

## **Sindhi**

Jennifer Cole

University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

Sindhi is an Indo-Aryan language with its roots in the Lower Indus River Valley. It takes its name from the river Indus, known in earlier times as the Sindhu. Today Sindhi is spoken in the province of Sindh, Pakistan, where it is recognized by the government as the official language of the province, home to an estimated 30-40 million people (projected from 1981 census data). Nearly half of the population of Sindh province lives in rural areas, where Sindhi is the primary language. In the urban centers of Sindh, Sindhi competes for status and speakers with Urdu (the national language of Pakistan), and increasingly English. Sindhi is also spoken by about 2.5 million people in India, including major communities in Gujarat, Mumbai and Pune, where immigrants from Sindh relocated after the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan. Beyond the Indian sub-continent, Sindhi is spoken by large diaspora communities in the United Kingdom and the United States, and around the world.

### **Language History**

Sindh is the site of the ancient Harappan civilization of the Lower Indus River Valley. A case can be made that remnants of Harappan culture are evident in classical Sindhi folklore and religious rituals, which raises the question of a possible linguistic link between Sindhi and the Harappan language. Unfortunately, there is little evidence on which to determine the linguistic stock of the Harappan language, the ancient script is as yet undeciphered, but a prevailing theory suggests a Dravidian origin. This theory points to the presence of the Dravidian language Brahui, spoken in the northwestern Pakistani province of Baluchistan, as a remnant of a broader Dravidian region in the sub-continent in earlier times. This possible link to an ancient Dravidian language of the Harappans has led some scholars to claim a Dravidian origin for Sindhi. This minority view, however, clashes with a substantial body of linguistic evidence for an Indo-Aryan origin of Sindhi.

The earliest historical reference to Sindhi is in the *Nāṭyaśāstra*, a dramaturgical text that was written between 200 B.C and 200 A.D. Evidence for Sindhi as a written language dates to a Sindhi translation of the Islamic *Qur'an* in 883 A.D., followed a century later by a Persian translation of the ancient Indian religious epic *Mahābhārata* taken from a language thought to be Old Sindhi. Dating the emergence of Sindhi in the evolution of Indo-Aryan is a matter of some controversy. Various theories, ably summarized by Khubchandani (2000), trace Sindhi to the Vṛācaḍa Apabhramśa or to an earlier pre-Vedic Prakrit language. Although Trumpp (1872), in his authoritative Sindhi grammar, describes Sindhi as a more 'pure Sanskritical' language compared to the other modern Indo-Aryan languages, Sindhi undeniably reveals the impact of its long history of contact with speakers of other languages.

Sindh has succumbed to foreign rule many times over a history of 2,500 years, and much like English, has accumulated linguistic features and vocabulary from the languages of its foreign rulers. In pre-Muslim history of the 6<sup>th</sup> century B.C. through the 1<sup>st</sup> century AD, Sindh was invaded by a succession of Achaemenian, Greek, Mouryan, Scythian and

Persian rulers, including Alexander the Great (329-324 B.C.). After a brief period of rule by local dynasties, the Arab invasion in 711 A.D. initiated the Muslim period and the heavy influence of Persian on Sindhi with numerous lexical borrowings. Following a period of rule by local dynasties in the 11<sup>th</sup> through the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Sindh joined the British Empire in 1843 A.D. The influence of English on Sindhi, especially through lexical borrowings, began at that time and continues in the present, and is second only to Persian in its impact on the language. The result of language contact in all these periods of foreign rule is a Sindhi lexicon with diverse etymological bases and multiple cognate forms, which is further complicated by an exceptional number of irregular verbal inflections, and by the expansion of the sound inventory to include several Perso-Arabic sounds not native to Indo-Aryan.

### **Related languages and dialects**

Among the languages spoken in the region today, Sindhi is closely related to Sirāikī, spoken north of Sindh province, and to Kachchhī, spoken in the Kachchh region of Gujarat, along the border between Pakistan and India. Grierson's (1919) survey lists five regionally-defined Sindhi dialects, with Vicholī 'Central' as the standard variety. Contemporary dialectal work has been carried out by Khubchandani (1962-1963) and Rohra (1971) on Kachhi (also spelled *Kachchhi*, *Kachchhī*). Bughio's (2001) sociolinguistic study of the urban and rural Vicholī varieties is the only work since Grierson to deal with Sindhi dialect variation within Pakistan, and opens the door for promising future investigation.

### **Linguistic features**

**Sound system.** Sindhi and the neighboring languages Sirāikī and Marwari are distinct among Indo-Aryan languages for their use of the glottal implosive stops /ɓ, ɗ, ɟ, ɠ/, which derive from Middle Indo-Aryan geminate voiced stops in medial position and single voiced stops in initial position. In other respects, the sound inventory of Sindhi is typical of Indo-Aryan, with a full series of voiceless, voiced, aspirated, and voiced aspirated stops and nasal stops at five places of articulation (see Table 1). Alongside the alveolar rhotic tap [r] there is a retroflex tap [ɽ]; but unlike [r], the retroflex tap is restricted to intervocalic position, where it can be considered the positional variant of the retroflex stop [ɖ]. Retroflex [ɖ] occurs intervocalically only in a few English loan words, where it corresponds to the English alveolar [d], as in *loḍiṅga* 'truck' *reḍiyo* 'radio' (from English *loading*, *radio*). Sindhi has incorporated a number of consonants from Persian, including the well-established sounds /f, v, ʃ, z, ɣ/, along with /q, ɣ/, which are not typically used except by urban, educated speakers for whom they are arguably reinforced by their stable presence in Urdu.

**Table 1. The consonants of Sindhi**

	Labial	Dental	Alveolar	Post-alveolar	Palato-alveolar	Velar	Glottal
Stop	p b	t d		ʈ ɖ		k g	
	p <sup>h</sup> b <sup>h</sup>	t <sup>h</sup> d <sup>h</sup>		ʈ <sup>h</sup> ɖ <sup>h</sup>		k <sup>h</sup> g <sup>h</sup>	
Implosive	ɓ		ɗ		ɟ	ŋ	
Affricate					tʃ tʃ <sup>h</sup>		
					dʒ dʒ <sup>h</sup>		
Nasal	m		n	ɳ	ɲ	ŋ	
Fricative	f		s (z)		(ʃ)	(x ɣ)	h
Rhotic			r	(ɽ) ɽ <sup>h</sup>			
Lateral		l					
Glide	v				y		

Sindhi has the standard Indo-Aryan vowel inventory with ten vowels that can be grouped in five long-short pairs: /i, iː, e, eː, u, uː, o, oː, a, aː/. The short mid vowels are subject to dialectal variation or merger (discussed below). Long vowels can occur with contrastive nasalization; compare the final long nasal vowels in *samhoː* ‘in front of’ and *vitʃ<sup>h</sup>uː* ‘scorpion’, with the final long oral vowels in *sanhoː* ‘thin’ and *kaduː* ‘gourd’. Phonetically nasal short vowels occur in the context of a following tautosyllabic nasal consonant, e.g., *āmbu* ‘mango’, but can also occur in an open syllable preceding or following /h/, where they contrast with oral short vowels. Compare the short nasal vowels in *mūhū* ‘mouth’, *jīhī* ‘who/relative pronoun’ with the short oral vowels flanking /h/ in *mahalu* ‘palace’, *subahu* ‘morning’.

Sindhi syllable structure allows for at most one consonant to appear in the onset and coda position (CVC). Consonant clusters (CC) occur word-medially, as in CVC.CV *kursiː* ‘chair’. With a few loanword exceptions, Sindhi words must end in a vowel. Short vowels in word-final position are extremely reduced, though grammatically important as markers of noun number, gender and case. Vowel-initial syllables may occur initially and medially, and in the latter case may give rise to word-internal vowel sequences (hiatus), as in *b<sup>h</sup>aːfaːiː* ‘brother’s wife’. Hiatus sequences never occur with identical vowels.

There are several features of Sindhi pronunciation that are subject to dialectal variation, distinguishing the speech of rural, uneducated, or older speakers who represent an older variety of Sindhi, from urban, educated (i.e., literate) or younger speakers, whose speech is more noticeably influenced by Urdu, Hindi and English pronunciation patterns. Three dialectal features described by Bughio (2001) are as follows. The short vowels /e,o/ are typically merged with their long counterparts in the old variety, resulting in [e, o] while new variety speakers more frequently keep them distinct, producing long monophthongs [e, o] and short diphthongs [aɪ, aʊ] or lax vowels [ɛ, ɔ]. The diphthong realization is

typical of Muslim new variety speakers, and the lax vowels are typical of Hindu new variety speakers. This distinction based on religious affiliation reflects in part the separation of Hindu and Muslim communities since the 1947 partition of India and Pakistan, and the maintenance of diphthongs in Arabic loan words (borrowed through Persian) in the speech of both Sindhi and Urdu speaking Muslims. Old and new varieties of Sindhi are also distinguished by the frequent deletion or total loss of the word-final short vowels in the new varieties. The third dialectal feature in Sindhi is the pronunciation of the retroflex stops /t, d, d<sup>h</sup>/ as stop-rhotic clusters [tʀ, dʀ, d<sup>h</sup>r] in the old varieties.

**Morphology.** Sindhi has rich system of nominal and verbal morphology, with regular paradigms of declension and conjugation that exist alongside a remarkably high number of exceptional forms. Nouns, adjectives and pronouns are marked for number, gender and case. The gender class of the noun is in most cases marked by the final vowel, and number and case marking are expressed through a combination of stem alteration and final vowel suffix. Examples of nominal declension are shown with paradigms for the masculine noun ‘boy’ and feminine noun ‘table’ in Table 2.

**Table 2. Nominal declensions for masculine and feminine nouns**

		Nominative	Oblique	Ablative	Vocative
‘boy’	singular	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okiro:	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okire:	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okirã:	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okira:
	plural	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okira:	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okirani	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okiraniã:	tʃ <sup>h</sup> okira:
‘table’	singular	meza	meza	mezã:	meza
	plural	mezũ:	mezuni	mezuniã:	mezũ:

Cases other than the ones shown in Table 2 are marked through the use of a postposition following the noun in the oblique singular form, for example *g<sup>h</sup>ara k<sup>h</sup>e:* ‘to the house’ (dative), *g<sup>h</sup>ara k<sup>h</sup>ã:* ‘from the house’ (ablative), *g<sup>h</sup>ara sã:* ‘with the house’ (comitative), *g<sup>h</sup>ara mẽ:* ‘in the house’ (locative), *g<sup>h</sup>ara jo:* ‘of the house’ (genitive). The genitive postposition is unique in that it is declined like an adjective, agreeing with the possessed noun in number, gender and case, as in (1).

- (1) tʃ<sup>h</sup>okire ja: kita:ba .  
 boy (masc. sg., oblique) | Genitive (masc., pl., Nom.) | book (masc., pl., Nom.)  
 ‘the boy’s books’

tʃ<sup>h</sup>okire ji: bili:  
 boy (masc. sg., oblique) | Genitive (fem., sg., Nom.) | cat (fem., sg., Nom.)  
 ‘the boy’s cat’

Sindhi verbs are marked for aspect, tense, mood and concordance (gender and number) through a complex system of modification of the verb stem, which may in addition be followed by a modal and auxiliary verb. These elements combine in various ways to

produce 17 distinct finite verb forms, and six nonfinite verb forms that function as nominal, adjectival and adverbial participles. Each finite and non-finite verb form can undergo further modification of the verb stem to express voice (active/passive) and valence (transitive/causative) distinctions. Several finite forms of the verb *lik<sup>h</sup>anū* ‘to write’, all expressing masculine, singular concordance, are illustrated in Table 3.

**Table 3. Example verb forms based on the root *lik<sup>h</sup>*- ‘write’**

Present Unspecified	lik <sup>h</sup> e t <sup>h</sup> o	‘he writes’
Definite Future	lik <sup>h</sup> ando	‘he will write’
Present Habitual	lik <sup>h</sup> ando a:he	‘he writes (habitually)’
Present Continuous	lik <sup>h</sup> i: rahiyo a:he	‘he is writing’
Unspecified Perfective	lik <sup>h</sup> iyō	‘he wrote’
Subjunctive Perfective	lik <sup>h</sup> iyō huje	‘he may have written’
Imperative	lik <sup>h</sup> u lik <sup>h</sup> o	‘Write!’ (rude) ‘Write!’ (polite)

**Syntax.** The pragmatically neutral word order in Sindhi is Subject-Object-Verb, but the order of these major constituents can be changed to put a phrase with Topic focus at the front of the sentence. Within phrases, the head element always occurs at the end, as in the noun phrase and verb phrase examples in (2).

(2) hi:a nand<sup>h</sup>ri: ʈopi:  
this small hat  
‘this small hat’

ama: k<sup>h</sup>e tʃiʈ<sup>h</sup>i: lik<sup>h</sup>i:  
mother Dat. letter wrote  
‘wrote a letter to mother’

The verb typically agrees with a nominative case-marked subject, as in *hu:a atʃe t<sup>h</sup>i:* she-Nom.|comes-3sg.|aux.-fem. ‘she comes’. An “experiencer” subject of a verb expressing physical state, psychological state or kinship is marked with the dative postposition, as in *huna k<sup>h</sup>e buk<sup>h</sup>i laʃi:* he-obl.|Dat.|hunger-fem.|strikes-fem.,sg. ‘he is hungry’. Sindhi has the split-ergative agreement pattern found in other Indo-Aryan languages, whereby in the perfective aspect the subject of a transitive verb is marked for oblique case, and the verb agrees with a nominative (inanimate) object if present, and otherwise displays a default agreement (3 sg.,masc.).

### Linguistic works on Sindhi

Among published grammatical works on Sindhi, there are several grammars in the Sanskritic tradition, including Stack (1849), Trumpp (1872), and a section in Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India* (1919). Contemporary linguistic studies include instrumental

phonetic studies (Nihalani 1986, 1995), sociolinguistic and dialect studies (Rohra 1971, Bughio 2001), and contemporary grammatical analysis (Khubchandani 1961). Khubchandani (2000) presents a comprehensive bibliography of works on Sindhi from 1947-1967.

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