
A Comparative Study of Majhi and Gypsy Dialects of the Punjabi Language in Lahore

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Abstract

The study aimed to explore and determine whether Gypsy lect of the Lahorite gypsies is a dialect of the Punjabi language like the Majhi dialect of the mainstream Lahorites or different enough to be categorized as a distinct language. It analyzed, both phonetically and phonemically, 60 tokens each from randomly selected 20 types of either stratum. The analysis indicated that the Gypsy lect should be regarded as a dialectical variety of the Punjabi language on mutual intelligibility and socio-political criteria, the general layman perception may differ on this point though. The findings of the study may have implications students, teachers and researchers.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, Punjabi Language, Dialect, Majhi Dialect, Gypsy Dialect

Introduction

The study is an effort to have a comparative analysis of the two dialects of a language i.e. Majhi dialect spoken by the major group of the Punjabi speaking community of Lahore and secondly the gypsy dialect of the marginalized group of society—a subgroup living like nomads dwelling in the temporary tents with their unique culture, norms and values. The affluent major group of Lahorites speaking Majhi dialect think that they are speaking the standard Punjabi dialect like the Londoners consider their English dialect to be a high variety of language as compared with the other low varieties spoken by the Welsh and Scottish people. On the same analogy, the Lahorites major group speakers attribute the gypsy dialect to be the stigmatized dialect spoken by the poorest of the poor class with whom they do not share any socio-cultural norms and values. The major group regard their lect to be highly prestigious and view the lect of Gypsies with the spectacle of socio-economic biasedness.

It is pertinent to mention that the city of Lahore in Punjab has a rich culture and due to this cultural diversity this city is accommodating modern and affluent social classes with different languages, dialects, races, castes, culture and religion. The socially empowered major class—majhi dialect speaking community—claims to have their own norms of speaking their native Punjabi language with the standardized dialect. On the other hand the Gypsies living in close proximity with the privileged social class are maintaining their own dialect of Punjabi language which is contributing factor to mark their distinct linguistic features, culture and values. Due to the lack of social contact between these two speaking communities there is a border line based on difference of socio-economic status and dialect which has resulted in the confinement of these two groups in their respective social circles. In a nutshell, this study is a focus on the dichotomy between the two speaking communities of Lahore having one language and two dialects of Punjabi.

Purpose of Study

The study aims to explore the differences/variations between the two dialects of Punjabi Language spoken by two communities residing in Lahore. In addition to that the study is also intended to investigate whether the variety of language spoken by the gypsies that we have named gypsy variety is a lect of Punjabi Language or we should call it a distinct language.

Research Questions

- i. What are the marked differences between lexical-morphological, syntactic and phonological features of the two dialects i.e. Majhi dialect and Gypsy dialect spoken by the major group and the subgroup living in Lahore?
- ii. Should we regard the two varieties i.e. Majhi and Gypsy as two languages or two dialects of one language?

Literature Review

Language is not a stagnant phenomenon. Language is like an organism. It should be studied as a whole process but not piecemeal. For instance its subparts like vocabulary, morphology, syntax, etc. keep changing with time. Language change can be synchronic (in the same time) or diachronic (historically). In a sense all the languages of the world are varieties or dialects of the one language. But people consider some of them languages and some of them dialects. How do we differentiate a language from a dialect?

1) We may distinguish language A from language B on the basis of structural (linguistic) criteria. (2) Or we may distinguish the two languages according to socio-political criteria, or because they've been differentiated historically (Myers-Scotton, 2006). If we use structural criteria, then we usually separate one linguistic variety from another when the differences in their various linguistic systems are so great that speakers of one language can't understand speakers of the other variety. By linguistic systems we mean phonology (pronunciation), morphology and syntax (word formation and sentence structure), and lexicon (vocabulary). Of course, when we say that these three are systems it means that speakers have to follow the rules of each system that make an utterance well-formed in the specific language that is under discussion; otherwise, they aren't speaking that language.

Phonology: The sounds a language has and how they are organized into units, with one unit (a phoneme) being perceived as different from another by that language's speakers; i.e., /b/ and /p/ are two different phonemes in English, but what is one phoneme in English, such as /b/, may be divided into two phonemes in another language (e.g. various Indian languages). Not all languages have the same sounds and not all organize their sounds in the same way.

Morphology and syntax: The way that meaningful units of sound are organized into words (morphology) and then organized again on another level into clauses and sentences (syntax).

Lexicon: The vocabulary or store of words that a language has, with their meanings (semantics) and their connotations, including how they are interpreted in certain contexts (pragmatics).

If the above-mentioned linguistics systems of two varieties have a lot of structural overlap, the two varieties will have mutual intelligibility and they will be considered two dialects of a language. If the two varieties have not mutual intelligibility owing to the lack of structural overlap, they will be two languages. Thus, a dialect can be defined as a variety of language which has differences like grammatical, phonological and lexical from other varieties and moreover it is associated with particular geographical area, social class or a status group.

Punjabi is a language that has a lot of different dialects. These dialects have structural overlap and mutual understandability. But they have also certain structural differences. The present study deals with the structural differences of the two dialects of the Punjabi language. These two dialects are the Majhi dialect spoken by the people of Lahore and the other dialect has not yet been named. I shall call this dialect the

Gypsy Dialect because it is spoken by the Gypsies of Lahore who are living in Lahore for the last many decades.

The term dialect is often used to refer to nonstandard and traditional dialects. The dialect of language which is normally used in writing or spoken by educative native speakers may be called the standard language. Here we are referring to two different dialects of Punjabi language being spoken by the two speech communities or groups residing in Lahore. Both the dialects of Punjabi language spoken by the two groups of Lahore have a structural overlapping. It implies that the speakers of one variety i.e. Majhi dialect are able to understand the speakers of another variety to a certain degree, and it is referred to a technical term of mutual intelligibility in the paradigm of sociolinguistics. It is the extent to which speakers from two or more speech communities can understand each other. It is a relationship between languages or dialects in which speakers of different but related languages can readily understand each other without intentional study or extraordinary effort (Trudgill, 2003).

Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language. The natives of East Punjab in India and West Punjab in Pakistan speak it as their mother-tongue. There are about 104 million speakers of this language in the world. About 76 million Punjabi speakers are living in Pakistan and 28 million people dwell in India who call themselves Punjabi speakers. In addition to it, there are millions of native speakers of this language in U.S.A., Europe, UAE and Canada. Punjabi is also spoken as a minority language in several other countries where Punjabis have emigrated in large numbers, such as the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom. Punjabi is an autonomous variety because its speakers and writers are not indebted to any other variety of language socially, culturally or educationally. Standard Punjabi dialect cannot emerge due to the lacking consensus of thought on the part of native speakers.

Majhi Dialect

The Majhi dialect is Punjabi's prestige dialect and spoken in the heart of Punjab where most of the Punjabi population lives. The Majhi dialect is the dialect of the historical region of Majha, which spans Lahore, Faisalabad, Sheikhupura, Kasur, Okara, Gujranwala, Wazirabad, Sialkot, Narowal, Gujrat and to some extent the Jhelum District of Pakistani Punjab and Amritsar, Tarn Taran Sahib, and Gurdaspur Districts of the Indian State of Punjab.

Gypsy Dialect

It is pertinent to mention that in addition to Majhi dialect spoken by the major group of Lahore there is a subgroup of gypsies coexisting with the major group and speaks a distinguished dialect of Punjabi language which has certain commonalities of Majhi dialect but maintaining its status as an exclusive variety of Punjabi dialect. The speakers of a minority group i.e. gypsies are a marginalized poor group living like nomads in the midst of the Lahorites major group and maintain their language identity. It is a unique study in the sense that any researcher has not taken up this topic for comparison of Punjabi dialects spoken by the major and minor groups living in close proximity with each other therefore there is no identical precedent study on this topic. This creative idea triggered me to choose this topic for analyzing the Majhi dialect of the major group in comparison with the dialect of the unprivileged segment of the society who are called Gypsies. The present study in this regard has been made (John, 2009).

Methodology

Research Design

The study is based on quantitative research design for the description of the phenomenon.

Population

The population for the study consists of gypsies living in different parts of Lahore (Province Punjab)

Pakistan and Lahorites speaking Majhi dialect of Punjabi.

Sampling Technique

The researcher used convenience sampling technique for the selection of gypsies and Lahorites speaking Majhi dialect.

Sample

The researcher took a sample of twenty from the each group i.e. gypsies and Lahorites. The gypsies were selected from N-Block Model Town and Iqbal Town Lahore. The sample of Majhi speaking Lahorites was selected from Lower Mall and Ichra Bazar Lahore.

Data Collection

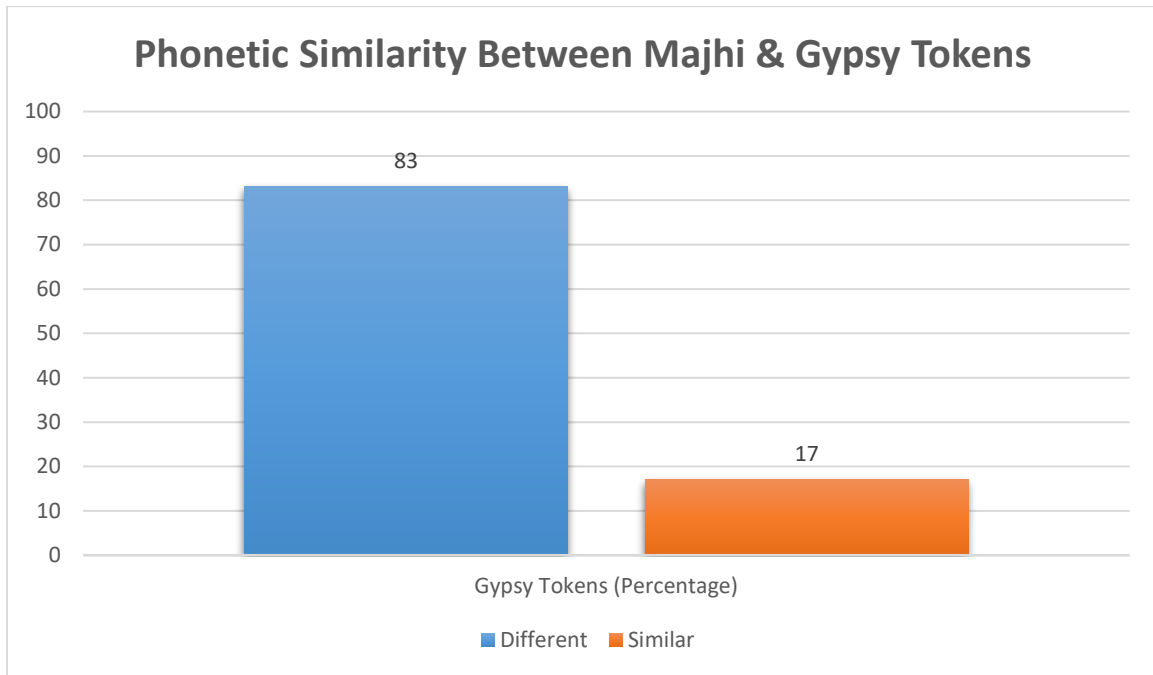
The researcher recorded the speech samples of gypsies and Lahorites. The data were transcribed for interpretation and analysis.

Data and Findings

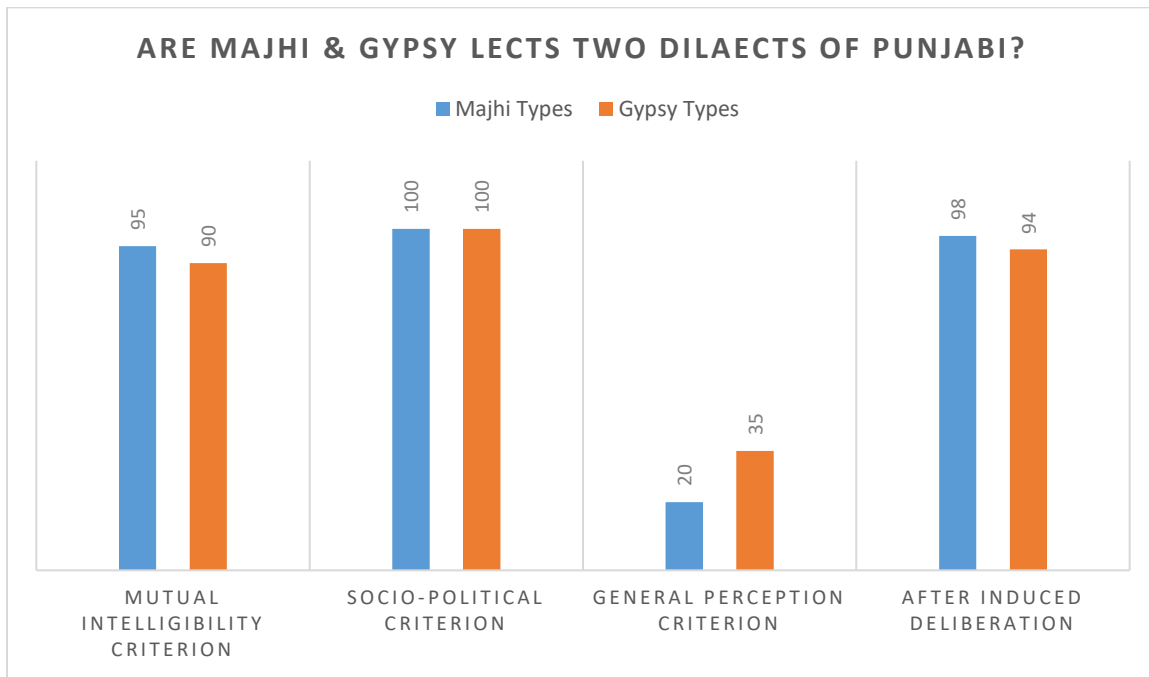
The data comprised 20 types, 15 men and 5 women and 60 tokens each from both strata. The analysis of the data, as shown in the graph below, indicated that 49 Gypsy tokens (83%) were phonetically different from yet phonemically similar to Majhi tokens while 11 gypsy tokens (17%) were almost phonetically identical, they still exhibited some phonetic nuances though.

Despite the phonetic and phonemic contrasts, about 95% tokens from both dialects were mutually intelligible while about 5% tokens caused global unintelligibility. So on the ‘mutual intelligibility criterion’, Gypsy lect should be a dialectal variety of the Punjabi language. The same is true on the ‘socio-political criterion’ because Gypsy lect has never so far been politically or linguistically categorized as a distinct language. On the ‘general perception criterion’, however, a majority of the participants in both strata viewed each other’s lects as two different languages at the first impression but after a little deliberation (induced by the researcher), it was agreed upon fact that ‘the other’ variant is ultimately Punjabi and not a different language altogether.

The comparison of the data of the two dialects (Majhi and Gypsy dialects) indicates that the two varieties have a lot of phonological difference between two dialects and these two varieties also show the maximum difference in this area. Often the Gypsies use /sh/ phoneme instead of /s/ phoneme at the beginning of the words. Gypsies also replace a diphthong with a single vowel. Sometimes a short vowel is changed into a long vowel and a long vowel is changed into a short vowel. Sometimes a phoneme is dropped. In short, there are a lot of phonological differences are noticeable and evident in the above data. Moreover, there are lexical differences. Different words are used by two dialects. Sometimes, one word is used in different meanings are in different range of meanings (e.g.; the Sauda) by the two languages. Different morphemes are produced on account of vowel changes (Mera and Maara). Different phrases and different idioms are also permeated in both the varieties. Syntactic differences are also clearly visible in the above-mentioned data. Different inflections are used which play their role in morphology and syntax. These inflections are called morphological and syntactic inflections by the morphologist. But it doesn’t mean that they are two languages. Thus the comparison of the data of the two dialects (Majhi and Gypsy dialects) indicates that the two varieties have a lot of morphological, syntactic and lexical differences along with phonological differences shown in the graphic presentation in this study. As it was observed in data analysis that both varieties have structural overlap and mutual intelligibility and similar syntax thus it is unbiased to say that they are two dialects of the same language rather than two languages.



Despite phonetic and phonemic contrasts, about 95% tokens from both dialects were mutually intelligible while about 5% tokens didn't cause global unintelligibility either. So on the 'mutual intelligibility criterion', Gypsy lect should be a dialectical variety of the Punjabi language. The same is true on the 'socio-political criterion' because Gypsy lect has never so far been politically or linguistically categorized as a distinct language. On the 'general perception criterion', however, a majority of the participants in both strata viewed each other's lects as two different languages at the first impression but after a little deliberation (induced by the researcher), they agreed on the fact that 'the other' variant is ultimately Punjabi and not a different language altogether.



Here are ten selected example tokens from Majhi and Gypsy data types. Words from both types are Romanized with the narrow phonetic transcription and English translation provided and juxtaposed for quick comparative analysis:

Table 1. Selected example tokens from Majhi and Gypsy data types

No.	Majhi Word (Romanized)	IPA (Narrow Transcription)	English Translation	Gypsy Word (Romanized)	IPA (Narrow Transcription)
1.	Tussi	[t̪ʊsi]	You (Subjective)	Tussaan	[t̪ʊˈsɑː]
2.	Farishta	[fəˈrɪʃ.t̪ɑ]	Angel	Farista	[fəˈrɪs t̪ɑ]
3.	Karachi	[kəˈrɑːtʃi]	Karachi (a city in Pakistan)	Karaanchi	[kəˈraːntʃi]
4.	Raashan	[raː.ʃən]	Ration	Raasan	[raːsən]
5.	Skool	[skuːl]	School	Shkooli	[ʃkuːli]
6.	Maskeenan di	[məs.kiː.nāː ɖiː]	Of the poor	Mashkeennan di	[məʃ.kiː.nāː ɖiː]
7.	Sadkan te	[səʃkɑː teː]	On the roads	Sarkante	[sɑʃkɑː teː]
8.	Shanaakhtikaad	[ʃə.nɑːx.ti.kɑːrd]	Identity Card	Sanaakhtikaat	[sə.nɑːx.ti kɑːrt]

9.	Pindistaap	[pɪndɪ'stɑ:p]	Pindi Stop (the name of a bus stop)	Pindishtop	[pɪndɪ'ʃtɑ:p]
10.	Sharbat	['ʃər.bət̪]	Syrup	Sarbat	[sər'bət̪]

Conclusion

The major group of Lahorites speaking Majhi dialect should give social acceptance to the subgroups of gypsies living in Lahore as their dialectal difference is contributing to the cultural diversity of Punjabi language; The speakers of major group should realize and acknowledge the existence of the Gypsy dialect a new name given by the researcher to the lect of the subgroup living in closed proximity with the privileged social class as no research of this nature has been conducted for the analysis of the variety spoken by gypsies. Neither one of these mentioned above two dialects is prestigious nor the other one is stigmatized but these should be viewed as two varieties originated from one language i.e. Punjabi. The cultural identity of the two groups should be maintained on the phenomena of tolerance and peaceful co-existence as we have examples of the same scenario from the modern society of London where Irish, Scottish and Londoners give space to one another's dialects for the sake of language variations and cultural diversity.

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