

Resisting Forces against Language and Cultural Drift: A Study of Language Vitality among Pakhtoons of Jammu & Kashmir

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Abstract

Language reflects culture; it is a medium for studying various cultural aspects. Language spoken by an ethnic group reflects their world view i.e. how they perceive the world (their dress, food, communication pattern, and acceptable way of behavior). It plays an important role in constructing one's social make up. A community maintains its culture and ethnic identity by retaining its language. This approach enables a better understanding of how utterances can reveal various socio-cultural patterns. It is language, which helps to understand culture-specific utterances in different contexts while considering their expected and conventional meaning. For example, in Kashmiri, [*ab feron*] and [*siran karun*] are two utterances used in different contexts. The literal meaning for both the utterances is to 'take bath'. [*ab feron*] is a culture specific utterance used at the time of ceremonial baths (birth/marriage) whereas, [*siran karun*] is a general term for bathing. Similarly, in Pashto the term [*tor*] generally means 'black', but in terms of Pakhtoonwali, it's an ethical code meaning 'public disgrace and defamation of both men and women who are found guilty of Adultery. While studying the patterns of language use, Attitude and Prestige (linguistic profile of the community) its culture can be revealed. Apart from culture, various other aspects of the community like its economy, education, modernization, impact of the dominant language etc. can be revealed. By studying the language use patterns in different domains, proficiency, acquisition, attitude and prestige, it can also be concluded that whether a community maintains its culture and ethnic identity by retaining their language.

The study is about the Pakhtoons (of Gutlibagh village, Ganderbal district of J&K state) who are mountainous tribal community, speaking Pashto an Eastern Iranian language. They are the world's biggest sedimentary lineage ethnic group. In the state of Jammu and Kashmir Therefore, it becomes crucial to explicitly analyze the language Proficiency, Acquisition, Prestige and language preferences of Pakhtoons in J&K. The intended purpose of this study is to draw an apparent picture of how Pashto language and culture of Pakhtoons both together ensured sustenance and longevity while overcoming the odds and inevitable changes, with time.

Keywords: Pakhtoons of Jammu & Kashmir, Language, Culture, Proficiency, Acquisition.

Introduction

The study of language vitality allows various perspectives to look at how language is insuring its prolonged existence. One way of looking at it from a definition point of view is that language vitality as conceptualized here, encompasses the extent of maintaining the language structure, the uses of language in all the possible domains, and above all, effective language transfer from one generation to the next. More generally, the study of language vitality is of great importance for determining whether a language shows all the necessary prevailing conditions that will ensure its sustainability. Therefore, languages with high vitality would be one that is used extensively both, inside or outside home or community, by all generations, and for most, if not all, topics, which indirectly also implies the ability of a linguistic community to resist language shift.

The state of Jammu and Kashmir has a multi-lingual, a multi-cultural and a multi-ethnic group representation, which resulted in a complex linguistic make-up of the entire region. It is apparent from the fact, that the state of J&K is inhabited by the speakers of various languages pertaining to different language families, like Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman and Dardic in particular. There are more than 8 prominent languages spoken in the state and great number of regional varieties that can be accounted for. Languages like Pashto, Shina, Brokpa and Burushaski etc., are languages confined within small communities spread across the state. These minority languages also play a significant role in understanding the linguistic landscape of the state. Since, Pashto as a language, being the focus of this study therefore, it is crucial to understand and acknowledge how Pakhtoons have sustained their linguistic identity, despite being in a complex linguistic situation as described above, where all the odds are against them.

It seems evident that such minority languages being in a vulnerable position, are very susceptible to language shift and which ultimately contributes to cultural drift, therefore, factors effecting such changes like dominant languages, globalization, modernization, education, economy etc. are no doubt responsible to a great extent. However, these categories are not directly considered for the fact that the purpose analysis of this study is to justify how the Pakhtoons are likely resisting the apparent threats to their language and culture, which will ultimately lead to language shift or cultural drift. In order to draw this conclusion, this study focuses on sociolinguistic variables like, Language acquisition, Language proficiency, domains of language use and language prestige. This is one way of exploring prospects of language vitality and reason with the fact that all the unnecessary changes that are likely to occur to a language are being resisted or slowed down. Hence, this can either be an underlying factor that is contributing to their language sustenance or it is their awareness of vulnerability that has created a strengthening need to survive longer.

The data for the study was elicited from a set of 100 informants belonging to different gender, age, and socio-economic group. The data was collected through a series of interviews where open ended questions were asked. Questions were asked regarding different domains like language use, attitude and prestige. The responses for various questions like claimed proficiency in Pashto, Urdu, Kashmiri and English was measured in terms of four skills namely understand, read, write and speak. The proficiency was measured across five levels that are nil, very little; moderate, good and very good. The coding was done as:

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Levels	Coding
Nil	0
Very Little	1
Moderate	2
Good	3
Very Good	4

Table 3.1: Coding for proficiency levels in different languages

For domains like—language used with God, dreaming, thinking, etc. coding was done as: Pashto = 1, Urdu =2, Kashmiri = 3.

To calculate the claimed proficiencies in different languages, mean of all the four skills (understand, speak, read and write) for all the variables (OF, OM, MF, MM, YF, YM) was calculated.

3.3. Language Proficiency

The first variable studied was the proficiency of the language used by the speakers of Pashto community. It is discussed below:

3.3.1. Proficiency in Pashto

Skills	YF	MF	OF
Understand	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Speak	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Read	Moderate	Very little- nil	Nil
Write	Nil	Nil	Nil

Table . Claimed proficiency in Pashto among Females

Skills	YM	MM	OM
Understand	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Speak	Very Good	Very Good	Very Good
Read	Moderate- very little	Moderate- very little	very little
Write	Very little	Nil- very little	Nil

Table 3.3. Claimed proficiency in Pashto among Males

It was observed that out of four components of proficiency i.e. Reading, Writing, Speaking and Understanding, two skills those of Reading and Writing is low i.e. close to zero. Proficiency in terms of Understanding is still well maintained among the Pashto communities. The females have the lowest scores in two aspects of Pashto proficiency i.e. reading and writing. The claimed proficiency in Pashto also declines as we move from ‘Understanding’ to ‘Writing’ in all genders. Also the decline is heavier among the women because most of the Pakhtoon women are not literate. Also, within the Kashmir valley Pashto literature is not available and majority of the Pakhtoons do not know the Pashto script. Thus, it can be concluded that Pakhtoons of Kashmir are mostly proficient in two language modalities of Pashto i.e. listening and speaking. Most of the Pakhtoons in Kashmir do not know how to read and write in their mother tongue Pashto.

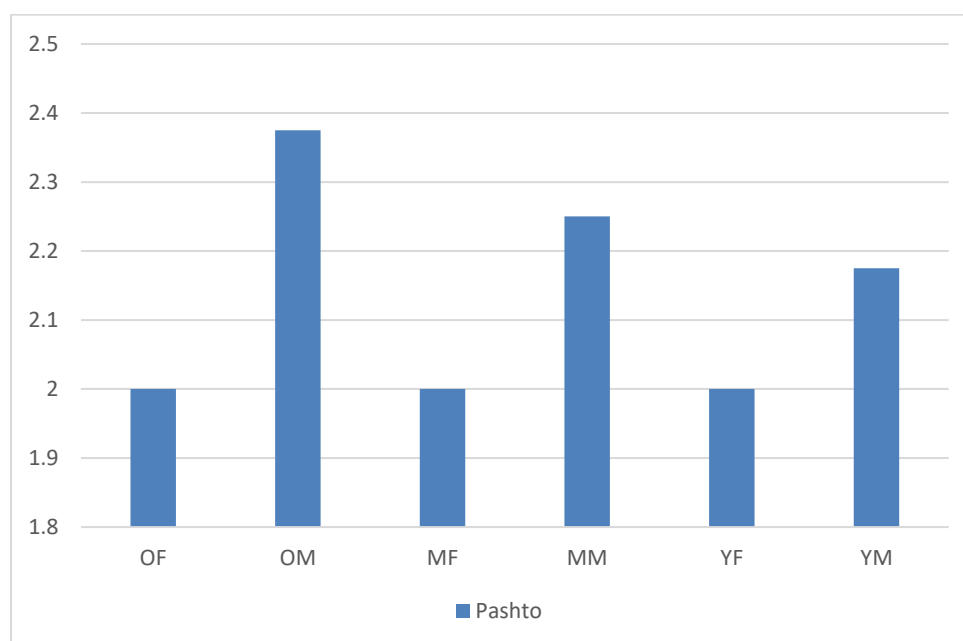


Fig 3.1. Claimed Proficiency in Pashto

3.3.2. Proficiency in Kashmiri

Claimed proficiency in Kashmiri and Urdu among Males and Females

Since OF being illiterate and socially less mobile show very little proficiency in Kashmiri than YF and MF. YF and MF are moderate in understanding and speaking skills while as show very little frequency in reading and writing. The claimed proficiency in Kashmiri also declines as we move from ‘Understanding’ to ‘Writing’ in all genders.

Only a few educated OM are proficient in all the four skills. While as majority of the males show good proficiency in two skills i.e. understanding and speaking but are very little proficient in reading and writing skills. Males show a decline in understanding Kashmiri as we move from older to younger males. However, an opposite trend is observed in Reading and Writing where younger males are observed to be more proficient than the older males. This probably can be attributed to the late inclusion of Kashmiri in the curriculum.

3.3.3. Proficiency in Urdu

Claimed proficiency in Urdu among Males and Females

Only educated MF can read and write in Urdu. It has been seen that YF show good proficiency in spoken Urdu. It has been seen that even the illiterate OM have good proficiency in Urdu. Despite of being illiterate they can understand, speak, read and even write in Urdu. The reason behind this may be that Urdu is the language of Islamic literature

It is observed that the youth have highest Urdu language skills. Most informants claimed to have at least some ability of speaking and understanding Urdu. In fact, a large majority claimed to be able to speak it well. Overall, a pattern is observed where in Urdu proficiency in any skill increases as age decreases. This is observed in both genders, except in the case of middle-aged Males and young Males in speaking, where the difference is very little. It is not surprising that women in general are thought to possess a low proficiency in Urdu given the fact that Urdu proficiency is directly proportional to literacy and mobility, which is lesser among Pakhtoon females.

Claimed proficiency in English among Females and Males

It was seen that only literate MF can understand and speak English but were not much proficient in reading and writing skills. While as illiterate MF was nil is all the four skills as English was mostly acquired in school domains. OF showed zero proficiency in English.

It was observed that only a few educated old males show moderate to good proficiency in understanding, reading, writing and speaking. Also, literate MM show moderate proficiency in English. While as illiterate MM know only Pashto and Urdu but not English which is usually acquired from the school. However, in most of the cases the proficiency in speaking is lesser than the other skills.

Claimed proficiency in Pashto, Urdu and Kashmiri

The informants claim the maximum proficiency in Urdu (the official language of Jammu and Kashmir) and least proficiency of Kashmiri (dominant language of Kashmir valley).

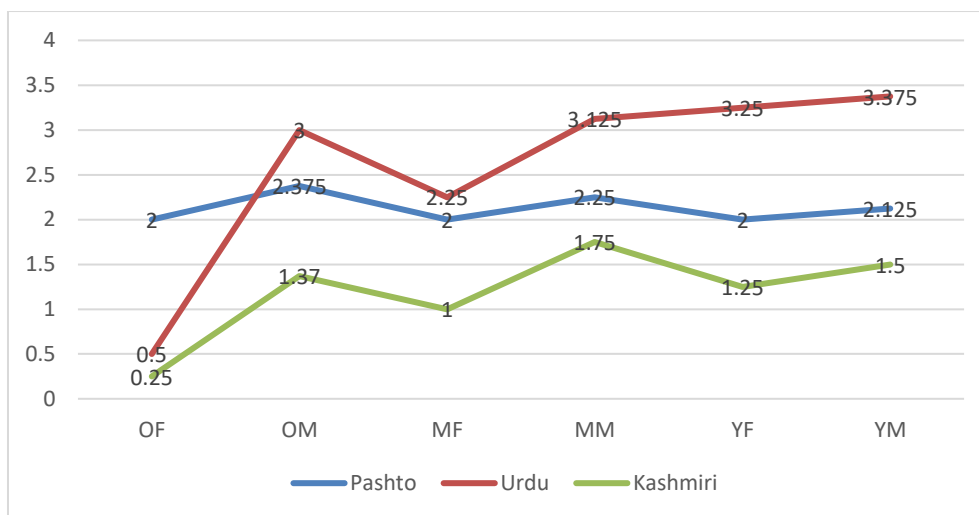


Fig 3.4. Claimed Proficiency in Pashto, Urdu and Kashmiri

1. All groups speak Pashto the most followed by Urdu and Kashmiri.
2. Old females use Pashto language maximally.
3. Middle aged females follow old females and rank second in using Pashto.
4. Young females show a better proficiency in Kashmiri than old and middle aged females.
5. Among males, old males are the greatest users of Pashto followed by young males. Middle aged males are the lowest ranking in terms of the duration of the use of Pashto language. This anomaly can be accounted by the fact that middle aged men have more exposure to Kashmiri and Urdu due to their greater mobility in the majority Kashmiri society because most of the middle aged males do jobs outside their community. This is followed by young males. Old and young males are comparatively confined to their own society and consequently they use Pashto for maximum duration than middle aged males.
6. The use of Urdu exceeds Kashmiri among all age groups in both the sexes.

Language Acquisition

The process of acquiring language is deeply affected by the process of becoming competent member of a society which is realized to a large extent through language, by acquiring knowledge of its functions, social distribution, and interpretation in and across socially defined situations, i.e. through exchanges of language in particular social situations. In multilingual contact situations language learning and use work together, people learn other languages as they use them. Different codes are adopted for different contexts and the objective of acquisition is usually repertoire building. People learn or acquire different languages for different purposes like social interaction, job, etc. These languages are learnt through various sources like home, school, and environment.

The acquisition contexts of Pashto, Urdu, Kashmiri and English from various sources like home, environment and school have been discussed below:

Language	YF	MF	OF
Pashto	Home	Home	Home
Urdu	At School/environment	At School/environment	Environment
Kashmiri	Environment	Environment	Environment
English	At School/environment	At School	Nil

Table: Language Acquisition among Females

It is clear from the above table that all females acquire Pashto from home. Urdu is learnt from school as well as environment. Illiterate MF and OF learn Urdu from environment. Kashmiri is learnt from environment only. English is learnt at school. OF and illiterate MF do not know English.

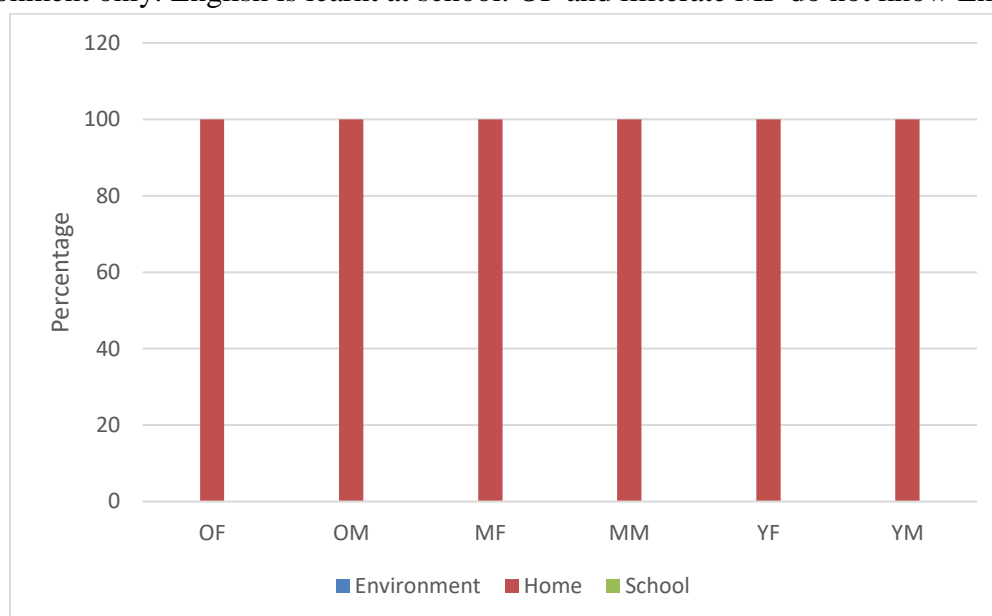


Fig 3.5. Acquisition context of Pashto

Language	YM	MM	OM
Pashto	Home	Home	Home
Urdu	At School/environment	At School/environment	Environment
Kashmiri	Environment	Environment	Environment
English	At School/environment	At School	At School

Table 3.11. Language Acquisition among Males

It is clear from the above table that all males acquire Pashto from home. Urdu is learnt from school as well as environment. Illiterate MM and OM learn Urdu from environment. Kashmiri is learnt from environment only. English is learnt at school. OM and illiterate MM except for a few educated MM and OM do not know English.

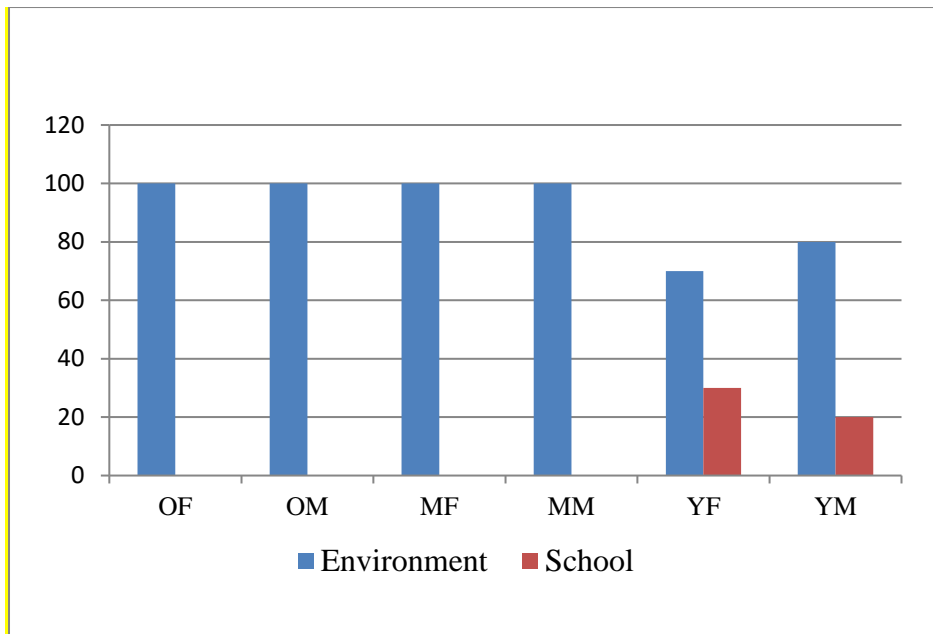


Fig 3.6. Acquisition context of Kashmiri

From the above tables it can be said that most of the informants in all age groups have acquired Pashto from home. Among the old males there were some informants who claim that they have acquired Pashto from environment because some informants have spent their childhood in Kohistani (also a minority language) environment which is their maternal place and among the middle-aged males. However, in general it is clear that Pashto is the language of home, and that is where it is generally acquired. It was also observed that Urdu has been acquired from different domains. As compared to Pashto and Kashmiri, Urdu is largely acquired from schools except in the case of old aged females who claim to have acquired Urdu from the environment.

Among the middle-aged males, there are some informants who claim that they have acquired Urdu either from environment or from home. It is interesting to note that the importance of school as a context of the acquisition of Urdu increases as we move from older generation to younger generation and the importance of environment decreases. It was found that youngsters are having the higher exposure in terms of mass and print media, and the youth are more educated than the older generation and hence are more exposed to Urdu. Also, it is clear those informants, who have acquired Urdu in the school domain show lesser duration of use of Pashto.

Except for young age group, all the groups have acquired Kashmiri from the environment. Among the youth, there are some informants who claim that they have learnt Kashmiri in schools.

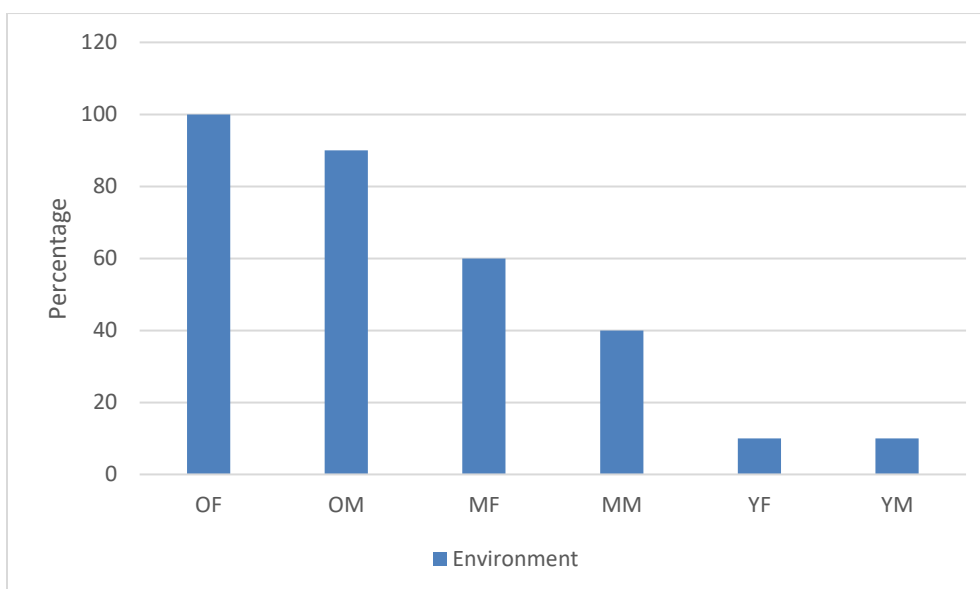


Fig 3.7. Acquisition context of Urdu

Domains of Language Use

Language preferences and domains of different languages in a society can essentially reflect the organization of a particular society and can become an essential guide for charting out the sociolinguistic setup of that community. This chapter deals with language use in different domains among Pakhtoons in Kashmir and its relevance in understanding their sociolinguistic setup. The main purpose of the elicitation of this data was to observe and understand the patterns of language with special reference to Pashto.

- Across different domains.
- Across interlocutors in each domain and
- Across informal and formal contexts.

By looking at language use in different domains one can get an idea whether there are any particular linguistic preferences for different domains and different interlocutors. What remains to be seen is whether this multilingual community is stable or unstable. In the unstable case the gradual reallocation of different languages to different domains occurs so radically that over a period of time people may give up one language in favor of the other (Fishman, 1968).

Boehm (1997:64) proposed, the choices people make in regard to language use reflect trends towards either language maintenance or language shift. In other words these patterns can reflect to some extent, the vitality of the language.

This domain discusses the language use pattern of the Pashto people. This area studies the language use in home, market, school and other mixed domains. It also studies the language use in various social and familial activities. These findings contribute in explaining the language

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maintenance choices of the Pashto people. As the choice people make in regard to their language use reflects the trends either language maintenance or shift. In other words these patterns can reflect to some extent the vitality of the language.

Fase el al. (1992:6) say that it has been commonly found that when the mother tongue of a minority language remains dominant in communication within the ethnic group, it can be said that the mother tongue is being maintained. If only inter group language shift occurs, the language situation within the community will evolve towards a form of stable bilingualism.

Home Domain

Home is the domain where interaction is presumably facilitated dominantly in the mother tongue. The home domain is the fundamental and significant domain for communication. Changes in language taking place in this domain may reflect changes happening elsewhere. When a language has lost the battle in other domains, the family domain often remains the last stand. If the language is kept alive and used in this domain, it lives, if not it dies.

Pashto is the language of Home Domain. They use Pashto for communicating with their family members and pets. They believe that their pets are part of their life; they are treated as in-group member. So they assume their pets understand their language i.e. Pashto. This domain analysis the language use between generations as the change in language use between generations indicates a likely ongoing shift. It was noted that Pakhtoons strictly follow Pashto in their home domain. It was observed that these people carry a notion of being ethnically superior to local Kashmiris and this can be one reason for their resistance in giving up Pashto.

School Domain

Urdu usually forms the language of the school domain. While communicating with the teacher (inside/ outside classroom) Urdu is used. Urdu is also used for communicating with the friends of other communities. While as Pashto is used to interact with the friends of same community. It was observed that Kashmiri was used very often to interact with non Pakhtoon friends.

Market Domain

Regarding the market domain it was observed that if the acquaintance is from the same community than only Pashto was used otherwise Urdu was the widely used language. It was seen that all the males and females use Pashto to interact with the merchant of same community. But while interacting with a non-Pashto merchant YF and MF make use of Urdu except for old females who interact in Pashto only. This is because of the reason that OF are socially less mobile and proficient in Pashto only. It has been seen that some MM and most of the OM make frequent use of Kashmiri than YM who mostly use Urdu with non Pakhtoons.

Religious Domain

In the religious domain it was seen that all the females use Pashto while praying to God (making Dua). They also use Arabic for reciting prayers. Religious songs were mostly sung in Pashto. However, YF and MF also claim to use Urdu for singing religious songs. So majority of the respondents claim to use Pashto in the religious domain. Arabic is used for the recitation of Quranic verses and prayers. While as for discussions, interactions and religious songs Pashto is used. It was observed that YF use Urdu with non-Pakhtoons at religious places or discussions. Most of the Pashto men use Arabic while reciting the prayers or performing holy rituals but Pashto was also used while praying. For majority of the choices in religious domain Pashto was used. Except for a few occasions like interacting with non-Pakhtoons at religious places where Urdu was used.

Language Used at Community Meetings

The people use Pashto at community meetings. At village meetings where the speakers of Kashmiri are also present, dominant language (Kashmiri) is used. These types of interaction are a part of predictable mixed group domain where the initiators of the conversation can predict the language choice of the interlocutor i.e. whether the interlocutor is a native Pakhtoon or non- native Kashmiri.

Language used with Strangers

While communicating with strangers the people of the community prefer to use Urdu. OM and MM also switch to Kashmiri if they happen to interact with the native speaker of Kashmiri. It was also observed that OF stick the Pashto only. Talking to strangers is labeled as an unpredictable mixed group domain where the initiator of the conversation cannot always predict whether the interlocutor is a native or non-native. As in this domain Kashmiri and other language speakers coexist apart from Pashto. So, as a result one cannot easily predict which language should be used to talk to the interlocutor.

Language used with the Doctor or Healer

The people of the community usually use Urdu to interact with the doctor. But MM and OM also use Kashmiri while communicating with the doctor. To a healer who is usually from the same community, the people talk in their mother tongue Pashto.

Language used in Mass Media

Pashto program is broadcasted on radio and television, but the language is entirely absent from newspapers, journals etc. A large majority of the informants have claimed to watch the television programs in Pashto as well, apart from the programs broadcasted in Urdu language.

Language used for Professional Activities

For various professional activities such as agriculture, hunting, fishing, bee-raising, cattle rearing etc. they used Pashto with the members of their own community. Urdu and Kashmiri are only used if required.

Language used in day-to-day activities

It was observed that for the activities like dreaming, thinking, dreaming, storing telling etc. Pashto was used. Urdu and English were only used in a few domains like counting, joking, etc. MF and OF make complete use of Pashto in all domains. Urdu is used very often by educated MM and YM in various domains like thinking, counting, flattering etc.

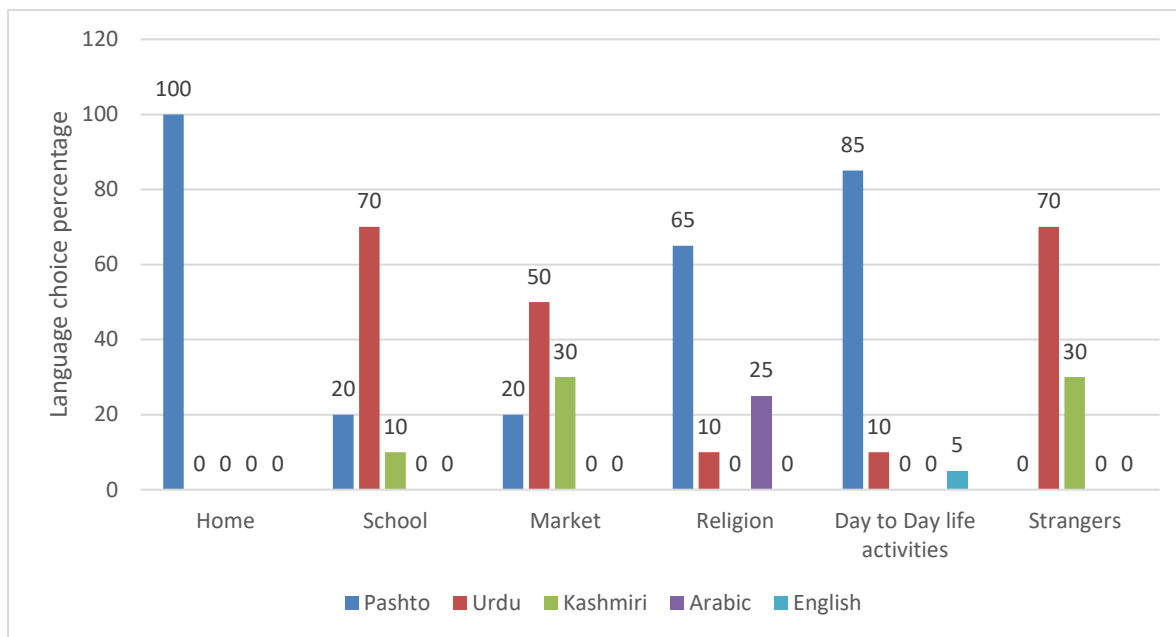


Fig. Language used in different domains

In most of the above domains Pashto is mainly used. They have a high comfort level when using Pashto which can be the reason that why Pashto is used in the intimate domain for asking God something, thinking, dreaming etc. as these things are essential part of the life. It is observed that the use of Pashto in personal domain decreases with a decrease in age and this pattern appears to be consistent. The youth and to some extent Middle aged males show a tendency towards decrease in Pashto usage when compared to the other age groups. Among all the categories from asking God to naming the days of the week, more loss is found in ‘counting’ and ‘naming the days of the week’. On the other hand, the old females show maximum retention of Pashto. Across the sexes, comparative loss in the use of Pashto is found in the males and retention is in females. Among all the age groups more loss is found in middle aged males and the youth.

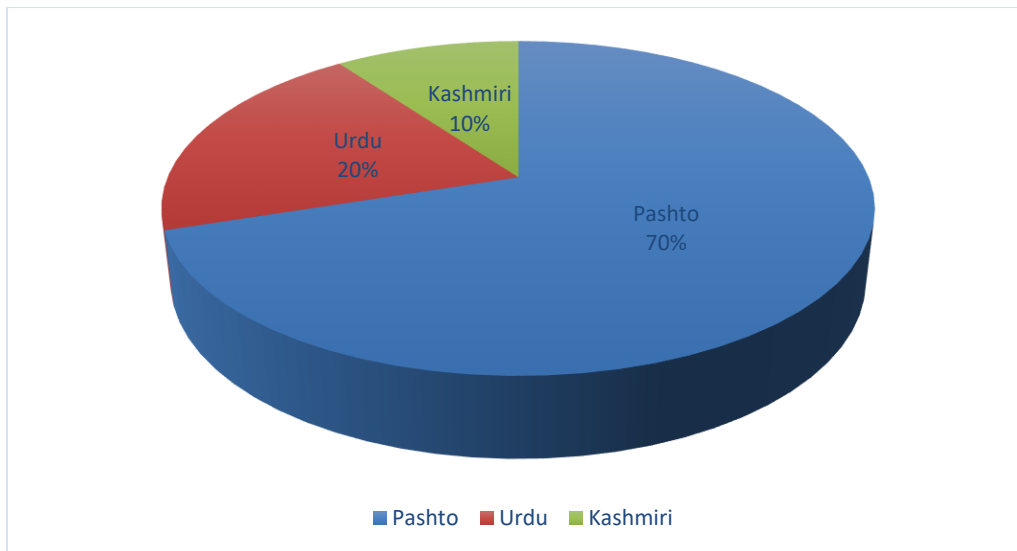


Fig 3.9. Percentage of language choice in all domains

However, language use in all domains points towards the conclusion that Pashto language vitality is very strong among Pakhtoons of Gutlibagh.

Language Attitude and Prestige

Prestige is the level of respect normally accorded to a specific language or dialect within a particular speech community. Sociolinguistic prestige is therefore one manifestation of, or analogous to, the more general phenomenon of social stratification – especially class. In general, a language or dialect associated with an upper class has positive prestige, while a language or dialect associated with a lower class has "negative prestige".

The domain of language attitude and prestige investigates various queries related to prestige factor like the most prestigious language spoken, language as a hindrance to social mobility, language endangerment and death etc. The choice of people for choosing their prestigious language reflects the vitality and maintenance of their language and culture.

Various questions regarding language attitude and prestige were asked from the informants like:

- **Which language is more prestigious?**
- **Do you think your language is a hindrance to socio-economic mobility?**
- **Do you ever feel that your mother tongue is dying?**
- **How do you react when the speakers of your mother tongue speak other languages?**
- **Do you prefer to marry a person who does not know your language?**
- **What language do you want your children to know well?**

All the respondents replied that the language of their own village (Gutli-bagh, Ganderbal) is the most prestigious variety of Pashto. Even though most of the respondents denied that their

language stops them from moving up the socio-economic ladder. However most of the young male/female and educated middle age male/female consider Pashto as a hindrance to socio-economic mobility they believe that learning languages like English and Urdu certainly improves their chances of moving up the ladder. Learning English and Urdu is associated with prestige All the informants responded negatively to this question that if their mother tongue was dying? As per them all the Pakhtoons still a strong adherence towards their language. They show a very positive attitude towards their language. It was observed that Pakhtoons use Urdu and Kashmiri only when required (i.e. when Pashto cannot be used). Children are also proficient in Pashto which means that language is successfully passed from older to younger generation. Despite living in a multi-lingual world and being in minority Pakhtoons have preserved their language as well as their culture.

When the informants were asked why they do not want to give the Pashto language and adopt some other language. They have given a simple answer; they are known by their own language throughout the world. Pakhtoons also believe that no doubt their younger generation may learn other languages but they will always maintain their identity. They want their children to speak Pashto the same way as they do.

Conclusion

Pakhtoons, they seem to prefer their own mother tongue over other dominant languages, until and unless required to switch to other known languages.

As compared to other minority languages and rather, the dominant languages as well, the Pashto language or the Pakhtoons, they seem to be very conscious about using their language as compared to any other languages in contact. Figures clearly expound the vitality properties, which in fact forms the core justification for the term resisting used to explain the linguistic awareness of the Pakhtoons to sustain their identity and heritage.

Pakhtoons believe that their language. Pashto is passed down to them by their ancestors and it is a vital symbol to differentiate them from other groups living in the same territory having the same life style. So in a way or so Pakhtoons have somehow maintained their prevalence and continued to be a unique community with their own social, cultural and linguistic identities.

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