
The Issue Of Internet In Punjabi Culture

The prompt I chose to discuss in this essay is discussing Covid-19 induced challenges in communication and give solutions. The language I will be focusing on specifically is Punjabi and the challenges its native speakers face in the times of Covid-19. In this essay, I will discuss Lingua Franca, how it relates to Punjabi, give the background information of Punjabi language and culture, discuss pre-existing resources for the minority community to use, ease of access to said resources, and end with providing benefits of implementing said solutions.

Lingua Franca is defined in the textbook, "Making Sense of Languages" by Blum as a method of communicating by people in a similar region who originally differ in their mother tongue but have the need to socialize amongst each other given the language barrier. In a broad view of communication, English is not the only Lingua Franca available. Lingua Franca can refer to any language used by speakers in any region, in this paper, a Lingua Franca is Punjabi. It is not socially efficient to rely only on one Lingua Franca as English due to the diversity of languages available. This is an issue to be noted for public health officials given the spread of COVID and crucial resources; verbal and written. This is important for Public Health Directives as the prompt asks due to the speed at which information is given regarding the illness and preventative measures taken. According to the Fresno Bee article, "A Fresno family got coronavirus. Advocates say language accessibility could've prevented it" from April 2020, Author Brianna Calix notes that due to not having proper access to information of COVID symptoms and warnings in Punjabi, a Fresno resident unwaveringly spread the virus to the rest of the family. This could have been halted if the proper resources such as translations and signage regarding quarantine had been in place. This was an example of why it is important for Public Health Directives to consider minority languages and other Lingua Francas. Taking into consideration various Lingua Francas such as Punjabi can help save lives and resources.

Punjabi is a minority language spoken by many in the central valley region. Historically Punjabi has different dialects and variations of how it is spoken. Punjabi has its origins in the land of Five Rivers as native speakers say. In referencing its origins in the text, "Punjabi: A Cognitive-descriptive Grammar" by Tej Bhatia, the author states that the reason for its different dialects and rich history is the five rivers run internationally through India and Pakistan since the partition occurred in 1945." So, to go off of Bhatia, and independent research, depending on which side of the river one was on, the dialect and tone would vary. On the Indian side of the border native speakers may have a different dialect than Pakistan Punjabis. This also made an impact on its culture and migration routes. When assessing the Punjabi-speaking native population in California, in the text, "The Rural Punjabis of California: A Religio-Ethnic Group" by Wenzel, although there is not an exact number of Punjabis in this state an estimated 6,000 plus call

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California home as of the 1960s. Leading into Punjabi culture in California there is a lot to offer and discover. For Punjabis in Central Valley, the most prominent religion followed is Sikhism where the place of worship is called a Gurudwara according to “Muslims, Hindus, and Sikhs in the new Religious Landscape of England” by Ceri Peach, and Richard Gale. This place of worship is also used as a hub of entertainment and resource center for many in the community. Culturally speaking, Punjabis are community-oriented, and many are self-volunteering also discussed by Peach and Gale. There is a noticeable overlap between Punjabi culture and Gurudwara institutions as it will be discussed regarding how the community gets most of its medical information. Although the Punjabi natives may seem small in numbers, it is important to make sure Covid resources and information reach all of its speakers. In the next paragraph, I will discuss why it is important to build trust and connection with the Punjabi speakers in our area related to COVID.

Views expressed in the article by Piller, et al. and reasons for minority languages lacking when it comes to COVID resources is the availability of information in said language. The article claimed reasons such as an English centered health care system, no translation of crisis relating messages in minority languages, and no plan to build a solution with framework. Their ideas can be useful in California for Covid because of the diversity in languages and the amount of help available to said minority populations. There are programs out there working towards all the points presented in the article but lack in one area or another. In the case of native Punjabi speakers, people are simply unaware of the resources and need the assistance of educated people. With the use of educated people and help of preexisting resources such as community centers and websites information can be spread quickly and effectively as the article states. Educated people with the knowledge about COVID can be beneficial because they would know how to integrate the community’s culture into providing the resources to help spread information. Helpful resources such as Jakara Movement and translation services are already in place for Punjabis, one point that will be discussed further on.

During the analysis of a public health website, the Fresno County Department of Public Health COVID 19 website, I found it had a variety of translations and languages available. On the languages tab in the upper right corner, Punjabi is on the list to translate information to. Information regarding mask regulations, social distancing, sanitizing surfaces, isolating oneself, and receiving vaccines are all available to read in Punjabi but not correct in translations. Some information for example mask regulations has the potential of not being translated correctly and native speakers have a chance of becoming confused and misinformed. The three key ideas I will concentrate on are mask-wearing importance, explaining social distancing, and locating vaccination centers. The two solutions I researched as effective in spreading crucial knowledge to the Punjabi community are as follows: the implementation of Punjabi Translators in all facilities and set up an information center at the Gurudwaras(temple). Since it was previously noted that Punjabis are community-oriented, having easy access to gurudwara is essential and

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many attend regularly. When speaking with the head priest at the Sikh Institute of Fresno, an average of 1,500 Punjabis attend services on a weekly basis. If there was an information and resource center located in a Gurudwara it could help Punjabis locate vaccination centers and do so without disrupting the culture. According to the article, "Combatting COVID-19: Why Community-Based Case Investigation and Contact Tracing is Crucial" by Ed Kissam, the Jakara Movement is an organization from Fresno focused on providing helpful resources to Sikh Punjabi families during the pandemic. This is one example of community centers being useful for Punjabis in the fight against Covid and misinformation. This organization has regular fundraisers used to help individuals in all aspects of life particularly during COVID and include translation services. If something similar to the Jakara Movement is implemented in all Gurudwaras not only would Punjabis benefit but others as well. My next solution is to have fluent Translators at all major facilities. Translators in all facilities can educate Punjabis about Mask wearing and social distancing by passing along the correct message to those in need. In an article by, T. Lee, Singh, and Oshan, "Problems Encountered During Cultural Adaptation of the EPIC Questionnaire for Prostate Cancer Into Punjabi and Chinese", some messages said in English cannot be translated verbatim to Punjabi due to the message not having meaning in Punjabi. This is seen on the Fresno County COVID website in the translation to Punjabi about wearing masks. We cannot ensure information is correct so there is a need for on-site Translators. Both solutions of implementing an on-site Translator, and in Gurudwara Information centers are beneficial in educating Punjabis about COVID. Next, I will review the gains of implementing said solutions and how Fresno as a whole would see benefits, not just Punjabis.

Communicating and explaining crucial COVID information in Punjabi should help the native speakers by reducing community spread cases, providing correct information regarding what exactly the virus is, and helping the community become vaccinated. All these benefits are possible if the solutions as discussed are implemented correctly. Community information centers in a public setting where the majority come to engage and catch up like Gurudwaras are culturally appropriate and effective because with the location alone more Punjabis will be aware of the center as a resource if in need. Translators in all major facilities can be culturally accepting of Punjabis since the native speaker will be more comfortable and understanding when talking to someone they understand. This would build trust so both parties can send and receive crucial information without feeling overwhelmed by the language barriers. The health and prosperity of minority communities such as Punjabis in relation to COVID are important for other communities in the same region as well. Both Punjabis and others benefit from the solutions due to the possibility of having a variety of languages available. In the Information and resource centers at Gurudwaras, non-Punjabis can also use this facility to the same extent as Punjabis and gain the resources. This facility would not be just exclusive to Punjabis, instead, accept all a kind. For the translating services, it would add on to the pre-existing languages available for others to use so there's a gain for all involved. As discussed in the introduction, since Punjabi had dialects and people from different places if one had a language like Punjabi,

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they too would see gains in using the translating service. Finally, caring for the Punjabi-speaking minority health outcomes is important because fighting COVID is a community effort, and all lives are important.

In conclusion, I covered some examples of issues faced by Punjabi speakers in the Central Valley during times of COVID, gave a definition of a Lingua Franca, presented background information of Punjabi, discussed some resources used in Punjabi culture previously, provided solutions such as translating services and in gurudwara information centers, and concluded with why it is beneficial for native Punjabi speakers and other community members to implement solutions. I did highlight that yes, a public health website is available in Punjabi, but we cannot guarantee the accuracy of the information and availability of the internet to all native Punjabi speakers hence the solutions proposed.

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