Sindhi on the Brink: 
Language Maintenance in the 
Global and Networked 
Community

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...of decline in the diaspora community, with few 
opportunities to experience the language, and little 
access to written texts.

...of renewal, with increased interest in literature and 
cultural heritage among youth.
Sindhi on the brink...

... of assimilation threatened by contact-induced language change and generational decline.

The outcome may depend on the success of efforts to link speakers electronically, across national boundaries, in an exchange of information, ideas, and cultural and literary heritage.

Sindhi in Pakistan

- Sindhi as mother tongue (L1): 20.5 million (1998)
  - Population of Pakistan: 145.5 million
  - Sindhi as mother tongue: 14.10%
    [data from Population Association of Pakistan]

- Sindhi as L1 in Sindh:
  1941: 82%
  1981: 52%  [data from Bughio 2001]
  1998: 60%  [data from Population Census Org., Govt. Pakistan]

- Rural vs. Urban Sindhi (1998)
  - Rural pop. is 51%, with 92% L1 Sindhi
  - Urban pop. is 49%, with 26% L1 Sindhi
    [data from Population Census Org., Govt. Pakistan]
Sindhi in Pakistan (2)

The trend:
• Number of L1 Sindhi speakers increasing along with population growth
• Increasing urbanization
  – For Pakistan: 17.8% in 1951 → 32.5% in 1998

The effect of urbanization on language:
• Increased bilingualism in urban areas
  – with evidence of contact-induced language change.
  -- Bughio 2001

Sindhi in Pakistan (3)

• Positive results of urbanization: increased literacy in Sindh
  – 31.45% in 1981 → 45.29% in 1998
  – For all groups: male/female, rural/urban
  – Literacy in any language
    [data from Population Census Org., Govt. Pakistan]

• Sindhi medium schools (in Sindh only) are estimated to number over 36,000
  – Approx. 20% of the total number of schools in Pakistan
  – Approx. equal to number of English-medium schools
    [data from Rahman 2002]

• NB., Sindhis report closures and decreasing numbers of Sindhi-medium schools. -- no statistics available
Shifting patterns of language use

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Sindhi</th>
<th>Urdu</th>
<th>Others</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1941</td>
<td>82%</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>19%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1951</td>
<td>73.8%</td>
<td>9.7%</td>
<td>16.5%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1981</td>
<td>52.40%</td>
<td>22.64%</td>
<td>24.96%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>59.7%</td>
<td>21%</td>
<td>19.3%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

[Bughio 2001]

Sindhi in Pakistan (4)

- Putting it together… we find increases in:
  - L1 Sindhi speakers
  - Literate Sindh residents
  - Urban Sindhi speakers
  - Multi-lingual Sindhi speakers
  - Language contact

**Strengthening factors**

**Weakening factors**
Sindhi in the Diaspora

- 2.5 million speakers (conservative estimate) in India
- Large communities in the UK, USA, Middle East and East/SE Asia.
- Declining literacy, declining fluency and declining use among youth.

But… a surging interest

A partial list of Sindhi organizations that have sponsored Sindhi-language forums in the last year:

- Young Sindhi Association - international
- World Sindhi Congress - international
- World Sindhi Institute - US
- Sadhu Vaswani Mission - US
Sindhi in the Diaspora (2)

An anecdote…

Links to Sindhi resources: 103
including cites in the US, UK, India and Pakistan.

Source: National Council for Promotion of Sindhi Language (India)
http://www.ncpsl.org/links.asp

Links with content in Sindhi: not many…

Sindhi newspaper: The Daily Kawish (Hyderabad)

http://www.dailykawish.com/
Sindhi newspaper: Daily Ibrat

( Hyderabad)

http://www.dailyibrat.com/

Sindhi news magazine: Sindhyun jo sansar

http://www.sindhyunjosansar.com/
Sindhi literary magazine: Sindhiana
http://www.geocities.com/sindh_iana/

Online Sindhi Resources

- Promote literacy and cultural communication among Sindhi speakers in Sindh.
- Stimulate interest in Sindhi literature and culture among Sindhis in the diaspora.
- Provide an important source of information about Sindh for expatriates and Sindh scholars.
Why so little online Sindhi content?

Script, script, script

- Nearly all of the Sindhi content currently online is in image format, created with fonts and rendering tools specific to the author’s computer.

- Image content can’t be searched, can’t be easily archived, or text-processed for translation in future work.

Sindhi Unicode Script

Enter Sindhi Unicode!

- Implemented in MS Windows in 2000
- Many varieties of Unicode fonts now available
Sindhi Unicode Script

Enter Sindhi Unicode!

Better quality than image format, flexible scaling, searchable!

The Shah-jo-Risalo Project
Searchable text!

http://www.freewebs.com/majidbhurgri/shah.htm
Unicode issues

• Sindhi adopts the Arabic encoding

• Each Arabic letter receives one Unicode encoding

• Additional diacritics and combinations are introduced to expand the Arabic consonant set for Sindhi (and Urdu, Pashto, Persian)

• Some Sindhi consonants are encoded with letter sequences: /jh, gh/

• This encoding can not distinguish /jh, gh/ from sequences of /jVh/ and /gVh/, as in

  jhirkii  ‘sparrow’  vs. jihaRo  ‘such as’
  ghirarnu ‘to enter’ vs. gihirarnu ‘to drag’
The script issue

- Outside of Sindh, the script is still a **HUGE** barrier.
  - In *India*: script and religious identity
  - In *N. America and Europe*: the dominance of the Latin alphabet
  - In *N. America* alone: the curse of the monolingual culture

Summing up

- Electronic media renders Sindhi news, culture, literature accessible to everyone with access to the web.
- Future developments will strengthen system support for Unicode Sindhi script, bringing Sindhi fully into the information age.
- Online Sindhi content will encourage literacy in Sindh and beyond, and provide valuable language exposure for learners in the diaspora who are outside of regional Sindhi communities.
- Sindhi text on the computer opens the door for electronic communication between mutually isolated populations of Sindhis.
• Online Sindhi text does not address the impact of contact-induced language change
  … and may in fact promote accelerated change through increasing interaction between Sindhis in different contact situations.

• Online audio content
  – Invaluable for language learners in diaspora
  – Provides access to non-contact Sindhi varieties, including the traditional standard variety (Vicholi).

Many thanks!

• UIUC Program in Arms Control, Disarmament, and International Security
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  – U Penn

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Works cited


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Thank you!