

## **Paharian Endangered Language: Causes and Solutions**

**Muhammad Rizwan Mughal**

**Ph.D. English Scholar at the University  
of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad Pakistan  
[mirzarizwanmughal1@gmail.com](mailto:mirzarizwanmughal1@gmail.com)**

**Received: 15/04/2023**

**Accepted: 04/06/2023**

**Published: 15/07/2023**

### **Abstract**

Language plays a vital role in communication and identity formation for a human community. So, the loss of a language has significant consequences for its speakers. An endangered language also stands to lose valuable cultural practices, oral histories, folk stories, poetry, and even art forms tied to the particular language. The world is facing a serious crisis of language loss that is becoming more and more serious with time. Most of the world’s languages are endangered and in the coming century, most of these endangered languages will become extinct. While keeping this phenomenon in mind, the present study aims to look at the different causes of the endangerment of the Pahari language spoken in Azad Jammu and Kashmir. The present study is significant as it highlights the issue of the endangerment of Pahari and the necessary steps to save it from complete extinction. The researcher is of the view that at present, Pahari is endangered. The methodology used in this study is qualitative. It is based on the interviews taken with 60 participants from three age groups. First, the researcher tries to locate the level of endangerment of Pahari and then the causes of its endangerment. In the final part, the researcher has also suggested some solutions to address and eradicate this issue to save the Pahari language from complete extinction.

**Keywords:** Causes, documentation, endangerment, language, levels, solutions

**Muhammad Rizwan Mughal; Email:** [mirzarizwanmughal1@gmail.com](mailto:mirzarizwanmughal1@gmail.com)

## 1. Introduction

The loss of a language is devastating not only for those who speak it but also for those who study languages. Linguists who conduct research in this area can learn a lot about human language in general from an examination of the forms found in endangered languages. When a language becomes extinct, it also carries the loss of the pool of linguistic data, and with it, our ability to learn about our world gets extinct. Endangered languages can provide a lot of information about that particular society and culture but a linguist has to reach there before the last speakers die. It is commonly understood by linguists as a fact that a language becoming endangered is not by some accident. Languages can become endangered because of genocide, colonization, and a need by people to use another language for access to education, health care, legal service, and jobs. When linguists start working on endangered languages, they mostly focus on collecting language-related data, analyzing its grammar, words, etc.

The language documentation literature has proposed several terms for endangerment and death of languages i.e., extinct, died, endangered, critically endangered, lost languages, etc. Numerous languages have perished into the eons of history and only their names remain on the ears of people even though a lot of dead languages have no reference at all. Based on the National Geography Society report, within the time of two weeks, one of the more than 7,000 languages uttered in the world die. Most of the extinction happens in the way that generations of speakers become bilingual and lose proficiency in their original tongues. It is estimated that 50% of the world's languages vanished in the last 500 years and 60% to 90% of current world languages may be at risk of extinction within the next 100 years (Woodbury, 2014).

The Sixteenth edition of Ethnologue of World Language states that 77 languages are spoken in Pakistan. Among these are 72 indigenous languages of Pakistan: Pahari is an Indo-Aryan language, spoken over a large area starting from Nepal and running through the foothills of the Himalayas, in the Himachal Pradesh in India, Indian Administered part of Kashmir, Azad Jammu & Kashmir and in some areas of northern Pakistan. It is spoken by 4.5 million people in Kashmir (Lothers & Lothers, 2010).

The present study aims to look at the Pahari language which, according to the researcher, is becoming endangered as Urdu is replacing it as a communicative language and English as an Education language for the current and upcoming generations. The researcher interviewed three age-group participants of society i.e., grandparents, parents, and grandchildren. The researcher tries to look at the level of endangerment of the Pahari, and the causes of its endangerment and also suggests some of the methods to save it from entering the zone of critically endangered or completely becoming extinct. The present research is based on the qualitative method of research and the researcher has used structured interviews for this purpose.

## 2. Significance of the Study

The present research is significant in the sense that it is the first attempt to look at the endangerment of the Pahari language. The researcher locates the level of the endangerment of the Pahari language. The significance of this study also lies in the fact that it suggests necessary steps that can be taken to avoid the complete extinction of the Pahari language.

### *Research Questions*

The present research aims to answer the following questions:

- i. Is Pahari an endangered language?
- ii. What is the level of the endangerment of Pahari?
- iii. What are the possible steps that can be taken to save the Pahari language?

### *Objectives*

The present research aims to fulfill the following objectives:

- i. To see whether the Pahari language is endangered
- ii. To locate the level of the endangerment of the Pahari language
- iii. The possible steps that can be taken to save the Pahari language

## 3. Literature Review

In previous decades a lot of research work is done in the field of Language Documentation and most researchers focused their research on documenting certain aspects of endangered languages like; getting data and preparing dictionaries, collecting data about their phonologies, and preserving their phonemic systems, etc. Himmelmann(2008) observed:

“Language documentation [...] focus on observable linguistic behavior and knowledge.

The goal is a lasting, multifunctional record of the linguistic practices attested at a given time in a given speech community and the knowledge speakers have about these practices.”

The researchers have also expressed apprehension, primarily deploring the fact that linguistic diversity is being lost at a dramatic speed, and occasionally arguing that the native speakers of these languages are losing their cultural and traditional heritage. Some of the studies conducted in this area are mentioned in the portion following.

Ladefoged (1992) in his study asked whether linguists are justified in deploring the fact that some people have found it more advantageous for them to shift from their native language to another that they find more useful or beneficial in current needs. He also stated that the dominant focus on the geographical expansion of Western European languages both as vernaculars in former settlement colonies and as lingua franca in former exploitation colonies have left little room for examining the world order in the coexistence of the indigenous languages because dominant always dominate colonial languages. Odlin (1997) argued that Irish English developed has spread primarily through migrant workers who found the nonstandard English to which they were exposed useful and learned it naturalistically. They shifted towards this only because they found it useful for them and their kids.

Merino (1983) conducted longitudinal research on the experience of those who grow up bilingual in the United States with Spanish-speaking primary school pupils and among her

participants, however, she discovered greater language loss than bilingualism. She mostly held the government responsible but she called the teachers, politicians, and parents also responsible for all of this because they are only concerned with the fast mixing of minority language children into the educational system and their eventual success in society.

The causes of language endangerment and its ultimate death or extinction are also important to look at. Many linguists in different parts of the world tried to look for the causes of this phenomenon of language loss. Nettle and Romaine (2000) in their study stated that in certain instances throughout history, it is found that a more powerful militia attacked the communities, murdered all the members of a community and thus forcibly ended the spoken language of the land. According to them, this was specifically the case for many Native American languages during the colonization by European settlers. They found that one instance of this genocide, in particular, is that of the language Yahi, in which the last speakers were exiled and murdered by colonists.

Some researchers also tried to look for solutions to save endangered languages. Zubair (2020) in his chapter about endangered languages of northern Pakistan suggested that the Government of Pakistan must recognize the worsening situation of language loss and set up plans for the preservation and promotion of the sources of indigenous wisdom and history. He was also of the view that globalization, with all its modern technologies, is a threat to native communities, but, it can be turned into an opportunity if proper measures are undertaken for including these languages in national education and people are properly encouraged by all forms of media. In the end part of his chapter, he suggested that international donors also need to focus on this shrinking cultural diversity of Pakistan and this reservation and promotion of cultural diversity is also vital for reviving tourism in the country.

In the present study, the researcher takes the Pahari language for investigation which according to him is an endangered language, and tries to look for the level, causes, and solutions of the endangerment of this language. The researcher by using qualitative methodology of research looks for the factors mentioned above.

#### **4. Methods and Materials**

##### ***Participants***

For the present study, data has been collected from three age-group participants of the District Haveli Kahutta Azad Jammu & Kashmir where the Pahari language is mostly spoken as the native language by a majority of people. The participants included in this study area totaled 60 in number and the method of random sampling was used to select the participant for this study. Those three age-group participants are:

- I. Twenty Grandparents from the age of 60 or above including 10 literate and 10 illiterate
- II. Twenty Parents from the age of 30 to 50 including 10 educated and 10 uneducated
- III. Twenty Grandchildren who are students from the class 5<sup>th</sup> to 10<sup>th</sup>

### ***Research instruments***

The participants who were interviewed for this study belong to both rural as well as urban areas. The methodology which is used by the researcher in this project is a qualitative study where the 60 participants were interviewed at different intervals and different places by using structured interviews. The researcher prepared three different types of interview questions for all three groups of participants. The researcher used a mobile phone for the recording of interviews.

### ***Research Procedures***

The questions being asked from the grandparents were different from the other two and the same was the case with the other two groups. But certain questions were the same for all age-group participants. For example, the researcher asked all the participants about their basic skills in the Pahari language like reading, writing, speaking, and listening. Some of the questions that were the same for all the participants were as follows:

- I. Do you know how to write the Pahari language?
- II. Do you speak the Pahari language at home?

And the questions which were different for all the participants were like:

- I. Do you speak Pahari Language with your grandchildren? (For grandparents)
- II. Which language do you prefer to speak with your children? (For Parents)
- III. Do you have a course on Pahari in your syllabus? (For grandchildren)

The interviews were taken in the Urdu language as all the participants told that they understand the Urdu language well but some of the grandparents although understand questions in the Urdu language responded in the Pahari language. As the researcher himself is a native speaker of Pahari so he didn't feel any problem understanding responses given in the Pahari language by some grandparents. The recorded interviews are later listened to, repeatedly by the researcher and he translated the study-related chunks into the English language. After collecting relevant data, listening to it repeatedly, and then translating the relevant data into English, the researcher analyzed first the level of endangerment of Pahari and then tried to find out the causes of endangerment.

### **Results**

While analyzing the data, the researcher has three things in mind: the level of endangerment, the possible causes behind this endangerment, and solutions to avoid this worse situation.

#### ***Level of Endangerment***

UNESCO (2003) has given the following parameter to judge the level of endangerment of a language and this parameter depends on the transmission of language in the generations.

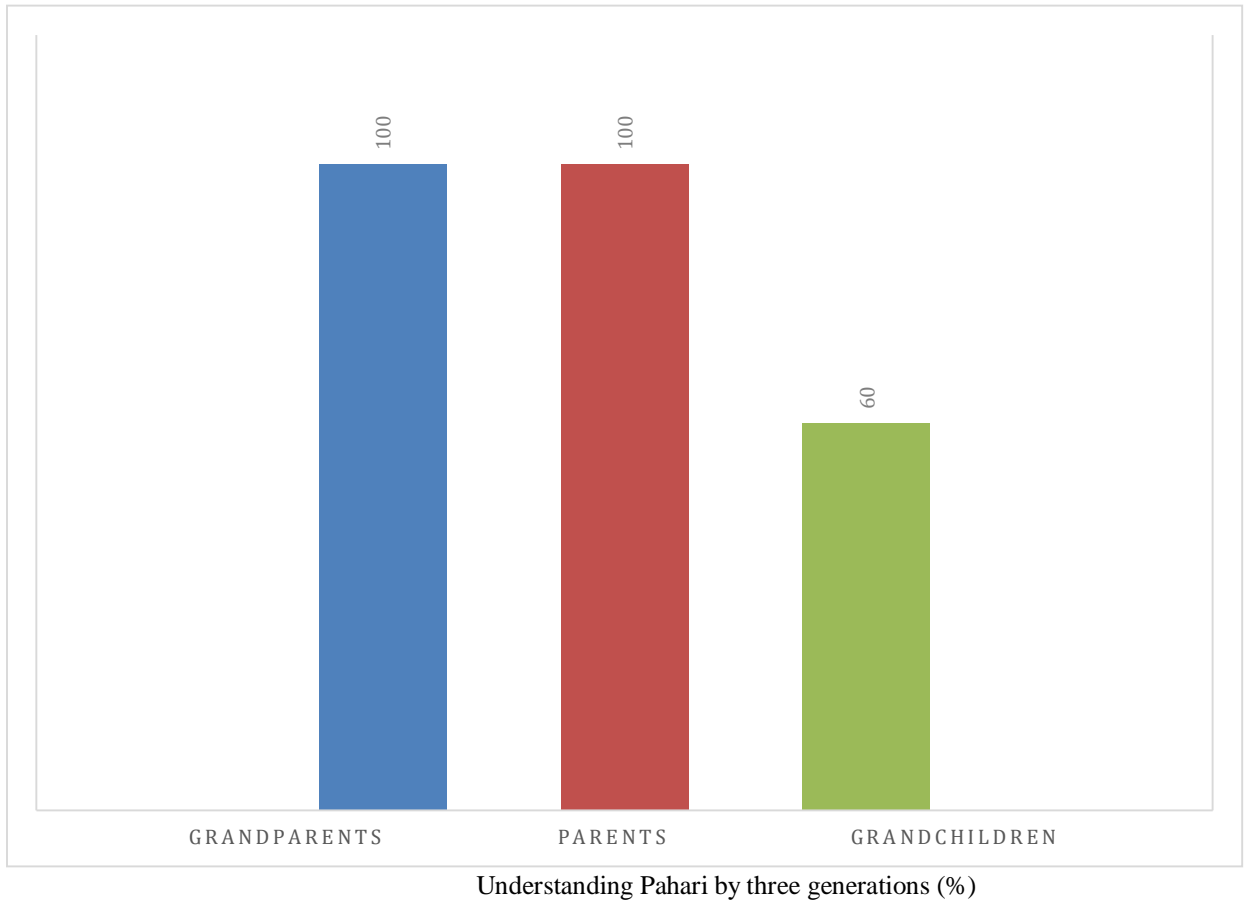
Table1. UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment Framework

Degree of endangerment	Intergenerational language transmission
safe	Language is spoken by all generations; intergenerational transmission is uninterrupted
vulnerable	most children speak the language, but it may be restricted to certain domains (e.g., home)
Definitely endangered	Children no longer learn the language as their mother tongue in the home
Severely endangered	language is spoken by grandparents and older generations; while the parent generation may understand it, they do not speak it to children or among themselves
Critically endangered	the youngest speakers are grandparents and older, and they speak the language partially and infrequently
Extinct	there are no speakers left

While analyzing the data, the researcher has this parameter in his mind and the following are the findings in this context.

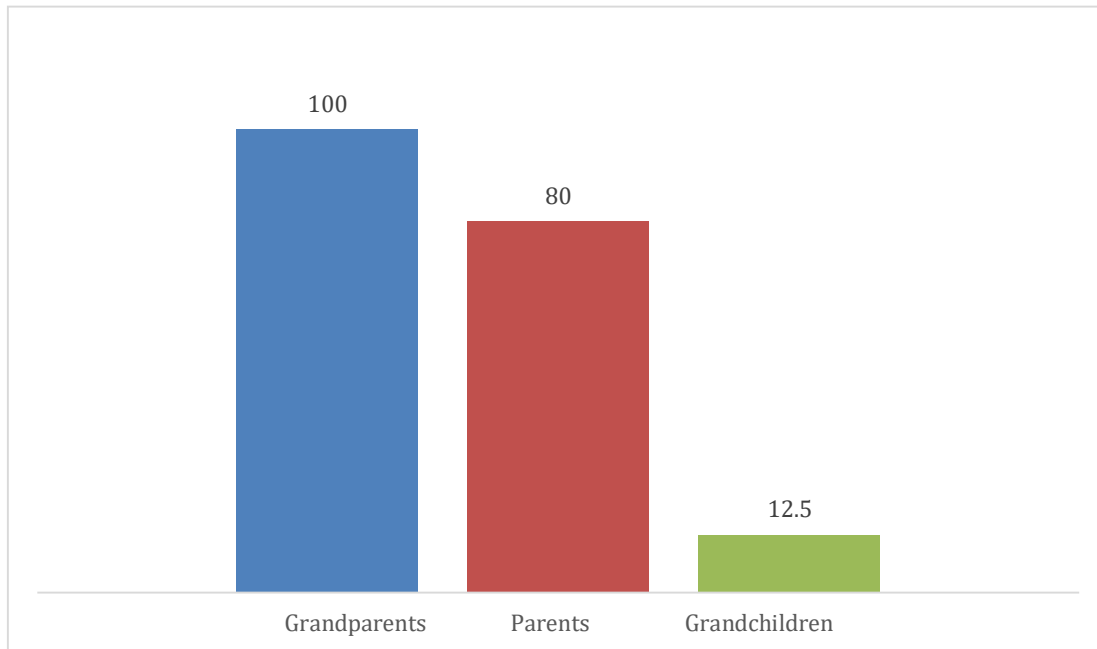
#### ***Understanding of the Pahari Language***

The following chart shows that all participants from the first two generations; grandparents and parents understand the Pahari language completely but only 12 out of 20 grandchildren told that they understand it completely which shows that the grandchildren have issues understanding their native language.



### ***Speaking of the Pahari Language***

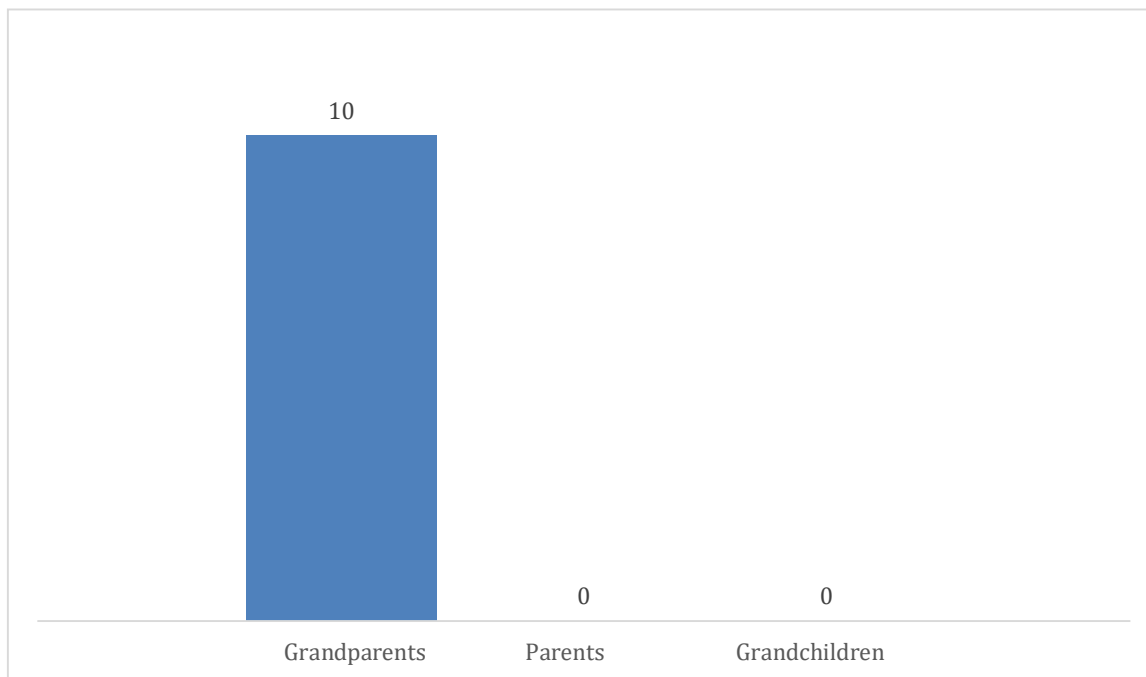
The following chart shows the alarmingly decreasing tendency of speaking Pahari in new generations. Though all the grandparents speak Pahari and even 80% of parents also speak it. It was unfortunate that only 4 out of 20 grandchildren told the researcher that they can properly speak Pahari. They told him whenever they try to speak any word of Pahari, they are discouraged by their parents and teachers and are instructed to talk in Urdu at home and in English at school.



Speaking of Pahari by three generations (%)

**Writing of Pahari Language**

The following chart shows the ability to write the Pahari language by the three generations. It was so surprising for the researcher that only 2 of the 60 participants told that they know a little bit about writing their native language i.e., Pahari. The rest of the participants from the 3 groups informed the researcher that they never wrote a single word of the Pahari language.

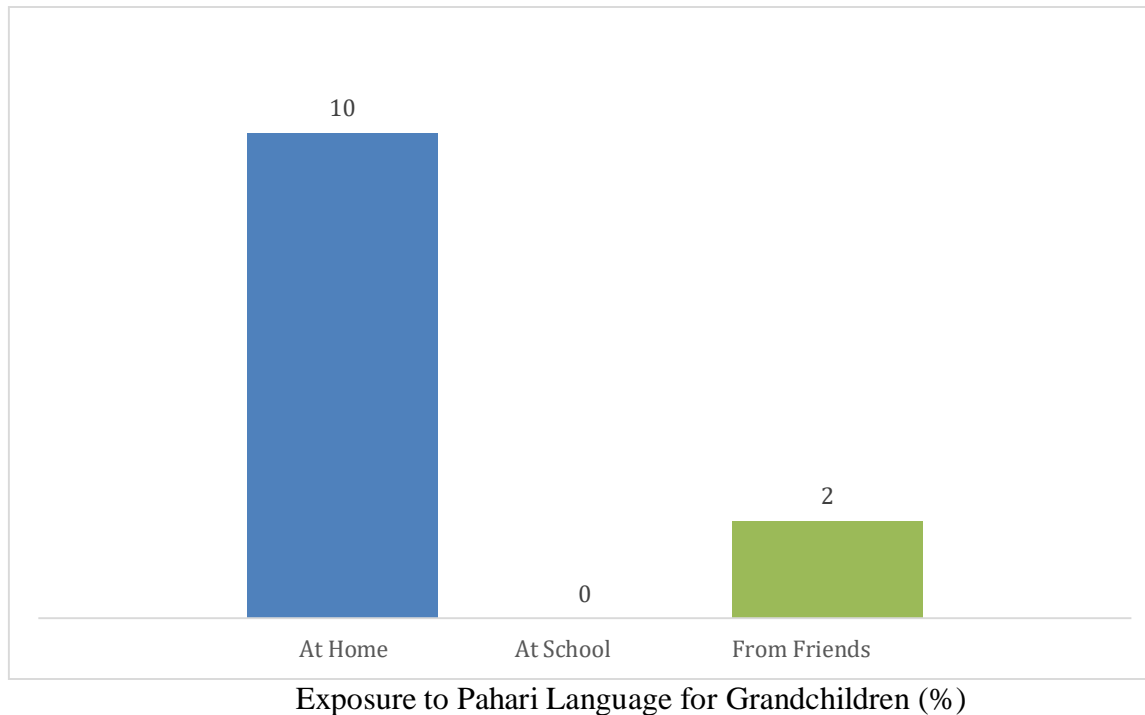


Writing of Pahari by three generations (%)



### ***Exposure to Pahari Language for Grandchildren***

The following chart also shows an alarming situation in which grandchildren don't get any exposure to their native language i.e., Pahari. The grandchildren told the researcher that they get very less exposure to the native language at home and that is from grandparents as their parents don't allow them to speak Pahari. In school, there is no exposure to the Pahari language and no one is allowed to use it and whoever tries to speak is strongly discouraged. The majority of the grandchildren told that when going out for a play with friends they talk in the Urdu language with each other.



### **The Level of Endangerment of Pahari**

Now after the analysis of the data the researcher used the parameter of UNESCO to check the level of endangerment of Pahari as follows:

Table2. Endangerment Level of Pahari on UNESCO's Language Vitality and Endangerment Framework

Degree of Endangerment of Pahari	Intergenerational Language Transmission of Pahari Language
safe	Pahari Language is not spoken by all generations because grandchildren don't speak it and it is also not transferred to grandchildren.
vulnerable	The children are discouraged to use it either at home or at school.
<b>definitely endangered</b>	<b>Children no longer learn the language as their mother tongue at the home</b>
severely endangered	Language is spoken by grandparents and older generations but parents also speak it with each other but they don't speak it with their children.
critically endangered	The grandparents and parents can understand and speak Pahari.
extinct	There are still a large number of speakers of Pahari.

After analyzing the data the researcher places the Pahari language at the third level which is definitely endangered because it is not taught to the children as their mother tongue at home because their mothers speak Urdu with them since their infancy.

## Discussion

### Causes of Endangerment

After a detailed analysis of the data, the researcher found some of the causes of the endangerment of the Pahari language which are mentioned below:

#### *The Dominance of Urdu and English Languages*

The first cause of endangerment of Pahari which the researcher found is the dominance of Urdu and English Languages. Almost all parents in the present age prefer to communicate with their children in Urdu and if they are educated will be using English. The language of schools is now English and the students are not allowed to use even a single word of Pahari at schools. Some of the grandparents told the researcher that despite the fact they can't speak Urdu properly due to the environment at home, they also have to speak Urdu with their grandchildren because their parents don't allow anyone to speak to their children in their native language.

### ***The Carelessness of Government***

The government has no proper policy to promote native languages and even they have no mechanism to preserve the endangered languages. The same is the case with Pahari language which is a victim of neglect by the government. The government has not included this native language in the syllabus at any level of education and there is no post of Pahari teacher in schools, colleges, and universities. Even the government doesn't encourage or provide initiatives for the researcher to conduct research in the area of language documentation.

### ***Educational System***

The educational system of Azad Jammu and Kashmir is also responsible for this endangerment of the Pahari language. Our education system mostly relies on Urdu and English and the students are encouraged to use English or Urdu at schools. During these interviews, not even a single student told that he is allowed to use Pahari at school. These conditions existed both in government as well as private institutions.

### ***Little or no Written Literature on Pahari***

During this research project, the researcher tried to find the existing literature on the Pahari language but it is very alarming that there is very less literature found in the Pahari language. There are some cases of folk songs or folk stories that are not written down. Some of the grandparents told that they have seen some written poetry collections in the Pahari language but it is tragic that the written portion of the literature is lost.

### ***Sense of Inferiority***

It was also asked from the participants how they felt while speaking their native language. The majority of grandparents told that they feel a little bit hesitation in speaking Pahari with their grandchildren. The parents told that they feel a sense of inferiority complex while using Pahari at home with their children. They told that they feel pride in speaking English or in any case Urdu. So the sense of inferiority is also a cause of the endangerment of Pahari.

### ***The Negative Role of Parents and Teachers***

The role of parents and teachers is very crucial for the development or preservation of a language. But during this research project, the grandchildren told the researcher that they are strongly discouraged by their parents at home and teachers at the schools for using any word in their native language. Some grandparents told the researcher that their grandchildren when they start speaking were taught to tell the names of body parts in English.

### ***The Migration to Other Cities***

As Kashmir has few job opportunities so people have to migrate to other cities. When they migrate to other areas, they also take their families with them. So children growing up in another society and under the influence of another language, tend to forget their native language.

## **The Solutions to Save Pahari from the Danger of Complete Extinction**

After a detailed analysis of the data, the researcher found that Pahari is definitely-endangered language and if the present condition continues to exist and no steps are taken to save and preserve it, it will become extinct in the decades to come. So it is a dire need to understand the crux of the situation and take steps to avoid becoming the situation worse. The researcher has suggested some steps in this respect:

### ***A New Education Policy***

There is a great need to review the education policy of Azad Jammu and Kashmir and steps to be taken to include the Pahari language in the syllabus since the beginning of schooling just like is done in the case of English and Urdu that is part of the syllabus from class one. Then, the government should make proper planning to train the teacher who would be able to teach the Pahari language in the schools. When the government will make it a compulsory part of the syllabus, the parents will also be forced to communicate with their children at home. This is done by the Punjab and Sindh governments who declared the native languages as a compulsory part of the syllabus at schools.

### ***The Role of Parents and Teachers***

The children have to face parents at home and teachers at school. So they must promote and encourage the use of the native language. The parents should communicate with their children in the Pahari language and also encourage them to speak it. First parents themselves have to come out of the inferiority complex and should feel proud of using their native language. At school, teachers should not forbid students to use words in their native language.

### ***Promotion through Social and Electronic Media and Newspapers***

The use of social media as well as electronic media has increased very much in the present digital world. So the promotion of the Pahari language can effectively be done by this digital technology. There should be regular programs on electronic media to teach and promote the use of the native language. The newspapers should also reserve some of the portions for the publishing of material from the Pahari language.

### ***Literature in Pahari Language***

The literature in a language is a very important source to document a language. Latin and Greek though lack a large number of speakers but these languages still survive because they have a very large portion of literature that still exists. So there should be proper initiatives to be taken to write in the Pahari language. The folk songs and folk stories should be written down to avoid their loss.

### ***Research in Pahari Language***

The research in Pahari language should also be encouraged by the government and universities across AJK. The government should start programs to encourage linguists to conduct their research in the Pahari language. There should be research on orthography, phonology, morphology, syntax, and other fields of this language.

The study under discussion was about the Pahari language becoming endangered with time. The researcher conducted interviews with 60 participants including the grandparents, parents, and grandchildren with equal ratios of them. The researcher first tried to locate the level of endangerment of Pahari and then looked for the causes of endangerment and in the end suggested some steps that can be taken to stop this situation from becoming worse. The study was based on a qualitative methodology of research in which structured interviews were used to collect data from the participants.

**About the Author: Muhammad Rizwan Mughal**

Ph.D. English Scholar at the University of Azad Jammu and Kashmir Muzaffarabad Pakistan

ORCID I.D:0009-0004-4835-3611

## 5. Conclusion

In this study, the researcher used a parameter of UNESCO given for checking the endangerment level of language. After the analysis of data, the researcher found that Pahari lies at level three of this parameter i.e. definitely endangered because it is no more taught to the children as the mother tongue. The parents are now making their kids learn Urdu as their mother tongue because mothers speak Urdu or even English with their kids. It was found that Urdu is replacing Pahari as a communicative language and English as a language of education. Most of the syllabus in the schools is in English so children are forced to learn English. The researcher found some of the causes of the endangerment of Pahari which include: the dominance of Urdu and English, the carelessness of the government, the educational system, the lack of written literature, the sense of inferiority, the discouraging role of parents and teachers and the migration to other cities. The researchers also suggested some remedies to save the Pahari language from the danger of complete extinction. The actions include a new education policy, the positive role of parents and teachers, promotion through social and electronic media and newspapers, writing the literature, and also research in the Pahari language. To conclude, it can be said that Pahari is an endangered language and the endangerment level will intensify in the coming decades if suitable steps are not taken to document and preserve this language, it will become extinct in the century to come. So it is the need of the hour to understand the situation and should take immediate measures both on government and public levels to promote the use of the Pahari language. The parents should also consider that a native language is not a sign of slight or shame, instead, they should feel proud of using Pahari among themselves as well as with their children. They should keep in mind if a language becomes extinct it also takes the culture of that society.

## 6. References

- Himmelman, N.P. (2008). 'Reproduction and preservation of linguistic knowledge: linguistics' response to language endangerment. *Annual review of anthropology*, 37, 337-50.
- Ladefoged, P. (1992). Another view of endangered languages. *Language*, 68, 809-811.
- Lothers, M. & Lothers, L. (2010). *Pahari and Pothwari: A Sociolinguistics Survey*. Islamabad: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Marino, B. J. (1983). Language loss in bilingual Chicano children. *Journal of Applied Developmental Psychology*, 4(3), 277-294.
- Nettle, D., & Romaine, S. (2000). *Vanishing voices*. New York, New York: Oxford University Press, Inc.
- Odling, T. 1997. *Hiberno-English: Pidgin, creole, or neither?* Occasional Paper Center for Language and Communication Studies, Trinity College, Dublin
- Torvali, Z. (2021). Preserving and Promoting Endangered Languages of Northern Pakistan in a Digital Age. In U. T. Haroon, I. Niazi, & S. Aneel. (Eds), *Sustainable Development in a Digital Society*, (pp.147-168) Sang-e-Meel Publishers
- UNESCO. (2003). *Intangible cultural heritage*. Available at [http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php?URL\\_ID=34325&URL\\_DO=DO\\_TOPIC&URL\\_SECTION=201.html](http://portal.unesco.org/culture/en/ev.php?URL_ID=34325&URL_DO=DO_TOPIC&URL_SECTION=201.html). (1 October 2009).
- Woodbury, A. C. (2014). *What Is an Endangered Language?* / *Linguistic Society of America*. <https://www.linguisticsociety.org/content/what-endangered-Language>.