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Patterns of language use and preferences in Watali community**Rahila Safdar***Ph.D. Research Scholar University of Mysore***Abstract**

The present study aims at exploring the patterns of language use in Watali community, which has a dwelling number of speakers. The clusters of community are scattered throughout the Jammu and Kashmir region though little in number. An important fact that calls for immediate attention is that the community has developed an extremely negative stereotype for their mother tongue which has restrained the children from using Sheikha Gal in various linguistic situations. The patterns of language preferences and choice were studied in different domains of daily life and it was found the community members prefer to speak in Kashmiri in front of strangers because of the low prestige attached to their mother tongue.

Key Words: language preferences, attitudes, stereotypes, language use, multilingualism. Prestige, Identity.

Methodology

A number of methods were used to obtain desired data to make this research a comprehensive one. The main instruments employed in the research were questionnaires, participant observation, and informal interviews. Random sampling was the procedure employed to determine which subjects were to be interviewed. The study is very important for the fact that there is no reliable or valid data available regarding the language as of now and the social stigma attached to the speakers of this language, makes it a language with dwelling number of speakers, making this study a valuable effort to understand the issues faced by the community.

Introduction

Language use pattern describes a phenomenon in which members of a community use different languages or speech varieties in different social situations called domains. One of the most

important factors in studying language shift and loss is to discover the language use pattern of members of given community. The present study attempts to understand the patterns of language use in *Sheikha Gal* language.

Sheikha Gal or Watali is a language spoken by a minority community classified as schedule caste in the Kashmir province of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. This language has no literature, writing system and is only spoken by the community members. It is a language with dwindling number of speakers as the people of this community have developed an extremely negative stereotype towards the language and do not prefer to talk to their children in *Sheikha Gal* and some would totally deny its knowledge for the fact that knowledge of *Sheikha Gal* means being a part of the community which has no social status and low prestige attached to it.

Linguistic Profile

The major aim of the survey was to trace linguistic profile and communication network in *watli* community. The communication networks were studied both among the community members and between community members and outsiders. The term 'communication network' or 'dominance configuration'- Schmidt Rohar (1932) reveals the overall status of language choice in various domains of behavior. The information regarding language use in various social interactions was collected from informants in terms of following:

1. Mother tongue
2. Number of languages known
3. Languages known to the other members of the family
4. Mother tongues of the neighbors
5. Languages spoken in neighborhood
6. Mother tongue of the people at the place of work
7. Languages spoken at the place of work
8. Mother tongues of friends
9. Languages spoken among friends
10. Languages taught at schools
11. Medium of instruction at schools
12. Languages spoken at markets and shops
13. Languages used at places of worship
14. Languages used at hospitals and private dispensaries
15. Languages used at public meetings
16. Languages used at hotels and restaurants
17. Which language films and T.V or radio programmes are listened?

18. Languages spoken with strangers
19. In which language does the informant reads newspaper and magazines (if literate)?
20. In which language personal letter correspondence is maintained

Mother tongue

In *watali* community one can find a range of speakers from bilinguals to the multilinguals with knowledge of about three to four languages, almost all of them have active command over two to three languages. Majority of the members of *watali* (*shup Ir watal*) community are bilinguals or trilingual but, *Sheikha Gal* forms the mother tongue of almost all the inhabitants of *watali* community with few exceptions. The variety of *Sheikha Gal* spoken is same throughout the community. The incidence of monolingualism in *watali* community shows a very different picture than rest of the minority communities of J&K, as it is almost impossible to find a monolingual in the community. The percentage of trilingual is the maximum in the community. One of the major reasons for this is the neighborhood languages and the languages used at work places as people engaged in certain occupation tend to show more degree of multilingualism. According to them Kashmiri is the language of their business and *Sheikha Gal* is used inside the community. Apart from Kashmiri and *Sheikha Gal* many of them can speak *Punjabi*, *Pahari* and *Urdu* as well.

DISTRIBUTION OF MULTILINGUALS ACCORDING TO AGE

TOTAL	-15	15-30	30-45	45+
120	47	27	22	24

The age wise distribution of multilinguals show that majority of the multilinguals belong to the older generation while the multi lingual in the age group of 15-30 are less, multilingualism is least the case for school going children for which their social isolation is one if the major reason. The children of other castes and social class are given strict instructions of not mixing with the children belonging to *watali* community by their parents.

The sex wise distribution of multi lingual show that majority of multilinguals are men, this may be because majority of men are engaged in different occupation where the need of speaking Kashmiri and Urdu becomes necessary.

Language Use

The language choice of language in various domains of behavior depicts the dominance of one language over another and also the stereotypes towards those languages. The language preference patterns in various linguistic situations in Watli community were traced out as following.

In Neighbourhood

There is only one different linguistic group in the neighbourhood of *watali* community i.e. *Kashmiri* speaking linguistic group. At home all the members of *watali* community speak *Sheikh Gal* but as Kashmiri occupies the status of dominant language in locality it has become the language of neighborhood.

At Place of Work

At the place of work there may be situation where maximum number of people employed belongs to a single linguistic group. In such cases the language of that group becomes the language at place of

work. When the members of two or three linguistic groups are employed at the same place of work in more or less equal proportions, the language of superior becomes the language at place of work, while on the other hand any of the language of these groups can be used as language of communication among these linguistic groups. At the times the numbers of the speakers decide the choice of the language. In *watali* community most of the people are engaged in small business of their own (making of winnowing pans) and few are working as sweepers in SMC (Srinagar Municipal Committee). In both the cases they need to deal with Kashmiri linguistic groups, thus Kashmiri automatically becomes the language at the place of work.

Among Friends

As mentioned earlier, people belonging to *watali* community are at the lowest level within the social hierarchy so; most of their friends belong to the same community and same linguistic group. When language is common, the language used among friends is always mother tongue. It is seen that some of them are friends with *keshir' watal* because of the same place of work i.e. SMC (Srinagar Municipal Committee). When languages are different, and one of the friends is bilingual or both of the friends are bilingual then both the languages are used. In mixed linguistic group however, Kashmiri is generally the dominant code. In such mixed gatherings code-switching and code-mixing is often observed.

In Education

Though there are many schools in the vicinity of *Tujgari Mohalla*, but the numerical strength of the children

attending schools is very less. At least three languages are taught as subjects in all these schools, which is true for all the schools in Kashmir valley. Kashmiri is the medium of instruction in all the Government schools of Kashmir which forms the mother tongue of majority of the population of Kashmir. Though, the mother tongue of *watali* community is *Sheikha Gal* but the medium of instruction in the schools of the community is Kashmiri with the minimum number of children enrolled from *watali* community. As, mentioned earlier almost every individual belonging to *watali* community

is trilingual with proficiency in spoken *Sheikha Gal*, *Urdu* and *Kashmiri*. With the result they don't face any problem in understanding lectures delivered in classroom. As far as the language used for communication in the class room is concerned Kashmiri and Urdu is used with a lot of code-mixing and code-switching but Kashmiri is used as dominant code. Kashmiri is used for communication by children belonging to *watali* community even when interacting within community at school.

Following table shows the linguistic situation of schools in *watali* community:

Name of the School	Medium of Education	Medium of Instruction	No. of <i>shuplr</i> children enrolled
1.Govt. Primary school for Boys and girls (Tujgari mohalla)	English	Kashmiri	6
2.Govt. Middle school for Boys and Girls (Beedi Sahib)	English	Kashmiri	4
3.Govt.High school for Girls (Nowhatta)	English	Kashmiri	7

At Health Centers

There are no health centers in the locality itself but, there is a government hospital in close vicinity of the Tujgari Mohalla. *Sheikha Gal* is not spoken by anyone other than the people belonging to the community thus it is used within the community only. The use of language at health centers depends up on the mother tongue of the doctor. However, in government hospitals Kashmiri is the dominant code and the second dominant code is Urdu.

At Public Meetings

When the public meetings are meant for smaller units such as community meetings, the mother tongue of the community i.e.

Sheikha Gal is used. At larger public meetings where more than one linguistic group is involved, Kashmiri is used as dominant code with little code-switching and code-mixing with Urdu. When some political party comes to visit the location the language used is always Kashmiri.

At Shops and Markets

There are two grocery shops located in Tujgari Mohalla and the language used by shopkeeper depends up on the language used by customer. If both the customer and shopkeeper belong to same linguistic group, the language used for interaction is mother tongue, but if the linguistic group they belong to is different the language used is Kashmiri. There are no restaurants

in the locality and the people belonging *watli* community usually do not visit restaurants and hotels because of their poor income and even if they visit the language used is Kashmiri which is mother tongue of the majority of the people working in restaurants.

At Religious Places

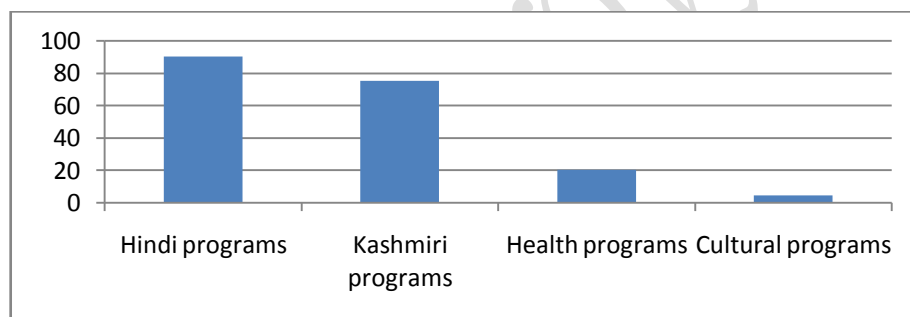
All people belonging to *watali* community are Muslims. In mosque the language used is Kashmiri because the mother tongue of the *Imaam* (religious head) is Kashmiri.

Exposure to Media

Majority of the people in community watch Hindi films. It was reported that no

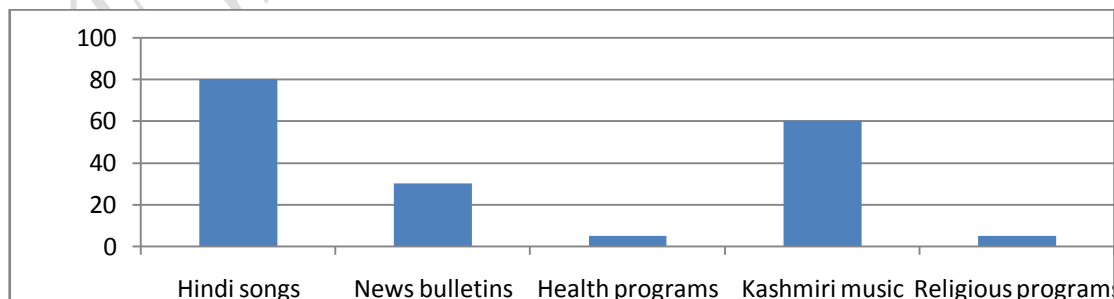
one in community watches movies in other languages. Programs are available to them mainly in Hindi, Kashmiri and English. Majority of people watch movies, sports and serials. It is observed that they watch local, national and satellite channels programs in the following priority wise order.

- Hindi films – 90%
- Hindi songs and other related programs – 90%
- Kashmiri programs – 75%
- Health programs – 20%
- Cultural programs – 15%



Most of the people listen to radio programs in Kashmiri and Hindi and almost all the households have radio sets. Moreover it is observed that the inhabitants prefer following programs to list

- Hindi songs – 80%
- News bulletins (in Hindi and Urdu)– 30%
- Health programs(in Hindi and Urdu) – 05%
- Kashmiri music – 60%
- Religious programs (Urdu) – 05%



In Writing

Most of the people belonging to *watali* community are illiterate. The personal letter correspondence is maintained in Urdu. Percentage of people reading newspapers and magazines is negligible. Reading newspaper is a symbol of prestige.

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