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Language Vitality of Chilisso: A Case of an Endangered Language of Pakistan

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Abstract

Endangered languages are a vital part of the world's linguistic heritage and their unique cultural and cognitive systems are under threat. Chilisso is a critically endangered Indo-Aryan language spoken in some pockets in District Kohistan in northern Pakistan. It is an undocumented language; about 500-600 people speak it, the majority of whom are elderly. The present sociolinguistic study aims to assess the linguistic vitality of Chilisso in Kohistan by focusing on two main factors: language use in different domains, and the attitude of speakers towards Chilisso. The study is based on a survey conducted in Dasu among 51 respondents of various age groups between 2024 and 2025 with the assistance of questionnaires. The results of the study indicate that the process of intergenerational transmission of the Chilisso language is low, and younger generation uses less Chilisso, shifting to Shina, which is one of the dominant languages of the region. The findings also hint at the less positive attitudes of the younger generation towards their ancestral language, as well as a continuous process of the shift to Shina in daily communication. This study can contribute some empirical data to the existing very limited literature on the Chilisso language and language use patterns, and can also fill part of the gap in the literature on the intergenerational transmission of the language in the Chilisso community. It also marks negative language attitudes towards Chilisso and the current shift to Shina, which provides insights that can contribute to future documentation efforts, language maintenance efforts, as well as policy planning of endangered languages in the region.

Keywords: Endangered Language; Language Vitality; Language Shift; Language Use; Language Attitudes; Chilisso

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Introduction

Language endangerment has become one of the main concerns of modern Sociolinguistics, as a considerable number of languages around the world are now assessed as being at risk of extinction. Language loss involves not only the disappearance of language systems but also the loss of cultural heritage, oral traditions, and indigenous knowledge (Crystal,2000). On the same note, Fishman (1991) points out that the weakening of intergenerational transmission is one of the most crucial indicators of the language shift and subsequent endangerment. Globalization, urbanization, and the prevalence of major languages in education and media are some of the forces that contribute to this process, and often result in the younger generations abandoning their ancestral languages in favor of those that offer greater socioeconomic mobility.

Pakistan is a land of linguistic diversity; however, most of the minority languages are under the threat of extinction. There is an extremely diverse variety of regional and indigenous languages used in the country, especially in its northern regions, although most of them are not officially recognized or supported by the institutions. However, whereas Urdu is the national language and English prevails in the official, educational, and administrative contexts, there are smaller languages, most of which are predominantly spoken in informal settings. Researchers have observed that this hierarchical distribution of language creates the circumstances in which there is a language shift, or that there is a language shift that is directed towards younger speakers who associate dominant languages with education and economic progress (Rahman, 2002). In remote areas such as Kohistan, other factors like geographic isolation, illiteracy in the local languages, and increased contact with other dominant linguistic groups further hasten the endangerment process.

It is within the wider frame of sociolinguistics that Chilisso is a highly threatened language. Chilisso is spoken by a small group of people in the Kohistan region. Ethnologue (Eberhard et al., 2025) estimates that the number of Chilisso speakers is less than 10,000, whereas Hallberg (1992) speculated that around 1600 Chilisso speakers live in the scattered areas of Kohistan, including Jalkot and Mahirin. The latest study estimates that less than 1000 Chilisso speakers are left in Kohistan (Liljgeren &

Akhunzada, 2017). According to our own field observations and data provided by the members of the community, the number of Chilisso speakers is estimated to be 500-600, yet there is no authentic official census information on the matter at the moment. Encyclopedia of World's Endangered Languages by Moseley (2008) classified Chilisso as a moribund language of northern Pakistan. Chilisso is spoken in a Shina- and Indus Kohistani-dominated region, and this language is under tremendous pressure, has limited functional domains, and is mostly used in home and community settings. The increasing power of Shina and Urdu has resulted in mass bilingualism and growing language shift among speakers. Previous observations indicate that younger age groups are less proficient in Chilisso and prefer dominant languages to communicate more widely (Hallberg, 1992; Liljegren & Akhunzada, 2017). This means that there is a deterioration in intergenerational transmission, which, as Fishman (1991) notes, is one of the main indicators of language endangerment. Although Chilisso has cultural and linguistic relevance, it has been under-documented, especially as regards empirical sociolinguistic research, and this has necessitated systematic investigation of its current trends of use, attitudes of the speakers, and the contributing factors to its decline.

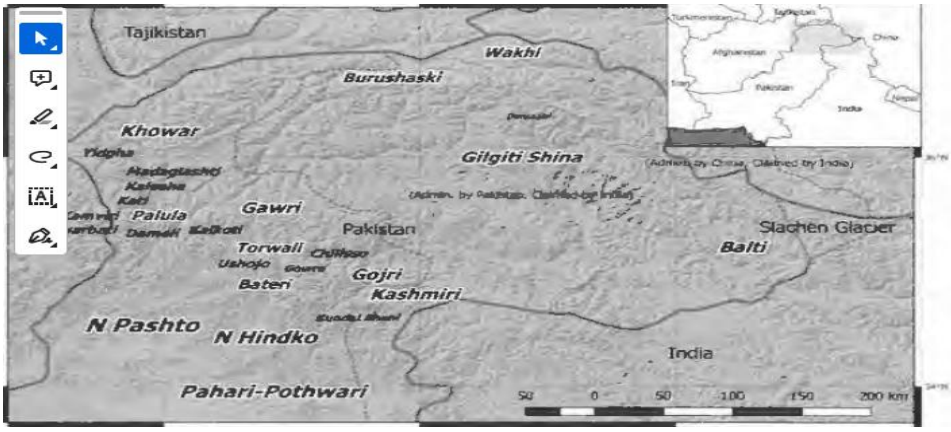
Chilisso belongs to the Dardic sub-group of the Indo-Aryan family. The speakers refer to it as 'chelisyo', '*cheliso' or 'chiliso'* and *ziip* (language). It is named after the Chillis Khel community, living on the mountainous east bank of the river Indus in Kohistan, Pakistan. It is placed in the Kohistani group of languages along with Shina, Indus Kohistani, Gowro and Bateri (Liljegren, 2016). Geographically, Kohistan extends from Gilgit-Baltistan in the north to the Mansehra District in the east, and further to the Battagram, Shangla, and Swat districts in the west. Serving as a convergence point for the Hindukush, Karakoram, and Himalayan ranges, Kohistan forms a natural boundary that distinguishes different ecological zones within these vast mountain systems.

The multilingualism in the eastern Indus Valley is driven by population and communication needs. Shina is the dominant language on the eastern bank of the Indus, and is used as the main language of communication within communities. It is used not only at home but also at the market as a lingua franca, facilitating communication between people speaking

different languages. Urdu is also an important language in the region, being the language of administration and the primary language of education. Consequently, the majority of speakers in the region become proficient in Urdu, despite it being a second language.

The region is also home to a number of smaller language groups, such as speakers of Chilisso. The Chilisso community tends to use its own language within the community, but uses Shina for communication with other groups and Urdu for their dealings with the government. This complex multilingual context gives rise to multilingual competence, where Chilisso speakers manage Shina as a local lingua franca - and Urdu as a national and academic language.

Figure 1*: Map of Northern Pakistan Exhibiting Language Locations (Liljegren & Akhunzada, 2017)*



The current study is focused on the Chilisso-speaking community belonging to Dasu and Gujjar Banda. Dasu is a small town in Kohistan, and Gujjar Banda is a remote village in the Jalkot valley. The primary aim of this research is to analyze the existing trends in Chilisso language use in the major areas of social life, including home, community relationships, and workplace environments, to learn about its functional distribution. It also aims to examine the variation in the use of language by the Chilisso-speaking society in terms of the different age groups in language use. The other important goal is to determine how much the intergenerational transmission of the Chilisso language is occurring and being used by younger speakers. The study will also seek to examine speakers' attitudes towards both Chilisso and the prevailing language, Shina. Last but not

least, the analysis aims to discover and examine the sociolinguistic forces that are contributing to the current shift of Chilisso to Shina and, therefore, to establish language use in a larger frame of social, cultural, and economic forces. To address these aims in a methodical manner, the following questions were formulated to focus on the language use patterns, intergenerational transfer, and the attitudes of speakers in the Chilisso-speaking society.

1. How does language use vary in different domains across younger and older age groups in the Chilisso-speaking community?
2. What are the attitudes of speakers towards Chilisso that cause maintenance or shift to Shina across younger and older age groups in the Chilisso-speaking community?

The two factors, language use and attitude, are key factors to study a language's vitality. They are included in several frameworks that study language vitality, such as the Graded Intergenerational Disrupted Scale (GIDS) by Fishman (1991), Language Vitality and Endangerment (LVE) by UNESCO (2003), and Extended Graded Intergenerational Disrupted Scale (EGIDS) by Lewis and Simons (2010). The language use in different domains helps to measure language safety in the community. If a language is used across multiple domains, that language is considered safe (Rehman,2012; Li, 2024; Fatinah et al., 2025). Likewise, language attitudes also determine the vitality of a language. Positive attitudes indicate higher chances of language maintenance in the future (Anjum, 2016; Gomeshi, 2022; Murad et al., 2023).

Age was selected as a key sociolinguistic variable because language maintenance and shift are strongly shaped by intergenerational patterns of use, proficiency, and attitude. In endangered-language contexts, comparison between younger and older speakers helps determine whether a language is being transmitted successfully or whether its use is becoming restricted to older generations (Kircher et al., 2023; Gomeshi, 2022).

Literature Review

Language attitudes generally refer to the feelings, evaluations, and judgments that speakers hold about their own language or the languages of others (Crystal, 1992). These attitudes are related to the hidden perceptions

about a particular language, thus determining its significance, status, and benefit (Preston, 2010). Sociolinguistic research views language attitudes as an essential factor to measure language maintenance and shift, especially in multilingual situations where social and economic benefits are associated with the dominant language (Baker, 1992; Garrett, 2010). Positive attitudes towards a language indicate higher chances of its maintenance in the future, while negative attitudes result in limited language use, thus making it endangered

Focused on the languages of northern Pakistan, several studies were conducted to investigate language shift and maintenance, such as Rehman (2012), who, in his sociolinguistic study of Kundal Shahi, concludes that speakers disregard their language for being low in prestige. This negative attitude leads to the reduction of the intergenerational transmission of Kundal Shahi. Similarly, Anjum (2016), in her sociolinguistic study of Mankiyali, notes language shift in the Mankiyali community. It is mainly due to the negative attitudes of the younger generation towards their native language because of its lower market value as compared to the dominant language, while older speakers value their language as an important identity marker. These studies illustrate how language attitudes significantly influence patterns of language use and contribute to language shift in endangered language communities.

Research on Chilisso remains extremely limited, and few scattered references in the literature are found. John Biddulph (1880), in his early work, only makes short comments on the origin of the community and briefly makes grammatical remarks, which do not shed much light on the sociolinguistic state of affairs. More specific descriptions are found much later, especially in A Sociolinguistic Survey of Kohistani Languages, Volume 1 by Hallberg (1992), and in Linguistic diversity, vitality and maintenance: a case study on the language situation in northern Pakistan by Liljegren and Akhunzada (2017). These works give us some of the few sociolinguistic accounts of Chilisso and its usage, attitudes of speakers, and the pressures that it experiences in the multilingual environment of Kohistan.

An early description of the sociolinguistic situation of Chilisso is given by Hallberg (1992). He collected two wordlists of Chilisso from Jalkot and Mahirin and compared them with each other and also with other languages of Kohistan, as shown in Figure 2. The findings indicate that Chilisso shares the highest lexical similarity with the Indus Kohistani varieties spoken in Seo, Patan, and Jijal, with a percentage of 71.

Figure 2*: Comparison of Chilisso with other Languages (Hallberg, 1992)*

Kandia
98 Duber
90 91 Seo
91 92 100 Patan
88 90 95 95 Jijal
71 70 71 71 71 Chilisso (Jalkot)
69 69 71 71 71 87 Chilisso (Mahrin)
61 61 63 63 62 **65 68** Gowro
58 59 61 61 60 **55 54** 60 Bateri
40 40 37 37 38 **56 49** 41 30 Jalkot (Shina)
38 38 36 36 37 **55 48** 40 29 100 Palas (Shina)
40 41 38 38 39 **53 52** 43 30 97 97 Kolai (Shina)
28 28 27 26 27 **25 26** 24 27 16 15 16 Kalami
28 27 28 27 27 **27 26** 25 29 17 17 19 44 Torwali
17 17 18 18 18 **17 16** 18 18 16 15 15 15 12 Urdu
14 14 12 12 12 **11 12** 11 12 12 11 13 7 9 11 Pashto

The study also revealed that Chilisso was still in use in the community at the time, especially in home and intra-group communication. The language was used as a medium of daily communication despite the small community size living in scattered places. Nevertheless, there were also indications of the pressure from Shina, the major lingua franca of the region, as pointed out by Hallberg. The use of two languages was common; Chilisso was used in the close domains and Shina in the broader context of communication. The attitudes towards language seemed to be rather ambivalent: speakers appreciated Chilisso as an identity indicator, but they were aware of the usefulness of Shina. Notably, some of the first signs of language change can be traced, particularly in areas outside the house, indicating that the vitality of Chilisso was compromised already. This study was based on short interviews from ten participants, which have limited empirical evidence.

Liljegren and Akhunzada (2017) measured the linguistic vitality of several different northern languages according to the factors proposed by UNESCO (2003). Chilisso is described as having low ethnolinguistic vitality with a low number of speakers and growing marginalization, lack of documentation, and no use in the media. The research also mentions that there is a considerable decline in intergenerational transmission and in use of the Chilisso language among younger speakers. Shina has also ventured into the majority of functional areas, which were the preserve of

Chilisso. On the whole, the picture is presented as one of continuous language shift with Chilisso being reduced to fewer and fewer contexts of use. Taken as a whole, the work of Hallberg (1992) represents an older phase of the language that is stable though showing strained bilingualism; whereas the subsequent analysis by Liljegren and Akhunzada (2017) depicts a definite shift towards language shift and endangerment. This study does not present a comprehensive picture of the linguistic vitality of Chilisso as it lacks empirical data, and mostly conclusions are given descriptively as estimates.

Expanding on the previous studies, the present research draws on empirical evidence, offering insights into the vitality of the Chilisso language and contributing to understanding its current status in a multilingual setting. Earlier studies by Hallberg (1992) and Liljegren and Akhunzada (2017) have reported an ongoing language shift in the Chilisso community, caused by the dominance of Shina as the regional lingua franca and factors such as the greater socioeconomic and educational value of Shina and Urdu. While these studies identify the major forces driving language shift, the present study examines the language shift through the theoretical lens of the Theory of Ecology of Pressures (TEP).

Theory of Ecology of Pressures (TEP) is a theory proposed by Terborg (2006) and later refined (Terborg & Landa, 2013), which can serve as a useful lens to understand why some languages are preserved and others are gradually lost. The framework is based on the more general concept of linguistic ecology, proposed by Haugen (1972), which considers language as a component of a dynamic system influenced by its social context. In this approach, the usage of the language is not predetermined but is always under the influence of the interaction between speakers and the situations where they use the language.

In its simplest form, TEP states that speakers in multilingual contexts are given competing forces that affect how they choose to communicate in their daily interaction. These pressures are caused by two complementary factors, namely, individual motivations and the immediate surrounding sociolinguistic environment. On one hand, the options of speakers are determined by the personal interests of the speakers, such as their attitudes, beliefs, needs, and perceived benefits of a language. Alternatively, these decisions are predetermined by externalities like the speaker distribution, language use patterns across all domains, levels of proficiency, and the

nature of interactions in the community (Haugen, 1972). Collectively, these forces dictate the language that will prevail or gain favor in certain situations.

The framework especially considers several major indicators of language vitality, including the percentage of speakers in the entire population, the degree of intergenerational transmission, the language use patterns across all social spheres, and community attitudes towards the language. Once they become weak, the pressures will shift towards a dominant language, which may result in decreasing usage and even eventual language shift.

Within the framework of the current research on Chilisso, TEP provides a topical theoretical background in analyzing the current sociolinguistic change. Chilisso-speaking people are a community that lives in a multilingual society where Shina and Urdu have a dominant influence. By applying TEP, it is possible to examine how various pressures influence the language choices of speakers by examining the degree to which the language is passed on to younger generations and its use in various contexts, such as home, community, and workplace. It also enables the systematic study of the community attitudes towards Chilisso and other competing languages.

By introducing the analysis as being based on ecological pressures, this research can go beyond mere description to explain why changes in the use of language are taking place. Particularly, it assists in determining whether a decline in using Chilisso is influenced by inner or outer forces like the shift in attitudes and preferences as well as the prevalence of Shina and Urdu in education, administration, and overall communication. By so doing, TEP offers a systematic method to the process of learning the mechanism behind the language maintenance or shift in the Chilisso-speaking community.

Methodology

This study is based on the data collected from Chilisso speakers during the researchers' visit to Kohistan in 2024 and 2025. Currently, the Chilisso community (400-500 speakers) lives in scattered areas across Kohistan, and the majority is concentrated in a small village, Gujjar Banda.

It is difficult to access a large number of the community members in that village due to their constant seasonal migration. During summer, they migrate towards higher and colder areas; whereas, in winter, they move towards urban areas. Adopting a convenient sampling technique, the data for the study were collected from the speakers available in Gujjar Banda and Dasu. Sociolinguistic data were collected from 51 respondents belonging to different age groups through questionnaires. Mostly, the data were collected from the males as it was difficult to access females for data collection due to the community's cultural norms and values. The participants were divided into two groups according to their age: younger generation and older generation. All of them reported being bilingual in Chilisso and Shina (see Table 1), that is, the dominant languages on the east bank of the Indus. Almost every male also had medium to low proficiency in Urdu, which is the language of offices, education, and media.

Table 1*: Demographics of Participants*

Variable	Category	N
Age	15–30 (younger generation)	29
	31–75 (older generation)	22
Gender	Male	44
	Female	7
Residence	Gujjar Banda	12
	Dasu	39
Raised in language	Chilisso	6
	Shina	13
	Both	32
Education	Uneducated	26
	Primary	15
	Matric and above	10

Instrument

The data used in this research were gathered via a structured questionnaire based on the adaptations of Rubin (1968) and Choi (2005), previously used by Gomeshi (2019) in a similar sociolinguistic setup. The tool was created in the form of a structured questionnaire to record the patterns of Chilisso language use, frequency of interaction in Chilisso, and the attitudes of the people towards Chilisso in a systematic manner.

The questionnaire was divided into three sections. In the first section, the details about the demographic and linguistic background of the participants were collected. Questions included:

- age, gender, residence, and proficiency in different languages.
- Participants' parents' language backgrounds and the language in which participants were raised.

The second section of the questionnaire was designed to collect data about use of Chilisso in different domains such as friends, home, job, market, mosque, and school.

Language use across different domains was measured using a five-point Likert scale reflecting the frequency of Chilisso use. Responses were coded as 1 = Always, 2 = Frequently, 3 = Half time, 4 = Sometimes, and 5 = Rarely. Consequently, lower mean scores indicate more frequent use of Chilisso, whereas higher mean scores indicate less frequent use. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations, were calculated for each domain and compared across younger (15–30 years) and older (above 30 years) respondents. Pearson's chi-square test was used to examine whether the distribution of responses differed significantly between the two age groups.

The last section of the questionnaire contained statements to measure attitudes toward Chilisso. The participants were given choices using a five-point Likert scale ranging from "Strongly Agree" to "Strongly Disagree." Each statement is about a different aspect of language attitudes:

- Chilisso is embarrassing.
- Chilisso is important for employment opportunities.
- Chilisso is an important identity marker.
- Chilisso should be taught to the new generation.
- Chilisso is easy
- Shina is easy

These questions were included to understand community perceptions and emotional attachment toward the language.

Further, this section also covered two questions on self-assessment of Chilisso and Shina proficiency by the participants. These responses helped to understand the participants' perceptions about these languages and also the level of inter-generational transmission of Chilisso.

Procedure

The questionnaire was administered in the field as part of the data collection process, through the Chilisso-speaking community. The questionnaire was written in Urdu and Chilisso so that the respondents could clearly understand the questionnaire. Where respondents were not fluent or proficient in Urdu, assistance was given through the Chilisso-speaking mediators.

The participants were contacted in various community settings, and the aim of the study was clarified to the participants prior to participation. There were attempts to make sure that all the questions, and especially those that concerned language use and attitudes, were clear to respondents. This strategy assisted in reducing misinterpretation and enabled the participants to answer more naturally in a language of their choice.

Results

The data were organized according to the age of the respondents, dividing them into the younger generation and older generation. The results are presented under two categories: personal language use patterns in different social domains and language attitudes and opinions. Data were analyzed quantitatively with the help of the software R, and percentages for each response of the questionnaires were calculated. Final results are presented in the form of bar charts and line graphs to address each research question.

Language Use in Different Domains

This section of results is based on the first two sections of the questionnaire that address the first research question:

> RQ1: How does Chilisso language use vary in different domains across younger and older age groups in the Chilisso-speaking community?

Considering the importance of young people for the vitality of a language, the data were collected and analyzed based on the age group of the respondents. The questionnaire contained six social domains of Chilisso use: friends, home, job, market, mosque, school. The Chilisso-Shina bilingual participants were given choices ranging from always to never. Table 2 presents results of the frequency of use of Chilisso in

different domains. Among younger speakers, Chilisso use remains consistently low across domains (see Table 2).

Table 2*: Language Use in Different Domains among Younger Respondents (15-30 Years), n = 29*

Domain	Always n (%)	Frequently n (%)	Half Time n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Rarely n (%)	M	SD
Home	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	3 (10.3)	11 (37.9)	15 (51.7)	4.41	0.68
Friends	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	11 (37.9)	18 (62.1)	4.62	0.49
Workplace	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.4)	28 (96.6)	4.97	0.19
Market	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1 (3.4)	4 (13.8)	24 (82.8)	4.79	0.49
Mosque	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (17.2)	6 (20.7)	18 (62.1)	4.45	0.78
School	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	29 (100.0)	5.00	0.00

Note. The scale was coded as 1 = Always, 2 = Frequently, 3 = Half time, 4 = Sometimes, and 5 = Rarely. Higher mean scores indicate less frequent use of the language in the domain.

Data show Chilisso is used 'sometimes' in the home setting, which is slightly higher than other domains. At home, use of Chilisso is slightly higher but still restricted, while 51.7% use it rarely, and 10.3% about half the time (M=4.41, SD=0.68). It is evident that in the home domain, Chilisso is used marginally more than in other domains, but still not a dominant medium of communication.

While interacting with friends, the majority responded as using Chilisso rarely (62%), whereas 37.9% use it sometimes, and no one uses it frequently or regularly (M=4.62, SD=0.49). It indicates that Chilisso use is limited in informal interactions by the younger generation.

Chilisso is minimally used at the workplace. The majority (96.6%) reported they rarely use Chilisso, while only a few use it sometimes (3.4%). Likewise, in the market, the majority use it rarely (82.8%), while13.8% use it sometimes (M=4.97, SD=0.19). The results suggest that Chilisso is mostly out of use in trade.

At mosques, Chilisso is also limited, where we have 20.7% responses as sometimes use, and 17.2% use it about half the time. However, the

majority 62.1%) of the younger generation responded that they rarely use Chilisso in mosques (M=4.45, SD=0.78).

In schools, 100% of responses indicate that they rarely use Chilisso in schools (M=5, SD=0). This highlights its lowest use in formal educational environments.

Overall, Chilisso is not a major medium of communication for the younger generation. It is rarely used informally and formally. The patterns reveal that the younger generation does not use Chilisso (see Table 3) frequently in their daily lives.

Table 3*: Language Use in Different Domains among Older Respondents (31 Years and Above), n = 22*

Domain	Always n (%)	Frequently n (%)	Half Time n (%)	Sometimes n (%)	Rarely n (%)	M	SD
Home	1 (4.5)	2 (9.1)	6 (27.3)	3 (13.6)	10 (45.5)	3.86	1.25
Friends	2 (9.1)	3 (13.6)	4 (18.2)	9 (40.9)	4 (18.2)	3.45	1.22
Market	0 (0.0)	1 (4.5)	1 (4.5)	2 (9.1)	18 (81.8)	4.68	0.78
Workplace	0 (0.0)	4 (19.0)	4 (19.0)	8 (38.1)	5 (23.8)	3.67	1.06
Mosque	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	5 (22.7)	7 (31.8)	9 (40.5)	4.23	0.81
School	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	22 (100.0)	5.00	0.00

Note. Percentages are based on valid responses for each domain. The scale was coded as 1 = Always, 2 = Frequently, 3 = Half time, 4 = Sometimes, and 5 = Rarely.

In the home domain, the use of Chilisso is more balanced; however, it is not very strong. The data shows that 13.6% of people use it frequently. The largest groups are people who use Chilisso half the time, which is 27.3%, and those who hardly ever use it, which is 45.5%. (M=3.86, SD=1.25). This shows that Chilisso is still important in the home domain for the older generation.

With friends, Chilisso is used more compared to other areas of life. The results show 9.1 % of people always use Chilisso when they are with friends, and 13.6% use it frequently. Then there are 9% who use Chilisso sometimes and 4.5% who hardly ever use it (M=3.45, SD=1.22). This tells us that when Chilisso is used with friends, it still has a presence even if people do not use it all the time.

For markets, the use of Chilisso is very low. Most people, which is 81.8%, never use Chilisso when they are at the market. 9.1% use it sometimes, and a small group of 4.5% use it frequently (M=4.68, 0.78). This shows that when people are buying things, they do not use Chilisso. For jobs, the pattern of Chilisso use is mixed, as data shows that 19% of people use Chilisso frequently at work and another 19% use it half the time. Then there are 37.5% who use Chilisso sometimes and 23.8% who hardly ever use it (M=3.67, SD=1.06). This tells us that older people may still use Chilisso to some extent at work, but they do not use it all the time. One respondent did not answer this question, which means that Chilisso may not be used in all jobs.

For mosques, the use of Chilisso is a little higher, and 22.7% of people use it half of the time, 31.8% use it sometimes, and 40.5 86.4% hardly ever use Chilisso at the mosque (M=4.23, SD=0.81). Nobody uses Chilisso regularly or frequently at the mosque. This tells us that Chilisso is not used much in community settings. For schools, Chilisso is not used at all. All the people (100%) said that they never use Chilisso at school. This shows that Chilisso has no place in education.

Overall, older people use Chilisso more than young people, especially when they are with friends and at home. However, the use of Chilisso is not consistent. The use becomes much weaker in public places like markets and mosques and in formal settings, like schools. This tells us that while older people still use Chilisso to communicate with each other in informal settings, the use of Chilisso is already very limited in terms of where and how it is used. Chilisso is still used by people (see Table 4), but it is not used as much as it could be and its use is decreasing.

Table 4*: Comparison of Language Use in Different Domains by both Age Groups, n = 51*

Domain	Younger (n = 29) M ± SD	Older (n = 22) M ± SD	χ^2	df	P
Home	4.41 ± 0.68	3.86 ± 1.25	8.78	4	.067
Friends	4.62 ± 0.49	3.45 ± 1.22	17.48	4	.002**
Market	4.79 ± 0.49	4.68 ± 0.78	1.59	3	.661
School	5.00 ± 0.00	5.00 ± 0.00	—	—	—
Mosque	4.45 ± 0.78	4.23 ± 0.81	1.84	2	.398

Domain	Younger (n = 29) M ± SD	Older (n = 22) M ± SD	χ^2	df	P
Workplace	4.97 ± 0.19	3.67 ± 1.06	28.94	3	< .001***

Note. M = mean; SD = standard deviation; χ^2 = chi-square. The chi-square values in this table were calculated from the frequency distributions shown in Tables 1 and 2 after excluding response categories with zero totals. ** p < .01. *** p < .001.

The results demonstrate limited use of Chilisso across all domains by younger people. The school domain shows (M = 5.00, SD = 0.00), indicating that all younger respondents reported rarely using the language at school. Likewise, for the results for workplace (M = 4.97, SD = 0.19), market (M = 4.79, SD = 0.49), friends (M = 4.62, SD = 0.49), mosque (M = 4.45, SD = 0.78), and home (M = 4.41, SD = 0.68). These results suggest that the younger generation uses Chilisso infrequently not only in public domains but also in informal and intimate contexts.

Less use of Chilisso is also demonstrated in older people's responses, although their mean scores were generally lower than those of the younger group. It shows a comparatively more frequent use of Chilisso among older respondents. The difference is especially visible in the friend domain, where older respondents had a lower mean score (M = 3.45, SD = 1.22) than younger respondents (M = 4.62, SD = 0.49). A similar difference is seen in the workplace domain, where older respondents reported more frequent use (M = 3.67, SD = 1.06) than younger respondents (M = 4.97, SD = 0.19). In the home domain, older respondents also showed somewhat more frequent use (M = 3.86, SD = 1.25) compared with younger respondents (M = 4.41, SD = 0.68), although this difference was not statistically significant.

The chi-square results show statistically significant differences between the two age groups in two domains. The difference in language use with friends was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 17.48$, $p = .002$, indicating that younger and older respondents differ strongly in their patterns of language use in peer interaction. The workplace domain also showed a highly significant difference, $\chi^2(3) = 28.94$, $p < .001$, suggesting that age group is strongly associated with language use in work-related contexts. In both cases, the older group reported more frequent use than the younger group.

The remaining domains did not show statistically significant differences. Language use at home approached significance, $\chi^2(4) = 8.78$, $p = .067$, but did not reach the conventional .05 level. Market use, $\chi^2(3) = 1.59$, $p = .661$, and mosque use, $\chi^2(2) = 1.84$, $p = .398$, showed no significant age-based differences. The school domain could not be tested because both groups gave identical responses, with all respondents reporting rare use.

The results indicate generally low use of the language across all domains, especially among younger respondents. Younger participants reported rare use of the language in school, workplace, market, friends, mosque, and home domains, as reflected in high mean scores across all domains. Older respondents also reported limited use, but their comparatively lower mean scores suggest that they use the language more frequently than younger respondents in some contexts. The chi-square test showed significant age-based differences in the friend domain, $\chi^2(4) = 17.48$, $p = .002$, and the workplace domain, $\chi^2(3) = 28.94$, $p < .001$. These findings reveal generational differences more clearly in communication with friends and workplace communication. In the home, market, or mosque domains, we do not see any significant difference among younger and older groups. Overall, the findings point to restricted use of the language across domains, where younger speakers use Chilisso less than older people, which is an indication of the ongoing intergenerational language shift.

Language Attitudes

This section presents results based on the third section of the questionnaire. It addresses the second research question of the study:

RQ2: What are the attitudes of speakers towards Chilisso that cause maintenance or shift to Shina across younger and older age groups in the Chilisso-speaking community?

The questionnaire contained questions about the attitudes of Chilisso speakers towards Chilisso. It also contained questions about proficiency in Shina and Chilisso (see Table 5). The data were analyzed for the younger generation and older generation.

Table 5 presents results on language attitudes towards Chilisso of the younger generation.

Table 5*: Language Attitudes of Younger Respondents (15-30 Years), n = 29*

Variable	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		M	SD
	N	%	n	%	N	%	n	%	n	%		
Chilisso embarrassing	5	17.2	14	48.3	5	17.2	4	13.8	1	3.4	2.38	1.05
Chilisso identity marker	0	0.0	9	31.0	9	31.0	11	37.9	0	0.0	3.07	0.84
Chilisso useful for job	1	3.4	0	0.0	0	0.0	4	13.8	24	82.8	4.72	0.80
Chilisso should be taught	1	3.4	7	24.1	11	37.9	8	27.6	2	6.9	3.10	0.98
Shina is easy	27	93.1	2	6.9	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.07	0.26
Chilisso is easy	2	6.9	10	34.5	6	20.7	9	31.0	2	6.9	2.97	1.12

Note. Responses scale was coded from 1 = Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3=Neutral, 4= Disagree, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

For the question about using Chilisso being embarrassing, answers are skewed towards agreement, and 65.5% agree or strongly agree, while 13.8% disagree or strongly disagree and 17.2% are neutral. This is an indication that a significant percentage of younger speakers actually do associate Chilisso with embarrassment.

In the case of considering Chilisso as an identity marker, the attitudes are mixed, albeit leaning towards the negative. About 31% agree, 31% are neutral, and 37.9% disagree. The lack of a high rate of agreement shows that Chilisso is not always considered a powerful identity marker among younger speakers.

In the case of the importance of employment (job), the trend is quite evident, where 85.7% strongly disagree, and 11.4% disagree, with a very small fraction (2.86%) strongly agreeing. This indicates that younger speakers do not attribute economic or professional significance to Chilisso.

Lastly, for teaching Chilisso to the next generation, attitudes are mixed and a bit hesitant. The support of teaching is 27.5%, and the opposition is 34.5%. The neutrality is 37.9%. This implies that even among the younger speakers, there is no solid agreement towards actively passing the language to the other generation.

In the case of speaking proficiency in Shina, there is a very strong and uniform pattern. All the respondents are highly proficient, with 91.4% strongly agreeing and 8.57% agreeing. This verifies that Shina is strongly prevailing in regard to competency. In the case of speaking proficiency in Chilisso, reactions are rather split. Approximately 37.1% of them agree or strongly agree that they are proficient, with 20% of them being neutral. A higher proportion (about 42.9) does not agree or strongly agree that they are proficient, with 20% of them remaining neutral. This means that there is a lack of balance in the perceived competence of oneself, which is quite surprising since younger speakers are usually anticipated to have a stronger command.

In general, positive attachment levels to Chilisso (see Table 6) are weaker in the younger generation as compared to what would be expected. It has a certain degree of embarrassment, a lack of understanding of the value of the identity, a reduced perception of economic usefulness, and a divided opinion regarding teaching. This, together with a skewed self-reported proficiency, indicates a language that is not just losing functional domains, but also experiencing a loss in confidence and support even among younger speakers.

Table 6 presents results of attitude towards Chilisso of the older respondents. Mostly, the older generation, on the issue of whether it is embarrassing, do not support this claim.

Table 6: *Language attitudes of older respondents (31 years and above)*

Variable	Strongly agree		Agree		Neutral		Disagree		Strongly disagree		M	SD
	n	%	n	%	N	%	N	%	n	%		
Shina easy	19	86.4	2	9.1	1	4.5	0	0.0	0	0.0	1.18	0.50
Chilisso easy	8	36.4	3	13.6	6	27.3	4	18.2	1	4.5	2.41	1.30
Chilisso embarrassing	1	4.5	3	13.6	7	31.8	5	22.7	6	27.3	3.55	1.18

Chilisso identity marker	8	36.4	3	13.6	4	18.2	5	22.7	2	9.1	2.55	1.44
Chilisso useful for job	0	0.0	0	0.0	0	0.0	2	9.1	20	90.9	4.91	0.29
Chilisso should be taught	3	13.6	7	31.8	4	18.2	4	18.2	4	18.2	2.95	1.36

Note. Responses were coded on a scale: 1 = Strongly Agree, 2=Agree, 3= Neutral, 4= Disargee, 5 = Strongly Disagree.

The percentage of strongly disagree and disagree is 37.5% and 12.5%, respectively, with only 18.8% in agreement that it is embarrassing. This means that Chilisso is not usually perceived negatively by the older generation.

Attitudes are more positive in terms of identity. Half of the respondents strongly agree and agree (36.4% &13.6% respectively) that Chilisso is a part of their identity. Even though a large portion of the population (31.8%) disagrees, the general trend is that a large number of old speakers still identify the language as their identity. However, its perceived economic value is very low. A huge majority, 90.9%, strongly disagree that Chilisso is useful in employment, and a majority of 9.1% also disagree. This indicates a strong unity of the view that the language does not help secure employment.

Self-reported competence is a mixed-field. Although half of the respondents strongly agree and the rest only agree that they speak Chilisso well, only a small proportion disagreed, with the rest remaining neutral. This implies a lack of confidence and competence in older speakers.

Contrarily, Shina presents very good results over time. The percentage who strongly agree and agree that they speak it well is about 86.4% and 9.1%, respectively, with almost no opposition. It proves that Shina is the language that older speakers consider themselves most fluent in.

There are mixed views on whether Chilisso should be imparted to the coming generations or not.

Approximately half of them do not support its transmission (13.6% strongly disagree & 31.8% disagree), but almost 32.4% are those who support transmission. This disunity indicates that there is doubt about the future of the language.

On the whole, older individuals do not consider Chilisso something embarrassing and tend to associate it with who they are. Simultaneously, they do not have much practical value in it, report mixed levels of proficiency, and are divided on its transmission. This union indicates that, although Chilisso continues to play a symbolic role (see Table 7), its survival in the long term is not guaranteed.

Table7: *Language attitudes of both age groups (n=51)*

Variable	Group	Strongly agree n (%)	Agree n (%)	Neutral n (%)	Disagree n (%)	Strongly disagree n (%)	M	SD	χ^2	df	p
Shina easy	Younger	27 (93.1)	2 (6.9)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1.07	0.26	1.46	2	.482
	Older	19 (86.4)	2 (9.1)	1 (4.5)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	1.18	0.50			
Chilisso easy	Younger	2 (6.9)	10 (34.5)	6 (20.7)	9 (31.0)	2 (6.9)	2.97	1.12	8.83	4	.065
	Older	8 (36.4)	3 (13.6)	6 (27.3)	4 (18.2)	1 (4.5)	2.41	1.30			
Chilisso embarrassing	Younger	5 (17.2)	14 (48.3)	5 (17.2)	4 (13.8)	1 (3.4)	2.38	1.05	13.09	4	.011
	Older	1 (4.5)	3 (13.6)	7 (31.8)	5 (22.7)	6 (27.3)	3.55	1.18			
Chilisso useful for job	Younger	1 (3.4)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	4 (13.8)	24 (82.8)	4.72	0.80	1.09	2	.580
	Older	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	0 (0.0)	2 (9.1)	20 (90.9)	4.91	0.29			
Chilisso should be taught	Younger	1 (3.4)	7 (24.1)	11 (37.9)	8 (27.6)	2 (6.9)	3.10	0.98	5.41	4	.248
	Older	3 (13.6)	7 (31.8)	4 (18.2)	4 (18.2)	4 (18.2)	2.95	1.36			
Chilisso identity marker	Younger	0 (0.0)	9 (31.0)	9 (31.0)	11 (37.9)	0 (0.0)	3.07	0.84	16.52	4	.002
	Older	8 (36.4)	3 (13.6)	4 (18.2)	5 (22.7)	2 (9.1)	2.55	1.44			

The chi-square test of independence was used to examine whether younger and older respondents differed significantly in their response patterns for each language attitude item. In this analysis, a p-value below .05 indicates that age group and response pattern are significantly associated.

The results show that three attitude variables had statistically significant differences between younger and older respondents.

For "Chilisso embarrassing," the difference between age groups was significant, $\chi^2(4) = 13.09$, $p = .011$. Younger respondents were more likely to agree that Chilisso is embarrassing, while older respondents were more likely to disagree or strongly disagree. This suggests a clear generational difference in attitudes toward the prestige or social image of Chilisso.

For "Chilisso identity marker," the difference was also significant, $\chi^2(4) = 16.52$, $p = .002$. Older respondents showed stronger agreement that Chilisso is an identity marker, whereas younger respondents were more neutral or disagreed. This indicates that older speakers attach stronger symbolic and cultural value to Chilisso than the younger generation.

For "Chilisso easy," the result was close to significance but did not reach the conventional .05 level, $\chi^2(4) = 8.83$, $p = .065$. This means that younger and older respondents showed some difference in their views, but the difference is not statistically strong enough to be reported as significant.

The other variables were not statistically significant. "Shina easy" showed no significant difference between age groups, $\chi^2(2) = 1.46$, $p = .482$. "Chilisso useful for job" was also not significant, $\chi^2(2) = 1.09$, $p = .580$. "Chilisso should be taught" was not significant either, $\chi^2(4) = 5.41$, $p = .248$. These findings suggest that the two age groups have broadly similar response patterns for these items.

Discussion

This study suggests that the Chilisso language is indeed being replaced by the Shina language by the Chilisso-speaking community. It is reflected in the distribution of language and users' attitudes, as well as in the self-reported language proficiency. The findings point to a significant decline in the functional strength of Chilisso and the emergence of Shina as the language of everyday regional language in use. The observations in the present study corroborate those of Hallberg (1992) and Liljegren and

Akhunzada (2017), which noted that the Chilisso community is moving towards Shina.

The present results, however, also raise questions about Hallberg's (1992) suggestion that the community has not lost faith in the value of Chilisso because of the transition. The findings indicate that the value of Chilisso is now restricted and erratic. There are limited connections between Chilisso and employment, income, education, and social mobility generally. This means that Chilisso can still be of symbolic and cultural significance to some of its speakers, especially to the elderly speakers; however, it has little, if any, material and socioeconomic value in the existing linguistic ecology. Urdu is seen as associated with schooling, literacy, media, and institutional mobility, while in contrast to that, Shina is seen to be more useful in regional interaction.

The results of the identity component are a sociolinguistic paradox. Chilisso is still a marker for some of the older respondents. But this symbolic bond is not always manifested in the actual use of language. They may feel good about the value of Chilisso in an emotional sense, but may find themselves more proficient in speaking Shina, or may not be confident they will be able to teach the next generation Chilisso. This pattern reinforces one of the conclusions drawn in the study by Rusdiansyah et al. (2024), that associating language to identity does not correspond to the language use pattern and transmission.

The younger speakers are particularly crucial for language vitality. Intergenerational transmission of Chilisso is getting weaker, as younger respondents indicated less use of the language and lower proficiency than their older counterparts. The study by Gomashie (2022) of Nahuatl and Spanish bilingual youth is relevant here since its findings indicate that bilingual youth can have positive attitudes towards a heritage language and use it in only a few domains, primarily with older members of their families. Likewise, the results of the Chilisso study indicate that positive attitudes are not enough to guarantee the maintenance of languages. For Chilisso to sustain itself, the use of the language has to be active and confident among younger people in their daily communications.

Chilisso's reported embarrassment in being spoken by younger speakers should be viewed in the context of the unequal prestige relations between languages. If the language is not used in the schools, markets, offices, media, or formal communication, younger users might start to relate the language to low status or low opportunity. They are by no means rejecting Chilisso from their identity; it does not mean they do not have any identity whatsoever. Instead, it demonstrates the possibility of a coexistence of

pride and insecurity. A speaker might be culturally attached to the use of Chilisso but not in public settings due to the presence of social capital associated with Shina and Urdu. For language maintenance, actual language use is vital along with positive attitudes (Kircher et al., 24).

Shina is a key player in this process. It serves as a regional lingua franca and has the value of being used in friendships, in the marketplace, when traveling, at work, and with speakers from other communities. Thus, it is not just a preference for a different language that is driving the transition towards Shina. It represents the need for the practical aspects of a multilingual environment in which Shina offers wider communication and geographical recognition. The pressure is further compounded by Urdu, as it is associated with education, educational attainment, administration, media, and mobility formally. Consequently, Chilisso has become endangered due to low prestige, less economic value, and lack of institutional support. Similar findings were reported in a study by Dai &Wang (2026), which outlines factors such as rapid intergenerational shift, Mandarin-centered education, occupational change, and stigmatization of the language as responsible for the endangerment of the Tanka language.

However, as there is uncertainty about teaching Chilisso to the next generation, this also points to weakening language maintenance. Intergenerational transmission is recognized as an important factor for language vitality. Crystal (2000) points out that when the transmission of a language to younger generations is inhibited, the language becomes endangered; and Grenoble & Whaley (2006) stress the importance of children and young people continuing to learn and use the language for language maintenance. The current study indicates that the younger speakers' lower level of proficiency and lower frequency of use of Chilisso may mean that the language is not being passed on as effectively within the home and community.

The findings can be interpreted using the Theory of Ecology of Pressures (TEP) that describes language shift as being caused by competing pressures within a multilingual ecology (Terborg, 2006; Terborg & Landa, 2013). For Chilisso, these pressures are a small speaker population, low intergenerational transmission, low prestige, and lack of institutional support. But the pressures in the Chilisso case are not independent, either. Urdu pressure is generated in the institutional sphere and in the context of education, literacy, and the official sphere, whereas Shina pressure is generated in the local and regional sphere in everyday communication.

The Chilisso speakers are a significant ecological pressure, being a very small population. The number of speakers is low, less than 1,000, making opportunities for its use, transmission, and development into new domains scarce. The problem of young speakers being less proficient in the language is aggravated by the growing use of Shina in everyday life by younger speakers. Another key determinant is prestige hierarchy. Because Chilisso is not tied to economic opportunity, education, or social mobility, it may be less commonly spoken than other languages that are more practical. In TEP terms, this is an illustration of the impact of low socioeconomic value on the vitality of a language.

The Chilisso case also helps to broaden discussion about language shift in isolated mountain communities. This transformation seems not to be solely due to migration to and within urban areas. Instead, contemporary integration, such as through road systems, education, the media, cell phones, markets, and regional transportation, has transformed the community's linguistic landscape. This demonstrates that language change may take place even if the community continues to live in its traditional place, as broader social and economic factors come into the community and alter the value of languages.

In general, the results indicate an advanced stage of the Chilisso language shift. Despite its symbolic and cultural importance, speakers associate less instrumental value with Chilisso; therefore, it does not meet the requirements for language maintenance. It only has a small number of functional domains, low prestige, weak transmission to younger speakers, and almost no institutional support.

Conclusion

This study has shown that Chilisso is undergoing a serious decline in functional vitality, with Shina increasingly occupying everyday social domains and Urdu dominating formal and institutional spaces. While Chilisso still carries symbolic value as a marker of ethnic identity, its reduced use among younger speakers, weak intergenerational transmission, low socioeconomic value, and lack of institutional support indicate that it is moving toward a restricted heritage-language status. Viewed through the Theory of Ecology of Pressures, the shift is not the result of a single cause, but of interacting demographic, economic, educational, and prestige-based pressures that reshape language choices within the community.

The significance of this study extends beyond the Chilisso-speaking community. Theoretically, it contributes to research on language shift by

showing how small mountain languages may decline even without large-scale urban migration, as modern schooling, regional mobility, markets, and institutional hierarchies introduce new pressures into local linguistic ecologies. In this way, the study adds to the application of TEP by demonstrating how regional and national languages can exert different but overlapping pressures on a minority language. For the areal linguistics of northern Pakistan, the study provides empirical evidence from an under-researched speech community and adds to existing scholarship on language maintenance, multilingualism, and ethnolinguistic vitality in the region. Practically, the findings are relevant for endangered language documentation and language policy planning, as they highlight the urgent need to document Chilisso and to consider community-based measures that can strengthen its use among younger speakers.

Future research should move beyond general descriptions of language use and examine the social mechanisms that shape language choice more directly. A mixed-methods approach would be particularly useful, combining a larger quantitative survey with qualitative ethnographic interviews, family language-use observations, and focus-group discussions with younger speakers, parents, and elders. Such research could identify how economic aspirations, education, mobility, and peer-group pressure affect language choices in specific domains. Matched-guise or verbal-guise experiments may also help uncover hidden attitudes toward Chilisso, Shina, and Urdu, especially where speakers publicly express symbolic pride but avoid using Chilisso in practice. These methods would provide a deeper understanding of both visible language behavior and latent language ideologies within the community.

The future of Chilisso will depend largely on whether the language can regain relevance among younger speakers and expand beyond symbolic identity into active everyday use. Documentation, intergenerational transmission, and community-led revitalization efforts are therefore essential. Without such measures, Chilisso may continue to lose communicative functions and survive only as a cultural emblem rather than as a living community language.

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