
**PERCEPTIONS OF SINDHI MUSLIMS TOWARDS
EXOGENOUS MARRIAGES: AN EXPLORATORY STUDY**

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ABSTRACT

It has been said that exogamous marriages tend to lead to language shift (Igboanus & Wolf, 2009 & Dumanig, David & Shanmuganathan, 2013). In an early study Gal (1978) found that Hungarian women marrying German men in the city of Oberwat had shifted to German to negate their peasant Hungarian ancestry and to move up the socio-economic ladder. Similarly, David and Dealwis (2011) found in their study of Malaysian Sindhi Hindus that exogamous marriages tend to lead to language shift but is not the only reason for the shift away from the heritage language. Therefore, before mixed marriages take place one should study perceptions of the speech community towards such marriages. In this exploratory study, the perceptions of Sindhi Muslims-men and women and from different socio-economic groups towards exogamous marriages are studied. With this objective, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Sindhi Muslim participants (four male adults and six female adults) who live in Karachi. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, coded and themes were generated after formal consent was obtained. The findings show that language choice in the home domain is shifting because of intercultural marriages. Also, such marriages are frequent among Sindhi community members with a high socio-economic status who live in cities. Gender plays an equal role too, as the women respondents showed mixed responses towards exogamous marriages while the male respondents had a more positive perception. Such views and perceptions may affect choice of marital partners and language choice in the home domain.

Keywords: Exogamous marriages, Language shift, Perceptions, Language Choice, Mixed Marriages, Naming Pattern.

INTRODUCTION

Sindhi is one of the oldest languages (Kumar & Kothari, 2016). The community has a rich cultural and linguistic background

and the Sindhi Muslims in Sindh, Pakistan have a high ethno-linguistic vitality towards the Sindhi language (David, Ali & Baloch, 2017). According to Narijo, Hamida and Avais, (2018) the Sindhi community members in the city of Sanghar in Sindh maintain their culture and customs mainly by favoring endogamous marriages.

However, because of internal migration to cities, young Sindhi speakers use both the national and international language, Urdu and English in different domains of language use (Wadho, 2018, Abbasi, 2019 & Abbasi, David & Zaki 2020) but maintain their culture through social networking, celebrating rituals and customs and consumption of traditional food (Abbasi & David, 2020).

Speaking of the Welsh language Morris and Jones (2007:484) state that in the home domain which is of vital importance for language acquisition and prestige language choices are changing. The family's major role which is to transmit the Welsh language from one generation to another is changing because of mixed marriages. In a research paper on Africa, Batibo (2005) explains that bilingual parents in urban areas in most cases favor the use of a common lingua franca. David and Nambiar (2003) while discussing an Indian community in Malaysia, the Malyalees explain the change in the family's outlook results in a growing negative influence in the retention of the mother tongue among the young generation mainly due to exogamous marriages.

Mixed marriages which has become a common practice of Sindhis especially in urban areas and have multiple consequences for the coming generation. The present study aims to investigate the perception of young Sindhi men and women from different socio-economic groups towards exogamous marriages.

RESEARCH QUESTION

What are the perceptions of Sindhi Muslims- men and women from different socio-economic groups towards exogamous marriages?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Language choice, attitude (de Klerk, 2002, Gardner 1985, Holmes and Harlow 1991), motivation (Spolsky, 1989) and role of a language in a multilingual society is crucial in determining the status of a language (Dawulung, 1999). Apart from the micro and macro-societal factors, language preference in the home domain is vital for

language maintenance. Marriage patterns across and within communities and the role of parents towards home/family language in a multilingual society are also important in determining language maintenance or shift.

Susan Gal (1979), conducted an ethnographic study in the village of Oberwart, examined the population's code choice in various domains, their gender roles and socio-economic factors. She attributed this shift towards the German language in all domains to different factors such as urbanization, industrialization, social context and marriage patterns. Young Hungarians women who married German monolingual speakers shifted to German in the homes and their children did not learn Hungarian. The socio-economic factor that a language carries with it due to a change in social context post-marriage plays an important role in language choice and language shift.

Similarly, David and Dealwis (2011) using oral interviews with four Sindhi men and their spouses and children in Kuching, Sarawak, Malaysia explored the effect of exogamous marriages and language choice in the home, religion (gurdwara) and street domains and found that exogamous marriages tend to lead to language shift. They argue however that other factors, apart from exogamous marriages, like the dominance of the national language, Malay in daily life, must be examined too.

Also, Igboanus and Wolf (2009) explored the role of ethnically mixed marriages on language shift and maintenance in Nigeria. The study inquired about the language choices of couples in mixed marriages and their language choice in their childhood with their parents and siblings and compared it with their current language use with their own children. The results showed a trend of using more English in the home domain now as parents as compared to the use of the mother tongue in the home domain when these same parents were children.

Narijo, Hamida and Avais (2018) explored the role of endogamous marriages in the district of Sanghar in Sind, and interviewed twelve married women who had married members of the same speech community. The findings show that these marriage patterns are followed as part of cultural rituals and have been determined by heads of families for centuries. Another major reason is

and other domains, the child may or may not use both the languages. In this case, either the language will be maintained or there might be a shift because of adoption of a neutral language in the home domain.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study is exploratory and aims to determine the perceptions of Sindhis to exogamous marriages. Purposive sampling has been utilized and data has been collected from young Sindhi Muslims studying in a public sector university in Karachi.

RESEARCH INSTRUMENTS AND PARTICIPANTS

In order to know the perceptions of speakers, semi-structured interviews were conducted with ten Sindhi Muslim participants (four male adults and six female adults). The participants were selected voluntarily, however their economic background and place of residence was inquired before the data collection as one of the variables of the study was socio economic standing and if that affected attitudes towards exogamous marriages.

Formal consent was obtained from the participants before the start of data collection and participant's convenience for the interview was considered. The sample size of ten was deemed sufficient as saturation resulted in similar responses from other participants.

The interviews with each participant lasted one hour each. The interview took place in a positive setting and in different settings (library, office and restaurant) depending on the convenience of the interviewees.

Interviewees responded in Urdu and English although the questions were in English. This was because most of the participants were studying in a reputed public sector university, which uses English as the medium of instruction. Field-notes were also taken.

DATA ANALYSIS

The recorded data and field-notes were transcribed in Roman Urdu and English. The transcribed data in Urdu was cross-checked by a colleague for accuracy. The data was coded and analyzed for different themes and sub-themes. In order to holistically understand the similarities and differences of themes among participants,

frequency analysis of the themes was conducted. This frequency analysis is shown in percentage according to the responses of the participants from different socio-economic backgrounds.

FINDINGS

The analysis shows that the socio-economic status of the participants influenced their perceptions towards mixed marriages.

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Participants with high socio-economic status (70%) prefer exogamous marriages. One participant said “nobody asks the big people why they are marrying outside the community” (see Table-1).

Similarly, members from low socio-economic status almost 80% prefer endogamous marriages and only 15% agreed to exogamous marriages while 5% are neutral. One participant said “it is a curse if you marry someone outside the socio-economic order and people will stereotype about the character of male and female member”. Also, due to bias and prejudice against lower-class Sindhis, one male participant narrated that “we do not get proposal from Urdu communities because they ran away when they get to know we are associated with Sindhi family”. Table-1 below shows the perceptions of high and low-socio-economic Sindhi community members to exogamous and endogamous marriages.

TABLE-1
PERCEPTIONS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Status	Exogamous Marriage	Endogamous Marriage	Neutral
High Socio-economic	70%	25%	5%
Low Socio-economic	15%	80%	5%

INTRINSIC AND EXTRINSIC MOTIVATION

Intrinsic and extrinsic factors also affect the perception towards exogamous marriages. Some of the major themes obtained from the interviews are shown in Table-2.

TABLE-2
PERCEPTIONS OF PARTICIPANTS ABOUT MARRIAGE

Bilingual Parents attitude	40%
Lack of social networking	20%
Educated Partners	15%
Urban Partners	10%
Cultural Diversity	10%
Single Independent life	5%

Bilingual Parents: The analysis shows that about 40 % of the respondents had parents who were bilinguals and their parents favoured the use of a lingua franca in the home and promoted both cultures. This attitude created a positive perception towards exogamous marriages as “*Vese Ammi Urdu Speaking Mohaajir hey*” (وے سے امی اردو اسپیکنگ مہاجر ہے) (LSM22) and ‘my mother is a Punjabi speaker but she knows that language’ (LSM07). These marriage patterns are promoted by parents and one parent said “... they are fine with exogamous for the young generation”

One male respondent said, “My mother convinced my father for marriage outside the family, initially my engagement took place with a Sindhi girl within the family”. Similarly, a female responded said “as we both belong to the same profession so within or outside the family does not count”.

Lack of Social Networking: About 20% of the participants have reported to have no association with their native language and culture. One female participant said that “there is no problem in marrying anyone from non-Sindhi community”. Another laughingly said “no one cares about language now”.

About 8% of the participants hold the same view and a participant said that “parents cannot hold on to old beliefs when it comes to their children” and “parents are now more open to their children’s preference”. Addressing this issue another participant said that all “Sindhis are educated but they just live in their small bubble, its 2020, we need to break such norms now, it’s like breaking the norm and not going for endogamous”.

Culture and identity preservation can also be done by maintaining the national culture instead of localizing the native one. One participant said, “Everything needs to be Sindhi specific, I

understand but then we are Pakistanis, we need to have some unity, like be okay with other customs and cultures”.

Educational Literacy: The participants believed that education and literacy has changed the mindsets of community members. About 15% of the participants narrated that education plays an important role for marriage choice and the participants said “if the boy is educated enough, so I have no problem with whether he is Sindhi or non-Sindhi community member”. Another participant remarked that “I won’t marry someone who is not matching my caliber of education because there’s no match between education and illiteracy”.

It is a common stereotype among different community members that people belonging to rural areas are mostly illiterate. One participant said “I would marry a non-Sindhi because of the mindset of Sindhis”. The participant meant to say that Sindhi-speakers, especially from the rural area, are narrow-minded and do not put much premium on education.

Professionalism: From the 15% of participants who conveyed that education is important almost 70% wanted to marry someone from their profession. As one participant said “in the older days females were not educated, so they were not given the option of marrying outside the community”. Another participant stated “My parents had been long waiting for my match with a person who is from my field in the community, however I decided to get engaged with someone outside the community but from the same profession”.

Another participant explained this new trend that “Young Sindhi women are educated now and they have acquired professional degrees now and have become doctors, engineers and social scientist, so now match-making is more based on profession than exogamous or endogamous. Like in my family for our sister we are only looking for a doctor as her match”. However the remaining 30% still prefer to marry within the same community and profession. As one participant said “For our sister, my parents especially my father is looking for someone belonging to the same profession and community”. Further narrating this, one participant said that “just read the advertisement for match-making given by some members, you will notice that the male/female should belong from the Sindhi family as the headline and I do not agree with this”. The participant believes that the community

members should not have rigid rules for match-making and should prefer non-Sindhis as well.

Urban Partner: Community members who have moved to urban areas are educated and are professionals. Over the years, their choice of a life partner has also changed, in comparison to the earlier beliefs of the community. About 10% of the participants said they would prefer a life partner from the urban area. One participant said “my first preference for marriage would be a Sindhi speaker of course, if he resides in Karachi, because of same culture”. Similarly one participant said that “she wants to marry someone from Karachi, an urban city, because in the rural areas there is no electricity and I will die because of hotness and life of city is quite different than of village”. Hence, almost 10% of the participants wanted to marry someone from a city.

Cultural Diversity: Pakistan is a multilingual and multicultural country. Due to frequent interaction with non-speech community members, about 10% of the Sindhi participants favor exogamous marriages for cultural diversity. As a female participant said “marrying outside your community will develop sense of diversity and my preference would be marrying outside Sindhi community because of diversity that I am looking forward to have in my children later”.

Similarly 4% of the participants conveyed that language might shift but culture can be preserved by the naming pattern, and said “language might be lost but the culture can be preserved as I carry my forefather’s name with me and I have no plans to change in future”. However, 2% of the participants said that following the rituals of two cultures can be difficult. So preference must be given to one culture, as “it is difficult for me to maintain balance between two things whether it is culture or language. So I will prefer maintaining one culture in marriage outside the community”

Personal Choice Versus Family Choice: Most of the participants, about 60% from both socio-economic groups, said that their personal choice matters most and one female participant explained, “In my family they ask the daughter if they are interested in someone or not”. While commenting on marriage, another participant said “the world has bigger issues than this, so if two people are happy then the third should not interfere whether it’s endogamous or

exogamous marriage. A person should be given complete freedom in this regard”.

However, 5% of the participants from both social groups were neutral about their choice of marriage partners and one respondent said “I do not prefer cousin marriage other than that, I am pretty neutral and I am fine with endogamous or exogamous marriages”.

However, about 30% participants consider their family’s choice for match-making as important. And one participant explained “there are no such restrictions from the family” for endogamous or exogamous marriages.

Participants remarked that in urban areas because of cultural ties Sindhi members do prefer endogamous marriages as they believe in maintaining long term relationships but now the trends and perceptions are changing. One participant explained “my khandan (خاندان) (family) prefer endogamous marriages but there is no strict adherence to this principle”. The participants conveyed that in most of the families residing in urban areas the parents had become neutral as “my parents are neutral about this and both endogamous and exogamous marriages have taken place in my family”.

About 30% of the participants feel that in terms of speaking their heritage language, personal motivation is more important for language maintenance than choice of marriage partners. This was conveyed by a female participant when she said “the young ones are not concerned with cultural ties, they are now more concerned about the compatibility of mind”.

GENDER VIEWS ON EXOGAMOUS MARRIAGE

Gender plays an equal role too, as the women respondents showed mixed responses towards exogamous marriages while the male respondents had a more positive perception. 70% of the male respondents believe their “personal choice, education and compatibility play a equal part and should be considered before marriage”. As one respondent said “*hamre elders smjhte ha agr hum outside the community shadi kre get toh hamare zaban aur culture affect hoga, per aisa zaroori nahe, parents Sindhi sekha sakhte ha coming generation ko*”. Hence, the participants remarked that for reserving culture and language endogamous marriage is not necessary, as one can learn the language in Karachi. Only 30% of the male

participants consider family choice *“hamare family wale decide krte ha”* and *“we trust their choice”*.

However, in the case of female respondents 50% favor exogamous marriage and 50% endogamous. As the female respondents said ‘because of the patriarchal values and beliefs, women does not have a voice’, as family decides everything from education to marriage, male heads of the family resist mixed marriage because of cultural values”. At the same time trends are changing and few other participants reported that “as more females are educated now, so they want an educated partner as well, which may belong to another community”, “age also plays a part as we do not get the match in our family so we prefer from other community as well of younger age”. Hence, the female participants because of their role in the society and preference for match-making by elders have seldom a choice; but trends are changing now especially in the urban areas, where females because of the awareness and feminist movements are more vocal about their choices and believe *“hamare pasand ke buhat ehmeayat ha”*.

DISCUSSION

Family language policy, education, gender and socio-economic prestige are major reasons for participants favoring exogamous marriages. If the positive attitude towards exogamous marriages is favored then the language choice in the home domain might shift and a neutral lingua franca might be adopted.

The marriages patterns among Sindhi communities are changing (Abbasi, 2019) from endogamous (Narijo & Avais, 2018) to exogamous marriages due to social and personal reasons. Gal (1979) and David and Dealwis (2011) focused on the outcomes of exogamous marriages on the ethnic language. However, in this study different reasons play a contributing part towards preference for exogamous marriage which include personal, educational and economic factors. Similarly, Wadho (2018) focused on the attitudes of Sindhi speakers towards multilingualism rather than exploring in-depth about perceptions towards the cultural practices especially preserving the language and culture through marriage.

Igboanus, Herbert and Wolf (2009) attributed the role of parents as important towards changing role of language and in the present study the positive attitude and mixed-marriages among the parents

helped in facilitating a positive attitude towards exogamous marriage and adopting a neutral lingua franca. Hence, the perceptions of young Sindhi Muslims reflect that more Sindhis in the future will favor exogamous marriage and this will have an impact on the culture and language of the community

CONCLUSION

The findings of the study reveal that about 70% (high) and 15% (low) from different socio-economic groups favor exogamous marriages. However a small percentage- 5% from both these socio-economic groups are neutral about contracting marriages within or outside their speech community.

There are a number of factors responsible for the positive attitude towards exogamous marriages by the respondents in this study. This includes the exogamous marriages of their own parents, the level of literacy of the respondents, their desire to have a partner who was a professional and their preference to live in a city and for partners from the cities as compared to one from the rural areas.

In short, apart from the economic and social factors, this study highlights the educational reasons, profession and life in the city as some of the major determinants for the preference for exogamous marriages.

What emerged from this exploratory study is that in a country like Pakistan which puts much premium on the status and role of the man, in such a male dominated and culture bound society, it is surprising that half of the women respondents in this study favored the notion of exogamous marriages. Perhaps this could be attributed to the fact that the respondents were educated and living in an urban multilingual, multicultural environment like Karachi.

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