Multilingual Manchester

Report

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Online and offline use of Punjabi in Manchester

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1   Introduction and Literature Review

In this study we investigate how Manchester speakers of Punjabi use language on social media networks Facebook and Twitter, aiming to compare and contrast online and offline language use with both quantitative and qualitative research. After having studied Paolillo (1996) we gained the impression that Punjabi might be more popular offline due to the problems it has faced online previously – the romanisation of the script meant that use was discouraged and continues to be used minimally, however computers are now able to process non-Roman scripts (Lee, 2011). The online Punjabi community largely consists of expatriates who now reside in English speaking countries, explaining why there is little use of Punjabi in Paolillo's study (1996) and why it seems marginalised despite its current 92,725,700 speakers (Ethnologue, 2019). Another reason highlighted to justify the lack of Punjabi spoken online is the second and third generation immigrants who are not fluent (Paolillo, 1996) and thus follow the original lingua franca of the internet – English (Lee, 2011). We will further explore the problems of this as we reveal and evaluate our findings.

The internet is a catalyst for human communication and creates various opportunities for online users to connect and share information (Reershemius, 2017), allowing just as much opportunity for people to speak on an online platform as in real life. This paper takes a look into how this works for internet users and to what extent they fulfil this modern opportunity, helping us to understand the possible reasons for the popularity, or lack thereof, of Punjabi online. Understanding that trends appear online (Durham, 2003), it is predictable that younger users might be swayed to use English in addition to not having full understanding of Punjabi for ease of communication. Leppänen & Peuronen (2012) have provided information that demonstrates the use of code-switching in youth culture as opposed to an older generation due to the informality and language proficiency, relating to the findings that claim online code switching and offline code-switching are resemblant of one another (Androutsopoulos, 2007). We will try to get an insight into how an online persona differs to unfiltered reality using their personal motivations and opinions.

2   Research Questions

Our study focuses on the use of Punjabi and how Manchester based speakers choose to use this online in contrast to other known languages. We chose to distribute our questionnaire amongst the general public, of which some participants we knew personally, however most responses were collected by adding the link to a public post from our personal social media pages and receiving anonymous responses. The aim of the questionnaire is to conceptualise language use based on domain, context, choice and linguistic skill – the questions reflect our intentions and are purposefully very open to allow for personal and specific answers. The aim of the research was to determine what languages people used online and offline. If these differed, then we wanted to know why they chose to interchange between these languages. Another concept we wanted to consider was if speakers of Punjabi were able to communicate with people who knew languages such as Hindi and Urdu. Finally, we wanted

to discover whether religion had an effect on individuals' language choices and what the circumstances might be if this is so.

3   Methodology

The research plan proposed initially has been improved to provide much more detail and include specifications that were incomplete or missing entirely beforehand. Of course, the study focuses on Punjabi, however we have accepted that there are multiple similar languages that we must factor into the research and that we must find out about through our participants. We have allowed the questions to be fairly open and ask about other Indo-European languages, scripts, domains and contexts which create opportunity for variety and discussion.

Using Surveyhero.com we created a questionnaire which compromised of questions that our research is based on and will be analysed later. These questions were designed for us to be able to collect both qualitative and quantitative data. After circulating this, we were able to see each individual survey and the answers given by each participant, some of which had been left blank or had given yes and no answers for an open question, therefore these have been disregarded. The way in which our data has been collected allows for us to display quantitative results through graphs, charts and tables while still providing qualitative reasoning and creating links between the two.

Interviews were carried out with certain people who agreed to this and were familiar with us – we believe that this slightly more personal interaction is an important factor in our investigation, especially with the small sample of data having been collected. It allows us to ask further questions to get a detailed insight on how a particular individual communicates on and offline.

In instances where participants were addressed directly, proof of agreement was taken and provided in this paper. Participants who simply completed the questionnaire have consented by willingly and explicitly partaking. For the participant contacted through private message on Twitter or Facebook, our aims were explained to them and we addressed ways in which they could help us. The screenshot of this private message is given in the appendix.
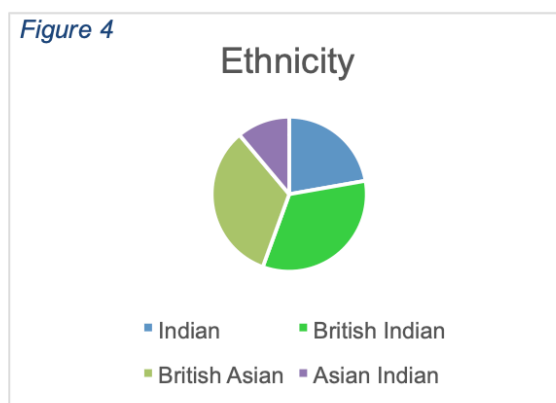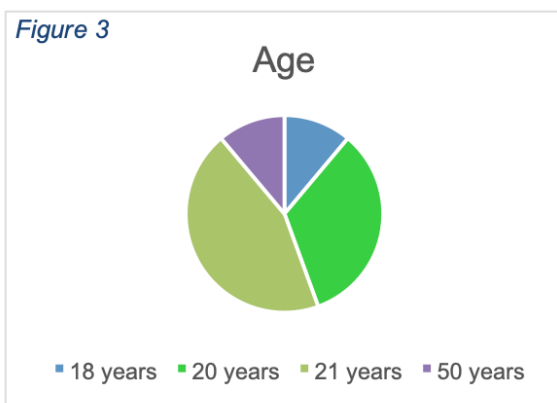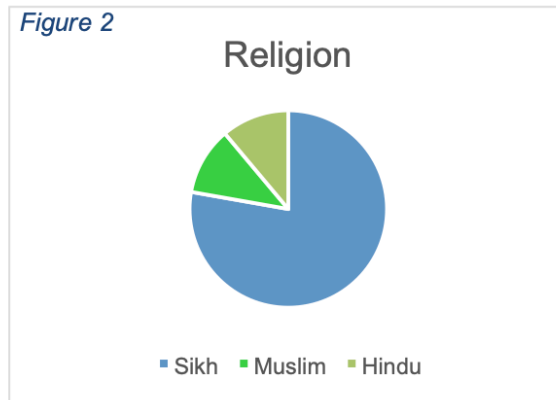
4   Findings

The Interview

We conducted an interview with someone we personally knew to get a better insight on how people behave online and the reasons for this behaviour. The individual we interviewed was a 19-year-old university student from London who currently lives in Manchester. Some of the key aspects that we found were that she did not use Punjabi personally online on any social media, even though she has a large Indian following, so this might have been expected as opposed to if she had a predominantly English following.

However, she did claim to use Punjabi on WhatsApp, a messaging application, with her grandparents. This should be pointed out after declaring that she does not use Punjabi elsewhere online, as the notion that she only uses it to communicate with her grandparents indicates the nature of the switch in language. The significance of WhatsApp within our study will be discussed later. Another essential finding in this interview was that she used Romanised letters to write Punjabi words, possibly relating to the fact that her use of Punjabi is generally restricted and providing evidence for the findings of (Paolilli, 1996) where keyboard limitations inevitably led to language limitations. This being said, her knowledge in any related languages was very limited and struggled to understand languages like Hindi and Urdu – two Hindustani languages which also belong to the Indo-Aryan family (Ethnologue, 2019). A lack of knowledge of languages that surround Punjabi, whilst not hindering the user's knowledge of Punjabi, will not help in progressing linguistically and could factor into why a user less likely to know other related languages might feel more comfortable using English. It was also very interesting that the user when being interviewed was asked if she used Punjabi on other platforms chose to use the word *bibi* when answering. The word *bibi* meaning 'grandma' in Punjabi. The individual conducting the interview was of Indian ethnicity and also spoke Punjabi.

The Survey

Over nine people willingly took this survey. Once we had reached the point where no more surveys should be taken in order to complete the paper, the data was cleaned up and resulted in the current nine responses – two of which were completed upon request by people we knew personally and seven from people online who anonymously yet willingly took part. They provided a detailed insight into what languages they know and to what extent, an account of where and when they use these languages, and the reasons behind their language choices. The first few data points we collected were gender (figure 1), religion (figure 2), age (figure 3), and ethnicity (figure 4).

Figure 1

Gender

■ Male ■ Female

Figure 2

Religion

■ Sikh ■ Muslim ■ Hindu

Figure 3

Age

■ 18 years ■ 20 years ■ 21 years ■ 50 years

Figure 4

Ethnicity

■ Indian ■ British Indian
■ British Asian ■ Asian Indian
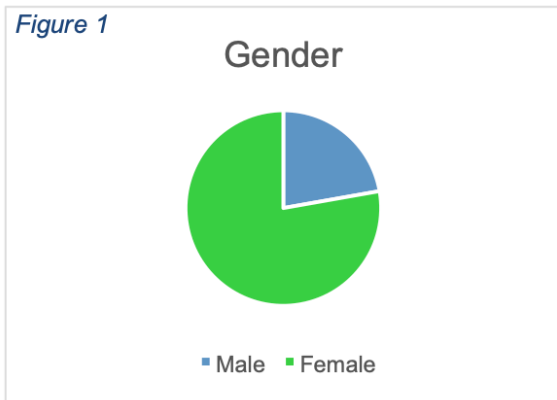
As displayed, we received mostly female contributors overall, however the small sample might be an unclear representation of this ratio and would have to be studied on a larger scale to get a better representation of this. It was found that Sikh is the most common religion in our data set with other Asian religions making up the remaining 22% from the sample. A vast majority of participants, surprisingly, were from a younger generation with just one 50-years-old answering the survey. The final piece of background information we asked from members who took the survey was ethnicity – 100% of the sample were from an Asian background and 67% explicitly confirmed they were Indian.

When asked their mother tongue language, responses for English and Punjabi were equal, with just one differing language, Hindi. 8 out of 9 people knew another language as well as their mother tongue and the proficiency they hold is demonstrated in figure 5. 33% of participants only had knowledge of English and Punjabi, with the other 67% having at least basic knowledge of Urdu and/or Hindi. Unique findings in this section include one person who had at least basic knowledge in every language listed, and another who ticked boxes for only Punjabi and English but had fluent understanding of Malayalam.
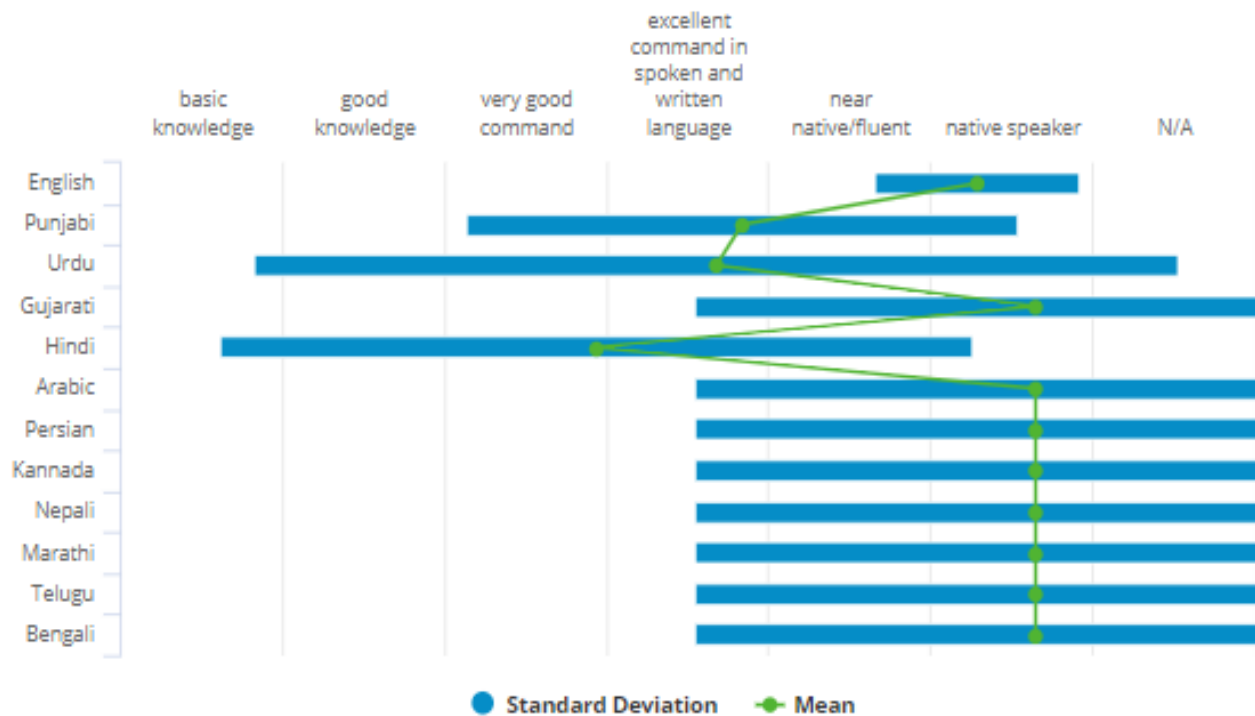
Figure 5

Now that we have an understanding of each person's linguistic knowledge and ability and have also been given a general idea of common patterns amongst Punjabi speakers, the details of language use will be explored and described.

Each participant was multilingual and declared that in everyday life, with friends or in education or employment, they would tend to use English because of the ethnic variance and general use of English around them. Alternatively, it would seem that most use Punjabi at home, with friends of the same ethnicity or with certain family members, specifically parents and grandparents – the older generations. Some recognised the advantage of being able to speak Punjabi with other university students yet indicated that they would only use English around those who didn't understand Punjabi, to ensure everyone felt comfortable.

The response in figure 6 is taken from the survey and illustrates the nature of the answers we received for this particular question.

If you are multilingual, do you use different languages to communicate in different parts of your life? For example, does your language use differ between the home, workplace, religious settings, or with friends? Please explain in as much detail as possible

I use Punjabi within my household to communicate with my parents. I often use it in University when I am with other people who speak Punjabi, when at University it's nice to find other people who speak Punjabi as it creates a sense of community. If there are people who don't know Punjabi then I tend to stick to English because I don't want anyone to feel left out. But my main language is English, I use it at work, university and accommodation

Figure 6

Importantly, everyone who completed the survey used a Facebook or Twitter account – it would have been impossible for them to participate without doing so. The usage of these social media accounts (figure 7) varied, with 78% only using one platform or the other. Contrastingly, the language use online did not vary, with 100% of participants using English most when posting. Similarly to earlier reasoning, results presented that English is the easiest way to go about posting online as it is more understood by their followers and friends. When asked about language switches, 56% denied any switches with the remaining 44% admitting that language switches might happen in order to create comedic effect, otherwise Punjabi online might not attract as much attention as an English post would.
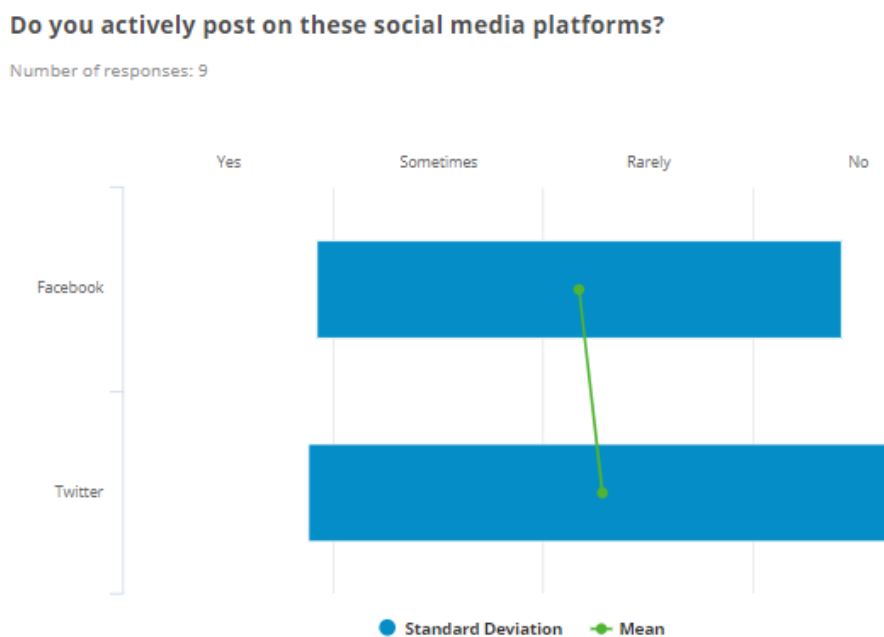

Figure 7

Religion was a significant factor in this study, and it is interesting to see how it affects language use. 56% responded that religion did not affect their language choice, however the smaller percentage said it did – a religious setting would mean they spoke Punjabi over English due to the nature of the surroundings and how they have learned to behave in these situations.

5   Discussion
The Interview

In the interview we learned that this individual never used Punjabi on social media. Her reasoning behind this was because she knew that all her followers were native speakers of English and that everyone she follows tweets in English, despite having more Indian followers. The orginal lingua franca of the internet was intended to be English (Lee, 2011), and seeing that the majority of the people she was interacting with were speaking and

communicating with each other in English possibly meant that she felt obliged. We find that people seek out groups of people online that are like themselves – the internet and social media have made it extremely easy to do so (Mitra, 2010). With this particular individual we see that her interactions are influenced by those she follows. In previous research it has been a trend that people who have the same mother tongue still choose to communicate in English online (Lee, 2011).

Another key point she made was that she used Romanised script to type out Punjabi on WhatsApp. As we will see, after the survey and this interview, this seemed to be a common trend between our sample. Most of them used WhatsApp to talk to their families, all using Romanised Punjabi. We are aware the the older generation are becoming more technologically aware (Mitra, 2010), however newer social media like Twitter and Facebook tend to be far from their grasp. Messaging apps such as WhatsApp are very simple and easy to use hence why it is so popular among older generations for keeping in contact with their families. The main reason this individual used Romanised Punjabi was because she didn't know how to write and read Punjabi herself but due to her speech being fluent it meant that she could phonetically write Punjabi. Translation software makes it able to translate a full web page into a desired langauge – however the translation is done word for word and sometimes results in the translation not being coherent (Mitra, 2010). This therefore leads to individuals choosing to exclusively using English as it is easier, which was corroberated by this interview.

The Survey

Most of the people who completed the survey had at least basic knowledge in other languages. Languages such as Hindi and Urdu were the most popular amongst the data, and with these being similar to Punjabi it is easy to understand why (Ethnologue, 2019). As our survey showed, most of the people understood a sister language. The scripts of these languages, however, are not the same – i.e. someone who may understand Hindi when it is spoken may not be able to read written script. Using Romanised Hindi and Urdu would mean that an indvidual would be able to read it and understand it like they would Punjabi. There is an online community who speak different languages but are able to understand each other with the help of Roman characters. Phones, nowadays mainly used for social media, come pre-set with an English keyboard which also limits indiviuals to using Enlgish characters when communicating with one another online (Paolilli, 1996). Almost all individuals who used Punjabi online used Romanised English. This further supports the findings of Paolilli (1996): technological limitations can affect the way that people communicate on technological devices.

Another common trend between these individuals was that they all tend to use Punjabi online less because they get less interaction from their followers. They prefer to speak in English so that their followers understand, thus getting the highest level of interaction. Social media allows people to find others who have similarities, therefore

creating online communities (Mitra, 2010). This survey supports that people online are trying to create communities online, through making their content inclusive, where everyone can understand their posts. Gaining likes is also something users prioritise highly. These people are craving interaction and want to reach a broader audience, increasing their exposure online. Previous research has shown that there is 'constant competition' online (Mitra, 2010). This survey has shown that people are trying to get more likes and are therefore making language choices that will reach more people.

Most of the people who took the survey said that religion didn't have an effect on their language choices yet being Sikh automatically meant that their religion exposed them to more Punjabi. A common trend is that most of the people had forgotten how to read and write as they got older. This then meant that when they wanted to communicate in Punjabi they would use English orthography. Their speech remained fluent however their reading and writing skills were compromised. These individuals all live in an English speaking country and are second or third generation immigrants which has had an adverse effect on their language. This further supports the ideas of Paolilli (1996) that language tends to die out when people move to English speaking countries, which then results in the further generations having a limited understanding in their mother tongues.

It was common to see responses where people used Punjabi in a Sikh temple. This is due to older generations being less fluent in English compared to younger generations. The nature of this language use explains why indivuals tend to have more fluency in their speech compared to reading and writing. Even though religon didn't affect langauge choices, which was our original question, we find that religion has help maintain fluency in Punjabi in some of the indviduals. Maintaining fluency in speech means that when they do want to communicate using Punjabi online it would simply be a case of using Roman orthography. Paolilli (1996) revealed that techonological limtations meant that people had no choice but to use Romanised characters. Our research shows that lack of literacy skills in Punjabi pushes people to use Romanised Punjabi rather than issues such as not having access to a keyboard with Punjabi script.

One trend that we found in both the interview and the survey is that most people wanted to use English as it was an element of inclusivity. This applies online and offline. The interviewee declared she 'didn't want non-Punjabi speaking friends to feel like they were left out the conversation' and one survey response read 'I don't want my English-speaking friends to feel left out'. This pattern, online and offline, shows that people make language choices to accommodate for other people. Even though these individuals are free to use their own language around friends who also speak Punjabi, they still choose to speak in English out of compassion. This relates to the findings that claim online code switching and offline code-switching are resemblant of one another (Androutsopoulos, 2007) as people are trying to maintain inclusivity on and offline.

6   Appendix

Survey

Survey responses

What is your mother tongue?	Which language do you use most on social media?
Number of responses: 9	Number of responses: 9
Text answers:	Text answers:
English	English
Hindi	Hindi and Punjabi and English
English	English
English	English
Punjabi	English
Punjabi	English
English	English
Punjabi	English
Punjabi	English

If you speak a language that does not appear above, please state below the language and your proficiency

Number of responses: 1

Text answers:

> I also understand Malayalam fluently from watching movies

If you are multilingual, do you use different languages to communicate in different parts of your life? For example, does your language use differ between the home, workplace, religious settings, or with friends? Please explain in as much detail as possible

Number of responses: 8

Text answers:

> Home/ grandparents punjabi
> Friends and uni - English

> I use Hindi at home. However I have a flatmate who speaks in Punjabi. I understand Punjabi completely and she can understand Hindi. So i talk to her in Hindi and she talks to me in Punjabi. These languages are really similar. In the Hindu temple I also speak Hindi as the elders do not understand or like speaking English in a religious setting

> Yes- everyday life English
> Home/family - punjabi and English

> I speak a mix of English and Punjabi with my family and friends that are also Indian but usually I only speak English

> I use Kashmiri Punjabi at home and in the Sikh temple because my elder family members do not understand English. Outside of the house and temple I only use English and never speak Punjabi even if the person Im talking to knows Punjabi. I dont use Punjabi because I dont want my English speaking friends to feel left out of any of the coversation we have

> I regularly speak in Punjabi when I am at home as that is my main form of communication with my mum, although when I am at college I speak English to my peers and teachers as it is the most common language spoken at college. On some occasions I do talk in Punjabi to my friends as they come from a similar background to me.

> I use Punjabi within my household to communicate with my parents. I often use it in University when I am with other people who speak Punjabi, when at University it's nice to find other people who speak Punjabi as it creates a sense of community. If there are people who don't know Punjabi then I tend to stick to English because I don't want anyone to feel left out. But my main language is English, I use it at work, university and accommodation

How do you decide which language to use?

Number of responses: 9

Text answers:

> Depends on who I'm with

> My twitter account is solely dedicated to being about Indian culture so I inevitably use a lot of Hindi and Punjabi

> Can only read and write English

> It depends on who I am speaking to and whether they are of the same ethnicity as me

> I don't need to decide between languages because i only ever use English online. there is no need for me to use Punjabi online as no one will understand.

> As English is a more renouned language used by the population, which means more people will understand.

> People I'm speaking to

> If the user I am communicating with is using Punjabi then I will most likely use a mix of Punjabi and English. However most of my tweets are in English as I know most of my followers are speakers of English

> English is my main spoken and written language therefore it is the most natural one to use

Do you ever switch between languages on social media?

Number of responses: 9

Text answers:

No

I use a mix of languages for comedic effect. A lot of my followers are british Asian

No

No

On social media I dont switch between languages because I strictly stick to English

Depending on the situation, I do switch languages, e.g. if a joke is from Punjabi culture

Yes

I switch between languages depending on who I am talking to. Punjabi I rarely use online however I will choose it if it is fitting.

No as can only write in English even though I can speak fluent Punjabi I cannot write it

If your language on social media does tend to switch, what is the difference between the success of the different posts? Does one language attract more interaction than another? Why do you think this is? Please explain in as much detail as possible

Number of responses: 4

Text answers:

Because my account is mainly to do with Indian culture and the humor behind it, my posts with

It would gravitate less attraction as Punjabi isn't a commonly spoken/taught language, so it isn't as relatable or it isn't understandable to other cultures.

A certain language will attract a certain crowd as the use of that language was to appeal to a more specific audience who perhaps know the reference for joke I was making in the given language

If I am using twitter and I am tweeting in Punjabi, the post gets less interaction. Most of the likes I get are speakers of Punjabi, Urdu and Hindi. The interaction tends to be people who I don't personally know. Because I know that all my followers know English fluently I tend to tweet in English most of the time, I also get the most interaction when I do this. I know that when I tweet in Punjabi that most of my followers can't understand what Im saying therefore Im aware that I will get less interaction

Does your language use on social media differ to that elsewhere online (any other site that is not a social media platform)? If so, how and why? Please explain in as much detail as possible

Number of responses: 6

Text answers:

I use Hindi on WhatsApp where all my family communicate with each other. But none of us use hindi letters we use English letters that sound out what the Hindi words sounds like

No

I do use Punjabi on WhatsApp because all my family use it to talk to each other. But when I use Punjabi on this platform I don't use Punjabi letters I use English letters. For example if I wanted to say how are you in Punjabi I would write 'kida' as thats what it sounds like out loud

On snapchat I mainly communicate in English to my friends as it is the main language spoken, but I'm Whatsapp I talk in Punjabi as I mainly have relatives on that form of social media. I change my languages so it is a more comfortable conversation.

Ofcourse, on Social media you can express yourself for who you really are whereas in an interview one would have to conduct them selves in a professional manor which isn't accurate to their true personality but to their professional selves

The only other social media platform I use is Instagram and I have never used Punjabi on this platform as it isnt the type of interaction where I need to use it. Instagram and Twitter are two very different platforms. Instagram is more based around pictures than what you're saying. Twitter is like having a conversation with someone therefore I find it appropriate to switch between languages on there.

Does religion have any effect on your language choice?

Number of responses: 8

Text answers:

No

No religion doesnt affect my language choices

No

I wouldnt say that religion affects my language choice. But being in religious setting has made my Punjabi better and in most Sikh temples they run Punjabi classes so we can learn to read and write in Punjabi. But as ive got older ive forgotten how to read and write, so thats why I use the English alphabet because I know how to speak fluently.

No

Yes

I would say it doesn't affect my language however if I see that someone else is Sikh I can assume that they speak Punjabi too as most Sikhs are Punjabi.

Yes as when in religious institut Gurdwara I would be highly likely to speak fluent Punjabi with any aged person. This is becoming more of an issue as my generation and those below are unable to really effectively communicate in Punjabi

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