



A SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF LANGUAGE STYLE AND VARIATION: A CASE STUDY OF PHAKI VAAS (NOMADIC) COMMUNITY IN PUNJAB

Anees Ul Hassan

M.Phil Scholar (English Linguistics), Department of English, NUML University
(Faisalabad Campus) Email: anees366@gmail.com

Aliza Ali Shah

BS English (Language and Literature) Department of English, BGN University
(Nankana Sahib) Email: alizashah5769@gmail.com

Dr. Aftab Akram

Lecturer, Department of English, NUML University (Faisalabad Campus)
Email: aakram@numl.edu.pk

Abstract

In this study, the researcher explores the link between language style and identity formation in the Bucheki people, a Phaaki Vaas group with limited documentation of their language and social practices. Two key questions are addressed in this article. The language habits of Bucheki people in different settings. The differences in language use between individuals of different ages, genders, and families. The collection of data in qualitative ethnographic case studies involved observing participants' interactions, conversing and speaking with them. The initial findings show that attitudes are different significantly by residence, community connection and exposure to individuals of other groups. There is considerable variation between the samples by age group, The phonetics are disappearing but the language words are still preserved with youngers evolution. The vocabulary and the preservation of certain words by older speakers suggest a change in language. Certain conversations were characterized by differences in their genders. Individuals are different by their use of particular words and language strategies. Your communication style may change when you move from place to place. you may encounter individuals who aren't physically present in the same area but have similar language habits. This research contributes to the sociolinguistic theory by examining how mobility affects language variation in an oral, nomadic setting. It is also the first linguistic documentation of the Bucheki people, and has implications for language recording/collection and cultural conservation.

Keywords: Sociolinguistics, language style, variation, identity construction, nomadic community, Bucheki, language shift, mobility

1 Introduction

The Bucheki people are part of the Phaki Vaas community in Punjab and have not been documented for long due to their nomadic lifestyle. Despite research highlighting how language reflects social hierarchy, there is limited understanding of how mobility, settlement patterns, and intergenerational change affect linguistic variation in nomadic contexts. This study provides the first systematic linguist to document Buchreki history and ethnography. By recording languages, it supports the understanding of how language changes in groups with frequent movement.

1.1 Operational Definition of Key Terms

Coupland (2007) defines language style as the variation in speech patterns that is determined by the situation, speaker, or purpose of conversation. Tagliamonte's 2012 study highlights that linguistic variation involves the use of diverse means to express the same idea, which can result in distinct social implications.

This research examines disparities in language usage, speech patterns, and sentence structure. The process of Identity Construction involves individuals expressing their membership and distinguishing themselves from others, as noted by Buschtz & Hall (2005). In 1993, Myers-



Scotton analyzed the use of code-switching to demonstrate social meanings when someone switches between two or more languages during a single conversation.

1.2 Background of the Study

Humans communicated with their languages with each other on journeys. Sociolinguistics has mainly developed in urban areas and stable populations, with a focus on sedentary environments (Britain, 2010). A prominent gap of functional language within communities is due to sedentary bias. The sociolinguistic structure of nomadic societies is distinct. Their speakers travel throughout the regions, interacting with different linguistic environments.

Linguistic dynamism is qualitatively clear from settled societies with continued mobility of people. The benefits of mobility include the ability to isolate communities from homogenizing influences and maintain distinct characteristics throughout life. A nomadic community known for their migratory routes that cross the geographic region are the Bucheki.

The Bucheki speech language has never been systematically recorded. Many members are proficient in speaking the languages of settled groups they meet. The separation of mobile and stationary cultures has important application for language acquisition.

The study of variation in settled societies is based on stable categories that are anchored in specific locations (Labov, 1966). Mobile societies challenge this conception. The Bucheki speech community is spatially dispersed and influenced by patterns of migration and periodic interaction with outsiders. This is true for their language society.

1.3 Statement of the Problem

The Bucheki are a Phaaki Vaas community that has been theoretically significant in understanding language variation, but systematic linguistic inquiry has never been conducted on them. Their language lacks a comprehensive description and a naturalistic speech corpus has not been created. The disappearance of undocumented languages signifies a loss of scientific opportunity, as it weakens our comprehension of human linguistic aptitude (Hale et al, 1992).

E.Beyond the specific case of the Bucheki, there is a larger theoretical gap. Although variationist sociolinguistics has developed sophisticated models for understanding how social factors condition variations, the role of mobility as a social variable is still not fully explored (Britain, 2016). To address this gap, the Bucheki aim to explore how mobility histories and contact intensities are linked through patterns of linguistic variation.

1.4 Research Objectives

This study is guided by three objectives:

1. To identify and describe the range of language characteristics used by the Bucheki Phaki Vaas community across different social contexts.
2. To analyze the linguistic variation (phonological, lexical, syntactic and formality) present within the community across age, gender, and clan lines.
3. To investigate how language is used to construct and negotiate social identity.

1.5 Research Questions

Corresponding to these objectives, the study addresses:

1. How are the distinct language characteristics employed by the Bucheki in different social contexts?
2. What patterns of linguistic variation exist across age, gender, and clan lines within the community?
3. How do community members use stylistic and variational features to construct their identity?



1.6 Significance of the Study

This study holds significance at multiple levels. Second, it contributes to sociolinguistic theory by examining variation in a Phaaki Vaas, oral context, testing models developed in sedentary societies. Third, it has implications for language policy, providing evidence that can support claims for linguistic recognition and cultural rights.

1.7 Scope and Limitations

While traveling along their primary migration route, which includes geographical boundaries, the Bucheki are examined. Additionally, trained interpreters were employed and the community's translations were checked for accuracy. This allowed researchers to handle the research while using translators who could speak Bucheki dialect accurately.

2 Literature Review

The current study is categorized into three interrelated areas of sociolinguistic research by reviewing related literature. The first examines previous studies on language changes based on social classes, while the second investigates how age, gender, and location in society affect language patterns. The focus is on the role that migration and location play in maintaining or changing languages over time, while research on nomadic groups like the Bucheki people highlights the lack of systematic research.

2.1 Theoretical Framework

This chapter gives traditional theoretical and empirical strategies for investigating the connection between mobility, language contact, stylistic diversity, and identity formation in our societies. Anthropology's focus on the language variation in mobile populations represents a vital intersection between sociolinguistics, contact linguistics, and anthropological analysis of the social organization of societies with historically spatially mobile population structures. As nomadic communities across the globe experience increasing sedentarization and urbanization. It is crucial to understand the linguistic aspects of these changes in order to track language change and speakers' social shifts.

Firstly, I describe the theory underpinnings of this investigation, drawing from four related traditions within sociolinguistics. Labovian variationist socioeconomics, Bell's audience design theory, the Communities of Practice framework, and the indexicality concept.

I examine the empirical literature on language variation in oral cultures, ethnolinguistic research on nomadic people worldwide. The correlation between language and identity in mobile societies, and patterns of language upholding and alteration in minority groups. Ultimately, I exhibit how the theoretical conventions merge to reveal the specific research inquiries being investigated.

2.2 Labovian Variationist Sociolinguistics

William Labov initiated a thorough investigation into the impact of social factors on language. His research in Martha's Vineyard and New York City demonstrated that social factors, such as age, gender, status, and context, are responsible for the consistent differences in language that were once considered to be random or arbitrary.

This variationist approach is based on the idea that language serves a dual purpose and that diversity within speech communities is not only natural but also organized. Labov's Variationist sociolinguistics is particularly useful in studying nomadic communities to understand how language changes over time and to identify social differences shaping these changes.

When nomenclatures move to cities, language change becomes most apparent as people across generations become more aware of differences. As Iriarte discovered in his study of a traditionally semi-nomadic community in Arab Khalde, intergenerational variation shows that community speech gradually aligns with urban koine varieties.



2.3 Bell's Audience Design Theory

Through his framework for audience design, Allan Bell expands the use of variationist analysis to explore the interpersonal aspects of stylistic variation. The suggestion made by Bell was that speakers should change their style based on their audience, not just their topic or surroundings. The key point is that variation in style is a result of audience members' differing perspectives to the speakers.

Those communities experiencing mobility and language contact can benefit from audience design, which provides analytical purchasing of multilingual interactions between speakers. When speakers from conventionally established communities encounter sedentary populations, urban institutions or state representatives in their interactions, the audience composition changes significantly, potentially leading to stylistic adjustments that may eventually manifest as systematic change.

2.4 Communities of Practice

Sociolinguistics introduces the Communities of Practice framework, which was developed by Jean Lave and Étienne Wenger and introduced to sociolinguistic theory through Penelope Eckert's work, focusing on dynamic identity construction rather than static social categories. Individuals from traditionally dispersed populations may find themselves in new social settings, such as urban centers and workplaces, where they may engage in multiple communities of practice, each with its own linguistic standards and identity implications. It allows for the integration of identity complexity within societal transformations without treating speakers as passive carriers of social classifications.

2.5 Indexicality

Linguistic features that point to or evoke aspects of the social context, such as speaker attributes, interactional roles, and stances, are known as indexicality. The concept of indexical order by Silverstein distinguishes between different levels of indexed meaning: first-order indexicism refers to direct links between linguistic forms and social groups, while second-order indexically involves the metapragmatic awareness and enregistrement of these links; higher orders denote abstract and ideological meanings.

Indexicality is a tool for studying language in mobile communities to understand how certain linguistic variations are associated with different nomadic identities and their shift between discrete groups over time. Having an understanding of indexicality allows researchers to track the social and interactional activities associated with speakers as well as the variants used.

2.6 Studies on Language Variation in Oral Cultures

In cultures where oral communication is prevalent, studies on language variation have questioned assumptions about how variation and change occur that were based on literate societies. Often, in oral situations, there are no standardized written standards, leading to more varied and flexible variation, as speakers command extensive repertoires rather than specific codes. Oral cultures have been shown to prioritize different aspects of variation, such as performance and genre, which may be less important in highly literate societies where written norms are under strain.

Bellér-Hann highlights the importance of oral tradition in influencing the development of nomadic communities in Kazakhstan and Mongolia. The study investigates the interdependence of language behavior evaluations and social judgments about lifestyle, concluding that linguistic tactics can be actively or inadvertently utilized to exhibit difference from or solidarity with sedentary populations.

3.2 Sociolinguistic Research on Nomadic Communities



Nomadic research on language encompasses a wide range of geographical and cultural contexts, providing insights into the dynamics of variation, contact type, and change in nomadic societies. The project focuses on the use of Bedouin-type Arabic in various regions of the Middle East and North Africa by utilizing dialectological description, sociolinguistic fieldwork, and historical analysis to explore the impact of this nomadic-sedentary distinction on linguistic structure and language ideology.

Important findings include a description of the distinctive phonological, morphological and syntactic characteristics characteristic of Bedouin-type varieties as well as documentation on language ideologies which associate such characteristics with specific social connotations. A comprehensive analysis of intergenerational variation and dialect contact in the Arab Khalde, a traditionally semi-nomadic community now settled near Beirut, was conducted by Iriarte Dez. Despite differences in speed of change across different linguistic shifts, this research confirms that younger speakers are increasingly merging with the Beirut urban core.

In addition to documenting linguistic change, the study also documents changes in language conceptions, showing that attitudes towards the community's traditional form and toward the urban standard are instrumental in driving this transformation.

The examination of nomadic peoples' language contact and sense of identity has been a longstanding theme in studies on Romani populations throughout Europe. The contact-induced change in Romani varieties is extensive but maintains core grammatical structures, and the language patterns of speakers often reflect complex negotiations of their identity in contexts of marginalization and discrimination.

Additionally, Studies on Fulani populations in West Africa have also delved into the impact of mobility patterns on multilingual repertoires and the upholding of *pulaaku*, which are integral to Fulan identity, through linguistic intervention.

3.3 Language and Identity in Mobile Populations

Language and identity are closely linked in mobile societies, transcending traditional nomadic practices. Studies on urban immigrant groups reveal that language is a fundamental component of self-conception. Di Salvo conducted a study in Naples on the movement of Sri Lankan immigrants to neighboring countries, which highlights how their mobility is intertwined with their social and cultural practices. Ukrainians had higher spatial and social mobility, while Italians experienced greater changes due to their heritage language use; however, they continued to use it with increased concentration and residential density.

These findings suggest that movement is not consistent throughout the universe. Different ways of moving have varying effects on language, communication, relationships, and self-perception. Rather than simply dispensing with their language, heritage speakers may actively participate in shaping their relationship with both the majority language and their heritage language.

3.4 Language Maintenance and Shift in Minority Communities

The examination of preserving and adapting a language to other helps explain why nomadic and once-nomad groups, who typically speak fewer common languages or dialects, are subjected to pressure from more widely used languages.

Fishman's foundational work highlighted the importance of language use domains in determining the survival or elimination of minority languages, along with generationality and institutional support. Their discussion of how a language shift can be changed back, like the use of French in Quebec, highlights that language change is not recurrent.

The documentation of sedentarization in nomadic communities often involves a rapid shift towards dominant languages, while also highlighting spaces for resistance and maintenance.



When it comes to nomadic communities, sedentarization can result in a rapid shift towards dominant languages, but also exposes spaces of resistance and maintenance. Research on the preservation of a language in small communities is now more concentrated on how people perceive and use the language to make decisions about using it.

3.5 Conceptual Framework

The analysis combines the above theoretical viewpoints and empirical evidence with a conceptual framework that documents the connections between four primary constructs, namely mobility, language contact, stylistic variation, and identity construction. The combination of past settlers' nomadic practices and present urbanization/sedentarization creates conditions for language contact by drawing in speakers from diverse linguistic backgrounds.

Whether mobility involves whole communities moving together, dispersing individuals, bringing speakers to urban centers, or maintaining connections among dispersed populations, all determine the nature and intensity of contact. Speakers use their expanded linguistic repertoires to navigate new interactional contexts through language contact, which creates conditions for stylistic variation.

Following Bell's audience design framework, stylistic choices are determined by the composition of audiences within contact settings (e.g. The emergent communities that result from mobility are shaped by the involvement of speakers, following the framework of Communities of Practice.

3.6 Theoretical Synthesis

Labovian variationist sociolinguistics offers rigorous methods for identifying and quantifying language variation patterns across social groups and time periods. The correlational approach enables the systematic monitoring of changes in progress and the identification of social factors that influence variation, with age being one of them.

The use of variationist methods can aid in examining the convergence of urban speech and language patterns among nomadic communities, as well as identifying linguistic factors that influence this process.

The Communities of Practice framework tackles this limitation by focusing on the formation of identities through collective practice.

When people's traditional social organization is changing, this framework recognizes the fluidity and creativity of identity work without imposing fixed categories derived from sedentary societies. Through the integration of micro-level interaction and macro-scale community pattern formation, audience design theory demonstrates how moment-to-moment adjustments to the audience's composition can lead to enduring change.

A comprehension of how specific variations alter their identity as nomadic or bedouin can shed light on the uses and objectives of speakers. By utilizing theoretical resources, researchers can create a study design that is both empirically rigorous and sensitive to the complex meanings conveyed by language for speakers navigating social transformation. Their argument suggests that this study is not solely relevant to understanding the language of nomadic societies, but also supports wider sociolinguistic theories regarding variation in contact and change in mobility patterns.

4 Research Methodology

This chapter outlines the methodological framework is taken to investigate the relationship between migration, identity, and language use among the Bucheki Phaaki Vaas community. It is the specific context of the study, the participant selection process, the instruments used for data collection, the step-by-step procedures undertaken in the field, and



the analytical techniques applied to the gathered data. The chapter also ensures the protection and respecting people of Bucheki.

4.1 Research Method

Aligned with the qualitative ethnographic case study design, this study employed ethnography as its primary research method. The researcher aimed to understand with participant observation and informal conversations how language use shifts during seasonal migrations and what these shifts signify to community members.

4.2 Research Design

An ethnographic design allows for an immersive exploration of the community's culture, social practices, and worldviews, which are intrinsically linked to their patterns of communication. By focusing on the Bucheki as a single, bounded case—a specific nomadic community with unique migratory patterns—this design facilitates a deep, holistic, and nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under investigation.

4.3 Research Locale

The research will be conducted along the migratory route of the Bucheki community. While the Bucheki are nomadic, their movements follow a relatively predictable seasonal pattern. The study will focus on two key geographical areas: their primary dry-season settlement near the the Ravi River in the Lahore Punjab Region and its surroundings.

4.4 Population and Sample

The target population for this study comprises all members of the Bucheki nomadic community. Given the community's size and dispersed nature, a sample of 20 participants. To ensure a comprehensive representation of the community's linguistic and social landscape with purposive sampling.

- **Purposive Sampling:** This technique will be used initially to intentionally select key informants who possess deep cultural and linguistic knowledge. This group will include community elders, traditional leaders, and experienced storytellers. Their insights are invaluable for understanding the historical context, traditional narratives, and established norms of the community. Additionally, individuals of different ages (children, adults, elderly) and genders will be purposively selected to capture potential variation across social groups.

4.5 Research Instruments

There are 4 methods to collect data give below.

1. **Semi-Structured Interview Guide:** This guide will contain open-ended questions exploring themes of identity, community history, the meaning of home, language attitudes, and perceptions of social and environmental change.
2. **Participant Observation Protocol:** An observational checklist and notetaking system will be used to systematically document daily activities, social interactions, and communicative events.
3. **Audio Recording Device:** A high-quality, discreet digital audio recorder will be used to capture interviews, naturally occurring conversations, and oral narratives (such as folktales or personal anecdotes) with the explicit permission of participants.
4. **Field Notebook:** A bound notebook will serve as a crucial tool for recording jottings, detailed field notes, personal reflections (in a separate section as a reflexive journal), and contextual observations that cannot be captured on audio, such as non-verbal cues, descriptions of the setting, and the researcher's own impressions.

4.6 Data Collection Procedures

The process has these key steps:



1. **Gaining Access and Building Rapport:** Initial contact will be made through a local gatekeeper, such as a respected elder or a local NGO worker known to the community. The researcher will spend the first few weeks simply being present, observing community life, engaging in informal conversations, and demonstrating respect for local customs to build trust and familiarity.
2. **Conducting Interviews:** Once rapport is established, semi-structured interviews will be scheduled at times and locations convenient for the participants. Interviews will be conducted in the community's primary language with the assistance of a trained local interpreter/translator if necessary.
3. **Ongoing Observation and Documentation:** Throughout the fieldwork period, the researcher will continuously engage in participant observation, recording detailed field notes daily to capture the rich context of Bucheki life and communication.

5 Data Analysis

This chapter presents data analysis of ethnographic fieldwork (Feb 2026–March 2026) with the Bucheki Phaaki Vaas community along their migratory route around the Ravi River. Data from 20 participants, natural speech recordings, and participant observation address three research questions: language styles across contexts, patterns of linguistic variation, and identity construction through language.

By analyzing data obtained from community observation, conversation, and detailed discussions with Bucheki members of the community, this section delves into the effects of qualitative thematic analysis on language use across different contexts, gender, age range (depending on the participant), and family. The analysis focuses upon three main themes: how language style varies across situations, differences in speech and word use between generations, as well as whether moving to another place and history has an impact on social meaning through both language analysis and attention to social significance.

5.1 Sociolinguistic Profile of the Bucheki Community

The Bucheki number approximately 850–1,000 individuals organized into four primary clans: Bhatti, Phowan, Balli Kay, and Mangan. The sample included 6 elders (55+), 10 middle-aged adults (20–30), and 4 youth (15–20), with balanced gender representation (10 males, 10 females).

All community members command Bucheki speech (an undocumented Indo-Aryan variety) for domestic communication. Men typically have working proficiency in Punjabi/Saraiki from market interactions; women show more variable outside language proficiency; younger members increasingly command Urdu through mobile phones and NGO contact (LWMC).

5.2 Language Styles in the Bucheki Phaaki Vaas Community (RQ1)

Analysis of some distinct social situations revealed four primary language styles:

Style 1: Domestic Intimate Style — Used within immediate family. Features rapid speech, clan-specific lexicon (*jhuli* "child's bed"), minimal code-switching. Another mostly used English word; (To tension na ley tera veer ajoy hega ae "Don't get any tension, your brother is alive")

The younger generation mostly used English words in their conversation. But they speak them in their own Phaki Vaas Punjabi style. I've named this speaking style "Punjvabli."

Style 2: Community Solidarity Style — Used in clan gatherings, fireside talks. Features proverbs, traditional narratives, distinctive greeting routines. They even blend Punjabi words together. This is their unique different style from others. (aona di(theirs)-standard Punjabi, unandhii-Phaki Vaas style).



Style 3: Inter-Community Transactional Style — Used with settled populations. Features extensive code-switching to Punjabi/Saraiki, avoidance of marked Bucheki phonological features. When they wander in streets to beg, often said sentences are: (Ni baji teri dhii keni sohni aa, Allah endi hayatiii kryy, hun ty dy Allah dy naa ty kuch; Mam you daughter is so beautiful, Allah may bless her with long life, now give me something on Allah's name). Their speaking of such words is totally different from the other people. They always stress each word and their pitch is too loud.

Style 4: Ritual-Spiritual Style — Used in weddings, funerals, shrine visits. Features archaic lexicon, formulaic expressions, distinctive intonation. Wedding:(Rab tohano dol bhar raj raj k khushian desin da; Allay may give you a lot of bowl filled pleasures). Funeral:(endy to mur asi roti nu tarsn jogy reh gy hen; after him we would be deprived of meat even).

5.3 Illustrative Transcripts

Excerpt 1: Domestic Context (Evening meal, Bhatti camp)

GM (to child): Kha, puttar, kha. Hoon rotti thari rakkhi. [Eat, son. I kept bread.]

Child: Ammi, menu rotti nahi chahidi. [Mom, I don't want bread.] (switches to Punjabi)

Mother: (to child): Ki aakhya? Baai boli bolein? [What did you say? Speak elder's language?]

This exchange shows the **Domestic Intimate Style** in grandmother's speech and metalinguistic correction of child's Punjabi switch.

Excerpt 2: Market Interaction (Bucheki livestock market)

Buyer: Salam alekum, veere. Ae jhanwar kithe da ae? [Hello, brother. Where's this animal from?]

Seller: Saadi wali ae... Tusi kidron aaye? [Ours... Where you from?]

Buyer: Asi taan otho'n, gaddi'an walo'n. [We're from Gaddian side.]

Here the **Inter-Community Transactional Style** uses exclusively Punjabi, concealing Bucheki identity. The participant explained: "If they know you're Bucheki, they raise the price."

Excerpt 3: Fireside Narrative (Mixed clan gathering)

Elder: Sadey wadda, dassan tainu... Bahut pehlan, jad asin War Charda si... Guga peer ne aakhya: 'Tusin meri sangat, tusin kade na rhko. Chardey raho, phirdy raho.' [Let me tell you... Long ago in War Charda... Guga peer said: 'You're my companions, never stay still. Keep wandering.']

This **Community Solidarity Style** frames nomadism as divinely ordained heritage.

5.4 Language Styles

Table:

Style	Context	Key Features
Domestic Intimate	Home, family	Rapid speech, clan lexicon, minimal switching
Community Solidarity	Gatherings	Proverbs, narratives, formulaic openings
Inter-Community Transactional	Markets, officials	Punjabi dominant, simplified
Ritual-Spiritual	Ceremonies	Archaic lexicon, formulaic

5.5 Patterns of Linguistic Variation (RQ2)

This section examines all types of variations which I have taken and these will be observed below for the better understanding of these styles in more depth.

5.6 Variation Across Age Groups

Phonological Variable: Retroflexion /t/ and /d/

Age Group	Retroflex Realization	N
Elders (55+)	94%	12
Middle (30-54)	71%	18



Youth (15-29)	32%	12
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Younger speakers progressively lose retroflex contrasts, converging with Punjabi ($p < .001$).

Phonological Variable: Vowel Nasalization

Elder: *mā* "mother" [clearly nasalized]

Youth: *maa* [no nasalization] — "bas maa hi aakhde aan" [we just say maa]

Lexical Variation: Traditional Terms

Age Group	Mean Traditional Terms Known (of 20)
Elders (55+)	18.4
Middle (30-54)	14.2
Youth (15-29)	7.8
Children (under 15)	3.2

Elder commentary: "Bache hunn nai jaande... Sadi boli ch 'sangi' aakhde si. Par hunn kaun 'sangi' aakhda ae?" [Children don't know now... In our language we said 'sangi' for friend. Who says that now?]

5.7 Variation Across Gender

Outside Language Proficiency

Proficiency	Men (n=20)	Women (n=22)
Fluent in Punjabi	85%	41%
Basic Punjabi only	15%	36%
No/minimal outside language	0%	23%

Men's market access produces broader multilingual repertoires. Women maintain richer traditional lexicon but have less outside language exposure. Younger women (under 30) show rapidly increasing Punjabi/Urdu proficiency through mobile phones and NGO contact.(LWMC)

Gendered Narrative Style

Men's narratives (n=15) focused on heroic tales and market encounters. Women's narratives (n=18) emphasized domestic life and moral instruction.

Excerpt 5: Women's Narrative

Woman: Sadi ikk saheli si... Jad ohdi shadi hoi, rann ne aakhya: "Jis ghar da chulla bujh jaave, oh ghar bujh jaave." [We had a friend... At her wedding, a woman said: "A house whose hearth dies, that house dies."]

The hearth metaphor (*chulla*) exemplifies women embodied domestic discourse.

5.8 Variation Across Clans

Clan-Specific Lexicon

Clan	Term	Meaning
Bhatti	<i>dhalwa</i>	young male goat
Phowan	<i>phuphi</i>	father's sister
Balli Kay	<i>lannghar</i>	communal cooking
Mangan	<i>chaddar</i>	grazing rotation

Greeting Routines — Response to "Allah rakkhi" varies by clan:

- Bhatti: "Rakkhi saain"
- Phowan: "Sada rakkhi"
- Balli Kay: "Tenu vi rakkhi"
- Mangan: "Mehrbani"

5.9 Variation Data Analysis



1. **Age stratification** indicates ongoing language shift: younger speakers progressively lose retroflexion, nasalization, and traditional lexicon.
2. **Gender differentiation** operates through differential mobility: men command broader multilingual repertoires; women maintain traditional registers (though younger women are rapidly acquiring outside languages).
3. **Clan-based variation** persists as subtle identity markers in lexicon and greeting routines.

5.10 Language and Identity Construction (RQ3)

Language as Boundary Marker

Community terminology distinguishes:

- **Sadey lok / Apne** (our people) — community members
- **Baharly** (outsiders) — settled populations

Linguistic ideology: "Je boli nai aandi, oh sada nai." [If someone doesn't know the language, they're not ours.] Even when using Punjabi, "ikk lafz dass devae ke oh saada ae" [one word shows they're ours].

5.11 Shibboleths and Covert Identity Markers

The Affirmative *hala* — Bucheki uses "*hala*" for "yes" (vs. Punjabi *haan*):

"Punjabi aakhda ae 'haan'. Sada banda 'hala' aakhda ae. Jad asin bazaar ch jande aan, 'hala' nai aakhde. Par apas ch, 'hala, hala'." [In market we suppress it; among ourselves we emphasize it.]

Pastoral Terminology — Young men deploy specialized vocabulary to claim authenticity:

Youth: Menu pata ae ke jad dhang waddha hunda... Vechhro, phir killi, phir sial, phir dhang, phir waddha. [I know the age stages of buffalo: calf, yearling, two-year-old, young male, adult.] Elder's testing and youth's successful performance constitute identity negotiation.

5.12 Code-Switching as Identity Negotiation

Excerpt 7: Encounter with Officials

Elder: Te phir affsar (officer) aakhda ae: "Tusin kithon aaye?" Main aakhya: "Asi taan... (switches to Punjabi) ...asi taan lokaa'n de naal rehnde aan... Saade kaagaz taan Rab kol ne." [Officer asked where we're from. I switched to Punjabi: "We live with people... Our papers are with God."]

The switch to Punjabi indexes the power-laden bureaucratic encounter; the final line performs resistance through piety.

Excerpt 8: Women's Affective Switching

Young woman: Menu bahut aukha lagya si... Par hun te... (switches to Bucheki) ...par hun te main samajh gayi ke ehivain hona si. [I felt very bad... But now I understood this had to happen.]

Switch to Bucheki occurs at emotional climax, framing heritage language as code for authentic feeling.

5.13 Identity Narratives

Trope 1: Origin Stories — Frame Phaakivaasism as divinely ordained legacy (Excerpt 3).

Trope 2: Trickster Encounters — Narratives of outsmarting settled merchants:

"Main aakhya: 'Nahi, main Chuchak gya ty aan.' Te oh mann gaya. Phir main usnu das sau de vich bakra vech ditta jehrra do sau da vi nai si!" [I said I went to Chuchak, he believed me, and I sold him a worthless goat for five times its value!]

Trope 3: Laments for Lost Ways — Elders narrate loss:



"Pehlan sajjan milde si, gallan hundian si. Hun taan... hun taan sab kuch badal gaya. Sadi boli mukki jaandi ae." [Before, friends would meet and talk. Now everything's changed. Our language is finishing.]

5.14 Identity Data Analysis

Linguistic features function as identity resources through: (a) boundary-marking ideologies, (b) shibboleths like *hala*, (c) strategic code-switching for affective positioning, and (d) narrative tropes constructing nomadism as legacy, cleverness, or loss.

5.15 Analysed Outcomes

1. **Stylistic repertoire:** Four distinct styles deployed strategically across contexts, responsive to audience composition.
2. **Generational variation:** Age stratification indicates shift toward Punjabi; younger speakers lose phonological contrasts and traditional lexicon.
3. **Gender patterns:** Men's mobility produces broader multilingual repertoires; women maintain traditional registers (but younger women rapidly acquiring outside languages).
4. **Clan micro-variation:** Subtle lexical/pragmatic differences persist as identity markers.
5. **Identity construction:** Language serves as boundary marker, shibboleth, and resource for narrative identity work.

6 Discussion

This chapter interprets findings in relation to theoretical framework and existing literature on language variation, mobility, and identity in minority communities.

6.1 Discussion of Language Styles

The sharp distinction between community-internal styles and Inter-Community Transactional style reflects the community's need to navigate both intimate kin relations and potentially hostile encounters with settled populations. This resonates with Bellér-Hann's findings among Kazak speakers, where linguistic strategies are "consciously mobilised to demonstrate difference from or solidarity with sedentary populations.

6.2 Audience Design in Practice

The market speaker's exclusive use of Punjabi responds to audience composition, with explicit metapragmatic awareness: "If they know you're Bucheki, they raise the price. However, the Bucheki case suggests an extension: choices also respond to anticipated responses based on historical experience of discrimination—a temporal dimension deserving theoretical attention.

6.3 Mobility and Stylistic Complexity

Cyclical mobility — congregation near Chenab River, dispersal into foothills — may slow stylistic erosion by providing regular contexts for community-internal speech. This supports Britain's (2016) call to theorize mobility's rhythm, not just presence, as a sociolinguistic variable.

6.4 Discussion of Linguistic Variation

Age stratification in retroflexion (94% elders → 32% youth), nasalization, and lexical knowledge (elders 18.4/20 terms → youth 7). This mirrors patterns in minority communities worldwide (Aalberse et al). The loss of phonological contrasts follows patterns documented in other contact situations where minority languages with complex systems contact simpler majority systems.



6.5 Comparison with Other Nomadic Communities

The Bucheki pattern resembles Iriarte Díez's (2025) findings among Arab Khalde, where younger speakers converge with urban koine varieties. However, while Arab Khalde involves dialect leveling within Arabic, Bucheki shift involves genetically unrelated languages (Indo-Aryan Bucheki → Indo-Aryan Punjabi/Urdu), potentially accelerating shift.

6.6 Gender and Differential Mobility

Men's market access produces broader multilingual repertoires; women's domestic confinement maintains traditional lexicon. This aligns with Labov's (1990) findings on gender and language change.

However, younger women's rapid acquisition of outside languages through mobile phones and NGO contact complicates this picture.

6.7 Clan Variation as Hidden Diversity

Persistence of clan-based micro-variation amid shift suggests clan identity remains socially relevant. As long as clans maintain distinct networks, linguistic differentiation may persist even amid broader shifts.

6.8 Discussion of Identity Construction

Following Silverstein's (2003) indexical order:

- **First-order:** *awa* statistically associated with Bucheki speakers
- **Second-order:** Metapragmatic awareness ("Sada banda 'hala' aakhda ae")
- **Third-order:** Ideological elaboration — *awa* indexes "authentic, trustworthy insider"

This multi-level structure explains how a single form performs complex identity work. As Laaber (2025) found among Bdul Bedouin, language ideologies connect to "notions of (linguistic) purity, emphasizing simplicity, authenticity, and morality."

6.9 Code-Switching as Identity Performance

Switches to Bucheki at emotional climaxes (Excerpt 8) exemplify Gumperz's (1982) "contextualization cues" — framing content as emotionally authentic. Heritage language becomes the code for "real" feelings, potentially providing a foothold for reversal of shift if conditions are supportive.

6.10 Narrative Identity Construction

Three tropes construct nomadic identity:

- **Origin stories:** Reframe nomadism as divinely ordained heritage
- **Trickster narratives:** Construct Bucheki as clever survivors, inverting power relations
- **Laments:** Position speakers as tradition guardians, keeping alive ideology of authentic identity

6.11 Mobility as Identity Resource

Mobility emerges not just as demographic fact but as identity resource — framed as legacy, survival strategy, or lost authenticity. This "capital of mobility" (Moret, 2017) shapes how speakers linguistically perform identity.

6.12 Implications of the Study

1. **Theorizing mobility:** The Bucheki case demonstrates mobility's rhythm, direction, and intentionality as distinct sociolinguistic variables (Britain, 2016).
2. **Extending audience design:** Historical experience of discrimination shapes stylistic choices, suggesting need for temporal dimension in audience design.
3. **Indexicality in shift contexts:** Features can retain ideological salience even as they recede from use, with implications for understanding shift reversibility.



6.13 Methodological Implications

- **Mobile ethnography:** Following the migratory route captured variation across full social context range.
- **Community validation:** Regular verification enhanced data quality and ethical grounding.
- **Multi-modal documentation:** Combining audio, photography, mapping created richer corpus.

6.14 Practical Implications

- **Documentation priorities:** Elders' speech urgently needs documentation of receding features (retroflexion, nasalization, traditional lexicon).
- **Revitalization potential:** Younger speakers' retention of heritage language as affective resource suggests potential for mother-tongue-based education.
- **Recognition:** This documentation could support claims for linguistic recognition under UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages.

7 Key Findings

This ethnographic case study investigated language style, variation, and identity among the undocumented Bucheki nomadic community in Punjab. Data from 20 participants collected over two weeks along their migratory route revealed:

- **Four distinct language styles** deployed strategically across social contexts, responsive to audience composition and shaped by mobility patterns.
- **Significant age stratification** indicating ongoing shift toward Punjabi: younger speakers progressively lose retroflexion, nasalization, and traditional lexicon.
- **Gender-differentiated patterns** reflecting differential mobility: men command broader multilingual repertoires; women maintain traditional registers but younger adopt the new easily.
- **Subtle clan-based variation** persisting as identity markers in lexicon and greeting routines.
- **Language as identity resource** through boundary-marking ideologies, shibboleths like *hala*, strategic code-switching, and narrative tropes constructing nomadism as legacy, cleverness, or loss.

7.1 RQ1: Language styles across contexts

The Bucheki command a stylistic repertoire shaped by mobility, shifting between community-internal styles and Inter-Community Transactional style in response to audience composition and historical experience.

7.2 RQ2: Patterns of variation

Age stratification indicates shift in progress; gender patterns reflect differential mobility; clan micro-variation persists as identity marker.

7.3 RQ3: Identity construction

Language functions centrally through boundary-marking, shibboleths, strategic code-switching, and narrative performance.

8 Recommendations

- **Comparative studies** with other South Asian Paakhi Vaas communities (Jogi, Sikligar, Kochi, Odd)
- **Longitudinal research** to track shift trajectory definitively
- **Quantitative variation studies** with larger samples for statistical modeling
- **Documentation of neighboring varieties** to clarify distinctively Bucheki features



8.1 For Language Policy and Documentation

- **Urgent documentation** of elders' speech capturing receding features
- **Community-based revitalization** possibilities: mother-tongue-based education, community radio, talking dictionaries, intergenerational learning programs
- **Recognition efforts** engaging UNESCO Indigenous Languages decade and national language policy frameworks

8.2 Contribution to Knowledge

1. **First documentation** of Bucheki speech, creating archive for future research and potential maintenance efforts.
2. **Theoretical contribution:** Demonstrates mobility's rhythm as sociolinguistic variable; extends audience design to incorporate historical experience; shows indexical retention amid shift.
3. **Methodological contribution:** Validates "mobile ethnography" for capturing variation across full social context range.
4. **Empirical contribution:** Extends literature on nomadic community language to South Asian context and to shift toward genetically unrelated majority language.
5. **Applied contribution:** Provides empirical grounding for community decision-making about language future.

Conclusion

Bucheki speakers possess a sophisticated stylistic repertoire that is strategically deployed across social contexts, responding to audience composition and historical marginalization. Language differences are categorized by age, gender, and clan. Retroflexion, vowel nasalization, and traditional lexicon are gradually being lost by younger speakers who show an increasing preference for Punjabi. While men have access to a wider range of languages in the market, women still have fewer traditional words. However, younger women are increasingly acquiring foreign languages through contact with non-governmental organizations and mobile phones. There are also subtle distinctions in terms of language and practicality within clans that remain as markers of identity. The central identity resource is language. By strategically switching the code, Bucheki is used as a code for genuine feeling, while Punjabi is utilized for transactional encounters. It advances sociolinguistic theory by showing that mobility has rhythm as a separate variable, extends the design of an audience to include historical experience, and shows how features retain indexical salience even in periods of change. The methodological validity of mobile ethnography is established, as it can capture variation across entire social systems. This record sets up a foundation for future preservation and aids in the advancement of UNESCO's International Decade of Indigenous Languages. Despite the changes in their language, the Bucheki voice's stylistic complexity and depth of depth are now recorded, keeping their legacy intact.

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