

**Maya Khemlani David**

*Faculty of Languages and Linguistics,  
University of Malaya*

## THE SINDHIS OF SINGAPORE – LANGUAGE MAINTENANCE OR LANGUAGE SHIFT?

### SUMMARY

This article examines the choice of languages in the home, work and religious domains of a minority ethnic community (Sindhis) in Singapore. It presents sociolinguistic observations based on a qualitative study of 8 Sindhi families consisting of 28 Singaporean Sindhis. The study found that a mixed discourse appears to be the new language option of community members who have to accommodate to the linguistic preferences of both young and old members of the community. The varieties of language options open to and used by the Singapore Sindhi speech community is not uniform. As respondents possess differing levels of proficiency in Sindhi and English, the mixed discourse does not only reflect the accommodative strategy used by community members in interaction, but also their own particular linguistic preferences. The Singaporean Sindhi community is English proficient and there is a tendency for many Sindhis to move towards its dominant use, even in intracommunity interactions. The use of dominant English in discourse with peers or younger community members as contrasted with a Sindhi dominant code switch with older community members indicates that it is merely a matter of time before the family moves away from the use of the ethnic or ancestral language. With the demise of the older community members, English will be the dominant language of the community. The need to accommodate will no longer exist though code mixes and switches may still be used to refer to cultural and religious items.

**KEY WORDS:** Sindhi, Sindhis, Singapore, mixed discourse, code switching, language maintenance, language shift, accommodation, English

### Introduction

The study of change in habitual language use is known as the study of language shift. In order to ascertain whether the ethnic or ancestral language is being maintained by Singaporean Sindhis this paper examines the choice of languages in the home and religious domain among family and Sindhi friends. The Sindhis are a diasporic community and are a global tribe who has a widespread international communal network. The study presents sociolinguistic observations based on a qualitative and quantitative study of 8 related Sindhi families, which consisted of 28 people who are related to the researcher. The aim of the research was to determine whether the Sindhi language among Singapore Sindhis is being maintained or whether it has become marginalized in favour of English, the elite language.

## **The setting**

The dominant ethnic group in Singapore are the Chinese; the Malays and Indians make up the minority ethnolinguistic communities in multilingual, multicultural Singapore. 64% of the Indians in Singapore are of Tamil speaking origin (Saravanan, 1993: 139). The rest of the Indian population are Malays, Bengalis, Punjabis, Gujeratis and Sindhis.

The 1990 census report notes a shift amongst all three ethnic groups towards English, which has become the predominant household language at the expense of Chinese dialects, Malay and Tamil. The 1990 data show that English is used in 34.8%, Malay in 13.5% and Tamil in 43.7% of Singapore households. In Singapore, English has assumed an increasing role as a medium of intraethnic communication, as the language of friendship and even the language of the home domain (Tay, 1983).

## **Studies of another Indian group – the Tamil community of Singapore**

It would be appropriate to situate the study of a minority Indian group against that of a majority Indian group i.e. the Tamils. A study of the Tamil community in Singapore reveals that even though Tamil has an official recognition as one of the four main languages used in Singapore, Tamil is declining in use compared to the other official languages. Saravanan (1993) argues that the social identity of the English educated Tamil in Singapore is based less on ethnicity, sex, religion or occupational background but more on socio-economic status and greater social mobility. English educated Tamils express their identity not through ethnicity but through nationality and linguistic choice. Nationality is expressed in being a Singaporean and linguistic choice is in choosing a prestigious language, which is English, over a less prestigious one.

This choice of language code, whether Tamil or English, is strongly correlated with socioeconomic classification. According to the 1980 census survey (Tay, 1983) the higher the income, the smaller the number of persons using Tamil as the principal household language. The linguistic choices of the Singapore Sindhi community will be studied against this backdrop of diminishing use of Tamil by the larger Indian community.

## **Methodology**

A questionnaire study (N=28) of language maintenance in the Singapore Sindhi community is accompanied by observations of language use in the domains of home, religion and intracommunity friendship networks (Table 1). The study observes language choice and use among 9 Singapore Sindhi families at home, in

religion and friendship domains. The 9 families consisting of 28 members of the Singapore Sindhi community are related to each other due to kinship ties.

Table 1: Respondents to questionnaire

Below 19	20–39	40–59	Above 60
7	8	10	3

## History of the Singaporean Sindhi community

According to the Singapore Sindhi Merchant Association, which was established in 1921 in order to promote a sense of togetherness and ethnic solidarity, there are 10,000 Sindhis in Singapore. The community is closely knit and ties are based on kinship and friendship networks. Professionally, the community has been traditionally a trading one, initially in the textile industry but more recently, there has occurred some diversification from the textile trade to electronics etc.

The Sindhis who initially came to Singapore are mainly from the *Bhaibund* trading class i.e. from the trading community. The Sindhi *Bhaibunds* are traders by heritage who derive their trading tradition from their regional loci in Sind which was one of the four major overseas trading zones in the Indian sub-continent (Aswani, 1995: 10). The town of Hyderabad near Karachi was the home of many of the first generation of Singapore Sindhis. Singapore, being the half way point between India and China, became the natural converging point for trade for the Sindhi *Bhaibunds*. The Amils who comprise of the Sindhi professional class only migrated to Singapore more recently i.e. with the partition of India (Aswani, 1995: 17).

Sindhi workers initially came to Singapore to manage, direct and work on a contract basis for huge international Sindhi owned retail and wholesale import and export textile business enterprises. Families jointly ran these firms in an interconnected international and/or regional network. The pioneer Sindhi business in Singapore was established by the latter half of the nineteenth century. Such firms included Assomull & Company (1864), K. A. J. Chotimal (1882), J. T. Chanrai (1892), G. Ramchand (1910–12) and M. B. Melwani (1906). Such Sindhi firms were generally found in High Street, North Bridge Road and Arab Street, which were ethnically dominated Sindhi enclaves (Aswani, 1995). The oldest Sindhi firm of Singapore i.e. Assomull had branches in Hong Kong, Manila, Japan, Saigon, Hanoi, Shanghai, Australia, Penang and Singapore.

However, with the partitioning of India the early Sindhis of Singapore moved from an initial immigrant stock of sojourners to a settled community. Furthermore, with partition more Sindhis came to Singapore to seek jobs and new homes. They were attracted by Singapore's economic viability as an entrepot port for goods, its sound infrastructure, free trading port and politically stable environment.

Although initially many Sindhis worked for these large trading companies, today many of them have opened their own businesses, initially as door to door

peddlers or owners of small businesses who then quickly moved up the economic ladder to become either wholesale or retail merchants. According to Sandhu (1969), the eclectic attitude of the Sindhi Hindus proved to be profitable in business. Their religion stresses Calvinist virtues of hard work, thrift and maximisation of material wealth. Today, many of the new generation of Sindhis in Singapore are educated and have become professionals.

Culturally, the Sindhis practice patrilocal residence after marriage and a joint family structure has traditionally been the norm although this pattern is slowly changing to unit or nuclear family system (Chandiramani, 1992). Marriage is an integral part of kinship as arranged marriages are still the norm. Sindhi brides are imported or exported and the dowry system flourishes among the community. The Sindhis practice kinship rights and observe social obligations with ethnic members in Singapore and across geographical boundaries across the world.

As for knowledge of languages, the first generation male Sindhi migrants had English on arrival in Singapore. According to Aswani (1995: 21) it was through their knowledge of the English language that Sindhis settled and made contacts in many regions of the world.

## **Results**

### **Arranged marriages and effect on language choice among the respondents**

Arranged marriages are still the norm among the Sindhi community. Sindhis have an international network and inevitably this has a ramification on language code and choice. Due to the arranged marriage system the second generation Sindhi male migrants may have first generation Sindhi wives who come from as diverse regions as Hong Kong, Indonesia, Japan, Korea, Las Palmas and the Caribbean Islands. Many of these young Sindhi women, even those from India, tend to be English proficient and dominant. The result is minimal communication problems with the English-speaking Singaporean Sindhis. However, one of the respondents who came from Spain and only knew Spanish had to learn English to communicate with her husband, as they both knew minimal Sindhi. Today, the household language between the couple is mainly English. Another first generation Singapore migrant from Indonesia who married a second generation Sindhi also uses mainly English with her Singaporean Sindhi spouse and children though both women switch to the language of their childhood i.e. Spanish and Indonesian respectively when speaking to their siblings or with ethnic community members coming from similar countries. At times, the Indonesian born Sindhi wife would slip into Indonesian even in interactions with her English dominant Singapore born second-generation Sindhi spouse. The result is at times non-reciprocal code in peer interaction but the languages are not English and Sindhi but in this case English and Indonesian.

When young Singaporean Sindhi women marry Sindhis from other parts of the world they generally face no communication trauma as the new generation of spouses and in-laws also use English with them. The 24-year-old Sindhi daughter of one person in the sample, who is now married to a Sindhi who works in New York and whose in-laws live in Montreal, uses English with her in-laws.

Due to Singapore's rather liberal immigration rules with regards to foreign-born male spouse of Singapore women the general norm of first generation migrant being married to a spouse of the same generation is not maintained. Second generation Singapore Sindhi women may have spouses who are first generation migrants in Singapore. These first generation men may again come from diverse parts of the world and from a range of different socio-economic backgrounds. This would affect choice of language in the home domain. For instance, a young Singaporean woman who had married a Sindhi from a hamlet in India and who lived with her in-laws in India had to revert very quickly from her dominant use of English to her dormant and passive Sindhi with her in-laws and even with her spouse. Now back in Singapore she uses a mixed discourse of dominant English with some Sindhi with her children, while the Indian born Sindhi spouse, who now works in Singapore, tends to use more Sindhi than English in the home domain. The result is that the children who lived with their paternal grandparents in India until the age of 8 and 9 are generally more proficient in Sindhi as compared to the Singapore born and bred Sindhi child in the sample. The speech of these children in interaction with their Sindhi peers in Singapore tends to be English dominant although in the home domain they tend to use more Sindhi with their father.

Another from the sample, a second generation Singapore Sindhi woman who is now in her fifties acknowledged that her husband, who had been educated in elite boarding schools in India, did not like her to use Sindhi, as even in childhood he had used English with his mother. The secret language the couple now use when they do not want others to understand them is not the ethnic language but Japanese, which they learnt during their stay and work in Japan. Sindhi is hardly used in this household except during the visit of older relatives and even then the discourse quickly slips into a mixed English/Sindhi one, where English is dominant. .

The varieties of language options open to and used by the Singapore Sindhi speech community is not uniform as noted in the above examples. Being a well-travelled community the result is that their life histories and experiences impinge on the dominant language used. Some of the second generation Singapore Sindhis remember learning Thai and Japanese as first languages when they were young as their parents lived in Bangkok and Tokyo respectively. However, they have forgotten these languages as their parents came to work in Singapore. Generally, however, due to its international community and trading networks, the Sindhi community is English proficient and there is a tendency for many Sindhis to move towards the dominant use of this international language, even in intracommunity interactions.

## Language choice of older Singaporean Sindhis (G1s)

There is a tendency to accommodate to the language choices of the younger members of the community. A 60-year-old mother who uses Sindhi with her peers switches to dominant English with her 35 year old daughter and son-in-law. Such accommodation is extended not only to younger members of the family but also to younger members of the community. However, such accommodation is often not complete. The older community members maintain their authority by maintaining some use of the ethnic language in a code mixed discourse where English is the dominant code. To a younger member of the community who is purchasing some items from her, the older community member accommodates by using dominant English but simultaneously uses nominal Sindhi linguistic items, which do not carry much meaning. The nominal use of Sindhi helps her to assume a position of authority *vis à vis* the English dominant younger Sindhis. The following example “Black *mana* (means) tussle is also black.” the nominal use of Sindhi is noted in the mixed discourse.

On the other hand, when a linguistic item, which carries core meaning, is used in an interaction with younger community members, older members accommodate by translating the Sindhi linguistic item, which carries meaning to English. This should enable comprehension on the part of the younger speech partner. For instance, when a mother told her son to “Use *kanchi*” she immediately rephrased to say, “Use scissors”. Such an echoing strategy used by older community members to ensure understanding across the generations was also noted in the Malaysian data (see David, 1996).

At times, when older community members insist on maintaining the use of the ethnic language in interactions with younger Sindhis, the result invariably is a non-reciprocal code choice as seen in the Example 1. Such non-reciprocal code use indicates that the younger community members have a passive knowledge of Sindhi but their spoken linguistic preference is English.

### Example 1: Non-reciprocal Code Choice

Mother: Sonu *hi gharo?* (How much?)

Daughter: I just opened a new one

Where the extended family still exists different codes are used, with different languages holding centre stage for different generations. The dominant code, in interaction across ages, as earlier indicated, is generally a mixed discourse, whereby the older ethnic member tends to use more Sindhi but with some English lexical items, while the younger members tend to use a more dominant English discourse with nominal Sindhi lexical items. This indicates constant accommodation by both parties.

Even in peer interaction, the older interlocutor tends to use more than one language. Sindhi and English are generally used in a code switched discourse although for the older interlocutor, the dominant code is Sindhi (see Example 2) while the younger community member’s dominant code is English (Example 3) as shown in the following examples.

**Example 2: Older member's Sindhi dominant code**

*Kathro* force *kanda ain* (They force a lot)

*Kuch* miss *thio ai?* (Is anything missing?)

Actually *kad nae moklai tha sutee gaal ai* (actually if she doesn't send the card it would be better)

*Ma* fill *thi kara* (I will fill it up)

*Ma thokae* pick up (I will pick you up)

*Thava mukae* invite *kana kyo aye*

For the Sindhi dominant older Sindhis, the English forms used are at times transliterations of Sindhi as noted in the following quote "You want me to come at 7 a.m. and sit on you".

**Example 3: Younger member's English dominant code**

Mummy I want to do *mehndi* (henna)

When is the *puja?* (prayer)

I want to go for the *sangeet* (songs are sung during the *sangeet* – to celebrate a wedding)

I am missing your *achar* (pickles)

He says he's got *mamand* (guests)

No wonder do *nakra*

In multilingual societies, speech communities have more than one language in their speech repertoires and the phenomenon of code switching is a fairly established means of communication. Code switching is seen when a speaker switches from one language to another within an utterance directed at the same listener, or moves from one language to another when speaking to different speech partners. The topic, locale and the interlocutors may determine such choice of the language code. Tay (1983) in researching Singapore's Chinese community also noticed such code mixing and switching in the home domain.

## Language choice of G2s

G2s tend to shift codes depending on the interlocutor. Sindhi is dominant in speech with older interlocutors and English is dominant in conversation with their peers and younger interlocutors. "If I use only Sindhi with my Sindhi friends they will think I am a freak" said a G2 respondent, now in his forties. The conversation among G2s generally consists of more than one language but English is dominant in this mixed discourse (see Example 4a and 4b).

**Example 4a: Mixed Discourse of G2**

A to B: *Hi suthao ai* (This is good)

B: Short

C: All are wearing short

D: Very nice

B: *Kithae ai* ? (Where is it?)

D: *Alai* (I don't know)

#### **Example 4b**

G: I think I am wrong so *cha thio* (what happened) when she's there my husband cannot smoke. She came for two weeks, stay two months. *Ghar tha hinjo tha aye* (The house is his). I cannot afford to give the hotel money.

R: What did she say?

G: Chapter closed. *Gal bitte*. (The matter ended there) Parish *die ji* (is her) birthday. *Chaeng* (She said) you bring everybody, so my husband doesn't go. I'm trying to plaster the hole. The hole is done.

There are many functions for the mixed discourse. For instance, in order to assert authority G2s shift to some items of Sindhi in their English dominant speech when they give directives or instructions to younger interlocutors (Example 5).

#### **Example 5: Code mixed discourse of G2 to give directives**

Mother: Take your umbrella. *Jaldi kar*. Umbrella *kithe ai*? (Be quick... where?)

Mother: *Jaldi kar*. *Kelas ka* (Be quick. Finish it)

Son: Cannot

Mother to daughter: *Vaar tye Jaldi kar* (Comb your hair Be quick)

Due to their various histories G2s tend at times to use not two but three languages in this mixed discourse. G1s married to Singapore G2s tend to bring into their dominant English the language of the setting they grew up in, as noted in the following discourse of a Sindhi woman married to a second generation Singapore Sindhi but who originally came from Indonesia. Her discourse consists of three languages: Indonesian, Sindhi and English. English (see Example 6) is, however, the dominant language.

#### **Example 6: Trilingual Mixed Discourse**

Purple colour *aye* (is) first class. I bring. Who wear orange? No need to iron that one. *Kapro* (the material) **itu putus**\*.(tore) Purple *rao* (scarf)?

**Ini pun mahu** (This is also wanted). . You **ini** you better wear. She can wear. *Kana hi sutho aye?* (Isn't this good?)

### **Language choice of younger Singaporean Sindhis (G3s)**

English dominates the code switching linguistic habits of young Singaporean Sindhis in peer interactions. The use of Sindhi in this code mixed discourse is nomi-

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\* Indonesian is in bold

nal. The functions of the Sindhi lexical items are generally cultural and/or religious. For instance, since kinship relationships are important in the community, younger ethnic members know the lexical items, which refer to such ties, and these items are used in their English dominant speech. Sindhi kinship terms consist of separate kinship terms of reference describing each genealogical relationship. For instance, there are four terms to refer to uncle as seen in Table 2. Other kinship terms used in English dominant speech of the younger community members include *dado*, *dadi*; *nano*, *nani*; *chacho*, *chachi*; *puppi*, *puppar*; *mamo*, *mami*. Expressions like “My nani (maternal grandmother) was there” or “My *poofi* is too much” are common.

Table 2: Sindhi linguistic items for Uncle

	Linguistic variants for uncle
father’s brother	<i>chacho</i>
mother’s brother	<i>mamo</i>
father’s sister’s husband	<i>puppar</i>
mother’s sister’s husband	<i>masar</i>

Culturally loaded items referring to life cycle rituals (“They had *jania*”, (i.e. thread ceremony for Hindu male children) and customs like *chati* (horoscope), *dahjo* (dowry), *boshni* (a cultural event to celebrate a wedding) are also used in the mixed code of which English is the dominant one.

Sindhi food is also referred to in English dominant speech. The odd Sindhi lexical item in English dominated speech often refers to Sindhi dishes, e.g. *metai* (sweetmeat) or *sai bhaji* (spinach). It is not unusual to hear code mixed expressions like “Mama you want *pokoro*?”

Certain actions can only be indicated by the use of culturally loaded Sindhi lexical items. For instance, the use of the term *nakra* which means to make a fuss, to keep on saying no when given a present. This word is often heard in dominant English utterances like “Don’t make *nakra*” Another culturally loaded action item is the word *perapao*, which means to bend and touch the feet of the elders as a mark of respect and to get their blessings. A third generation lady speaking to her peer in English was heard to use the Sindhi item in the following sentence: “My children say you were wrong. You have to *paraepao*.”

Sindhi is also resorted to for jokes and to tease a speech partner. The favourite Sindhi word for this is *chari* (mad). Sindhi is also resorted to in English dominant discourse for negative or pejorative remarks. “They have to leave by 1 a. m. It depends on how much *beka beka* (chatting) they do”, “You going *jua*?” (gambling).

Younger members of the community know certain cultural items but appear to think in English as manifested in the following example. A younger community member speaking to an older ethnic interlocutor initially used the word “trousseau” then accommodated to the older interlocutor by using the Sindhi lexical item “My trousseau my *dahjo*.” Such replication of terminology in different languages was

also noted in the speech of older interlocutors who switched from the Sindhi lexical item to the English term for the same reference in order to accommodate the younger speaker's linguistic abilities. Such replication was also noted in a study of the Sindhi community in Malaysia (David, 1996).

Linguistic creativity results from the combination of English structure to Sindhi lexical items. For instance, when a father used a mixed discourse to assert parental authority, "Go and *sanān*" (bathe), the child responded: "I'm *sanaing*".

In interactions with older Sindhi speakers who have passive knowledge of English, young Sindhis accommodate nominally. Such nominal use of Sindhi is seen in the use of Sindhi particles like *ne* or empty fillers like *bas* (enough) in English dominant speech as seen in the Example 7.

**Example 7: Nominal Use of Sindhi**

*Gold you have ne Auntie?*

*So bas that's all?*

*Mummy hi extra ho. I promised Naina*

The variety of English used by the young Sindhis in informal conversation with their peers, is a Singapore variety as seen in Example 8. It must be emphasised that this variety is used only in informal discourse. The acrolect is used in formal situations.

**Example 8: Basilect Variety of Singapore English in informal situations**

You come and see me better (It would be better if you came to see me)

This will last you longer (This is longer lasting i.e. more permanent)

Handle one (The one with a handle)

He got come (He came)

The traffic was jammed throughout

I leave you 12.30 (drop you off)

He's no good eh? (Is he not good?)

Lousy parker! (Someone who has parked)

Got see TV what? (Did you see it on TV?)

This one do like that (Do it this way)

I go in the sun so long what (I have been in the sun for a long time)

## Variety of codes in Singapore Sindhi households

The choice of codes in Sindhi households shows a society in transition with interlocutors switching between codes depending on who their speech partners are. For instance, a 40-year-old third generation Singapore Sindhi father uses only English with his wife and 12 and 10-year-old children and a Sindhi/English code mix with his 70-year-old mother who lives with him (Example 9)

**Example 9: Language Accommodation – Code Shifting and Switching across Generations**

40-year-old sons with mother

*Keri language peri peri?* Before school? (Which language did you first learn?)

*Sindhi khaki sikhae?* *Panje* parents? (Where did you learn Sindhi? From..?)

*Tinjo pi Sindhi ho* or mixed *ho*? (Was your father a pure Sindhi or was he... ?)

*Who khaste pario?* Primary school? (Up to which level did you study?)

*Tu English ghar mae cho use kandi aing?* (Why do you use English in the home?)

The grandmother in turn uses Sindhi with him but a code mix of Sindhi/English with her grandchildren. The grandchildren respond to their grandmother either in monosyllabic, i.e. single word Sindhi utterances like *Ha* or *Na* (Yes and No) or switch to English, which she has a passive knowledge of. Such a variety of code choices are shown in Table 32

*Table 3: Range of Codes in Singapore Sindhi Household*

	Languages spoken in a Sindhi Household
J with son R:	Sindhi
J with grandchildren:	Sindhi and/or Sindhi/English
Grandchildren with J:	Monosyllabic Sindhi, non-verbal responses or English
R with J	Sindhi/English
R with children	English
R with wife	English
Children with Parents	English

The use of dominant English in discourse with peers or younger community members as contrasted with a Sindhi dominant code switch with older community members indicates that it is merely a matter of time before the family moves away from the use of the ethnic or ancestral language. With the demise of the older community members, English will be the dominant language of the community. The need to accommodate will no longer exist though code mixes and switches may still be used to refer to cultural and religious items.

In another household where the parents use a mixed discourse of Sindhi/English among themselves their three children (aged 24, 22 and 19) use only English both in sibling interactions and even in talk with their parents. Such variance in the preferred code of the siblings as compared to the preferred code of the parents again reveals that it is merely a matter of time before the family becomes English speaking. At present the parents have compromised and accommodate to their grown children’s language preferences by using more English in their interactions with the former.

Ethnic members representing the larger society in Singapore tend to use a variety of codes even in a short discourse as seen in Example 10 where Sindhi, Malay and English are all used. Here R, in her fifties, talking to G in her thirties moves from Sindhi to English while G moves from English to Malay. Such constant switching and shifting results in a multilingual code use, which is not uncommon in this part of the world (see David, 1999).

**Example 10: Trilingual Mixed Discourse Across Generations in Singapore Sindhi Homes**

R: *Kari* bas? (Which bus?)

G: Feeder service

R: What is your number?

G: Dua, tiga empat\* (two, three four).

## Language choice at the work place

In the domain of business, parents shift to Sindhi if an outsider is around and the Sindhi language then functions to exclude the non-ethnic speech partner. A mother who was seen to use English with her children reprimanded her daughter in Sindhi in the presence of the outsider because the former had given a low quote to a customer. Even in peer interaction when English is the dominant code, Sindhi is resorted too in order to exclude an outsider. The mother was talking to her peer in dominant English, and then used Sindhi to describe the ethnicity of some Caucasian customers as shown Example 11.

**Example 11: Mixed Discourse to Exclude Outsiders**

*Bekra* (goat) *ayo ai* (The goat man i.e. the Australian has come)

*Sau* (\$100) *ayo ai* (The green note i.e. the American has come)

In code mixed discourse the section of the message, which is private, will be in Sindhi, while the non-confidential part of the message will be in English. Speaking in front of a shopkeeper the Sindhi speaker said, “*Hithae* market *sasti kana aye* (it is not cheap in this market), but we have no choice”. Another businessman informed his peer with whom he had been using English “*hi mathae mae sur*” (he, i.e. the customer, is giving me a headache). Sindhi thus takes on the function of an exclusionist language, i.e. to exclude outsiders. The irony is that Sindhi’s role as an ethnic marker and a language for members of the same speech community has declined and that a function is found for the ethnic language only when outsiders are in the vicinity and need to be excluded from a private piece of information. However, as more and more young Sindhi members move away from the family business to professional fields, this need to use Sindhi as a private language at the work place will diminish.

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\* Malay is underscored

## Language choice in the religious domain

Religious functions conducted in the Sindhu House (a Club House for Singaporean Sindhis) were observed with a view to determining the choice of codes in the religious domain. One of the functions observed to determine choice of the spoken codes of the Singaporean Sindhi community in the religious domain was the annual Sai Baba birthday celebrations held at the Sindhu House on 23<sup>rd</sup> November 1996.

After these *bhajans* (hymns) were sung a speech on Sai Baba was delivered. The speech by a leading member of the community was made entirely in English except for the closure “*Om* (peace) Sai Baba”. However, the announcements made by another member of the executive committee of the Sindhi Merchant’s Association of Singapore to a crowd of about 200 ethnic members was in a mixed Sindhi/English code (Example 12).

At times this mixed discourse moved to entire stretches in English like “Happy birthday to you Sai Baba”; “Children drama mime; please give him a big round of applause”; “Wherever you are Mrs. Mita, can anybody spot her?” “Last round of applause for those who have contributed behind the scene”. Thanks were acknowledged in English.

The use of English lexical items in the mixed discourse (Example 12) to refer to specific words like voice-mail, drama, circular, lady, tent and sound system, coordinator, sponsorship, president etc. is understandable seeing that such terms refer to concepts seldom used in Sindhi. However, where English lexical items like enjoy, birthday, daughter are replacing Sindhi lexical items, this suggests either a reduced proficiency in Sindhi or a easy comfort and use of English.

### Example 12a: Mixed discourse at Religious Function

*bharan jo* drama (children’s)

birthday *aye* (it is)

circular *aye*

*lady jo ghar mae aye*. (it is held in a lady’s house)

*jako* (who) tent and sound system sponsorship *aye asajo* (has our) president

*thavi* enjoy *karanda* (you will enjoy)

*jako* dance *thava dito* (the dance that you saw)

*hinae kae* gift (for her the gift)

Mr. Mohan stage *mae atchae* (come)

Mano Sabnani *ji* (his) daughter

*thanji* competition (your)

*hi* (this) combination *aye* (is)

drama *ja* (of) main coordinator *jaka ain* (who are)

*bharan kae* control *karan* (to control the children)

The mixed discourse (Example 12b) in a formal public speech made in the religious domain to an all-ethnic crowd is merely reflective of the mixed discourse of

the larger Singaporean society (see Tan, 1988). The mixed discourse appears to be the new language option to community members who have to accommodate to the linguistic preferences of both young and old members of the all-Sindhi audience. This juggling between the two languages is an accommodative strategy, which appears to fulfil the needs of an ethnic audience, some of whom have a passive knowledge of one language and the others of another. As members of the sample possess different levels of proficiency in Sindhi and English, the mixed discourse does not only reflect the accommodative strategy used by community members in interaction, but also their own particular linguistic preferences.

### **Example 12b: Language Accommodation in Religious Discourse**

*Ekra* (one) item *thave dito* (you saw) *background* (children) *mae kiyo bharan jo dancing*. *Hune jo (its) choreographer ain (is) ... . Hinae mae (in it) volunteers- Please give big applause to Sabnani family.*

*Thavi disande hinae (you will see) hall mae baba jo sayings and hinae jo (his) help kapae (required) and it is none other than...*

*baba hina saal mae (in this year) the year of the truth chao ai (has said)*

In the announcements made in the religious domain the speaker also translated certain Sindhi words like *krodh*-anger; *moh*-attachment, *kaam*-lust; *nafrat*-hated to English thus suggesting an awareness that these items were beyond the understanding of the Sindhi audience and thus inferring a loss in linguistic proficiency on the part of the ethnic listeners.

## **Choice of written script**

In a handout to the all-Sindhi congregation the hymns were written in Romanised script thus indicating a loss in written skills. Even the words of the hymns were not Sindhi but Hindi.

## **Conclusion**

English is widely used in all domains, but the generally used English is interlaced with Sindhi linguistic items. The result is a mixed discourse or what is generally called code switching. Peer group interactions of those in the fifties and below is English dominant. As long as social and economic elitism is related to English, Sindhi will have little significance. In the case of the Singapore Sindhis, dominant English has replaced Sindhi in interactions among the younger (below fifties) community members. However, replacive bilingualism is not the norm, as in the case of many studies of language shift. However, what has emerged is a mixed discourse with English being the dominant language in the discourse but not at the complete exclusion of Sindhi. Sindhi is relegated to single linguistic items, which refer to

cultural or religious terminology. Its functions are limited to single linguistic items to signal a tease, a joke or a pejorative description. In peer interaction among older community members Sindhi is still dominant, but the rampant accommodation habits of the older community members does put Sindhi at risk.

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**Maya Khemlani David**

## **SINGAPURSKI SINDI – OČUVANJE JEIKA ILI JEZIČNI POMAK**

### **SAŽETAK**

U radu se ispituje izbor jezika u kući, na poslu i u domeni religije manjinske etničke skupine (Sindi) u Singapuru. Sindi su iseljenička zajednica i selilačko pleme sa široko rasprostranjenim međunarodnim etničkim mrežama. Rad daje sociolingvistička zapažanja temeljena na kvalitativnom ispitivanju 8 sindskih obitelji koje se sastoje od 28 singapurskih Sindija. Cilj istraživanja bio je odrediti je li sindski jezik sačuvan među singapurskim Sindima ili je marginaliziran u korist engleskoga, elitnog jezika. Istraživanje je pokazalo da je miješani govor, koji se katkada sastoji ne samo od dvaju nego i od triju jezika, postao novom opcijom pripadnika zajednice koji se moraju prilagoditi lingvističkim sklonostima i mladih i starih članova. Raznolikosti jezičnih mogućnosti koje se otvaraju singapurskoj sindskoj jezičnoj zajednici i koje ona koristi, nisu jednoobrazne. Kako je to zajednica koja se mnogo selila, posljedica je da se njihove životne povijesti i iskustva sudaraju s dominantnim jezikom koji se upotrebljava. To balansiranje između jezika je strategija prilagodbe koja, čini se, zadovoljava potrebe niza sugovornika od kojih jedni pasivno znaju jedan jezik, a ostali drugi. Budući da ispitanici u ovom uzorku posjeduju različite razine znanja sindskoga i engleskog jezika, miješani govor ne samo da odražava strategiju prilagodbe članova zajednice u interakciji nego i njihove vlastite lingvističke preferencije. Takav miješani govor primijećen je i u mnogim višejezičnim društvima gdje jezične zajednice imaju više od jednog jezika na svom repertoaru, a pojava promjene koda postala je prilično utvrđeno sredstvo komunikacije. Miješani govor samo je odraz miješanoga govora širega singapurskog društva. Stariji pripadnici zajednice održavaju svoj autoritet donekle upotrebljavajući etnički jezik u govoru miješanih kodova gdje je engleski dominantan. Engleski dominira lingvističkim navikama promjene koda u mladih singapurskih Sindija u međusobnoj komunikaciji. Upotreba sindija u tome kodski miješanom govoru je nominalna. Funkcije sindskih leksičkih elemenata općenito su kulturne i/ili vjerske. Uloga Sindija kao etničkog markera i jezik pripadnika iste jezične zajednice slabe, a etničkom jeziku namijenjena je ekskludirajuća funkcija, tj. on se upotrebljava kada su u blizini nečlanovi i kada postoji potreba za čuvanjem privatnih informacija. Raznolikost engleskoga koji upotrebljavaju mladi Sindi u neformalnom razgovoru sa svojim vršnjacima predstavlja šarenilo Singapura. Izbor koda u sindskim kućanstvima pokazuje društvo u tranziciji s govornicima koji mijenjaju kodove u zavisnosti od sugovornika. Zahvaljujući svojoj internacionalnoj zajednici i trgovačkim mrežama, sindska singapurska zajednica vješta je u engleskome. Mnogi Sindi naginju prevladavajućoj upotrebi međunarodnog jezika, čak i u međusobnoj komunikaciji. Upotreba dominantnoga engleskoga u razgovoru s vršnjacima ili mladim članovima zajednice, suprotstavljena sindskoj promjeni koda u komunikaciji sa starijim članovima, pokazuje da je samo pitanje vremena kada će se obitelj udaljiti od upotrebe etničkoga ili starosjedilačkog jezika. Smrcu starijih pripadnika engleski će postati dominantnim jezikom zajednice. Potreba za akomodacijom više neće postojati premda će se miješanje i promjena kodova možda još koristiti u vezi s kulturnim i religijskim temama.

**KLJUČNE RIJEČI:** Sindi, sindski, Singapur, miješani govor, promjena koda, očuvanje jezika, jezični pomak, prilagodba, engleski

**Maya Khemlani David**

## **LE SINDHI DE SINGAPOUR – SAUVEGARDE OU TRANSFORMATION DE LA LANGUE**

### RÉSUMÉ

Cet article étudie le choix de la langue parlée à la maison, au travail et dans le domaine de la religion, au sein d'un groupe ethnique minoritaire (Sindhi) de Singapour. Les Sindhis sont une communauté de migrants et une tribu itinérante, possédant de vastes réseaux ethniques de par le monde. Le présent travail expose des remarques sociolinguistiques basées sur l'étude qualitative de 8 familles Sindhis, comptant 28 Sindhis de Singapour. Le but de l'étude était de déterminer si la langue Sindhi s'est conservée parmi les Sindhis de Singapour ou si elle est marginalisée au profit de l'anglais, langue de l'élite. Cette recherche a montré qu'il semble bien que la nouvelle option choisie par cette communauté, qui doit s'adapter aux préférences linguistiques de ses membres, depuis les jeunes jusqu'aux plus âgés, est un parler mixte, composé de deux voire trois langues. Les différentes combinaisons linguistiques qui s'offrent à la communauté linguistique Sindhi de Singapour, et que cette dernière exploite, ne sont pas uniformes. Cette communauté ayant beaucoup voyagé, les histoires et les expériences personnelles de ses membres se heurtent à la langue dominante qui est utilisée. Cet équilibre des langues est une stratégie d'accomodement qui semble satisfaire les besoins de toute une palette d'interlocuteurs, dont les uns ont une connaissance passive d'une langue, les autres d'une autre. Les personnes interrogées ici présentant des niveaux divers de connaissance du Sindhi et de l'anglais, leur parler mixte n'est pas seulement le reflet d'une stratégie d'adaptation des membres de la communauté dans une interaction donnée, mais aussi celui des préférences linguistiques de chacun. Ce genre de parler mixte est observé dans nombre de sociétés possédant plusieurs langues, où les communautés linguistiques ont plus d'une langue à leur répertoire, et le phénomène du changement de code est devenu un moyen de communication assez connu. Ce parler mixte n'est que le reflet du parler mixte d'une large part de la société de Singapour. Les membres plus âgés de la communauté maintiennent leur autorité dans une certaine mesure en utilisant la langue de l'ethnie dans un parler à codes mixtes où l'anglais est le code dominant. L'anglais domine dans les habitudes linguistiques de changement de code chez les jeunes Sindhis de Singapour, dans leur communication entre jeunes. L'utilisation du Sindhi dans ce parler au code mixte est nominale. Les fonctions des éléments lexicaux Sindhis sont en général culturelles et/ou religieuses. Le rôle des Sindhis en tant que marqueur ethnique ainsi que la langue des membres de cette communauté perdent de leur importance, et la langue ethnique se voit réserver une fonction d'exclusion, c'est-à-dire qu'elle s'emploie en présence de personnes étrangères à la communauté quand le besoin se fait sentir de protéger des informations privées. La variété de l'anglais utilisé par les jeunes Sindhis dans la conversation informelle avec leurs camarades illustre la diversité de Singapour. Le choix du code dans les foyers Sindhis trahit une société en transition, dont les locuteurs changent de codes en fonction de leur interlocuteur. Grâce à sa communauté internationale et à ses réseaux de commerce, la communauté Sindhi de Singapour manie également bien l'anglais. Nombre de Sindhis ont tendance à utiliser essentiellement une langue internationale, même dans la communication avec d'autres membres de leur ethnie. L'utilisation de l'anglais dominant dans la conversation entre personnes du même âge ou avec les membres plus jeunes de la communauté en opposition avec le changement de code Sindhi dans la communication avec les membres plus âgés laisse prévoir que la famille va abandonner assez rapidement l'utilisation de la langue ethnique ou autochtone. Avec la mort des membres âgés de la communauté, l'anglais va devenir la langue dominante de la communauté. Le besoin d'accomodement ne se fera plus ressentir bien que le mélange et le changement des codes puissent continuer à être utilisés pour les thèmes religieux et culturels.

**MOTS CLES:** Sindhi, sindhi, Singapour, parler mixte, changement de code, sauvegarde de la langue, décalage linguistique, adaptation, anglais