



IMPACT OF SOCIAL MEDIA MEMES ON THE USE OF PUNJABI LANGUAGE IN UNIVERSITIES

Yasir Ullah

yasirullah744@gmail.com

MS Scholar, Department of Humanities, COMSATS
University Islamabad (CUI) Main Campus, Islamabad,
Pakistan.

Samiya Raheem

samiyaraheem30@gmail.com

MPhil Scholar, Department of English Literature and
Linguistics, COMSATS University, Islamabad, Pakistan.

Abstract

This study delves into the intricate dynamics of social media memes and their consequential impact on Punjabi speakers, particularly focusing on the sociological and psychological ramifications. The research aims to comprehend how these memes construct a false representation of the Punjabi language, contributing to its perceived threat and lack of prestige among its speakers. The research questions investigate the sociological and psychological influences of these memes on Punjabi speakers and explore the potential role of age in shaping these impacts. Through a comprehensive literature review, the study bridges existing gaps and explores the varied perspectives surrounding the declining significance of the Punjabi language. Drawing on the theoretical framework of media ecology, the research employs thematic analysis to discern the psychological impacts of memes on Punjabi speakers and their language usage, utilizing data collected through interviews from students and teachers across universities in Islamabad. The findings illuminate diverse reactions among participants, highlighting the multifaceted nature of perceptions towards social media memes and their effects on the portrayal of Punjabi language and culture. Furthermore, the study unveils the influence of socio-economic status and age in shaping individuals' responses to these memes, shedding light on the complexities of language perception and identity formation within the context of social media influence.

Keywords: *Psychological Impact, Social Media, Memes, Punjabi Language, Universities*

Corresponding Author: Yasir Ullah (MS Scholar, Department of Humanities, COMSATS University Islamabad (CUI) Main Campus, Islamabad, Pakistan). Email: yasirullah744@gmail.com

1. Introduction

In the context of contemporary studies, Bilingualism and bilingual proficiency, the prevalence of social media memes has ushered in a new era of communication and expression, shaping perceptions and attitudes towards languages and cultures. Specifically, within the context of the Punjabi language, these memes have emerged as influential tools that inadvertently construct false images and stereotypes. This study endeavors to dissect the implications of these memes on the sociological and psychological fabric of Punjabi speakers, aiming to unravel the intricate interplay between social media representations and language identity. By leveraging media ecology as a theoretical lens, this research embarks on a journey to decipher the nuanced impacts of memes on individuals' relationships with the Punjabi language, particularly within university settings. Through rigorous data analysis and thematic exploration, this study seeks to unravel the intricate web of influences that contribute to the perceived threat and lack of prestige associated with the Punjabi language.

1.1. Problem of Statement

The social media memes create a false image of a language which causes language threat. This study aims to inquire in detail the dynamics of these memes and their influence on the Punjabi speakers.

1.2. Research Questions

1. What is the sociological and psychological impact of social media memes on Punjabi speakers?
2. Does age factor of Punjabi speakers play a role in this socio-psychological impact?

1.3. Research Objectives

1. To understand the sociological and psychological impact of social media memes on Punjabi speakers.
2. To inquire whether the age of speakers plays a role in this socio-psychological impact.

2. Literature Review

Haider et al (2021) argues that though the ratio of the speaker of the Punjabi language is greater yet the native speakers of the Punjabi language are disowning it. The

study uses phenomenological design and collects data from Punjabi ethnic students in four different universities in Islamabad. The study uses semi-structured interviews, TV shows, and natural conversations. Findings reveal that the Punjabi speakers themselves disown their language as well as Punjabi identity due to social, economic, religious, and political reasons. He adds on that since the language maintenance needs not only the dominance of the speakers of that language rather it also depends on the attitude of those speakers, the native speakers towards the Punjabi language.

Moreover, he argues that the language death is rapid because the language ratio is greater in number. Punjabi speakers are in majority and are also dominant in Pakistan therefore the situation is described as a majority language death. On the other hand, Mehmood et al (2023) opines that the younger generation appears to lack enthusiasm for the historical language which result in the decrease of the language. The arguments are made stronger as he claims that the elderly, who used to have passed on the tradition of languages, are not devoted anymore to pass on the language to their children. Surveys, semi-structured interviews, and recordings of informal conversations are taken as data collection tools. The selection of participants is based on their residence, gender, and age, and the survey explored various aspects of the respondents' relationship with the Punjabi language. the study found that while most respondents viewed Punjabi as an integral part of their culture, they felt that it was not receiving the recognition it deserved within society. Nonetheless, the vast majority expressed their beliefs to safeguard and promote Punjabi language for future generations. Abbas et al (2020) expresses his views that though, the Punjabi language is the native and mother tongue yet the way the speaker of the language behaves towards it non seriously and therefore the language has not been up to the level to be considered as a prestigious language. He has therefore, conducted research to evaluate the language attitude of the Punjabi language and their speakers towards language being native and in contrast with English and Urdu. An indirect technique like matched guise is used for analyzing the subconscious thought patterns of the language speakers. The findings indicated that the participants of the research awarded the best possible status to the English language; the status given to Urdu language was also quite high, while they perceived quite low status for Punjabi language. The results from the application of paid sample test reveal that the language attitudes of Punjabi native speakers differ significantly across Punjabi, Urdu, and English languages. Similarly, Kalwar and Mehmood (2022) has investigated attitudes of educated and uneducated Punjabi speakers towards their native language. Research questions were designed to find out perceptions, feelings, and thoughts of educated and uneducated Punjabis towards their mother tongue. For this purpose, researchers made use of quantitative method and the data was collected with the help of questionnaires, from the population of Dilawar, Punjab. The total number of participants

where 100; 50 were educated and 50 were uneducated. The data was analyzed through SPSS and it was seen that Punjabi speakers disown their mother tongue in Pakistan because it does not give them access to power and job opportunities. Their reasons behind holding negative attitudes were quite instrumental as the state does not give prestigious status to Punjabi language when it comes to academics and jobs.

2.1. Research Gap:

To sum up the discussion, the researchers have investigated the decline or the minimalization of Punjabi languages through various perspective including the attitude of the speakers towards their languages, the attitude of the educated and uneducated speakers towards the language etc. The study at hand will focus on how memes on social media influences the speakers of the Punjabi language and therefore psychologically affects them which might be the reason for the speakers in considering Punjabi language as a stereotyped and non-prestigious.

2.2. Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the impact of social media memes on the relation of Punjabi speakers with their language and social usage at university level, we have used the theoretical framework of media ecology. It is used to understand the role of social media, particularly, memes in shaping the thought process of the users. Neil Postman (2009) presents the ideas about media ecology and its relationship with human perception in his seminal work, *What is Media Ecology*. He argues that media ecology tries to understand the relation of user with the Media of communication and how shapes the way we think and act (Postman, 2009). It basically acts as a normative structure which guides us towards the prescribed way of living. In other words, it specifies our boundaries for us, as to where we can cross these boundaries and where we cannot. Postman (2009) also argues that media representations and specifications are very explicit in nature which makes means that media forces us to play certain roles (p. 230). Keeping in mind the aforementioned discussion of role of media, the modern-day media usage is highly defined and influenced by memes. These memes are most widely consumed and circulated mean of information. Therefore, the understanding of these memes is very essential because they are not just harmless source of comedy, rather, they also propagate and reiterate certain stereotypes. Subsequently, these stereotypes are perceived differently by different users. Therefore, in order to understand the response of the speakers and the psychological implications of these memes on their use of Punjabi language, we have conducted this research under the light of theoretical framework of media ecology.

3. Research Methodology

In order to examine the psychological impact of memes on Punjabi speaker and their use of Punjabi language, the researchers have used the method of thematic analysis to analyze the themes for understanding this impact. In this manner, the research model of thematic analysis provided by Braun and Clarke (2006) have been used for identification of themes and subsequent analysis of the data. This model presents a six-stage process for thematic analysis that includes the familiarization, code generation, themes generation, reviewing the themes, defining themes and location of examples (Braun and Clarke, 2006). However, these theorists argue that the identification of themes lead to categorization of data in a patterned way, whether that theme covers the majority experience or not (Scharp and Sanders, 2019, p.1). In this way, it is not claimed that these patterns are generalizable to whole experience of Punjabi speakers, rather it is from the context of students and teachers from specific universities.

4.Data Analysis

The data collected from the interviews consisting of four questions was transcribed by the researchers. The participants were teachers and students from three universities in Islamabad i.e., COMSATS University, Abbasyn University and Iqra University. Therefore, the thematic analysis of the data using Braun and Clark's model (2006) is as follows:

Table 1: *Thematic Analysis of Data Provided in Question 1*

S.No	Data	Codes	Themes
1.	I think, these memes, along with the comedy, are portraying the stereotypical image of Punjabi language and culture.	Stereotypical image	The teacher considers that the memes are both the source of comedy and propagator of stereotypes.
2.	My response was that these memes are entertaining. They put a smile on my face.	Source of entertainment	The teacher regards the memes as only the source of entertainment.

3.	I found these memes funny and humorous, but also sarcastic in a way as if they are aimed at belittling Punjabi speakers.	Sarcastic	The teacher reflects over the memes as amusing yet sarcastic.
4.	I felt offended by certain memes because they are presenting a negative image of Punjabi language and culture. It is not the way we deal with our language.	Negative Image	The student thinks that the memes are promoting negative image of Punjabi culture and language.
5.	After looking at these memes I felt uncomfortable because this is not how Punjabi language and culture is. This is a false representation of the culture.	False representation	The student considers that the memes has a negative impact on language and culture.
6.	After the displeasing memes, I am being irked as it misconstrue what a real Punjabi culture is. A total misrepresentation of the Punjabi language which is and will be invasive to any Punjabi Speaker.	Misconstrued Punjabi language	The student feels that the memes reflect a misconstrued representation of Punjabi language and culture.

The identification of themes from the above-mentioned responses show that there was varied reaction to the memes. For the teachers, it is mostly a source of entertainment. However, the students considered them as a source of developing a negative image about the Punjabi language and culture.

Table 2: *Thematic Analysis of Data Provided in Question 2*

S.No	Data	Codes	Themes
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1.	I consider that these memes can affect students more, because they are more influenced by the social media. So, it can change the way they perceive Punjabi language and culture.	Effects the students	The teacher believes that these memes have negative psychologically impact on the students regarding Punjabi culture and language.
2.	In my opinion, we should only consider these memes as a source of entertainment, so it doesn't affect you psychologically because it's nothing more than comedy.	Doesn't affect	The teacher argued that social media are just to be considered as a source of entertainment, so, they do not have negative psychologically effect on the speakers.
3.	I reckon that these memes normalize and therefore internalize a solemn issue about the down-play of Punjabi Culture and Language in the minds of those who excessively use social media and university students are standing actively in this queue, tagging it as source of entertainment.	Effects the users	The teacher agrees that such memes can have a psychological impact on excessive users of social media as it "Normalizes and Internalizes" the belittling of Punjabi culture and language. Adding that students are the active key player in this regard as they are actively using social media.
4.	Of course, these memes definitely effect our relationship with our culture and language. Because they highlight the common misconception about Punjabi culture as a loud culture and Punjabi language as uncultured language.	Definitely affect	The student thinks that these memes negatively impact their relationship with the Punjabi language.

	As a result, we feel like if we promote our language then people will mock us by tagging us as uncultured or Paindu- with negative connotations.		
5.	Yes, it surely impacts you psychologically. Because, when you see the memes that has false or stereotypical representation of our culture, then it makes its way into our subconscious. As a result, we feel embarrassed to speak our language and own our language.	Surely affects	The student considers that the social media memes impact you psychologically in a negative way, which hinders the widespread usage of Punjabi language.
6.	Since we are university's students now, I feel it that we have internalized these memes to the extent that we cannot call our father <i>PIO</i> (A Punjabi term used for father). Apart from that a false image is built up through these memes which has influenced the youth who are using social media in excess, which hinders us to speak Punjabi in public sittings.	Severely Affect	The student reckoned that social media memes drastically influence Punjabi speakers that internalized the language of Punjabi in their minds as belittled language which harness them from speaking Punjabi language in public and official sittings.

The identification of themes from the above-mentioned responses show that there was almost same perception of the students and teachers regarding the question of psychological impacts of memes and social media negative portrayal of Punjabi language and culture. According to the responses of participants people surely get affected psychologically by the representation of Punjabi culture and language.

Table 3: *Thematic Analysis of Question no 3*

S.No	Data	Codes	Themes
1	Yes, you can say that, because the way we receive memes from social media is different from the way our students receive. The students have more understanding of social media than us. They are born in it, so the psychological impact is stronger in them	Strongly Influenced	The teacher believes that the age factor is an important contributor in the psychological development of an individual regarding culture and language.
2.	Yes, to some extent we can say that young people who are well aware of social media get influenced by it, so it affects their stance towards their language. But this is not the case with our age group.	Partial influence	The teacher views that the age partially influences the perception of people regarding their language.
3.	I may put it in a way that age can only be the factor in terms of interest in using social media, social media skills and expertise. Since our generation lacks expertise in using social media and we are only limited to WhatsApp groups and chats, most of us I believe, in a larger ratio may lack the interest in scrolling through Facebook, watching YouTube et cetera. Having it said, the psychological influence upon the students and of youth may be at larger level as compared to our generation which is due to the excessive use of social	Intensely influence	The teacher expressed his views in arguing that age matters and influences the psychological impact as the students and the youth excessively uses social media which maps their thought process and perceptions. He also expressed that age may be the factor but other than age, lack of Interest, busy schedule and expertise in social media also contributes to the psychological impact.

	media and therefore memes like the ones you just showed me. For instance it shapes their perception and thought process.		
4.	Yes, the age of the user is directly related to the influence that these memes have on the consumers. Because sometimes we show our parents some memes and they do not understand it or just take it very casually. However, the way we take memes is very different because we are aware of the functionality of meme culture.	Strong Influence	The student opined that the parents of their generation are somehow lagging in the understanding of the social media memes. This could be analyzed that the generation of the parents of the current day students is way different in terms of technological advances where he laughs are observed individually through memes which affects their thought process as they are not mature enough to understand the message portrayed through the memes which is dangerous in terms of language decline
5.	It is because we use social media daily; opening eyes to scroll down reels on Facebook, Snap Chat, YouTube and even reels on twitter. Teachers might have the know-how of WhatsApp groups and chats as their interest is different from ours. But our relationship with social media is stronger than them, hence it affects us more/.	Strong influence	The student factually argued that most of the students' priorities are different than those of teachers as they are addicted to social media. They use social media from the time they wake up.
6	I think people of our age group like students; they get more influenced by these memes and they get framed by it accordingly.	Strong influence	The student views that the portrayal of culture and a language by social media paves the way for the negative framing of the students.

The analysis of themes from the above-mentioned responses show that there were alike views of the students and teachers concerning the age factor involved in the framing of people about a language and culture development and the use of social media, particularly memes. The responses can be concluded that students are more involved in the usage of social media so they get more affected by the representation of Punjabi culture and language by the memes.

Table 4: *Thematic Analysis of Question no 4*

S.NO	Data	Codes	Themes
1.	I think that in sociological factors, only the economic factor can be responsible for enhancing the effect of these stereotypical images being transferred, specifically in students. For instance, in my observation, the students coming from low socio-economic classes are more conscious of their social image. Therefore, if they see these memes, it can affect their relationship with Punjabi in a negative manner.	Economic factor	The teacher believes that the economic background of an individual is responsible for enhancing the impact of memes on Punjabi language. Students coming from low socio economic status are already triggered by their status and the memes about their culture adds up to that.
2.	One sociological consequence that I can relate is the socio-economic status of a student, which is responsible to some extent in impacting their culture and language. They feel shy to speak their language and to show their culture and yes we can say that these memes then can play a role in enhancing that kind of mindset.	Socio economic status	The teacher admits that students of low socio economic status feel embarrassed of their identity and when they analyze these memes according to that framing, they starting to quit their language and culture.

3	Being the teacher, I observed many students belonging to the elite class or urban setting, when intermingle with low socio-economic class highlight the use of more socially prestigious language which consciously and unconsciously influences their relationship with Punjabi language. In addition to that, these memes further make it complicated for them to openly use and own their language and culture. It makes them conscious to adopt more urban attitudes.	Economic Influence	The teacher argued that the elite class or urban sensibility is one of the factor that contribute in the decrease in the open usage of Punjabi language in university setting.
4.	Yes! I believe it's a fact that economic status plays a vital role in impacting a language and culture because they are already at that status and when they see their language and culture being portrayed negatively, they get more influenced.	Economic Status impacts a language	The student views socio economic status to be the prominent factor responsible for framing of a student about the language and culture .The memes then more influenced the students of a particular economic status.
5.	In my view financial status impacts a student more regarding their language and culture when they see these memes or stereotypical negative images. They think that people will call them "Paindu" if they speak Punjabi.	Financial status and stereotypical images	The student presents his view that student coming from low socio economic background get more influenced by the negative presentation of Punjabi culture and language .They do not use their language because of the reason that

			they to be regarded as uneducated and belonging to a low economic class.
6.	In the class, I have always observed the students who are financially stable and are from the elite class, they tend to strictly ignore the language which are perceived as non-prestigious. Even if that is their mother tongue, they disregard and disown the language and turns to the one that though may not be spoken well by them, yet they try to get fluency in that prestigious language which is linked to high class.	Language directly links to the financial status	The student himself, being the keen observer expressed that the fellow mates from elite class, disowns a language that is mocked in a society. It can evidently be observed that the students feel a bit above in society and therefore they try to level up themselves to the standard language which may have good reputations. The matter of the fact is that they avoid the language which is tagged devalued, though it is a stereotype and a misconception of the elitist and higher class people in Pakistan. Any language is

The analysis of the responses given by students and teachers regarding the sociological reasons and factors responsible for impacting Punjabi language and culture along with social media and memes argues that mainly the economic factor is responsible for impacting a language and its culture. The people of low socio-economic factors get more framed by the representation of Punjabi language and culture through memes.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this study unveils the profound influence of social media memes on the perception and usage of the Punjabi language among its speakers. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of responses towards these memes, revealing a spectrum of reactions ranging from amusement to discomfort and offense. Furthermore, the study sheds light on the pivotal role of socio-economic status and age in mediating the psychological impacts of memes, elucidating how these factors shape individuals' attitudes

and perceptions towards their language and cultural identity. Ultimately, this research underscores the urgent need for a deeper understanding of the intricate interplay between social media representations and language dynamics, advocating for strategies that safeguard linguistic diversity and foster a more nuanced and inclusive portrayal of the Punjabi language and culture within the digital sphere.

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