

Sociolinguistics of Language Proficiency: A Study on Kashmiri Speech Community of Anantnag District

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to examine the claimed language proficiency of Kashmiri Speakers in terms of four language skills i.e. understanding, speaking, reading and writing in Kashmiri, Urdu and English.

Keywords: Kashmiri, Sociolinguistics, Language Proficiency, Mother Tongue, SPSS, ANOVA

1. Introduction

Kashmiri (locally known as kə:šur) speaking community is a close-knit community. The most widely spoken language in the union territory of Jammu and Kashmir is Kashmiri. Above 98% of the total population of the valley speak Kashmiri as their mother tongue. According to census 2011, Kashmiri is the mother tongue of 52% of the population of J&K. Other major languages include Dogri (20%), Gojri (9.1%) and Pahari (7.8%). The remaining population speaks other languages such as Kashtiwari, Punjabi, Bhaderwahi, Poguli, Siraji, etc. Urdu is extensively understood and spoken language particularly in Jammu and Kashmir

where it acts as a lingua franca alongside Kashmiri. Urdu along with English serves as a medium of instruction in the Kashmir province. These two languages are also used in home and in intercommunity communication domains along with Kashmiri. The code switching and code mixing processes usually involve Urdu and English among Kashmiri speakers.

2. Methodology

The present research work is based on the data collected from 500 Kashmiri speakers. The respondents have been taken from all the twelve tehsils of Anantnag district. It covered informants belonging to both the genders having rural and urban backgrounds. A questionnaire has been the main instrument employed for eliciting the sociolinguistic data from the Kashmiri speech community. The questionnaire consisted of two sections.

Section one focused on ascertaining the background information of the respondents such as age, gender, education level etc.

Section two elicited information regarding the claimed language proficiency of the respondents. The main aim of this section was to examine the claimed proficiency of the informants in Kashmiri, Urdu and English respectively in terms of four language skills viz, understanding, speaking, reading and writing across five levels of proficiency i.e.: Nil, Very little, Moderate, Good and Very good. Coding was done as under:

Nil	1
Very Little	2
Moderate	3
Good	4
Very good	5

Table 1.1 Scale for levels of Claimed Proficiency

To find out the claimed language proficiency of the respondents for Kashmiri Urdu and English, the sample was divided into two social variables viz age and gender. The data for each respondent was codified, fed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and tabulated. Overall claimed proficiency in languages has been obtained by using latest version of SPSS. ANOVA has been employed to check out the significant differences in language proficiency.

3. Claimed Proficiency in Kashmiri

The claimed proficiency in Kashmiri has been elicited in terms of four skills viz; understanding, speaking, reading and writing across the genders i.e. Upto 25 years males, Upto 25 years females; 26-40 years males, 26-40 years females, Above 40 years males and Above 40 years females. Table1.2 shows the mean scores in these four skills.

	Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Upto 25 years males	3.92	3.64	3.85	3.85
Upto 25 years females	3.8	3.5	3.71	3.71
26-40 years males	4	4	2.4	2.3
26-40 years females	4	4	2.4	2.3
Above 40 years males	4	4	3.4	3.2
Above 40 years females	4	4	2.3	2.2

Table 1.2: Mean Scores of Claimed Proficiency in Kashmiri

Table 1.2 clearly shows that out of the four components of language proficiency the skills of reading and writing are low as compared to the other two skills, i.e., understanding and speaking. The respondents are having ahead in terms of their level of proficiency in understanding their mother tongue, i.e., Kashmiri. Proficiency in terms of speaking is highly maintained among the middle and old aged speakers. The maintenance of understanding and speaking skills is found as a result of usage of mother tongue (Kashmiri) in home domain (Sheikh, A. M. 2014). As far as gender is concerned, it has been observed that in case of females, falling under the age group upto 25 years, speaking skill appears to be slightly low. It is because a surge in the use of Urdu (in some cases English) has been observed in the Kashmiri speech community. People have been seen encouraging their wards to speak Urdu at the cost of their mother tongue, i.e., Kashmiri. At the face of it, it seems that people are neglecting Kashmiri and shifting to Urdu and English.

It is interesting to observe that the claimed proficiency in Kashmiri declines as we move from understanding to reading and writing of all genders falling under the age group of 26-40 years and above 40 years respectively. However, in reading and writing skills, the younger males and females falling under the age group upto 25 years are slightly proficient; this can be attributed to the late inclusion of Kashmiri as a subject in the curriculum (Mullick A.P. 2014).

Analyzing the above data on the basis of the variable of settlement (rural and urban) reflects the following percentage scores.

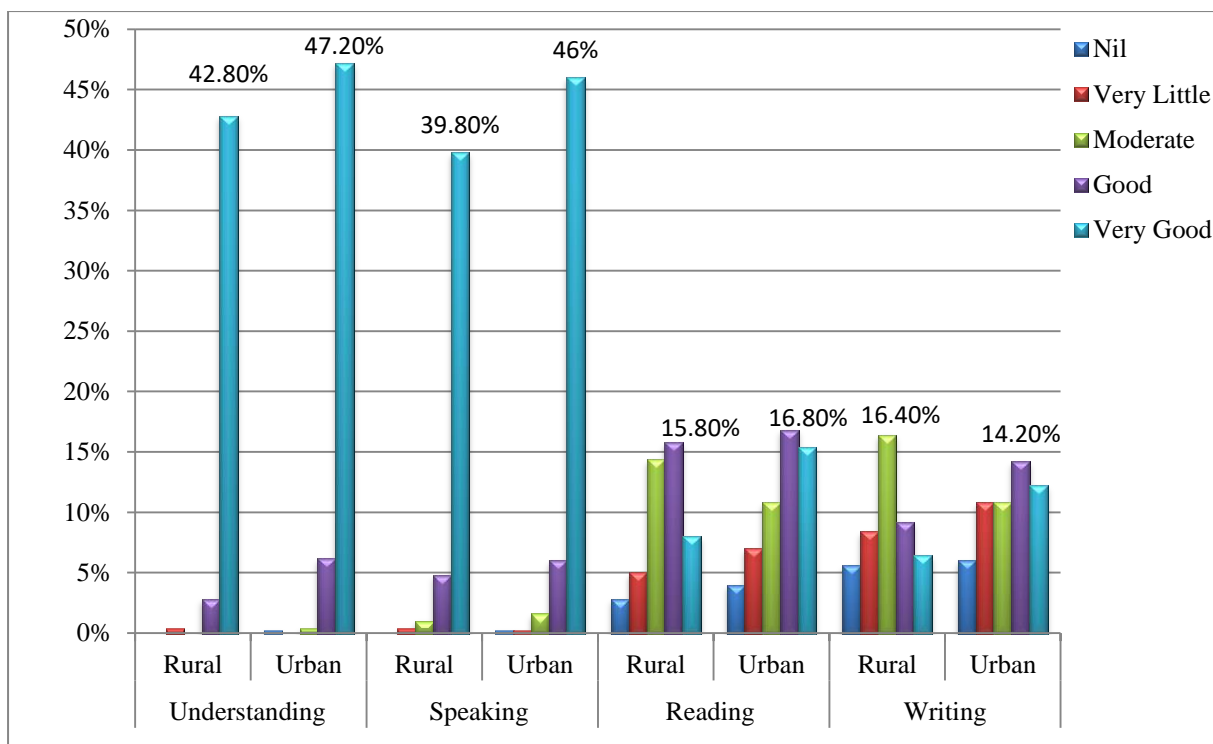


Fig. 1.1 Percentage Scores of Kashmiri as per settlement

From the figure 1.1, it is clear that majority, 42.8% and 39.8% respondents from rural area and 47.2% and 46% respondents from urban areas claim to be more proficient in understanding and speaking skills respectively, while as only 15.8% and 16.8% respondents from rural and urban areas are proficient in reading Kashmiri. The respondents from rural areas are a bit more proficient (16.4%) in writing Kashmiri as compared to the urban respondents (14.2%).

Overall, it can be concluded that Kashmiri speakers are more proficient in two language skills of Kashmiri, i.e., understanding and speaking and are less proficient in reading and writing.

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been carried out in order to ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the mean proficiency levels of Kashmiri speakers of all the three age groups. The ANOVA shows that there is a significant difference between the age and the proficiency levels of Kashmiri as far as understanding skill and

speaking skill is concerned ($p < 0.05$). However, there is no significant difference between age and mean proficiency of Kashmiri reading and writing ($p > 0.05$), as can be seen from Table 1.3.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Understanding Kashmiri	Between Groups	1.871	2	.936	5.949	.003
Speaking Kashmiri	Between Groups	2.364	2	1.182	4.541	.011
Reading Kashmiri	Between Groups	7.101	2	3.551	2.274	.104
Writing Kashmiri	Between Groups	6.959	2	3.480	1.809	.165

Table 1.3: ANNOVA in Case of Kashmiri Language

4. Claimed Proficiency in Urdu

The claimed proficiency in Urdu has been elicited in terms of four skills, viz, understanding, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1.4 shows the mean scores in these four skills.

	Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Upto 25 years males	4	3.98	3.94	3.85
Upto 25 years females	4	4	3.95	3.87
26-40 years males	4	3.6	3.85	3.81
26-40 years females	4	3.8	3.85	3.82
Above 40 years males	4	3.1	3.9	3.95
Above 40 years females	3	2.85	1.58	1.2

Table 1.4: Mean Scores of Claimed Proficiency in Urdu

Table 1.4 clearly shows that all the four skills, i.e., understanding, speaking, reading and writing, have almost equal proficiency score. On comparing the internal difference in all the age groups, it is observed that the younger-age groups have highest Urdu language skills. The primary reason for the high scores is that Urdu is taught in schools and forms the core component of curriculum. Furthermore, a pattern is observed wherein Urdu proficiency, in terms of understanding and speaking skill, increases in younger age groups as they have acquired these skills in home domain. Therefore, younger groups prefer Urdu more than Kashmiri in social domains as well. Old-aged females due to their illiterate background claim to have some ability of reading and writing in Urdu. It is observed that females falling under the age group upto 25 years claim to have highest proficiency in Urdu since Urdu is the medium of instruction in their educational institutions. Another reason for this occurrence of high scores in Urdu skills is the prestige attached to Urdu. As far as gender is concerned, females are generally more prestige conscious than males; they want to prove that they belong to the elite class by stating that they use Urdu in all the domains of language use. Electronic media, particularly television and radio broadcasts, provide another source of

learning. In Kashmir, majority of TV and radio programmes are broadcast in Urdu, resulting in increased visual exposure to Urdu.

Analyzing the above data on the basis of the variable of settlement (rural and urban) reflects the following percentage scores.

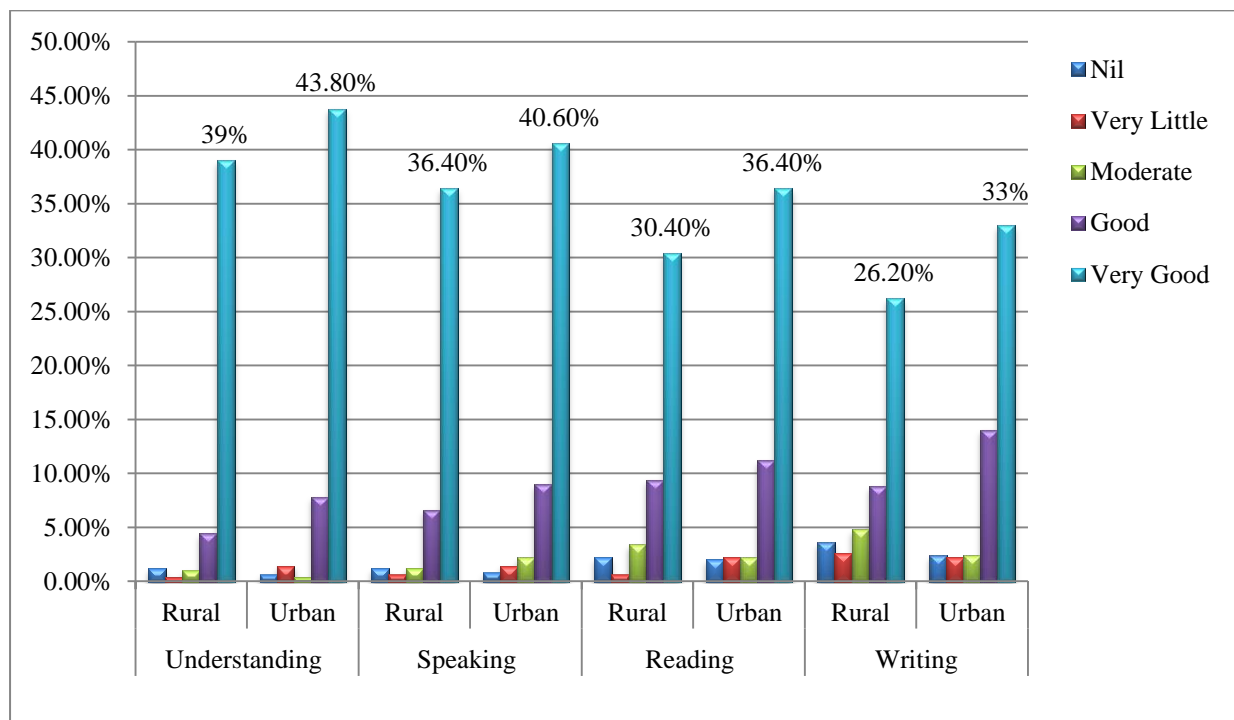


Fig. 1.2 Percentage scores of Urdu as per Settlement

From the figure 1.2, it is clear that majority of the respondents, i.e., 43.8% and 40.6% from the urban areas claim to be more proficient in understanding and speaking skills respectively than the respondents from rural areas (39% and 36.4%). Again, 36.4% and 33% respondents from urban areas are more proficient in reading and writing Urdu as compared to the respondents from rural areas (30.4% and 26.2%).

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) has been carried out in order to ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the mean proficiency levels of Kashmiri speakers of all the three age groups. The ANOVA shows that there is a significant difference between the age and the proficiency levels of Urdu as far as understanding and speaking

skills are concerned ($p < 0.05$). However, there is no significant difference between age and mean proficiency of Urdu reading and writing ($p \text{ value} > 0.05$), as can be seen from Table 1.5.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Understanding Urdu	Between Groups	9.550	2	4.775	8.909	.000
Speaking Urdu	Between Groups	16.701	2	8.350	13.194	.000
Reading Urdu	Between Groups	8.469	2	4.234	4.158	.016
Writing Urdu	Between Groups	9.346	2	4.673	3.525	.030

Table 1.5: ANNOVA in Case of Urdu Language

5. Claimed Proficiency in English

The claimed proficiency in English has been elicited in terms of four skills viz; understanding, speaking, reading and writing. Table 1.6 shows the mean scores in these four skills.

	Understanding	Speaking	Reading	Writing
Upto 25 years males	3.6	3.1	4	3.3
Upto 25 years females	3.7	3.5	4	3.43
26-40 years males	3.5	3	4	3.4
26-40 years females	3.5	3.4	4	3.42
Above 40 years males	2.2	2	2.4	1.68
Above 40 years females	1.19	0.5	0.6	0.2

Table 1.6: Mean Scores of Claimed Proficiency in English

It is clear from table 1.6 that out of the four skills, the skills of understanding and reading score higher as compared to other two skills, i.e., speaking and writing. On comparing the internal difference in all the age groups, it is observed that the younger and mid-age respondents are more proficient in English language skills as compared to the old-aged groups. The main reason for the high scores is that English is being taught in schools and parents also prefer their children to communicate with one another in English. Furthermore, being able to communicate well in English is essential in academics or for seeking job. It is observed that female respondents, falling under the age group upto 25 years are a bit more proficient in English language as compared to the other groups. The specific educational environment does contribute towards a greater use of English. Old-aged females, due to their illiterate background, show negligible score in English language proficiency.

Analysis of the above data on the basis of the variable of settlement (rural and urban) portrays the following percentage scores.

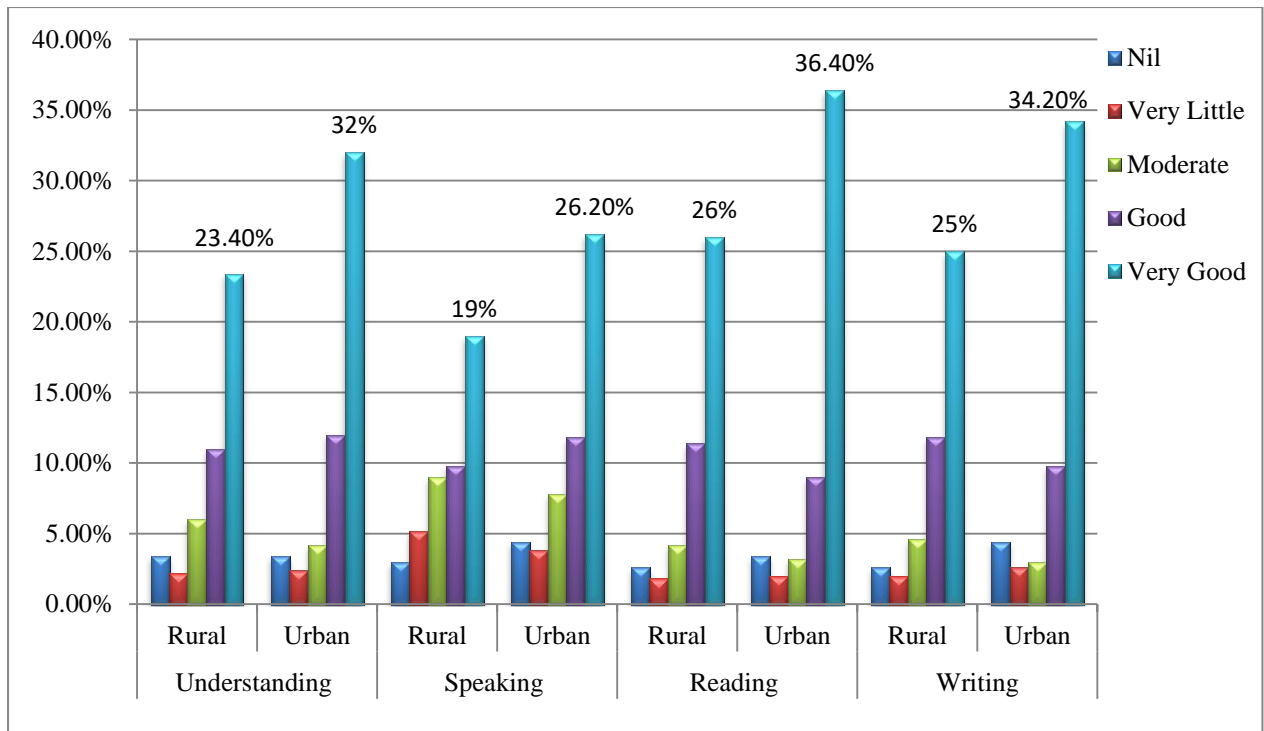


Fig. 1.3 Percentage Scores of English as per Settlement

From the figure 1.3, it is clear that majority of the respondents, i.e., 32% and 26.2% from urban areas claim to be more proficient in understanding and speaking skills, respectively, than the respondents from rural areas (23.4% and 19%). Again, 36.4% and 34.2% respondents from urban areas are more proficient in reading and writing English as compared to the respondents from rural areas (26% and 25%).

One way analysis of variance (ANOVA) was carried out in order to ascertain whether there is any significant difference between the mean proficiency levels of Kashmiri speakers of all the three age groups. The ANOVA shows that there is a significant difference between the age and the proficiency levels of English as far as understanding and reading skills are concerned ($p < 0.05$). However, there is no significant difference between the age and the mean proficiency of English speaking and writing ($p \text{ value} > 0.05$), as can be seen from table 1.7.

ANOVA

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Understanding English	Between Groups	10.225	2	10.225	7.237	.007
Speaking English	Between Groups	10.505	2	10.505	6.494	.061
Reading English	Between Groups	6.927	2	6.927	5.343	.021
Writing English	Between Groups	4.187	2	4.187	2.920	.088

Table 1.7: ANNOVA in Case of English Language

6. Conclusion

The present paper has attempted to give a brief sociolinguistic account of Kashmiri speakers of Anantnag District of the Kashmir valley. The study depicted the high-claimed proficiency in Kashmiri among old and middle-age groups. This is due to the fact that speakers of old and middle-age groups are more restricted in their home environments, where Kashmiri is the most prevalent and dominant language. The low claimed proficiency in Kashmiri among younger groups, particularly females, is because they are more prestige-conscious as they feel it inferior to use their mother tongue showing affinity towards Urdu and English considering them as more prestigious languages. The speakers from urban areas are more proficient in Urdu and English language skills than the speakers from rural areas. The younger groups prefer Urdu and English more than Kashmiri in social domains as well. Exposure to mass media, pursuing formal education are the main reasons for their claimed proficiency in Urdu and English skills respectively. The younger group claims the highest score in Urdu and English, as greater prestige and power is attached with these two languages. This group mentioned that possessing knowledge of English can provide them better job opportunities. The low claimed Urdu and English proficiency in old-aged females is due to illiteracy and limited exposure.

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