora.

While Khowar female speakers have been shown to maintain their language in certain domains, a more comprehensive investigation is required to explore the strategies used to either maintain their mother tongue or shift away from it. Therefore, the present study focuses on female Hindko speakers in the multilingual environment of Karachi, examining whether young female speakers are maintaining the Hindko language or shifting to Urdu and English in response to social and linguistic pressures.

Methodology

The current study aims to explore the process of language shift or maintenance among female Hindko speakers in Karachi. To achieve this objective, a qualitative multiple-case study approach was adopted (Creswell, 2015). Qualitative research is well-suited for examining the strategies, processes, and status of a language within society. The multiple case study method was selected to identify similarities and differences in the responses of female participants (Creswell, 2015).

Based on the study's objective and research question, data was collected through semi-structured interviews. This method was chosen because semi-structured interviews elicit detailed responses and narratives, offering valuable insights into the language use patterns and status of the Hindko language in Karachi's multilingual environment. Thematic analysis was employed to analyze the interview data. Codes, categories, and themes were generated from the transcriptions to identify key language use and maintenance patterns.

Respondents were selected using purposive and snowball sampling techniques, targeting Hindko speakers who met three criteria: (1) they were enrolled in a public sector university, (2) they were exposed to at least two languages, and (3) they had lived in Karachi for a minimum of three years. Accessing female Hindko participants at the university was challenging. However, with the support of initial respondents and social networking, additional participants were identified and recruited. Data collection was concluded after five participants, as the researcher observed data saturation — the point at which no new information was emerging from additional participants.

A pilot study was conducted with two participants before the formal study began to ensure the reliability and clarity of the research instrument. The purpose of the pilot was to review and refine the interview questions where necessary. Questions requiring clarification were edited to improve their effectiveness for the main study. Formal consent was obtained from all participants who took part in the study voluntarily. They were assured that their identities would remain confidential throughout the research process.

Findings

Language Profile

The interviews provided rich data on the language shift and maintenance of the Hindko language among participants in the multilingual setting of Karachi. The participants shared information about their hometowns, family backgrounds, language proficiency, reasons for migration to the city, and the acquisition of additional languages, as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: Language Profile of Hindko Speakers

S. No	Family Hometown	Reason for Migration	Languages
H01	Hazara, KPK	Family Feud	Hindko, Urdu, English, Sindhi, Punjabi, Seraiki, Chinese, & Turkish
H02	KPK	Education	Hindko, Urdu, English, & Chinese
H03	KPK	Education	Urdu, English, Hindko, & Turkish
H04	KPK	Job Opportunities	Hindko, Urdu, English, & Turkish
H05	KPK	Business Opportunities	Hindko, Urdu, Seraiki, & English

The case of H01 was particularly unique, as she self-reported having basic proficiency in 15 languages. The participant stated, *“I know and understand at least 15 languages, including regional and foreign languages like Chinese and Turkish.”* She further explained, *“My hometown is in Hazara, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa (KPK), but I was born and raised in Karachi.”*

She elaborated on her family history and her passion for languages, attributing it to her family’s travel experiences. She shared, *“My paternal grandfather went to Hong Kong for higher studies and returned to Karachi in the 1990s, where he settled. My maternal grandfather had a job in Kotri, Sindh. Both of my parents were born in Karachi.”* Despite being born in Karachi, her parents maintained Hindko as their ancestral language, which they passed on to her. Despite living far from her ancestral town, one of the key reasons for her strong connection to Hindko was her frequent visits to Hazara. She recalled, *“We used to visit Haripur, Hazara during summer vacations and had beautiful memories there. Unfortunately, due to our busy schedules, we don’t travel to our hometown as often. My last visit was in January 2020. However, we frequently speak Hindko at home.”*

Similarly, the other four participants in the study were also raised in Karachi, where their parents had migrated for various reasons, as shown in Table 1. Despite being raised in an urban environment, the female Hindko speakers maintained a strong connection to their culture, family,

identity, and ancestral geography. Their frequent visits to their hometowns further reinforced their bond with the Hindko language. This connection enabled them to maintain Hindko within the urban, multilingual setting of Karachi.

Language Use in Different Domains

The participants were also asked about their language use patterns in different domains. During the interviews, questions focused on language use across various domains, interlocutors, and topics of conversation. Table 2 presents the self-reported language use patterns in social domains, specifically in home settings, based on the frequency of use among the female Hindko speakers.

Table 2: Language Use in Home Settings

Participant	Hindko	Urdu	English	Other
H01	60%	30%	10%	-
H02	70%	15%	15%	-
H03	30%	60%	10%	-
H04	50%	30%	20%	-
H05	30%	30%	10%	30%

Table 2 illustrates the basic information about language use in home settings. Three of the five female Hindko speakers reported using Hindko frequently (60%, 70%, and 50%). Two participants used Hindko less regularly (30%). One participant, H05, was exposed to four languages at home—Hindko, Seraiki, Urdu, and English—making the language use more complex. When narrating their language use, participants shared:

- a. **H04** said, *“The family emphasized speaking Hindko, the language of Hazara people, since childhood.”*
- b. **H01** remarked, *“At home, we all speak Hindko, especially with my mother and siblings.”*

- c. **H02** stated, *“We speak Hindko with siblings for family gossip and other purposes. However, we also communicate in English sometimes.”*

Nearly all the participants (five out of five) reported using Urdu with friends and neighbours. However, H01 shared, *“I speak Sindhi, Punjabi, and Seraiki as well with friends.”* Similarly, H05 said, *“I have Seraiki-speaking friends in the neighbourhood.”*

As stated by all five participants, English and Urdu were the most frequently used languages in the workplace. H02 said, *“I speak Urdu and English in my workplace and university, or a mixture of both.”* H04 shared, *“Yes, I speak Hindko with my family, but all my friends are Urdu or Punjabi speakers. So, I cannot speak Hindko with them and switch to Urdu.”*

Maintaining Cultural Values

Cultural practices play a significant role in one’s life and in maintaining linguistic identity. The female participants shared, *“We attend different wedding ceremonies in our community, where traditional rituals are practised”* (H02). Similarly, H04 stated, *“We often visit our hometown to participate in the wedding ceremonies of our relatives.”* When asked about their culture, H01 mentioned, *“Hazara people have a special cultural dance called ‘Kombar,’ which is known as ‘Luddi’ in Karachi. It is not the same as Kombar; it has different steps.”* H05 also noted, *“I know about our cultural dance, Kombar, and I often perform it at weddings or privately at home.”* Likewise, H04 stated, *“We perform Kombar on special occasions, like weddings, with Hazara Dhol.”*

The participants also discussed the uniqueness of Hindko music. H01 shared, *“I often listen to Hindko music, depending on my mood.”* H04 said, *“We play Hindko music at weddings and ceremonies in Karachi.”* H05 added, *“I often listen to Hindko music on SoundCloud.”* H03 mentioned, *“Hindko music is often played by my father, so I know the lyrics and beats a bit.”* The female participants believed that listening to traditional Hindko music at home and weddings fosters a sense of connection with the Hindko community, helping young speakers maintain their cultural identity in urban cities with diverse cultures.

In addition to music and dance, Hindko cuisine is also an important aspect of cultural maintenance. H01 said, *“Our famous food is Chappli Kebab and Kehwa.”* H02 shared, *“Whenever we visit our*

hometown, we consume Chappli Kebab and drink Kehwa.” H04 explained, “These foods are popular in our community because of the cold temperatures in our hometown, where people prefer hot food like meat and Kehwa. These food items help keep us warm, unlike Karachi’s different climate.”

When asked about cultural norms, H01 shared, *“The Hindko community places great value on respecting both younger and older individuals.”* H04 described a greeting ritual among children, saying, *“Young children always offer their hands to a female so she can kiss them while bowing down her shoulders, so the children don’t have to stretch or stand up.”* H02 explained, *“We slightly bow our heads so elder males, including family members, brothers, and fathers, can place their hands on our heads.”* H05 added, *“It’s a gesture of male presence, as they are considered our protectors.”* H01 also noted that while shaking hands is common in cities, *“If we shake hands with a male, it will be considered a sign of disobedience towards the elders.”*

Thus, the female Hindko speakers maintain their cultural identity through activities like listening to music, performing cultural dances, attending traditional weddings, consuming traditional foods, and following customary greetings. These practices help them preserve their language and culture in Karachi.

Language Maintenance Strategies

Maintaining a distinct linguistic identity is challenging in urban settings. However, three out of the five participants shared their experiences and strategies for preserving and promoting the Hindko language. They believed these strategies could also be adopted by members of other indigenous communities to help preserve their languages.

Public Awareness: Voice Over

H01 shared her experience of how maintaining one’s distinct identity in Karachi is not easy. She highlighted an opportunity she had to promote the Hindko language and raise awareness among the female members of her community. H01 explained, *“The best way to promote your indigenous language is to preserve and showcase it on social media and digital platforms.”* She shared her experience working on a voice-over project and the value of her indigenous language:

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“SOC Films shared on their social media profile that they were looking for a voice-over artist for the Hindko language. However, there are very few Hindko speakers in Karachi. I decided to seize this opportunity and reached out to their HR. They immediately contacted me and invited me to their studio to work on the project. The project aimed to raise awareness about social issues, justice, and laws for women in a patriarchal society in Pakistan. I completed voice-overs for four films on women’s empowerment and their property rights. This project was an initiative of the Sindh Government in collaboration with SOC Films. I had a wonderful time recording the short films, and they are available on YouTube. The organization has remained in contact with me even after several years.”

Similarly, H02 shared her experience: "As I am good at writing, I sometimes do transcriptions for different NGOs and write subtitles in Hindko, either in Roman or Urdu script.”

Promoting Indigenous Language Rights

Promoting indigenous language rights on digital platforms is an effective way to promote both the language and culture. H02 shared her experience, stating that she translated language rights materials for an NGO that contacted her through LinkedIn. She said, “I also did transcription for a language rights project.”

Similarly, H04 shared her experience of aiding her teacher in creating awareness about Indigenous languages when the teacher reached out to her. She narrated:

“I facilitated my teacher, who was conducting a workshop on the importance of native indigenous languages, by teaching him verbal greetings in Hindko through calls and voice notes. The teacher then taught these greetings to young children at the Pakistan Children Learning Festival at the Arts Council in Karachi.”

Examples of the greetings include:

- a. **Hindko:** *Tusda ky Haal Thiya* (**Urdu:** *Ap ka kya kiya haal hai*) [**English:** How are you?]
- b. **Hindko:** *Main theek thi* (**Urdu:** *Main theek hoon*) [**English:** I am fine]

Overall, the experiences of the three female Hindko speakers demonstrate that Indigenous languages can be promoted by raising awareness within the community and actively engaging on digital and social media platforms.

Discussion

The present study contributes to the existing literature on language shift and maintenance among indigenous speakers in Karachi. Previous studies have shown that language shift is occurring in urban cities (Abbasi & Aftab, 2019; Abbasi & Zaki, 2019; Abbasi et al., 2022, 2023; Haider et al., 2021; Nazir et al., 2013; Komal et al., 2022; Riaz et al., 2011). Hindko speakers who have migrated from their hometowns to cities like Peshawar are also shifting to mainstream languages (Ali et al., 2021; Kiani et al., 2020). In contrast, the present study found that young female Hindko speakers are maintaining their mother tongue in Karachi.

This study reveals that female Hindko speakers, who serve as the primary caretakers of language transmission, are preserving their heritage language. In contrast, Haider et al. (2021) and Panhwar et al. (2021) reported that female speakers have shifted to mainstream languages. However, when analysing language use patterns, Abbasi et al. (2023) found that female speakers maintain their languages in home and educational domains. Furthermore, the present study shows that female Hindko speakers preserve their language at home and spread awareness through digital and social media platforms. David (2023) reported similar findings, noting that the Sindhi-speaking community maintains its language through websites, telefilms, TV shows, music, and digital and social media literature.

Previous studies have indicated that Hindko speakers in Peshawar and Muzaffarabad are shifting to Pashto and other languages (Ali et al., 2021; Kiani et al., 2020). Language shift is particularly common among the younger generation. However, the present study found that young Hindko speakers actively maintain their language and use various strategies to promote it in multilingual urban environments.

Conclusions

The present study focuses on whether female speakers, who spend most of their time at home, are maintaining and preserving their language. The findings showed that these female speakers are

indeed maintaining their indigenous Hindko language in urban settings. The participants are also actively involved in keeping their distinct culture and identity.

The findings further indicate that language can be maintained through a close affiliation with the Hindko community and frequent visits to native relatives. Similarly, patterns of language use at home enabled the participants to preserve their language. Parents' language policies also supported the maintenance of Hindko at home with siblings, relatives, and even friends.

The city is a place for distinct cultures; therefore, preserving one's particular identity is essential. The findings showed that participants maintain their cultural values by participating in weddings, performing traditional dances, listening to Hindko music, eating traditional food, and practising cultural norms at home. Similarly, three out of five participants shared different strategies to promote the Hindko language on digital platforms and social media. These include voice-overs in Hindko, Roman transcription and subtitles in Hindko, and facilitating teachers to promote the Hindko language among children.

The findings show that community members actively promote and maintain their language in cities. These strategies can be applied by other community members in cities to maintain and promote their languages in diverse linguistic environments.

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