

Pakistan is a land of linguistic diversity having more than sixty languages. Punjabi, along with its numerous mutually intelligible dialects, is an ancient language. It is mainly spoken in the Pakistani province of Punjab and Indian Punjab in the subcontinent. It is a member of the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family. The aim of this ethnographic study is to explore the status of Punjabi language in our society by looking at the language usage and linguistic practices of Punjabi native speakers residing in selected urban and rural areas. Ten families, five from urban area and five from rural area, participated in the study. The participants were selected on the basis of their educational level, marital status, monthly income, occupation, family background and the size of land owned by them.

The theoretical framework which informs this research is the constructivist qualitative paradigm. The tools of data collection include semi structured interviews and recordings of informal conversation of the research participants. The analysis of the collected data reveals that in the urban areas, Punjabi language is not the dominant medium of communication among the research participants. The participants do not consider it important and worthwhile to maintain Punjabi language, as they do not see it as economically advantageous and profitable to them. It is just a part of their cultural heritage, but they do not use it for communicative purposes. In the rural areas, however, the research participants expressed a strong sense of association and affiliation with Punjabi language; Punjabi language is their dominant medium of communication with others; they consider Punjabi an inevitable part of their cultural heritage and identity; they support the idea of learning English and Urdu languages but not at the cost of Punjabi language.

These findings suggest that language desertion is an urban phenomenon, as Punjabi language is not maintained by the urban research participants due to certain wider socio-political factors which have disrupted and distorted the status of Punjabi language while consolidating the role of English and Urdu in the society.