

## Analyzing Changes in the Lexicon of the Punjabi Films

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### Abstract

The study aims to investigate the lexical changes in the Punjabi films, exploring factors responsible for the language shift. Punjabi are replacing Punjabi language with English and Urdu in their everyday language (Abbas & Iqbal, 2018), influencing the language “in use”, and bringing about a lexical shift in the Punjabi language (Weinreich, 2010). For the purpose, the study applied qualitative research design. The purposively selected sample consisted of film scripts for an original Punjabi and its remake within a span of 40 years, and scriptwriter interviews. A corpus of the word categories was created, the were interviews analyzed thematically. The findings of the study reveal that the classical Punjabi lexicon are being overwhelmed and replaced with Urdu. Factors involved in the change process include negative attitude towards Punjabi language fueled by other reasons like loyalty to language, varying economic, influential media discourse and a noticeable absence of institutional, educational and cultural support. The study concludes that the reality of the declining lexical features is shaped by a combination of factors, is not just an assertion but a testimony to the claim of the depleting essence and soul of Punjabi language. This paper fulfills the need to identify language shift in lexicon of the Punjabi films. Future research on Punjabi could focus on the changes at other levels of language and categories like technology, business and animates to expand the domain for exploring the lexicon changes influence on the Punjabi vocabulary over the time.

**Keywords:** Punjabi language shift, lexical change, films, Urdu, factors, attitude

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Languages are fluid, evolving over time to accommodate speakers’ whims and to create new words and sentences according to the changes in society (Hackret, 2009). Eventually, the gulf between the current and earlier language trends can be felt and may lead to language extinction for an entire community, the process of change is frequently referred to as “*language shift*” (Tsunoda, 2006). It raises a situation in which successive generations of speakers at the individual and community levels abandons one language at the expense of other and gradually lose proficiency in their mother- tongues in favor of dominant languages (Heinrich, 2015).A language is in danger when its community speakers stop using it, or using in an increasingly reduced number of public domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next. The language shift may effect various levels of language, such as lexical, syntactic grammatical and phonological (Tsitsipis, 2012).

The language shift at the lexical level is defined as relexification of the native lexicon with that of the dominant language may lead to loss of vocabulary, semantic distinctions and performance ability (Sands et al., 2007). Lexical shift refers to a phenomenon which goes hand in hand with the loss of lexical skills in a minority language (Appel & Muysken, 2005). Accumulating the factors responsible for lexical change include borrowing words, age, loanwords, time, social culture that may cause lexical change and language shift in a

language (Lishandi, 2013). Lexical change gradually influences the use of vocabulary that ultimately effects various domains (Zhao & Liu, 2007).

Pakistan as a multilingual country has over seventy spoken languages. The notable ones are Urdu, English, Punjabi, Pushto, Sindhi and Balochi are ranked in the top twenty of the world's languages (Comrie et al., 2003). Punjabi is the mother tongue of 54.6 % of the Pakistani population (Riaz, 2011), and the most recent calculation the population of the Punjab is 95 million with Punjabi as the mother tongue (Koka, 2014). While, Rukh and Saleem (2014) corroborated that the culture of the Punjab was exhibited magnificently through the richness and diversity in the Punjabi language. Similarly, Rahman (2017) maintained that Punjabi presents a positive individuality with characteristics such as humor, warmth, loyalty and spontaneity which represents not only in Pakistan but also in other countries. It boasts a vast corpus of literature in terms of the Punjabi films, represents richness of the language (Ammar et al., 2015), and is acknowledged as the language of theatres and entertainment (Mir, 2010) ubiquitous in its strong influence on the masses (Mahmood, 2013). For the Punjabis and their language; cinema is a productive setting to understand the intersection of language ideology, social class, and ethnicity in Pakistan. The Punjabi films have an intense appeal and long lasting effects on the viewers (Singh, 2012).

Despite its richness, splendor and charm, the languages of the domains of power such as government, corporate sector, media, education, etc. are English and Urdu (Rahman, 2006). Punjabi is an unfortunate language as it lacks the status and prestige which it deserves (Meyerhoff, 2006). The threat to conventional language construct of Punjabi language is being affected and undergoing various changes (Winford, 2003). The situation is referred to as the "Language Shift", signifying the shift of Punjabi language speakers to dominant languages (Nazir et al., 2013). Signposting towards the phenomenon of language attrition, as a majority of users are shifting their loyalties to other dominant languages. Punjabis first deserted it for Urdu and then for English. Similarly, Punjabi is presented as an endured and tolerated language, neither proscribed nor promoted by the government (John, 2015).

Vocabulary changes with the change in society, replacing the lexicon with that of the main language (Verma, 2015). Films play a crucial role to identify the changes that may have taken place in developing and maintaining dominant public discourse by making use of specific linguistic choices, and in representing things and culture in a particular way (Heinrich & Shimoji, 2010). Certain lexical items and features of Punjabi language have almost diminished from the public discourse as a result of the process of the language shift (Din & Ghani, 2017). The shift influences the vocabulary in use, bringing about a change in the lexicon (Weinreich, 2010) emphasizing the fact that the day may not be far when Punjabi may become a vanishing language in Pakistan, which mandates developing a corpus to conserve a record of the lexical changes happening in the Punjabi public discourse.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The aim of this study was to explore the language shift phenomena in Punjabi by comparing the lexicon of films made with a gap of 40 years to examine changes and key factors of Punjabi language shift.

## **2. LITERATURE REVIEW**

Regional languages of Pakistan are in threat to be extinct because their speakers have stopped using these languages. Punjabis are no more interested to reserve their language. They feel shame and insult while speaking this language (Shah, 2010). While, Nazir et al. (2012) used the term "language shift" referring to linguistic situation of the Punjabi language and the disloyalty of the speakers who frequently attributed the pressures of social mechanism including prestige, modernity and social mobility issues as being a threat to the Punjabi language on a broader scale.

Other studies exploring the prestige and status of Punjabi language in the social community found that negligent attitudes and socio-political factors disturbed and distort the status and prestige leading to abandonment of Punjabi (Riaz, 2011). Likewise, Abbas et al. (2019) in their study highlighted that academic

status were not bestowed on Punjabi and pronouns as “miserable future” and “dismal” have routinely been attached to the language. Similarly, John (2015) claimed that Punjabi community considered their language as a symbol of the social order, individuality and culture but they were uncertain as to the preserve the future of Punjabi.

Furthermore, Barirah et al. (2013) stated that language status, economy and demographic were essential factors which contributed to the shift in Punjabi towards the dominant languages. In addition, Akmal (2013) maintained that the social elite in Pakistan favored Urdu and considered it a slogan of Muslims’ language while, suppressing the local languages (Zaman, 2002). It caused a number of social problems as the diversity of languages present in the country was suppressed in favor of Urdu because of the changed socio-economic scenario (Nawaz et al., 2012).

Recent studies analyzing the neglect in Punjabi language point to the pervasiveness of Urdu in all official and influential areas since Pakistan independence (Meyerhoff, 2006). In the investigation on perception and attitudes of families towards the Punjabi and Saraiki language shift, Ghani (2013) found that people Urdu is preferred due to its recognition at the national and global level. This claim was supported by Gillani and Mahmood (2014), in their investigation of attitudes and perspectives of individuals towards Punjabi language. The study indicated that Punjabi has been replacing and losing its place and status with the shift towards Urdu language, it is considered *astolerated language* neither proscribed nor promoted by its speakers and has become a symbol of cultural shame and low status (John, 2015).

Altaf (2015) also asserted that Punjabi has also been one of the most neglected languages, in its own home and by its own people for dominant languages. It has been moving towards the process of Urduisation of Punjabi language. On the other hand, Nawaz et al. (2012) claimed that language shift was taking place from Punjabi, which is most spoken language in Pakistan, to English. Explaining that various economic, social, psychological and historical factors had caused the speakers to shift from Punjabi to English.

Akram and Yasmeen (2011) in their study investigated behaviors towards Punjabi, English and Urdu language and established that majority of Punjabi speakers were socially marginalized and neglected as Punjabi was not considered as a *bread earning* language. In another study by Rukh and Saleem (2014) also focused on the status of Punjabi and Urdu in Central Punjab found Punjabi was limited to dialogic situations as compared to Urdu. Likewise, another study claimed that the Punjabi Muslims had started associating themselves with Urdu and largely ignored Punjabi (John, 2009). As compared to Punjabis, other ethnic groups, place high value to their linguistic identity (Rahman, 2000). Verma (2015) mentioned that Punjabi language undergoes changes with change in society because of number of factors such as military profession, products of industrialization, register of law and administration and things of common usage- got included in Punjabi.

Saraisky (2016) discussed media as public discourse and considered analysis of media content as an essential analytical tool for knowing educational policy, language trends and patterns dedicated to the voice of the individuals. In addition, media role was essential in effecting the attitude of speakers, leading to the homogenization of cultures (Ravindranath, 2009). Similarly, Mahmood (2013) investigated that cinema is the most complex and powerful art form in the present world and it could help audience to enhance their understanding of our lives, society, culture and to build attitude according to trend.

Kirk (2014) investigated language ideologies and verbal art of the Punjabi cinema and found that the Punjabi community considered their language crude, rural and backward and ideal for insults and jokes. While, Singh (2012) maintained that “*Punjabiyaat*”, a certain global identity had been established as a concept of mutual leisure use. Similarly, Mir (2010) also argued that Punjabi had been largely relegated to the limited domain of entertainment, considered as the only way to restore culture. The present study focused on exploring the lexicon changes influencing vocabulary of the Punjabi films over the time.

### Research Questions

The current study investigates the language shift phenomena in Punjabi by asking the following question: What are the lexical changes that have influenced the language in the Punjabi films over time?

### 3. METHODOLOGY

The present study used a qualitative research design, focusing on analyzing qualitative data with the central aim to develop an extensive cognizance of the changes occurring in the Punjabi lexicon by using complementary data. For the purpose, a corpus was developed to understand the existing position as well as the shift in the lexicon of the Punjabi films. Interviews would further help to inform the key factors involved in shift of Punjabi language.

#### 3.1 Sample

The study uses a purposively selected sample to investigate the lexical changes in the films. The film scripts were transcribed due to unavailability of online scripts. Interviews of the script-writers were conducted to explicate the language shift and its influence on their work in the films.

#### 3.2 Data Collection and Analysis

Data was collected from a corpus created from the transcribed scripts of the selected films. The lexicon was analyzed on the basis of two categories: *island of lexemes* and *parts of speech*. The first category the *island of lexemes* was further divided into culture, human classification and kinship are described in the results first. The interviews were analyzed for emerging themes.

### 4. RESULTS

The results for the changes in the Punjabi language films are presented in the corpus and interview analyzed for overarching themes in order to address the objectives of the study.

#### 4.1 Corpus

The Corpus was created to identify the shift in the lexicon of the Punjabi language through the comparison between the films within the span of forty years. It is developed on the basis of the screenplays. From the transcribed scripts of the given Punjabi films, the lexicon were employed based on two categories, island of lexeme and part of speech. The sub-categories like culture, kinship, human classifications are used to explore nouns under the category; island of lexemes. On the other hand part of speech is identified to restore lexicon (including verbs, determiners, adjectives expect nouns).

Culture specific lexicon a subcategory of island of lexemes; is an umbrella term that encompasses the social behavior and norms found in societies, knowledge, laws, customs, artifacts, ceremony and weatherword associations are presented in table 1.

**Table 1: Island of lexemes related to culture**

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	Meaning
1.	جگ	دنیا	World
2.	سج	نمٹ	Deal
3.	سدران	خواہشاں	Desires
4.	پٹھی	الٹی	Opposite
5.	پھٹی	تکتی	Plank
6.	ڈیگر	عصر	Azar (prayer)
7.	لوہڈا	ظہر	Zuhr (prayer)
8.	ٹکر	روٹی	Bread
9.	جھل	برداشت	Tolerance
10.	چھورا	افسوس	Rue

11.	ول	طرف	Direction
12.	بچ	بہانہ	Excuse
13.	لمے	لمبے	Long
14.	پیڑ	درد	Pain
15.	لنگھانا	گزارنا	Pass
16.	کھیچ	کھینچ	Pull
17.	ککڑ	مرغا	Cockerel
18.	مڑھکا	پسینہ	Sweat
19.	صافہ	رومال	Handkerchief
20.	دھرتی	زمین	Land

Table 1 revealed the cultural lexicon changes indicate that Urdu has the similar lexicon structure as of Punjabi such as; “لمے” partially changed into “لمبے”, “کھیچ” into “کھینچ”, “اگ” into “آگ” and “چھالوں” into “چھلانگان”. Other changes were absolute ones such as “موچھا” transformed into “ٹکڑا”, indicating these changes to be superfluous. Other examples of lexicon related to culture are given in (Appendix 1).

Another area in the corpus is kinship assert the terms relating to relationships by blood or marriage, collectively making up the kinship system as indicated in table 2.

**Table 2: Island of lexemes related to Kinship**

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	Meaning
1.	بیلی	دوست	Friend
2.	بان	بم عمر	Fellow
3.	انگ ساک	رشتہ دار	Relative
4.	پیو	باپ	Father
5.	کھصم	شوہر	Husband
6.	ہانی	ساتھی	Companion
7.	گوانڈی	پڑوسی	Neighbor
8.	پووا	پھوپھی	Paternal Aunt
9.	بیلی	دوست	Friend

Table 2 shows a number of Punjabi kinship terms that have been lost to Urdu such as; “ہانی” changing to “ساتھی” and “گوانڈی” changing to “پڑوسی”, indicating relative similarities in lexical structure and style of words for both languages.

The third area under investigation in the corpus is gender referring to social distinctions associated with being male and female as indicated in the Table 3.

**Table 3: Island of lexemes related to the gender classification**

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	Meaning
1.	کڑی	لڑکی	Girl
2.	نار	عورت	Lady
3.	مٹیاری	عورت	Female
4.	تر یایا	پیاسا	Thirsty
5.	نکی	چھوٹی	Younger
6.	نمانی	بے چاری	Poor soul
7.	کڑیاں	لڑکیاں	Girls
8.	شدائی	پاگل	Mad
9.	مررکھ	بے وقوف	Fool

Table 3 show the corpus of human classification word associations has shown an absolute shift in the lexicon as “مٹیاری” shifted to a new Urdu word “عورت”. On the other hand, some partial changes are

evidenced like representation of Urdu and Punjabi is same, merely changing place of alphabets like “کڑی” with “لڑکی” indicate that change is not out of need but out of choice. Synonyms in Urdu have been found by Punjabi speakers while the pure language words remain forlorn.

For the second category in the island of lexemes; *Part of Speech*, referring to the words in a language that can be divided broadly into clusters or groups such as verbs, adjectives, adverbs and pronouns, among others as mentioned in table 5.

**Table 4: Items related to other Part of Speech**

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	Meaning
1.	لوایا اے	لگوا یا ہے	Have him appointed
2.	کہندے نیں	کہتے ہیں	It is said
3.	گل وچ	گلے میں	In the neck
4.	کردے او	کرتے ہو	Do
5.	اوبنوں	اسکو	Him
6.	ورگوں، وانگ	کی طرح	How
7.	کچ	کچھ	Some
8.	کراواں	کراؤں	Make it happen
9.	بوریا اے	بوربا ہے	Is taking place
10.	کیوں ہویا	کیوں ہوا	Why did it happen
11.	ہوندیانئیں	ہوتی ہیں	Happens
12.	کیندی	کس کی	Whose
13.	جاوے گی	جائے گی	Will go
14.	جاندی رہیں	چلی جانا	Go
15.	لگاتار	م مسلسل	Consistently

The corpus shows that for the second category ‘*Part of Speech*’ (representing verbs, adjectives, pronoun word associations other than nouns), shows a shift in the Punjabi lexicon for example, the verb “سٹ” in the earlier Punjabi films changes to the “پھینک” in current film. The changes are absolute which eradicates the structure and familiarity of the original Punjabi words. Similarly, shifts in determiners, pronouns and phrases all indicate the shift with the Punjabi lexicon moving closer to the more dominant Urdu language (See Appendix 2).

## 4.2 Interviews

The interview analysis highlighted the influence of the language shift on the Punjabi public discourse in the following key areas.

### 4.2.1 Films reflecting societal choices

In response to the question about the: “Do you feel that Punjabi language spoken today is as same as was spoken four decades earlier?” (See appendix 1) a scriptwriter commented that “*it is not the same as before... we can call it a mixture ... Punjabi has lost its purity and is now more a mix of Urdu and Punjabi and some English too*” (SW-1), suggesting that Punjabi is no longer proudly spoken. It has lost its pure form and it has been influenced by other languages. Changes in Punjabi language over a time have led to loss of lexicon, originality, and significance primarily due to the influence of Urdu and English.

### 4.2.2 Speakers’ Attitude

Another important factors in the Punjabi language shift highlighted in the interviews was the negative attitude of its speakers. As pointed out by one of the script writers “*I believe that social developments, urbanization and status consciousness are responsible a great deal for the attitudinal change in the speakers*” (SW-2), suggesting that the shift was inevitable as these factors impact the thinking and the behaviors of the people. While discussing other possible cause for the shift the interviewees pointed to “*Punjabi has lost its purity because of neglected attitude because it is not taught as a major subject instead school do not allow to speak it in the premises. People think if they would speak, they would be considered less educated*” (SW-

3), suggesting that education was another important factor in addition to other reasons including lack of educational instruction in Punjabi, and a blatant disrespect for the language by its speakers.

## 5. DISCUSSION

The lexical changes identified in the corpus include some absolute and partial changes in the structure of the Punjabi lexicon, indicating that both conditions are playing its role in eclipsing the Punjabi language in the Pakistani society. The findings revealed in the corpus show that the influence of the dominant language is very noticeable in changing landscape of the Punjabi films in the past 40 years' time span. In addition, the findings also show that attitude is a significant factor influenced by media, urbanization, better economic opportunities, lack of education, status consciousness, culture, home and official domains. The scriptwriters considered that as the Punjabi community visualizes Urdu and English as prestigious languages which has over time also influenced the language use in the films. This point of view is also supported by Ayyers (2008) claim in their study that the Punjabi language is being taken over by Urdu in major domains.

The script writers stressed on another factor that may be leading to the loss of Punjabi in its pure form was a deliberate absence of education in the Punjabi. This claim is also supported by Ammar et al., (2015) asserted that lack of local languages support in educational institutes such as the schools going students had literally cut off from the rich literary heritage of Punjabi language.

Another important finding of the study was linked to the social developments and urbanization. Respondents during the interview revealed that social developments, pointing out that Punjabi transmission was limited to rural areas due to its association with the uneducated people and the language of the rural areas. A study conducted earlier supported the findings, by Khan (2014) who asserted that urbanization has disturbed and misrepresented the status and prestige of Punjabi language.

The casual attitude has also had decisive effect on the Punjabi lexicon of the public discourse. The respondents substantiated that negative attitude have brought about changes in Punjabi lexicon of public discourse, indicating that in order to improve economic conditions, a particular language is preferred which is also dominating major domains. The present study has also attempted to find out the role of media in the demise of the Punjabi language. Respondents revealed that Punjabi films not only influence communication but also represent educational policy, language trends and patterns use by a society.

Another factor highlighted in the interviews was that Punjabi language was not spoken at home and offices because of an all pervasive negative outlook towards language. This aspect is validated by Zhao and Liu (2007) asserted that domain of home can be used to endanger and preserve the language.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Taking into consideration the findings and observations, it can be concluded that the reality of the lexical change from Punjabi to Urdu is a local testimony to the assertion of language change as a universal characteristic of all languages. The study collected (265) lexical items, comprising of nouns, verbs, pronouns, adjectives, determiners and verbs that have, or are in the process of getting lost to Urdu. The findings indicate that Punjabi word categories is most affected by this lexical change and losing its prestige in comparison to the dominant languages. It has presented that daily used nouns and verbs (word categories) relating to the social life of the Punjabi community was found to be the most affected area.

This study found that Punjabi has slowly but gradually been changing over the past few decades fuelled by a neglected attitude of speakers because of combination of reasons like educational, mass media, religious and government institutions educational, urbanization, better economic conditions, lack of education, prestige, status consciousness, time, culture, home and office domains, this change has led to the loss of a significant number of native Punjabi words to Urdu and endangered the future of Punjabi language.

Owing to the factors discussed earlier, it may be concluded that the Punjabi language is in flux; undergoing the process of Urduisation and thus losing its purity due to its diminishing lexical features.

#### 6.1 Future Research

This study focused on the lexical change happening in Punjabi language. Justifiably, change in language is not limited to the lexical level only. Hence, future research on Punjabi could focus on other levels of language, to identify the changes that may have taken place at those levels. Most importantly, the researchers could conduct the investigation into the large number of changes in categories like technology, business and animates to address issues of the Punjabi language shift. The sample for the interviews was limited to three out of which only one was interviewed face-to face while the other two were restricted to telephonic interviews. Future research can explore the perception of large sample of script writers to explore other responsible factors of Punjabi language shift in films and its influence on the writings and society.

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## Appendix 1

## Lexicon of culture items

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	English
1	جند	جان	Life
1.	چہتر	جوتا	Shoe
2.	گل	بات	Talk
3.	بووا	دروازہ	Door
4.	چاکری	نوکری	Job
5.	سونہ	قسم	Swearing
6.	پاسا	طرف	Side
7.	قول	وعدہ	Promise
8.	مخول	مذاق	Joke/jest
9.	تاہنگ	آرزو	Wish
10.	ویہاڑ	رویہ	Attitude
11.	چاکری	نوکری	Job
12.	جندرا	تالا	Lock
13.	دیوا	چراغ	Lamp
14.	مڑاسا	نقاب	Veil
15.	سول	کانٹا	Thorn
16.	سانبھ	سنبھال	Preserve
17.	جنج	بارات	Wedding procession
18.	ترس	رحم	Mercy
19.	راہ	راستہ	Way
20.	سویر	صبح	Morning

## Appendix 2

## Lexicon of part of speech

Sr. no	Classical Punjabi lexicon	Current Punjabi lexicon	English
1.	سکدا	سکتا	Can
2.	بیئدیاں نیں	بیٹھتی ہیں	Are sitting
3.	کی کہہ رہی این توں	کیا کہہ رہی ہے تو	What are you talking about?
4.	کھلوتی	کھڑی	Standing
5.	تک	دیکھ	See
6.	کر لاناں	رونا	Cry
7.	اودے	اپنے	My
8.	ایندی	اس کی	Her
9.	نال	ساتھ	With
10.	لیندی	لیتی	Take
11.	جاندا	جانتا	Know

12.	اُن	ہوں	Am
13.	مسموم	معصوم	Innocent
14.	کھچرا	چلاک	Clever
15.	ہوندى	ہونی	Happen
16.	چاہی دی اے	چاہیے	Want
17.	ایا اُن	آیا ہوں	Come
18.	کے نال	کے ساتھ	With
19.	چیتا	یاد	Remember
20.	کیہ کیا سی	کیا کہا تھا	What have you said?
21.	دے	کے	's
22.	ساتے	ہم سے	Our
23.	تسی دوویں	تم دونوں	Both of you
24.	دوویں	دونوں	Both
25.	کیپندی	کہتی	Says
26.	دسدى	بتاتی	Tells
27.	آکھان	کہہ	Said
28.	دیتا	دیا	Give
29.	ہوندى	ہوتی	Is
30.	لیندا	لینا	Take
31.	اودا	اپنا	Own
32.	آکھیا	کہا	Said
33.	ویکھ	دیکھ	Watch
34.	بنناں	جوڑنا	Fix
35.	کھادا	کھایا	Eat
36.	لایا اے	لگایا	Affix
37.	کردا پیاساں	کر رہا تھا	Was doing
38.	اسی	ہم	We
39.	مینوں	مجھے	I
40.	اے ہے	یہ ہے	This is

**Appendix 3**  
**Interview protocol**

**Respondents: Punjabi script writers**

**Time 20 to 30 minutes**

Respondents were requested to answer all the questions.

- How do you feel about the status of Punjabi language in the Punjab? Why.
- Do you feel that Punjabi language spoken today is as same as was spoken four decades earlier?
- How far do you feel the language change has influenced the language of Punjabi films?
- Which factor play key role in this language change from Punjabi to Urdu language? Why?