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**LANGUAGE POLITICS IN PAKISTAN AND ITS SOCIOLINGUISTIC IMPACTS ON SINDH: A CRITIQUE**

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**ABSTRACT**

*This critique is based on the critical analysis of the language and education policies in Pakistan and their impacts on the sociolinguistic situation in the region. The article is poised on the descriptive approach. To evaluate the policy making decision the historical, socio-political and linguistic scenario of Pakistan is analyzed in detail. It also shades light on the motives behind the decision to announce Urdu and English, the two foreign languages, as the official languages of the state, ignoring the indigenous regional languages of the newly created state. Focusing on the political decisions, which cause the socio-linguistic unrest in Pakistan, specially, in Sindh, the second largest province of Pakistan; the article highlights the dents caused to the ethnic and sociolinguistic stability due to the language politics.*

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**Keywords:** Sociolinguistic, language politics, language policy, linguistic diversity.

**INTRODUCTION**

To understand language politics as the absolutism strategy, it is essential to analyze the socio-political and linguistic landscape, the language and education policies and status of national and indigenous languages of a state. Such information facilitates the readers' understanding about the sociolinguistic significance and the presence or absence of major and minor languages in the official and power domains. This article critically evaluates the historical, socio-political and linguistic scenario of Pakistan and critical analysis of the language policies and linguistic changes caused due to language policies before and after the creation of Pakistan. The critique describes in detail the political motives behind the decision to announce Urdu and English, the two foreign languages, as the official languages of the state, ignoring the indigenous languages of the state. Such political decisions are causing the serious dent and damage to the stability of the country due to the failure to acknowledge linguistic diversity. This article adopted the descriptive approach focusing on the historical facts which are causing the socio-linguistic unrest in Pakistan, specially, in Sindh, the second largest province of Pakistan.

**RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

- What are the sociolinguistic impacts of language decisions on Pakistan after 1947?
- What is the sociolinguistic situation of Sindh after 1947?

**FRAME WORK**

To critically analyze the language and education policies and politics of language in Pakistan the various sources were taken for the information. These are the more general resources included the various research works and historical analysis on the languages of the region. The basic document is the constitution of Pakistan that is authentic version of the state on the language and education policies. However the works of Burton (1851); Advani (1956); Baluch (1962); Allana (1963); Shah (1978); etc., are the widely read and quoted publications providing the information on regional languages including Sindhi. Rahman (1995, 2006) describes in detail the past and present language and education policies of Pakistan. Apart from that the articles of various sociolinguistic scholars, who are keenly observing the sociolinguistic scenario of the region, the writings provided a great deal for this critique. For instance the works of Kennedy (1991) and Tekchadani (2005) encompasses in detail the sociolinguistic situation of the region, especially, ethnic violence caused due to the language policies in Sindh. Hence, a wide variety of the works of sociolinguistic and political observers is employed as the framework for this critique.

**RESEARCH METHODOLOGY**

This article is poised on the qualitative descriptive approach that investigates the “things as they actually are, not as we wish them to be” (Gall, Gall and Borg, 2007). The qualitative descriptive is an acceptable research design that analyze all aspects of language using the vast amount of data includes observations, and examination of records, reports, photographs, and documents (Creswell, 2015). Hence, it is a more holistic and often involves a rich collection of data from various sources to gain a deeper understanding of individual participants, including their opinions, perspectives, and attitudes (Nassaji, 2015:129). “This research is more concerned with what rather than how or why something has happened” (Creswell, 2015). The data, as said earlier, is based on the study of documents including the constitution of Pakistan, the study of the language and education policies of Pakistan, the historical and research studies of various veteran linguistics of the region like works of Burton (1851); Advani (1956); Baluch (1962); Allana (1963); Shah (1978); Rahman (1995, 2006) etc., are used for the in-depth analysis.

**SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF SUB-CONTINENT BEFORE 1947**

The area of Sindh, which is often presented as the 7000-year-oldest civilization, is known, from ethnic and linguistic perspective, as one of the most sensitive and problematic regions of Pakistan. The history of Sindhi language is traced from the inscriptions on the rocks around 2500 years ago (Memon, 1964). The scholars believe that the Sindhi language derives from

the Assames Branch of the Indo-Aryan group. For Trumpp (1872) Sindhi language is the daughter-language of Sanskrit. Memon (1964) disagrees and states that Sindhi is not derived from Sanskrit on the contrary Sanskrit originated from the Sindhi language. However, for centuries Sanskrit and its daughter languages were the main languages of the communication of the region.

The sociolinguistic situation of Sindh changed in 712 AD when Arabs conquered Sindh. In a short time, the Arabs efficiently preached Islam and many Sindhis, specially, labour class converted from Hindu to Islam dividing the Sindhi nation into two major native communities: Hindu-Sindhi and Muslim-Sindhi (Baluch, 1962; Memon, 1964). The Hindu-Sindhi community was the prosperous and educated elite while the majority Muslim Sindhi class was farmers and working class (Tekchadani, 2005). However, the religious scholars of both communities preached religious and cultural tolerance and sermonized humanity, love, peace and brotherhood (Shah, 1978). Arab enforced and promoted Arabic (nowadays known as classical Arabic language) as the official language of communication, education and business, thrusting aside regional languages (Panhwar, 1988). Despite the massive use of Arabic, the Arab rulers failed to establish it as the lingua franca of the subcontinent (Memon, 1964; Panhwar, 1988). It is not surprising that Arabic left a permanent trace on the local languages and consequently a wide variety of Arabic structural features and lexical borrowing were registered in local languages (Baluch, 1962; Allana, 1963).

In 1530 AD the Persian Mughal King Baber conquered Hindustan and Sindh and laid the foundation of the Mughal Empire (Harbans, 2004). Mughal declared Persian as the official language of business, education and literature (Memon, 1964). The elite class adopted Persian and many Persian lexical items and structural features were deliberately introduced into the local languages (Panhwar, 1988). Like Arabic, Persian language failed to gain the status of lingua franca of Hindustan due to its different script and structure (Baluch, 1962). In such situation, there was a dire need for a language that would be acceptable to the Mughal Empire as well as to the people of the Hindustan.

During the same time a new language called Urdu (in India it is known as Hindi) was developing in the army barracks when indigenous young men, who spoke different regional languages, were recruited from all parts of the Hindustan and communicated in mixture variety of languages (Waaz, 1920). Urdu, due its close resemblance and assimilation of a range of indigenous vocabulary successfully filled the vacuum and it emerged as the lingua franca of the subcontinent (Waaz, 1920). The last Mughal King Bhadur Shah Zafar (1775-1857) contributed to popularize that language as the code of communication in the court, literature and education (Harbans, 2004). Apart

from the official sheltering, the main reason for popularity of Urdu is its amazing flexibility to accommodate borrowed vocabulary due to its morpho-syntactical resemblance with local languages (Waaz, 1920).

In 1832 India was colonized by the British Empire and English was declared the official language. Subsequently British conquered Sindh in 1843 and annexing it into the Bombay Presidency. The elite classes of sub-continent, who had previously adapted Arabic and Persian, now learnt English, registered their children in the expensive English schools to indicate their social prosperity and political affiliation with the colonizers (Anchimbe, 2011). When British government declared literacy in English language one of the major eligibility factors for government employment, it highly facilitated the elite class, who was literate in English, to occupy the high ranked jobs while the middle and working class was excluded from the main stream of the country (Shah, 1978). It has created the widespread unrest among the common people. The people of Sindh reacted and agitated against the decision (Shah, 1978). Realizing the situation the British rulers appointed Sir Richard Burton to develop a Sindhi alphabet. He along with Sindhi scholars developed 52-letter alphabet with 46 distinctive consonant phonemes and 14 vowels sounds by adapting Arabic *Naksh* script (Advani, 1956). When the British government declared English as the official language of India, it also declared Sindhi as the second official language of Sindh (Shah, 1978). British government took the special measures to use Sindhi language in the official domains including administration, judiciary, education, etc. (Shah, 1978).

Whereas Urdu, in the subcontinent and Sindhi in Sindh were getting the status of lingua Franca, English; despite all official support, did not qualify as the status of lingua-franca of Hindustan as well as Sindh. According to Rahman (1995) there were three main reasons for this: (i) English was the language of the foreign conqueror therefore the masses resisted it as their language; (ii) due to the structural, and phonological differences from indigenous languages, local people faced difficulty in learning English; and (iii) English was the medium of instruction only in expensive grammar schools affordable only by the elite class. Besides, there was fourth reason: Muslim and Hindu religious scholars declared English as the language of enemies and encouraged the people not to learn English. The middle and working class Muslims followed their religious scholars and avoided learning English but they learned Arabic for the Muslim identity. However, Hindu community, who was in majority, ignored declarations of their clergies and started learning English (Shah, 1978).

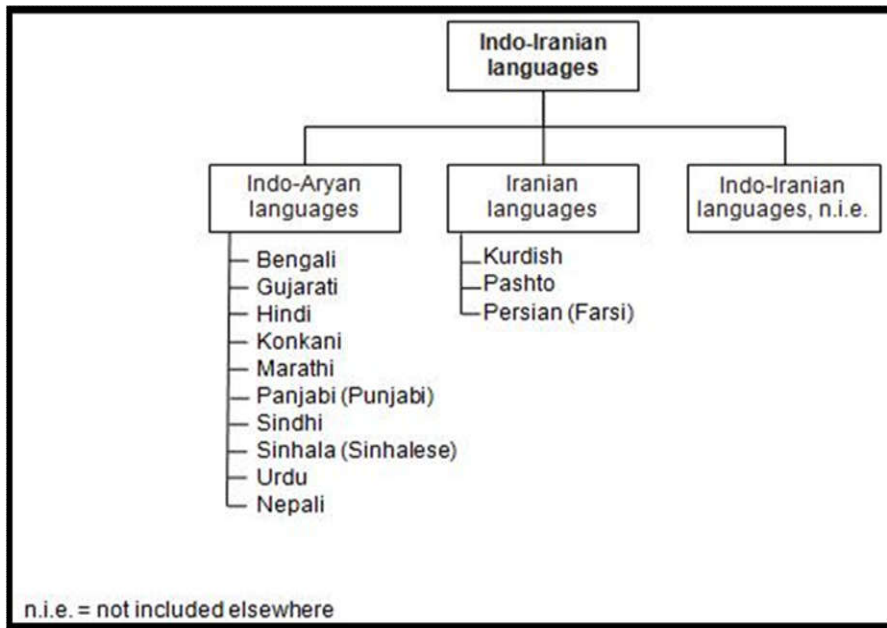
#### **SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF SUB-CONTENT AFTER 1947**

On 14 August 1947 British divided Hindustan into two independent states India and Pakistan on the basis of the two-nation theory, as demanded by the Hindu and Muslim political leaders (Shah, 1978). The two-nation

theory is based upon the ideology of religion rather than the ethnicity. It states that Hindu and Muslim are two different nations therefore they need the separate states where they can live their lives according to their religions (Shah, 1978). Meanwhile the Hindu religious extremists also declared Muslims as non-Indian and demanded the expulsion of all Muslims from India (Malik, 1963).

The newly born Pakistan was initially geographically comprised two separate states: East Pakistan and West Pakistan. West Pakistan comprised four provinces: Sindh, Punjab, Baluchistan and North-West Frontier Province (NWFP) now known as Khyber-Pakhtunkhwa (KPK). East and West Pakistan were the blend of diverse religious, cultural and linguistically a rich region where six major languages along with more than 69 minor languages are spoken (Rahman, 1995). In East Pakistan Bengali was the major spoken language and in West Pakistan Punjabi, Sindhi, Baluchi and Pashto were the languages of Punjab, Sindh, Baluchistan and North West Frontier Province (NWFP) respectively. All the local languages share close similarities in grammar, phonology and vocabulary because all belong to the Indo-Aryan family, except Pashto, that belongs to the Indo-Iranian family as illustrated in the following figure:

#### LANGUAGE FAMILY TREE OF INDO-IRANIAN FAMILY



Retrieved from: [https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Indo+iranian+family&rlz=1C1NHXL\\_enGB693GB693&es](https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=Indo+iranian+family&rlz=1C1NHXL_enGB693GB693&es) (Accessed: 25 March 2018).

**SOCIOLINGUISTIC SITUATION OF PAKISTAN AND SINDH AFTER 1947**

After the partition 1947 the mass migration started. The Muslims of India (nowadays called *Muhajirs*) migrated to West Pakistan while the Hindu of East and West Pakistan migrated to India. Most of the Indian Muslim refugees speak Urdu and they were settled in Sindh province bringing the dramatic changes in the political, geographic, economic, sociolinguistic-cultural situation as well as legislative and administrative framework of the province (Shah, 1978). The mass settlement of refugees, which brought their language and culture, has reshaped sociolinguistic scenario of Sindh (Khokar, 2009). Within a year of independence the population of refugees increased to 86.9% in Hyderabad and 59% in Karachi and turning the native people into minorities in both main cities of Sindh (Waseem, 1996). Thus, practically overnight the two major economical hubs of the province turned into refugee cities. The large influx of refugees “disturbed the balance, created serious differences and conflicts, which resulted in a ruptured society” (Naeem, 2012:28). When refugees (now known as *Muhajirs*) reached in Sindh, attacking and occupying over properties of Hindu occurred in major cities, which compelled Sindhi-Hindus to flee to India leaving behind their properties and business (Shah, 1978). The Muslim refugees occupied these homes and businesses left by Hindus. This act had crippled the economy of Sindh because Karachi was major revenue-generating source (Shah, 1978). The situation worsened when all the industries were set up in Karachi, neglecting the rest of the province, recruiting Urdu speaking labour pushing Sindhis toward poverty (Shah, 1978). The situation deteriorated when the agricultural lands of Sindh were granted to retired Punjabi military personnel as reward of their services against the colonizers (Khokhar, 2009). In 1947 Karachi was declared the capital of Pakistan; that means it was not part of Sindh province. Hence, the independence had not changed the socio-economic conditions of Sindhi-Muslims. Previously Sindhi worked as farmers or subordinates under their Hindu masters and now they were working in the same positions under the *Muhajirs* who become lords.

The most terrible and shocking was the decision of official language. In 1947 Urdu was declared the official language. The Sindhis, who constituted 78% of population of Sindh, neither accepted settlement of refugees on their land and nor Urdu as their official language (Shah, 1978; Rahman, 1995). Hence, the tension between native Sindhi and refugees began since the creation of Pakistan (Shah, 1978). Two factors played important role in the promotion of Urdu as the official language of Pakistan: the first, the political leaders of Pakistan Muslim League (PML), the political party representing Muslims community in India before the partition, who were elite Urdu speakers. They migrated to Pakistan and gained the power of newly born state without any electoral system. They declared Urdu the



official language without recognizing the native languages. The second reason is that Punjab province, which forms the majority of population in the country as well as in bureaucracy and army, officially adopted Urdu's writing system to make a script for Punjabi (Farida, 2018). A notable point is that Punjabi language does not have written script. Before 1947 Punjabi language was written in a blend of Sindhi, Persian and Arabic scripts. After independence the Punjab province endorsed the immense support in declaration of Urdu as the official language of the state and settlement of refugees in Sindh (Shah, 1978). Sindhis were trapped in a political and bureaucratic structure dominated by Punjabi and Muhajirs (Farida, 2018). Sindhis took these actions of Punjab as deliberate attempts to undermine their economy, culture and language (Farida, 2018).

Sindhi nation faced linguistic shock Urdu, the language of 5% Indian Muslim refugees, and English, language of former colonizers were declared the official languages of Pakistan on the pretext that Urdu is the "most sophisticated and civilized language" designated to replace "lesser cultural" languages (Rahman, 2006:75). The rulers of newly born state had neglected the language of 75% Sindhi population (Shah, 1978). Sindhi language was banned in Karachi with an official pamphlet that used slogan "go to [interior] Sindh if you retain Sindhi language" (Rahman 1995:1010). Sindhis were denied official jobs on the basis of their lack of understanding of Urdu language (Malik, 1963). Such situations allowed the Urdu-speaking community to control the bureaucracy, business and education in the newly born state (Rahman, 2006). The rulers failed to realize the sensitivity of the situation, rather focused on the settlement of refugees and imposing refugees' culture upon local people (Mitha, 1986). This decision created the widespread resentment against Urdu among speakers of indigenous languages specially, in Bengal and Sindh. Thus, Pakistan faced serious ethnic problems from the very beginning of her birth. The country's power was transferred to "those who had still not developed affinity to its soil and its people and in the utter seriousness and hurry to establish their socio-political and economic hegemony" (Shah 1978:98). Such policies created ethnic riots between natives and refugees (Mitha, 1986). The Sindhi were "struggling to retain ethnic and linguistic identity, while *Muhajirs* were fighting to carve out a place for themselves as an emergent community and a political power in their newly acquired homeland" (Naeem, 2012:28).

Realizing the situation the government announced that declaration of Urdu as official language is a temporary decision and commission would be formed to resolve issue of national language (Shah, 1978; Rahman, 1995). However, next year in 1948 the government of Pakistan claimed that Urdu is the symbol of national unity and it welds different ethnic linguistic groups into one nation, therefore, it retains the title of official language along with

English (Shah, 1978; Rahman, 1995). Rahman (1995) identifies two reasons behind this decision: first, to avoid the ethnic resistance by three provinces Bengal, Sindh and Baluchistan, which wanted independent status as they had before the colonial period; second, the power domains came into the hands of elite Urdu speakers, who supported refugees to settle and made Urdu national language to secure their position in Pakistan. The declaration of Urdu as the official language sparked protests in Sindh and East Pakistan but such protests were curbed using the iron hands. “It is Urdu that the ruling elite of Pakistan has supported and ethnic nationalists have never accepted it” (Rahman, 1995:1006).

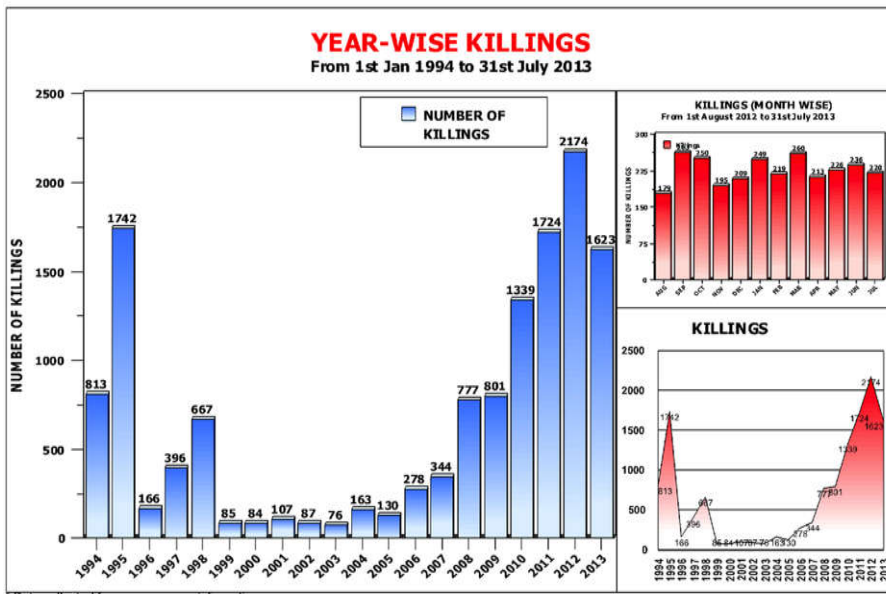
The linguistic biasness continued by the dictators (Lodhi, 2013). In 1954 the first Marshal Law government of General Ayub Khan declared Urdu as the sole language of Sindh province. The decision provoked a severe reaction and under the Sindhi public pressure Ayub withdrew it (Shah, 1978). The persisting anti-Sindhi agendas made the Sindhi nation highly conscious about their land, language and culture (Shah, 1978). In reaction, the first Sindhi political party, Jeay Sindh Student Federation (JSSF) was formed in 1960 with a motto to ‘save the rights of Sindh and Sindhis’ (Shah, 1978:27). In 1970 the succeeding second Marshal Law of General Yahya Khan had again taken a controversial decision by declaring Urdu as the sole official language of East and West Pakistan. This time Pakistan paid the heavy price for this language policy (Shah, 1978). This decision sparked a new wave of protest in East Pakistan and Sindh province. JSSF and Bengalis resisted relentlessly. On 21<sup>st</sup> February 1970 hundreds of Bengali-speaking students of University of Dacca were killed by state police during demonstration against declaring Urdu as national language. This episode is known as *Bhasha Andolan* (language movement) (Rafiq, 2010). On 3<sup>rd</sup> December 1971 India intervened and declared war against Pakistan in support of the Bengalis, which resulted in the separation of East Pakistan on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1971. Thus, Bangladesh became new country on the map of world while West Pakistan retained its position as an independent Islamic republic of Pakistan. It is irony that in 1947, Pakistan was created on the basis of religion ideology and subsiding ethnic-cultural ideologies, but in 1971, Pakistan was split on the bases of ethnic ideology and rejection of linguistic diversity (Farida, 2018). In Sindh the massive operation against JSF started and linguistic movement was temporarily cramped.

In 1972 this language movement resurfaced taking the shape of agitation against the Bhutto government, who was the first Sindhi Prime Minister of the country (Shah, 1978). The Bhutto regime was forced to announce Sindhi language as the third official language of Sindh Province along with Urdu and English (Khokhar, 2010). This ordinance was opposed by Urdu community and again the country witnessed the language riots between Sindhi and Urdu speaking communities for more than six months. In 1977 the third Marshal Law of General Zial-ul-Haq reverted the decision of



Bhutto and Urdu was declared sole official language of Sindh. The Zia government faced the serious resistance by JSSF but protest was crushed by killing of JSSF members (Kennedy, 1991). The Zia formed a new political party for Urdu community Muhajir Qoumi Movement (MQM) to encounter JSSF (Kennedy, 1991). The Zia government also settled million Afghan refugees in Sindh to unbalance the claim of Sindhis as the major community (Kennedy, 1991). Meanwhile MQM demanded an independent state on the bases of language difference. MQM started the violence and target killings against the government servants, police and local ethnic citizens in order to force them to evacuate Karachi and Hyderabad (Khokhar, 2009). Punjabis, who were supporters of MQM in past, this time, opposed them because Karachi is the main revenue-generating and strategic city from the military point view (Kennedy, 1991 and Khokhar, 2009). In 1992, Pakistan army started operations against MQM. Sindh was again crippled due to bloodshed and heavy loss of lives of MQM workers (Kennedy, 1991). However, the Urdu speaking community was always successful to gain the official shelter. The fourth Marshal Law government of Pervez Musharraf again empowered MQM to regain the control of Karachi. MQM started the massive genocide of their opponents, Sindhi, Pashto and other ethnic communities in Karachi (Khokhar, 2009 and Kennedy, 1991). The target killing snatched the lives of thousand people as indicated in the following figure:

**TARGET KILLING IN KARACHI**



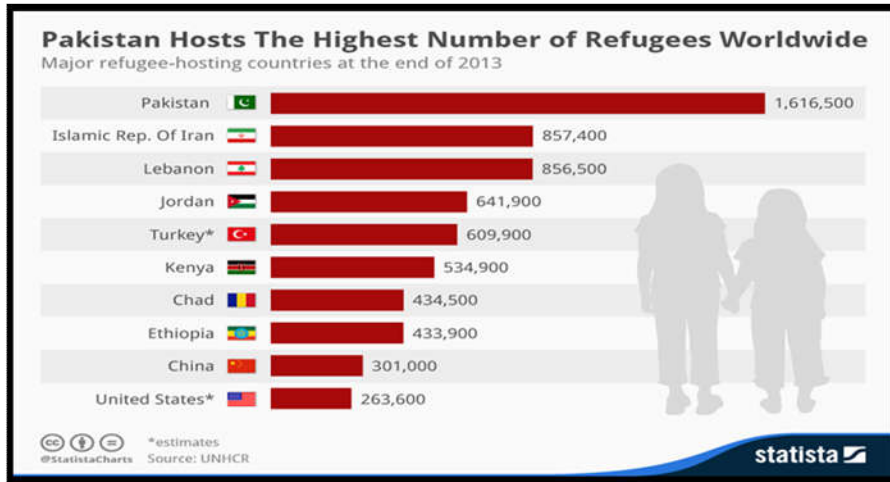
Retrieved from: <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=target+killing+in+karachi&biw=1920&bih=985&source> (Accessed on 28 June 2016).

In retaliation the reaction against the *Muhajir* started in the other part of the state. Sindh was again gripped in the ethnic violence (Kkokhar, 2009). The ethnic violence divided Karachi and Hyderabad into language zones e. g. Urdu-zone, Sindhi-zone, Baluchi-one, Pashto-zone restricting the movement of people from one to other zone etc. (Khokhar, 2009; Lotbiniere, 2010). In 2015 the government started a massive army operation against all ethnic groups and there is a decline in the target killing.

**CURRENT SOCIOLINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF SINDH**

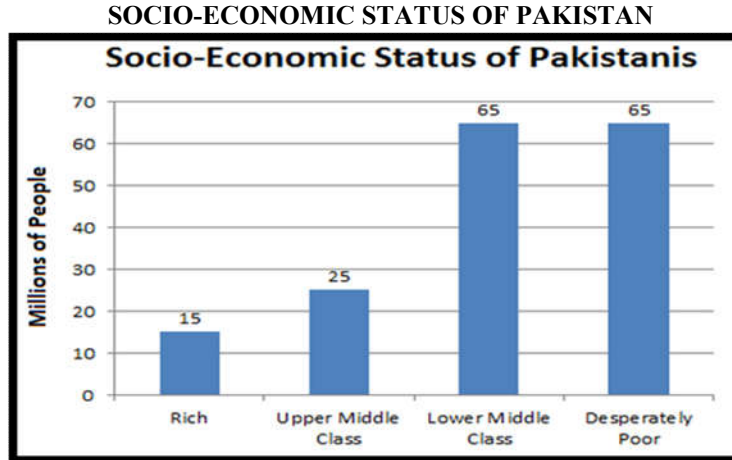
In recent decades, Sindh province has continued to receive large numbers of refugees who are getting the status of immigrants. Majority of refugees are settled in Sindh. According UNHCR (2013), Pakistan is the largest refugees-hosting country of the world with 1,616,500 as indicated in the following table:

**STATISTICAL DATA OF REFUGEES IN THE WORLD**



Retrieved from: <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=The+difference+between+code-switching+and+borrowing&biw=1366&bih=638&source> (Accessed on 28 June 2017).

The government schools in the main cities of Sindh are filled with children of refugees who are speaking their ethnic languages but are educated in Urdu language. Sindhi children, who are the minority in big cities, are also educated in Urdu language (Rafiq, 2010). The socio-economic situation of Pakistan is also unequal. The children from poorer families attend government schools where the language of instruction is Sindhi or Urdu. The rich families’ children are usually enrolled in private English schools. There is a wide gap between rich and poor, and rural and urban life as indicated in the following chart:



Retrieved from: <https://www.google.co.uk/search?q=language+map+of+Sindh&biw=1920&bih=985&tbm=isch> (Accessed on 28 June 2016).

Sindhi language is the second most spoken language of Pakistan after Punjabi and the fourth in the Subcontinent (Panhwar, 1988). It is the second most common language for electronic media channels, publications, newspapers and books in Pakistan after Urdu. The areas where there is a mixed population, both Sindhi and Urdu languages are used for communication. In Sindh rural areas the scant use of Urdu is a marked feature. Urdu does not seem to be a lingua franca of most of the elder generation and those who have not studied in Urdu medium. On the contrary, the young Sindhi generation is effectively good in the use of Urdu, English and in some indigenous languages due to the educational system and close cultural ties among various language communities. The role of the native languages of Sindh is neglected. It is neither protected nor socially recognized. In Karachi they are in the edge of death due to over emphases on Urdu while in interior Sindh Sindhi is overlapping them (Farida, 2018). The most native languages are almost in the endangered zones spoken by only a few hundred people, confined to a handful of villages in remote areas of Sindh (Farida, 2018). They are not taught and neither any step is taken for the documentation of these languages. The children either get education in or Urdu and parents also speak in their academic language. These local regional languages are almost at the edge of extinction if serious language policy is not outlined on emergency basis.

## CONCLUSION

The objective of the present critique has been to present a detailed account of Pakistan's historical, political, and linguistic terrain; especially

focusing on the Sindh. This context is vital to a fuller understanding of the role of language politics, which acted as the social-language phenomenon in the lives of people of Sindh. It is explained that prior to 1947 Sindhi and English were the official languages of Sindh Province. However, after 1947, Urdu, the language of 5% of Indian-Muslim refugees was declared the national language, along with English. This move created much unrest and ethno-linguistically-based violence between the Sindhi and Urdu speaking communities. However, though the province is still linguistically divided; the currently, due to the spread of multilingualism and cultural awareness, governmental language policies are accepted. Still there is a need for the extensive survey to analyze the sociolinguistic scenario of Sindh which retains the title of dangerous zone due to the linguistic sensitivity.

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