

# Relationship between language loss and attitude

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**Abstract:** This study aims to determine relationship between language loss and attitude to language. More than one hundred participants who live in Delhi and speak Saraiki as L1 were studied. Half of the participants were born in Mianwali and adjacent areas and half of them were born in Delhi. Those who were born in Mianwali, moved to Delhi in 1947 at the time of division of the subcontinent into Pakistan and India. The number of male and female was equal in both groups. The participants were asked to produce words of Saraiki containing of the target sounds on word-medial position in the most accurate pronunciation. The productions were recorded and presented to four native speakers of Saraiki for evaluation. The evaluators marked the sounds on a five-point Likert scale. The scores were averaged. Interview was another tool of research. The participants know English, Hindi and Saraiki. In the interview they were asked which languages they knew. Their affiliation to Hindi, Saraiki and English was determined on the basis of their responses. The first language that they named was awarded 3 marks, the second one was awarded 2 marks and the one named last was awarded 1 mark. The results show that the participants were mostly affiliated to Hindi. In the production results it was also found that the influence of Hindi on language loss was very effective. Thus the study determines a relationship between attitude and language loss.

**Key words:** *attrition, attitude, Delhi, Saraiki*

## 1. Introduction and Background

There is a large body of literature which establishes influence of markedness and dominant language in language loss. Another factor which plays effective role in language loss is frequency of use. The sounds which are used more will attrite later than those which are used less (Paradis, 1993; Schmid, 2007; Schmid & Dusseldorp, 2010). Another important factor which influences language loss strongly but which has not been studied at large is language attitude. The current study aims to fill this gap. It attempts to establish a relationship between language attitude and language convergence. There is a very subtle relationship between attitude and language loss. The accommodation theory (Giles, Coupland, & Coupland, 1991) addresses this issue at large. According to the theory, the speakers of a specific language group develop accommodative attitude about a language in a society. According to McGroarty (1996, p. 12), an important aspect of the accommodation theory is that it takes into account feelings of speakers of a language not only about their own language but also about other languages in the same society. According to the accommodation theory, sometimes a group of speakers develop strong feelings of affiliation and solidarity for another language. In this situation, normally the other language is a prestigious or dominant in the society and the approach of speakers is called convergent accommodation. A group of speakers with convergent accommodative attitude normally try to merge into the other linguistic community speaking a prestigious language. The normal result of this attitude is

that the speakers of a specific language lose their own language and converge into another language group. This convergence ultimately leads to language death in a specific community. Another attitude identified in the accommodation theory is of divergent accommodation. With this attitude, the speakers of a specific language are strictly affiliated to their own language and want to preserve it at any cost. In this context, the speakers try to maintain their separate linguistic community in a multilingual society. The speakers with this attitude maintain their language at any cost regardless of the fact that their language does not enjoy a high status in society. An ultimate effect of this attitude is language maintenance. The best example of divergent accommodation can be seen in Israel where the Jews have revived an old archaic Hebrew language into modern Hebrew. Attriting languages provide examples of convergent accommodation. Some studies attempted to determine a relationship between attitude and language loss. Some of these did not establish any correlation between attitude and language loss. For example, Schmid (2013) did not find any correlation between language loss and attitude of speakers. On the other hand Cherciov (2011) found a correlation between attitude and language loss in the context of Romanian immigrants. The current study also aims to determine the influence of attitude on language loss.

## **2. Research Methodology**

There are two groups of participants in this study. One of the groups consisted of 57 participants who were born before the emergence of Pakistan in 1947 in district Mianwali and adjacent areas. Thus, according to the dialectal variation of Saraiki by Shackle (1976), they speak northern dialect of Saraiki. They migrated to Delhi at the time of partition of the Subcontinent. The second group consisted of 61 native speakers of Saraiki who were progeny of these migrants. The difference between the two groups is that the migrants were born in a Saraiki speaking monolingual environment of Mianwali and the other group of participants were born in a multilingual environment of Delhi where Hindi is a dominant language. The minimum age of the Mianwali group of participants was 66 and their maximum age was 87 with 75.25 (standard deviation: 6.26) years mean age. Minimum age of the Delhi-born participants was 27 and maximum was 64 years with a mean of 52.53 (standard deviation: 8.90) years. According to the self-statement of the participants they speak English for an average of 2-3 hours in a day. 60 of the participants were male and 58 were female.

A semi structured interview and a word recording task were major tools of research in this study. The data were collected in Delhi at different places of convenience of the participants. First of all, the participants were asked some questions by the third author of this study who himself is a native speaker of Saraiki. The interview was recorded and decoded by the first

author. The information quoted above was obtained in the interview. In the interview, questions about age, linguistic and academic background of the participants were asked. The replies of the participants were recorded. After the interview, the participants were asked to produce a list of words. The current study focuses on the results related to only three plain nasals of Saraiki.<sup>1</sup> The following words given in (1) were used as stimuli to get the target sounds produced by the participants.

(1)

1. 'mengadian' [meŋɳjã] [ŋ] dung (of goats)
2. 'sunja' [suŋã] [ɳ] barren
3. 'kanda' [kaŋã] [ŋ] single-eyed

Some other sounds were also included in the above list. A detailed analysis of the whole results have been given elsewhere (see foot note 1). The recordings of the participants were given to four native speakers for evaluation. The native speaker judges were living in London at the time of evaluation. The evaluators were from District Mianwali of Pakistan. Recall that the participants also originally belonged to District Mianwali before migration. The evaluators evaluated these sounds on a Likert scale. The scale ranged between 1 and 5. The consistency and reliability of the evaluation was determined on the basis of a Cronbach's alpha reliability test. The reliability coefficient for the target sounds was greater than 0.7 which indicates strong reliability (Larson-Hall, 2010; Scholfield, 1995). The scores awarded by the four evaluators were averaged for ease of analysis. In the following section only averaged results for the target sounds will be presented.

### 3. Presentation and analysis of data

As mentioned earlier, the mean scores of each of the participants awarded by each of the judges were averaged. The following table shows the averaged results.

Table 1: Mean Scores

Sound	Score	Standard Deviation
[ɳ]	2.52	2.01
[ŋ]	3.92	3.90
[ŋ]	3.48	1.19

A one-way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was applied on these data. The results confirm that the difference of mean scores for these consonants is strongly significant ( $F=51.509$ ,

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<sup>1</sup> The current discussion focuses on only relationship between attitude and language loss. A detailed analysis of the results of this study can be seen in Syed, Malik and Hasan (2014).

p.<0001). The mean values show that the participants have scored the highest in production of retroflex nasal [ŋ] and the lowest in production of alveo-palatal nasal [ɲ]. A score of 4 indicates near native-like production. The average production of the participants is 3.92 for retroflex nasal [ŋ] which indicates that overall they are closer to the near-native level in production of retroflex nasal.

In the interview, the participants were asked which languages they can speak. In response to this question, they enumerated in a sequence, the languages they knew. All participants knew Hindi and Saraiki. With the exception of only six, all of them also knew English. For determining the affiliation of the participants to these three languages (i.e. Hindi, English & Saraiki) a score of '0' to '3' was awarded to each language of each of the participants. The first language that they mentioned in the sequence was given 3 marks, second one was given 2 marks and the third one was given 1 mark. For example, in response to the question 'which languages you know', if a speaker replied 'I know Hindi, English and Saraiki' a score of 3 was awarded to Hindi, 2 to English and 1 to Saraiki. If they did not mention either of these three languages, in that case zero mark was awarded to the language which they knew but which they did not enumerated. Some of the participants when asked which languages they speak, replied that they knew Hindi and English. They did not include Saraiki in the list. When the author pointed out that Saraiki was their mother tongue and that they were speaking Saraiki, they remembered that they also knew Saraiki. In such cases, zero mark was awarded to such a participants. These scores show level of their affiliation with these languages. The affiliation score was averaged. Table 2 shows the mean values.

Table 2: Participants' Affiliation with Saraiki, English & Hindi

<b>Language</b>	<b>Mean Score</b>	<b>St. Deviation</b>
English	1.61	1.00
Hindi	2.54	0.71
Saraiki	0.96	1.08

The difference between the mean values is strongly significant (F=53.779, p<.0001). The attitude of the migrant and Delhi born participants towards these three languages was not significantly different from each other (p>.1). Table 2 reflects that the participants have the strongest affiliation with Hindi but the weakest one with Saraiki. In response to the question, how many languages they know, they either did not include Saraiki among the list of

languages they knew or they enumerated it at the end. On the other hand, in most of the cases, they enumerated Hindi first of all. This shows their affiliation to these languages. Since the participants feel more affiliation with Hindi than with Saraiki, they prefer to shift from Saraiki to Hindi. An important point in this regard is that the participants have obtained highest scores in production of retroflex nasal and the lowest scores in production of alveolar nasal. Previous research shows that markedness also plays important role in language loss. Marked sounds attrite before unmarked sounds (Hansen & Chen, 2001). From the point of view of articulation, retroflex sounds are more marked than alveolar and velar consonants because retroflex sounds are more complex than the other sounds. One has to twist tongue for production of this consonant. In this way, one would expect that retroflex nasal should lose before alveolar and velar nasal. Similarly, coronal sounds are more unmarked than velar ones (de Lacy, 2007). Keeping in view effective role of markedness on language convergence we may expect that the Delhiite Saraiki speakers will lose retroflex and velar nasal before alveolar nasals. But the results show the converse. This is because the retroflex and velar nasal stops exist in Hindi but alveolar nasal does not exist in it. Thus, we conclude that most of the process of language loss of Saraiki among the Delhiite Saraiki speaking community is triggered by the dominant language i.e. Hindi. The influence of a dominant language on language attrition is already established. Speakers of a moribund language always wish to assimilate with the speakers of a dominant language (Bonner, 2001; Fries, 1998; Pavlenko & Lantolf, 2000). The results of this study confirm that the participants are more affiliated to Hindi than to Saraiki and they are also inclined to converge to from Saraiki to Hindi. Before concluding this paper, the current study proposes some future line of action to further this research. A synchronic phonologic description of Mianwali dialect of Saraiki will add more meaning to this study particularly if it is for the purpose of comparison with the Delhiite Saraiki.

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