

# Linguistic Trends among Young Sindhi Community Members in Karachi

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**ABSTRACT** — Sindh is a multilingual province with Sindhi as its official language (Abbasi, 2017) and Sindhi is the third most common language spoken in Pakistan. (Census, 2017). However, in the cities of the Sindh province, Urdu the national language, is widely spoken is in constant competition with other regional languages (Ali, 2017). Due to rapid urbanization and modernization, different communities are shifting to cities for better economic conditions. This study explores linguistic trends by investigating the language used by young Sindhi speakers in the city of Karachi and has used Fishman's domain model (1971). The domain identifies the use of language in different settings between a range of interlocutors and the purpose of communication between interlocutors. The methodology used to collect data was both questionnaire and observation. The results indicates that the use of other languages-Urdu and English is often noted in various domains. Even within the home domain Sindhi speakers are frequently using 'the other tongue'. This study encourages researchers to study language choices in contact situations in the urban cities of Pakistan.

**Key words:** Linguistic Trends, Community Domain, Language Choices, Karachi, Sindhi, Pakistan

## I. Introduction

Language is the core part of the knowledge system in any community; it represents the cultural and linguistic diversity of a speech community (Abbasi, 2017). Globalization has a great influence on languages and English is today an important international language.

Pakistan is a multilingual state with nine major languages (as reported in the Census-2017) and sixty five other minority languages (Rahman, 2006). English is the Co-official language used in different domains of power and education, while Urdu is its national and official language (Article 251 of the Constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan). Urdu is the most widely understood language and medium of interaction in the urban areas, and is also used by other ethnic groups as it has become an identity marker for a Pakistani. The Sindhi language which is used by about 14.1 percentage of the total population in Pakistan is not a national language.

Karachi, the provincial capital of Sindh is known as the hub for linguistic and cultural diversity. Many diverse speech communities reside within the province. They speak Balochi, Dhatki, Memoni, Punjabi, Pashtoo, Sindhi, Saraiki and many northern languages. However, only nine languages were

included in the Census-2017 survey and the other minority languages were included in the 'other language' column.

Urdu is the dominant language in the city, and is the national and official language of Pakistan (Rahman, 2002). It is used in the education work and media domains. Minority language speakers, migrating from their home-towns to Karachi have to learn and acquire Urdu for communication (Ali, 2010; 2015 & 2017). Similar findings were reported by Nazir, Aftab and Saeed (2013); Nawaz, Umer, Anjum and Ramzan (2012) and Mansoor (1993) showed Punjabi speakers shifting to Urdu and English in urban areas due to societal, economic and cultural reasons. Ali (2015 & 2017) explored the language choices of Balti, Brushaski, Shina and Khovar language speakers, who are living away from their home town and are living in Karachi. The findings showed that the mother tongue users mainly use the mainstream language (Urdu & English) in a majority of the domains while indigenous languages have been reduced to the home domain that too only for those who are living with their families in Karachi. A similar study was conducted by Abbasi and Aftab (2019) on Dhatki language spoken in the eastern part of Sindh and in some parts of India. The linguistic choices of the young Dhatki speakers were explored and it was disclosed that they are shifting towards

Sindhi, Urdu & English and most of them were also eager to learn Chinese due to Chinese businesses in Pakistan. These studies in Karachi reveal that minority language speakers despite having a positive attitude towards their heritage language, tend to shift to more dominant powerful languages in the city.

Linguists claim that the Sindhi language is now used less in cities; especially Karachi (Rahman, 2002), as the Sindhi speaking population only makes up 10 percent of the total population of Karachi (Census, 2017). A number of studies have been conducted on the Sindhi Hindu diaspora (Daswani & Parchani, 1978; David, 1999, 2001a, 2001b, 2003, 2017; Detaramani & Lock, 2003; Dewan 1987 & Ivengar, 2013) and the only study on the Sindh speakers in their home bound areas in Pakistan was conducted by David, Mumtaz and Baloch, 2017 but did not include the urban areas. The study by David et.al (2017) on Sindhi speakers used a questionnaire to elicit information from 320 male and female participants from 16 districts of Sindh province and examined language use across the generations. As the Sindhis apart from external diaspora are migrating internally as well we focus in this research on the young generation of Sindhis in the city of Karachi who are migrating to cities for education and workplace opportunities.

## II. Objective of the Study

The objective of this study is to explore the patterns of language choice among young Sindhi community members in different domains who are working and studying in Karachi.

## III. Literature Review

Language choice varies from one situation to another, from one domain to another and also depends on the objective of the discourse and who is speaking to whom. The major domains that Fishman identified are family, friendship, religion, education and employment (Scotton, 2006)

Language maintenance is an important phenomenon in the presence of dominant languages. Fase, Jasport & Kroon (1992) define language maintenance as relating to the continuing use and proficiency in one's mother tongue or heritage language.

Anthonissen (2009) defines language shift as a process which occurs when a community gives up a language completely in favor of another. Umrani & Memon (2016) take a similar position especially when one is in a language contact situation. As far back as 1991 Fishman (1991) defined language shift as the non-use of a heritage language by the users, with fewer speakers, readers, writers and even reduced proficiency in every generation.

Language shift and maintenance are related or linked to a set of factors such as socio-economic conditions in a society, migration into or out of regional areas, institutional support for the language, status of the language, and language attitude. (Appel & Muysken, 1987; David, Naji, & Kaur 2003; Dorian 1980; Fasold, 1984; Gal, 1979; Mukherjee 2003). David and Dealwis (2008) listed urbanization, increased mobility, and education as macro level language shift factors.

Language shift can occur across generations. If elders speak the traditional language but their grandchildren do not, then language shift has occurred (Fasold, 1984). Most of the studies conducted across three generations have reported that language shift tends to occur within the young generation. (David, 1996; Hoffman & Cais, 1984; Romaine, 1994). However, Zaid, Mee and Hei (2012), noted that cross-cultural marriages in Malaysia can also result in language shift.

David's (1999) study in Malaysia reported a shift away from the heritage language Sindhi and a shift to English & Malay language. A similar finding was also reported among the Sindhis of Singapore (David, 2000) where mixed discourse appears to be the new language of the community who have to accommodate to the linguistic preferences of both young and old community members. Ivengar (2013) also explored the Sindhi community in an urban area in India i.e. Pune to determine the perceptions of the young Sindhis. The findings showed that all the informants rated their need for, exposure and emotional attachment to the Sindhi language as low and had poor competence in the Sindhi language.

However Sindhis in the province of Sindh David et al (2017) showed that Sindhi enjoys higher ethnolinguistic vitality. They usually maintain their language in different domains and have sentimental affiliation with the language as part of their cultural identity. However, this study focuses on the language choice and use patterns among young Sindhi community members in Karachi.

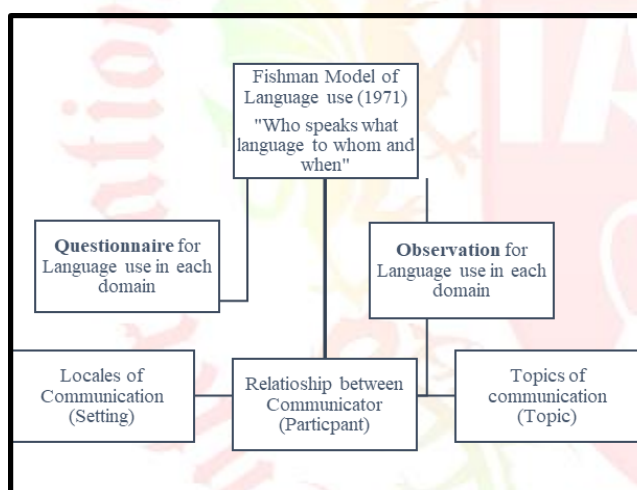
## IV. Theoretical Model

Most of the studied on Language shift and maintenance incorporate Fishman's domain concept to measure the degree of language shift/maintenance by focusing on the language choice and use in different domains. Fishman's major theoretical foundations were in the issue of 'who speaks what language and to whom and when'. It relied on the location, topic and participants. Fishman's (1971) model of language shift and maintenance specified domains for observing language use. The domains in this study are expanded. Similarly, for validity of the data reported, observations are also made as part of the model. The participant observation

was carried out in the homes, social events and gatherings for 10 hours and notes were taken (See Figure 1).

## V. Methodology

In sociolinguistic studies, researchers have largely adopted the qualitative case study research design for obtaining data, as it provides comprehensive data. (Ali 2015 & Ali, 2017). Case studies are beneficial and reliable as they provide an insight view of a participant, “to understand the complexity and dynamic nature of the particular entity and to discover systematic connections among experience, behavior and relevant features of the context” (Johnson, 1992, p. 84). In this study, multiple instrumental cases were studied as Duff (2008) believes that in studies with many participants, “case studies may be provided to personalize and illustrate profiles of particular members within a studied group” (p. 43-44). Multiple instrumental case study was specifically chosen because the focus of this research was a minority speaking linguistic community in the city of Karachi whose mother tongue is Sindhi and their exposure to multilingual language contact situation in the city.



**Figure 1 Fishman Model of Language Use, 1971 (Modified)**

### A. Research Site

In qualitative studies, the selection and access to the research participants is an important stage. The research site selected for this study was a public sector university situated in the urban area of Karachi. Students from different ethnographic groups are the essential part of the university resulting in a rich linguistic diversity. Since, the population of the university is diverse, it makes it a perfect research site for any study on multilingualism and sociolinguistics. Many Sindhi speakers are enrolled in the university, as they have reserve seats from Hyderabad, Mirphurkhas, Larkana Sindh Board. Furthermore, the public sector university is a fairly leading institute in the city, where students from diverse linguistic backgrounds are

enrolled. For the current study members of Sindhi community (native Sindhi-speaking students) were selected who are enrolled in different departments in the university.

### B. Participants and Sampling

The population for this study included members of the Sindhi community who live in Karachi. The target population was young native Sindhi undergraduates studying in a public university in Karachi.

Purposive sampling was used to elicit comprehensive information from the participants (Cohen et al., 2013; Savin-Badin & Major, 2013). The data was collected from young native Sindhi-speakers who have been exposed to a non-native environment for a period more than five years, and who were residing with their parents in Karachi.

Thirty male and female students were asked to fill the sociolinguistic profile; which consisted of demographic information, language biography and language use data (Charmaz, 2006). The sample size of thirty was sufficient because similar perspectives and responses from the participants were being obtained. Therefore further participants were not made part of the study and thirty participants' data was considered to be reliable. In order to validate the findings of the sociolinguistic questionnaire, five participants were selected for observation based on their accessibility and willingness (Creswell, 2012).

### C. Research tools

In the present qualitative case study, the information about language use in different domains was essential to obtain. For this purpose, the information was collected through a sociolinguistic questionnaire. The questionnaire provided basic demographic language biography and language use in each domain, with different interlocutors and with different topics.

The sociolinguistic questionnaire used in this study was adapted from Khan (2014). The domains of language use Fishman (1971), Khan (2014) and Ali (2015) included in their studies like home, neighborhood, market, friends, classroom, canteen, workplace and hostel, were used.. Moreover, other domains of language use like social protests, restaurants, gatherings and social media, and language use with interlocutors like paternal and maternal parents, cousins and relatives, father, mother, siblings and friends were also included in the questionnaire. Furthermore, the topic of conversation with the interlocutor were also included. These variables had to be included as language shift is not measured only by analyzing language choice in different domains or language preference with a range of interlocutors but the topic

of the interaction with the interlocutor also determines the language used.

As the research is qualitative case study, observation appears to be a useful tool. The participants can be easily observed in terms of language use with interlocutors and in different domains. Participant observation was conducted using a technique of shadowing (Umrani, 2015). Through shadow observation one of the writers was able to seek the answers to additional questions (McDonald, 2005).

The site selected for observation has to be a natural setting and one that is accessible to the researchers and the participants. Two participants were observed in their homes for four hours, after consent was obtained. Two of the participants were observed at the wedding of a cousin of one of the participants four participants attended a social event ‘Sindhi Literature Festival’ The four participants arrived at different intervals and were observed for three hours each. Hence, the participants were observed for ten hours in three different settings. The observation validated the findings reported in the questionnaire.

A questionnaire is an essential tool to obtain data for language use patterns, however in order to cross-validate the information reported by the respondents, observations are necessary to check the reliability and validity of the responses. Hence, the present study uses sociolinguistic questionnaire to elicit information about language use and observation to validate the information obtained from the questionnaire.

#### D. Data Analysis

The data from the questionnaire was used to obtain frequency and percentage of language choices use in different domains with different interlocutors focusing on different topics. Observations were made to check whether the responses given by the respondents in the questionnaire reflect authentic interactions.

### VI. Findings

The first section inquired about the basic demographic information, while the second section inquired about language proficiency that included speaking, reading, listening and writing; it also enquired if code-switching occurred and if so with what other languages. The third section was developed according to Fishman’s model (1971) which focused on language used in different settings, determining language used with the interlocutor and language used for each topic with the interlocutor

#### A. Speaking

The analysis of the items shows interesting data that despite being native Sindhi speakers only 40% of the speakers ‘always speak’ in Sindhi; while 32% do not use it frequently. About 28% of the participants said they ‘never use/speak’ the language in the urban setting.

During observation at home, it was observed that speakers frequently code-switch from one language to the other. When the participant spoke with their parents most of the phrases were in Urdu

#### B. Switching to other language

Similarly, the participants were inquired about switching to other languages in the multilingual urban setting. Almost 68% of the participants reported to switch to other language. Few (12%) said that they occasionally switched, while 12% rarely switched to another language. However, 8% of the speakers said that they never switched to other languages and only communicated in their own native Sindhi language. While observing one of the participants, it was seen that within the family, code-switching was the preferred medium for communication for different topics of communication.

#### C. Summary of Basic Demography

The young Sindhi respondents have no competence in reading (40% rarely and 40% never ) and writing (24% rarely and 40% never); and the majority of the participants reported that they rarely use reading and writing skills in their mother tongue ( see Figure 2 which provides a brief summary of the language biography). Additionally, the participants rarely listen to the language (28% rarely and 32% never). The overall results signify that the Sindhi language has been reduced to spoken discourse (40% always use it) but within it switching to the other language is quite common as 68% reported to switching to other languages. The young Sindhi participants are not reading, writing, listening and even watching the folk tradition (40% rarely and 40 never) in the native language. (See figure. 02 for summary of language biography.)

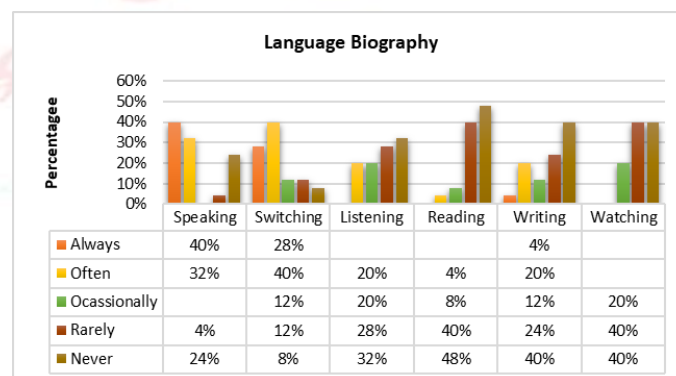


Figure 2 Language Biography

#### D. Language use in different domains

Home is an important setting where a language develops and frequent interaction in the mother tongue is possible. Data analysis shows interesting results regarding the Sindhi language used by the native speakers in their home domain. A total of 52% of the participants reported that they used Sindhi in their home most often, while 40% reported that they used Urdu in their home. However, 8% reported use of English.

In the urban multilingual context, analysis show that nearly 84% of the participants reported that they used Urdu while nearly 16% said that they used Sindhi when interacting with the neighbors.

Use of language in the social gatherings also pre-determines the societal value of a language. Analysis shows that almost 92% used Urdu in social gatherings while merely 4% used Sindhi and English simultaneously when gathered for an event. During the literary festival and wedding, it was observed that the participants were using Urdu frequently for different purposes, even on occasions where both the participants were native Sindhi speakers.

Languages are also shaped by cultural and religious beliefs, therefore religious events are a strong indicator of language maintenance. (David et al, 2017). The results however show that 96% of the Sindhi participants said that they used Urdu while only 4% said that they used their mother tongue when praying.

#### E. Language use with the interlocutor

The second part of Section III of the questionnaire inquired about the language used with the interlocutor. Figure 03 shows that the young Sindhi speakers use Urdu with shopkeepers, colleagues and friends. However, with maternal/paternal

uncles, aunts, cousins and relatives Urdu is used although not as much as Sindhi. With the older generation, Sindhi is maintained, but the trends are changing as about 32% and 24% of participants are using Urdu frequently with interlocutors. It was observed that during the literary festival participants used Urdu for communicating with their young relatives, while a code-mixed variety was used when communicating with close relatives.

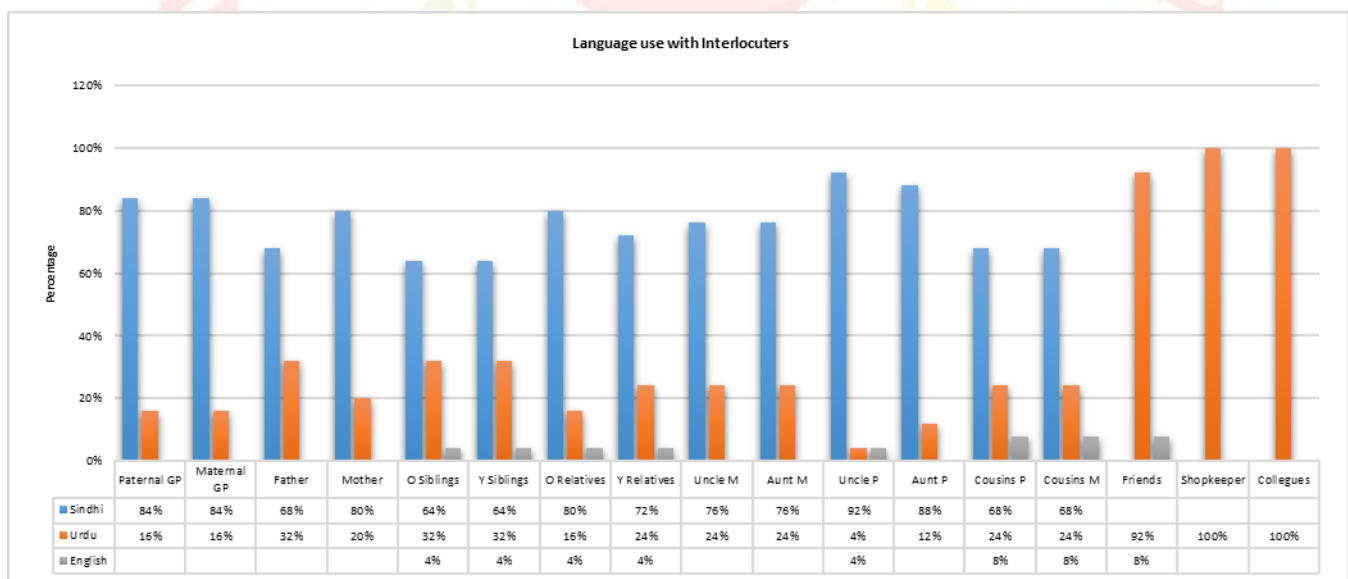
#### F. Language use for different Topics of communication between interlocutors

##### 1. Language use for different topics with father

The analysis shows that young Sindhi speakers preferred to use English for discussion on topics related to academia - in this case academic issues, and book discussion. Also when discussing entertainment topics like travelling and movie plans English is the most frequent language used. As for discussions on shopping, health and media Urdu is frequently used. Sindhi is mostly related to topics like gossip, political talk, nature, informal discussion and talk on food as shown in the Table 1.

**Table 1: Language use for different topics with Father**

| Topic                | Sindhi | Urdu | English |
|----------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gossip               | 60%    | 36%  | 04%     |
| Shopping discussion  | 24%    | 76%  | 04%     |
| Political views      | 52%    | 28%  | 20%     |
| Academic issues      | 04%    | 28%  | 68%     |
| Health               | 24%    | 60%  | 16%     |
| Media talks          | 08%    | 64%  | 28%     |
| Academic discussions |        | 40%  | 60%     |
| Informal discussion  | 68%    | 32%  |         |
| Kitchen/ Food talk   | 56%    | 34%  |         |
| Movie Plan           | 08%    | 32%  | 60%     |



|                 |     |    |     |
|-----------------|-----|----|-----|
| Travelling Plan | 12% | 24 | 64% |
| Book Discussion |     | 24 | 76% |

### 2. Language use for different topics with mother

In the case of mother, the language choice for each topic differs as Sindhi is the most frequent language as shown in the Table 2 for various topics of discourse like shopping, gossip, health, media talk etc. However there is little use of English with the mother even for academic issues and academic discussion.

**Table 2 : Language use for different topics with Mother**

| Topic                | Sindhi | Urdu | English |
|----------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gossip               | 72     | 28%  |         |
| Shopping discussion  | 40%    | 60%  |         |
| Political views      | 78%    | 32%  |         |
| Academic issues      | 60%    | 32%  | 08%     |
| Health               | 56%    | 44%  |         |
| Media talks          | 72%    | 28%  |         |
| Academic discussions | 56%    | 36%  | 08%     |
| Informal discussion  | 72%    | 28%  |         |
| Kitchen/ Food talk   | 68%    | 32%  |         |
| Movie Plan           | 68%    | 32%  |         |
| Travelling Plan      | 64%    | 36%  |         |
| Book Discussion      | 72%    | 28%  |         |

### 3. Language used for different topics with siblings

Similarly, young Sindhi speakers used English for communication on topics like media, academic issues, and book discussions with siblings more than Urdu as shown in Table 3. However, for the rest of the topics Urdu was preferred more than English; and Sindhi was used less frequently by the participants for communication with siblings. Therefore, the dynamics of language use in the home domain with the siblings is changing.

**Table 3: Language use for different topics with Siblings**

| Topic               | Sindhi | Urdu | English |
|---------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gossip              | 20%    | 40%  | 40%     |
| Shopping discussion | 36%    | 36%  | 28%     |
| Political views     | 28%    | 44%  | 28%     |
| Academic issues     | 16%    | 40%  | 44%     |
| Health              | 12%    | 48%  | 40%     |
| Media talks         | 20%    | 20%  | 60%     |

|                      |     |     |     |
|----------------------|-----|-----|-----|
| Academic discussions | 16% | 40% | 44% |
| Informal discussion  | 12% | 48% | 40% |
| Kitchen/ Food talk   | 20% | 40% | 40% |
| Movie Plan           | 16% | 44% | 40% |
| Travelling Plan      | 20% | 48% | 32% |
| Book Discussion      | 08% | 32% | 60% |

### 4. Language used for different topics of communication with cousins and relatives

The language preferred with the first cousins during different topics of communication was mostly Sindhi and Urdu. Gossip (68% Sindhi and 32% Urdu), Shopping discussion (64% Sindhi and 36% Urdu), political views (60% Sindhi and 40% Urdu), informal discussion (60% Sindhi and 40% Urdu), kitchen/food talk (60% Sindhi and 40% Urdu). For discussion on topics like health (48% Sindhi, 40% Urdu and 12% English) was used; media talks (52% Sindhi, 36% Urdu and 12% English) was used. While for discussion on topics related to academia and entertainment; English was preferred more for academic issues (English 44%, Urdu 36% and Sindhi 20%), academic discussion (40% English and Urdu each and 20% Sindhi); book discussion (40% English and Urdu each and 20% Sindhi) and movie plan (40% English and Urdu each and 20% Sindhi). However for travelling plans it was 30% English, 42% Urdu and 28% Sindhi.

**Table 4: Language use for different topics with cousins and relatives**

| Topic                | Sindhi | Urdu | English |
|----------------------|--------|------|---------|
| Gossip               | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Shopping discussion  | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Political views      | 56%    | 44%  |         |
| Academic issues      | 20%    | 40%  | 40%     |
| Health               | 40%    | 60%  |         |
| Media talks          | 40%    | 60%  |         |
| Academic discussions | 20%    | 40%  | 40%     |
| Informal discussion  | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Kitchen/ Food talk   | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Movie Plan           | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Travelling Plan      | 60%    | 40%  |         |
| Book                 | 20%    | 40%  | 40%     |

Relatives also play a critical role in the choice of language during communication. However, with most of the relatives Sindhi and Urdu was reported to be used more as shown in Table 4. In almost all of the topics 60% opted for Sindhi while 40% opted for Urdu. These topics ranged from gossip, shopping discussion, and kitchen/food talk. As for verse topics like health and media talks 60% used Urdu and 40% Sindhi. However, with regard to academic issues, academic discussion and book discussion English was used more than Urdu and Sindhi. (40% English, 40% and 20% Sindhi).

### G. Wedding and Literary Festival

Wedding events and Sindhi Literature Festival held in the month of February was observed with the participants' consent. It was observed that the participant's followed the same patterns of language use as reported in the profile with shopkeepers, friends and cousins in both the events. Also, they frequently used English and Urdu with each other and code-mixing patterns were also noted in their communication.

## VII. Conclusion and Discussion:

Figure 2 provides essential insights into the proficiency of speakers. This study reveals that Sindhi speakers in the urban domain have low competence in their mother tongue as 32% of them reported that they never receive language input in listening encounters, 88% of Sindhi speakers were not interested in reading in Sindhi language and 64% of them have never written in Sindhi and 12% occasionally write. Only 40% of the Sindhi speakers speak the Sindhi language always while 28% (24% never and 4% rarely) use it. Ivengar (2003) also reported that Sindhi youth in urban area had poor competence in Sindhi.

Home domain is regarded as a major component for language contact and maintenance. The present study shows that there is shift towards English/Urdu (40% Urdu and 8% English) in the home domain. In domains like neighborhood, social gatherings, religious domain and academic both Urdu and English are the preferred languages. Hence, the speakers have shifted in these domains from their mother tongue to Urdu and English.

Similarly, as identified by David (1999) the topic for communication is also vital in identifying language choice. The present study has shown patterns of language use in the home domain with father and siblings which are more in English and Urdu than Sindhi. However, with the mother, Sindhi language is retained. In this study, new patterns of language use among the siblings have emerged where Urdu and English is used more than Sindhi. The analysis of the present study shows that the Sindhi speakers are resorting to use Urdu and English with their siblings and even younger

ones, as narrated by David (2000) in her study of the Sindhis in Singapore.

In the home domain participants used English for discussion on academic issues, movie and travelling plans. However for health topics, media talks and shopping discussion Urdu is used and Sindhi is retained for informal discussion, political views and gossip.

In conclusion Letsholo (2009) while exploring language use reported that the native speakers were not using their mother tongue even in the domains where mother tongue could be used; like speaking with parents and siblings with the same mother tongue.

It is clear that language policy of Pakistan affects the speech communities who adopt the majority language which also has a national status (Ali, 2015 & 2017). When the scenario in the home domain changes and shifts away from the dominant use of the heritage language there is bound to be a shift to a new language, in this case the national language, Urdu and the international language, which is also an official language-English. This shift to Urdu and English seems to be facilitated by parents, siblings and community members. The present study shows that language shift is taking place in various domains where previously mother tongue was used.

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