



**Language Vitality and Language Attitude Among the
Punjabi People in Chiang Mai, Thailand**

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1 Abstract

The aim of the research is to study the language attitude and language vitality of the Pakistani background Punjabi people living in Chiang Mai. The subjects were ten Punjabi people from different areas of Pakistan. Two male subjects were married to local Thai nationals. The data was collected by questionnaire and observation. The study found that the Punjabi language is used in limited domains; it was evident that the language is not being taught to children in most of the families and it seems that a language shift is in progress. The Punjabi people in Chiang Mai have a very negative attitude towards the Punjabi language.

2 Introduction

2.1 Punjabi Language

Punjabi (also spelled as Panjabi) is classified as the member of the Indo-Aryan sub-group of the Indo-European languages, spoken by over 100 million native speakers throughout the world. Punjabi is primarily spoken in the Punjab region of Pakistan and India. According to the Ethnologue 2013 estimate, over sixty two million native speakers speak the western Punjabi variety in Pakistan, and over twenty nine million speakers speak the eastern Punjabi variety in India.



2.2 Chiang Mai

Chiang Mai city, famous for its rich culture, linguistic diversity, cool climate and stunning mountain scenery, is the capital of Chiang Mai province located in north of Thailand. Population of Chiang Mai city is over 200,000. Most of the inhabitants in Chiang Mai are local Thai people. However, many ethnic minority groups have migrated and settled in the city. The Pakistani Punjabi community is one of the very small ethnic minority groups which have settled in Chiang Mai over last two decades. There are no official numbers available for Pakistani background Punjabi speakers in the city, but about 500 speakers are living in Chiang Mai.

2.3 Research Questions

My objective for doing this study was to answer the following questions:

1. What languages do the Punjabi people use in different domains with native Punjabi speakers in Chiang Mai?
2. How do the Punjabi people in Chiang Mai feel about their language?
3. Will the young Punjabi people maintain their language or shift to another language?

2.4 Hypothesis

In Pakistan educated Punjabi speakers do not have a very positive attitude about using their language in formal settings, such as education, offices, etc., I assume that the Punjabi people living in Chiang Mai will have a rather positive attitude towards their language. This is because people living outside their community often want to maintain their identity. [a quote from a textbook]

2.5 Methodology

In order to get a set of qualitative data, direct and indirect methods were used. To answer the research questions of this project, a survey was conducted using three approaches to elicit the data: Questionnaires, observation and informal interviews.

2.5.1 Questionnaire

The questionnaire used in this research was adopted from Baker (1992). The questions were modified according to the situation of the target group and split into three sections; linguistics background, language use, and language attitude. A number of Punjabi speakers from different social and age groups were approached. Ten subjects were able to respond to the survey.

2.5.2 Observation

Before the research began the researcher had met some of the subjects and spent time with them in social situations. During this time the researcher began to make informal observations and form hypothesis about their attitude towards Punjabi. The researcher then spent many hours over two weeks with a number of Punjabi speakers in different situations to do informal research by participating in their social events, conducting informal interviews, and meeting individuals as well as groups. The Urdu language was the medium of communication between the researcher and the participants.

3 Previous Studies

Summaries of two studies on attitude to Punjabi language in two different areas will be given in this section. One was done in Pakistan and the other was done in Manchester, UK.

3.1 Language Attitude in Pakistan

Sabiha Mansoor's book 'Punjabi, Urdu, English in Pakistan: A Sociolinguistics Study' (1993) is an excellent and careful study of language attitudes and a major contribution in the field of sociolinguistic in Pakistan. Mansoor found that the majority of Punjabi students have a negative attitude towards their language and community. They have no interest in studying Punjabi, and think it has no benefit for their future. Even among those who would like to study Punjabi, they see it as only having value for insights into Punjabi culture. However the author found that Punjabi boys used Punjabi more often than Punjabi girls, and in more domains. For Punjabi boys, the Punjabi language has value as a marker of cultural identity. The Punjabi-speaking students had a high regard for Urdu and a desire to learn it, as well as a strong desire to learn English.

3.2 Language Attitude in the United Kingdom

Sara Khan's research study, "Language use and attitudes of the British-born Pakistani community in Manchester" is a brilliant work, providing extensive details about the language use and attitudes of the Pakistani people born in Manchester,

England. According to Khan, the UK census shows that Pakistanis in Manchester are the largest ethnic minority group, and she says there are total of 129 languages spoken in Manchester schools with Urdu and Punjabi being at the top of the list. Since Punjabi is second largest language spoken in Manchester schools, her investigation provides some sound information in relation to language vitality and attitude among the Punjabi community in Manchester. Khan investigates the following questions:

What languages are spoken in the Pakistani community? To what extent are heritage language(s) being maintained by the British-born generation? What are speaker's attitudes towards the heritage languages and their future maintenance? [Khan]

Khan concludes, "British-born Pakistanis have been able to maintain their heritage language up to three generations (although to varying levels of competence). However English dominates the [lives] of the younger generations, and is the preferred language for communication. Negative attitudes displayed toward Punjabi opposed to Urdu have an effect on the maintenance of the language. Changing attitudes in conjunction with a low level of competence, particularly among the 3rd generation may indicate language shift being in process".

Findings and Data Analysis

In this section, all of the results of the questionnaire and observation will be presented and an analysis of the outcomes will be given. It should be noted that because of time constraints, only ten subjects were chosen to answer the questions in the questionnaire.

3.3 Language Use

This part of the survey contained three questions focusing on language use of Punjabi people in Chiang Mai. The overall results of each question are presented in tables.

3.3.1 Question 1: What languages do you speak with the following interlocutors?

The focus of this question was primarily on the language use. In this question twelve different interlocutors were given to the subjects. In order to analyze the question more neatly, the interlocutors are grouped into four domains (in table 1): home domain (sub-questions a-f), community domain (g-h), public domain (i-j) and government domain (k-l).

It should be noted that the total numbers in the table are greater than 10 because some subjects said that they used more than one language with the given people. For example, one of the subjects spoke both Punjabi and Urdu with his parents. One subject spoke Punjabi, Urdu, English and Thai with his spouse. So the total number of responses in most cases is higher than the number of subjects. Some of the subjects did not respond to some of the questions. For instance, some subjects did not ever see their grandparents so they did not respond to that question. The overall responses from the questionnaires are given in Table 1 below.

	Total	Punjabi	%	Urdu	%	English	%	Thai	%
a. ... with parents	10	7	70	6	60				
b. ...with grandparents	4	4	100						
c. ...with siblings	10	5	50	5	50				
d. ...with spouse	10	3	30	6	60	2	20	2	20
e. ...with children	10	4	40	7	70	2	20		
f. at home, what language do you use the most	10	4	40	6	60	1	10	2	20
g. What languages do you speak with Punjabi friends	10	10	100	4	40				
h. ...with non-Punjabi friends	10			10	100	6	60		
i. ...at the market with Punjabi people	10	10	100	4	40				
j. ... with people in the city	10			2	20	8	80	7	70
k. ...with a government worker/official	10					9	90	6	60
l. ...with teachers	5					2	40	3	60

Table 1: Raw data of the languages the subjects speak with different people.

It appears that in the home domain, Punjabi is used more when speaking with parents and grandparents while Urdu is used more when speaking to spouses and children. It was found that seventy percent of the subjects spoke Punjabi with parents, hundred percent with grandparents¹, fifty percent with siblings, thirty percent with spouses², forty percent with children and forty percent spoke Punjabi at home. It was found that sixty percent of the subjects spoke Urdu with parents, fifty percent with siblings, sixty percent with spouses, seventy percent with children and sixty percent spoke Urdu at home. English was spoken by twenty percent of the subjects with their spouses and by ten percent at home. Thai was spoken by twenty percent of the subjects with their spouses and by twenty percent at home.

	Punjabi	Urdu	English	Thai
Percent of subjects	50%	56%	9%	7%
Number of responses	27	30	5	4

Table 2: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the home domain.

Table 2 (above) is a summary of the data presented above. It can be seen in table 2 that Urdu is being used very significantly in the home domains. The overall

¹ Only four subjects responded to this question, the grandparents of the other subjects' passed away when they were very young.

² It must be noted that spouses of the 2 subjects were local Thai nationals and could not speak Punjabi.

percentage of Urdu usage is 56% in home domain which is higher than the usage of Punjabi. Thai and English are also being used at home. This shows that the language use between parents and children has already started changing which means language shift is in progress both in mono-cultural and bi-cultural families.

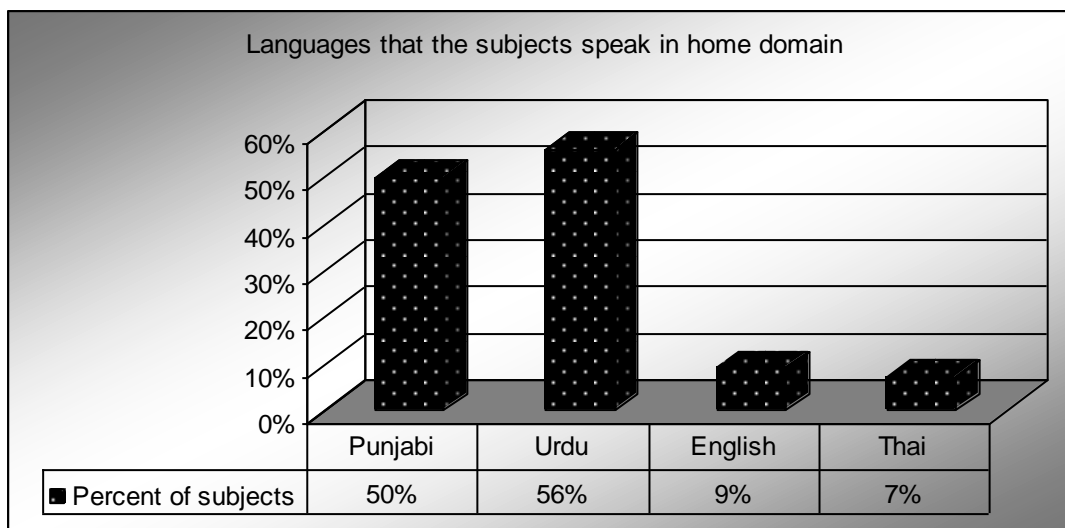


Table 3: Languages that the subjects speak in the home domain.

Looking at the overall responses in the community domain in table 4, it can be seen that Urdu is being used by 70% of the subjects. This is higher than Punjabi, which is being used by 50% of the subjects. . It also shows that English is being used by 30% of the subjects in the community domain

	Punjabi	Urdu	English	Thai
Percent of subjects	50%	70%	30%	0%
Number of responses	10	14	6	0

Table 4: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the community domain.

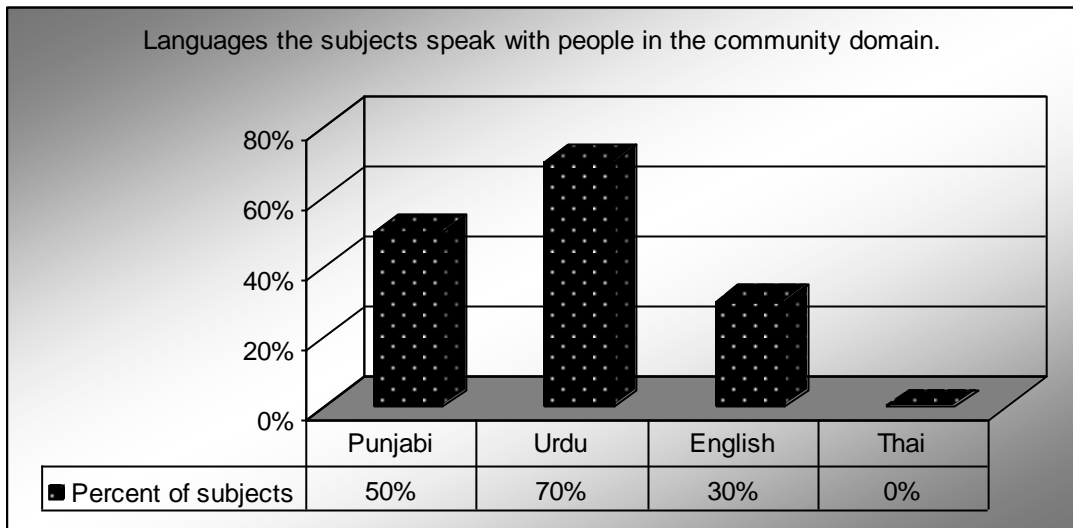


Table 5: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the community domain.

In the public domain Punjabi is being used by 50% of the subjects, Urdu is being used by 30%, English by 40%, and Thai by 35%. The public domain results are given in Table 6.

	Punjabi	Urdu	English	Thai
Percent of subjects	50%	30%	40%	35%
Number of responses	10	6	8	7

Table 6: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the public domain.

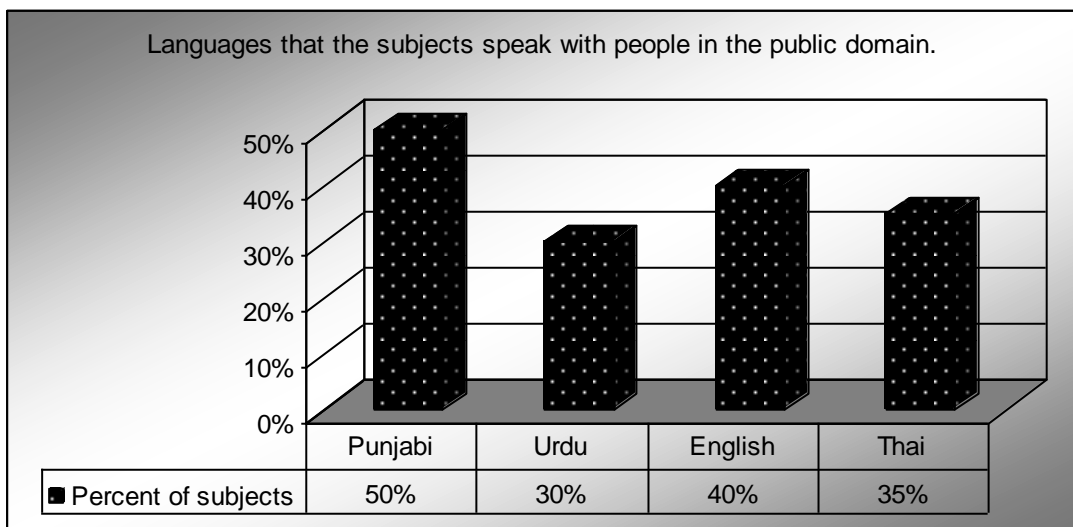


Table 7: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the public domain.

As it can be seen in table 8, Punjabi is never used in the government domain, instead English and Thai are used.

	Punjabi	Urdu	English	Thai
Percent of subjects	0%	0%	55%	45%
Number of responses	0	0	11	9

Table 8: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the government domain.

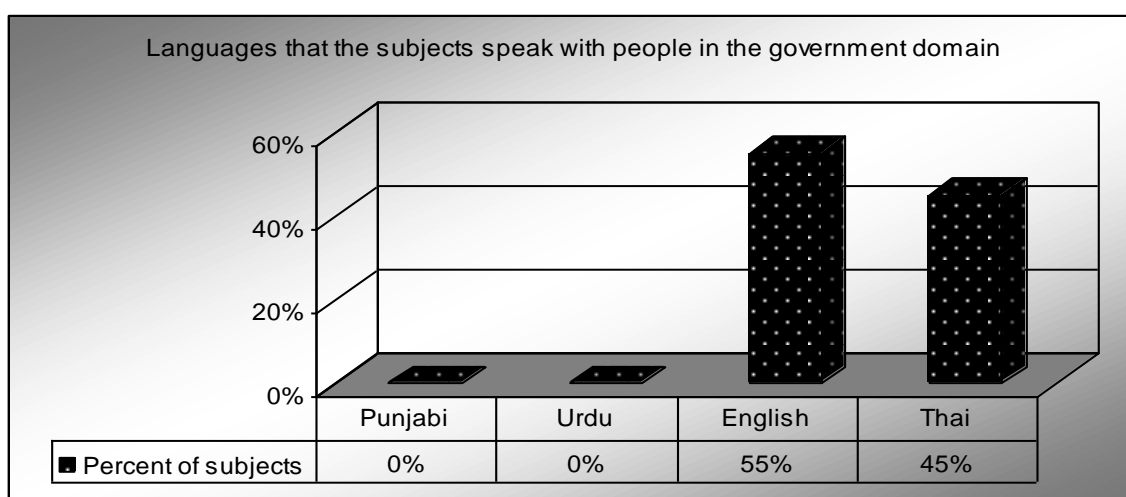


Table 9: Languages that the subjects speak with people in the government domain.

3.3.2 Question 2: What languages do the Punjabi children in Chiang Mai speak first?

The results given in table 10 show that the first language most of the children learn is Urdu (90%). On the other hand, Punjabi is the last language that the children learn first. English and Thai languages are also learned as the first language by a number of children. Some subjects responded that children learn more than one language simultaneously.

Urdu	English	Thai	Punjabi
9	4	2	1

Table 10: Raw data of languages Punjabi children spoke first.

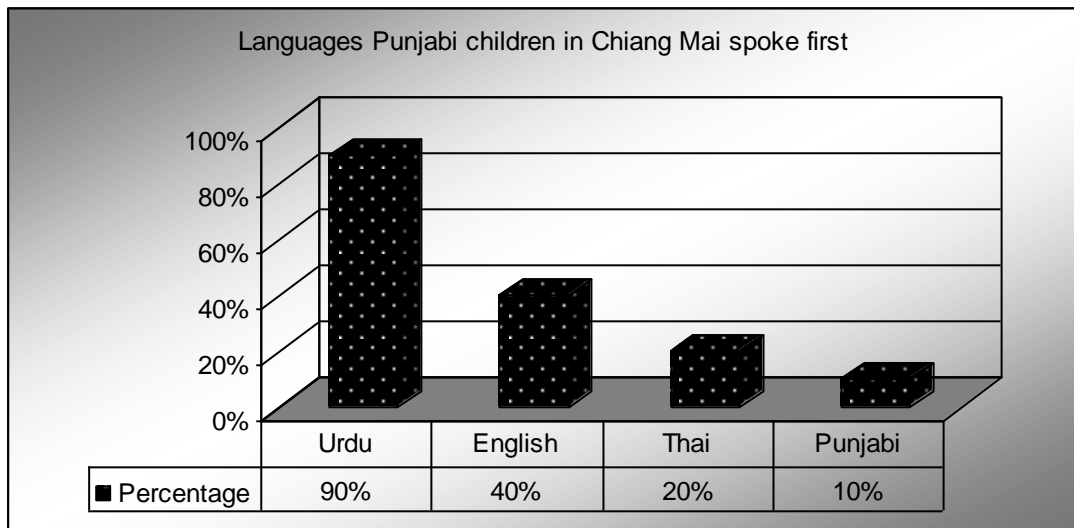


Table 11: Languages Punjabi children spoke first.

3.3.3 Question 3: Which language do Punjabi parents speak to their children?

Table 12 shows that most of the subjects indicated that Punjabi parents speak Urdu to their children. Some subjects indicated that some parents use Punjabi and English to speak to their children. Thai language is also used by Punjabi parents to speak to their children.

Urdu	English	Thai	Punjabi
9	2	1	2

Table 12: Raw data of languages Punjabi parents speak to their children

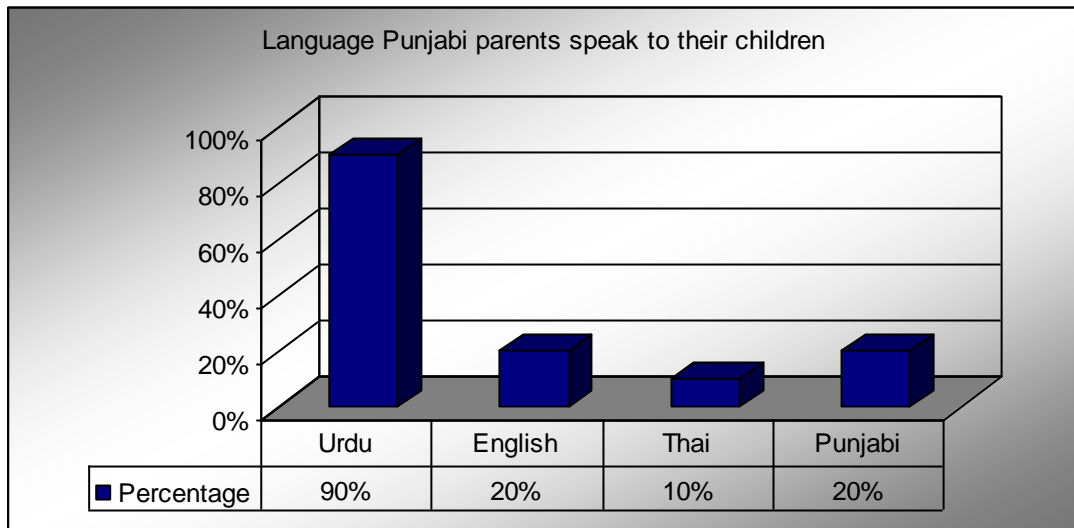


Table 13: Languages the Punjabi parents speak to their children.

3.3.4 Conclusion

Punjabi language in Chiang Mai seems to be restricted to only a few limited domains such as home and community. Even in the home and community domains, Punjabi is used less frequently than other languages. In most of the subjects' homes, children do not learn Punjabi as their first language. Urdu seems to be the most dominant language among Punjabi people in Chiang Mai.

3.4 Language Attitude

This part of the survey contained questions and statements focusing on language attitude of Punjabi people in Chiang Mai. The overall results of both questions are presented here.

3.4.1 Question 4: How important or unimportant the Punjabi language is for doing the following:

A question was asked to the subjects to find out how important or unimportant the Punjabi language is for making friends, earning money, reading, writing, listening to radio, getting a job, going to religious places, and so on. The subjects were asked to rank all of the activities according to a scale of 1 to 5, 1 being 'very unimportant' and 5 being 'very important'. In table 5, the raw data of the questionnaire is given which shows the feelings of 10 subjects.

	Very important	%	Important	%	Neutral	%	Unimportant	%	Very unimportant	%
For people to:	Raw data		Raw data		Raw data		Raw data		Raw data	
1. make friends	1	10	2	20	4	40	3	30		
2. earn money					2	20	1	10	7	70
3. read					2	20	2	20	6	60
4. write					2	20	2	20	6	60
5. listen to radio	1	10			4	40	1	10	4	40
6. get a job					2	20			8	80
7. go to mosque/church/temple			2	20					8	80
8. go to market			2	20	3	30	3	30	2	20
9. go shopping			2	20	2	30	2	20	4	40
10. make phone calls					6	60			4	40
11. be accepted in the community			2	20	2	20	1	10	5	50
12. talk to friends in school	1	10			7	70			2	20
13. talk to teachers	1	10			2	20			7	70
14. talk to people in the community	3	30	3	30	4	40				
15. talk to people outside the community	2	20					2	20	6	60
16. contact with the government officials					2	20	2	20	6	60

Table 14: Raw data of importance/unimportance of Punjabi

According to the raw data in table 14, it is very obvious that the subjects think that Punjabi language is "very unimportant" for a large number of activities. For example 70% think Punjabi "very unimportant" for earning money. 60% think it is "very unimportant" for reading and writing. 80% think it is "very unimportant" for getting jobs and in religious places. 70% think it is "very unimportant" for talking to teachers.

There was only one activity 30% of the subjects thought for which Punjabi is "very important" and that activity was to talk to people in the community.

Table 15 (below) shows overall percentage of importance and unimportance of Punjabi language for various activities. It shows that Punjabi is "very unimportant" to 47% of the subjects.

	Very important	Important	Neutral	Unimportant	Very unimportant	Total
Responses	9	13	44	19	75	160
Percent	6%	8%	27%	12%	47%	100%

Table 15: Percentage of importance/unimportance of Punjabi for various activities.

3.4.2 Positive and negative statements to be agreed or disagreed

Eleven statements about the Punjabi language and community were given to the subjects. The list of statements consisted of six positive statements and five negative statements. The subjects were given four options to choose one of them, the options were, 'Agree', 'Neutral', 'Disagree' and 'No Idea'.

	Agree	%	Neutral	%	Disagree	%	No Idea	%
1. I like hearing Punjabi.	9	90			1	10		
2. Punjabi is a language worth learning to read and write.	4	40	2	20	4	40		
3. Punjabi should be taught to all Punjabi people in Chiang Mai.	3	30	1	10	6	60		
4. I like speaking Punjabi.	6	60	3	30	1	10		
5. Punjabi has no place in the modern world.	8	80					2	20
6. Parents should not teach their children to speak Punjabi.	4	40	3	30	3	30		
7. We need to keep speaking Punjabi from one generation to the next.	4	40	4	40	2	20		
8. You are considered a low class person if you speak Punjabi.	5	50	1	10	4	40		
9. It's difficult to learn Punjabi.			4	40	6	60		
10. Punjabi is a valuable language.	4	40	2	20	4	40		
11. I am not willing to read and write Punjabi.	7	70			3	30		

Table 16: Raw data of language attitude towards the positive and negat statements.

4 Conclusion

Punjabi speakers from Pakistani background use at least four languages in different domains in Chiang Mai. It is primarily being used in communication between Punjabi speakers in the community domain. It has a quite limited function in the home domain, the language for communication between parents and children is dramatically shifting from Punjabi to Urdu and Thai.

Language attitude among the Punjabi people in Chiang Mai is rather negative. They feel that Punjabi is an incomplete and rude language, therefore it should not be used in home, school and business domains.

It is very much evident that the number of speakers is continuously declining and the current speakers of the language are not willing to maintain Punjabi in Chiang Mai. There seems to be a language shift in progress.

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APPENDIX A

PUNJABI INDIVIDUAL SOCIOLOGICAL QUESTIONNAIRE³

Instructions

- Shaded items are NOT to be read aloud.
- Items in parentheses () give information about when or how to ask a question. Items in brackets [] require a choice depending on whatever is appropriate.

Informed Consent

Hello. My name is Saeed Zubair. I work with Payap University in Chiang Mai studying minority languages. We want to know more about the Punjabi People living in Chiang Mai. I would like you to help me today. These questions are not difficult; they're questions about yourself and your language. You don't need to be afraid. You can answer according to what you think. If there's a question that you don't feel comfortable answering, that's OK, you don't have to answer. It'll take about 30-45 minutes, but if something comes up, don't feel like you have to stay. Is this something you could help us with?

INFORMED CONSENT:

Given:

Not Given:

Date:

³ This questionnaire was adopted and modified according to the requirements of this study. The sources were: Blair, Frank. 1990; Maliwan, Tuwakham. 2005; Nahass, Ramzi, J. Kelsall and N. Mann. 2006.

Question	Answer
1. Questionnaire Number	
2. Interview Location	
3. Date	
4. Interviewer Name	
5. Language of Elicitation	
6. Language of Response	
7. What is your name?	
8. Gender	
9. How old are you?	
10. How long have you been living in Chiang Mai?	
11. Are you married already or not yet?	
12. What is (was) your work?	
13. Up to what level of education did you complete?	
14. (if did not finish elementary) What was your reason for dropping out?	
15. Where were you born? (village, city, town)	
16. Have you lived anywhere else for more than a year? Where? When? How long did you live there? Why?	
17. What language did you speak first?	
18. Can you speak any other languages?	
a. (if yes) What languages?	
19. Of all the languages you speak, which language do you speak best?	
a. ... second best?	
b. ... third best?	
20. What [people group/tribe/clan] is your father from?	
a. What language did your father usually speak to you when you were a child?	
21. What [people group/tribe/clan] is your mother from?	
a. What language did your mother usually speak to you when you were a child?	
22. When you were a child, what language did your parents speak to each other?	

Question	Answer
23. (if married) Now I'm going to ask you some questions about your spouse. Where was your [husband/wife] born?	
a. What people group is your [husband/wife] from?	
b. What language did your [husband/wife] speak first as a child?	
24. What languages do you speak...	
m. ... with your parents?	
n. ...with your grandparents?	
o. ...with your siblings?	
p. (if married) ...with your spouse?	
q. (if have children) ...with your children?	
r. (if old and have children) ...with your grandchildren / nieces / nephews?	
s. So, in your house, what language do you use the most?	
t. What languages do you speak with Punjabi friends?	
u. ...with non-Punjabi friends?	
v. ...at the market with Punjabi people?	
w. ... with people in the city? (in Pakistan)	
x. ... with people in the city? (in Chiang Mai)	
y. ...with a government worker/official? (in Pakistan)	
z. ...with a government worker/official? (in Chiang Mai)	
aa. ...with teachers (in Pakistan)	
bb. ...with teachers (in Chiang Mai)	
cc. At present, what language do you speak with Punjabi classmates at school?	
dd. ...with non-Punjabi classmates at school?	
ee. ...with your teacher?	

<i>Ask Questions 25 to 33 ONLY if you know this person is a Christian</i>	
25. Where do you usually go to church?	
26. At church, what language is used most often for...	
a. ...fellowship	
b. ...singing	
c. ...preaching	
d. ...corporate prayer	
e. ...announcements	
27. What language do you use when you pray on your own?	
28. The Bible that is used at your church, what language is it in?	
29. Is it hard or easy to understand that Bible?	
30. (if not "easy") Why? Because it is the Bible or because of the language?	
31. (if the Bible used in their church is not the Punjabi Bible) Have you ever read or heard the Punjabi Bible?	
32. Is it hard or easy to understand that Bible?	
33. (if not "easy") Why? Because it is the Bible or because of the language?	

CHILDREN

Question		Answer
34. Normally, what language do Punjabi children in this city speak first?		
35. What language do Punjabi children in this city speak when they play?		
(if not only Punjabi)	a. How do you feel about that?	
	b. Why?	
36. (If they have children) Do your children ever speak Thai at home?		
(if yes)	a. How do you feel when they do that?	
	b. Why?	
37. Are the young people in this city proud of the Punjabi language?		
a. (if no) Why not?		
38. Are the young people in this city proud of being Punjabi?		
a. (if no) Why not?		
39. (If they have children) What parts of being Punjabi would you like to see your children and grandchildren continue?		
Note whether or not you have to give the “for example” below. Examples Given <input type="checkbox"/> Examples NOT Given <input type="checkbox"/>		
For example: customs, culture, traditions, food, dress, etc..		
a. Why?		
40. Do you think Punjabi children in this city speak Punjabi well?		
(if no)	a. In what ways do they speak it not well?	
	b. How do you feel about this?	
	c. Why?	
41. What language do Punjabi parents use with their children?		
a. (if not Punjabi) Why not Punjabi?		

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES 1

- How important or unimportant do you think the Punjabi language is for doing the following:

	Very important 5	Important 4	Neutral 3	Unimportant 2	Very unimportant 1
42. make friends					
43. earn money					
44. read					
45. write					
46. listen to radio					
47. get a job					
48. go to mosque/church/temple					
49. go to market					
50. go shopping					
51. make phone calls					
52. be accepted in the community					
53. talk to friends in school					
54. talk to teachers					
55. talk to people in the community					
56. talk to people outside the community					
57. contact with the government officials					

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES 2

- Read the following statement and respond whether you agree or disagree.

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	No Idea
58. I like hearing Punjabi.				
59. Punjabi is a language worth learning to read and write.				
60. Punjabi should be taught to all people in Chiang Mai.				
61. I like speaking Punjabi.				
62. Punjabi has no place in the modern world.				
63. Parents should not teach their children to speak Punjabi.				
64. We need to keep speaking Punjabi from one generation to the next.				
65. You are considered a low class person if you speak Punjabi.				
66. It's difficult to learn Punjabi.				
67. Punjabi is a valuable language.				
68. I am not willing to read and write Punjabi.				

LANGUAGE ATTITUDES 3

Question	Answer	
69. Should your children be able to speak Punjabi?		
a. (if yes) Why?		
70. Should your children be able to speak Urdu?		
b. (if yes) Why?		
71. For singles, will you marry someone who speaks only Punjabi? only Urdu?		
a. (if no) Why not?		
72. What language should a mother speak to her children? Why?		
73. What language do you hope your children will speak?		
74. Do you want to be Punjabi or something else such as Thai or Pakistani?		
75. What is the best language for traditional activities such as funeral, spirit world, religious belief and so forth?		
76. Suppose you go to Lampang City and overhear people speaking Punjabi, how would you react?		
77. Have you ever been ashamed to be overheard speaking Punjabi?		
78. Twenty years from now, do you think there will still be children in this city who can speak Punjabi?		
(if no)	a. How do you feel about that?	
	b. Why?	

Subject #: 000

Location:

Comments/Observations: