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FROM MOUNTAINS TO PLAINS: A DATA-DRIVEN SOCIOLINGUISTIC STUDY OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPES, CULTURAL IDENTITIES, AND LITERARY TRADITIONS ACROSS REGIONS OF PAKISTAN

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Sociolinguistics, Language and Identity, Multilingualism, Language Contact, Code-Switching, Cultural Identity, Regional Diversity, Pakistan

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Abstract

Pakistan is characterized by considerable linguistic and cultural diversity, shaped by its varied geographical environments, historical interactions, and socially distinct communities. This study explores the relationship between language, culture, and identity across five diverse regions of Pakistan: Hunza, Peshawar, Quetta, Multan, and Lahore. Adopting a qualitative comparative sociolinguistic approach, the study examines local language practices, multilingual communication, language contact, code-switching, cultural expression, and the ways in which linguistic practices are connected with regional identity and everyday social life. The study draws on firsthand observations and field experiences alongside relevant linguistic, sociolinguistic, and cultural research. Particular attention is given to the coexistence of local languages with Urdu and English, as well as to the influence of geography, mobility, education, urbanization, tourism, and historical contact on language use. The comparison brings together markedly different linguistic environments, including Burushaski in Hunza, Pashto in Peshawar and Quetta, Balochi and Brahui in Quetta, Saraiki in Multan, and Punjabi in Lahore. Cultural practices including food, clothing, heritage, social interaction, and traditional forms of expression are considered as complementary dimensions through which regional identities are experienced and communicated. Rather than treating language and culture as separate domains, the study approaches them as interconnected aspects of social life. Through cross-regional comparison, the research seeks to highlight both the diversity and the shared patterns of linguistic and cultural experience within contemporary Pakistan.

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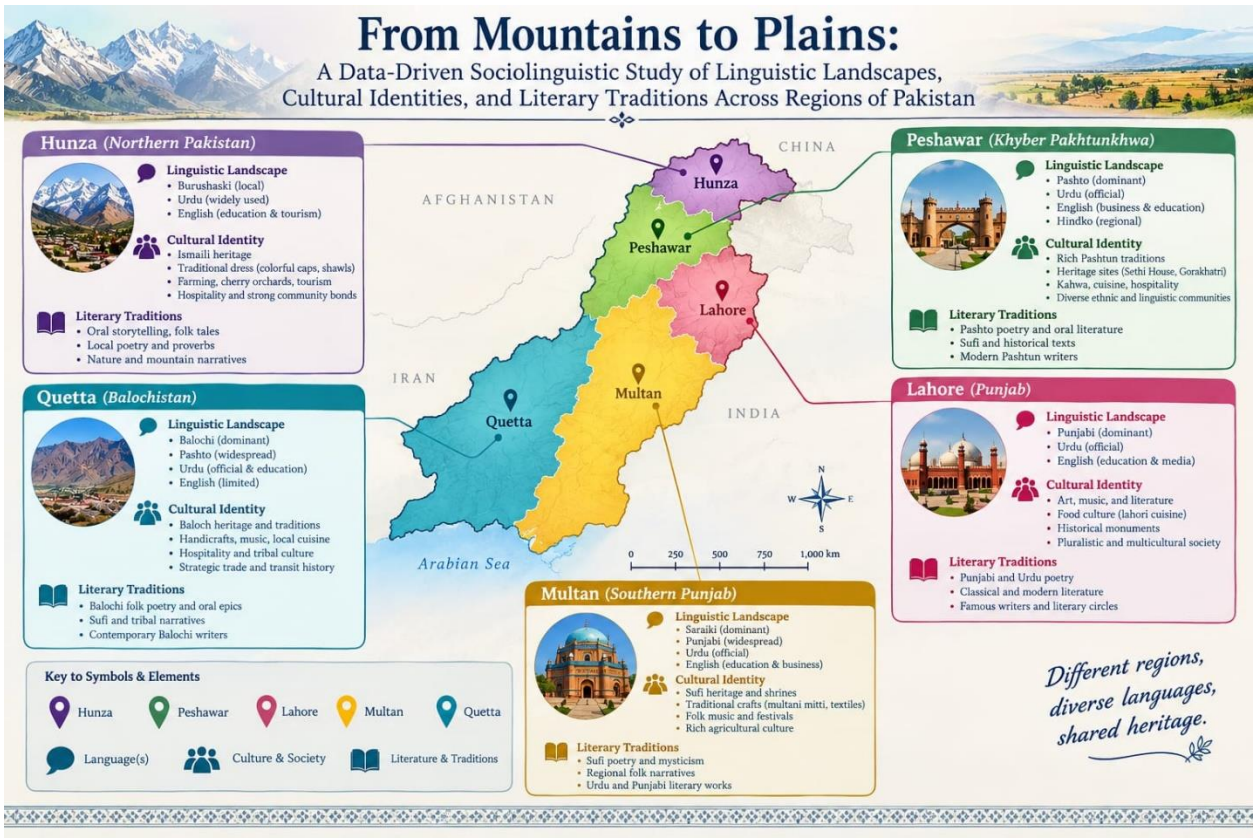


Figure 1. Geographic and sociolinguistic overview of the five selected regions of Pakistan: Hunza, Peshawar, Lahore, Multan, and Quetta.

1.Introduction

Pakistan is a linguistically and culturally diverse country in which people from different regions speak different languages, follow different cultural traditions, and develop different ways of expressing their identities. This diversity can be seen not only in the languages spoken across the country but also in everyday communication, food, clothing, social relationships, festivals, traditions, architecture, and ways of interacting with others. Languages such as Punjabi, Pashto, Saraiki, Balochi, Brahui, Sindhi, Burushaski, Shina, Wakhi, and others are used in different parts of the country, while Urdu has an important role as a widely used national language and English has a strong presence in education, professional life, administration, and other formal or

high-status domains. As a result, many people in Pakistan live in multilingual environments where more than one language may be used according to the situation, place, relationship between speakers, or purpose of communication.

Language is more than a means of exchanging information. It can also be an important part of how individuals and communities understand themselves and how they are recognized by others. The language a person speaks may be connected with family background, geographical belonging, cultural history, social relationships, and feelings of identity. For many communities, a local language represents a connection with earlier generations and with a particular place. At the same time, people may use other languages because those languages provide access to education, employment, wider communication, tourism, migration, or social mobility.

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Therefore, language choice is often influenced by both cultural attachment and practical needs. This relationship between language and identity becomes particularly interesting in a country such as Pakistan, where different linguistic communities exist within the same national and political framework. A person may identify with a local or regional language while also using Urdu in communication with people from other linguistic backgrounds and English in educational or professional settings. In some situations, speakers may move between languages within the same conversation. They may also use words, expressions, pronunciation patterns, or communication styles associated with more than one linguistic community. Such practices can be understood through concepts such as multilingualism, language contact, code-switching, and linguistic identity.

The present study focuses on five geographically and culturally different regions of Pakistan: Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta. These locations provide an opportunity to examine how language and culture are experienced in different regional settings. Hunza represents a multilingual northern environment where languages such as Burushaski exist alongside other regional and wider languages. Peshawar provides an important context for examining Pashto and its interaction with Urdu and English in an urban environment. Multan provides a context in which Saraiki, Urdu, Punjabi, and English can be considered alongside a strong history of Sufi traditions and regional cultural practices. Lahore represents a major urban centre in which Punjabi, Urdu, and English interact within a highly diverse social environment. Quetta provides another particularly complex multilingual setting in which languages including Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Urdu, and Hazaragi are associated with different communities and social contexts.

The purpose of bringing these regions together is not to suggest that they represent all of Pakistan or that every person in a particular region uses language in the same way. Instead, the comparison allows the study to identify similarities and differences in the ways language and culture are connected with place and identity. Each region has its own historical background, linguistic environment, cultural traditions, and patterns of interaction. At the same time, the regions are also influenced by wider national and global processes. Education, urbanization, migration, tourism, employment, digital communication, and the increasing importance of English can affect how people use local and wider languages. These changes may create new opportunities for communication while also creating questions about the continued use and transmission of regional languages.

An important part of this study is therefore the relationship between local languages and more socially widespread languages. Local languages may have an especially strong role in family life, community interaction, cultural traditions, and the expression of regional belonging. Urdu may be used to communicate across linguistic communities, while English may become important in education, employment, technology, tourism, and professional communication.

However, these roles are not fixed. The same speaker may use different languages in different situations, and the importance of a particular language may change according to age, education, occupation, location, and social environment. Examining these differences can provide a more detailed understanding of multilingual life in Pakistan.

The study also considers culture as an important part of linguistic identity. Language does not exist independently from the cultural practices of the people who use it. Food, clothing, music, festivals, traditional crafts, architecture, social customs, and forms of hospitality can all

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contribute to the way communities express their sense of belonging. For example, regional food names and expressions may carry cultural meanings that are not easily separated from the language in which they are used. Traditional clothing may communicate regional or community identity, while festivals and heritage sites can provide spaces in which cultural histories are remembered and displayed. By examining language together with these cultural practices, the study aims to develop a broader understanding of regional identity.

Geography is another important dimension of the comparison. The five selected locations differ considerably in their physical and social environments. Hunza is a mountainous region, while Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta have developed within different urban, historical, and geographical settings. Geography does not automatically determine how people speak or behave, and this study does not assume a simple cause-and-effect relationship between landscape and language. Instead, geographical and historical contexts are considered as part of the wider environments in which languages and cultural practices develop and change. This approach makes it possible to ask how communities living in different environments experience language, identity, mobility, and cultural continuity.

The study is also concerned with language contact. When speakers of different languages interact regularly, languages can influence one another in vocabulary, pronunciation, communication patterns, and language choice. Multilingual speakers may select different languages depending on the person they are speaking to or the social setting in which communication takes place.

Code-switching can therefore be more than a random mixture of languages. It may serve social and communicative purposes, such as expressing familiarity, humor, emotion, formality, group membership, or professional identity. However, these functions cannot be assumed to be identical across all communities. They need to be examined in relation to the particular linguistic and cultural context of each region.

The comparison of these five locations also makes it possible to examine the relationship between linguistic continuity and social change. Regional languages and cultural practices can remain important even when speakers increasingly use Urdu or English in particular domains. At the same time, changes in education, migration, employment, media, tourism, and urban life may influence younger generations and alter patterns of language use. Some speakers may use a local language mainly within the family or community, while using Urdu or English in wider social and professional settings. Such patterns raise important questions about how languages are maintained, adapted, transmitted, and valued in changing societies.

This study therefore approaches linguistic diversity not simply as a collection of different languages but as a social phenomenon connected with identity, culture, place, and changing patterns of interaction. The comparison between Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, Quetta allows attention to both linguistic structure and everyday language practices. It considers not only which languages are spoken but also where they are spoken, with whom they are used, what social meanings they may carry, and how their roles can change across different contexts.

The study draws on firsthand observations and field experiences from selected locations together with relevant academic and secondary sources. These materials are used comparatively rather than treating personal observations as representative of entire populations. The purpose is to connect observed experiences with broader sociolinguistic questions while recognizing that individual experiences cannot describe every speaker or community. Academic sources are

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therefore important for providing wider linguistic and cultural context and for supporting claims about language structure, language contact, and regional practices.

By bringing linguistic and cultural perspectives together, this research seeks to contribute to a more detailed understanding of Pakistan's internal diversity. Rather than presenting regional communities as completely separate or completely uniform, the study explores the ways in which difference and connection exist at the same time. The five regions have distinct linguistic and cultural characteristics, but they are also connected through migration, education, national communication, economic activity, tourism, and wider social change. Their comparison can therefore reveal how local identities are maintained while speakers participate in broader multilingual and increasingly interconnected social environments.

Ultimately, the study asks how language functions as both a practical tool for communication and a meaningful part of cultural identity. It examines how people use local and wider languages, how languages come into contact, how cultural practices support a sense of belonging, and how these relationships are changing. Through a comparative sociolinguistic exploration of Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta, the research aims to show that linguistic diversity is closely connected with the cultural and social diversity of Pakistan.

Research Questions

1. How do linguistic differences across the five regions reflect distinct cultural identities and historical experiences?
2. How do multilingualism, code-switching, and language contact shape everyday communication and social identity in these regions?
3. How do local languages function alongside Urdu and English in education, public spaces, family life, commerce, and other social domains?
4. How are language, food, clothing, traditions, and other cultural practices used to express regional identity and belonging?
5. How do speakers perceive the relationship between their local languages and more socially dominant languages such as Urdu and English, particularly in education, tourism, employment, and public life?
6. How are traditional linguistic and cultural practices changing under the influence of urbanization, education, migration, globalization, and changing social attitudes?

1. Methodology

1.1 Research Approach

This study uses a qualitative comparative approach to explore the relationship between language, culture, and identity across five diverse regions of Pakistan: Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta. A qualitative approach is suitable for this research because the study is concerned with people's language practices, cultural expressions, social experiences, and regional identities rather than with numerical measurement alone. The purpose is to understand patterns and meanings within different linguistic and cultural contexts.

The study follows a comparative design. Each selected region is examined individually before being compared with the other locations. This makes it possible to identify both similarities and differences in language use, multilingual communication, cultural practices, and changing patterns of identity.

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1.2 Study Locations

Five locations were selected for the study: **Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta.** The locations were chosen because they represent different geographical, historical, linguistic, and cultural environments within Pakistan.

Hunza provides a context for examining Burushaski and other languages used in a multilingual northern environment. Peshawar provides an important setting for examining Pashto and its relationship with Urdu and English. Multan provides a context for examining Saraiki and its relationship with other languages, together with the city's strong Sufi and regional cultural traditions. Lahore represents a major urban environment where Punjabi, Urdu, English, and other languages interact. Quetta provides a highly multilingual setting in which Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Urdu, Hazaragi, and other languages may be encountered.

The comparison is not intended to suggest that each location has a single language or a single culture. Rather, each location is treated as a socially and linguistically diverse environment in which different communities and language practices exist.

1.3 Field Observations and Personal Experience

The study incorporates firsthand observations from selected locations. These observations were made through visits, everyday interactions, informal conversations, and attention to linguistic and cultural practices in public and social environments.

The researcher spent approximately twenty days in Hunza during December 2025 and approximately fifteen days in Quetta during March 2026. The research also draws on firsthand experiences in Peshawar and long-term lived experience in the Lahore area. These experiences provided opportunities to observe language use, communication patterns, cultural practices, public spaces, food, clothing, heritage, and interactions between people from different linguistic backgrounds.

The interactions in the field were primarily informal and exploratory rather than structured research interviews. Therefore, statements based on personal observation are presented as observations rather than as representative claims about entire populations. The study does not assume that the experiences of a limited number of individuals can represent every person living in a particular region.

1.4 Secondary Sources

Alongside firsthand observations, the study uses secondary sources to provide broader linguistic and cultural context. These include academic journal articles, books, theses, institutional publications, and other reliable research sources related to the languages, communities, and cultural practices discussed in the paper.

Secondary sources are particularly important when discussing linguistic structures, language contact, multilingualism, code-switching, language attitudes, and regional language use. They also help place individual observations within a wider academic context. Where a claim requires evidence beyond personal observation, relevant published research is used to support the discussion.

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1.5 Comparative Analysis

The information collected from observations and secondary sources is analyzed thematically and comparatively. Several major themes guide the analysis: language and identity, multilingualism, code-switching, language contact, cultural expression, language attitudes, and social change.

The regional sections first examine each location separately. Attention is then given to similarities and differences between the five regions. The comparison considers how local languages interact with Urdu and English, how cultural practices contribute to regional identity, and how factors such as migration, education, urbanization, tourism, employment and globalization may influence language and culture.

The study also considers linguistic features at a broader structural level, including differences in sound systems, grammar, vocabulary, and patterns of language use where reliable linguistic sources are available. However, structural differences are not interpreted as direct products of geography or culture. Instead, they are considered within their historical and sociolinguistic contexts.

1.6 Limitations

This study has several limitations. First, the field observations do not represent a statistically sampled population. The experiences described in the paper therefore cannot be generalized to every speaker or community in the selected regions. Second, the amount of firsthand experience differs between locations. Some parts of the study rely more heavily on secondary research than others. Third, multilingual communities are internally diverse, and language practices can differ according to age, education, occupation, family background, migration history, and social setting.

For these reasons, the study uses cautious language when discussing regional patterns. Personal observations are distinguished from findings reported in published research, and broader claims are supported through appropriate academic sources wherever possible. These limitations do not prevent comparison; instead, they define the scope of the study and help ensure that the analysis remains responsible and evidence-based.

2. Theoretical Framework

This study uses a sociolinguistic and cultural perspective to understand the relationship between language, identity, culture, and social change across different regions of Pakistan. The framework combines several related concepts: **language and identity, multilingualism,** language contact, code-switching, linguistic landscape, and linguistic relativity. These concepts provide a basis for comparing the five regions without assuming that all communities use language in the same way.

2.1 Language and Identity

Language is an important part of social and cultural identity. People may use a particular language or variety to express their connection with their family, community, region, or cultural background. Local languages can therefore carry meanings that go beyond communication. They may represent belonging, cultural memory, traditions, and connections between generations.

At the same time, identity is not necessarily connected to only one language. A multilingual person may use a local language in one context, Urdu in another, and English in another.

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Different languages may therefore become associated with different parts of a person's social identity. This study uses this idea to examine how speakers in Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta negotiate regional and wider identities through language.

2.2 Multilingualism and Language Contact

Multilingualism refers to the use or knowledge of more than one language by individuals or communities. In multilingual societies, languages frequently come into contact because speakers interact with people from different linguistic backgrounds. This contact can influence vocabulary, pronunciation, language choice, and communication practices.

Pakistan provides many examples of such contact. Local and regional languages exist alongside Urdu and English, and speakers may use different languages according to their social environment. The study therefore examines multilingualism not simply as the presence of several languages but as an active social practice.

2.3 Code-Switching

Code-switching refers to the movement between two or more languages or language varieties during communication. It can occur between sentences, within sentences, or across different parts of a conversation. Code-switching may be influenced by the topic, speaker, audience, setting, or purpose of communication.

In this study, code-switching is considered as a possible resource through which speakers manage different social situations and express meanings such as familiarity, formality, humor, emotion, or group belonging. However, the study does not assume that code-switching has the same function in every region.

2.4 Linguistic Landscape

The concept of linguistic landscape focuses on the languages visible in public spaces, including shop signs, advertisements, roads, buildings, public notices, and other written displays. Public language choices can provide information about which languages are given visibility and how different languages are positioned within society.

This concept is particularly useful when comparing urban environments such as Peshawar and Lahore with other regional settings. The presence or absence of a language in public spaces can provide another perspective on language status, identity, commerce, and social change.

2.5 Linguistic Relativity

The study also considers the idea of linguistic relativity, often associated with the Sapir-Whorf tradition. In its weaker form, linguistic relativity suggests that the language people use can influence how they organize or interpret aspects of experience. This idea is useful for asking whether differences in linguistic expression may be connected with different ways of describing culture, identity, social relationships, or the environment.

However, this study does not claim that geography directly determines language or that a particular language automatically produces a particular worldview. Such relationships are complex and are influenced by history, social interaction, migration, education, and cultural practices. Linguistic relativity is therefore used as a perspective for examining possible relationships rather than as a theory that the study seeks to prove.

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Together, these concepts provide a framework for examining how language functions within cultural and social life. They allow the study to move beyond simply listing the languages spoken in each region and instead investigate how language choices, cultural practices, and social changes interact in different parts of Pakistan.

3. Hunza: Language, Culture, and Identity

Hunza provides an important context for examining the relationship between language, culture, identity, and geographical environment in northern Pakistan. The region is linguistically diverse, and Burushaski is particularly significant in relation to local identity. Other languages, including Urdu and English, are also present in different social and communicative contexts. This makes Hunza useful for understanding how a local language can remain connected with cultural identity while speakers also participate in wider multilingual environments.

3.1 Linguistic Environment

Burushaski is one of the most distinctive languages associated with the Hunza region. It is generally classified as a language isolate, meaning that it has not been demonstrated to belong to a known language family. This makes it particularly important for linguistic research. However, its importance is not only structural. For speakers and communities, a local language can also function as a marker of belonging and cultural continuity.

Research on language attitudes among Burushaski speakers indicates that the language continues to have cultural importance while speakers also use languages such as English and Urdu in different contexts. Studies of Burushaski discourse have also identified English code-switching, particularly among speakers with greater levels of education. This suggests that the presence of English does not necessarily mean that local languages disappear from everyday life. Instead, speakers may use different languages for different purposes.

My own experience in Hunza provided a practical context for understanding this multilingual environment. I visited Hunza for approximately twenty days in December 2025 and interacted with local people in different everyday settings, including Altit village. The conversations were informal rather than structured interviews. During these interactions, I noticed that communication could take place across different languages depending on the people involved and the situation. Urdu and English were also understood or used in a number of interactions I experienced, particularly in contexts connected with tourism and communication with visitors. One important observation was the willingness of local people to share aspects of their language and culture with visitors. In one interaction, a local person introduced me to words or expressions from Burushaski. Although such individual interactions cannot represent the language practices of the whole region, they demonstrate how language can become part of interpersonal cultural exchange. A local language is not simply a system of grammar and vocabulary; it can also become a way through which cultural knowledge is shared.

3.2 Language, Multilingualism, and Social Change

The linguistic situation in Hunza also demonstrates the relationship between local identity and wider communication. Urdu can provide communication across different linguistic communities in Pakistan, while English has an important role in education, employment, tourism, and other wider domains. Research on Burushaski speakers has similarly highlighted

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the growing importance of English, particularly among educated younger speakers.

This creates a situation in which speakers may attach cultural meaning to their local language while recognizing the practical value of other languages. Such multilingualism should not automatically be understood as language replacement. A speaker can value Burushaski as part of cultural identity while using English for education or professional purposes and Urdu for communication with people from other regions.

This distinction is important because language choice is often connected with social context. A language used within a family or local community may perform a different function from a language used in education, tourism, employment, or communication with outsiders. Consequently, the presence of Urdu or English does not by itself demonstrate that a local language has lost its importance.

3.3 Cultural Identity

Language in Hunza is closely connected with broader cultural practices. During my visit, I observed traditional clothing, colorful caps and shawls, handmade embroidered items, local foods, agricultural activities, and forms of interaction that contributed to the distinctive cultural environment of the region. These observations are important because cultural identity is communicated through more than spoken language.

Traditional objects and practices can function as visible expressions of belonging. Clothing, crafts, food, music, and local traditions can help maintain connections with regional history while also being presented to visitors and tourists. In this sense, culture operates through both everyday community life and public representations of the region.

The relationship between culture and tourism is particularly relevant in Hunza. Tourism creates opportunities for local communities to present aspects of their language and culture to people from other parts of Pakistan and from outside the country. At the same time, increased contact with visitors can create new communicative needs and increase the practical value of languages such as Urdu and English.

3.4 Identity and the Changing Linguistic Landscape

Hunza therefore illustrates a broader sociolinguistic issue: local identity can remain important even when speakers participate in multilingual environments. The continued cultural significance of Burushaski exists alongside the use of wider languages for education, tourism, employment, and communication.

The region should consequently not be described simply as a place where a traditional language is either being preserved or being replaced. A more useful interpretation is that speakers negotiate several linguistic resources according to their social needs. Local language can provide cultural belonging, while wider languages can provide access to broader social and economic networks.

Hunza thus demonstrates the importance of examining language within its social context. Its linguistic diversity cannot be understood only by identifying which languages are spoken. It is also necessary to consider who uses them, in which situations, for what purposes, and with what meanings. The interaction between Burushaski, Urdu, English, and other languages provides an example of how linguistic identity can remain locally grounded while simultaneously adapting to education, tourism, mobility, and wider social change.

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Figure 2. Hunza: Burushaski multilingualism, linguistic identity, cultural landscape, traditional crafts, and material heritage.

4. Peshawar: Language, Multilingualism, and Cultural Identity

Peshawar provides a different sociolinguistic environment from Hunza. As a major urban centre in northwestern Pakistan and an important historical centre of the Pashtun region, Peshawar has a strong association with Pashto while also containing considerable multilingual interaction. Pashto, Urdu, and English can occupy different roles in everyday communication, education, commerce, and public life. The city therefore provides an important setting for examining how a regional language functions alongside languages with wider national and international reach.

4.1 Pashto and the Linguistic Environment

Pashto is an important language of cultural and social identity in Peshawar. It is used in family and community interactions and remains closely connected with Pashtun cultural belonging. At the same time, Peshawar is not linguistically uniform. Urdu is widely used for communication across different linguistic backgrounds, while English has an important role in education, professional communication, and other formal or high-status contexts.

Research on multilingual families in Peshawar has shown that Pashto, Urdu, and English can

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exist within the same household and may be used for different purposes. Such research demonstrates that multilingualism is not necessarily a simple division in which each person speaks only one language. Instead, speakers can move between languages depending on the participants, topic, setting, and purpose of interaction.

My own experience in Peshawar also provided an opportunity to observe this multilingual environment. I interacted with several people through both informal and more structured conversations and visited a number of historical and public spaces, including the Heritage Trail, Gorakhatri, Sethi House, Sethi Mohalla, Masjid Mohabbat Khan, Ghanta Ghar, Islamia College, and areas of the old city. These experiences provided a context for observing how language and cultural identity appear in everyday urban life.

4.2 Code-Switching and Language Choice

The coexistence of Pashto, Urdu, and English makes Peshawar a useful case for examining code-switching and language choice. A speaker may use Pashto when communicating with family members or members of the same linguistic community, while Urdu may become more useful when communicating with people from different linguistic backgrounds. English may be selected in educational, professional, technological, or formal contexts.

These choices should not automatically be interpreted as evidence that one language is replacing another. Instead, they may reflect the different social functions associated with each language. A multilingual speaker can use several languages as complementary resources. In this sense, language choice can reveal information about relationships between speakers, the social setting, and the purpose of communication.

The use of English is particularly relevant to this discussion. Research on the linguistic landscape of Peshawar has identified a visible presence of English and English transliterations in public and commercial spaces. Such visibility can be associated with education, modernity, business, and social status. However, the meaning of English in public spaces should not be treated as identical for all speakers. The social interpretation of a language depends on the context in which it appears and the people who encounter it.

4.3 Linguistic Landscape

The public spaces of Peshawar provide another way of examining language and identity. Shop signs, advertisements, billboards, transport signs, and other written displays can reveal which languages are visible in the urban environment. Research on Peshawar's linguistic landscape has found that English and Urdu are prominent in different types of public and commercial communication, while Pashto has also been identified as an important language in the city's broader public environment.

This creates an interesting contrast between spoken and written language. A regional language may have strong importance in interpersonal communication and cultural identity while not always receiving the same level of visibility in commercial or formal written spaces. The difference between what people speak and what appears on signs can therefore provide insight into social language hierarchies.

This issue is particularly important for understanding urban multilingualism. Public language is not selected randomly. Businesses and institutions may choose languages that they believe will reach particular audiences or communicate particular social meanings. Consequently, linguistic

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landscapes can reflect both practical communication needs and attitudes toward languages.

4.4 Cultural Identity and Pashtun Traditions

Language in Peshawar is closely connected with Pashtun cultural identity. Cultural practices involving hospitality, social relationships, traditional clothing, food, and community gatherings provide additional ways through which identity is expressed. Concepts associated with Pashtun social traditions, including hospitality and community-based forms of interaction, are often discussed in relation to Pashtun identity. However, these traditions should not be treated as fixed rules followed in exactly the same way by every individual.

During my observations in Peshawar, cultural identity was visible not only through language but also through historical buildings, traditional food, clothing, tea and social gathering practices, and the character of the old city. Peshawari cultural spaces demonstrate how language and material culture can work together in the expression of regional identity.

The importance of traditional foods and social spaces is also relevant to language. Food names, greetings, forms of hospitality, and culturally specific expressions can carry meanings that are connected to particular communities. In this way, language provides a verbal dimension to cultural practices that are also expressed through food, architecture, clothing, and social interaction.

4.5 Language, Identity, and Urban Change

Peshawar demonstrates that regional identity can remain important within a rapidly changing multilingual urban environment. Pashto continues to function as an important marker of cultural belonging, while Urdu and English provide access to wider forms of communication and social participation.

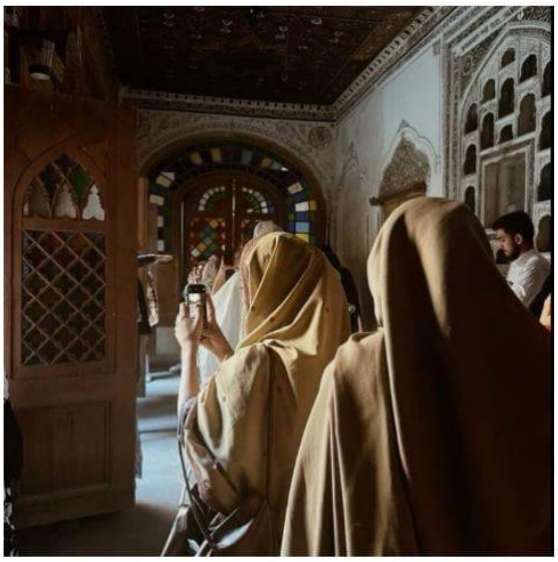
The city therefore illustrates the importance of examining multilingualism as a dynamic process. Language practices can change as people move between home, educational institutions, workplaces, markets, and digital spaces. Younger speakers may encounter greater exposure to English and Urdu while continuing to use Pashto within family or community contexts. Such patterns can create new forms of multilingual identity rather than producing a simple choice between a local language and a wider language.

Peshawar consequently provides an important comparison with Hunza. In Hunza, multilingualism is shaped partly by a highly diverse northern linguistic environment and increasing interaction with tourism and wider educational networks. In Peshawar, multilingualism develops within a major urban centre where Pashto interacts strongly with Urdu and English. In both cases, however, language is connected with identity while also serving practical communicative purposes.

The Peshawar case therefore supports the broader argument of this study: language should be understood as part of social life rather than as an isolated system. The relationship between Pashto, Urdu, and English demonstrates how speakers can maintain regional linguistic identities while participating in wider national, educational, professional, and urban networks.

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Figure 3. Peshawar: Pashto linguistic identity, multilingual practices, cultural heritage, architecture, and community spaces.

5. Multan: Saraiki, Cultural Heritage, and Regional Identity

Multan provides a different perspective on the relationship between language, culture, and identity in Pakistan. Often associated with Saraiki language and culture, the city has a long history of religious, cultural, agricultural, and commercial activity. Its identity is also strongly connected with Sufi heritage, historic shrines, traditional crafts, local food, and regional forms of expression. From a sociolinguistic perspective, Multan is particularly useful for examining how a regional language functions alongside Urdu, Punjabi, and English and how language is connected with a broader sense of place and cultural belonging.

5.1 Saraiki and the Linguistic Environment

Saraiki is an important language associated with southern Punjab, including the Multan region. Its position within the wider linguistic landscape of Pakistan has also been discussed in relation to questions of regional identity and language classification. Rather than treating such classifications as completely straightforward, it is more useful to recognize that language categories can also have social, historical, and political dimensions.

In Multan, Saraiki exists alongside Urdu and Punjabi, while English is increasingly relevant in education, professional communication, technology, and other formal domains. This creates a multilingual environment in which speakers may have access to several linguistic resources. The choice of language can depend on the relationship between speakers, the setting, the topic of conversation, and the purpose of communication.

Saraiki is particularly significant as a marker of regional identity. The language is associated not only with everyday communication but also with literature, poetry, music, oral traditions, and cultural memory. Through these forms, language can connect speakers with the history and cultural heritage of southern Punjab.

5.2 Language and Regional Identity

The relationship between Saraiki and identity is important because language can become a way of expressing attachment to a particular region. A regional language may communicate belonging even when speakers are also comfortable using Urdu or another language. This means that multilingualism does not necessarily remove regional identity. Instead, different languages may contribute to different aspects of a person's social life.

For example, Urdu can facilitate communication with people from different linguistic backgrounds across Pakistan, while Saraiki can carry stronger regional and cultural associations for speakers from southern Punjab. English may have a different function in educational and professional contexts. These different roles demonstrate that languages can coexist without having identical social meanings.

The use of Saraiki in literature and cultural expression is particularly important in this context. Poetry and oral traditions allow language to preserve cultural ideas, local experiences, emotions, and historical memory. Language therefore becomes not only a tool for everyday communication but also a medium through which a community represents itself.

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5.3 Sufi Heritage and Cultural Expression

Multan's cultural identity is closely associated with its Sufi heritage. Historic sites and shrines connected with figures such as Bahauddin Zakariya and Shah Rukn-e-Alam have contributed to the city's cultural image and continue to attract visitors. Religious gatherings, Urs celebrations, devotional music, and other traditions form an important part of the cultural environment associated with Multan.

From a cultural-linguistic perspective, Sufi traditions are significant because they connect language with music, poetry, storytelling, ritual, and collective memory. Regional languages can provide an important medium for expressing religious and cultural ideas. The use of local linguistic forms in poetry and devotional expression can strengthen the relationship between language and cultural heritage.

However, Multan's cultural identity cannot be reduced to its Sufi heritage alone. The city also has a strong tradition of crafts, agriculture, food, trade, and everyday urban life. These different dimensions contribute to the broader cultural identity of the region.

5.4 Material Culture, Food, and Identity

Cultural identity is also expressed through material practices. Multan is associated with traditional crafts such as blue pottery and other forms of decorative work, as well as textiles and locally produced goods. Such crafts can function as visible representations of regional heritage and may also contribute to tourism and local economic activity.

Food provides another important form of cultural expression. Local products and dishes, including mangoes and traditional sweets such as Sohan Halwa, are strongly associated with the city's cultural image. Food can contribute to identity because it connects everyday experience with place, memory, family traditions, and regional reputation.

These practices demonstrate that cultural identity does not exist only through language. Instead, language interacts with other cultural forms. Names of foods, craft terms, religious expressions, local stories, and traditional practices can all carry linguistic meanings connected to the region.

5.5 Multilingualism and Social Change

Like the other regions examined in this study, Multan is affected by social and economic change.

Urbanization, education, migration, digital communication, employment, and interaction with people from other regions can influence language practices. Speakers may increasingly use Urdu or English in particular domains while continuing to use Saraiki in family, community, cultural, or informal settings.

This does not necessarily represent a complete movement away from the regional language. Instead, it may demonstrate a process of domain differentiation, in which different languages become associated with different areas of life. The same individual may therefore use Saraiki in one context, Urdu in another, and English in another without considering these choices contradictory.

The relationship between Saraiki and Punjabi is also relevant when examining language identity in southern Punjab. Linguistic boundaries do not always correspond neatly to political or administrative boundaries, and speakers may share features, vocabulary, or multilingual abilities across language varieties. This makes the Multan case useful for understanding how language

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categories are connected with both linguistic practices and social identities.

5.6 Multan in the Comparative Context

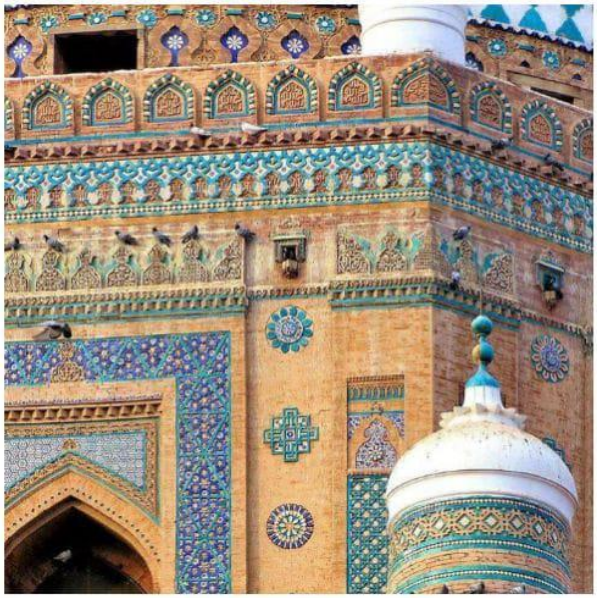
Multan adds an important dimension to the comparison of Pakistan's diverse regions. While Hunza highlights a distinctive northern multilingual environment and Peshawar demonstrates the relationship between Pashto, Urdu, and English in an urban Pashtun setting, Multan highlights the relationship between a regional language, cultural heritage, and regional identity in southern Punjab.

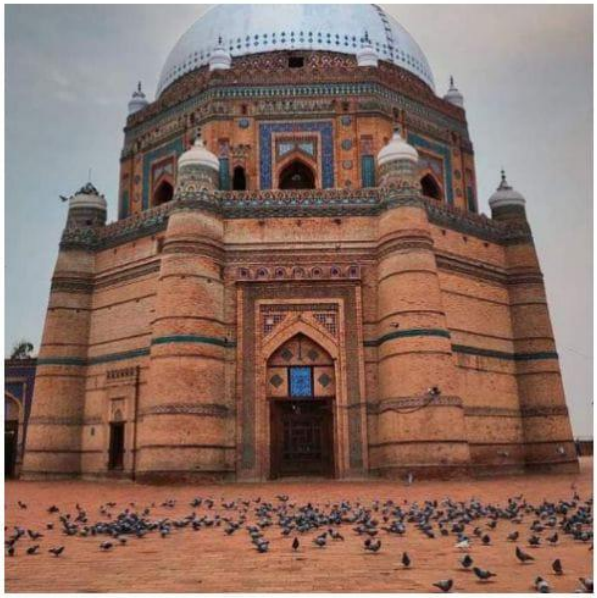
The Multan case demonstrates that language can be closely connected with historical memory and cultural expression. Saraiki is not simply a means of everyday communication; it can also function as a symbol of regional belonging through literature, poetry, music, and cultural traditions. At the same time, the presence of Urdu, Punjabi, and English demonstrates that regional identity exists within a wider multilingual environment.

Multan therefore supports the broader argument that linguistic identity is flexible rather than fixed. Speakers can participate in wider national and global communication while maintaining connections with regional languages and cultural practices. Understanding this balance between local continuity and wider linguistic interaction is essential for understanding the changing sociolinguistic landscape of Pakistan.

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Figure 5. Multan: Saraiki linguistic identity, multilingual practices, Sufi literary traditions, cultural heritage, and traditional crafts.

6. Lahore: Urban Multilingualism, Language Contact, and Identity

Lahore represents a different type of linguistic and cultural environment from the northern and western regions discussed above. As one of Pakistan's major urban centres, Lahore has developed through long-term migration, education, commerce, political history, cultural exchange, and interaction between people from different linguistic backgrounds. Punjabi has a strong historical and cultural connection with the region, while Urdu is widely used across different communities and English has an important position in education, professional life, business, and other formal contexts. The city therefore provides an important setting for examining urban multilingualism and the relationship between language, social identity, and changing patterns of communication.

6.1 Punjabi, Urdu, and English

Punjabi is strongly associated with the cultural and historical identity of Lahore and the wider Punjab region. It is used in different forms of everyday interaction and has a rich tradition of poetry, music, storytelling, theatre, and popular culture. At the same time, the linguistic environment of Lahore is not limited to Punjabi. Urdu has a major role in communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds, while English is widely associated with education, professional communication, technology, and social mobility.

This creates a multilingual environment in which the same speaker may use different languages depending on the situation. A person may communicate in Punjabi with family or close friends, use Urdu in broader social interaction, and use English in an educational or professional setting. These choices do not necessarily indicate that the speaker has separate identities. Instead, they can demonstrate the ability to move between different linguistic and social contexts.

Research on multilingual communities in Lahore also demonstrates that migration can contribute to complex language practices. For example, studies of migrant Pashto-speaking communities in Lahore have found that families may maintain Pashto within the home and community while using Urdu and English for wider social, educational, and professional purposes. This illustrates how local and migrant identities can coexist within the same urban environment.

6.2 Code-Switching and Urban Communication

Lahore provides a particularly useful environment for examining code-switching. Conversations in multilingual urban settings may involve movement between Punjabi, Urdu, and English. Such switching can occur for many reasons, including the topic being discussed, the people participating in the conversation, the social setting, or the meaning a speaker wants to communicate.

English words and expressions may appear in otherwise Urdu or Punjabi conversations, particularly when discussing education, technology, employment, entertainment, or professional matters. Punjabi expressions may also be used to create familiarity, humor, emotional emphasis, or a stronger sense of local identity.

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Code-switching should therefore not automatically be described as poor language ability or linguistic confusion. For multilingual speakers, switching between languages can be a normal communicative practice. It can allow speakers to use the linguistic resource that best fits a particular social situation.

At the same time, patterns of code-switching can reveal social differences. Some English expressions may be associated with particular educational or professional environments, while Punjabi expressions may carry meanings of familiarity and regional belonging. Urdu can function as a bridge between speakers who do not share the same first language. These overlapping functions make Lahore a useful example of how language choice can carry social meaning.

6.3 Language, Social Identity, and Prestige

Urban language practices are also connected with ideas of prestige and social status. Languages and language varieties are not always valued equally in every social situation. English, in particular, can carry strong associations with formal education, professional opportunities, and international communication. Urdu can provide wider national communication, while Punjabi may be strongly associated with local and regional identity.

These different associations can influence how speakers choose to present themselves. A speaker may emphasize one language in a particular setting and another language elsewhere. Language choice can therefore become part of social identity management.

This does not mean that one language completely replaces another. Instead, different languages can acquire different social meanings. A speaker may value Punjabi as an important part of cultural identity while also believing that English is necessary for professional development. Similarly, Urdu may be preferred for communication with people from different regions while Punjabi remains important in local social interaction.

This relationship between language and social meaning is particularly important in Lahore because of the city's large and diverse population. People from different parts of Pakistan may live, study, and work in the city. Migration therefore adds another layer to the existing linguistic environment and creates opportunities for languages to interact.

6.4 Language and Cultural Expression

Lahore's cultural identity is expressed through language as well as food, literature, music, architecture, festivals, theatre, art, and everyday social practices. Punjabi poetry and music remain important parts of the wider cultural heritage of the region, while Urdu literature and popular culture have also played major roles in the city's intellectual and artistic life.

Food is another important part of Lahore's cultural identity. Traditional dishes and food streets provide spaces where language and cultural practices come together. Food names, expressions, forms of hospitality, and social interaction around meals can contribute to a sense of belonging. These practices also show how cultural identity is reproduced through ordinary daily activities rather than only through formal cultural events.

The city's historical architecture provides another connection between language and identity. Mughal-era buildings, colonial structures, markets, old neighbourhoods, and modern commercial areas exist alongside one another. The coexistence of these spaces reflects the historical changes that have shaped Lahore and provides a broader context for understanding

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its contemporary cultural identity.

6.5 Migration and Changing Identities

Migration is an important factor in Lahore's multilingual environment. People move to the city for education, employment, business, family reasons, and other opportunities. As people from different linguistic backgrounds interact, they may acquire additional languages or modify their existing language practices.

Research on migrant Pashto-speaking communities in Lahore suggests that families can maintain their heritage language while also adopting Urdu and English for wider social participation. Such patterns demonstrate that migration does not necessarily lead immediately to the abandonment of a home language. Instead, families may develop different language practices for different domains.

For younger generations, these patterns can become particularly complex. Children may hear one language at home, use another with friends, and encounter English extensively through education and digital media. As a result, identity can become multilingual and flexible. A young speaker

may identify with a regional heritage while simultaneously participating in a broader urban and global culture.

6.6 Lahore and the Wider Comparison

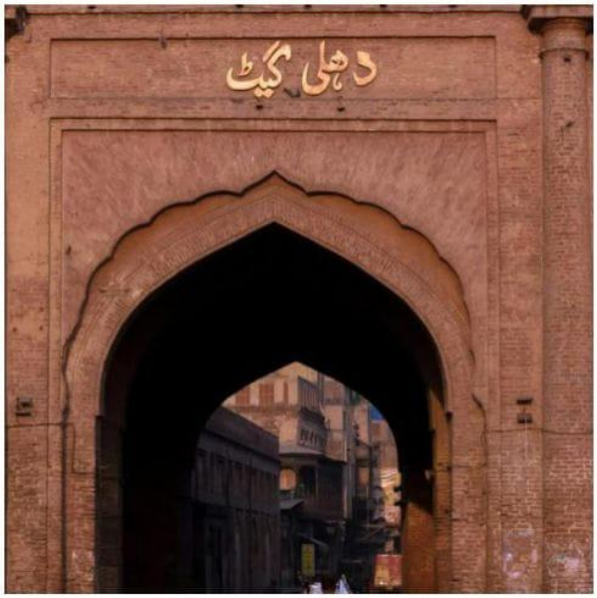
Lahore differs from Hunza, Peshawar, and Multan in the scale and complexity of its urban environment, but there are important similarities. In each region, local or regional languages remain connected with identity while Urdu and English provide wider communicative possibilities. The difference lies partly in the social environments in which these languages interact.

In Lahore, migration and urbanization create particularly frequent opportunities for language contact. The city demonstrates how linguistic identities can become layered rather than singular. Punjabi, Urdu, English, and migrant languages can exist within the same neighbourhoods, families, educational institutions, and workplaces.

The Lahore case therefore highlights an important theme of this study: multilingualism is not simply a question of how many languages are spoken. It also involves the social meanings attached to those languages and the ways speakers move between them. Language choices can express regional belonging, social relationships, educational background, professional identity, and participation in wider urban and global networks.

Lahore consequently provides a strong example of how language, culture, and identity change together in an urban environment. Its linguistic diversity demonstrates that regional identity can remain meaningful even as speakers become increasingly connected to national and global forms of communication.

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Figure 4. Lahore: Punjabi linguistic identity, Urdu–Punjabi multilingualism, literary culture, historical spaces, and urban cultural practices.

7. Quetta: Multilingualism, Cultural Diversity, and Urban Identity

Quetta provides one of the most complex linguistic and cultural settings in this study. As the capital of Balochistan and an important urban centre, the city brings together people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Languages associated with the region and its communities include Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Urdu, and Hazaragi, while other languages may also be heard among migrant and settled communities. This linguistic diversity makes Quetta an important case for examining how local languages, multilingual communication, cultural identity, and urban interaction exist alongside one another.

7.1 A Multilingual Urban Environment

The linguistic environment of Quetta cannot be understood through a single dominant language. Different communities use different languages according to family background, neighbourhood, social relationships, and communicative situation. Pashto, Balochi, and Brahui are particularly important in understanding the indigenous linguistic diversity of Balochistan, while Urdu can provide a wider means of communication between people from different linguistic backgrounds. This situation creates opportunities for language contact. A person living in Quetta may encounter several languages in everyday life without necessarily using all of them at the same level. Language choice may depend on who is speaking, where communication takes place, and what the speakers want to achieve. A local language may have a strong role in family and community life, while Urdu may be useful in communication across linguistic groups.

The presence of English can also be understood within this wider multilingual environment. As in other Pakistani cities, English is associated with education, professional communication, technology, and wider national and international networks. Its role is therefore different from that of many local languages, which may carry stronger associations with regional and community identity.

7.2 Firsthand Observations in Quetta

My own experience provides an additional perspective on this linguistic and cultural environment. I visited Quetta for approximately fifteen days in March 2026. During this period, I had opportunities to observe different aspects of urban and regional life and to interact with people in everyday settings.

These experiences were informal and exploratory rather than formal interviews. Therefore, they are used in this study as firsthand observations rather than as representative evidence for the entire population of Quetta.

One important aspect of the experience was the visible presence of cultural diversity. Different forms of clothing, food, language, and social interaction contributed to an environment in which regional identities could be observed in everyday life. The coexistence of different

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communities also demonstrated that urban identity does not always correspond to a single linguistic or cultural category.

The experience of visiting Quetta was therefore useful for understanding multilingualism as something that can be encountered in ordinary social life. Rather than existing only as a theoretical concept, multilingualism can be visible in conversations, markets, interactions between communities, and the cultural products found in the city.

7.3 Pashto, Balochi, and Brahui

The relationship between Pashto, Balochi, and Brahui is particularly significant in the linguistic study of Quetta. These languages belong to different linguistic histories and provide an important example of the diversity found within Balochistan.

Balochi and Pashto belong to the Iranian branch of the Indo-Iranian language family, while Brahui is generally classified as a Dravidian language. The presence of Brahui within a predominantly Indo-Iranian linguistic environment makes it particularly interesting from the perspective of language contact and historical linguistics.

However, linguistic difference should not be interpreted as evidence that communities are completely isolated from one another. Speakers can become multilingual through trade, migration, education, family relationships, employment, and everyday interaction. Language contact can therefore occur even when languages have very different historical origins.

Brahui is especially important for understanding the relationship between language and identity. Its use can connect speakers with a particular community and cultural history. At the same time, speakers may use other languages when communicating outside that community. This illustrates an important point in sociolinguistics: knowledge and use of a wider language does not necessarily eliminate attachment to a heritage language.

7.4 Language and Cultural Identity

Language in Quetta is closely connected with cultural identity, but cultural identity is expressed through many other practices as well. Clothing, embroidery, music, dance, food, hospitality, crafts, and traditional social practices all contribute to how communities represent themselves. Traditional clothing and handicrafts can be particularly significant because they make cultural identity visible. Balochi embroidery, mirror work, Pashtun clothing and embroidery, woolen garments, and other forms of regional craftsmanship can communicate cultural affiliation without requiring spoken language. These material forms of culture therefore complement linguistic identity.

Food provides another important example. Dishes such as Sajji, various forms of meat preparation, Chapli Kebab, and regional tea traditions are associated with the cultural environment of Balochistan and the communities living in Quetta. Food does not simply satisfy physical need; it can also create social spaces in which people interact, share traditions, and communicate cultural belonging.

Music and dance similarly contribute to cultural expression. Different communities have their own forms of musical and social performance. Such practices provide another way of maintaining cultural memory while adapting to contemporary urban life.

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7.5 Urbanization and Cultural Change

Quetta also demonstrates that regional cultural identity exists within a changing urban environment. Urbanization brings people into closer contact with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds. Education, employment, migration, technology, media, and commercial activity can further increase this interaction.

These processes can influence language choice. Younger speakers, for example, may encounter several languages through schools, workplaces, social media, and friendships. They may therefore develop multilingual identities that combine local cultural belonging with broader national and international influences.

This change should not automatically be described as cultural loss. Cultural practices can change while still retaining important meanings for communities. Languages can also adapt to new contexts by acquiring new vocabulary or developing new patterns of use. The important question is therefore not simply whether a traditional practice remains unchanged, but how communities negotiate continuity and change.

7.6 Quetta in Comparison with the Other Regions

Quetta adds an important dimension to the comparison developed in this study. Hunza demonstrates multilingualism in a northern environment strongly associated with Burushaski and other regional languages. Peshawar demonstrates the relationship between Pashto, Urdu, and English in an urban Pashtun context. Multan highlights Saraiki and the relationship between language and regional cultural heritage, while Lahore demonstrates the complexity of multilingualism in a large metropolitan environment.

Quetta differs from all of these locations because of the particularly high degree of linguistic diversity associated with its urban population and the wider linguistic environment of Balochistan. The coexistence of Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Urdu, Hazaragi, and other languages demonstrates that regional identity in Pakistan cannot always be understood through a single language-community relationship.

At the same time, Quetta shares an important pattern with the other regions: local languages can function as important markers of cultural identity while wider languages provide opportunities for communication across communities. This shows that multilingualism can involve both cultural continuity and social adaptation.

7.7 Quetta and the Relationship Between Language and Place

The Quetta case also supports the broader approach of this study, which treats language as part of a wider social and cultural environment. The linguistic diversity of the city is connected with its history, population movements, cultural communities, and position as an urban centre. However, it would be too simple to argue that the geographical environment itself directly created particular languages or cultural practices. Languages develop through long and complex historical processes involving migration, contact, social organization, and transmission between generations. Geography forms part of this context, but it does not provide a single explanation for linguistic structure or cultural identity.

Quetta therefore demonstrates the value of combining sociolinguistic and cultural analysis. Studying languages alone would not fully explain the city's identity, just as studying food, clothing, or heritage alone would not explain its linguistic diversity. The interaction between

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these dimensions provides a more complete picture of how communities maintain identity while participating in a shared urban environment.

Overall, Quetta illustrates the complexity of multilingual identity in contemporary Pakistan. The coexistence of several languages and cultural traditions demonstrates that identity can be layered, flexible, and shaped by both local belonging and wider social interaction. The city's linguistic diversity therefore provides an important final case for understanding how language, culture, and identity interact across different regions of Pakistan.

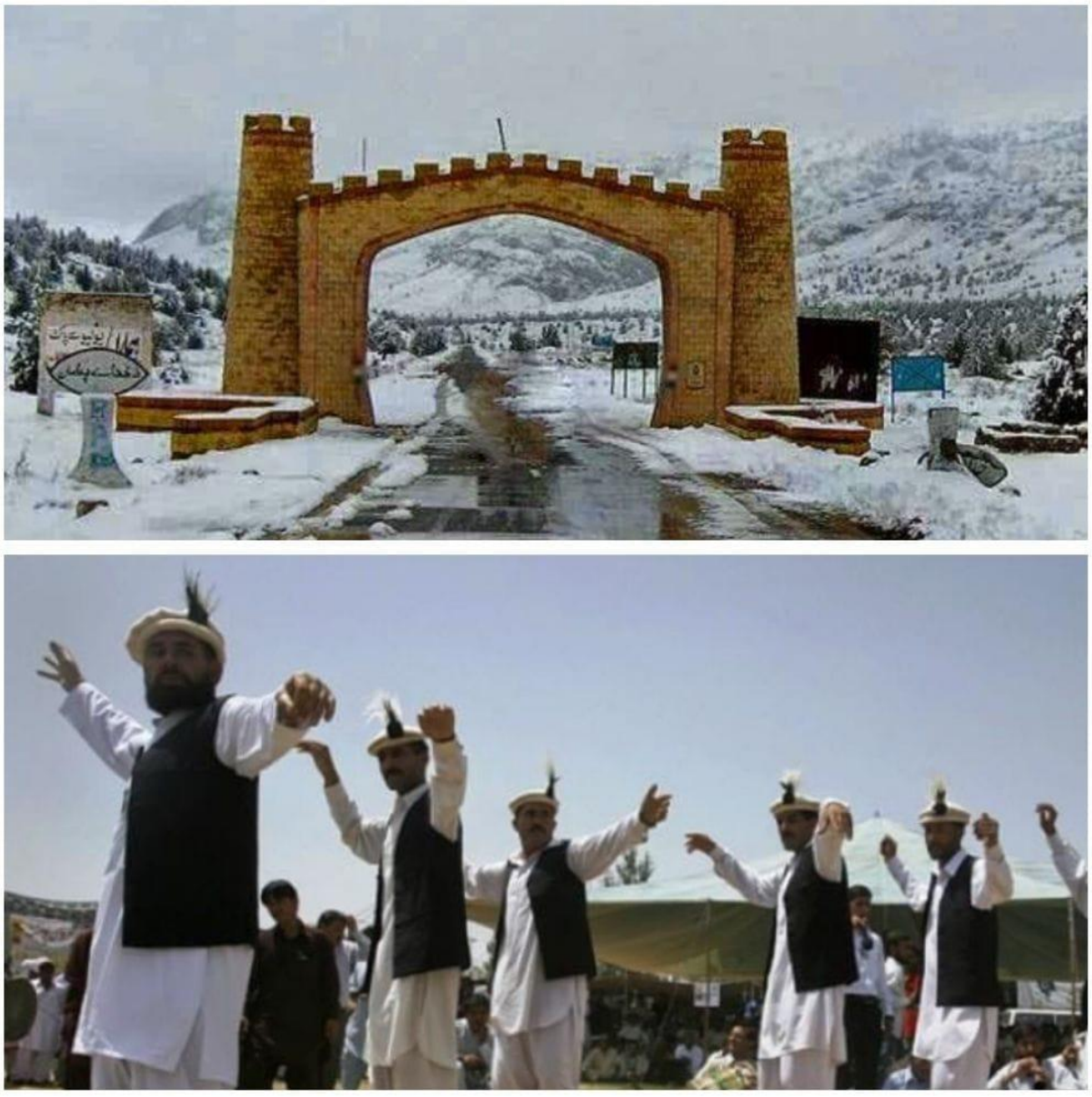


Figure 6. Quetta: multilingual linguistic landscape, cultural identities, and literary traditions.

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8. Comparative Linguistic and Cultural Analysis

The comparison of Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta shows that Pakistan's linguistic diversity is not simply a matter of having different languages in different geographical areas.

Language use is closely connected with cultural identity, social relationships, mobility, education, urbanization, and historical experience. Although each region has its own linguistic and cultural characteristics, several common patterns can be identified across the five locations.

8.1 Local Languages and Regional Identity

One of the strongest patterns across the five regions is the connection between local languages and regional identity. Burushaski in Hunza, Pashto in Peshawar, Saraiki in Multan, Punjabi in Lahore, and languages such as Pashto, Balochi, and Brahui in Quetta can function as important markers of cultural belonging.

However, the strength and form of this relationship differs between regions. In Hunza, Burushaski is connected with the identity of a distinctive local linguistic community. In Peshawar, Pashto has a strong relationship with Pashtun cultural identity. In Multan, Saraiki is closely connected with regional identity and cultural expression in southern Punjab. Punjabi has a strong cultural and historical presence in Lahore, while Quetta demonstrates a more complex situation because several regional languages coexist within the same urban environment.

This comparison suggests that language identity cannot be understood only by asking which language is spoken. It is also necessary to consider what the language represents to speakers. A language may represent family history, regional belonging, cultural memory, community relationships, or a connection with previous generations.

8.2 Multilingualism Across the Five Regions

Multilingualism is another major similarity. None of the five regions can be adequately understood through a single-language model. Local languages interact with Urdu and, in many contexts, English.

The specific combination differs from one region to another. Hunza has a distinctive northern multilingual environment involving Burushaski and other regional languages, alongside Urdu and English. Peshawar demonstrates strong interaction between Pashto, Urdu, and English.

Multan involves Saraiki alongside Urdu, Punjabi, and English. Lahore has a highly urban multilingual environment involving Punjabi, Urdu, English, and languages brought by migrant communities. Quetta has particularly complex interaction among Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, Urdu, Hazaragi, and other languages.

These differences demonstrate that multilingualism is not a single experience. It takes different forms according to social and geographical context.

8.3 Different Social Roles of Languages

The comparison also shows that different languages can have different social functions. Local languages are often closely connected with family life, community interaction, cultural traditions, and regional identity. Urdu can provide communication across different linguistic communities and has a wider national role. English is frequently associated with education, professional life, technology, and international communication.

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These roles should not be treated as completely fixed. A language may be used across several domains, and speakers can use more than one language in the same social environment. Nevertheless, the distinction helps explain why multilingual speakers may continue to value a local language while also using Urdu or English regularly.

This pattern is particularly important because language use should not be interpreted simply as a competition in which one language must replace another. Speakers may use several languages because each provides different communicative and social resources.

8.4 Code-Switching and Language Contact

Code-switching provides another point of comparison. In multilingual environments, speakers may move between languages according to the topic, audience, relationship, or social setting. This can be seen particularly clearly in urban environments such as Peshawar and Lahore, where different linguistic communities interact frequently.

Code-switching can also occur in educational, professional, and digital environments. English words and expressions may appear in Urdu or Punjabi conversations, while local-language expressions may be used to communicate familiarity or cultural meaning. Similar processes can occur between regional languages and Urdu.

The important point is that code-switching should not automatically be understood as evidence of weak language competence. For multilingual speakers, it can be an effective communication strategy. It can also carry social meanings by signalling closeness, identity, humour, formality, or participation in a particular social group.

8.5 Linguistic Structure and Diversity

The five regions also demonstrate considerable structural diversity at the linguistic level. The languages discussed in the study do not belong to a single linguistic family or share identical grammatical and phonological systems. Burushaski, for example, has a distinctive linguistic history, while Punjabi and Saraiki belong to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European family. Pashto and Balochi belong to the Iranian branch, while Brahui is generally classified within the Dravidian family.

Such differences are important because they demonstrate that Pakistan's linguistic diversity exists at several levels. Languages differ not only in vocabulary but also in sound systems, grammatical structures, patterns of agreement, sentence formation, and historical development. However, structural differences should not be directly explained by geography or cultural behaviour. A language's grammar develops through complex historical processes, and linguistic features cannot simply be attributed to the physical environment or cultural characteristics of its speakers. The relationship between language and culture is therefore better understood as an interaction rather than a simple cause-and-effect relationship.

8.6 Language and Cultural Practices

The comparison also demonstrates that language and culture are expressed together through everyday practices. Food, clothing, music, festivals, crafts, architecture, hospitality, and heritage sites all contribute to regional identity.

In Hunza, traditional clothing, handicrafts, food, agriculture, and local traditions contribute to the region's cultural representation. Peshawar's cultural identity can be observed through

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Pashtun traditions, historical architecture, food, hospitality, and social spaces. Multan is strongly associated with Sufi heritage, crafts, poetry, food, and Saraiki cultural expression. Lahore
combines Punjabi cultural traditions with a large urban cultural environment involving literature, food, architecture, music, and contemporary artistic life. Quetta brings together several cultural
traditions reflected in clothing, embroidery, food, music, crafts, and multilingual interaction.
These examples show that identity is communicated through both language and non-linguistic practices. Cultural identity is therefore not limited to what people say; it can also be seen, heard, tasted, performed, and experienced.

8.7 Urbanization, Migration, and Social Change

Urbanization and migration are important factors connecting the five regions. Lahore demonstrates this particularly strongly because people from many linguistic backgrounds move to the city for education, employment, and other opportunities. Peshawar and Quetta also function as important urban centres where speakers from different communities interact.
Migration can produce new multilingual identities. A person may maintain a heritage language within the family while learning another language for school, employment, or social interaction. Younger generations may therefore develop language practices that differ from those of older generations.
Tourism is particularly relevant to Hunza, where interaction with visitors creates additional reasons for using Urdu and English. Education and employment similarly increase contact with wider languages across the regions.
These changes do not necessarily mean that traditional languages and cultures disappear. Instead, communities may adapt their practices to new circumstances. The result can be a combination of continuity and change.

8.8 Similarities and Differences

The five regions therefore reveal both shared national patterns and important regional differences.
Shared patterns include:

- the continued importance of local or regional languages;
- the presence of multilingual communication;
- the wider role of Urdu;
- the growing importance of English in certain domains;
- the connection between language and regional identity;
- language contact caused by mobility and social interaction;
- changing language practices among younger generations.

Important differences include:

- the particular languages involved;
- the historical origins of those languages;
- the degree of urbanization;
- the relationship between language and regional identity;
- the intensity of migration and tourism;

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- the cultural traditions associated with each region;
- the ways in which languages appear in public and private domains.

These differences demonstrate why Pakistan's linguistic diversity cannot be explained through a single national pattern. The country contains multiple sociolinguistic environments, each shaped by its own history and social conditions.

Overall, the comparison suggests that language in Pakistan performs several functions simultaneously. It communicates information, expresses identity, maintains cultural connections, enables social relationships, and provides access to wider opportunities. Local languages and wider languages therefore should not always be viewed as mutually exclusive. Their relationship is more accurately understood as a changing system in which speakers select and combine
linguistic resources according to their social needs and identities.

9. Discussion

The comparison of Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta shows that language and culture are closely connected to the ways people understand place, identity, belonging, and social change. Although the five regions differ in their linguistic histories, cultural traditions, and patterns of multilingualism, they also share an important feature: local languages continue to play an important role even when Urdu and English have wider functions in education, employment, administration, and communication. The findings therefore suggest that multilingualism in Pakistan should not be understood simply as the replacement of local languages by dominant languages. Instead, different languages often perform different social and cultural functions.

9.1 Language and Identity

One of the clearest patterns across the five regions is the relationship between local language and regional identity. Burushaski in Hunza, Pashto in Peshawar, Saraiki in Multan, Punjabi in Lahore, and the combination of Pashto, Balochi, Brahui, and other languages in Quetta provide speakers with ways of expressing their connection to particular communities and places.

Language can therefore function as more than a means of communication. It can also carry memories, traditions, social relationships, and cultural meanings.

At the same time, identity is not always connected to only one language. The multilingual settings examined in this study demonstrate that people can participate in several linguistic communities at the same time. A speaker may use a regional language in family or community settings, Urdu in wider communication, and English in education or professional contexts. This flexible use of languages suggests that multilingual identities are often layered rather than fixed.

9.2 Multilingualism as a Social Resource

The comparison also demonstrates that multilingualism can provide practical as well as cultural benefits. Urdu allows communication across different linguistic communities in Pakistan, while English has particular importance in education, professional life, technology, and international communication. Local languages, meanwhile, remain important for community relationships and cultural belonging.

The social value of a language, however, is not always equal across contexts. A language may

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have strong emotional and cultural value but less institutional power, while another language may provide greater access to education or employment. This difference can influence people's language choices, particularly among younger speakers. The cases examined here therefore illustrate how speakers may maintain local languages while also acquiring languages associated with broader social and economic opportunities.

9.3 Language Contact and Code-Switching

Code-switching and language contact are another important point of comparison. The regions examined in this study demonstrate different combinations of local languages, Urdu, English, and, in some contexts, other regional languages. Switching between languages may occur because of the topic, the people involved, the social setting, or the communicative purpose. Rather than viewing code-switching simply as a sign of weak language ability, it can be understood as a communicative strategy. Speakers may select particular words or languages to express humour, formality, intimacy, education, professionalism, or cultural identity. The exact pattern differs between communities, but the broader comparison indicates that multilingual speakers actively manage their linguistic resources according to social context.

9.4 Language, Culture, and Place

The study also suggests that linguistic identity cannot be separated completely from other forms of cultural expression. Food, clothing, architecture, music, religious traditions, crafts, festivals, and forms of social interaction all contribute to how regional identity is expressed. Language often works alongside these cultural practices rather than independently from them.

This relationship is particularly visible when comparing regions with different historical and geographical backgrounds. The mountain environment of Hunza, the historical and commercial importance of Peshawar, the Sufi heritage of Multan, the highly urban character of Lahore, and the multilingual cultural environment of Quetta provide different social contexts for linguistic and cultural practices. Geography itself does not determine language or culture, but place influences the social conditions in which languages and cultural practices develop and are maintained.

9.5 Social Change and the Future of Regional Languages

Finally, the comparison highlights the influence of education, migration, urbanization, tourism, technology, and globalization on regional languages. These forces can increase contact between linguistic communities and create new opportunities for multilingual communication. At the same time, they may place pressure on languages that have fewer institutional or economic functions.

However, change should not automatically be interpreted as language loss. Speakers can adapt their language practices while continuing to maintain important cultural connections with their regional languages. The future of these languages is therefore likely to depend partly on whether younger generations continue to use them in family, community, cultural, educational, and digital spaces.

Overall, the comparison supports a view of Pakistan as a highly diverse multilingual society in which language, culture, identity, and social change are continuously connected. The five cases show both diversity and commonality: each region has its own linguistic and cultural character,

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yet speakers across the regions use multilingualism to negotiate local belonging and participation in wider social worlds.

10. Conclusion

This study explored the relationship between language, culture, identity, and social change across five diverse regions of Pakistan: Hunza, Peshawar, Multan, Lahore, and Quetta. By combining firsthand observations with secondary research, the study examined how regional languages function alongside Urdu and English and how linguistic practices are connected with cultural identity and everyday social life.

The comparison shows that linguistic diversity is one of the important features of the regions examined. Burushaski in Hunza, Pashto in Peshawar, Saraiki in Multan, Punjabi in Lahore, and the multilingual environment of Quetta demonstrate different forms of linguistic identity. These languages are not used only for basic communication. They can also express belonging, cultural memory, social relationships, and connection with a particular place.

The study further found that multilingualism is a common and flexible feature of everyday communication. Local languages, Urdu, and English often have different functions depending on the social context. Regional languages may be especially important in family and community life, while Urdu can facilitate communication between speakers of different linguistic backgrounds. English may have particular importance in education, employment, technology, and wider international communication. As a result, speakers may move between languages according to their needs, relationships, and social environments.

Code-switching and language contact also demonstrate that linguistic identities are not fixed. Speakers can use more than one language to express different aspects of their identities and to respond to different communicative situations. This supports the understanding of language as a social resource rather than simply a fixed system. At the same time, differences in the social status and institutional use of languages can affect language choices, particularly among younger generations.

The comparison also demonstrates that language is closely connected with cultural practices. Food, clothing, music, architecture, religious traditions, crafts, festivals, and patterns of social interaction all contribute to regional identity. Language provides an important means through which these cultural practices are described, shared, remembered, and transmitted. In this sense, the preservation of linguistic diversity is connected with the preservation of broader forms of cultural knowledge.

The study also recognizes that regional languages exist within changing social environments. Education, migration, urbanization, tourism, digital communication, and globalization are changing the ways people communicate and identify themselves. These changes may create new opportunities for multilingualism but may also place pressure on languages that have fewer institutional or economic functions. Continued use by younger generations, along with opportunities to use regional languages in cultural, educational, community, and digital spaces, may therefore be important for their long-term vitality.

Overall, the five cases demonstrate that Pakistan's linguistic diversity cannot be understood through a simple division between “local” and “dominant” languages. Regional languages, Urdu, and English can coexist while performing different social, cultural, and practical functions. The study therefore contributes to a broader understanding of how language, culture,

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identity, and social change interact across diverse Pakistani contexts. Further research involving larger participant groups, structured interviews, linguistic data, and detailed studies of individual
languages could provide a deeper understanding of these processes.

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