

Heritage or Hurdle? Understanding the Decline of Urdu Among Pakistani Immigrants

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Abstract

baat karne kā hasīñ taur-tarīqa sīkhā
ham ne urdu ke bahāne se salīqa sīkhā

Capturing the essence of a language as inherently poetic as Urdu presents a unique challenge, yet the work of poet Manish Shukla aims to convey its beauty, providing a window into Urdu's profound cultural and expressive importance. The gradual decline of the Urdu language is a significant cultural and linguistic concern, particularly among Pakistani immigrants and their descendants. This decline represents not only the loss of a language but also the fading of rich literary, poetic, and philosophical traditions that Urdu embodies. As proficiency in reading and writing Urdu diminishes, particularly among the younger generations, there is a risk that future generations will lose access to a vast heritage of classical poetry, literature, and historical narratives that form a crucial part of the Urdu language. This paper investigates the decline of Urdu exploring the hurdles in its continuation as a heritage vehicle for the immigrants of Pakistani ethnicity based around the globe. Employing a descriptive-qualitative research methodology, this study collects data through an in-depth review of academic literature, poetic records, books, and online resources concerning the decline of the Urdu language. Additionally, the paper incorporates the author's personal experiences as an immigrant of Pakistani origin, traveling globally and encountering a younger generation that increasingly drifts away from the Urdu language. Using Fishman's (1966) framework, this research examines language use holistically, emphasizing the need to consider reading, writing, and cultural engagement beyond just verbal communication. The findings reveal that, despite the social and economic progress of Pakistani immigrants, there is a gradual decline in the relevance and use of the Urdu language. This research seeks to answer whether Urdu serves as a heritage asset or a hindrance for Pakistani immigrants as they adapt to new cultural and geographic environments. Ultimately, the paper argues for a critical re-examination of Urdu's role in cultural heritage, emphasizing the urgent need to preserve it as an intangible heritage.

Keywords:

Urdu, Heritage, Pakistani, immigrants, language, Migration and mobility, Cultural, Geographic

In 1992, linguists gathered at the International Linguistics Congress in Quebec reached a collective agreement that the loss of any language constitutes an irreplaceable cultural and intellectual loss for humanity. Recognizing the urgency of this issue, they called upon UNESCO to prioritize initiatives that promote and support linguistic organizations in documenting endangered and under-researched languages through the development of grammar, dictionaries, and the recording of oral literature. In response, UNESCO launched the 'Endangered Languages Project' in 1993, including the creation of the 'Red Book of Endangered Languages.' A subsequent progress report underscored the pressing need for action, revealing that while the full scope of language extinction was not yet fully understood, the rapid disappearance of languages across the globe required linguists to enhance their documentation and preservation efforts. Several key developments followed, including the establishment of the International Clearing House for Endangered Languages at the University of Tokyo in 1995, and the founding of the Endangered Language Fund in the United States the same year. The Fund's inaugural statement was a stark warning: while language loss has always been part of human history, the current rate of extinction is unparalleled. The statement highlighted that much of the linguistic knowledge studied today risks being lost to future generations, urging language professionals to take immediate responsibility for safeguarding the cultural heritage of numerous communities before it vanishes irretrievably.(Crystal, 2000). Language, much like other aspects of cultural heritage, serves as a clear indicator of identity and belonging. Additionally, it embodies the tension between preserving cultural continuity and embracing change within multicultural societies (Butcher, M. 2008). Language shift occurs when speakers gradually transition from using one language to another (Crystal, 2000). In contrast, language maintenance refers to a community's continued use of their native language in at least some aspects of their daily lives (Pauwels, 2004) (Karidakis & Arunachalam, 2015).

Over the past three decades, immigration has become a significant global phenomenon. In traditional immigrant-receiving nations such as Australia, Canada, and the United States, the number of immigrants has increased, with a notable shift in origin from Europe, once the primary source, to regions such as Asia, Africa, and Latin America. At the same time, Europe experienced a reversal in its migratory patterns, as countries that had historically been sources of emigration transformed into immigrant-receiving societies. Following

1945, Western European nations began attracting a substantial number of foreign workers. Initially, these migrants came primarily from southern Europe, but by the late 1960s, most originated from developing nations in Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and the Middle East (Massey et al., 1993). As immigration affected many social-cultural dynamics, language has been affected significantly. Carnevale (2009) emphasized that she was struck by the limited attention given to the complexity and intensity of the immigrant language experience in historical immigration literature. Despite the profound role that language plays in the immigrant experience, scholarly discussions have largely focused on language maintenance and language shift, primarily in terms of cultural continuity or assimilation, leaving the deeper nuances of linguistic challenges faced by immigrants underexplored.

Migration has historically been a crucial aspect of human existence, though much of the scholarly work on the topic has been authored by individuals who have not experienced migration firsthand. Migrants are frequently depicted in a homogenized manner, with the presumption that their experiences and journeys are uniform. However, this generalized perspective is contested by migrant-authored creative works, such as personal letters, journalistic articles, autobiographies, and fiction (Ahmad, 2019; Salazar, 2023). Although a significant body of literature has focused on language decline and the rise of immigrant populations, there remains a need for more comprehensive research to fully understand the interaction between these two phenomena. Many previous studies have primarily used demographic variables such as age, gender, occupation, religion, ethnicity, and education level to explore language maintenance and shift. However, the reliance on these disjointed categories has not produced broadly applicable or dynamic theories regarding the influence of migration on language decline (Fishman, 1966). Consequently, the complexity of how migration impacts language preservation or loss, particularly with regard to whether language serves as a cultural heritage or becomes a barrier for immigrants, is not yet fully understood.

To address this research gap, it is essential to conduct more targeted studies that explore the specific factors contributing to language maintenance or decline among immigrant communities. The effects of migration on language are not uniform and cannot be summarized across all languages at risk of decline. Instead, further research is required to investigate how migration influences particular

languages, particularly those that immigrants may struggle to retain across generations. By examining the unique challenges faced by immigrant groups in maintaining their linguistic heritage, we can develop a more nuanced understanding of the interplay between migration, language maintenance, and heritage.

Hence, the decline of a language such as Urdu is more complex than merely the correlation between being spoken around the world and the understanding of its literature. This paper aims to critically examine the decline of the Urdu language, particularly within the Pakistani diaspora. Over the years, a significant number of Pakistani immigrants have settled in countries such as the United States, Canada, Australia, the United Kingdom, and the Gulf region. As a result, we are witnessing the emergence of second- and third-generation Pakistani immigrants who are successfully integrated into their host societies, adopting new cultural norms and languages. However, this adaptation has come at a cost: many of these younger generations are not proficient in Urdu, the language of their ancestors. While some may be able to speak Urdu, their ability to read and write in the language is often limited or absent.

This decline in literacy threatens the preservation of a rich cultural and literary heritage, including classical poetry, literature, and historical narratives, which are integral to the identity of Urdu-speaking communities. This paper explores the ongoing decline of Urdu and investigates the challenges to its survival as a vehicle of cultural heritage for Pakistani immigrants worldwide.

The objectives of this research are:

1. To highlight the richness and cultural significance of the Urdu language.
2. To examine the factors contributing to the decline of Urdu, particularly among immigrant communities.
3. To analyze how Pakistani immigrants are maintaining Urdu as a cultural heritage amidst global migration and mobility.
4. To provide recommendations for preserving the Urdu language in the face of an increasing number of immigrants.

Research Methods

This study employs a descriptive-qualitative research methodology, focusing on an in-depth analysis of the decline of the Urdu language among immigrant communities, particularly of Pakistani origin. Data collection is primarily conducted through a comprehensive review of academic literature, poetic records, books, and online resources, all of which provide insights into the factors

contributing to the diminishing use of Urdu. In addition to these secondary sources, the research incorporates the author's personal experiences as an immigrant, offering firsthand perspectives on the generational shift away from Urdu observed during global travels and interactions with younger generations.

By utilizing Fishman's (1966) framework on language maintenance, this research examines language use from a holistic perspective, moving beyond simple statistical measures of speakers. Fishman's assertion that habitual language use includes more than just verbal communication highlights the importance of analyzing additional dimensions such as reading, writing, and cultural engagement. This qualitative approach allows for the collection of narrative and contextual data, offering a deeper understanding of the social and cultural dynamics influencing language maintenance, which cannot be fully captured by quantitative methods. Through this methodology, the study provides a nuanced analysis of the ongoing decline of Urdu in immigrant settings, shedding light on the broader social phenomena at play.

Historical context of Urdu Language

Urdu traces its origins back to 1027, with Lahore recognized as its birthplace and Old Panjabi as its linguistic parent. While Old Khari Boli played a role as a step-parent, Urdu had no direct connection with Braj. The term "Urdu" itself, however, only appeared around 750 years later. The significance of the year 1027 lies in the fact that it marked the formal annexation of Punjab by Mahmud of Ghazni, who stationed Persian-speaking troops in Lahore. These soldiers, now living among speakers of Old Panjabi, inevitably began to interact and integrate with the local population, likely learning the language of the people. Contrary to the notion that the local population switched to Persian, it is more plausible that the army began using Old Panjabi while introducing Persian vocabulary and phrases, marking the beginning of what would become the early form of Urdu (Bailey, T. G., 2011).

The word "Urdu" is derived from the Turkic term *orda* or *ordu*, meaning "army," which also serves as the root for the English word "horde." However, this etymological link does not imply that Urdu is closely related to the Turkic languages. There was no direct borrowing of Urdu vocabulary from Turkish. Instead, words of Arabic and Chagatai (a Turkic language) origin were borrowed through Persian, rather than directly from Turkic sources. Due to the fact that both Turkish and Urdu borrowed extensively from Persian and Arabic, there are noticeable similarities in the pronunciation of many words in both languages. The term "Urdu" was first

coined by the poet Ghulam Hamadani Mushafi in 1780. In its written form, Urdu employed the Persian script, which was commonly used by both Hindus and Muslims. This practice persisted until 1837, when Hindustani replaced Persian as the official language, alongside English, in the subcontinent (Day Translations Blog. 2018).

Cultural Significance of Urdu Language

Urdu is considered a thriving language spoken by approximately 100 million people globally, serving as a medium of communication not only in Pakistan but also within the Muslim community in India. The script in which Urdu is written, Nastaliq, is derived from Arabic Naskh, and a large portion of its vocabulary is borrowed from Arabic. However, the language also features many words of Persian and Turkish origin (Hassan & Sultana, 2019). Interestingly, the term "Urdu" was not initially used to describe the language as we know it today. In its early stages, Urdu was often associated with saints and mystics (faqirs). In the realm of Urdu culture, poetry has undergone significant changes over time. Hali, a pivotal figure in the history of Urdu poetry, is credited with introducing social themes into Urdu poetry (Farooqi, Prakash, & Kumar, 2020).

Rahman (2008) explains that Urdu is currently the national language of Pakistan and serves as a key identity marker for Indian Muslims, with strong historical ties to Islam in South Asia. This association between Urdu and Islam was strengthened during British colonial rule when Persian was replaced by Urdu at the administrative level and English at higher levels. Urdu became the medium of instruction in Islamic seminaries (madrasas) and a major language of religious scholarship. Additionally, Urdu played a role in mobilizing the Muslim community during the Pakistan Movement, contributing to the creation of Pakistan in 1947 (Hassan & Sultana, 2019).

In terms of literary origins, Shamsur Rahman Faruqi's *Early Urdu Literary Culture and History* (2001), an English adaptation of his earlier work *Urdu ka Ibtida'i Zamana* (1999), presents an exclusivist view of Urdu literary history, focusing primarily on Khari Boli literature produced by Muslim authors (Bangha & Orsini, 2010). Meanwhile, the Aligarh reformers believed that there is a profound connection between a community's life and the literature and language it creates. This notion reflects Coleridge's concept of "lingua communis" and was prevalent among modernized indigenous elites by the late 19th century. Figures like Muhammad Azad (2001) argued that a society's literature mirrors its condition and thought,

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suggesting that poor literary quality could negatively affect a community's moral standing. Altaf Husain Hali, in his Introduction to Poetry and Poetics, also emphasized the relationship between a society's moral condition and its literary output, asserting that *language not only reflects but also shapes civilization for better or worse* (Ahmed, 2012).

Thus, Urdu poets have been instrumental in shaping the cultural significance of the Urdu language, contributing to its rich literary heritage and solidifying its role as a medium of emotional, philosophical, and political expression. Iconic figures like Mirza Ghalib, with his introspective ghazals, and Allama Mohammad Iqbal also known Iqbal Lahori in Persian speaking countries , whose philosophical poetry inspired self-empowerment and the ideological foundation of Pakistan, are central to this tradition. Faiz Ahmed Faiz, known for blending romance with revolutionary ideas, brought social justice and resistance to the forefront of Urdu poetry, while Mir Taqi Mir laid the foundation for its emotional depth with his classical themes of love and sorrow. The works of these poets made Urdu a language that transcended personal sentiment and became a medium for social critique, intellectual thought, and collective identity.

The influence of Urdu poets is not limited to the past; modern voices like Parveen Shakir broke barriers with her bold expression of femininity and contemporary social issues, while Ahmed Faraz and Josh Malihabadi continued the tradition of using Urdu as a language of resistance and political defiance. Poets like Daagh Dehlvi also helped popularize Urdu through their playful and witty use of language, making it accessible to both the urban elite and common people. Through their collective contributions, these poets ensured that Urdu remains a dynamic and culturally significant language, capable of articulating both the personal and the universal, while preserving its role in shaping identity, heritage, and memory across generations.

Discussing the cultural significance and poetic expression embodied by the Urdu language would undoubtedly require an extensive exploration, as its depth and richness span centuries of literary tradition. As previously mentioned, Urdu is heavily influenced by Persian and Arabic, both of which are languages with their own profound cultural and literary significance. The integration of Persian and Arabic into Urdu not only enriched its vocabulary but also infused it with the sophisticated literary and poetic traditions of these languages. Consequently, Urdu poetry, with its intricate

metaphors, deep philosophical insights, and emotional resonance, continues to hold an esteemed place in cultural discourse, reflecting the shared heritage of its linguistic predecessors.

Factors Contributing to the Decline of Urdu

To fully understand the decline of the Urdu language among immigrants of Pakistani origin, it is essential to clarify that this research does not suggest that the significance of Urdu is diminishing, nor that the process of immigration directly caused its decline. Rather, the decrease in the use of Urdu in the context of migration and mobility should be analyzed using Fishman's (1966) framework on the primary subdivisions of language maintenance. Fishman argues that it is insufficient to rely solely on statistical data that measures the total number of "speakers" of a language, as speaking is only one aspect of habitual language use. Moreover, speaking itself encompasses various roles, stylistic levels, and domains of linguistic behavior.

In this regard, Fishman proposes that any inquiry into language use in multilingual contexts should consider several key sources of variation:

1. **Media Variance:** The use of language across different media such as writing, reading, and speaking. The degree of language maintenance or shift may vary considerably between these forms.
2. **Role Variance:** The degree of maintenance or shift can differ depending on the role of language, such as inner speech (where the individual is both speaker and listener), comprehension (where the individual is the listener), and production (where the individual is the speaker).
3. **Situational Variance:** The degree of language maintenance or shift may change according to the formality of the situation, ranging from formal to informal, or intimate communication contexts.
4. **Domain Variance:** The degree of language maintenance or shift may also vary across different domains of language use, such as the family, public spaces like streets and playgrounds, schools, religious institutions, media, workplaces, and governmental institutions.

This nuanced approach offers a more comprehensive analysis of the various factors influencing the use and decline of Urdu language among immigrant communities. A closer examination of these factors reveals distinct variances contributing to the gradual

decline of the language. Hence, in order to explore this, we need to consider each variance in the context of the immigrant's approach to the Urdu language.

Media Variance

One significant factor is the influence of media, which can be categorized into three major areas: speaking, reading, and writing. In terms of speaking, Urdu has experienced the least decline, as many immigrants still communicate in their native language within their communities. However, challenges arise when Pakistani immigrants, who share cultural and linguistic ties with other South Asian immigrants, form close-knit circles. This phenomenon, commonly referred to as "Desi communities," often leads to the dilution of language purity. Within these groups, a mix of words and expressions from various South Asian languages is used, allowing for easier communication among diverse nationalities. This gradual shift may go unnoticed until individuals return to their homeland or interact with people who have maintained the integrity of their native language.

Reading, on the other hand, shows more variability depending on the individual's educational background. Immigrants who attended schools following a Pakistani curriculum generally maintain better reading proficiency in Urdu, partly due to the similarity between the Arabic script used for Quranic education and the script used for Urdu. However, writing in Urdu faces the greatest challenge. As the art of writing by hand declines in the modern, fast-paced world, Urdu writing is becoming increasingly rare among immigrants. Writing, in this context, refers to the manual act of forming letters and sentences, an activity that is less common due to the widespread use of digital communication tools. While Urdu typing remains somewhat prevalent among less educated immigrant groups, the growing reliance on English-language devices, texting, and voice notes has further eroded the practice of writing in Urdu. Consequently, the remaining connection to written Urdu is rapidly fading, especially in English-speaking countries.

Role Variance

The Role Variance in language maintenance or shift offers a detailed perspective on how Urdu is used and sustained among immigrant communities. This concept examines how the degree of maintenance or shift can vary based on the role of language in different communicative as well as the personal perceptions. Firstly, in the context of inner speech, where an individual acts as both

speaker and listener in their internal dialogue, Urdu may be more robustly maintained. Inner speech often reflects a person's cultural and emotional identity, and even when living in an English-dominated environment, individuals may still think, reflect, or process emotions in Urdu if it's their mother tongue. This private use of the language can persist even when external, spoken use starts to decline. This is a strong indicator of the bond that immigrants may have with their mother-tongues and this is what resists the decline of a language in a new geographical setting. In line with this, the inner monologue of the immigrant becomes as important as the outer world he indulges in.

Secondly, in the role of comprehension, where an individual is the listener, Urdu is often retained through passive exposure, such as listening to Urdu media or engaging with family members in the language. This is where the disconnection with the Urdu language subtly occurs among the Immigrants as many immigrants, especially second-generation speakers, may understand Urdu but not necessarily use it actively. This is often due to infrequent formal use of the language in their new environment. Although comprehension tends to remain longer than active speaking skills, a lack of continued use can still result in gradual decline over time.

Finally, production, where an individual is actively producing Urdu language either in the form of speaking, writing or any other digital or artistic ways, is typically the most vulnerable to language shift. Without consistent opportunities to personally produce the Urdu language in everyday life, especially in the context of speaking or writing when dealing with the formal or complex situations, immigrants tend to rely more on the dominant language of their surroundings, such as English. For many Pakistani immigrants, while Urdu may still be used informally within family settings, its use in professional or public domains can decline significantly with less production. This highlights the importance of dissecting and addressing different roles of language use in efforts to maintain and preserve Urdu in immigrant communities.

Situational Variance:

The maintenance or decline of Urdu among immigrants is closely tied to the context in which they engage with the language. Situational variance, related to role variance, evolves as immigrants adjust to their new environment, and changes over time as they age. The extent of language maintenance or shift can be influenced by the formality of the situation. For example, in formal settings like family

gatherings, public lectures, or cultural events such as poetry recitals, an immigrant's connection to Urdu may be strengthened. Those with a deeper involvement in or appreciation for the cultural significance of Urdu are likely to maintain a stronger bond with the language. In contrast, in informal contexts like interactions with friends or siblings, Urdu may be less frequently used. Immigrants, especially second- or third-generation individuals in countries like the UK and USA, often communicate in English or the dominant local language among peers and siblings, while reserving Urdu for conversations with elders or parents. This pattern reflects a shift in language use based on the situational demands and social circles, emphasizing the importance of the environment in language retention.

A notable change occurs in intimate communication contexts, where Urdu may resurface in romantic or close relationships. For example, couples who both speak or understand Urdu may choose to interact in the language, especially influenced by the cultural impact of Bollywood, where romantic expression is often associated with Urdu's poetic charm. In such contexts, music and films can amplify the emotional connection to the language, as the immigrant seeks comfort in their mother tongue or a language closely related to it. This highlights how emotional and cultural factors intertwine to influence language use in specific situations.

Domain Variance:

Closely connected to situational variance is domain variance, which extends the consideration of language use beyond the home into public and institutional settings like schools, universities, and workplaces. The time spent in such environments can significantly influence language maintenance. For instance, working in an environment where Urdu is spoken can directly support the continuity of the language. However, in multicultural workplaces, even those who share a mother tongue may be compelled to use English or the official language of the host country, as it is often considered more inclusive and professional. Ethical considerations in the workplace, such as avoiding alienating colleagues who do not speak the same language, further reinforce the shift toward using a common language like English.

This multicultural setting contributes to a gradual linguistic shift, where immigrants become more accustomed to using the dominant language in their daily interactions. Although work-related communication in Urdu might persist in some cases, the broader influence of the work environment plays a pivotal role in shaping

language preferences over time. Consequently, domain variance reflects how external factors like professional and educational settings can accelerate the drift away from Urdu in an immigrant's day-to-day life, highlighting the complex relationship between language, environment, and social interaction.

Reasons of Decline Among the Immigrants

Thus far we have discussed the variance which gradually leads towards the decline of the Urdu language among the immigrants. Now we will shed light on some of the dominant reasons which tend to accelerate these variances. As, Abdurab, (2015) emphasized that the language, of course, is under crisis. What is troubling, specifically, is the lack of concern in its maintenance. We are on the verge of becoming "illiterate" in our own language.

The first and foremost is the lack of awareness or if one may dare to say the lack of concern, that such a rich language is on the verge of facing a significant decline if appropriate measures are not taken. To tackle this, first, we need to acknowledge the fact that there is a decline that we are witnessing in the usage of our mother tongue, Urdu language and we all are to be blamed somehow since we are also contributing to this decline consciously or unconsciously.

Another significant issue contributing to the decline of the Urdu language is the increasing dominance of software, digital media, and communication platforms that primarily operate in English. As these digital tools and applications become more integral to everyday life, especially among the youth, the usage of English has become more widespread, often at the expense of Urdu. Furthermore, a deep-rooted societal preference for English, which holds status as an international language and one of the official languages of Pakistan, has exacerbated this trend. This linguistic shift has led to the growing practice of blending Urdu and English within conversations, a phenomenon known as code-switching. While this mix of languages has become common, it undermines the integrity of both languages, as neither is used fully or accurately, contributing further to the decline of Urdu's presence in daily communication (Noor-Ul-Haya 2022).

Age is another significant factor in determining how easily individuals can acquire a community's language and develop deeper connections with both the language and the community (Kipp, Clyne, & Pauwels, 1995; Karidakis & Arunachalam, 2015). Younger generations, particularly those exposed to globalization and multicultural environments, often experience a natural inclination to

adopt modern, cosmopolitan identities. Even within settings where Urdu is widely spoken, this shift towards modernity and global culture may lead to a decline in the use of Urdu, as younger individuals prioritize other languages and cultural practices. This phenomenon is especially prominent during the days of youth when there is a tendency to align with more contemporary, global trends. However, this trend can sometimes reverse as individuals age. Older immigrants may increasingly gravitate towards their mother tongue, recognizing its beauty and cultural significance. As they grow older, there may be a renewed appreciation for Urdu, which embodies a sense of belonging and connection to one's roots.

These dynamic underscores the importance of language preservation for immigrants striving to maintain a balance between their cultural heritage and their new sociocultural environment. The decision to maintain or abandon Urdu has broader implications beyond language use, affecting whether immigrants preserve their cultural heritage and connections to their roots. When immigrants distance themselves from others who share a common cultural background, it can not only contribute to the decline of the Urdu language but also intensify feelings of alienation in the new environment. Such estrangement can lead to a sense of displacement and restlessness. Therefore, the preservation of the Urdu language is vital, as it serves as a medium through which immigrants convey and sustain shared meanings and cultural ties. The presence of "the stranger"—an individual who cannot be easily understood linguistically—can disrupt this cohesion, potentially resulting in unease and anxiety within the community.

Challenges Faced by Second and Third-Generation Immigrants

The challenges faced by second and third-generation immigrants in maintaining their mother tongue, particularly Urdu, are multifaceted and require extensive analysis or a research of its own. While multiple factors contribute to language decline, two major issues stand out. First, these generations often grapple with balancing their ancestral heritage and the dominant culture of their host country. This can lead to identity conflicts, as they navigate between trying to maintain a connection to their roots while assimilating into a modern, multicultural environment. Such internal struggles can be compounded by the external pressure to conform to the cultural norms of the host country. In many cases, this results in feelings of being caught "in between" cultures—neither fully belonging to their heritage nor fully accepted by their host society. The situation can be

further exacerbated by racism or cultural prejudice, pushing younger immigrants to discard their native language in favor of blending in, thus distancing themselves from their linguistic and cultural heritage.

Secondly, the decline of Urdu among these generations is often a consequence of limited exposure to the language. Language attrition occurs as younger generations are increasingly immersed in the dominant language of the host country, particularly in educational and professional settings. While the first generation of immigrants may still use and encourage the native language, the younger generations often prioritize the host country's language for social integration, higher education, and career advancement. This gradual shift away from Urdu is also a result of their reduced engagement with reading and writing in the language. Over time, this lack of active use leads to a weakened connection with their cultural heritage and, eventually, a further decline in linguistic skills, especially when it comes to passing the language on to future generations.

Discussion: Is Urdu language a Heritage or a Hurdle?

An interesting fact to consider is that Quaid-e-Azam primarily expressed himself in English, even advocating for the Urdu language in English due to his proficiency in the language. However, his command of Urdu was not as strong initially. Recognizing Urdu as the language of the people, he made significant efforts to improve his proficiency. His success was evident during the 36th session of the All India Muslim League in Patna in December 1938, where, after delivering a speech in English, he also delivered a powerful and articulate speech in Urdu for the first time, marking a significant milestone in his linguistic journey (Aqeel, 1984; Hassan & Sultana, 2019).

While it's widely acknowledged that learning more languages opens up opportunities, it's also true that knowing multiple languages can facilitate learning others. Having lived in the Gulf region where Arabic is spoken as the national language, and in Turkey and Cyprus where Turkish is the official language—along with significant immigrant populations from Iran speaking Persian—I was struck by the similarities not just in vocabulary but also in sentence structures between Persian and Urdu. This realization became even more evident among less-educated Pakistani immigrants, who seemed to acquire Turkish more quickly than those who relied heavily on understanding everything through the framework of English. This suggests that one doesn't necessarily need to translate a new language into English to learn it; translating into Urdu can also be an effective

This observation doesn't diminish the value of English, which remains a universal language and offers considerable advantages. However, immigrants shouldn't feel that they need to abandon their native language, such as Urdu, to adapt to new linguistic environments. In fact, today there is an urgent need for Pakistan to invest in developing and promoting its national language not just for the sake of immigrants but also the nationals residing within the country. In 2015, the Supreme Court of Pakistan issued a verdict mandating the implementation of Urdu as the official language at both provincial and federal levels. Despite this, over 40 years since the Constitution was enacted, the process of adopting Urdu as the official language remains incomplete, and in many areas, it has not even begun (Hassan & Sultana, 2019).

In this context, it is essential to examine language maintenance and language shift within the broader framework of intergroup relations, considering significant non-linguistic factors such as urbanization (or ruralization), industrialization (or its decline), nationalism (or de-ethnization), nativism (or cosmopolitanism), and religious revival (or secularization). When two groups come into contact, both the groups and the languages that represent them are affected by various socio-cultural processes that shape their interaction. These processes can either intensify or reduce the level of interaction between the groups, detach them from or reinforce their traditional sources of authority, influence how open they are to each other's influence, emphasize or downplay their sense of group identity, and alter their relative power dynamics. Moreover, these processes also shape how the groups perceive their interaction, either positively or negatively, and how they respond to the evolving relationship based on those perceptions (Fishman, J. A., 1966).

To justify the use of such dire language, it is crucial to amplify the voices of those impacted by language loss—although this is often challenging, as individuals who have experienced it may struggle to articulate their emotional state. What does it feel like to lose one's native language? Hendrik Stuurman, reflecting on his Khoikhoi heritage in north-western South Africa, describes it poignantly: "I feel as though I have been nourished by a stranger, growing up as someone else, because I do not speak my mother's language." (Massey et al., 1993).

Role as an immigrant

As Pakistani immigrants, our role in safeguarding and

preserving the Urdu language is miscellaneous, encompassing a deep sense of responsibility, cultural pride, and adaptation to new environments. Urdu, more than just a medium of communication, serves as a vessel for transmitting our rich cultural heritage, identity, and worldview, carrying the nuances of history, traditions, and values. By actively engaging with Urdu through storytelling, literature, and cultural events, immigrants create a bilingual or multilingual environment that not only strengthens ties to their roots but also equips future generations with linguistic diversity that can enhance their cognitive development and cultural awareness.

In essence, the preservation of Urdu among Pakistani immigrants not only fosters a connection to their heritage but also contributes to cultural diversity within their host societies. The continued use of Urdu enriches these societies with unique perspectives and historical depth, promoting a deeper understanding of global multiculturalism. This commitment to maintaining Urdu requires ongoing effort, but it brings significant rewards in preserving a strong sense of identity and heritage while simultaneously encouraging cross-cultural dialogue and mutual respect in an increasingly interconnected world.

Recommendations for Preventing Urdu Language Decline Among Immigrants

- **Promote Bilingual Education Programs-** Establish bilingual or Urdu language programs in schools attended by Pakistani immigrant children. This can help young generations maintain fluency in both their heritage language and the local language of their new country.
- **Cultural and Language Immersion Initiatives-** Encourage community centers, cultural institutions, and mosques to offer Urdu language classes, storytelling sessions, and cultural events that emphasize the importance of Urdu in preserving cultural identity.
- **Integration of Urdu in Digital Media and Technology-** Create more online platforms, apps, and social media content in Urdu to engage younger generations who are more inclined toward digital media. This will help them stay connected to their heritage language through modern technology.
- **Parental Involvement and Family Language Practices-** Encourage Pakistani immigrant parents to speak Urdu at home, ensuring that children grow up bilingual. Family interactions in Urdu can strengthen the child's connection to the language and culture.
- **Development of Urdu Language Resources-** Increase the availability of Urdu books, magazines, newspapers, and online

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content. Easy access to Urdu literature will enable immigrants, especially youth, to engage with the language regularly.

- **Support from Cultural and Heritage Organizations-** Pakistani and other cultural organizations abroad should focus on preserving Urdu by organizing language preservation campaigns, heritage festivals, and competitions like poetry recitals or Urdu writing contests.
- **Urdu Language Learning Incentives-** Provide incentives such as scholarships, certificates, or career benefits for immigrants, especially younger generations, to learn and maintain proficiency in Urdu, recognizing it as an asset for identity preservation.
- **Collaboration with Pakistani Institutions-** Establish partnerships with Pakistani educational and cultural institutions to support Urdu learning abroad. These collaborations could involve exchange programs, language camps, or teacher training for Urdu instructors in immigrant communities.
- **Media Representation in Urdu-** Advocate for more Urdu content in mainstream media channels available to immigrants. This could include Urdu television channels, radio stations, and online platforms, ensuring the language remains visible and relevant.
- **Urdu Heritage Language Tutions-** Establish weekend or evening tuitions dedicated to teaching Urdu and Pakistani culture to immigrant children. These tuitions can play a crucial role in passing on the language and ensuring it remains a living part of the diaspora's heritage.

Conclusion

The decline of the Urdu language among immigrants, particularly those of Pakistani origin, reflects a significant concern for the preservation of a linguistically and culturally rich heritage. This decline, while alarming, necessitates a deeper understanding of the underlying factors contributing to the diminishing use of Urdu. By applying Fishman's (1966) framework on language maintenance, this study underscores the importance of moving beyond merely statistical measures of language speakers. Fishman's argument—that habitual language use encompasses more than just speaking—highlights the need to consider various dimensions of language practice, such as reading, writing, and cultural engagement, to fully grasp the scope of the issue.

In conclusion, this research has critically examined the decline of the Urdu language, particularly within immigrant communities and their descendants. It has explored the cultural significance of Urdu and analyzed the multiple factors contributing to its decline, such as immigration, the dominance of host country

languages, and generational shifts in language use. The findings reveal how Pakistani immigrants can strive to maintain Urdu as a vital part of their cultural heritage, while also pointing to the risks facing future generations in terms of language continuity. This study emphasizes the urgency of developing and implementing strategies to preserve Urdu amidst the challenges posed by migration and cultural adaptation. To ensure the survival of Urdu in the context of global migration and mobility, targeted efforts are necessary to foster its transmission across generations and to maintain its relevance as a cultural and linguistic bridge within immigrant communities.



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