

## Language Shift in Muzaffarabad: A case study of Hindko and Kashmiri

Zafeer Hussain Kiani<sup>1</sup>

Abdul Qadir Khan<sup>2</sup>

Musarat Yasmin<sup>3</sup>

Muhammad Javed Iqbal<sup>4</sup>

### Abstract

*This study aims to investigate whether there is any language shift among those who have migrated to city Muzaffarabad from the countryside. The study further aims to identify the role of attitude and culture on the shift. For this purpose, ten immigrant families were taken as sample. Out of ten, five were those whose first language was Hindko and five were selected with Kashmiri as their first language. They were given a questionnaire which meant to examine the competency of parents and their school going children in their first language. They were also interviewed about their attitude towards their first language and Urdu. The results reveal that the parents speak their first language at home considering it their linguistic identity but the children are losing their first language rapidly. However, Kashmiri speaking families showed more concern towards their first language than Hindko speaking families. The language shift towards Urdu was found to be the result of Urdu being mode of communication in educational institutions and electronic media. Another reason of the language shift is the supposition that Urdu speaking children are the only representative of modernity and elite class.*

### 1. Introduction

If there are two or more languages in a community, a hierarchical structure is always adopted, with one becoming the dominant language and the other the subordinate one (Sasse 1992). Both languages can coexist for long periods of time, but changes such as migrations, social and economic events can break the proportion. The speakers of the subordinate language may notice that their language has lost value relative to the dominant language. They may decide that it is no longer useful and stop speaking it in all domains of use.

It is well known that language shift is the most common course of language death

<sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of English, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad

<sup>2</sup> Associate Professor, Department of English, University of Azad Jammu & Kashmir, Muzaffarabad

<sup>3</sup> Assistant Professor, Department of English, University of Gujrat, Gujrat

<sup>4</sup> Lecturer in Translation Studies, CELTS, University of Gujrat, Gujrat

(Campbell 1994). Language shift consequently leads towards the language extinction. This prevalent trend has an effect on several million people round the globe. By and large, language shift is the result of rapidly developing globalization that has made the English language a standard of communication. However, abandonment of native language may also happen due to the influence of any other second language which possesses dominant status in the society.

Language shift, if not checked, leads towards the course of language death. Blommaert (2010) remarks that whenever a big and a powerful language such as English appears in foreign territory, small, indigenous languages will die. Language death is not only an ancient event but also a more recent one. With the death of its last speaker, Vegliot Dalmatian completely died in 1898. It is estimated that 90% of the approximately 6,000 languages currently spoken will have disappeared by the end of the 21st century (UNESCO 2003).

Latin and Greek are usually referred to as dead languages because they are not in use currently. Similarly, languages which are spoken currently are referred to as living languages. It is believed that a language is living organisms. A language is born, grows up and finally dies. However, these suppositions are not utterly true, because the fate of languages is not always death, but change (Belltrran, et. al., 2009). For a language shift to occur, the speakers must be fluent in at least two languages. A language shift is a phenomenon of bilingual and multilingual societies. If the speakers know a language but don't use it anymore, that language becomes extinct regardless of their knowledge.

The question arises that if the natural process for a language is to change, why have some languages died out? There are two main reasons: (a) because the speakers disappeared due to an action such as direct genocide, or the destruction of their habitat; or (b) because the speakers decided to speak a different language (Mühlhäusler 1996).

The language shift in Muzaffarabad, which may consequently escort towards language death, is somewhat amalgam of these two reasons.



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*Zafeer Hussai*

*Hindko and Kashmiri |*  
*ı & Muhammad Javed*  
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***Figure 1.1 District Muzaffarabad, AJ&K, Pakistan***

After the Earthquake 2005, a vast majority of people migrated towards the city Muzaffarabad. These immigrants used to speak only one language in their native villages but their children were noticed using Urdu in more than one domain of their daily life. This research was initiated with the supposition that there is a language shift among the native Hindko and Kashmiri speakers who migrated to city Muzaffarabad after Earthquake 2005. The research was carried out to answer the following research questions:

- a) What language do Hindko speakers, living in Muzaffarabad, prefer in various domains?
- b) What language do Kashmiri speakers, living in Muzaffarabad, prefer in various domains?
- c) In which domains, are first languages preferred?
- d) Is there a relationship between the speaker's social set-up and language behaviour?
- e) What type of social set-up may best explain the speaker's language use?

**2. Research Methodology**

Usually in the study of a language, an exploratory research approach is employed. The methodology employed for this study is also exploratory. This is a pertinent

research approach to gather information about a new field of study or to look into an under-researched problem (Rehman, 2011). Following two research techniques were adopted for the present study:

### **2.1. Questionnaire**

Questionnaire is a tool which is used to gather in depth information. It is a well-liked research tool in social sciences (Dornyei, 2003). The questionnaire was designed with mostly close ended questions. Close ended questions are useful when detailed information is required in a short time. Moreover, they are also easy to analyze. The questionnaire consisted of two parts. The first part of the questionnaire aimed to get the personal information of the respondents. The second part meant to gather information about the languages understudy.

### **2.2. Interview**

An interview is a frequently used tool in social sciences to explore in-depth insights. According to Mishler (1991), it is a type of discourse that is shaped by asking and answering questions and interpreted as narrative accounts. The interview is considered as an essential research tool in the ethnographic research studies (McCracken, 1988; Patton, 1990). Unlike a questionnaire, an interview is not always planned though there are some strictly planned interviews such as structured interviews for public office recruitment. Usually, the researcher decides on site what to ask and what sequence to follow. The interviews were conducted with an aim to elicit information which was not possible by means of a scripted questionnaire. The respondents were asked through semi-structured interviewing to express their views and attitudes towards languages. The interview helped getting information about the social activities, education, family size, household income and residence history of the adult respondents. It also helped gathering information about the educational institution, social and academic activities, interests, games and hobbies of the young respondents. This all meant to know to the language proficiency variations among an adult and the offspring. An interview guide was hired to conduct interview of Kashmiri speakers.

### **2.3. Sampling**

Five Hindko speaking families & five Kashmiri speaking families with a school going child were targeted to collect data for the present study. All selected families were the post-earthquake immigrants from surrounding countryside to the city Muzaffarabad. Head of the family and one school/college going child from each family were selected as the participants, thus 20 subjects were selected overall. The selected participants were given a questionnaire to examine their L1 & L2 behaviour. The same participants were interviewed about their attitude

towards L1 & L2 and their L1 proficiency.

### 3. Results and Discussions

#### 3.1 Questionnaire

The second half of the questionnaire which was designed to gather information about language behaviour consisted of following questions:

**i. Is it a good thing to use your mother tongue?**

Interestingly, all 20 participants responded in affirmation. They showed concern for their first language but results show that not all of them use their mother tongue practically in all domains of life.

**ii. Do you speak the same language as your grandfather did?**

Once again, they all said yes but later when analyzed in various domains, this answer did not match with their later responses. There was a remarkable fluency variation among the adults and the young respondents.

**iii. What language did you speak at your home as a child with your parents?**

All elderly participants (Hindko & Kashmiri) said that they used their first language with their parents at home. School going Kashmiri children said that they use Kashmiri with their parents but they also use Urdu while doing homework and preparing for tests and exams. On the other hand, all school going Hindko children responded that they use Urdu with their parents and siblings.

**iv. What language do you use with the people coming from your village?**

All adult respondents said that they use their first language with the people coming from their villages. Young Kashmiri informants also replied the same. However, young Hindko respondents said that they speak Hindko and Urdu with such people according to their (visitors') competency in the said languages.

**v. Can you read and write in your language?**

**vi. If yes, do you find enough literature in it?**

Only adult Kashmiri speakers said that they can read in their first language and three of them said that they can write as well. All of them said that they don't find enough literature in their language. Three of the adult Hindko respondents said that they can read in Hindko but they don't find enough literature in it. Two of them said that they can write in Hindko

though they never did. They said that it is not difficult to form words and sentences in Hindko because the Hindko script resembles Urdu script. Four young Kashmiri informants said that they can only read in their language but none answered to have the ability of writing in their first language. On the other hand, on one of the young Hindko informants said that he can read in Hindko but non answered in affirmation when asked about the writing in their first language.

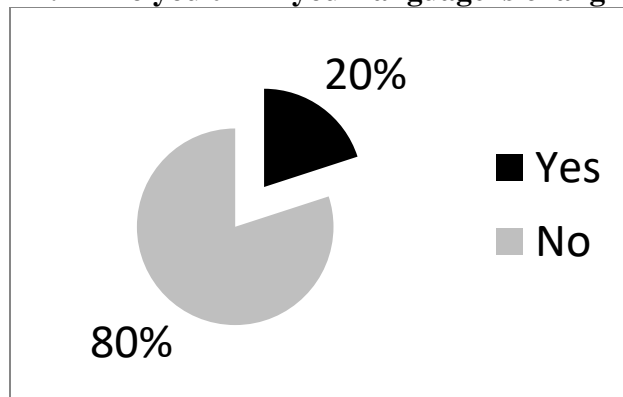
- vii. Are TV and radio programs broadcasted in your mother tongue?**  
**viii. If yes, do you watch or listen to these programs?**

All adult Kashmiri respondents said that radio programs and TV news are frequently broadcasted in their first languages and three of them said that they listen to radio broadcasts in a routine. Hindko speakers said that TV programs are broadcasted in Hindko on a local channel but they don't usually watch such broadcasts. Among the young informants, Kashmiri speakers said that they sometime listen to radio programs in their first language. The young Hindko informants were found totally unaware of these broadcasts.

- ix. Do you travel to your native place?**  
**x. If yes, how frequently do you go there?**  
**xi. For what purpose/s do you travel?**

All of the informants said that do so only on certain occasions i.e. cultural or ceremonial events. They travel to their native places to attend wedding ceremonies or to attend funerals in near relatives. They said that they also celebrate the ceremonies of Eid in their respective villages.

- xii. Do you think your language is changing?**

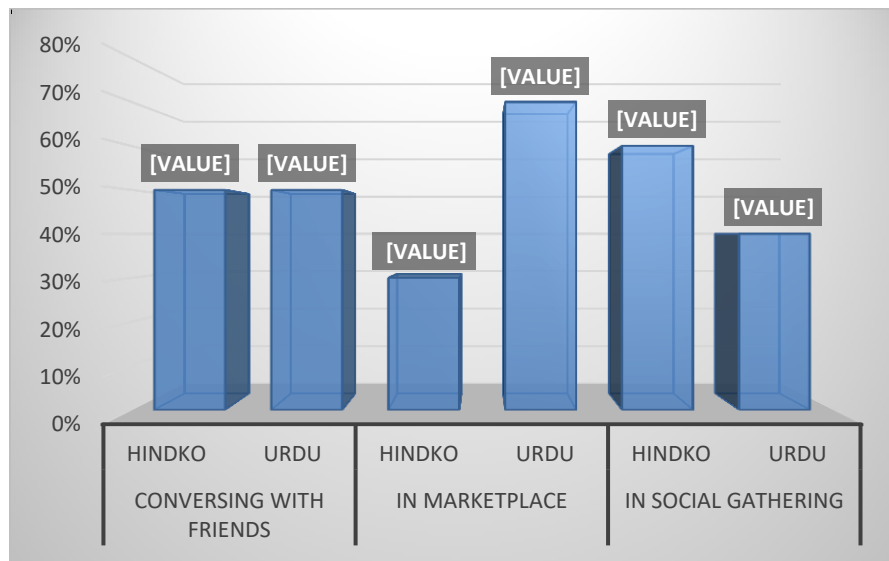


**xiii. If yes, has it changed**

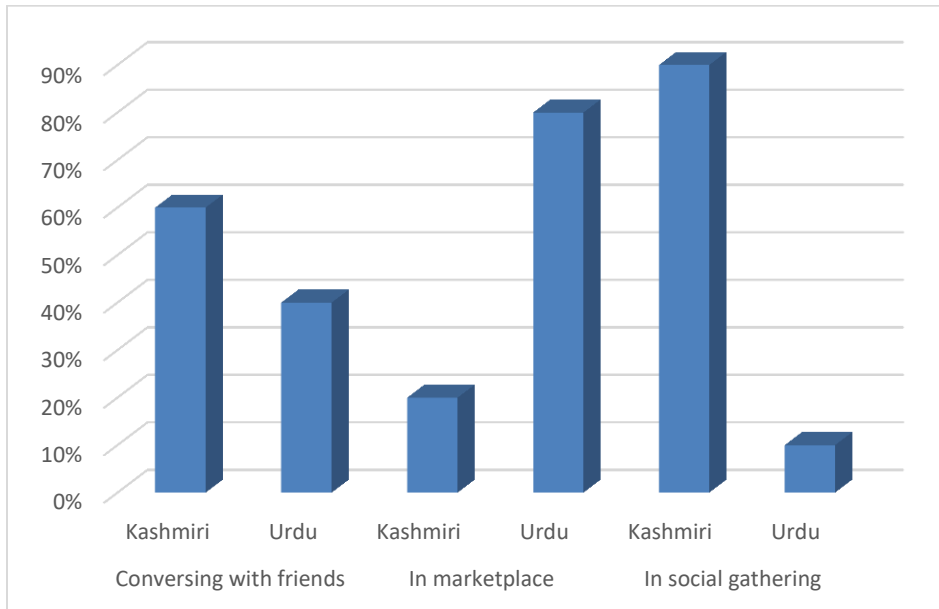
- in vocabulary (words)?
- in meaning?
- in pronunciation?

Only 20% of the respondents answered in affirmation and said that their language is changing in vocabulary and pronunciation.

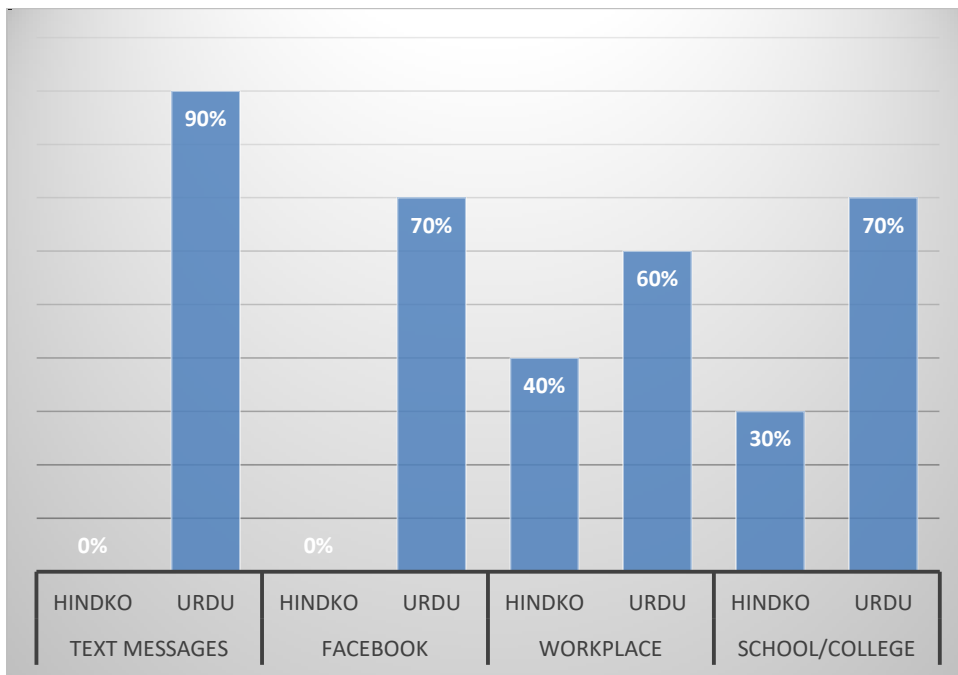
**xiv. What language do you prefer in the following contexts?**



*Fig. 3.1 Comparative use of Hindko and Urdu in various domains-I*

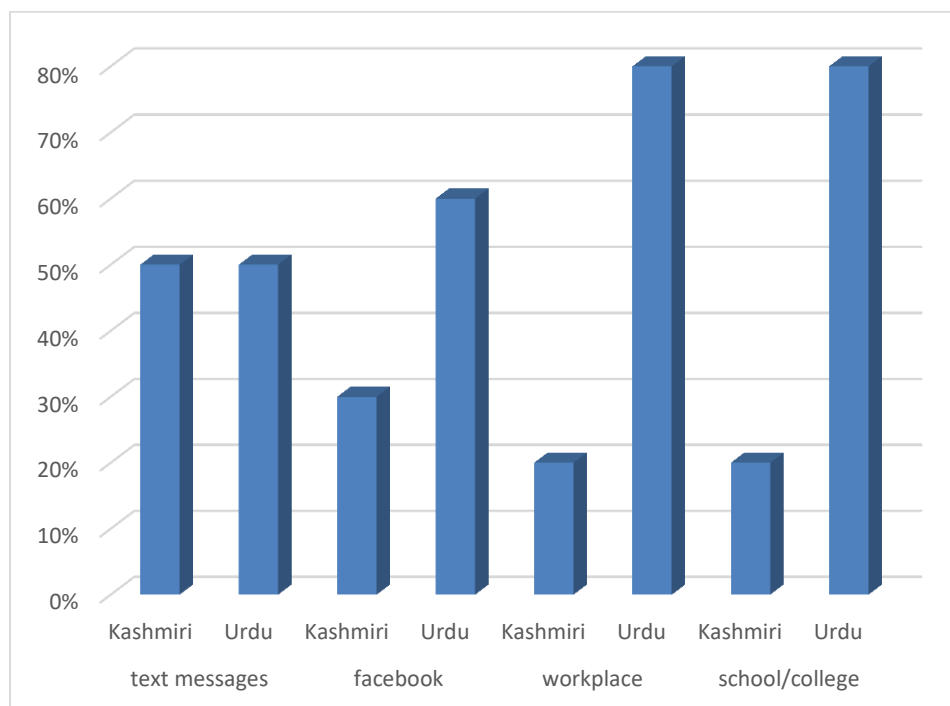


**Fig. 3.2 Comparative use of Kashmiri and Urdu in various domains-I**



**Fig. 3.3 Comparative use of Hindko and Urdu in various domains-II**





**Fig. 3.4 Comparative use of Kashmiri and Urdu in various domains-II**

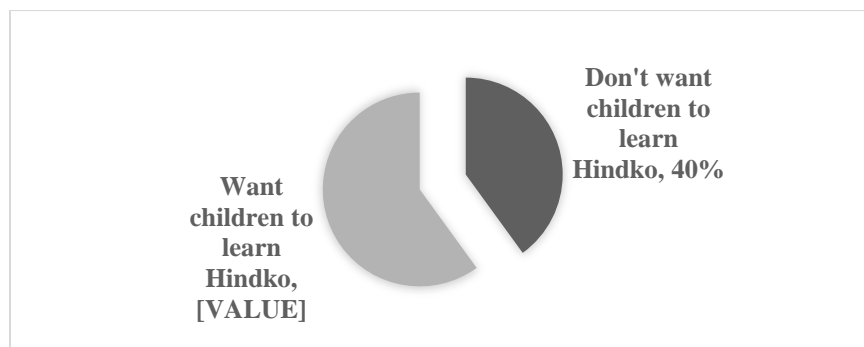
Figures 3.1 and 3.3 represent the language use in various domains by Hindko speakers and the figures 3.2 & 3.4 represent the use of languages by Kashmiri speakers. The data reveals that Kashmiri speakers preferably use their first language in various domains such as conversing with friends and in social gatherings. They equally use Kashmiri and Urdu in their text messages while they use Urdu more often than Kashmiri in marketplace, in workplace, in educational institutions and on social media. They switch to Urdu only when they find a non-Kashmiri recipient. In all the instances of Kashmiri speaking recipients, they tend to use Kashmiri as a mode of communication.

On the other hand, Hindko speakers use their first language more frequently than Urdu only in their social gatherings. In all other domains of life, they use Urdu more commonly than their first language. It is interesting to note that Hindko is almost non-existent on social media (Facebook) and in text messages. Overall, the data represents a major shift towards Urdu. Some of the respondents said that they also use English in text messages and on social media.

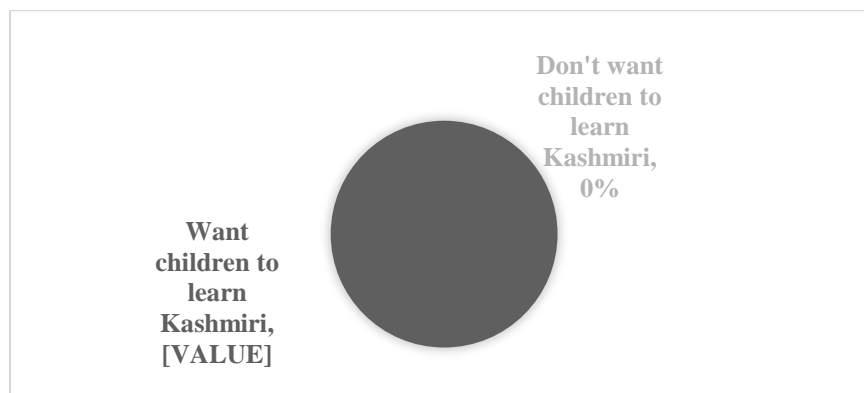
### 3.2. Interview

The interviews were conducted with an aim to know the language proficiency of

the adult and young participants and the reasons of the language shift. The results exhibit a considerable variation in the language proficiency of the adult and young Hindko informants. Young Hindko informants were noticed unable to express themselves in Hindko though they responded earlier that speaking mother tongue is a good thing to do. On the other hand, young Kashmiri informants show very negligible proficiency variation from their adults. The following figures show the attitude of the informants towards their respective mother tongues.



**Fig. 3.5. Attitude towards learning Hindko**



**Fig. 3.6. Attitude towards learning Kashmir**

The data in figures 3.5 & 3.6 show that Kashmiri speakers show more concern towards their first language as compared to Hindko speakers. When asked about the reason of language shift, the informants said that Urdu is the mode of communication in almost all educational institutions whether they are public or private schools.

The shift is also an influence of the persistent use of Urdu in electronic media.

Hindko speakers, who responded that they don't want their children to learn Hindko, said that Hindko is of no use in modern society. According to them, their children are ridiculed by their classmates and friends when they try to speak Hindko. Kashmiri speakers, on the other hand, showed more concern towards their first language. They also wanted their children to speak Urdu in their schools and with friends but they said that they speak Kashmiri with them at home because they don't want to lose their identity.

#### **4. Conclusion**

The present study was carried out to answer five research questions. These questions are answered by the following summary of major findings:

Hindko speaking immigrants living in Muzaffarabad prefer Urdu language as mode of communication in various domains of daily life. The parents speak Hindko with each other and with other elderly people but they don't communicate in Hindko with their school going children. As a result, the children are losing their first language rapidly. The reason behind this change is the dominance of Urdu in various domains which include educational institutions, markets, curriculum and electronic and print media.

The use of Urdu, as a mode of communication, is also considered as the sign of higher social status by Hindko speakers. Kashmiri speaking immigrants, living in Muzaffarabad, also prefer Urdu as a mean of communication in many domains of life but they also use Kashmiri where they find a Kashmiri recipient. The parents speak Kashmiri with each other and with their children at home. They consider the language as their inherited identity and transfer the language to their children consciously. However, school going Kashmiri children are also losing their first language because they use Urdu in their academia but the loss is gradual. The first languages were found in frequent use while conversing with friends and in social gathering only. In all other domains of life, Urdu is found taking the place of first language.

Kashmiri speakers prefer their first language in Facebook and mobile chat where Urdu is in dominant use by Hindko speakers. There is a direct relationship between the social status of the speaker and the language he speaks. The people with higher social set up prefer to speak Urdu while the commonplace speakers use their first language. The school going children speak Urdu not only in their schools but also with their class mates and friends when they converse out of the schools. Similarly, the adult speakers also prefer Urdu while conversing with the officials and their seniors at workplace. Urdu is also preferred while talking to the

strangers at market place and in other domains. This also shows that use of mother tongue in conversation also exhibits familiarity or frankness with the recipients. Based on the findings of current study, it can be concluded that social changes have a decisive impact on the loss of speakers' first language.

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## Appendix-A

### Questionnaire to examine language shift in Muzaffarabad

#### Personal Information

1. Age \_\_\_\_\_
2. Gender \_\_\_\_\_
3. Marital Status \_\_\_\_\_
4. Mother tongue \_\_\_\_\_
5. Place lived \_\_\_\_\_
6. Village name \_\_\_\_\_
7. Profession \_\_\_\_\_
8. Education level \_\_\_\_\_

#### Questions

1. Is it a good thing to use your mother tongue?
2. Do you speak the same language as your grandfather did?
3. What language did you speak at your home as a child with your parents?  
\_\_\_\_\_
4. What language do you use with the people coming from your village?  
\_\_\_\_\_
5. Can you read and write in your language? Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
6. If yes, do you find enough literature in it? Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
7. Are TV and radio programs broadcasted in your mother tongue?  
Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
8. If yes, do you watch or listen to these programs? Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
9. Do you travel to your native place? Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
  - i. If yes, how frequently do you go there? \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. How long do you stay there? \_\_\_\_\_
10. For what purpose/s do you travel? \_\_\_\_\_
11. How fluently can you use and understand the following, (know all, know some, can only understand some but cannot speak, know only few words and phrases, don't know)
  - i. Urdu \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. English \_\_\_\_\_
  - iii. Any other \_\_\_\_\_
12. What language do you prefer in the following contexts?
  - i. Conversing with friends \_\_\_\_\_
  - ii. In marketplace \_\_\_\_\_
  - iii. In social gathering \_\_\_\_\_

- iv. In text messages \_\_\_\_\_
  - v. In Facebook/what's app chat \_\_\_\_\_
  - vi. In office/workplace \_\_\_\_\_
  - vii. In school/college/university \_\_\_\_\_
13. Do you think your language is changing? Yes/No \_\_\_\_\_
14. If yes, has it changed
- i. in vocabulary (words)?
  - ii. in meaning?
  - iii. in pronunciation?