

# Language Documentation and Description

ISSN

---

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description*,  
vol 19. Editor: Peter K. Austin

## **Punjabi (India and Pakistan) – Language Snapshot**

QANDEEL HUSSAIN

Cite this article: Hussain, Qandeel. 2020. Punjabi (India and Pakistan)  
– Language Snapshot. *Language Documentation and Description* 19,  
144-153.

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/215>

This electronic version first published: December 2020



This article is published under a Creative Commons  
License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The  
licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate  
or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the  
original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial  
purposes i.e. research or educational use. See  
<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

---

## **EL Publishing**

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website: <http://www.elpublishing.org>  
Submissions: <http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions>

# Punjabi (India and Pakistan) – Language Snapshot

Qandeel Hussain  
*University of Toronto, Canada*

<b>Language Name:</b>	Punjabi (also Panjabi)
<b>Language Family:</b>	Indo-European → Indo-Iranian → Indo-Aryan
<b>ISO 639-3 Code:</b>	pan (Eastern Punjabi), pnb (Western Punjabi)
<b>Glottolog Code:</b>	panj1256 (Eastern Punjabi) west2386 (Western Punjabi)
<b>Population:</b>	29,258,970 (Eastern Punjabi) 92,721,700 (Western Punjabi)
<b>Location:</b>	31.633375, 74.871865 (Amritsar, India) 31.51793, 74.34671 (Lahore, Pakistan)
<b>Vitality rating:</b>	EGIDS 4 (Institutional) according to Ethnologue

## Summary

Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the Punjab states of India and Pakistan. There are two major divisions of Punjabi dialects: Eastern and Western. The Eastern dialects are mainly spoken in the Indian state of Punjab while Western dialects are spoken in the Punjab state of Pakistan. Punjabi is written in Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi scripts; the former is derived from the Lahnda script and is used to write the Eastern dialects in India, the latter is based on the Perso-Arabic script and is mainly used in Western Punjab in Pakistan. All the Punjabi dialects have extensively borrowed words from Arabic, English, Persian, and Urdu. Punjabi speakers grow up in a multilingual environment. In addition to Punjabi, children are exposed to Hindi-Urdu and English. There is an ongoing language shift among Punjabi speakers, particularly those residing in Pakistan and abroad. The author is involved in the phonetic and phonological documentation of Punjabi dialects spoken in India and Pakistan.

## Summary (Urdu)

پنجابی ایک ہند آریائی زبان ہے جو ہندوستان اور پاکستان کے پنجاب کے صوبوں میں بولی جاتی ہے۔ پنجابی کو دو لہجوں میں تقسیم کیا جاتا ہے: مشرقی اور مغربی۔ مشرقی لہجہ بنیادی طور پر ہندوستانی صوبے پنجاب میں بولا جاتا ہے جبکہ مغربی لہجہ پاکستان کے صوبے پنجاب میں بولا جاتا ہے۔ پنجابی گُر مُکھی اور شاہ مُکھی کے رسم الخط میں لکھی جاتی ہے۔ اول الذکر لہندا رسم الخط سے ماخوذ ہے اور ہندوستان کے مشرقی لہجوں کو لکھنے کے لیے استعمال ہوتا ہے، مؤخر الذکر فارسی-عربی رسم الخط پر مبنی ہے اور یہ بنیادی طور پر پاکستان کے مغربی پنجاب میں استعمال ہوتا ہے۔ تمام پنجابی لہجے عربی، انگریزی، فارسی اور اردو زبان سے بڑے پیمانے پر الفاظ لیتے ہیں۔ پنجابی بولنے والے کثیر لسانی ماحول میں بڑے ہوتے ہیں۔ پنجابی کے علاوہ، بچوں کو ہندی-اردو اور انگریزی زبان بھی آتی ہے۔ پنجابی بولنے والوں خصوصاً پاکستان اور بیرون ملک مقیم افراد میں پنجابی زبان سے دوسری زبانوں کی جانب منتقلی کا عمل جاری ہے۔ مصنف ہندوستان اور پاکستان میں بولے جانے والے پنجابی لہجوں کی صوتی دستاویز بندی کرتا ہے۔

## 1. Overview

Punjabi is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in India and Pakistan.<sup>1</sup> A large number of Punjabi speakers also reside in Australia, Canada, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America. In Canada, Punjabi is the third most widely spoken language. The dialects of Punjabi are roughly classified into two major groups: Eastern and Western (Figure 1). The Eastern dialects are mainly spoken in the Indian state of Punjab whereas the Western dialects cover the area of Punjab, Pakistan (Hussain *et al.* 2019; Singh 1971). Majhi, a dialect of Punjabi spoken in Amritsar (India) and Lahore (Pakistan) is generally considered the standard dialect of Punjabi (Bhardwaj 2016). After 1947, the year when the Indian subcontinent was divided into India and Pakistan, a large number of Punjabi speakers migrated from the Indian Punjab to Pakistani Punjab and settled around Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Lahore, and Sahiwal. There are no well-defined boundaries of modern Punjabi dialects (Shackle 1979, 2006). Each city has a slightly distinct dialect which merges with the neighboring cities. Since early 20<sup>th</sup> century, a plethora of linguistic surveys have been conducted to classify the dialects of both Eastern and Western Punjabi. In the Linguistic Survey of India, Grierson (1916) used *Lahnda* (also Lahanda, Lahandi, or Lahndi, meaning Western) as an umbrella term for North-Western (Hindko, Peshawari), North-Eastern (Pothwari - Pothohari, Awankari), and Southern (Siraike or Multani)

<sup>1</sup> Also spelled *Panjabi*.

dialects which differ from the *Punjabi proper* spoken in the Central and Eastern Punjab.<sup>2</sup> Hindko and Pothwari are distinct languages but, to some extent, are mutually intelligible to the dialects of Punjabi spoken in Lahore, Faisalabad, and other neighboring cities.



Figure 1. Map of Eastern (India) and Western (Pakistan) Punjab.

A full scale version of this map is on page 153.

Black circles indicate some of the major cities where dialects of Punjabi are spoken. Multan is predominantly occupied by Siraiiki speakers but there is a large population of Punjabi speakers residing in the main city (created with QGIS; © 2020 by Qandeel Hussain).

All dialects of Punjabi have been heavily influenced by Arabic, Persian, English, and Hindi-Urdu. The dialects of Eastern Punjabi have borrowed Sanskrit words via Hindi, while Arabic and Persian words came into Western Punjabi via Urdu (Hussain et al. 2012).<sup>3</sup> The name *Punjabi* itself is a

<sup>2</sup> Central Punjab here refers to the cities of Gujranwala, Faisalabad, Lahore, and Sahiwal.

<sup>3</sup> Persian was the court language during the Mughal Empire and used for all the official purposes (Alam 1998).

combination of two Persian words, /pəndʒ/ ‘five’ and /ab/ ‘water,’ so can be literally translated as ‘the land of five rivers’ (Shackle 2003). Punjabi is written in two different scripts: Gurmukhi and Shahmukhi; the former is derived from the Lahnda script and used to write the Eastern dialects of Punjabi in India, the latter is based on the Perso-Arabic script and is mainly used in the Western Punjab in Pakistan.

Modern literary Punjabi has passed through four major phases (each of which produced rich Punjabi literature): (1) 1000–1400 CE; (2) 1400–1700 CE; (3) 1700–1850 CE; and (4) from 1850 CE to the present (Padam 1954, via Bhardwaj 2016). Baba Farid-ud-din Ganj Shakar (1173–1266 CE) is considered as one of the major writers in phase (1); other well-known Punjabi poets include Guru Nanak, Bulleh Shah, Shah Hussain, and Waris Shah. The stories of Heer Ranjha and Sohni Mahiwal are masterpieces of Punjabi literature.

## 2. Language shift

South Asia is a hotspot of multilingualism, and Punjabi speakers grow up in a multilingual environment. Although Punjabi is a major language in both India and Pakistan, there are differences in its usage across different domains. In India, Punjabi has religious and official status and it is one of the 22 Scheduled Languages of the Indian Constitution, and therefore widely used in both formal and informal contexts. However, in Pakistan it is mainly a provincial language, and is more narrowly used for informal occasions. There is an ongoing language shift in Pakistan towards high prestige languages like English and Urdu (see Riaz 2011), with negative and derogatory connotations associated with Punjabi speakers, who are considered *paindu* ‘villagers, yokels’. Moreover, in Pakistan, Punjabi is not taught as a school subject, with English and Urdu employed from day one of kindergarten. At high school, college, and university levels, students can opt to study Punjabi.

Khokhlova (2014) considers Pakistani Punjabi as an endangered majority language because even though it is spoken by a large population (44.15%) it lacks official and provincial status. It can be argued that Punjabi speakers are shifting towards other major and high prestige languages in Pakistan, but it is far from being an endangered language. A fuller study of endangerment of both Eastern and Western dialects of Punjabi would be useful, and should consider: (a) the absolute number of speakers; (b) intergenerational transmission; (c) decreases in the number of speakers over time; and (d) decreases in domains of use (Rogers & Campbell 2015).

In Canada, the United States, and the United Kingdom, where English is the dominant language, in the home younger heritage Punjabi speakers are learning English and Urdu (the latter especially among Punjabi families from Pakistan). Thus, it might be expected that in coming decades Punjabi will be replaced in these immigrant communities. However, in Pakistan, where

Punjabi is a majority autochthonous language, its replacement is not expected any time soon, although shift to Urdu is under way, especially among upper and higher social status families.

### 3. Key linguistic features of Eastern and Western Punjabi

The most striking feature of Punjabi dialects is phonemic tones, which were developed via tonogenesis. Bailey (1904, 1914, 1926) first pointed out the existence of contrastive tones. There is a wide range of tonal diversity across Punjabi dialects: Eastern dialects in India appear to have completely lost voiced aspirated stops (i.e., /b<sup>h</sup> d<sup>h</sup> g<sup>h</sup>/) and have developed contrastive tones. However, Western dialects spoken in Pakistan can be classified into: (a) those which have completely lost voiced aspirates and developed tones (dialects spoken in Lahore, Faisalabad, Sargodha and neighboring cities; Hussain et al. 2019); (b) those which have preserved voiced aspirates and also contrast tones (Awankari variety of Lahndi: Bahri 1962; dialects spoken in Jhelum and neighboring cities); and (c) those which are still in a transitional phase (i.e., in the process of losing the aspiration contrast but without gaining contrastive tones, e.g., Jangli spoken in various parts of Western Punjab, especially in rural areas of Faisalabad). Other key features of Punjabi include SOV word order, postpositions, and rich gender and case systems (Bhatia 1993). Morphologically, it is a highly concatenative language with rich agreement: nouns (animate or inanimate), verbs, and postpositions are marked for gender (Bhardwaj 2016).

### 4. Available literature and resources

Some of the earliest linguistic descriptions of Punjabi are Carey (1812), Beames (1872, 1875), Wilson (1899), Bailey (1904, 1914, 1926), and Grierson (1916). The most recent grammars include Bashir & Connors (2019), and Bhardwaj (2016); the former compares Punjabi with Siraiki and Hindko. Descriptions of various aspects of Punjabi can be found in Arun (1961), Bahl (1957, 1969), Bhatia (1975, 1993), Bowden (2012), Tolstaya (1981), Clivio (1966), Dulai (1989), Dhillon (2010), Gill (1960), Gill & Gleason (1962), Hussain (2015, 2017), Hussain *et al.* (2019), Jain (1934), Malik (1995), Singh (1971), Evans et al. (2018), Kanwal & Ritchart (2015), Shackle (2003), and Vatuk (1964).<sup>4</sup> Grainger (1980) is apparently the first articulatory study using palatography.

---

<sup>4</sup> The internet archive has various resources including dictionaries, grammars, poetry, short stories, and encyclopedias (<https://archive.org/about/>; accessed 2020-09-09).

Sandhu (1986) provided a detailed acoustic and articulatory description of Punjabi consonants. Kochetov et al. (2019) investigated articulatory variation in the realization of dental and retroflex nasals using ultrasound-imaging. The author has published on various phonetic aspects of Lyallpuri Punjabi spoken in Faisalabad, Pakistan (Hussain 2015, 2017; Hussain et al. 2019). There are a wide range of Natural Language Processing (NLP) resources created by researchers at Punjabi University, Patiala, India.<sup>5</sup> Theses and dissertations on various aspects of Punjabi in India<sup>6</sup> and Pakistan<sup>7</sup> are available online. A searchable Punjabi dictionary can be found on the webpage of Digital Dictionaries of South Asia.<sup>8</sup>

## **5. Current research**

The author is involved in the phonetic and phonological description of Punjabi dialects spoken in India and Pakistan (see also ongoing work by Alexei Kochetov and colleagues). Most of the available literature describes the dialects of Eastern Punjabi (India), and there are few detailed descriptions of Punjabi spoken in the Pakistani Punjab (Bashir & Connors 2019). I am working on tonogenesis and acoustic/articulatory description of stop laryngeal and place contrasts of both Eastern and Western Punjabi. The findings of these projects will help inform tonal and laryngeal typology across the various dialects.

## **Acknowledgements**

Research for this paper was partially funded by a Faculty of Arts and Science Postdoctoral Fellowship Award (University of Toronto, Canada), and an Endeavour Postgraduate Scholarship (Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australia).

---

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.learnpunjabi.org/publications.aspx> (accessed 2020-09-09)

<sup>6</sup> <https://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/handle/10603/79345> (accessed 2020-09-09)

<sup>7</sup> [http://pr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/handle/123456789/9/browse?type=title&submit\\_browse=Title](http://pr.hec.gov.pk/jspui/handle/123456789/9/browse?type=title&submit_browse=Title) (accessed 2020-09-09)

<sup>8</sup> <https://dsal.uchicago.edu/dictionaries/> (accessed 2020-09-09)

## References

- Alam, Muzaffar. 1998. The pursuit of Persian: Language in Mughal politics. *Modern Asian Studies* 32(2), 317-349.
- Arun, Vidya B. 1961. *A comparative phonology of Hindi and Punjabi*. Ludhiana: Panjabi Sahitya Akademi.
- Bahl, Kali C. 1957. Tones in Punjabi. *Indian Linguistics* 17, 139-147.
- Bahl, Kali C. 1969. Punjabi. In Thomas A. Sebeok (ed.) *Current trends in linguistics*, 153-200. The Hague: Mouton.
- Bahri, Hardev. 1962. *Lahndi phonology, with special reference to Awánkárí*. Allahabad: Bharati Press Publications.
- Bailey, Thomas G. 1904. *Punjabi grammar: A brief grammar of Panjabi as spoken in the Wazirabad district*. Lahore: Punjab Government Press.
- Bailey, Thomas G. 1914. *A Panjabi phonetic reader*. London: University of London Press.
- Bailey, Thomas G. 1926. Notes on Panjabi aspirates and tones. Note I. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society* 58(1), 113-115.
- Bashir, Elena & Thomas J. Connors. 2019. *A descriptive grammar of Hindko, Panjabi, and Saraiki*. USA: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Beames, John. 1872. *A comparative grammar of the modern Indo-Aryan languages of India*. Vol. I: On sounds. London: Trubner and Co.
- Beames, John. 1875. *A comparative grammar of the modern Indo-Aryan languages of India*. Vol. II: The noun and pronoun. London: Trubner and Co.
- Bhardwaj, Mangat. 2016. *Punjabi: A comprehensive grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Bhatia, Tej K. 1975. The evolution of tones in Punjabi. *Studies in the Linguistic Sciences* 5(2), 12-24.
- Bhatia, Tej K. 1993. *Punjabi: A cognitive-descriptive grammar*. London: Routledge.
- Bowden, Andrea L. 2012. *Punjabi tonemics and the Gurmukhi script: A preliminary study*. Unpublished Master's thesis. Brigham Young University, Utah.
- Carey, William. 1812. *A grammar of the Punjabee language*. Serampore: Mission Press.
- Clivio, Gianrenzo. 1966. A phonological sketch of standard Panjabi. *Studies in Linguistics* 18, 1-12.
- Dhillon, Rajdip K. 2010. *Stress and tone in Indo-Aryan languages*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Yale University, New Haven, Connecticut.
- Dulai, Narinder K. 1989. *A pedagogical grammar of Punjabi*. Patiala: Indian Institute of Language Studies.

- Evans, Jonathan, Wen-Chi Yeh & Rukmini Kulkarni. 2018. Acoustics of tone in Indian Punjabi. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 116(3), 509-528.
- Gill, Harjeet S. & Henry A. Gleason. 1962. *A reference grammar of Panjabi*. USA: ERIC.
- Gill, Harjeet S. 1960. Panjabi tonemics. *Anthropological Linguistics* 2(6), 11-18.
- Grainger, Peter J. 1980. A palatography experiment to show the contrast between dental and post-alveolar stops in Punjabi. *Papers in Southeast Asian Linguistics* 7, 23-28.
- Grierson, George A. 1916. *Linguistic survey of India: Specimens of Western Hindi and Punjabi*. Vol. 9. India: Office of the superintendent of government printing.
- Hussain, Qandeel. 2017. *Phonetic characterization of a complex coronal system: Insights from Punjabi*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. Macquarie University, Sydney.
- Hussain, Qandeel, Rashid Mahmood & Muhammad A. Mahmood. 2012. Phonological make-up of English loanwords incorporated into Punjabi via Urdu. *Journal of Language Teaching and Research* 3(5), 838-843.
- Hussain, Qandeel, Mark Harvey, Michael Proctor & Katherine Demuth. 2015. Contrast reduction among coronals is conditioned by the following vowel. In The Scottish Consortium for ICPHS 2015 (eds.) *Proceedings of the 18th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*, 1-5. Glasgow, Scotland.
- Hussain, Qandeel, Michael Proctor, Mark Harvey & Katherine Demuth. 2019. Punjabi (Lyallpuri variety). *Journal of the International Phonetic Association* 50(2), 282-297.
- Jain, Banarsi D. 1934. *A phonology of Panjabi, as spoken about Ludhiana and a Ludhiani phonetic reader*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. University of London.
- Kanwal, Jasmeen & Amanda Ritchart. 2015. An experimental investigation of tonogenesis in Punjabi. In The Scottish Consortium for ICPHS 2015 (eds.) *Proceedings of the 18th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*, 1-5. Glasgow, Scotland.
- Khokhlova, Liudmila V. 2014. Majority language death. In Hugo C. Cardoso (ed.) *Language endangerment and preservation in South Asia*, 19-45. Language Documentation & Conservation Special Publication No. 7. Hawai'i: University of Hawai'i.
- Kochetov, Alexei, Mathew Faytak & Kiranpreet Nara. 2019. Manner differences in Punjabi dental-retroflex contrast: An ultrasound study of time series data. In Sasha Calhoun, Paula Escudero, Marija Tabain & Paul Warren (eds.) *Proceedings of the 19th International Congress of Phonetic Sciences*, 2002-2006. Melbourne, Australia.
- Malik, Amar N. 1995. *The phonology and morphology of Panjabi*. New Delhi: Munshiram Manoharlal Publishers.
- Padam, Piara S. 1954. *Panjabi boli da itihās*. Patiala: Kalam Mandir.

- Riaz, Fakhira. 2011. *Punjabi language: A study of language desertion*. Unpublished PhD dissertation. National University of Modern Languages, Islamabad, Pakistan.
- Rogers, Christopher & Lyle Campbell. 2015. Endangered languages. In Mark Aronoff (ed.) *Oxford research encyclopedia of linguistics*. New York: Oxford University Press.  
<https://oxfordre.com/view/10.1093/acrefore/9780199384655.001.0001/acrefore-9780199384655-e-21> (accessed on 2020-12-08)
- Sandhu, Balbir S. 1986. *The articulatory and acoustic structure of the Panjabi consonants*. Patiala: Publication Bureau, Punjabi University.
- Shackle, Christopher. 2003. Punjabi. In George Cardona & Dhanesh Jain (eds.) *The Indo-Aryan Languages*, 581-621. London: Routledge.
- Shackle, Christopher. 1979. Problems of classification in Pakistan Panjab. *Transactions of the Philological Society* 77(1), 191-210.
- Singh, Narinder. 1971. *Some aspects of the generative phonology of Punjabi*. MA thesis. University of York.
- Tolstaya, Nataliya I. 1981. *The Panjabi language: A descriptive grammar*. Translated by George L. Campbell. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul.
- Vatuk, Ved P. 1964. *Punjabi reader: Level 1*. Colorado: Colorado State University Research Foundation.
- Wilson, James. 1899. *Grammar and dictionary of Western Panjabi, as spoken in the Shahpur district with proverbs, sayings and verses*. Lahore: Punjab Government Press.



Figure 1. Map of Eastern (India) and Western (Pakistan) Punjab. This is a full scale version of a smaller map on page 146.