

LANGUAGE PREFERENCES OF YOUNG URDU SPEAKERS ACROSS SOCIAL CONTEXTS IN KARACHI: A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY

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ABSTRACT

Young Urdu speakers in Karachi use language extensively in all aspects of their lives, including social media, school, and home. Urdu, which is used as both the national language of Pakistan and a regional language in Karachi, faces difficulties due to the city's great cultural diversity as well as the expanding impact of English and other languages. The goal of this research project is to understand how young people's language choices are influenced by variables such as socioeconomic status and educational background. To obtain primary data, semi-structured interviews were conducted with 11 participants, including Government University Students, Private University Students, Government College Students, Private College Students, and Office Professionals. Purposive sampling is used to choose people with different backgrounds and levels of education. For a thorough examination, the interviews are transcribed and thematic analysis is applied to find patterns and themes that demonstrate how language preferences change depending on the situation and reflect social and personal factors.

Key Terms: Language Preferences, Sociolinguistics, Domains of Language Use, Language Identity, Socioeconomic Background, Educational Access, Semi-Structured Interviews, Thematic Analysis, Phenomenological Approach

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

There has been an air of uncertainty as far as the identification of one's core goes in this era heavily influenced by the emergence of technology and globalization. Cultures are enclaves within an unseen thread, with the impact of each other's distinctive features becoming inevitable day by day. In the light of different cultures impacted by each other, it was only a matter of time before languages also started to mold and stretch into shapes that once were considered a hit to their originality and uniqueness. With things changing

quite fast and lifestyles evolving into realms unseen, there is a growing sense of unease among the purists, with the elephant in the room silently echoing, "What would happen to our language, say five years from now?"

Thinning down the focus, what should be done at this point is try to rejig and re-evaluate what's in front of us. Living in Karachi, a hub of over 25 million people, easily speaks for itself why there's an imminent need to highlight the changes being applied to the national language of Pakistan, Urdu. In retrospect, things could become more

serious when it is taken into account the fact that a huge number of local Karachiites are young—below 25. Therefore, in this research I aim to focus on the language preferences of young Urdu speakers in shifting social environments in Karachi. The core theme is to find out whether a certain setting or an event is likely to influence locals to shift tone, dialect, or more so, their language to a certain one in order to communicate efficiently.

Urdu is a language that, by origin, had a variety of languages sub-merged into it to make it one. Those languages were Sanskrit or Hindi. However, since the language has passed the time-test and it's a right time for it to evolve into a global one, seeing a trend of local youngsters avoiding its usage in their daily lives poses a grim picture. Hence, this research comes with an honest purpose that's circling around to bring the mojo of Urdu back to the streets and grounds of Karachi. The way people speak in Karachi has changed a lot over the years. Karachi is a big city with many different cultures and languages. After Pakistan became independent in 1947, Urdu became the main language of the country. This was because Urdu was seen as a way to bring together the different language groups in Pakistan (Rahman, 1996). Before independence, when Pakistan was under British rule, English was introduced and became very important. Even after independence, English stayed as the language used in government, schools, and by people of higher social status (Baumgardner, 1993). Due to this factor, young people in Karachi have grown up using both Urdu and English in their daily lives.

This study on language use among young people in Karachi draws on ideas from sociolinguistics and language philosophy. Studies highlight how local languages like Urdu interact with global languages like English. For example, Rahman (1996) notes that Urdu symbolizes national identity. Baumgardner (1993) discusses why English is vital for modernization and job opportunities. In terms of philosophy, this research aligns with the idea of linguistic relativity. This concept suggests that language shapes how we think and view ourselves. Pennycook (1994) argues that language choices are influenced by cultural and personal identities, not just practical needs.

There are a few theories in sociolinguistics that explain the relationship between language and society. For instance, Fishman's Domain Analysis Theory (1972) suggests that people use different languages depending on their social settings, while Giles and Powesland's Communication Accommodation Theory (1975) explains that people often adjust their language to match the person they are communicating to.

The language choices of young Urdu speakers in Karachi are interlinked to issues of identity and nationalism. Urdu has been connected with Pakistan's national identity and unity. It creates a sense of togetherness among the country's various ethnic groups. For young people, speaking Urdu helps them feel connected to their national heritage and cultural roots (Rahman, 1996). While English is often seen as a sign of being modern, connected globally, and having better job prospects as it is preferred in schools and workplaces because it is considered a prestigious language that can lead to success.

The Problem

The major issue that has been addressed in this research is the variation in language preferences of young Urdu speakers in the different social settings in Karachi. Viewing it from the perspective of the ones living in Karachi, Urdu speakers adopt a very interesting language-producing environment where different languages are used in different context and settings. However, there is a gap in understanding how these preferences vary across different social settings and what factors influence them.

Research Questions

This research will emphasize on these research questions that are associated with the impact on the preferences of language at the different levels.

1. How do language preferences of young Urdu speakers vary across different social settings (e.g. home, school, and social media)?
2. How do factors like region, socioeconomic background, and educational access influence the language preferences of young Urdu speakers?

Objectives of the study

The study aims to understand and explain the usage and changes that language has suffered when it comes to the choices of Urdu Speakers. Considering these factors, I plan to declare a point of view on whether it is a positive or a negative change and how to consider the way of communicating. The objectives of this study are:

1. To determine how language preferences vary across different social settings.
2. To identify the impact of socioeconomic background, education, and regional origin on language preferences.
3. To find out the reasons behind language choices and their relation to individual's identity.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language preferences and usage among young people have always been a central theme in sociolinguistic studies, particularly in multilingual urban environments like Karachi. Karachi's rich linguistic diversity makes it an important site to study how Urdu speakers, especially the youth, negotiate their identities, aspirations, and cultural ties through language. This section reviews existing literature on language and identity, youth attitudes, code-switching practices, socioeconomic influences, and the impact of technology, while also situating the present study within relevant theoretical frameworks.

Language, Identity, and National Cohesion

The relationship between language and identity in Pakistan is deeply rooted in history. After independence, Urdu was declared the national language as a symbol of unity among the country's diverse ethnic groups (Rahman, 1996). Rahman highlights that Urdu serves as more than a tool of communication; it is a cultural and political symbol of Pakistani identity. Ahmad, Akram, and Ranra (2022) similarly argue that Urdu fosters national cohesion, though they also stress the importance of recognizing regional languages to ensure inclusivity. This dual role of Urdu, as both a national symbol and a practical lingua franca, is especially visible in Karachi, where the population includes speakers of Sindhi, Punjabi, Pashto, Kashmiri, and other languages.

Abbasi, Khan, and Panhwar (2022) found in their qualitative case study of young Kashmiri migrants in Karachi that Urdu dominates across most domains such as education, social interactions, and even at home, largely due to its role as a lingua franca. Yet, participants retained a strong connection with their heritage language in private and familial contexts, showing how youth balance practical needs with cultural identity. This demonstrates the tension between language shift and language maintenance in a multilingual city.

Youth Attitudes towards Urdu and English

While Urdu retains emotional and integrative value, English holds strong instrumental significance. Baumgardner (1993) identifies English as the language of modernity, higher education, and socioeconomic opportunity, a trend that continues today. Abbas and Iqbal (2023), in a comparative study, confirm that youth often view English as essential for career advancement and global connectivity, while Urdu remains tied to culture and national belonging. This duality creates a diglossic situation where youth strategically choose languages based on context: Urdu for identity and belonging, English for prestige and advancement.

Pennycook (1994) adds that language choice is never neutral but deeply tied to cultural identity and self-perception. Thus, when young Urdu speakers in Karachi shift between Urdu, English, and regional languages, they are not only adapting for communication but also negotiating social status, identity, and group belonging.

Code-Switching, Social Contexts, and Theoretical Perspectives

Different researches show that code-switching is widespread among Pakistani youth. Shahzadi et al. (2021) studied university students in Lahore and documented frequent mixing of Urdu, English, and regional languages in informal settings. This practice reflects an adaptive strategy to fit diverse social contexts, a finding that resonates with Fishman's Domain Analysis Theory (1972). Fishman explains that language choice varies by domain: family, education, workplace, or media. In Karachi, similar trends often emerge, such as Urdu dominating in family settings, English in

formal education and workplaces, and blended forms of Urdu-English appear on social media.

Communication Accommodation Theory by Giles & Powesland, 1975 further clarifies how young speakers adjust their language depending on their audience. They may look for gaining social approval, or diverge to emphasize their distinct identity. So this theory is particularly relevant in Karachi, where shifting between languages is often a way of signaling group membership or social aspirations.

Socioeconomic and Educational Influences

The fact is language preferences are strongly tied to class and access to education. Kachru (1992) and Baumgardner (1993) note that proficiency in English is linked to privilege, higher socioeconomic status, and access to quality education. The private institutions, where English is the medium of instruction, those students are more likely to prefer English in both academic and social domains. In contrast to this, students from government institutions rely more on Urdu, highlighting how class and educational background shape linguistic choices.

An additional layer comes from educational practices themselves. Naeem and Abrar (2025), while examining ELT teachers' perceptions of written feedback, highlight how structured instruction and feedback improve students' syntactical accuracy in English. Although their study is about writing, its implications extend to language preferences, stronger competence in English through targeted teaching can increase youth confidence and encourage its broader use across contexts. Thus, education not only reflects but also actively shapes language preference.

Technology, Digital Media, and the Future of Urdu

The digital age has introduced both challenges and opportunities for Urdu. Androutsopoulos (2014) observes that digital communication fosters hybrid language practices, blending local languages, English, and internet slang. This is evident on Pakistani social media platforms where Roman Urdu and English often dominate. Ahmed (2023) notes that Urdu's Nastaliq script presents technical hurdles, making it less user-friendly

online. However, digital initiatives such as the Matnsaz app and platforms like Rekhta are working to modernize Urdu's digital presence and make it more appealing to younger users. These developments are crucial for sustaining Urdu's relevance in the age of globalization.

Conclusion

The reviewed literature makes it clear that the language preferences of young Urdu speakers in Karachi are influenced by a combination of identity, socioeconomic factors, education, and technology. Urdu serves as an emotional anchor and a symbol of national identity, while English functions as a gateway to modernity, prestige, and opportunity. Code-switching shows the flexible negotiation between these two languages while these choices vary by social domain.

Apart from the literature, there is still a gap in focused and localized research specifically on Urdu-speaking youth in Karachi. Existing studies often look at minority language groups or broader national trends but do not examine in detail how young Urdu speakers themselves navigate their multilingual environment. Therefore, this study addresses that gap by investigating their preferences across varied contexts, adding to the understanding of language, identity, and social change in Pakistan's largest city, which is Karachi.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

This study on language preferences adopted **qualitative research design** with an exploratory purpose. A phenomenological approach was chosen to understand the lived experiences and language preferences of young Urdu speakers in Karachi. This design helped the participants to share their perspectives in detail and provided insights into the ways social settings, socioeconomic background, and education influence language use.

Procedure

The research process was carried out systematically to ensure reliability and ethical integrity. Ethical approval was obtained, and participants were informed about the aims of the study. Informed

consent was taken, with assurances of confidentiality and anonymity.

Primary data were collected through **semi-structured individual interviews**, which allowed flexibility in exploring participants' views while ensuring coverage of the key research questions. An interview guide was used to maintain consistency across sessions while giving room for follow-up probing. All interviews were audio-recorded (with consent) and later transcribed verbatim for analysis.

Population

The target population consisted of young Urdu speakers in Karachi, aged **18–25 years**. This group was selected because youth in this age bracket are highly active across multiple social settings such as home, college/university, workplace, and social media. The population was diverse in terms of educational institutions (government vs. private) and professional background, which ensured a variety of perspectives on language preferences.

Sample and Sampling Method

A total of **11 participants** were interviewed. Participants were selected using **purposive sampling**, which is suitable in qualitative research for identifying information-rich cases (Patton, 2002). This method ensured that respondents represented different educational and professional backgrounds relevant to the research objectives. The final sample included 6 males and 5 females aged 18-25.

- Government College Students (n=2)
- Private College Students (n=3)
- Government University Students (n=2)
- Private University Students (n=2)
- Office Professionals (n=2)

Instrument for Data Collection

Data were gathered using a **semi-structured interview guide** based on the study's research questions. The guide included questions on:

- Language use across domains (home, school/college, work, and social media)
- Attitudes toward Urdu and English

- Influence of socioeconomic background and education on language choice
- Identity and cultural associations with language
- Semi-structured interviews provided both structure and openness, allowing participants to express their views while keeping the focus aligned with the objectives of the study.

Data Analysis

The transcribed interviews were analyzed using **thematic analysis** (Braun & Clarke, 2006). The process involved the following procedure:

- Familiarization with the data through repeated readings of transcripts.
- Generating initial codes to capture recurring ideas (e.g., "English as prestige," "Urdu as identity").
- Grouping codes into broader themes (e.g., "Social Contexts of Language Use," "Socioeconomic Impact on Preferences").
- Reviewing and refining themes to ensure alignment with the research questions.
- Presenting findings with supporting quotations from participants to illustrate key points.

Table1: Participant Demographics

Participants	Gender	Age	Education	Occupation	Locality of Residence	Urdu Proficiency	English Proficiency
Respondent 1	Female	23	Pursuing Master's (Govt.)	Part-time teacher	Gulberg	Intermediate	Basic
Respondent 2	Female	24	Pursuing Master's (Govt.)	Part-time HR	Gulberg	Intermediate	Intermediate
Respondent 3	Male	21	Pursuing Bachelor's (Private)	Not working	Gulistan-e-Johar	Advanced	Advanced
Respondent 4	Female	23	Pursuing Master's (Private)	Part-time teacher	Gulistan-e-Johar	Basic	Advanced
Respondent 5	Male	19	Pursuing Intermediate	Not working	Azizabad	Intermediate	Intermediate
Respondent 6	Male	18	Pursuing Intermediate	Not working	Garden	Intermediate	Basic
Respondent 7	Male	20	Completed A-levels (gap year)	Corporate Employee	Gulistan-e-Johar	Advanced	Intermediate
Respondent 8	Female	18	Pursuing A-levels	Not working	Gulistan-e-Johar	Intermediate	Intermediate
Respondent 9	Male	20	Completed A-levels (gap year)	Corporate Employee	Gulshan-e-Iqbal	Advanced	Advanced
Respondent 10	Male	25	Bachelors-Graduate	Assistant Sales Manager	North Karachi	Advanced	Advanced
Respondent 11	Female	24	Masters-Graduate	Subject Head (Private School)	Malir Hault	Advanced	Advanced

FINDINGS

Language Preferences at Home

A consistent theme across respondents was the dominance of Urdu in family interactions. Regardless of socioeconomic status, most participants reported speaking Urdu with their parents and siblings, often describing it as “natural” and “comfortable.” For instance, a government university student explained: *“At home, I never think about which language to use; it’s always Urdu. It connects me to my parents and feels respectful.”* (Govt Uni Female, Respondent 2) Even participants with high English proficiency noted that English was rarely used at home except in rare instances such as academic discussions or when quoting something in English. A private college student reflected: *“Even if I know English well, speaking it with my parents would sound odd. They expect Urdu, and I also feel more expressive in it.”* (Private College Male, Respondent 5).

An office professional added, *“Typically it’s a mix and match of both but it depends upon the severity of the situation. Like if it’s a debate or something like that then I would rather and much prefer communication in English. And if it’s like a casual talk or conversation on social media with my friend or especially in a social circle like sitting face to face, definitely Urdu will be my go to language then.”* This demonstrates that the home domain reinforces Urdu as the language of intimacy and cultural belonging, suggesting that English has not replaced Urdu in familial relationships, even among urban, educated youth.

Peer Interaction and Language Choice

Language choice among peers; however, was more fluid. Respondents highlighted that with friends, the decision often depended on context, school background, and social image. A private university student admitted: *“With friends, I often mix English and Urdu. Sometimes speaking English makes you sound modern, but we can’t avoid Urdu-it’s our base.”* (Private Uni Male, Respondent 4)

In contrast, a government college student stressed that Urdu remained dominant with his peer group: *“Most of my friends are from similar backgrounds. We all use Urdu, and if someone tries to show off in English, we make fun of them.”* (Govt College Male, Respondent 7). Peer groups thus

become a space where language is negotiated. Among elite and private institution students, English carried symbolic capital and was associated with confidence and prestige. In working-class and government-sector environments, however, Urdu was perceived as more authentic and socially acceptable.

Educational Institutions and Language Use

Educational background significantly shaped language preferences. Respondents from private universities and colleges reported using English more frequently in academic discussions, especially in formal assignments, presentations, or classroom interactions. A private university student explained: *“In university, it’s almost expected to use English. Teachers prefer it, and we have to submit work in English anyway.”* (Private Uni Female, Respondent 6) She also added, *“I come from a convent school where we were not allowed to talk in Urdu. And even if any of the teachers or the staff members caught us talking in Urdu, they were supposed to pay a fine. Our teacher made a box that was kept in our classroom and made me 5 rupees or 10 rupees. We had to chip in every time we made the mistake of speaking Urdu while we were in the boundary of an English medium school. We were only allowed to use Urdu during the Urdu class. So, I definitely do think it has an influence on you because your teachers conditioned you this way. It was conditioned this way that we were taught that you are supposed to talk in English and you should use English only and English is superior. If I would have been from some other school or from a government school or a school that is not English medium and does not prioritize English in that way, I think I would have been more comfortable with Urdu and using Urdu in my society.”*

On the other hand, government college and university students shared that even though English is the official medium of instruction, Urdu was often used informally in discussions, explanations, and peer-to-peer support. One respondent stated: *“Teachers often switch to Urdu because not everyone understands English fully. We use Urdu among friends to explain concepts.”* (Govt Uni Male, Respondent 1). This highlights the dual role of educational institutions: while they serve as a

site for the institutional reinforcement of English, they also act as spaces where Urdu remains a supportive, inclusive language for comprehension and solidarity.

Language in Professional and Digital Domains

Office professionals and older respondents emphasized that English had stronger dominance in professional spaces, particularly in written communication, emails, and formal meetings. One office worker described: *"In my workplace, English is the standard. Emails, reports, even meetings—it's all in English. But during breaks, we switch to Urdu for casual talk."* (Office Professional, Respondent 10)

Digital spaces such as social media and texting showed mixed patterns. Several respondents reported using Roman Urdu (Urdu written in English script) more often than either full English or traditional Urdu script. A female private college student noted: *"I mostly chat in Roman Urdu. It's easier to type, but when I post something formal, I switch to English."* (Private College Female, Respondent 8). Thus, digital platforms blur the boundary between English and Urdu, giving rise to hybrid practices that reflect both practicality and identity.

Perceptions of English as a Symbol of Prestige

A recurring theme was the association of English with status, respect, and opportunity. Many respondents, particularly those from private institutions, equated English with success. As one private university student put it: *"In Pakistan, if you know English, people think you are educated and superior. It opens doors."* (Private Uni Male, Respondent 3)

However, some participants criticized this perception, arguing that it unfairly devalues Urdu. A government university respondent remarked: *"It's sad that our own language is seen as low-class. People judge you for speaking Urdu, even though it's our national language."* (Govt Uni Female, Respondent 2) A private university student also added, *"Even in the other foreign countries, if you would look at the products they are making, any XYZ product be it the skincare, makeup or any XYZ thing and you go through that description that is also written in their own language only. Exactly, that's why, that's because they*

have always valued their own language from the very start and they have not given English that kind of standard to take over their own language and today that is why their own mother tongue and their personal language is thriving all over the world."

These narratives reveal the dual pressures faced by young people in Karachi: the need to master English to gain social and professional mobility, and the simultaneous desire to preserve Urdu as a marker of identity.

Urdu as a Marker of Identity and Belonging

Several respondents expressed that Urdu was deeply tied to their personal and cultural identity. For them, using Urdu was more than just a communicative choice—it symbolized their connection to heritage, traditions, and national pride. One office professional reflected: *"Urdu keeps me connected to my roots. No matter how much English I use at work, Urdu is my real identity."* (Office Professional, Respondent 11)

A government university student similarly noted: *"When I speak Urdu, I feel I belong to Pakistan. It's part of who we are."* (Govt Uni Male, Respondent 1). For such participants, Urdu provided a sense of comfort and authenticity, countering the idea that English should be the only language of progress. This aligns with the idea that language is a powerful symbol of group identity, especially in multilingual societies.

Code-Switching and Hybrid Practices

Nearly all respondents described frequent code-switching, where English and Urdu were mixed within the same sentence. For many, this was an unconscious habit shaped by schooling, peer influence, or digital communication. A private college student shared: *"We mix both languages all the time. Sometimes a word comes faster in English, sometimes in Urdu. It feels natural now."* (Private College Male, Respondent 5)

Similarly, a female private university student explained: *"In social media posts, I write in English but add Urdu phrases for humor or emotion. It makes the message more expressive."* (Private Uni Female, Respondent 6)

This hybrid use reflects linguistic flexibility, where code-switching is not seen as deficiency but as

creativity. It also indicates that Karachi's youth are comfortable navigating both languages simultaneously, depending on context and audience.

Socioeconomic Background and Language Preferences

Socioeconomic differences strongly influenced language choices. Respondents from private institutions and office settings demonstrated greater reliance on English in formal contexts, whereas government college and university students leaned more toward Urdu. A government college respondent emphasized: *"English is not really needed in my circle. We all study in Urdu-medium, so that's how we communicate."* (Govt College Male, Respondent 7). Another office professional added that, *"North Karachi is majority Urdu-speaking. If I'd grown up in DHA or Malir Cantt, where English is normalized, I might now speak English more fluently."* Meanwhile, a private university participant stated: *"English is a must in my environment. Without it, you cannot survive academically or socially."* (Private Uni Male, Respondent 3). This contrast highlights how socioeconomic class and institutional exposure shape not only proficiency but also attitudes toward language. For higher-class respondents, English represented opportunity and advancement, while for lower- to middle-class respondents, Urdu remained the more accessible and inclusive choice.

Future of Urdu and English in Karachi

When asked about the future, many respondents predicted that English would continue gaining ground in Pakistan, especially in education, media, and professional domains. However, most participants also stressed the need to preserve and promote Urdu. A government university female said: *"If we don't promote Urdu, it might lose importance in the next 20 years. But it's part of our culture, so we must keep it alive."* (Govt Uni Female, Respondent 2)

An office professional was more pragmatic: *"English will keep growing because of globalization. But that doesn't mean Urdu will disappear—it will always be there in homes and emotions."* (Office Professional, Respondent 10). Adding that, *I'm happy to see lower-*

income individuals improve their English and win freelance projects. But I'm also aware of the downside—the diminishing presence of Urdu. So it's bittersweet. This dual view, accepting English as a global necessity while defending Urdu as a cultural and emotional anchor, captures the central tension in Karachi's youth identity today.

Summary of Findings

The thematic analysis reveals that language preferences among young Urdu speakers in Karachi are dynamic and context-dependent. Urdu dominates in familial and emotional contexts, while English is strongly linked to prestige, education, and professional advancement. Peer interactions and digital spaces encourage hybrid practices, especially code-switching and Roman Urdu. Socioeconomic status and type of institution play critical roles in shaping attitudes, with private-sector youth leaning more toward English and government-sector students affirming Urdu.

DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to explore the language preferences of young Urdu speakers in Karachi across different social settings, while also considering the influence of socioeconomic background, education, and occupation. The findings show that the use of Urdu and English is not fixed but depends on where the speaker is, who they are speaking to, and how they see their own identity. This section discusses these results in light of the research questions, objectives, and previous studies.

Language Preferences across Social Settings

The findings clearly show that participants used Urdu more frequently at home and with family members, while English was more common in educational and professional spaces. This supports Fishman's (1972) **Domain Theory**, which explains that people select languages according to the situation or "domain" of interaction. For example, government university and college students emphasized how Urdu felt natural in family interactions, but they often switched to English in academic settings, especially when talking to teachers or writing assignments. Private university

students and office professionals, on the other hand, described English as almost unavoidable in professional and academic life.

This variation reflects the dual status of Urdu and English in Pakistan: Urdu as a marker of national and cultural identity (Rahman, 1996), and English as a symbol of prestige, modernity, and career advancement (Baumgardner, 1993). The results confirm that young people in Karachi are constantly negotiating between these two languages, using each where it is socially or practically required.

Influence of Socioeconomic and Educational Background

Socioeconomic background and type of institution were strong influences on language choice. Students from government colleges and universities showed greater attachment to Urdu, often expressing pride in its role as a unifying national language. They also highlighted difficulties with English, saying it sometimes acted as a barrier in academic performance. This aligns with Rahman (2002), who argued that unequal access to English-medium education widens the social gap between classes.

On the other hand, private university students and office professionals described English as essential for upward mobility and workplace success. They frequently linked English with respect, confidence, and professional recognition. This reflects Baumgardner's (1993) claim that English in Pakistan is closely tied to opportunities for social and economic advancement. However, some participants admitted feeling conflicted, because while English gave them an advantage, they worried it overshadowed Urdu's cultural importance.

Identity, Respect, and Language Mixing

A recurring theme was the relationship between language preference and identity. Many participants said Urdu was central to their cultural identity, yet English gave them respect in professional and social circles. This tension reflects Pennycook's (1994) idea that language choices are not only about communication but also about identity and social belonging.

The frequent mixing of Urdu and English (code-switching) was another significant pattern. Almost all participants admitted to blending the two languages in everyday conversations, particularly with friends and on social media. This practice shows how young speakers creatively use language to fit different contexts, echoing Giles' **Communication Accommodation Theory** (1975), adjusting language to match the person or situation.

Concerns about the Future of Urdu

Several participants expressed concern about the future of Urdu, fearing that English might dominate social media, workplaces, and education. While office professionals saw English as unavoidable, students, especially from government institutions, stressed the need to promote Urdu more strongly. These findings resonate with Rahman (1996), who emphasized the symbolic importance of Urdu for national unity, and with current debates about language attrition in multilingual societies.

Balancing Urdu and English

Overall, the findings suggest that young Urdu speakers in Karachi are not rejecting Urdu but are balancing it with English according to need. While English is seen as a language of opportunity, Urdu remains emotionally tied to family, culture, and identity. This balance highlights the importance of policies that promote bilingualism without letting one language overshadow the other. For instance, participants suggested that Urdu and English should both be given importance in education, workplaces, and media, so young people can value their cultural roots while also engaging globally.

CONCLUSION

This study explored the language preferences of young Urdu speakers in Karachi across different social settings. The findings show that while Urdu remains central to identity and cultural belonging, English often dominates in education, workplaces, and digital spaces. These patterns reflect how social background, type of schooling, and professional needs shape language choices. The research highlights the importance of understanding these preferences because they

directly link to identity, access to opportunities, and the future of Urdu in Pakistani society.

LIMITATIONS AND FUTURE RESEARCH

Like any qualitative study, this research has also some limitations. The sample size was small, focusing on 11 participants, which means the findings cannot be generalized to the whole population. Also, the study mainly relied on self-reported answers, which may not always capture actual language use in daily practice. Future studies could include a larger and more diverse focus group, observe real conversations, or compare Karachi with other cities such as Lahore or Islamabad to provide a broader picture of language preferences in Pakistan.

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Appendix A-Interview Questions

Section 1: Personal Details

1. Name:
2. Gender:
3. Age:
4. Occupation:
5. Marital Status:
6. Education:
7. Place of Birth:
8. Locality of Residence:
9. What is your native (first) language? a) Urdu b) English c) Other: _____

Section 2: Language Proficiency

10. How would you rate your proficiency in English? a) Basic b) Intermediate c) Advanced
11. How would you rate your proficiency in Urdu? a) Basic b) Intermediate c) Advanced

Section 3: Language Use and Preferences

12. In which social settings do you prefer using Urdu or English (home, school, work, and social media)? Why?
13. Do you change your language depending on who you're speaking to (e.g., friends vs. teachers)? Why?
14. What factors influence your choice of language (e.g., comfort, education, respect, work)?
15. Which language do you find more useful in daily life, and why?
16. Do you think English brings more social respect than Urdu in Pakistani society? Why or why not?
17. Do you mix English and Urdu when speaking? Can you give examples?
18. Can you share an experience where you had to switch between Urdu and English to fit in?

Section 4: Digital & Educational Language Use

19. What language do you usually use when texting, emailing, or on social media? Why?
20. Do you think English dominates communication on digital platforms? Why does this happen?
21. Do you find it easier to read and write in Urdu or English? Why?

22. Do you think Urdu and English should be treated equally in education? Why or why not?

23. Has studying in a government or private institution affected your language use? How?

Section 5: Language, Identity & Society

24. How important is Urdu to your personal or cultural identity?
25. Do you think Urdu should be promoted more in Pakistan? What steps can be taken?
26. How would you feel if Urdu became less common in the next 20 years?
27. Do you think learning English is harming the Urdu language? Why or why not?
28. Does your area or neighborhood influence the way you speak or the language you prefer? How?

Section 6: Broader Perspectives & Recommendations

29. Why do you think some people are hesitant to use Urdu as their first language in Pakistan?
30. What do you think about English becoming more popular and widely used in Pakistan?
31. Should Urdu be used more in official government documents instead of English? Why or why not?
32. Why do you think Urdu was chosen as Pakistan's national language?
33. What role does a native language play in the development of a country?
34. What steps can be taken to reduce English's dominance and support Urdu more in Pakistan?
35. What is the best way to encourage Urdu use among young people?