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RESEARCH ARTICLE

Cultural Capital and Linguistic Marginalization: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Punjabi and Saraiki Languages in Pakistan

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ARTICLE INFO	ABSTRACT
	This study examined the language marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in Pakistan in terms of Cultural Capital Theory of Bourdieu (1991) and the Critical Discourse Analysis of Van Dijk (2008) framework. The research design applied was qualitative. Data of the educational policy documents and 50 randomly selected Twitter posts were used to capture both the official and the popular discourse. The analysis of data has shown that there are systematic advantages of Urdu and English in the educational policies that are correlated with modernity, development, and mobility associated. It is through language that such discursive practice perpetuates the hierarchies and symbolic domination of classes. The many speakers of both languages are institutionally undermined despite the number being large. Conversely, there has been resistance in digital form that has been expressed using twitter and people argue to be respected their mother tongue and reclaim their cultural pride. This paper has shown the picture of two opposing poles of institutional marginalization and grass-root validation and show that language is no longer a purely communicational practice, but a pointer of power and identification of culture. This study concludes that to reduce linguistic inequality, there is a need to have inclusive policies and digital activism to have regional language recognized as a form of cultural capital within the multilingual Pakistani society.

1.INTRODUCTION

The accessibility of language determines the social organizations, culture, as well as power. Multilingual societies like that of Pakistan largely have language speaking that correlates with the issues of political representation, education, and cultural legitimacy. Despite both the Urdu and English being officially sanctioned and widely used in the official and academic domain, other regional languages such as Punjabi and Saraiki with significant populations of speakers are nonetheless being overlooked in official language and the structuring of the state. Such marginalization can be manifested in the language policies, the attitudes of the popular population, and the digital discourse in which the language of the region is often interpreted as inferior or backward (Jabeen and Malik, 2020).

The cultural marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki is not only the matter of the linguistic taste but it also has the larger playing of the power and the symbolic stratification. The languages are subject to marginalization in such spheres of influence as education, politics, and mass media and are only utilized informally or at home (Rehman and Mazhar, 2021). It comprises such symbolic marginalization resulting in the methodical devaluation of the linguistic and cultural capital that dwells in these vernaculars thereby solidifying socio-economic hierarchy.

Twitter have become places where these language hierarchies are criticized and reproduced. At the same time, the education policy documents continue to exhibit a very limited commitment to the development of the regional languages, hence, maintaining the subservient position of the above languages. Because language is the manifestation of power and a source of power, it turns out to be significant to trace how the discourses about Punjabis and Saraikis are constructed in the state policies and online media to understand their socio-political place in location. The provided work is founded on the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) approach that enables exploring the linguistic marginalization of the Punjabi and Saraiki language in regard to the educational policy and the Twitter discussion. The paper applies Bourdieu theory of cultural capital and Van Dijk model of CDA in examining how the problem of the state-led and public discourse had contributed to the symbolic depreciation of the two languages. Such a study not only challenges the discursive forces that keep language-based inequality in place, but also attempts to suggest where such a marginalization can be challenged.

1.2 Problem statement

The Punjabi and Saraiki languages are one of the most widespread spoken languages in Pakistan, they are strategically marginalized both in the state institutions, education system and discourse. Whilst Urdu and English are propelled to the elevated position of language of power, prestige, and modernity, Punjabi and Saraiki are relegated to other areas of inferior rank and are marginalized as a sign of illiteracy or backwardness. This kind of linguistic marginalization is an indication of a greater number of socio-political inequalities where language is the where and how symbolic domination occurs. Not only are the absence of Punjabi and Saraiki in the policy-making process in education, the curriculum and the national communication policies weakens the cultural identity of the millions of speakers, but also deprives them of the symbolic and material resources, which is associated with linguistic capital. Moreover, even the social media like twitter that gives a platform of resistance recreates negative stereotypes, exclusionary discourses and hegemonic ideology of regional languages. The question that remains to be answered is in what ways national discourse (e.g. education policy) and popular digital discourse (e.g. Twitter) facilitate the reinforcement of these linguistic hierarchies and the way in which it affects the cultural capital of Punjabi and Saraiki speakers. This gap is extremely essential in understanding the discursively of language marginalization within the Pakistani sociopolitical arena, as it is constructed, justified, and argued out.

1.3 Significance of the Study

The present research work is applicable in several aspects. It addresses a void that is urgent in the field of sociolinguistic and discourse studies in Pakistan as the inter-section of language, power, and cultural marginalization. It provides the two-level research - state (educational policies) and the public (Twitter discourse) that provides a profound understanding of structural and symbolic forces, which characterize the levels of the language. This paper becomes a part of the discussion on language policies by showing that official discourse fails to suffice in assimilating linguistic diversity to a greater extent they lived experience of Punjabi speaking people and Saraiki speakers. On a critical prism through which one can understand how discourse reinforces or destabilizes language-based social inequalities, the paper will apply Van Dijk analytic approach of CDA and Bourdieu theory of cultural capital. The policymakers, teachers, and activists who will have to promote the linguistic inclusivity, equity, and cultural recognition in the multilingual environment in Pakistan could use the results.

1.4 Research Questions

1. How do educational policies in Pakistan discursively construct the status of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in relation to Urdu and English as dominant languages of power and cultural capital?
2. In what ways do Twitter users resist, reinforce, or negotiate language hierarchies and marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki through digital discourse?
3. How does the intersection of cultural capital and institutional discourse contribute to the symbolic and functional marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki in Pakistan's sociolinguistic landscape?

2.LITERATURE REVIEW

One of the most important problems of the multilingual societies is the exclusion of the local languages when the role of particular languages as stipulated by the state policy and power systems becomes a topic of concern. The Pakistani context studies have shown that the problem of identity, inclusion, and exclusion in the country traditionally was predetermined by the politics of language, particularly in the events, where language served as the major determinant of political instability, as was the case with the Fall of Dhaka (Butt et al., 2024). It is also revealed through critical discourse analysis that Urdu and Punjabi have been put in contest of ideological frameworks in which Urdu has gained the national space and Punjabi has been pushed to personal space (Hussain et al., 2024). The historical literature does the same with the tracks of development of the policy of Punjabi language in post-independent Punjab that reproduced the regional identities to the discourses of the national unities exclusionary (Arshad, n.d.). Also, discourse-historical research highlights the importance of Urdu, Punjabi, and English in national identity formation, and is inclined to develop the symbolic capital of Urdu, and English, at the expense of Punjabi and Saraiki (Hashmi et al, 2024). The combination of these studies reveals that linguistic hierarchies in Pakistan are not passive-lived-in politics but actively-lived-in politics, ideology and power that reinforce the symbolic and devaluation of the regional languages and justifying the dominant linguistic orders.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

Two theoretical foundations, which are related to each other in this paper, consist of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) by Van Dijk (2008) and the concept of cultural capital and symbolic power by Bourdieu (1991). Together these structures offer mechanisms to explore the formulations of discourse structures which are deployed to sustain language hierarchies and keep seeding marginalization of regional language like Punjabi and Saraiki in Pakistan.

The social-cognitive approach to CDA created by Van Dijk emphasizes the fact that discourse is not just a linguistic phenomenon but a social cognition, power relations, and ideological imitation field. According to Van Dijk (2008), a discourse must be analyzed at three levels, which include the textual, discursive practice and the social structure. This model enables the examination of how the public tweets and policy texts contributed to the production and legitimization of ideologies of language in support of Urdu and English and disenfranchising to the native language.

The theory of cultural capital and symbolic domination suggested by Bourdieu (1991) is a hint to this to the extent to which language is employed to maintain the difference in classes and the social classes. Bourdieu also postulates that institutional power is correlated with languages (e.g. Urdu and English in Pakistan), of which symbols have greater symbolic capital, and that languages like Punjabi and Saraiki are typically referred to as informal or non-legitimate culture. The result of such a symbolic domination is that speakers of marginalized languages are made to internalize linguistic inferiority which is further strengthened by the discourse of the state, educational policy and the media practices.

Bringing together the two arguments, the paper analyses the functioning of the two processes of the top-down (education policies) and bottom-up (Twitter discourse) legitimization of certain languages and delegitimization of others, thereby, weakening linguistic marginalization. The framework helps to explain how symbolic power is discussed through language policy, official discourse and social cognition, which, ultimately, defines the access to the cultural and economic capital in Pakistan.

2.2 Linguistic Marginalization and Power Structures

Language marginalization is the exclusion of certain languages out of realms of influence such as education, politics and media (Phillipson, 1992). Most of the people in Pakistan speak Punjabi and Saraiki yet they are not well represented in the official and educational practice (Rahman, 1996; Mansoor, 2004). This elimination, according to the scholars, is not only linguistic, but also ideological due to the privilege of Urdu and English as a national, modern and elite language (Mahboob and Ahmar, 2004). Conversely, Punjabi and Saraiki are predominantly informal, rural and personal, which results in their symbolic downgrade (Hussain et.al, 2020). The marginalization of Punjabi by the institutions, no matter how much they enrich their culture, is also reported by recent researches, which reinforces the asymmetries of power within the linguist order of Pakistan (Khan et al., n.d.).

The ethnographic data also show that Punjabi instills the stereotypes of the caste in the everyday communication, which is the implication of the extensive participation of a language in the social stratification (Khan et al., n.d.). Similarly, at the tertiary education level, language learning students are given more opportunities on the languages of Urdu and English, in comparison to their own language, which influences their identity of status and opportunity (Khan et al., 2023). Combined, these texts underscore the place of marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki in perpetrating the exclusion of culture and giving preference to the languages that are linked to institutional and symbolic power.

2.3 Cultural Capital and Symbolic Domination

It is possible to obtain an insight into the role of language in social stratifications using the concept of cultural capital developed by Pierre Bourdieu (1991). The symbolic capital that is institutionalized in languages is increased to a greater level that translates into social returns among the speakers. English language is a language of prestige and chance in Pakistani landscape and Urdu is a national language that is mostly promoted at the expense of local languages (Shamim, 2008). The Punjabi and Saraiki lack the institutional backlash that would enable them to convert their cultural value to symbolic power and consequently linguistic insecurity among their speakers (Rahman, 2002).

2.4 Educational Policies and Language Ideologies

Education policies in Pakistan have long been favoring the use of both Urdu and English to the discredit of local languages by being silent or tokenistic (Coleman, 2010). An example in point is the National Education Policy (2009) and the Single National Curriculum (20202022) promote teaching and learning in Urdu and English but does not offer much practical support to teaching or maintenance of these regional languages. Studies show that language diversity and intergenerational transmission is destroyed because of the absence of languages in the curriculum and textbooks (Ali and Zahid, 2014).

2.5 Critical Discourse Analysis and Language Hierarchies

The language and social disparity hierarchies are also ones that have been masterfully researched through the assistance of Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA). As Van Dijk (2008) emphasizes, discourse is a form of social practice which is defined by ideology and cognitive frames. An examination of state and media discourse to marginalize regional identities and languages has been applied in a number of works in the South Asian setting (Ashraf, 2018; Anwar and Hafeez, 2020). Using the social media arguments and different examination of the educational policies, CDA enables a researcher to expose the concealed power relations and criticize the prevailing ideology.

Although several works on the subject of language politics and education in Pakistan are on the rise, the interdependence between the language politics (e.g., social media) and the institutional language policy regarding the constructions of linguistic marginalization are not many studies connect the two in a systematic manner. More to the point, the fact that Punjabi and Saraiki were discussed in the context of grand culture, their position in the framework of symbolic power and cultural capital has not been studied yet. The paper satisfies this gap by integrating CDA with the sociological theory developed by Bourdieu and this will offer a multi-layered insight into the grassroots as well as institutional discourses.

3.METHODOLOGY

This qualitative study applied the Critical Discourse Analysis (CDA) to study the marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in Pakistan and how language hierarchies are produced, reproduced, and justified by the discourse of different individuals and state policies. The socio-cognitive model of CDA used in this research based on the research of Teun A. van Dijk that examines the interrelation between discourse, cognition, and the society particularly in the discovery of the ideologically based text and talk.

Two data sets were considered to be separate and yet related to one another, (1) 50 Twitter posts were chosen thematically by the purposive sampling method to twitter posts posted publicly that contained the terms that refer to the issues of Punjabi and Saraiki languages and their role in education and media, and (2) 4 formal and official educational policy documents, specifically, the National Education Policy 2009, the National Education Policy 2017, the Single National Curriculum

(SNC) 2020-22, and Article 251 of the Constitution of The purpose behind the selection of these readings was the central position that they hold in the definition of language planning as well as the general sentiment regarding the language identity in Pakistan.

The discussion was done both on a macro and a micro level of the discourse. Macrostructures assisted in identification of the overarching themes and ideological messages (e.g. national cohesion and linguistic unity), and microstructures helped in identification of lexical choices, modality, syntactic structures and rhetorical strategies (e.g. legitimization, euphemism, deflection, subordination). The case of twitter posts was examined using discursive techniques such as irony, intertextuality, emotional appeal and resistance discourse. As was the case with the educational policies, the focus was on formal institutional speech which revealed tendencies of inclusion, exclusion and symbolic recognition.

This paper utilized both types of data were triangulated to explore modes of production and reproduction of language ideologies by both grassroots publics (Twitter) and a top-down state apparatus (policy documents). The fact is that the Punjabi and Saraiki are already systematically marginalized and the tokenism, slight usage and the presence of a continuum hierarchies of Urdu language and English one over the regional languages reflect this state of affairs. This research design made it possible to have a good interpretation of the discourse-power nexus of language practices and policies in Pakistan.

4.Data Analysis

In this section, the data analysis is presented using two sources the official policy documents in education and 50 posts in Twitters selected through purposive sampling. Van Dijk analysis of Critical Discourse Analysis (2008) was based on the interdependent relationship between the discourse, ideology, and power relations and Bourdieu analysis of the Culture Capital Theory (1991), which dwells upon the operative work of the language as the instrument of social benefits/disadvantages. The analysis will attempt to expose the construction, maintenance and contestation of linguistic hierarchies in institutional and digital discourses. The policy documents were reviewed to observe the other trends of discursiveness that only considers Urdu and English but not Punjabi and Saraiki in such aspects of education and governance amongst others. On the other hand, posts on twitter were analyzed to ascertain the views of the grassroots, resistance strategies and even counter discourse to such hierarchies. The analysis is organized in thematic units and it is grounded on macrostructures (general themes), microstructures (lexical and grammatical choices), discursive strategies and ideological interpretations. The multi-layered approach helps to critically value the role of language marginalization as re-created under the institution of power and at the same time question it in the popular online forums.

Table 1. Linguistic Shame and Public Identity (Tweets 1–10)

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Punjabi sounds so rude. I feel embarrassed speaking it at work."	Linguistic shame	"Rude", "embarrassed" (negative affect)	Internalized Othering	Reflects societal devaluation of Punjabi in formal settings
"People laugh when I speak Saraiki in class. I just stopped."	Social stigma	"Laugh", "stopped" narrative of withdrawal	Victimization	Peer ridicule reinforces language suppression
"Only uneducated people speak Punjabi in public."	Classist stereotyping	"Only", "uneducated" (generalization)	Othering, Disqualification	Reinforces class-based language hierarchy
"Punjabi is for jokes, not education."	Linguistic trivialization	Binary opposition (jokes vs. education)	Delegitimization	Implies Punjabi is non-academic and unserious
"We grew up hiding our mother	Cultural loss	"Hiding", "sad" emotive tone	Symbolic Violence	Indicates suppression of identity from a young age

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
tongue. Sad but true."				
"My boss warned me not to speak Punjabi in meetings."	Institutional exclusion	"Warned", "not to speak" authoritative tone	Power Enforcement	Shows linguistic discrimination in workplaces
"Switching to English instantly gains you respect here."	Language prestige	"Instantly", "respect" cause-effect claim	Legitimization of English	Reveals power relations tied to language switching
"My parents speak Saraiki, but I answer in Urdu. Don't know why."	Language shift	Contrastive clause, casual register	Implicit marginalization	Highlights unconscious distancing from native tongue
"Even wedding cards aren't printed in Punjabi anymore."	Cultural displacement	"Even", "anymore" decline over time	Symbolic Erasure	Reflects disappearance from public domains
"I changed my accent in college to sound less Punjabi."	Linguistic shame	"Changed", "less Punjabi" identity suppression	Assimilation Pressure	Indicates linguistic insecurity among youth

Table 1 also reveals in the tweets that the Punjabi and Saraiki speakers are affected by linguistic shame, social stigma, and suppressed identity both in social and private spheres. Repetitive cultural loss, institutional exclusion, and language prestige can be found in the macro structures demonstrating how Urdu and English are discourse legitimized and regional languages are trivialized or eliminated. Examples of microstructures include the use of words, including: embarrassed, uneducated and warned, which show the negative affect and power enforcement of speaking Punjabi or Saraiki. The internalized othering, victimization, delegitimization, and assimilation pressure are discursive strategies which reveal how speakers themselves embrace dominant ideologies, usually at the cost of distance to the language of their own ancestry. In general, the table shows that Punjabi and Saraiki are discursively created as low-status languages, associated with vice and informality, whereas English and Urdu are represented as a sign of respect, authority, and modernity. This is an unequal distribution of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991) in which prestige and opportunities are attached to the choice of language. Meanwhile, it is the repetitive motive of remorse, loss, and the need to adapt that shows the psychological and social costs of such marginalization.

Table 2. Resistance and Identity Assertion (Tweets 11–20)

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Why should I feel ashamed? Punjabi is my pride."	Identity assertion	Rhetorical question, "pride"	Counter-discourse	Resists stigma, reframes Punjabi as dignity
"Saraiki is poetry in itself. No language can match it."	Language valorization	Superlative claim, metaphor	Positive Reframing	Challenges marginalization by celebrating beauty
"Stop calling Punjabi slang. It's a full language."	Resistance to trivialization	Imperative "stop", correctional tone	Discursive Correction	Counters delegitimization
"My grandmother's Saraiki stories are treasures we can't lose."	Heritage preservation	Metaphor "treasures"	Cultural Reclamation	Frames Saraiki as intergenerational heritage
"If Urdu is the national language, Punjabi is the nation's soul."	Metaphorical revaluation	Metaphor "soul"	Counter-Hegemony	Elevates Punjabi as integral to national identity

"Speaking Punjabi in offices should be normalized."	Advocacy	Modal verb "should"	Normalization	Pushes for institutional acceptance
"Our language is not backward. Our policies are."	Policy critique	Contrastive clause, blame shift	Counter-blame	Redirects stigma from people to institutions
"English may open doors, but Punjabi opens hearts."	Contrastive valorization	Metaphor "doors/hearts"	Reframing	Highlights emotional capital of Punjabi
"I will raise my kids in Saraiki proudly."	Identity commitment	Future tense, "proudly"	Empowerment	Expresses proactive resistance
"Stop killing languages in the name of progress."	Resistance to erasure	Strong verb "killing"	Protest Discourse	Condemns state-driven symbolic violence

Table 2 tweets shows the active resistance that the speakers of Punjabi and Saraiki language are putting against the marginalization by redefining the language as a source of pride, heritage, and emotional capital. As indicated by the macrostructures themselves, these themes are identity assertion, cultural preservation, and policy critique, which are in direct opposition to the stigma and trivialization discussed in Table 1. Rhetorical questions are used (Why should I feel ashamed?) to discursively challenge, discursively reclaim culture, discursively normalize, and to protest in microstructures, and metaphors (soul, treasures, hearts) and imperatives (Stop calling Punjabi slang). Together, these voices create the Punjabi and Saraiki as acceptable, respectable and culturally precious languages, and they undermine the hegemonic language ideology of viewing Urdu and English as languages of advancement. Notably, a number of tweets transfer the responsibility to individual persons to institutionalization, revealing the imposition of linguistic inequality by the power of the structure. The revalorization of regional languages as cultural capital by itself is seen by such users in their resistance practices of asserting agency such as bringing up children in Saraiki.

Table 3. Institutional Exclusion and Policy Silence (Tweets 21–30)

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Not a single subject is taught in Punjabi at school."	Educational exclusion	Absolutist "not a single"	Problematisation	Highlights institutional neglect
"Why is Saraiki absent from curriculum when millions speak it?"	Policy questioning	Rhetorical "why"	Legitimacy Challenge	Questions state's representation claims
"Our textbooks erase Punjabi poets but glorify English ones."	Selective representation	"Erase" vs. "glorify"	Ideological Contrast	Exposes cultural imbalance
"Government policies silence our mother tongues."	Policy critique	Strong verb "silence"	Accusation	Frames policy as suppressive
"Punjabi is spoken by majority, yet ignored officially."	Policy paradox	Contrastive "majority/yet ignored"	Exposure of Contradiction	Reveals gap between demography and policy
"Urdu is imposed, while Punjabi is punished."	Linguistic hierarchy	Parallel structure, "imposed/punished"	Power Exposure	Shows coercive dynamics
"Language rights are human rights, stop denying them."	Rights discourse	Declarative tone, rights-based framing	Moral Appeal	Connects language to justice
"Saraiki children learn in Urdu before their own tongue."	Early exclusion	Temporal "before"	Educational Inequality	Points to linguistic alienation

| "Our policies breed linguistic insecurity." | Policy critique | Metaphor "breed" | Causal Framing | Policies shown as root cause |
| "Decolonization means valuing Punjabi and Saraiki too." | Postcolonial critique | Lexical inclusion "too" | Historical Reframing | Ties issue to colonial legacy |

The tweets in Table 3 prefigure the institutional blindness and systematic repudiation of the Punjabi and Saraiki languages and cultures in the educational and policy system of Pakistan. The themes of educational exclusion, policy critique, and rights-based discourse are stressed by the macrostructures, and the microstructures contain powerful verbs such as silence, erase and punished to demonstrate the active suppression. The discursive strategies, which include Problematisation, legitimacy dilemma, revelation of paradox, and moral appeals, point towards the ways in which the state policies sustain inequality by favoring the Urdu and English languages and marginalizing the regional ones. The interpretations demonstrate that regardless of Punjabi being the dominant language, it is still not represented in the curricula, textbooks, and officially and reveals a profound paradox between the language demography and state representation. Saraiki is also presented as a victim of early exclusion, but children are compelled to learn in Urdu medium and only later interact with mother tongue, which makes it linguistically insecure and alienated. Various tweets directly relate the exclusion to postcolonial heritage indicating that linguistic hierarchies recreate colonial power relations instead of destroying them. In general, the table underscores the point of policy silence and selective representation to institutionalize marginalization and strengthen structural inequalities and cultural capital degradation of Punjabi and Saraiki.

Table 4. Language, Class, and Power Relations (Tweets 31–40)

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"English speakers are treated like VIPs here."	Class privilege	"VIPs" metaphor	Privilege Exposure	Shows status-based linguistic power
"Punjabi makes you sound low-class, that's the stereotype."	Class stigma	Explicit stereotype marker	Stereotype Exposure	Acknowledges but critiques prejudice
"Only the poor stick to their mother tongue, others switch."	Class-based switching	Binary poor/others	Generalization	Associates regional languages with poverty
"Elite schools ban Punjabi on campus."	Institutional ban	"Ban" authoritative	Policy Enforcement	Symbolic policing of language
"English is seen as progress, Punjabi as backwardness."	Binary valuation	Parallel opposites	Ideological Dichotomy	Reveals cultural bias
"Saraiki songs are mocked, English songs are praised."	Cultural hierarchy	Contrastive evaluation	Comparative Discourse	Unequal cultural value assignment
"Rich people sprinkle English to show class."	Performativity	"Sprinkle" metaphor	Symbolic Capital	English as performative cultural capital
"Why is pride in Punjabi seen as ignorance?"	Critical questioning	Rhetorical why	Identity Challenge	Unmasks ideological contradiction
"Our accent decides our respect in society."	Accentism	Deterministic framing	Power Exposure	Accent as symbolic marker of inequality
"Punjabi in parliament? Unthinkable!"	Political exclusion	Hyperbolic "unthinkable"	Symbolic Exclusion	Marginalization in governance domains

Table 4 shows that the language usage in Pakistan is closely connected with the issues of class and power, as the tweets demonstrate. The macro structures are based on class privilege, stigma, institutional bans and political sidelining whereas the micro structures use metaphors (VIPs, sprinkle), binaries (progress/backwardness) and hyperbole (unthinkable) to reveal the discursive

elevation of English and Urdu and devaluation of Punjabi and Saraiki. Privilege exposure, stereotype critique, ideological dichotomy, and symbolic exclusion are discourse strategies which depict how language can be a signifier of social status. It was noted in the tweets that English is a form of symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1991), which is regarded prestigious and respectful in elite schools, work-places, and governance and the Punjabi and Saraiki are looked down upon as low-class, backward, or ignorant. Even in cultural areas, English is glorified and Saraiki and Punjabi forms were ridiculed to increase cultural hierarchies. The data, taken altogether, demonstrates that linguistic inequality is institutional and, more importantly, it is driven by classes, as accents, language choice, and even cultural products define the access to respect and privilege. This highlights the role of language as a stratifying process, marginalizing regional identities in the process of authorizing elite power formations.

Table 5. Digital Resistance and Cultural Reclamation (Tweets 41–50)

Tweet Sample	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Twitter is the only place I can proudly write in Punjabi."	Digital space	Adverb "only"	Digital Empowerment	Shows online as safe space
"Saraiki hashtags unite us across borders."	Collective identity	"Unite" metaphor	Solidarity	Builds community online
"We trend Punjabi poetry to resist erasure."	Digital activism	"Trend", "resist"	Counter-hegemonic	Online activism against marginalization
"Memes in Punjabi spread faster than English ones."	Cultural vitality	Comparative "faster"	Popularization	Counters narrative of irrelevance
"Our stories live here, even if not in textbooks."	Alternative archive	"Live here" metaphor	Digital Archiving	Social media as cultural preservation
"Every tweet in Saraiki is an act of resistance."	Symbolic resistance	Declarative framing	Identity Assertion	Treats language use as activism
"Stop saying regional languages are dying. We are alive!"	Rejection of erasure	Imperative "stop"	Counter-discourse	Rejects death narrative
"We need digital Punjabi dictionaries and apps."	Digital inclusion	Modal verb "need"	Advocacy	Push for language technology
"Young people are reviving Punjabi online."	Youth agency	Progressive aspect "reviving"	Positive Reframing	Youth framed as change agents
"Hashtags are our protest banners."	Metaphorical activism	Metaphor "banners"	Symbolic Protest	Social media framed as protest arena

The tweets in Table 5 emphasize the use of digital spaces as counter-hegemonic spaces in which Punjabis and Saraikis speakers reclaim identity, fight against marginalization and safeguard cultural heritage. The macrostructures refer to digital empowerment, collective solidarity, activism, and cultural archiving, whereas the micro textual structures of metaphor (unite), imperative (stop saying), and modal auxiliary (need) construct social media as a place of safety and a place of protest. Discursive moves, such as counter-discourse, solidarity-building and advocacy and symbolic protest, demonstrate how speakers utilize places such as Twitter to challenge ideologies of dominance, normalize linguistic pride and maintain cultural vibrancy. Online activities, be it trending Punjabi poetry, memes, or the creation of digital tools, are in opposition to the erasure that occurs in the educational and policy sectors. The continued focus on the agency of youth and the use of hashtags indicates that the new generations are transforming linguistic hierarchies by defining digital activism. On the whole, this table indicates that although institutional discourses suppress Punjabi and Saraiki, digital media allows resisting, reclaiming culture, and asserting the identity, turning social media into a symbolic space of protest and alternative archive of oppressed languages.

Table 6. National Education Policy 2009

Policy Excerpt	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Urdu shall remain the medium of instruction at the national level."	Linguistic centralization	Modal "shall remain" – certainty	Authority Assertion	Reinforces Urdu dominance, sidelines regional languages
"English will be taught as a compulsory subject from grade one."	Language prestige	"Compulsory", "from grade one"	Institutional Enforcement	Elevates English as essential cultural capital
"Provincial languages may be taught as additional subjects."	Marginal accommodation	Modal "may" – optionality	Symbolic Tokenism	Delegitimizes regional languages as secondary
"Students should be proficient in Urdu and English for national development."	Progress narrative	"Proficient", "development"	Modernization Discourse	Links progress with Urdu/English, excluding others
"Promotion of regional languages is subject to provincial resources."	Conditional inclusion	"Subject to" – conditional phrasing	Limitation Strategy	Shifts responsibility, downplays state role

The texts of the National Education Policy of 2009 demonstrate a centralization and stratification discourse of the linguistic system, making the Urdu and English the dominant and the prestigious languages and the regional languages such as Punjabi or Saraiki irrelevant. Authority, prestige, optionality, progress and conditionality are demonstrated in the macrostructures, which are supported with the help of microstructures as modal verbs (shall remain, may, should) and the signs of certainty. Discursive tactics such as power claims, institutional policing, symbolic tokenism, modernization discourse, and framing limitation reveal the ways of how the policy reinforces linguistic inequality. Urdu is confirmed as the default medium of instruction, and English promoted as inseparable cultural capital beginning in the first grade, as the two being the keys to national development. Regional languages on the other hand are downgraded into optional, conditional and resource-dependent subjects and thus their role in formal education and nation-building is all but delegitimized. In general, this table shows that the 2009 policy institutionalizes the symbolic power of Urdu and English and suppresses the regional identities. The policy identifies Punjabi and Saraiki as peripheral, which is an expression of a hegemonic ideology, which equates progress with dominant languages, to the detriment of the marginalization and cultural devaluation of local linguistic communities.

Table 7. Punjab Education Policy

Policy Excerpt	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Urdu is to be the primary medium of instruction in schools across Punjab."	Linguistic dominance	"Primary medium" – exclusivity	Standardization	Neglects Punjabi despite majority speakers
"English is encouraged at higher levels to meet global challenges."	Globalization narrative	"Encouraged", "global challenges"	Prestige Building	Frames English as gateway to success
"Mother tongue instruction may be considered in early grades."	Conditional inclusion	"May be considered" – tentative phrasing	Symbolic Gesture	Punjabi minimized, framed as optional

"Textbooks will ensure alignment with national linguistic policy."	Policy alignment	"Ensure alignment" – directive	Authority Reinforcement	Provincial policy mirrors federal Urdu bias
"Cultural values will be preserved through Urdu literature."	Cultural representation	"Preserved" – passive construction	Cultural Gatekeeping	Ignores Punjabi as cultural carrier

The Punjab Education Policy reflects the federalism of languages by prioritizing and supporting Urdu and English in favor of the common language in the province, Punjabi. The macrostructures predict linguistic dominance, globalization, conditionality, policy alignment, and cultural representation with microstructures such as primary medium, global challenges, and may be considered supporting exclusivity and optionality. The discursive practices, which include standardization, prestige-building, symbolic gesture, reinforcement of authority and cultural gatekeeping, are used to show how the policy institutionalizes the Urdu language as the official means of cultural and educational practices and also as the English language as a prestigious means of global movement. Punjabi, in their turn, is reduced to the precarious and non-obligatory position in early education, which is positioned as non-essential and dispensable. Even cultural preservation is explicitly connected with Urdu literature, not taking into consideration the primary role of Punjabi in the very language of Punjab. In general, this table demonstrates that the provincial policy rather than opposing to federal linguistic hierarchies repeats and legitimizes them, continuing to symbolically marginalize the Punjabi even in its own heartland. This is an explicit instance of linguistic hegemony that has been internalized and the language of the majority suppressed in the name of national unity and global competitiveness.

Table 8. Saraiki Regional Education Initiatives

Policy Excerpt	Macrostructure	Microstructure	Discursive Strategy	Interpretation (Ideology/Power)
"Saraiki may be introduced as an elective subject in select schools."	Limited inclusion	Modal "may", qualifier "select"	Restrictive Framing	Saraiki access restricted to few
"Resources for Saraiki textbooks remain limited."	Resource scarcity	"Remain limited" – passive voice	Resource Justification	Excuses neglect through financial framing
"Priority is given to Urdu and English in teacher training programs."	Policy prioritization	"Priority is given"	Resource Allocation	Saraiki marginalized in capacity building
"Saraiki literature can be preserved through cultural forums."	Cultural sidelining	"Can be preserved"	Delegation	Responsibility shifted to non-academic spaces
"Medium of instruction will continue to be Urdu, with English support."	Continuity of dominance	"Continue to be"	Authority Reinforcement	Confirms structural exclusion of Saraiki

The policy documents of the Saraiki show that there has been a tendency of token recognition with no structural empowerment. Macrostructures like limited inclusion, scarcity of resources, policy emphasis, culture sidelining and continuity of dominance depict the containment of Saraiki as the discursive structure of the of education system periphery. Such microstructures as may, remain limited, priority is given and continue to be support its secondary and conditional position. Discursive tactics such as restrictive framing, justification of resources, the allocation bias, delegation, and reinforcement of authorities bring out the systemic exclusion of Saraiki in significant education sectors. On the one hand, symbolic measures (such as the introduction of Saraiki as an elective or the maintenance of its literature in cultural organizations) are put on paper, but the fact is that the real power is still concentrated in Urdu and English, in which the mediums of teaching at

institutions and teacher training are organized. These efforts, in general, indicate the discursive marginalization of Saraiki on grounds of resource scarcity and the protection of cultural values, supporting its further alienation to the mainstream education. The policy maintains the linguistic hierarchy instead of recognizing Saraiki as an active linguistic medium and, therefore, denies the community access to equal access to educational and social economic resources.

5. RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The current research indicated that a number of notable tendencies of linguistic marginalization and symbolic domination are inherent in both the state-level policy documents and general discourse on the topic of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in Twitter. The study, which is informed by Bourdieu concept of cultural capital and based on Van Dijk macrostructure, microstructure and sociocognitive analysis, provided the central findings.

The analysis of 2006-2022 educational policy documents (such as the Single National Curriculum and National Education Policies) demonstrates that the issue of erasing or tokenism in recognition of Punjabi and Saraiki languages persists within the policies. Thus, 2006 NEP policy focuses on the promotion of national integration through Urdu, but it is silent on Punjabi and Saraiki, thus excluding them as the official language capital. Single National Curriculum (2020-2022) focuses Urdu is to be used as the medium of instruction since grade 1 onwards, and English is to be taught as one of the subjects; region languages are grouped in the category of mother tongue/local languages, without any recognition or implementation strategies.

The point of omission is a form of symbolic violence (Bourdieu, 1991), and non-recognition of a language translates to non-recognition of its speakers and their cultural identity and their capacity to have institutional power. Twitter data did present 40 tweets, which revealed that the common discourse evident in the public strengthens negative stereotypes, class-related mockery, and linguistic inferiority towards Punjabi and Saraiki languages would be internalized. Punjabi must remain in the drawing room but not in the parliament. It's not a serious language." This is the exclusion discourse strategy whereby the Punjabi is marginalized by making it unsuitable in terms of its use in formal or institutional context (Van Dijk, 2008).

Saraiki speaking folks are sweet yet backward, Urdu is what makes you a gentleman. This discloses the ideological polarization of the Urdu and Saraiki, in keeping the cultural capital by the dominant forms of language. About 65% of the tweets under analysis involved sarcasm or mockery or dismissal when mentioning Punjabi or Saraiki, especially in political or educative situations. It is only 15 percent of the tweets that were not easily marginalized and appealed to regional pride or protest against discrimination. This discussion not only reproduces stereotypes of language, but also upholds the hierarchy of classes and ethnicity, in a symbolic exclusion of regional languages in elite cultural space (Bourdieu, 1991).

The evidence is that there is an increasing internalization of linguistic inferiority in the regional speakers of the language, especially the Punjabi speakers in the cities where Urdu and English are perceived as the points to modernity and status. Lots of tweets by self-identified speakers of Punjabi apologized or dissociated themselves with the use of Punjabi in social or professional contexts. This is supported by educational policies that do not provide a systematic curriculum to study Punjabi or Saraiki, which suggests their non-institutional status. This is in line with the Bourdieu (1991) who states that symbolic capital is gained not only in the way language is used, but also in its institutionalization which does not exist in these languages in Pakistan.

Despite the prevalence of the marginalization discourse, the research observed the occasional appearance of resistance both at the public and policy levels. Mother-tongue education was demanded by some activists and educators on Twitter with references to the multilingual education guidelines of UNESCO. A 2022 education draft at provincial level typically briefly recognized the requirement of the regional language instruction at the primary level- however, it was not clear how it would be implemented and standardized. These results have shown that discursive resistance is being formed but is not supported by policies nor mass support.

The present results are in line with the past studies that indicated that the Punjabi and other regional languages in Pakistan are still experiencing structural marginalization and symbolic exclusion in the state policies and discourse (Khan et al., 2025; Butt et al., 2025; Hashmi et al., 2025). Nevertheless,

whereas previous research focuses more on erasing policy, or ideological subordinations, the given analysis is in opposition and shows the tightening of these power relations to the masses on the level of Twitter, which advances a more rooted sociocognitive presence of linguistic inferiority.

6.DISCUSSION

This research shows the marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in the areas of power, knowledge, and prestige in Pakistan. With the concept of cultural capital as introduced by Bourdieu (1991), it can be clearly seen that Urdu and English are always placed as the linguistic capital that would help an individual to attain social mobility, whereas the symbols of Punjabi and Saraiki are weakened in a symbolic way. In the institutionalized discourse of policy documents (e.g., the Single National Curriculum and National Education Policies), this hierarchy is indirectly supported by the fact that these languages are not meaningfully integrated in the policy documents. Such lack of official status declines their practical use and diminishes their perceived value by the speakers themselves.

The educational policies in Pakistan support Urdu and English as languages of national integration and development and peripheral and non-essential languages of Punjabi and Saraiki. This is apparent in the National Education Policy (2006) and the Single National Curriculum (2020-2022) which do not even mention Punjabi and Saraiki, or do so in a generalized form as local languages. This discursive silencing in language denotes an omission in language, not only there is no linguistic expression but there is a symbolic de-legitimization of the cultural capital of these languages (Bourdieu, 1991).

In Van Dijk terms, this is an unambiguous application of macrostructural discourse strategy in which ideologies of power and modernity are incorporated into policy discourses in favor of those languages being applied that are indicative of elite status and national identity. Urdu is introduced as the unifying language whereas English is built as the language of global capital and development. This is not extended to Punjabi and Saraiki, a hierarchy of languages in which access to resources, prestige and mobility are mediated not by the mother languages of the majority population, but by the dominant languages.

This kind of discourse perpetuates a monoglossic policy orientation that is, relegating the reality of multilingualism and imposing penalties on the institutionalization of local identities. The Twitter posts were a distinctive prism of ordinary ideologies and societal views on language. The generalization of the dismissive or mocking language towards Punjabi and Saraiki on social media is the internalization of the dominant ideologies (Van Dijk, 2008). Users reproduce elite discourses by linking Urdu and English to smartness and prestige, showing discursive power going round both informal and formal centers.

Nevertheless, alternative forms of resistance emerge through digital space, as well. There was a substantial number of tweets that called linguistic justice, condemning linguistic elitism that marginalizes indigenous languages. It indicates that there is a rising sociolinguistic awareness in these posts especially in younger and educated users. Though small and insignificant, such expressions are critical to the hegemonic narratives challenge and to provoke the discussion of the population.

Twitter talk demonstrates the reproduction of hierarchies as well as constrained resistance to the hierarchies. Linguistic mockery or dismissal against Punjabi and Saraiki was found in more than 65 percent of the examined tweets, and this point supports the notion that these languages are not as prestigious, valued, or serious as they should be. For instance, one tweet read: Punjabi is too coarse to pass in more sophisticated circles. Talk Urdu, otherwise you are disrespectful.

This tweet proves the internalization of symbolical domination, when the language speakers, who speak the mother language accept the low position of this language, to receive the access to the symbolic and social capital (Bourdieu, 1991). With respect to CDA, these are micro-level discursive practices that reiterate macro-level ideological arrangements in other words, hegemonic language ideologies being strengthened in terms of the daily engagements (Van Dijk, 2008).

Nonetheless, approximately 15% of tweets had resistance discourse. Other users claimed the significance of Punjabi and Saraiki in identity, heritage, and expression of emotion, and they required

to be included in the field of education and administration. One such tweet stated: What is wrong with banning Punjabi in schools? Is not it the native language of the most? Language shame is colonization by some other way.

These kinds of tweets denote discursive consciousness and an increased awareness to the users regarding linguistic injustice. Nevertheless, this opposition is still disorganized and lacks institutional appeal, and this is what restricts its ability to transform. It is not clear whether this online resistance is being delivered into actual policy change or a change in power structure.

Although educational policy discourse is not explicitly oppressive, it is a form of symbolic violence which is strategic silence (Bourdieu, 1991). Punjabi and Saraiki are sometimes recognized at provincial level but not in the implementation plans on national level. This exclusion not only is not neutral, but it carries out a gate keeping role that deprives these languages of institutional recognition and any formalized channels of growth. The state does not only make identities marginal but also denies communities of their linguistic rights by failing to appreciate these languages in education and in general discourse. This is in line with Van Dijk (2006) idea that the hegemony of a group is preserved by the dominant groups through the control of the discourse of the masses and defines what is what can be regarded as legitimate knowledge.

An interplay between institutional discourse (policies) and cultural capital (language prestige and utility) is the best way to understand the symbolic and functional marginalization of the Punjabi and Saraiki. Bourdieu (1991) states that the ability to gain access to educational, economic, and social progress is dependent on linguistic capital. In Pakistan, the currencies of this capital are Urdu and English and the institutional discourses do help to construct and maintain this linguistic economy. Panjabi and Saraiki do not have the symbolic capital of national languages since their implementation in national curricula is not structured, which makes them practically useless at the areas of power (education, law, administration). This lack causes language shift, the speakers themselves start preferring major languages to climb the ladder- hence, continuing marginalization.

Also, the lack of policy promotes social attitudes on Twitter: that Punjabis and Saraiki do not belong in the modern or elite. Such discursive conformity between the societal attitudes and the state institutions is indicative of the sociocognitive model introduced by Van Dijk: it is the elite discourses that influence the common opinion of the people, which subsequently strengthens the ideologies reflected in institutional practices. Therefore, the marginalization is not accidental but an ideologically created, reproduced, and re-worked at the discursive locations, creating a cycle of symbolic ghettoization and cultural disempowerment of the speakers of Punjabi and Saraiki.

The results of the research point to the strong interaction between symbolic marginalization (ideological) and functional marginalization (institutional). Symbolic marginalization is utilized in the discourses of shame, ridicule, and perceived backwardness and functional marginalization is achieved through curriculum-design, language-in-education policy and official communications. This combination forms a self-perpetuating process of exclusion in which indigenous languages get stuck in the cycle of underuse and underrating. This multifaceted interaction demonstrates that linguistic inequality is both a predisposing and an outcome factor of unequal power relations within the Pakistani society that is often based on colonial past as well as reinforced by the state structures along postcolonial lines.

7.Implications

Introducing Punjabi and Saraiki as first language or powerful second languages in early school curriculum would enable children to learn in their native language and enhance not only their cognitive but also their identity. Policymakers need to go beyond the symbolic mentions and invest in the curricular inclusion, teacher training and resource development of such languages. The national and provincial governments, media, and social influencers have to strive to de-stigmatize the regional languages, and place them as a valuable cultural resource. The campaign by the government might encourage linguistic pride and awareness of multilingualism as a strength and not a weakness. The social media should also be used strategically by the civil society and advocacy groups to construct counter-narratives, strengthen the voice of resistance and hold the educational and cultural institutions accountable. Mobilization of Twitter and other platforms as counter-hegemonic can be promoted and used by youth and communities of diaspora.

8.CONCLUSION

This study examined linguistic marginalization of Punjabi and Saraiki languages in Pakistan based on a Critical Discourse Analysis approach of educational policy texts and Twitter conversations. With reference to the theory of cultural capital proposed by Bourdieu (1991) and the socio-cognitive model of CDA by Van Dijk (2006, 2008), the results showed that there is a systematic nature of institutional neglect and discursive devaluation of these regional languages. Policy analysis revealed that national education policies such as the Sharif Commission in 1959, Education Policies in 2006 and 2017, and the Single National Curriculum (202022) do not have any meaningful inclusion of Punjabi and Saraiki in their policies, making Urdu and English the languages of power, prestige, and social mobility. This marginalization is a kind of symbolic violence, which deprives millions of the right to speak, and supports a limited understanding of the national identity. Twitter analysis pointed to the possibility of reproduction of dominant linguistic ideologies on the social media as well as spaces of resistance and reclaiming. Although a large number of users do represent the internalized opinion that Punjabi and Saraiki were worse or improper to be used in the mainstream discussion, some also argue against it, which requires the linguistic justice and equality. Finally, this paper concludes that linguistic marginalization in Pakistan is not only systematic but ideological as it operates on the nexus of educational policy, social perception, and discourse. This injustice needs structural changes, discourse, and social political determination.

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