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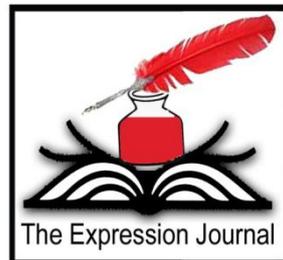
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MINORITY LINGUISTIC GROUPS AND LANGUAGE PREFERENCES: A STUDY OF LANGUAGE PREFERENCES IN MEDIA AMONG YOUNG BURSHOS AND PAKHTOONS IN KASHMIR

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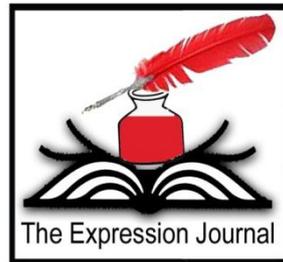
Abstract

Kashmir valley is home to a number of minority language groups. The groups which are the subjects of this paper are the Burshos and Pakhtoons. Burshos and Pakhtoons exist as well-knit communities in the Kashmir valley, and speak Burushaski and Pashto respectively, where the overwhelming part of the population speaks Kashmiri. The present paper aims to analyse the relation between language identity and choice of language use in media, in situations where a minority linguistic community is in the midst of a majority linguistic community. This study, apart from dwelling on the preferences of each community, also attempts to compare the communities. The intended purpose of the study is to draw an picture of how these immigrant minority linguistic groups prioritize their language choice and preferences in the domain of media, ensuring the sustenance and longevity of their language and culture while overcoming the odds and inevitable changes with time.

Keywords

Language Identity, Language and Media, Immigrants, Language Attitudes, etc.

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Introduction

Maintenance of a language is determined by many factors such as degree of ethno linguistic vitality, status, and demographic strength of an ethno-linguistic minority community. The tendency of a community to either hold on to its culture and language, or to adopt another one, depends on a number of factors which can be political, social, economic etc. In a multilingual situation, minority communities are often tempted to use media of the language of majority for many reasons. According to Fishman (2001), "the overall effect of media tends rather to undermine than support minority identity as mainstream media accelerate language shift and assimilation of minority communities" (473-474). Others like Busch 2001 and Cormack 2007 have also supported this view. According to Moring (2007), "Choice of media is conditioned by the *objective institutional* factor of existing supply over a full range of media platforms. Only then the *subjective status-related factor* of choice, relating to social identity gratification, and meeting the strict preference condition may emerge"(283-301). Different types of media play an important role in enhancing certain aspects of language and culture. The language choice with respect to media depends on the extent to which people within a group are actually inclined towards the 'media supply' that is produced for them in their language or for their community. Other factors that affect language choice across different age groups in this regard are:

1. Availability of different types of media such as radio, television, and print media.
2. Availability of formats such as information, cultural programmes, news and entertainment.

This paper attempts to look at different contexts that might give an idea about particular language choice in terms of media in culturally contested situations. This study is restricted to immigrant communities with presence in the region and access to locally produced as well as cross border media.

Migrants in J & K

Migration is generally a movement of people from their origin of place to another place for the purpose of settling down either permanently or temporarily. The nature of migration is broadly classified in terms of type of choice (voluntary or involuntary) or geographical territory (international or internal), rural to rural, rural to urban, urban to urban etc. Involuntary or voluntary forced migration is caused due to a variety of reasons related to poverty, manmade or environmental disasters that pose or have caused a severe threat to life, and do not allow the individual/individuals to remain at the place of residence any longer, leaving no other option but to leave. There is a large number of Pashto speaking Pakhtoons living in the state of Jammu & Kashmir. Although their exact numbers are hard to determine, it is estimated that there are more than 100,000 Pakhtoons living in present day Kashmir. Pakhtoons in Kashmir are also called Kashmiri Pathans. It is believed that the community migrated from Pakistan and Afghanistan and settled in the state of Jammu and Kashmir region of South Asia. They claim Pakhtoon ancestry through their forefathers who migrated to the region under the Afghan rule in Kashmir. Interestingly, these people although a minority have still retained their Pashto culture and ethnicity. However, many of these Pathans have over time also absorbed a part of Kashmiri culture and language.

Another immigrant community the Burshos have migrated from the mountainous regions Hunza and Nagar (Gilgit) which these days falls in the area of Kashmir under Pakistan. The geographical focus of the Bursho homeland extends from 36° 00' to 37° 10' N and from 74°10' to 75°40' E . They consider themselves as the decedents of Raja Azur Jamshed Khan of Gilgit. The reason behind his migration from Gilgit (presently under Pakistan) to Kashmir (presently the Indian part) is because of some conspiracy which took place in Gilgit against him due to which the Raja, along with his courtiers and attendants migrated and settled in Kashmir. It is said that he was imprisoned in the fort of Hari Parbat for many years. Raja Azur Jamshed Khan along with his group became free when Kashmir was overtaken by the Dogra rulers. Maharaja Pratap Singh allotted him 55 kanals of land in Rainawari, and that particular area was named as 'Bangla' which is nowadays called Botraj colony. The Burshos speak Burushaski which is also called Brushaski, Burucaski, Burushaki, Burucaki, Burushki, Biltum, Khajuna, and Kunjut (*Ethnologue*, 2005).

Media as an Institution in Relation to Minority Languages

The functionality of media in relation to minority languages can be best described by Cormack's criteria for development of minority language through media. According to Cormack (1998: 39-43) there are seven criteria for minority language media to develop in society. These seven criteria are further organized into six clusters

- (1) The number of people using the language must be big enough for media supply to evolve.
- (2) A subjective aspect of the demographic base must occur in the form of wide support for media in the minority language.
- (3) Objective institutional factors must be in place, and adequate; the power of region's strength in relation to the government also plays a role.
- (4) Subjective institutional conditions must be met; the political culture in the host-state plays a role for how things evolve.
- (5) Objective status factors, such as international trends (for example, when a minority language is brought up on the international political agenda and these issues also get more national attention) also have an impact.
- (6) Subjective status factors, such as the symbolic status of the minority language are important.

Methodology:

The data for the paper was collected from the two immigrant communities of Burushaski and Pashto, settled in Kashmir. Burushaski is spoken by Bursho community in Srinagar and Pashto is spoken by Pakhtoons in Gultlibagh (Gandarbal) and Wantrag (Anantnag) district. The data for the study was elicited from a set of 30 informants for each group, speaking Pashto and Burushaski (young males and females) belonging to different socio-economic groups. The data was collected through structured questionnaires, and a series of interviews where open ended questions were asked. The queries focused on studying the language of media use and the impact of some background variables on language choice.

Analysis:

The data collected from the two communities was subjected to analysis. The preferences of these communities were then compared to understand as to how the two immigrant communities differed from or resembled each other.

Case 1. Media Use among Young Males and Females in Bursho Community

Burushaski language is spoken by the Bursho community in the valley of Kashmir. The community is settled in the vicinity of Rainawari area of Srinagar. The immigrant community has succeeded in maintaining a separate identity, both social and linguistic, since their migration. The community has lived in Srinagar for over a century. It appears that the Burushos have withstood the pressures of linguistic assimilation and successfully overcome the danger of language loss. Most of the Burushaski speakers are also familiar with Kashmiri, English, Persian and Balti. From an educational perspective, Urdu is being taught up to 10th standard and English is the medium of instruction of both government as well as private schools. Kashmiri, apart from being taught as an optional language in schools is usually acquired by interacting with the surrounding Kashmiri community. Balti and Persian is mostly spoken by the old generation in the community with a little or no speakers found among the young adolescents. The script used for writing Burushaski and Balti is *khat i nastalik* script which is the script used to write Urdu, so the Burshos find it easy to use, considering their Urdu schooling. Persian is only used for reading and writing purposes, and is not spoken. English, Kashmiri and Urdu is spoken, read and written using different scripts. (Usman, 2016).

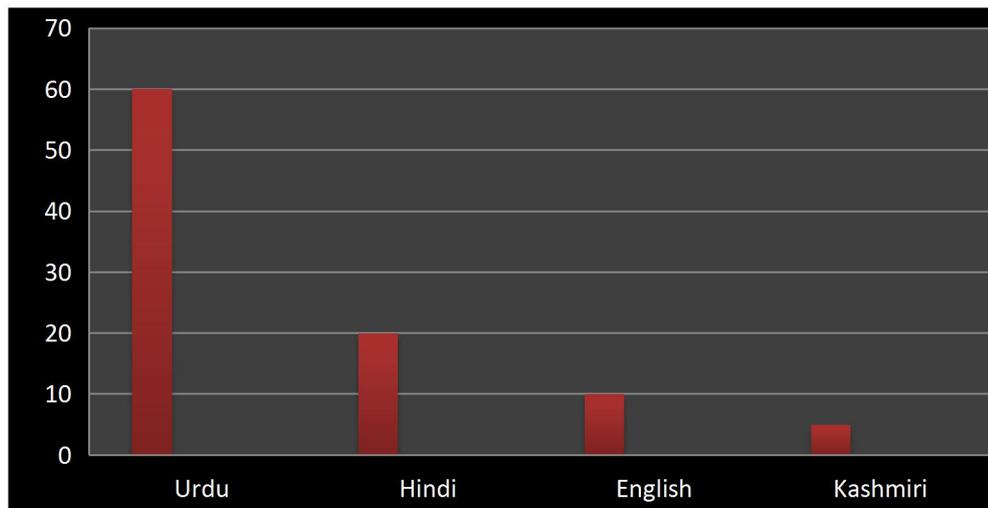


Fig 1. Language choice for media by young Burshos

From the figure above, it is observed that the majority of the young Burshos prefer to watch programmes which are broadcasted in Urdu and Hindi. Television serials and news broadcasts in other languages such as Kashmiri and English are also available but young members of the community prefer to watch the programs which are broadcasted in Urdu language followed by the Hindi language programs. Kashmiri has the least viewership among the young age group in the community. Burshos are observed to listen to radio programs in Urdu. There are no programs available in *Burushaski* language. Majority of the educated people reported that they listen to Urdu and English news along with Pakistan broadcast, which is mostly in Urdu language. In this setting Urdu is seen to dominate Kashmiri, which is otherwise the language of majority when it comes to choice of media language by young Bursho population. The major factor affecting the choice of media language seems to be the language inculcated in schools, rather than the environment (other than school). Most Bursho families in Kashmir send their children to local English medium schools. In these schools officially the medium of instruction is English whereas Urdu is the main language in which education is imparted. Language of communication in schools among Bursho children is also Urdu. Even though Kashmiri is the dominant language in their environment, it is seen to be the last choice when it comes to language choice of media.

The above findings highlight two main things. First, the school language is a strong predictor of linguistic identity among young Burshos. Second, minority groups through their media language choice, in some cases, strive to differentiate themselves from the the majority community. The media behaviour would thus partly be related to their identity.

In this case inadequate objective institutional factors and unfavourable subjective institutional conditions are responsible for the absence of *Burushaski* in media. With the complete absence of broadcasts in their mother tongue, the community has no choice but to use Urdu as a dominant language in this domain to differentiate themselves from the majority.

Case 2. Media Use among Young Males and Females in Pashto Community

Pashto is the mother tongue of the Pakhtoons living in the state of Jammu and Kashmir. As a minority linguistic community Pakhtoons have been living in Jammu and Kashmir from past 150 years and have been successful somehow in settling as groups in various districts of Kashmir valley. In spite of being a minority community, Pakhtoons have maintained their language and culture and have kept themselves distinct from the mainstream society. Pashto is the identity of the Pakhtoons which separates them from other people and makes them ethnically different as language reflects the thoughts, ethnic background and other cultural features of a society. Pashto is written in Persio-Arabic script. It belongs to the Iranian branch of the indo-European family of languages. Its closest major relatives are Persian, Kurdish, Buluchi, Tajik and Ossetian, and these languages are spoken in the area around Afghanistan.

Apart from Pashto, most of the Pakhtoons are also proficient in Urdu and Kashmiri. Thus, it can be said that Pashto community in Kashmir functions in three languages i.e. Pashto, Urdu and Kashmiri. All these languages are distributed across different domains. Some elderly Pakhtoon men are also familiar with Persian but are proficient only in two skills (understanding and reading). Educated Pakhtoons are also familiar with English, especially the youth, who show higher proficiency in all four basic skills (reading, writing, speaking and understanding). Illiterate women know very little Urdu and Kashmiri. Most of the old females are proficient in only Pashto.

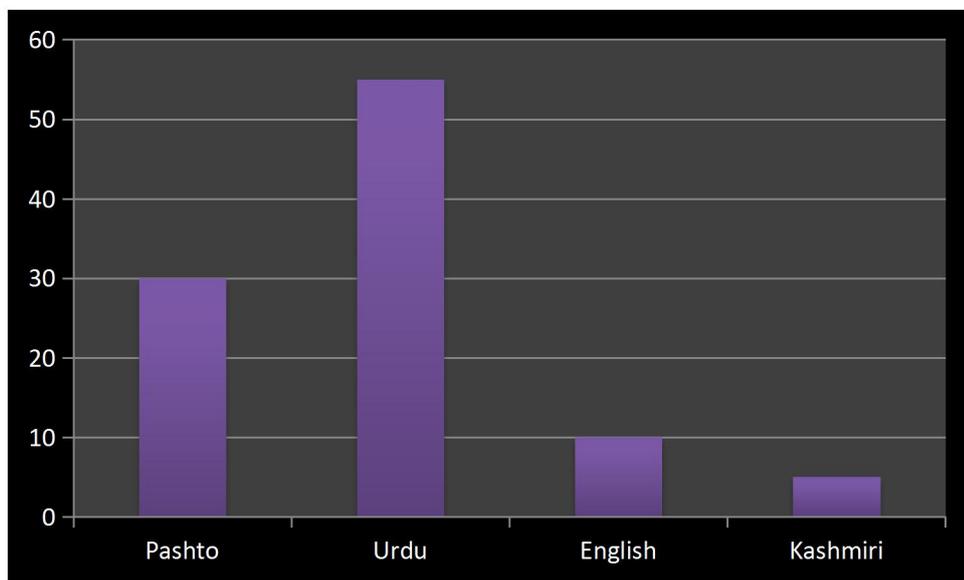


Fig 2. Language Choice for Media by Young Pakhtoons

The figure above shows the language choice in media by the young Pakhtoons. During the field survey it was observed that the normal mode of inter-Pakhtoon communication is through Pashto. However, there is a shift in language when they converse with Kashmiri speaking people, where they use Urdu or Kashmiri. In the case of language use, Kashmiri is given the last preference for

communication as compared to Urdu. After analysing the linguistic scenario in the Pashto communities, it was observed that Pashto is the language in which majority of the speakers feel most comfortable. But, Urdu seems to be gaining the status of 'comfortable' language for quite a number of speakers with frequent use and exposure to Urdu. As it has been seen during the field survey, these people are more comfortable in Urdu than in Kashmiri. With non-native speakers of Pashtu, their first preference is to talk in Urdu rather than in Kashmiri. All the informants feel most comfortable with Pashtu language rather than Urdu and Kashmiri. One reason behind this might be that most of the Pakhtoons are not well educated. Also, in order to maintain their language and identity, the Pakhtoons prefer to communicate in Pashtu language because they are very conscious about their identity. They have a high comfort level when using Pashtu which can be the reason that Pashtu is used in the personal domain.

Urdu is being taught in schools, it's the medium of instruction, as well as communication. It is also acquired from media, especially by females who are illiterate and interact less as they have a lesser social mobility. Although both Kashmiri and English are part of the language curriculum, Kashmiri is learned from the neighbouring environment and English usually from school. It was also observed that the proficiency of Urdu is greater than that of English. The popularity of Urdu is also due to the fact that it is the language in which most of the Islamic literature is available to the Pakhtoons, after Arabic (which for them is incomprehensible). Also like Urdu, Pashto is written in Persio-Arabic script.

Urdu forms the language of mass media notably television and radio programs due to the limited availability of Pashto in mass media. Young Pakhtoons also prefer to watch T.V programs telecasted in Urdu, and same goes for the radio where programs in Kashmiri, Urdu, Dogri, Gojri, etc are broadcasted, Pakhtoons prefer to listen to Urdu programs and news only over Kashmiri. They prefer Urdu over Kashmiri for reading newspapers. However, only a few literate young Pakhtoons prefers reading English newspapers and watching English news.

A large majority of Pakhtoons claimed to watch T.V Programmes in Pashto language which are telecasted on AT.V Khyber, Shamshaad T.V etc, from Peshawar, Pakistan. They also listen to various radio channels like Diva radio, VOA (Voice of America) broadcasted from America. There is no Pashto program broadcasted or telecasted from Jammu and Kashmir. "Nawe kor nawe jaund" (New home, New life) is one of the popular drama series among Pakhtoons, aired from radio Pakistan.

Even though Pashto programs are broadcasted on radio and television, the language is entirely absent from newspapers and journals etc. Kashmiri even though being the dominant language is not seen as a preferred choice for media domain. The use of Kashmiri is restricted to certain domains of formal and informal settings where using Kashmiri is inevitable. But given a choice Pakhtoons always prefer Pashto followed by Urdu, over Kashmiri, in order to maintain a separate ethnicity and identity.

It was also observed that younger males and females are fond of watching and listening to Pashto songs, videos, movies; etc on social media (YouTube,

Facebook, Tiktok, and Instagram). This helps them to remain in touch with their culture and maintain their identity.

Conclusion

The language media choice for the minority groups (Bursho and Pakhtoons) determines their attitude towards the dominant language i.e. Kashmiri and their affiliation towards it. There appears to be similarity in the media preferences of the two communities with Kashmiri, even though being the language of majority, failing to dominate the domain of language use in mass media among Burshos and Pakhtoons. In this setting, Urdu is observed to dominate Kashmiri. The above findings highlight two main results. First, the school language is a strong predictor of linguistic identity among young minorities. Secondly, minority groups through their media language choice strive to differentiate themselves from the rest of the majority community notwithstanding the linguistic assimilation and somehow preventing the threat of language loss. The media behaviour would thus partly be related to their display of identity. It is evident that these two linguistic minority groups have maintained their language and the influence of mainstream society is negligible as their sociolinguistic identity is quite distinct from the mainstream society.

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