

Saraiki: language or dialect?

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Resumen

Los autores que han analizado y escrito sobre la identidad Saraiki discrepan sobre si el sistema lingüístico denominado Saraiki es una lengua o un dialecto. Los proponentes del movimiento Saraiki han creado de manera eficiente la identidad Saraiki con el propósito de demarcar su propia provincia dentro de Pakistán. Los factores en los que fundamentan la identidad son diferentes; un lenguaje único, una cultura única, la raza y la concentración de la población en un área específica, etc. Mientras que los defensores del movimiento Saraiki afirman que es una lengua y sobre todo que no basan sus afirmaciones acerca de cualquier análisis lingüístico o motivos lingüísticos justificados, otros tienen negado esta afirmación indicando que es un dialecto de Punjabi. Mientras que muchos de los defensores de Saraiki como lengua tienen intereses políticos y creados, la gran mayoría no cuenta con ningún razonamiento teórico de este reclamo. Este es un esfuerzo científico e imparcial con el propósito de comprender si Saraiki es una lengua o un dialecto, a través de un análisis estrictamente lingüístico.

Palabras clave: *lengua Saraiki, dialecto, identidad Saraiki.*

Abstract

Authors who have analyzed and written about the Saraiki identity disagree on whether the linguistic system called Saraiki is a language or a dialect. The proponents of the Saraiki movement have efficiently created the Saraiki identity with the purpose of demarcating their own province within Pakistan. The factors in which they base the identity are various; a unique language, a unique culture and race, population concentration in a specific area, etc. While the proponents of the Saraiki movement claim it is a language and mainly they do not base their claims on any linguistic analysis or justified linguistic reasons, others have denied this claim stating it is a dialect of Punjabi. While many of the proponents of Saraiki as a language do have political and vested interests, the great majority do not offer any linguistic reasoning for this claim. This is a scientific and impartial endeavor with the purpose of understanding whether Saraiki is a language or a dialect, through strictly a linguistic analysis.

Keywords: *Saraiki, language, dialect, Saraiki identity.*

Introduction

The matter of whether Saraiki should be classified as a language or a dialect has puzzled linguists since the linguistic system was discovered by western orientalist, giving birth to dubious classifications as well as differences of opinion on the matter. This is mainly based on

the fact that a clear criterion for classification of languages and dialects has not been set by linguists as they have differences of opinion on the characteristics of a language and a dialect.

Maldonado García explains this phenomenon in the following manner:

It seems simple to differentiate between a language and a dialect. However, although the definition of language seems to be clear and every dictionary of the world contains it, in practical terms when facing the dilemma of whether a particular linguistic system is a language or a dialect, these definitions are blurry from a scientific point of view and sociolinguistic and political pressures may play a role in many cases (Maldonado García, 2015).

Ethnologue in its 18th edition sets its criteria for differentiation of languages from dialects using the ISO-639-3 criteria:

Two related varieties are normally considered varieties of the same language if speakers of each variety have inherent understanding of the other variety at a functional level (that is, can understand based on knowledge of their own variety without needing to learn the other variety). Where spoken intelligibility between varieties is marginal, the existence of a common literature or of a common ethnolinguistic identity with a central variety that both understand can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered varieties of the same language. Where there is enough intelligibility between varieties to enable communication, the existence of well-established distinct ethnolinguistic identities can be a strong indicator that they should nevertheless be considered to be different languages.¹

While the first two points would make Saraiki a dialect of a language, based on the third point, a separate identity, *Ethnologue* classifies Saraiki as a language while stating that Lahnda varieties have a 70%-85% similarity level with Punjabi.

Glottolog, on the contrary, classifies Saraiki as a dialect of Sindhi-Lahnda. This could be acceptable because the lexical similarity level between Saraiki and Sindhi is of 85%.² However, the interesting part is that Punjabi seems to be classified as a dialect of Sindhi, or a language derived from it rather than a separate linguistic system. *Glottolog* classifies Sindi-Lahnda into 17 linguistic systems, being unclear whether these are languages or dialects. It is mainly divided into three groups of linguistic systems;

1. Eastern Panjabic which contains Panjabi and Sansi,
2. Lahnda, which contains two varieties of Hindko, Northern and Southern, Pahari Potwari and Panjabic with two varieties, Mirpur Panjabi and Western Panjabi.
3. Siraikic with two varieties, Jakati and Siraiki. Siraiki is further divided into Bahawalpuri, Derawali, Jafri, Jatki, Multani, Siraiki Hindki and Thali.³

The last linguistic system mentioned under Sindhi-Lahnda is Sindhic with eight varieties; Jagdali, Kachchi, Khetrani, Lasi, Luwati, Memoni, Sindhi, Sindhi Bhil.⁴

These two language resources seem to classify Saraiki as a separate language of the Lahnda family. In the case of *Ethnologue*, Lahnda is mentioned as an alternate name of Western Punjabi. In the case of *Glottolog* it is a subdivision of Sindhi-Lahnda. The contradiction here is obvious.

Interestingly enough Christopher Shackle, on which Glottolog partially bases its information on Saraiki, classifies it as a dialect of Punjabi with the following breakdown under “Common Panjabi”:

- A. Hindko Proper
 - a. Avankari (with three sub-varieties)
 - b. Ghebi
 - c. Attock-Haripur Hindko
 - d. Kohat Hindko
- B. Peshawar Hindko
- C. Dhanni
- D. Pothohari
- E. Saraiki (Multan)
- F. Central Panjabi (Lahore) (Shackle, 1980)

In this regard, while Shackle considers Saraiki as a dialect of Punjabi, *Glottolog* considers it as a sister language of Punjabi and both dialects of Sindhi-Lahnda or languages derived from it. *Ethnologue* on the other hand treats Sindhi as a separate language, and Western Punjabi as a group of languages also called Lahnda which have 70%-85% similarity with Saraiki as compared to 85% lexical similarity index with Sindhi.

Masica explains these contradictions very effectively:

Shackle, who has done more work in the area than any other recent linguist, has challenged (1979, 1980) the "Lahnda" construct even in terms of its convenience, as well as Grierson's subclassification of the dialects comprising it (which has long been found unsatisfactory), although without presuming to come up with a final scheme himself. The situation is complicated for indigenous scholarship by the rival claims of old (i.e. pan-Punjabi) and new language movements (Masica, 1993).

The fact of the matter is that neither the scientists who wrote *Ethnologue*, neither the authors of *Glottolog* have analyzed the matter from a scientific point of view. While their labor is laudable and a wealth of linguistic information, it is almost impossible to analyze every linguistic system contained in their database to ensure accuracy and so, other authors are being cited who have previously worked on the subject. Furthermore, the word Lahnda, (which, in fact, refers to Western Punjabi) has the meaning of "west" and was first utilized by George Grierson in the *Linguistic Survey of India (1903–28)*, to define this group of languages.⁵ Grierson further named Saraiki as "Southern Lahnda" and through this label the international community has recognized it as an independent language, this claim being still disputed by the locals⁶ and agreed with by the proposers of the Saraiki Movement.

Other linguists have also tried to classify Saraiki. A few linguists, who propose that Saraiki should be an independent language, do so on a limited linguistic basis:

While Saraiki shows the characteristics of both Punjabi and Sindhi, it deserves to be treated as a distinct language due to its disagreement with the Punjabi, in terms of the inflexion and forms of the verb, and for morphological differences with Sindhi (Khan, 2004).

Lexical similarity indexes would play an important role even though the author of the previous statement insists that the similarity can be due to language transfer from Persian and Arabic into the three linguistic systems. Since etymological dictionaries of Sindhi, Punjabi and Saraiki are still not available and the studies of these languages are scarce, that claim cannot be proven, although it seems logical that it would be like that considering the fact that Urdu have received numerous loanwords from these two languages.

An etymological analysis of the basic lexicon of Urdu (1,000 words), revealed 220 terms from Persian in Urdu, as well as 306 terms of Arabic in the language (Maldonado, 2015). In this regard, the transfer of loans from Persian and Arabic into other linguistic systems of Pakistan is definitely more than a probability.

The position of the proponents of Saraiki as a language has been duly explained. Nevertheless, a large group of orientalist and linguists state that Saraiki is, in fact, a dialect. While some of them state that it is a dialect of Sindhi, the large majority states that it is a dialect of Punjabi. This is based on the fact that the mutual intelligibility among the languages cannot be denied. According Hussain Ahmad Khan this controversy is due to the works of British colonial scholars:

The controversy owns its existence to the works by British colonial scholars posted in this region who considered Siraiki to be a dialect of the Punjabi. William Carey (1761-1834), working at Serampore, termed this language "Wuch" in 1813. He also compiled a book of grammar which was probably the first of its kind in the *kirakki* script. Richard Burton (1849), another British scholar, compiled a grammar by the name of *Siraiki*. He was probably the first man to have used the word "Siraiki" for the language spoken in the southern parts of Punjab, which he considered to be a dialect of the Punjabi. Andrew Jukes (1847-1931) and Trevor Bomford, both missionaries, used the word "Western Punjabi" for it. George Grierson also used this word "Lahnda" (Western Punjabi) in his linguistic survey (Khan, 2004).

In this manner, there is a large number of authors that consider Saraiki as a dialect of Punjabi. Tariq Rahman points out the same, in a more descriptive style and citing Gangovsky, explaining that the division of Grierson of languages with Punjabi and Sindhi being classified into circles is not satisfactory (Rahman, 1996).

The fact of the matter is that the classifications of Saraiki so far have been less than satisfactory. This research is an endeavor to clarify a small element of the controversy and lends itself to revealing whether Saraiki should be considered a language or a dialect following the criteria set in Maldonado (2015b). Other authors like Alvar, also propose similar criteria for differentiation of language and dialect.⁷

Methodology

According to Maldonado García a linguistic system can be classified as a language given the following criteria:

1. The linguistic system should present a high degree of leveling. That is a large number of speakers spread over one or more geographical areas. The language community should present language coherence.
2. It presents an elevated differentiation degree.
3. The linguistic system has thrived over others of the same origin which have not presented the same level of success remaining without some of the same factors that make the former successful, such as same leveling degree, lack of formal rules, etc.
4. The language enjoys a high level of prestige. For example; it is a national language, an official language, a language of the United Nations or any other international organization, etc.
5. The linguistic system presents written manifestations as well as grammar, rules of orthography, phonetics, syntax, etc.
6. The linguistic system is utilized as a medium of instruction.
7. The linguistic system is spread through television channels, newspapers, radio and other media manifestations in society such as the internet, etc.
8. The linguistic system presents a vast literary tradition of which is vehicle and includes many forms of literary expression such as prose, poetry, etc.⁸

The analysis will be performed by investigating Saraiki linguistic facts according to the above criteria and the results will, then, be mapped on a table and then discussed. Shall Saraiki not comply with all the requirements of the language criteria, the criteria for dialect will be consulted.

Results

For obtaining the results, the criteria were set on a linguistic table and each linguistic criterion of Saraiki investigated in order to conclude with the revelation of whether Saraiki is a language or rather a dialect:

Linguistic Criteria for Language Identification Saraiki under Analysis		
1.	High Degree of Leveling	Yes. Population in all countries 20,068,000. ⁹
2.	High Degree of Differentiation	No. Lexical similarity with western Punjabi 70%-85%. Lexical similarity with Sindhi 85% mutually intelligible with both. ¹⁰
3.	Thriving over Others	No. Urdu, Punjabi and Sindhi have thrived over Saraiki.
4.	High Level of Prestige	No. Other languages of the area have a much higher level of prestige such as Urdu which is the official language of the country. Saraiki is not the official language, a national language or even a regional language.
5.	Written Manifestations and Grammar	Limited. Grammar, dictionary, limited written manifestations in Shahmuki (a script also used by Punjabi).
6.	Medium of Instruction	No. It is not used as a medium of instruction in schools.
7.	It is a Language of the Media	Limited. Some programs in radio stations and tv. ¹¹
8.	Vast Literary Tradition	Very limited. Some efforts have been made by cultured members of the Saraiki community, although this can hardly constitute a vast literary tradition (Rahman, 1996).

Table 1. Saraiki under Analysis. Linguistic Criteria

The results indicate that Saraiki, does not comply with the great majority of the criteria needed in order to be classified as a language. In fact, it only fully complies with the first criteria, high level of leveling.

Since Saraiki did not fit into the criteria set for languages the criteria for dialects shall be tested next. According to Maldonado a linguistic system is a dialect when:

1. It derived from another, extinct or in use, which falls into the above mentioned parameters of language.

2. It is a system of signs parallel to others which present similar characteristics, derived from a common language, alive or extinct.
3. It is present within a specific geographic area subordinate to the national territory.
4. It does not present strong differentiation in front of other linguistic systems of common origin.
5. It does not adjust to the criteria of language, as its inherent characteristics fail to reach to that level due to the fact that it lacks one or multiple of the following factors:
 - a. A literary tradition.
 - b. A strong leveling with a high number of speakers.
 - c. A high level of prestige.
 - d. Being the medium of instruction.
 - e. Being used as the language of the media.
 - f. Written manifestations.
 - g. Formal rules such as grammar, syntax, morphology, etc. (Maldonado, 2015).

Linguistic Criteria for Dialect Identification Saraiki under Analysis		
1.	Derived from Another	YES. A similarity level of 70%-85% with Western Punjabi group of languages and 85% with Sindhi ¹² indicates that these languages are genetically related. This means they derive from the same language.
2.	Parallel to Others which Present Similar Characteristics	Yes. 70%-85% similarity with western Punjabi and 85% similarity with sindhi. ¹³
3.	Present within a Specific Geographic Area Subordinate to the National State (Region).	Yes. In some areas of Punjab, Sindh, Kpk and Baluchistan.
4.	Not High Degree of Differentiation	Yes. Same as in points 1 and 2.
5.	It Does Not Adjust to the Criteria of Language	Yes. This has been proven in table 1.

Table 2. Saraiki under Analysis. Dialect Criteria

Analysis of the Results

An analysis on whether Saraiki fits the criteria set for identification of languages was performed. The results indicate that Saraiki fits only one of the main characteristics fully. This is a high degree of leveling with more than 20 million of speakers, out of which the 20 million are living in Pakistan. These numbers are not strange given the fact that the literacy rate of the population

of the area is of less than 1%.¹⁴ This means that the availability of learning about contraceptive methods is limited as well as other means of knowledge transfer.

According to the second criterion, it was established that Saraiki does not enjoy a high degree of differentiation with other languages, since the similarity levels are elevated with Sindhi and the Western Punjabi languages. This proves that it belongs to a group of languages with which a genetic relationship has been proven.

The third criterion establishes that the linguistic system needs to thrive over others in order to be considered a language. However, Sindhi seem to be thriving over Saraiki even though it has a similar number of speakers¹⁵ but its literary tradition is larger.¹⁶ The linguistic system enjoys prestige as a provincial language, it has been the medium of instruction in schools of the area, it has a dictionary, a Bible, radio programs, etc., and it has also been the language of instruction of the area in question. In terms of Punjabi, the language has more than 60 million speakers in Pakistan and approximately 30 million speakers in India.¹⁷ It is taught as a subject in colleges and universities, it has newspapers, radio stations, films, videos, music and a vast literary tradition for centuries, including different varieties of prose and poetry including Sufi poetry with authors like Bulleh Shah, Baba Farid and Sultan Bahu (Maldonado García, 2014) and many others.

Criterion number four states that the linguistic system enjoys a high level of prestige being a national or official language or an official language of an international organization, such as United Nations. In this case, Saraiki does not fit any of the main characteristics of the criterion as it is not a national or official language, neither a language of any international organization. Saraiki is also not a regional or provincial language.

In regards to criterion number five, the number of written manifestation is limited. According to Ethnologue, it has a grammar and a dictionary but it is not written by students in schools. The authors that write in Saraiki language are not very numerous, although a Quran has been translated into the language. In 1950 a Saraiki magazine called *Panjnad*, started publication in Karachi. In any case, language continuity cannot be assured if written manifestations are not present and in the case of Saraiki they are quite limited.

Criterion number six establishes that the language needs to be a medium of instruction. However, in the case of Saraiki this is impossible for various reasons. The main reason is that since Saraiki is not the national neither the official language of Pakistan, the mediums of instruction are Urdu and English (Sindhi has also been in some areas). In addition, it is impossible to train teachers who would teach in Saraiki when the literacy rate of the speakers of Saraiki is less than 1% and books are not being printed in this language.

In regards to criterion number seven, the linguistic system needs to be utilized in the media. Although in this case these are present, the programs are in limited number. This is also an effect of the low literacy rate as well as just being a regional linguistic system.

The last criterion states that in order for a linguistic system to be classified as a language it needs to enjoy a vast literary tradition which in the case of Saraiki is very limited. It seems to have started with some poems prior to the 18th century. Later works includes Sachal Sar Mast (1739-1829) wrote poetry in many languages, just like Sultan Bahu, and he also wrote in Saraiki. The Diwan-e Bedil of Qadir Bux Bedil (1814-1873), Khawaja Ghulan Farid (1845-1901) with his Deewan-e-Farid and Ghulam Mohammad's (1883-1934) collection are also written in Saraiki.

Some contributions of the 20th century are those of Shakir Shujabadi with its Kalam-e-Shakir, Khuda Janey, Shakir Diyan Ghazlan, Peelay Patr, Munafqan Tu Khuda Bachaway, Shakir De Dohray, and Ramzan Gaddi with Pir Adil Dera Ghazi Khan.

In this regard, and after analyzing the complete criteria, it is clear that Saraiki is definitely not a linguistic system that can fit into the parameters which characterize a language. Rather, it fits all criteria of a dialect which will be analyzed as follows:

Criteria number one states that a dialect derives from another language and that there is a language that enjoys more prestige within the same area from which it may derive. The great majority of linguistic systems, even those those which are classified as languages, (such as the Romance family of languages composed by Spanish, Italian, Portuguese, Romanian, French, etc. which derive from Latin) derive from other languages, although there are rare cases of languages which do not derive from other languages, such is the case of the Basque language. In those cases, linguists denominate this type of linguistic systems as *language isolates*, since there is no

known ancestor language. If a linguistic system derives from a language, this is not enough to classify them as a dialect. For example, the members of the Romance family of languages were once dialects of Latin and in current times have been rightly classified as languages on their own right.

The elevated similarity indexes between Saraiki and Western Punjabi dialects as well as between Saraiki and Sindhi indicates a genetic relationship among the languages. Ethnologue classifies the Lahnda languages as a group within the Western Zone. Nevertheless, only a genetic analysis can verify from which language Saraiki actually derives.

Criterion number two, the parallelism with others which share the same characteristics has been established through the elevated similarity indexes mentioned earlier. Tariq Rahman citing Shackle states that the level of similarity with Punjabi is more elevated than with any other language:

Shackle is right that ‘many shared morphological details, as well as overall agreement in much of the vocabulary and syntax, link it quite closely to Panjabi, with which it has a higher degree of mutual intelligibility’ (Rahman, 1996; Shackle, 1979).

This is a statement that can be verified through a genetic analysis utilizing some of the new technologies.

In regards to the third criterion, the language is present on a specific limited geographic area or region which is subordinate to the national geographic area. Ethnologue mentions the following geographic areas of Pakistan as being Saraiki speaking:

South Punjab Province, Jampur area north along Indus river valley, almost to confluence of Jhelum river; from there southeast to India border, continuing southwest into north Sindh; Sindh Province, Ghotki and Kashmore districts; some in North-West Frontier, Dera Ghazi Khan district; Derawali dialect: Dera Ismail Khan, Tank, Bannu; Jangli dialect: Sahiwal area.¹⁸

For these reasons, these areas are subordinate to the national territory as they are not even a complete province but pockets of speakers concentrated in various areas around the country mainly in South Punjab and North Sindh.

The fourth criterion is not a high degree of differentiation. Even though the proponents of the Saraiki Movement insist that Saraiki has a separate identity and have made planned language reforms towards this effect, they have been unable to achieve such degree of differentiation which would make their linguistic system fall into the characteristic of language:

Dervi (Derawali), Jhangvi, Mianwali, Multani (Khatki), Riasati, Shahpuri, Sindhi-Saraiki. Dialects blend together into Punjabi east and Sindhi [snd] south. Until recently it was considered a dialect of Panjabi.¹⁹

As stated earlier, Ethnologue seems to base its classification as a language on the separate identity the Saraiki Movement has been able to achieve rather than on its linguistic factors. The linguistic characteristics of the language, though, still point at the fact that Saraiki is a dialect.

At last, if the linguistic system does not adjust to the criteria of a language, it is, in fact, a dialect. This has already been proven and discussed earlier.

Conclusion and Future Work

The analysis was aimed to making a scientific conclusion on whether Saraiki fits the criteria set for language identification or not. The results proved that while the criteria of leveling is met through a large number of speakers, Saraiki fails to comply with other important criteria such as high level of prestige, since it does not enjoy the status of national or official language, an established and vast literary tradition which in this case is very limited, it is not the medium of instruction in any school or university, it is not the language of the media, although it has shown some media manifestations, such as radio and television programs. It has a grammar and a dictionary, nevertheless, the research done into its syntax and morphology is limited. On the other hand it complies with all the criteria set for dialects.

Even though the proponents and supporters of the Saraiki movement maintain that Saraiki is a language based on a separate identity which focuses on unique ethnicity, culture and linguistic system, the fact is that Saraiki has been proven to be a dialect, rather than a language due to the fact that it complies with all the socio-linguistic factors that characterize them.

A future analysis could verify the language from which Saraiki derives with the purpose of finding a genetic link associating all the languages with which Saraiki has similarity under a common link. The previous research conducted in Pakistan suggests Saraiki is a dialect of Punjabi.

Notes

- 1 Ethnologue: Languages of the World, <http://www.ethnologue.com/about/problem-language-identification>
- 2 Ibid.
- 3 *Glottolog* made this classification according to information obtained from Christopher Shackle. 1980. Hindko in Kohat and Peshawar. Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies 43. 482-510.
- 4 *Glottolog* 2.5. <http://glottolog.org/resource/language/id/sind1279>
- 5 Encyclopaedia Britannica. Online version: <http://www.britannica.com/topic/Lahnda-language>
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Alvar, Manuel. "Hacia los conceptos de lengua, dialecto y hablas."
- 8 Ibid
- 9 *Ethnologue* (2015) <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/skr>
- 10 Ibid.
- 11 Ibid
- 12 *Ethnologue*. <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/skr>
- 13 Ibid.
- 14 Ibid.
- 15 *Ethnologue* <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/snd>
- 16 It even has a Sindhi Language Authority set up in 1990. (Rahman, Language and Politics).
- 17 Ethnologue <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/pnb>, <https://www.ethnologue.com/language/pan>
- 18 *Ethnologue* <http://www.ethnologue.com/language/skr>
- 19 Ibid.

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