The Advent of Digital Media and the Survival of Minority Languages in Gilgit-Baltistan

Muhammad Issa [1]
Sajjad Hussain [2]
Muhammad Kamal [3]

Abstract

This study tries to find out the current state of vitality of the local languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan (henceforth GB), Pakistan, especially in the current scenario where social media platforms, mediated with the two dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English, have completely occupied people from all age groups alike. Data for this study were gathered through a questionnaire developed on Google form containing items both closed-ended and open-ended statements. The questionnaire was distributed among the native speakers of local languages spoken in GB through emails, WhatsApp (groups), and Facebook. Mixed methods research was used in the study to collect and analyze the data from different perspectives to draw a clearer and holistic picture of the phenomenon under study. The findings show that relexification in the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan is at its peak and words from both Urdu and English are being injected into these languages through education, electronic media and social media. Education and social media have been the most prominent and influential modes of word transfer into the local languages of GB. Furthermore, the dominant languages are gradually replacing the local languages in most of the domains of use, which as a result is compelling these minority languages to recede from every day use. Moreover, the natives consider their mother tongues to be impractical and they do not see any future for and in their mother tongues. The attitude of the natives is not favorable for these waning languages which can be a big hurdle in their maintenance and revival.

[1] Assistant Professor, Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, UoBS, Skardu
[2] Lecturer, Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, UoBS, Skardu
[3] Lecturer, Department of Languages and Cultural Studies, UoBS, Skardu

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1. Introduction

Communities in the world are recognized by the language they speak, people who speak French are known as French, and the ones who speak English as their native language are called English. Thus, one of the roles that languages play in the world is the identity of their speakers. According to Ethnologue, there are more than 7000 languages spoken in the world, however, most of these languages have fewer than 100,000 speakers, that is, 06% languages of the world's languages are spoken by 94% of the world's population, and 94% of the languages are spoken by only 06% of the population. According to scholars, by the end of the present century, almost 50% of these smaller languages will become extinct (Krauss, 1992; Sallabank, 2012; Ahearn, 2017) and only "the fittest survive" (Moseley, 2007, p. viii). If the history of the world is closely observed one finds a number of events in the history which played the key role in the spread of some languages across the globe. "First, the spread of agriculture, the rise of colonialism, later the Industrial Revolution, and today mass media, globalization of economies, etc., have propelled a few languages to spread over the last few centuries" (Romaine, 2018, p. 41). Extending Romaine's view especially regarding the role of media in the spread of dominant languages in the world, Moseley (2007) states, "in the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries, more than ever, the key to linguistic hegemony lies in the possession of the media" (p. ix). The media made the contact of languages quite easier and more lethal for the minority languages in some cases. Thus, language contact has been one of the main reasons for language decline or decay for the minority languages all around the globe. "'Language contact' occurs when speakers of different languages interact and their languages influence each other" (Matras, 2009, p. I). Language contact situations, usually, promote bilingualism or multilingualism when the people in contact do not share the same L1. Contact among linguistically different nations takes place in a number of ways, like through colonialism, migration, education, trade, intermarriages, etc. (Myers-Scotton, 2006). However, whenever, a language with less prestige and fewer speakers came into contact with the dominant language(s), the minor language(s) has always lost its speakers to the dominant and instrumental language(s), in most of the cases in favor of the languages of former colonials, consequently fading away from the common use as if it

never existed (Ravindranath, 2009). This phenomenon is quite commonplace where:

> quite often the interaction between groups is socially unequal, and this is reflected in the fact that in many cases borrowing of words or constructions goes mostly or entirely in one direction, from the more powerful or prestigious group to the less favoured one. (Grant, 2019, p. 01)

This phenomenon stigmatizes the minority language and it gradually loses its domains of use even in its native ecosystem. Though "the language is spoken in most contexts by all generations with unbroken intergenerational transmission, yet multilingualism in the native language and one or more dominant languages has usurped certain important communication contexts" (Miyaoka, Sakiyama, & Krauss, 2007, p. xv). Thus, the native speakers of the minority language prefer to use the dominant language(s) instead of their mother tongue in every domain of life due to the instrumentality of the dominant language (Crystal, 2014). The erosion of the minority language(s) from every sphere of life heralds the end of the very language when its native speakers shift to the more instrumental and dominant language(s) found in their immediate surroundings in the form of language medium of instruction, the language of mass media and government. Thus, "the inability of minorities to maintain the home as an intact domain for the use of their language has often been decisive for language shift" (Romaine, 2000, p. 54). Language shift is the end result of language contact in most of the cases where the smaller languages became extinct. Minority languages in Pakistan are no exception to this global trend as the languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan especially the Balti language is going through the phenomenon of language erosion at an increased pace with the advent of digital media in the region. Balti is gradually receding from a number of domains of use today as compared to its instrumentality three decades ago in the region.

2. Literature Review

The advent of social media accompanied by the phenomena of globalization has reshaped almost every sphere of life by turning up down the scheme of things. Anything is hardly left un influenced by the powerful means of technology. This has given another lethal weapon in hands of the countries, previously colonizers, equipped with the technology. Social media looks

like a voracious giant with mouth opened devouring what comes in in its way. One of the targets of the social media is minority language/s, mercilessly battering. Powerful languages specially English is trimming down the vernaculars and indigenous minority language/s coming in contact through social media. A lot of research probing into the impacts of social media has been done in the last decades and have come up with exhaustive suggestions for the maintenance and revitalization of those languages. The indigenous languages of Gilglit- Baltistan are no special cases, the Redbook of languages include all of them in the list of endangered languages and shown apprehension for their death in coming two decades. The claim made in the Redbook is further accentuated by the researches previously done in the region.

The phenomenon of language contact brings a number of changes with it to speakers of the minority language(s) in contact. One of the prime transformations language contacts brings is bilingualism (Romaine, 2000, p. 51).The standards and notions of language contact have gone through a complete transformation as of today, speakers of different languages, who come into contact, do not need to live in the neighborhood unlike in the past, they living thousands of miles away from each other can influence one another through different forms of digital media in no time. The world has been experiencing an unprecedented revolution led by digital media in human life as far as the medium of communication is concerned as it has nourished translingual and transcultural practices beyond borders (Canagarajah 2013). If one retrospects, one finds that postal letters, taking months to reach their destination, have been replaced with instant messaging through a number of social media platforms. People are not only able to send and receive text messages and images, but they can also have live chats and meetings (Darvin, 2016). However, the contact situations on social media demand a number of etiquettes and social media protocols; one of them is language, because "the audience formed by this network has a strong influence on the choice of language used,.." (Cunliffe, 2019, p. 466). The social media users need to opt for a lingua franca for communication, and the ones belonging to the minority languages have to compromise and opt for the dominant language(s) because "when groups are in contact, they both value their own language, but typically the less powerful group learns the other group's language, not vice versa" (Myers-Scotton, 2006, p. 09). Moreover, "the audience formed by the social network on a social media platform has a strong influence on a user's

choice of language" (Cunliffe, 2019, p. 470), and the advent of digital media has associated English as the sole medium of communication in the form of the approved lingua franca in the developing countries like Pakistan.

> …the arrival of social media in 1995 with the appearance of Ebay, has resulted in an amplified need for a Lingua Franca… English had been a dominant Lingua Franca even before the emergence of social media. Therefore, as social media spread around the globe so did the influence of English as a Lingua Franca and the need to use English. Allowing the presence of English to grow even stronger. (Jimma, 2017, p. II)

Whether social media, broadcast media and the internet, they "usually serve only to expand the scope and power of the dominant language at the expense of endangered languages"(UNESCO, 2003, p. 11), and in the case of Pakistan, especially in Gilgit-Baltistan all these apparatuses serve to promote Urdu and English at the expense of local languages. The extensive exposure to the dominant and instrumental languages in their immediate surroundings, and change in the living conditions of the natives make them insensitive towards their mother tongues resulting in endangering the local languages (UNESCO, 2003). The natives of these local endangered languages have varying proficiency in these dominant languages depending on their socioeconomic status, education, age, and the degree of exposure to these languages (Aikhenvald, 2019), which directly or indirectly make them vulnerable in the competitive market out there. The network of people engages in communication usually resolve to use a single language as the lingua franca and especially it is the language whose content dominates the digital media all around the world.

In the context of Pakistan, it is either the English language or Urdu whose content dominates not only official spheres but also digital platforms across the country with the revolution in the field of digital media. "The digital revolution has transformed language by triggering an explosion of new vocabularies, genres, and styles and by reshaping literacy practices" (Darvin, 2016, p. 523). This phenomenon is vividly visible in Gilgit-Baltistan, thus, the speakers of the minority languages, living in the mountains of Gilgit-Baltistan, have to turn towards the dominant languages to stay connected and to be among "us" while they are to carry out some official tasks, receive education or spend time on social media. Unfortunately, their own language(s) is nowhere to be seen at any of the above mentioned platforms, thus, the lack of visibility of their language may influence "…the perception of the overall vitality of the language by non-speakers, commercial organizations, the media, and government" (Cunliffe, 2019, p. 453).

Even such prevailing conditions tend to infuse a feeling among the speakers of the minority languages that their native tongues are worthless and impractical as compared to the dominant languages (UNESCO, 2003). Thus, they shift towards the instrumental language(s) for better future prospects and "in the case of shift, many communities do not consciously decide to change languages; it happens gradually" (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel-Molina, 2020, p. 02). As a result of language contact and bilingualism mediated by a number of sources like education, broadcast media, social media and the internet the minority or endangered languages embark upon a journey where these languages erode continuously losing all their domains of use, and at the end their native speakers shift to more instrumental and practical languages.

The world keeps evolving and through this evolutionary process, it goes through different kind of transformations. Unfortunately, a number of languages such as Balti and other minority languages of Gilgit- Baltistan are losing their kinship terminologies, because these languages are losing their lexis very fast and kinship terminologies are one the areas affected by vocabulary loss (Tsunoda, 2006). In addition to kinship terms, these languages are also losing their number systems "…with them much of human mathematical thought—are now rapidly eroding" (Harrison, 2007, p. 195). The erosion of linguistic knowledge in the minority languages is a common phenomenon as the influx of exotic words and phrases from the dominant languages are making their way into these waning languages.

The natives of these minority languages have a heavy responsibility upon their shoulders, and whatever they decide today, they will get things in return accordingly. This phenomenon is completely applicable to languages of the world too. The natives of minority languages if prefer to be fluent speakers of the dominant languages they have to sacrifice their own native tongues. Romaine believes:

> Choices made by individuals on an everyday basis have an effect on the long-term situation of the languages concerned. Language shift generally involves bilingualism (often with diglossia) as a stage on the way to eventual
> monolingualism in a new language. Typically a community which was once monolingual becomes bilingual as a result of contact with another (usually socially more powerful) group and becomes transitionally bilingual in the new language until their own language is given up altogether (Romaine, 2000, p. 51).

When the natives of a language start bending towards the dominant languages and they feel more ease in speaking the dominant language(s) than their mother tongue, and they see the dominant language(s) more instrumental and practical than their native tongue, they start using the dominant language(s) more as compared to their mother tongue. If any language goes through this very phenomenon, it heralds the beginning of language shift, and "once the process of language shift has started and language loss is imminent, there is little chance that the language will ever again be spoken as the first and primary language of any community" (Ravindranath, 2009, p. 02). The global village mediated with digital media provides a best virtual platform of language contact among the speakers of dominant and minority languages. The languages with less prestige and lack of instrumentality slowly and gradually erodes even in their own ecosystem, i.e., in their own native country or region. Linguists stress to document, preserve and maintain these languages as "language maintenance is concerned with the retention of the minority language by its speakers when it is in a constant contact with the majority language" (Abdelhadi, 2017, p. 110). However, maintaining and reviving a declining language is not an easy task especially when its speakers consider their mother tongue backward and a hindrance to progress and prosperity. Often the speakers of minority languages have negative attitude towards their native tongues due to their impracticality for the prospects of socioeconomic benefits (UNESCO, 2003). This very notion does not allow them to use it in their day to day affairs which diminishes the prospects of its maintenance and revival. Furthermore, the transmission of the minority language(s) "…may fail because speakers do not use it sufficiently in the learners' presence; or because the learners themselves, for some reason, do not choose to make use of it, but get their language from some other source" (Ostler, 2018, p. 315). In such situations the task of language maintenance gets harder. Unless the whole society especially the youth are ready for maintaining and reviving the language of their forefathers, individuals cannot do it alone. Therefore, "if the language is to survive at all, individual language maintenance is no longer enough. Young adults must be pressured into the much larger effort of learning what has by then become the language of their elders" (De Swaan, 2010, p. 68). Thus, the transmission of the weaker language is mandatory for the maintenance, "if the transmission is impeded in some way, the language is endangered" (Ostler, 2018, p. 315). Hundreds of minority languages around the globe are going through a condition where their natives do not see any economic benefit in learning and propagating their mother tongues, and if this very attitude remains in place, then a large number of indigenous minority languages will cease to exist by 2100 (Skutnabb-Kangas & Phillipson, 2010, p. 88). Linguists propose a number of ways for language maintenance and schools are one of the effective platforms to maintain a waning language (Disbray & Wigglesworth, 2019). Only the inclusion

of the minority languages into the school syllabus is not enough, rather "…positive attitudes seem to be a necessary if not sufficient pre-requisite for language maintenance/revitalization" (Sallabank, 2012, p. 117). Language revitalization or reclamation is a process through which the diminishing languages are brought back to life.

Language maintenance and revitalization are closely related, when language maintenance turns into a conscious effort/process, "…it becomes more similar to revitalisation, especially in terms of requiring deliberate language planning efforts. The major differences between language shift, maintenance, and revitalisation lie in their starting points, goals, and the means of achieving their goals" (Comajoan-Colome & Coronel-Molina, 2020, p. 02). Revitalization, revival or reclamation of a languages is not only related to reviving the language in question, rather language revitalization is broader part of ethnic revival. The revitalization process revives cultural traditions, relearning of the peculiar behaviors, ways of relating to friends, family, community members, even reclaiming a relationship to the flora and fauna and revitalizing the ways to relate to them (Hinton, Huss & Roche, 2018). Luckily, while the revitalization process is in progress, the language in question "…is still spoken by some members of the community and is used as a resource in wider community efforts for others to regain or learn skills in that language" (Bradley, 2019, p. 522). Languages can be revitalized through different ways, and the current technologically advanced modern world provides the linguists and the community members of the minority languages to employ the digital media in documenting, preserving, maintaining and reviving their waning languages. The access to technology the linguists have today is unprecedented. They can use oral dictionaries particularly designed for languages without written script, freely accessible online audio files containing language chunks and sentences, language specific keyboards, software, android cellphones and social media platforms such as Twitter, Facebook, YouTube, etc. to revive the diminishing languages (Williams, 2013). Furthermore, "social media has become an arena where resources are created and shared, enabling communities of speakers to support each other and promote their languages" (Outakoski, Cocq, & Steggo, 2018, p. 21). In addition to social media platforms, educational institutions especially schools can play a vital role in the language revitalization efforts Disbray & Wigglesworth, 2019). Furthermore, there is a unique program to revitalize waning languages known as "language nest". It is a collective community-based platform that engage the young children in an environment where they are extensively exposed to the endangered languages which as a result "…can succeed in some cases in raising the prestige associated with those languages, thereby improving the chances that people will want to keep speaking

their languages and keep teaching them to their children" (Ahearn, 2017, p. 271). The process of revitalizing a language cannot be successful by the efforts of an individual, it is rather it must be a collective effort by the very speech community However, if a language is successfully revitalized, it does not remain the same, rather it turns out to be a new language with a number of features of the old one. It would have new lexicon, pronunciation, grammar and used by new speakers in contexts never used before (Crystal, 2014; Hinton, Huss & Roche, 2018). Balti and other minority languages of Gilgit-Baltistan can be revived with the help of education, electronic and digital media in collaboration with linguists and the community of native speakers.

3. Methodology

The present study employs mixed methods approach in data collection and analysis. Triangulation provides a better picture of the phenomenon under observation as it employs more than two methods of data collection from a number of sources, thus, the variety of methods used help to covers all the possible perspectives (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2007; Creswell, 2012; Tavakoli, 2012). Data for this study were collected through a questionnaire developed on Google form containing closed-ended and open-ended questions and statements. The questionnaire was circulated among the natives of Giglit-Baltistan through WhatsApp, Facebook and emails. In total the researcher received 294 responses in three weeks.

The researcher did not apply any additional tests on the responses received, rather Google form itself provided the responses in the form of percentages according to the nature of the statements or questions and their options. The researcher used the results as they were on the Google form. Furthermore, to "… refine, extend, or explain the general picture" (Creswell, 2012, p. 542) of the quantitative findings, the researcher used the quotes provided by the respondents accordingly. In some fields the respondents were allowed to choose more than one option according the nature of the statements or questions wherever applicable, thus, in some figures, table and pie charts the cumulative percentage of the responses may exceed 100% due to the provision to choose more than one option.

Demographic information from the respondents were collected on four scales, i.e., gender, mother tongue (see Figure 3.1), qualification (see Figure 3.2) and number of languages spoken (see Figure 3.3).
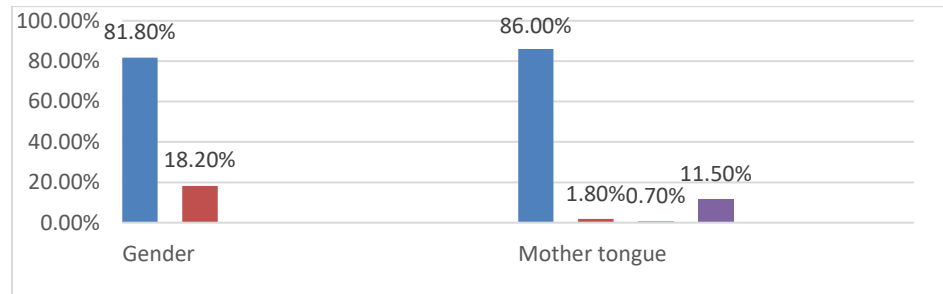

Fig. 3.1: Gender and Mother Tongue of the Particiapants

According to Figure.3.1, males were in majority (81.8%) who responded the questionnaire, however, there were only 18.2% females who filled in the questionnaire. As far as the mother tongues of the respondents are concerned, the informants belonged to four languages of Gilgit-Baltistan, i.e., Balti (86%), Burushaski (1.8%), Khowar (0.7%), and Shina (11.5%).

The other two scales were qualification and number of languages spoken by the respondents. According to Figure 2, most of the respondents were Master's degree holders (51.4%), MS or M.Phil. (18.9%), B.A/BSc/equivalent (16.4%), Intermediate (7.9%), Ph.D. (2.9%), Matriculation (0.4%), and others (2.1%). Furthermore, all of the respondents were multilinguals according to Figure 3, most of them speak 03 languages (81.5%), 5.3% of them speak two languages, 4.5% speak four languages and 8.7% respondents are placed in the category of others.
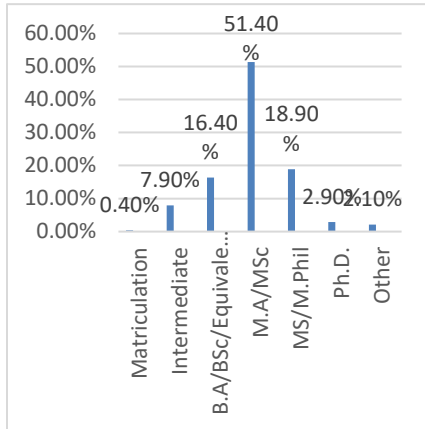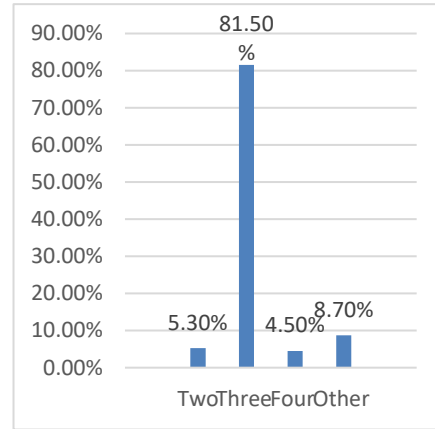
Fig. 3.2: Qualification

Fig. 3.3: Languages spoken

The data show that all the respondents are from Gilgit-Baltistan, they are educated and speak more than one language. Multilingualism on the part of the respondent may be due to their qualification and engagement with digital media.

4. Findings

According to Figure 4.1, the respondents mostly use their mother tongue(s) (93.2%) with their family members, however, 13.6% of the use Urdu and 3.4% use other languages with their family members.
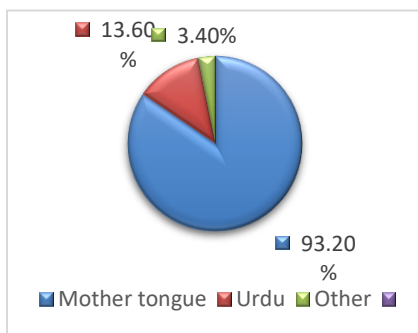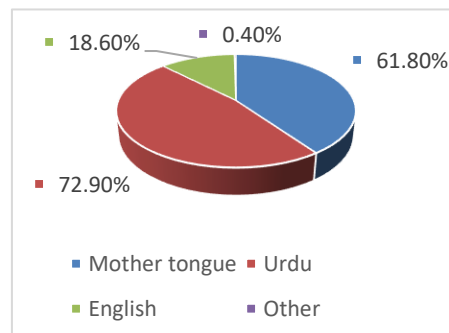

Fig. 4.1: Languages used with family

Fig. 4.2: Languages used with friends

However, Figure 4.2 shows that a majority of them (72.9%) prefer to use Urdu with their friends, but, 61.8% of them use their mother tongue(s) while communicating with their friends. Some of them (18.6%) of them use English and other (0.40%) languages while conversing with their friends.

The qualitative data extend and refine the quantitative figures that is shown in the following quotations.

> Even my home my nieces, younger brothers and sisters speak Urdu and English while talking.
>
> We don't use local language at home, in different social gathering and traditional events.
>
> Even though we talk in mother tongue at home but the electronic media and social media has a such a power that our children speak English and Urdu with us and others.

The changing trend in the society mediated by the digital media provides a different picture of the scenario, where the youth are using Urdu and English even in their friend and home domains. It is turns the future of these waning languages of Gilgit-Baltistan even darker with the passing of everyday.

Figure 4.3 below shows the proportion of words from Urdu and English that are used in local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan by their natives. According to the data, 43.7% of the respondents sometimes use English words while conversing in their mother tongues, moreover, 23.7% of them often use English words. Furthermore, 10% of them always use English words while communicating in their mother tongue, however, 18.6% seldom and 4% never use English lexis while conversing in their mother tongue. However, the trend of using Urdu words is quite high, as 38.4% of the respondents often and 25% of them always use Urdu words while conversing in their mother tongue. While 3.6% seldom and 0.7% of the respondents never use Urdu lexis while communicating in their mother tongue.
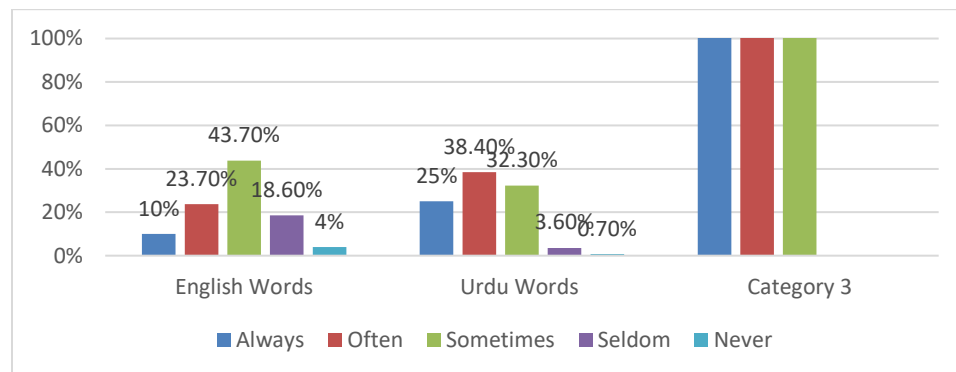

Fig. 4.3: Employing English/Urdu words while conversing in the mother tongue

The quotes by the respondents given below show the severity of the situation as most people in Gilgit-Baltistan tend to use more Urdu and English words while communicating in their mother tongues.

> People try to use English words in their local languages and they tend to forget the several words of local language.
>
> Induction of Urdu and English words increasing day by day.
>
> Excessive use of English and Urdu words is weakening the local languages among the children and youth.

The new generation is very much inclined towards the use of Urdu and English words due to a number of factors and education, electronic media and social media platforms are the most prominent ones.

According to the Figure 4.4, most of the participants (47.8%) of the survey think that education has been one of the most influential medium which injected more words of Urdu and English into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. According to the data 33.3% of the respondents have placed social media as the second most influential medium, and 15,2% of them consider electronic media and only 1.1% believe print media is responsible for the injection of Urdu and English lexis into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. Rest of the 2.2% of the respondents consider all the media mentioned below responsible for the influx of exotic words into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan.
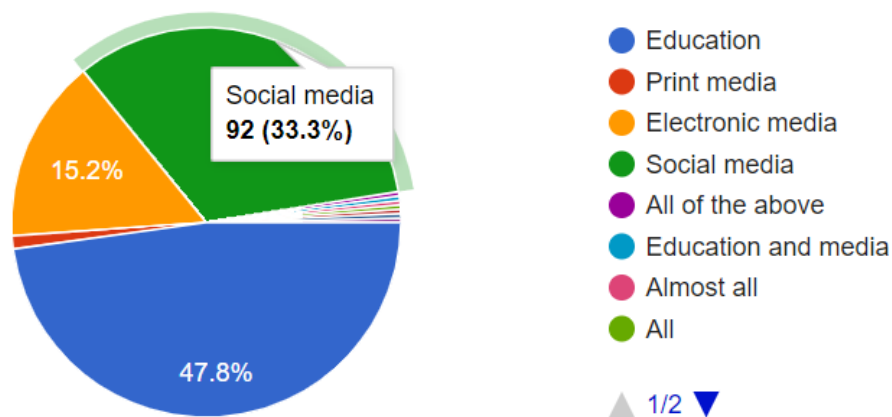

Fig. 4.4: Most influential medium to inject Urdu and English words

Some of the prominent quotes by the respondents have been mentioned below to confirm the quantitative findings visualized in Figure 7 above.

> Because all the words are written and read in English and Urdu, the mother tongue has less priority.
> Electronic and social media cause infusion of English words into local languages of Gilgit Bsltistan.
> Induction of Urdu and English words increasing day by day.
> After electronic media, print media and social media comes educational institutions where the both administration and academics give unnecessary importance to English and Urdu.

According to the qualitative data, all the media which have been discussed have their share in the injection of Urdu and English words into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. In continuation of phenomenon discussed above, Table 1 below shows that a large majority of the respondents, with varying degrees, code-switch to either Urdu or English while communicating in their mother tongue. A handsome number of them (32.2%) sometimes code-switch, while 29.7% often and 12.5% always code-switch to Urdu or English, depending on their needs, during their communication in their mother tongue. However, only 24.2% rarely and 1.5% never code-witch to Urdu or English while conversing in their mother tongue. Table 1 further visualizes that how often the natives of Gilgit-Baltistan use Urdu or English equivalents for the words already available in their mother tongues. Most of the respondents, i.e., 33.7% of them use the Urdu or English equivalents instead of the words already available in their mother tongues. Moreover, 30.5% often and 8.6% always use Urdu and English equivalents respectively. A good number of the respondents, i.e., 22.9% rarely and 4.3% never use the Urdu or English equivalents while conversing in their mother tongues.

Table 4.1: Code-switching and use of equivalents from mother tongue to Urdu and English while communicating in the mother tongue

Degree	Always	Often	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Code-switching from mother tongue Urdu and English	12.5%	29.7%	32.2%	24.2%	1.5%
Use of Urdu or English equivalent for mother tongue lexis	8.6%	30.5%	33.7%	22.9%	4.3%

To verify, extend and refine the quantitative results, if we consult the quotes provided by the respondents, we find similar findings.

> People copy the words and sentences of other languages from social and electronic media and try to use them in conversation instead of mother language.
> They are replacing the words and diverging the attention of people from mother tongues to Urdu and English
> People prefer to use Urdu words even there is a Balti word to be used.

The way electronic and social media are influencing people's language repertoire which as a result replaces their mother tongues with Urdu or English is quite alarming. According to the results from both the perspectives, qualitative and quantitative, the process of relexification is quite severe in this part of the country where the natives of local languages prefer to switch to Urdu or English in their daily conversations and even they are replacing the available lexicon of their mother tongues' with Urdu and English. If this trend remains active for some time, these languages may cease to exist in most of the language domains they are used.

The pace of relexification has been multiplied by the introduction of social media in the region. According Table 2 below a staggering majority of 76.6% prefer to use English, and 63.1% are in favor of Urdu to be used on social media. However, only 13.5% of them prefer to use their mother tongue and 2% of them use other languages while using social media platforms.

The respondents use varying languages while posting a status on social media or commenting on someone else's posts. According to Table 2, 80% of them use English and 66.8% of them use Urdu while posting a status on social media. However, only 7.9% of them use their mother tongue for positing a status and 1% of them use other languages. The same table further shows that 80.5% of the respondents use English and 68.1% of them use Urdu while commenting on someone else's posts on social media. Interestingly, 14.2% of them use only some words or phrases of their mother tongues while commenting on the posts of other social media users. The rest of the 1% use other languages for the said purpose. The cumulative sum of the data mentioned in the table at times goes beyond 100%, because the respondents had a choice to select more than one options accordingly.

Table 4.2: Language preference on social media

Language on Social Media	Mother tongue	Urdu	English	Others
Preferred language on social media	13.5%	63.1%	76.6%	2%
Language(s) used while posting on social media	7.9%	66.8%	80%	1%
Language(s) used while commenting on social media	14.2%	68.1%	80.5%	1%

The following quotes by the respondents show that how the natives of Gilgit-Baltistan are bending towards Urdu and English due to the use of electronic and social media platforms.

> Electronic and social media have a great role in weakening the local languages of Gilgit Baltistan. Because the users of these media often use English and Urdu languages while using these media.
> On social media and electronic media intentionally or unintentionally we are using Urdu and English for versatile purpose.
> Because all the words are written and read in English and Urdu, the mother tongue has less priority
> There is no Balti keyboard so the native Balti speakers tend to use Urdu and English keyboard which is the fundamental cause of Balti language declination.

The preference of using languages other than mother tongue on social media platforms has far reaching impacts on the waning languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. The continuous exposure to Urdu and English, especially for the youth, predicts a gloomy future for the minority languages of Gilgit-Baltistan.

At present the main platform that provides maximum exposure to Urdu and English is social media, according to Figure 8 below 89.3% of the respondents use Facebook and 72.2% of them use YouTube. Moreover, 51.6% use Instagram, 37.7% Twitter, 20% Telegram, 4% WhatsApp, and 1.2% use other social media platforms. The data shows that all the respondents who participated in this study use more than one social media platforms, because they had the option to choose more than one option.
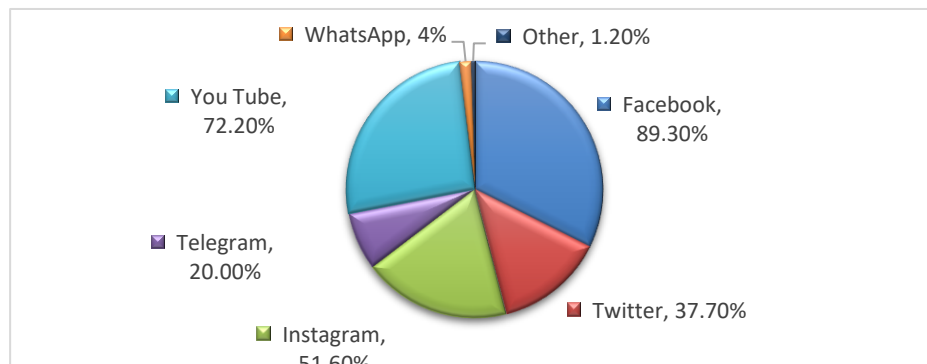
Fig. 4.4: Use of social media platform

The participants of the study ranged between students of matriculation to Ph.D. scholars (see Figure 2). Everyone of them has access to a number of social media platforms because there are two proofs for it. a) all of the respondents either have selected one media platform or more than two while filling in the questionnaire, b) the researcher used three media to share the questionnaire, i.e., emails, Facebook, and WhatsApp. Furthermore, the qualitative data gathered in the study extend this finding, see the following quotes.

> Now a days mostly people's using social media as well as E Media.
> Every person used mobile phone and different electronic media
> Ever one has access to social media
> Because all the native speakers post either in English or Urdu.

Looking at the quotes above, it is clear that all the respondents use one of the social media platforms. Moreover, they are accessible to everyone in their surroundings, it entails that social media is playing an important role in spreading the dominant languages.

In addition to access to social media platforms, the respondents spend a considerable amount of time using them. According to Figure 8 most of them spend more than one hour daily using social media platforms, and the majority (38.8%) spend many hours a day on social media. Furthermore, 15.3% of the respondents spend three hours, 21.4% two hours, 19.9% one hour and only 4.6% spend thirty minutes a day on social media platform. It means, these users have more exposure to Urdu and English than to their mother tongue in a day.
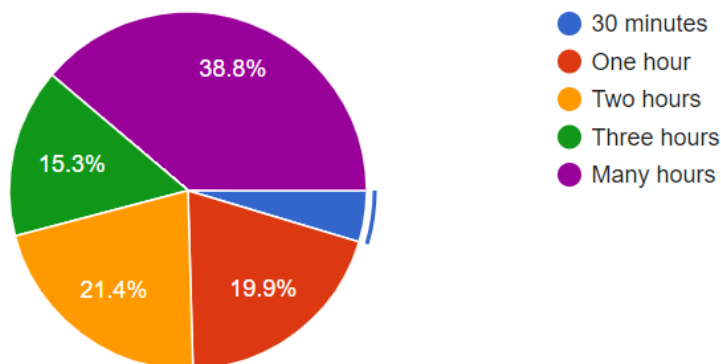
Fig. 4.5: Time spend on social media

The qualitative data extends the earlier findings, see the following quotes as a reference.

> People spend almost their entire time on electronic and social media.
> It is having a huge impact as it is lowering the social contact with relatives and friends etc in our neighbourhood. Now, we just type and communicate with the people and be on Internet all the time.

The respondents are more engaged with their social media friends than their family members and friends in their immediate social settings. The amount of time that the respondents spend on social media, entails that they are becoming more proficient in the dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English than their mother tongue, consequently they forget their mother tongues According to the respondents since they started using social media, shown in Figure 10, maximum exposure to social media cause them to forget the lexicon of their mother tongues. A majority of them (42.8%) believe that they have forgotten 05-10 percent of the words of their native tongues, and 20.7% have forgotten 10-15 percent, and 10.7% respondents have forgotten 15-20 percent, and 10.3% of them have forgotten 20-30 percent of lexicon of their mother tongues. Almost 5% of them think that they have not forgotten any lexical item of their mother tongue since they started using social media platforms.
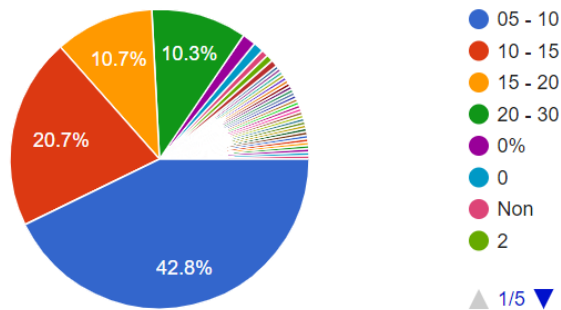
Fig. 4.6: Forgetting native words since started using social media

Exposure to a particular language for a longer period of time has its own impacts. The following quotations from the respondents show that the native of Gilgit-Baltistan are forgetting the lexicon of their own mother tongue due the unavoidable influence of the social media.

> People are using either Urdu or English Terminologies instead of local Terminologies sometimes people forget that what is the exact terminology of that words in local language.
>
> People are forgetting the terms of local languages unintentionally. Hence, media can play a vital role in weakening the local languages of G-B.

The quantitative and qualitative data show that relexification in the languages of Gilgit-Baltistan is at its peak and if steps are not taken in time to slow down the pace of relexification, these languages will soon lose most of their domains of use as they will not have enough lexicon to communication particular ideas related those specific domains.

The family domain is one of the stronghold of the native language of any nation, however, when a native language is unable to fulfil the needs of its users, especially, in their home domains, the very language is considered highly endangered. Table 3 below shows that only 60.1% of the adults are able to use kinship terminologies in their mother tongue, however 35% of them use Urdu and 2.9% use English kinship terminologies, and 2% of them use kinship terminologies from other languages. The scenario turns more shocking when the trend in the children (age 02 – 13) is observed. According to the respondents, children in their homes are more inclined towards Urdu and English than the mother tongues. A majority of the children (58.2%) use Urdu kinship terminologies to address their blood

relatives and 10% of them use English for the very purpose. Only 29.6% of the children age 02 – 13 in the families of the respondents use kinship terminologies from their mother tongues and 2.2% use languages other than the ones mentioned here.

Table 4.3: Use of kinship terminology to address blood relatives

Use of kinship terminologies	*Mother tongue*	*Urdu*	*English*	*Others*
Adults	60.1%	35%	2.9%	2%
Children	29.6%	58.2%	10%	2.2%

After two decades most of these children will be parents and some of them in their adulthood. When these kids themselves are away from their mother tongues, it seems impractical to see them encouraging their children to use the kinship terminologies of their mother tongue. The following quotes will extend the quantitative findings.

> The new generation follows and acquires the name of things, places and even use English and Urdu kinship terminologies.
> People ashamed to use mother tongue and cannot use properly.
> First of all many parents don't allow their children to speak their mother tongue in homes. Mostly they prefer English language and then Urdu.

Ignorance of the fundamental knowledge belonging to the native language, i.e., terms for kinship terms, words for colors, flora and fauna found in their surroundings, means that the very language has already eroded to the extent that it revival is almost impossible. The same phenomenon seems to be very much applicable to the native languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan. The new generations of the region may never know most of the kinship terminologies used in their native tongues, as their own parents would be unaware of them. This alarming situation should be dealt with as soon as possible, otherwise these languages will cease to exist aft a century or two.

Table 4.4 contains varying sorts of statements, however, they are indirectly related with each other. Use of social media affect them in way or the other, according to the respondents, social media can be used as an important tool to develop the waning languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. Most of the respondents (63.2%) believe that social media platforms can help maintain and revive the vanishing languages of Gilgit-Baltistan, however, 10% of them do not think so. Rest of the 26.8% of the respondents are not sure about

the very prospect. The same table further visualize that how many of the respondent can count from one to hundred in their mother tongues.

A majority of them (71.4%) of them can count in their mother tongues, however 18.6% cannot, and 10% of the respondents are not sure about it. Table 4 further shows that the ability to speak in English improves the grade of the students. Majority of the respondent (73.6%) think that the ability to speak English earns them better grades in educational institutions. However, 11.8% of them do not think so and 14.6% of them are not sure about it. If the influence of Urdu and English over the languages of Gilgit-Baltistan is seen, according to most of the respondents (65.6%) think that Urdu and English are replacing the local languages of Gilgit-Baltisan, however, 19.4% do not think so, and rest of the 15.1% are not sure about this phenomenon.

Table 4.4: Social media, language revival, dominant languages for better future prospects and replacement of local languages

Stance	Yes	No	Maybe
Use of social media in revival of local languages	63.2%	10%	26.8%
Counting from one to hundred in mother tongue	71.4%	18.6%	10%
Ability to speak English improves grades	73.6%	11.8%	14.6%
Urdu and English are replacing local languages of GB	65.6%	19.4%	15.1%

Quotes from the respondents given below extend and endorse the quantitative findings.

> Using English is considered to be privileged that's why people try to use English words in their local languages and they tend to forget the several words of local language.
> Electronic media and social media can play a vital role to revive the local languages of Gilgit Baltistan.
> English is preferred in every institution
> The role of electronic media is to extinct local languages by replacing the dominant languages...!

There is no denial of the role that social media can play in the revival of the waning languages of Gilgit-Baltistan as still people can count and use

kinship terminologies in their mother tongue. However, relexification is taking place very fast due to the introduction of the social media platforms. This phenomenon is promoting the dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English at the expense of the local languages. Competency in English is considered an ability and knowledge, thus, the students who are competent in English get better grades in their class tests and examinations. The role of media in all of them is very much visible.

According to Table 4.5 social media platform are helping the dominant languages to flourish at the expense of the waning languages of Gilgit-Baltistan. A great majority of the respondent (51.4%) agreed and 13.3% strongly agreed with this phenomenon. However, very few respondent disagreed (9.7%) and strongly disagreed (8.6%) respectively with this prevailing phenomenon. Some of the respondent (16.9%) of them remained neutral.

Table 4.5 further shows that competency in English guaranties better prospects for jobs. In this regard, majority of the respondents (45.9%) agreed and 30.2% of them strongly agreed and think that fluency in English brings chances of getting good jobs. However, 3.9% disagreed and 12.8% strongly disagreed with this very phenomenon and 7.1% of the respondents remained neutral.

According to Table 4.5 the dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English, help the natives of Gilgit-Baltistan in their worldly affairs, but their mother tongues do not. According to the data, 42% of the respondent agreed and 15.3% of them strongly agreed with the very statement. However, 20.3% of the respondent disagreed and 12.8% of them strongly disagreed with the phenomenon where only Urdu and English are helpful not their mother tongues. However, 13.5% of the respondents remained neutral.

Most of the respondents do not see any future for their mother tongue. According data displayed in Table 5, 41.6% of the respondents think that their mother tongues do not have a future keeping in view the inclination of their speakers towards the dominant languages. Furthermore, 17.8% of them feel it strongly. However, 14.9% of the respondent disagreed and 4.7% of them strongly disagreed with this notion. Rest of the 21% of the respondent preferred to stay neutral.

Table 4.5 shows that the respondents themselves believe that they are not helping their mother tongues to flourish. According to the data 50% of them agreed and 15.4% of them strongly agreed with the notion that they are not helping their mother tongues to develop. But, 12.1% of the respondents disagreed while 6.1% strongly disagreed with this idea, and 16.4% of the respondent preferred to remained neutral.

According to the data tabulated in Table 5 show that if nothing is done in time the languages of Gilgit-Baltistan will become extinct in the future. A large number of respondents 39.9% agreed and 29.9% of them strongly agreed with the statement, however, 8.2% of them disagreed and 5.3% of the respondents strongly disagreed with this notion. Rest of the 16.7% of the participants remained neutral.

Table 4.5: Development of dominant languages with better future prospects but decline of local languages

Degree	Strongly disagree	Disagree	Neutral	Agreed	Strongly Agreed
Social media help Urdu and English to develop at the expense of local languages	8.6%	9.7%	16.9%	51.4%	13.3%
Competency in English, get better jobs	12.8%	3.9%	7.1%	45.9%	30.2%
English and Urdu helpful not mother tongue	8.9%	20.3%	13.5%	42%	15.3%
No future for mother tongue	4.7%	14.9%	21%	41.6%	17.8%
I am not helping my mother tongue	6.1%	12.1%	16.4%	50%	15.4%
If nothing is done, local languages of GB will become extinct	5.3%	8.2%	16.7%	39.9%	29.9%

The following quotes from the respondents will extent and verify the quantitative findings.

> Media is promoting Urdu and English only.
> We prefer to use English and Urdu language while we using social media which will be harmful to our own language.
> Electronic and social media is decreasing the uses of local languages of GB because most of the people of GB are useing Urdu and English languages as a medium of communication on electronic and social media. Therefore, electronic and social media are weakinging the uses of local languages Gilgit-Baltistan.
> Due to none existence and part of curriculum in school level local languages are threaten to extinct in near future.
> As Urdu and English are used at social and electronic media as local languages of GB is not getting any importance so there is a sign of danger that one day local languages of GB will be extinct if nothing is done in time.

Analysis of the data in gathered in quantative and qualitative manner clearly indicate that the native languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan are losing ground to the dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English. Thus, the natives of these minority languages do not see any future for their mother tongues and they do not find these languages instrumental in their worldly affairs. If the same attitude by the natives remain the same in the future too, then the vitality of these languages is highly endangered. They may cease to exist, if nothing is done in time to change the attitude of the natives and support these languages to revive through education, electronic and social media and through the exploitation of all the pertinent available resources.

5. Discussion

The languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan are going though one of the most critical period of their life. Everything around them seem to be hostile towards them even their own native speakers. The native speakers of these languages are multilingual and due to the influence and instrumentality of their 2nd or 3rd domiant language(s), they tend to use the instrumental language(s) more than their mother tongue (Romaine, 2000). Furthermore, the introduction of education in these dominant languages, i.e., Urdu and English, and the advent of electronic and social media have drastically change the ecosystem of these minority languages (Comajoan-Colomé & Coronel-Molina, 2020.

Relexification in these language is at its peak where the youth prefer to use Urdu and English words instead of the words available in their mother tongues. Furthermore, the extensive exposuere to digital media platforms have, to some extent, completely replaced their mother tongues with Urdu and English, (Ravindranath, 2009) and they seem to be more comfortable in the dominant languages than in their mother tongues. Their preference to use Urdu and English is receding their mother tongue from the main domains of use, where these languages once ruled.

The extraordinary use of Urdu and English lexis in their day to day conversations is causing the native lexicon higly endangered (UNESCO, 2003). Most of the children are unable to count and address their blood relatives in their native kinship terminologies (Tsunoda, 2006). Furthermore, their attitude towards their mother tongues may cause premature death of these languages if the natives are not sensitize in time and steps are not taken in time to document, preserve, maintain and revive these waning languages of the north (De Swaan, 2010). If these languages cease to exist, they shall take with them a collection of experiences and conventions and may more in the form of a priceless treasure of knowledge with them according to this part of the world (Harrison, 2007).

6. Conclusion

Languages spoken in Gilgit-Baltistan have been slowly and graudually fading away from their traditional use in the domians where they were the only languages considered appropriate to use some decades before. However, these languages are losing gound to the dominant languages available in their sourrundigns, i.e., Urdu and English. Words from these dominant languages made their way into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan first through education, print media and now through electronic and social media. The ratio of words being injected into the local languages of Gilgit-Baltistan is unprecedent and incredible. A large number of exotic words have already made their place in these local languages, where the natives now prefer to use the words from Urdu and English in their daily conversations instead of the words available in their mother tongues.

The youth are very much inclined towards to dominant languages and most of them have already replaced hundreds of their native words with Urdu and English ones. A large majority of the children can neither count nor name

blood relatives in the native kinship terminologies and even in some families they have completely replaced the native languages, in most cases, with Urdu and in some with English phrases and sentences.

The natives consider their mother tongues as impractical and inappropriate to use in a number of formal settings, however, they prefer to use the dominant languages istead. Furthermore, the advent of educational institions, print media, electronic media and now social media have palyed their role in weakening these languages. The natives do not see any future for their mother tongues, and they are not taking any practical step in helping these waning languages to revive. If these languages are to bring to life, the attitude of the natives should be changed towards them though sensitization. Furthermore, unless these languages are made part of educational curriculum, print and electronic media, social media and attach prestige and identity with them, their revival is impossible.

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