

The Emerging Picture: A Study of Language Preferences in Kashmiri Youth

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Abstract

Kashmir valley is a multilingual area where languages belonging to different language families are found. Kashmiri forms the mother tongue of majority of population. Urdu serves as the second language followed by English. Both the languages occupy an important position in the linguistic setup of the valley. Given this linguistic scenario majority of Kashmiri youth are multilingual and use the languages for different purposes. The present paper is an attempt to study the language preferences and choices of Kashmiri youth in different domains.

Key Words: Language Preference, Language Choice, Maintenance, Shift, Mother Tongue.

Introduction

Kashmir forms one of the important provinces of the Jammu and Kashmir state. It is a multilingual area where many languages are spoken. Being the mother tongue of majority of population, Kashmiri enjoys the dominant position in the valley. Urdu serves as the second language followed by English. Urdu also enjoys the status of official language in Jammu and Kashmir state. It is the dominant language of mass media in Kashmir valley and plays the role of a lingua franca in Jammu and Kashmir state.

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Given its dominant and prestigious position at the global level, English occupies an important position in the linguistic make up of Kashmir valley. It serves as the medium of instruction in government as well as private schools. It follows Urdu as the dominant language of mass media. Hindi also forms an important component of the educational setup of the state.

Owing to this linguistic scenario majority of Kashmiri youth are multilingual and frequently use the languages at their disposal for a host of purposes. In this backdrop the present paper aims to study the language preferences and choices of Kashmiri youth in different domains.

Methodology

The data for the present study was elicited through a sociolinguistic questionnaire. A questionnaire was designed keeping in mind the nature of the study. It was circulated among the informants to elicit the data. A sample of 100 informants, falling within the age group of 20-30, was selected for the study. It covered informants belonging to both the genders and of rural and urban backgrounds. The data information is based on the responses of the selected sample of informants. The statistical data presented in the study is essentially indicative in nature.

Statistical analysis was done in two steps: -

- The data was codified, tabulated and quantified for every informant.
- After codification, tabulation and quantification, the data was fed into an Excel worksheet (MS Office 2007). Microsoft Office Excel 2007 was used to obtain the mean scores, Standard Deviation and Pearson's Correlation Coefficients.

As mentioned above, the aim of this paper is to evaluate the different features of the language use of Kashmiri youth community in Kashmir

valley. In this regard many variables were taken and analyzed quantitatively, which are discussed below in detail:

The list of variables along with their range, mean and standard deviation (SD) is given as under:

V.No.	Variable	Range	Mean	SD
1	Gender	Running	-	-
2	Educational Qualification	2 Point Scale	1.675	0.474
3	Age	Running	-	-
4	First Language Acquired	3 Point Scale	1.30	0.464
5	Language preference of mother tongue	3 Point Scale	1.075	0.266
6	Mother tongue acquired at	3 Point Scale	1.45	1.084
7	Knowledge of Kashmiri	4 Point Scale	2.377	0.629
8	Knowledge of Urdu	4 Point Scale	3.07	0.47
9	Knowledge of English	4 Point Scale	3.217	0.414
10	Kashmiri acquired at	3 Point Scale	1.125	0.404
11	Urdu acquired at	3 Point Scale	1.95	0.932
12	English acquired at	3 Point Scale	2.475	0.816
13	Language used with Grandparents	7 Point Scale	1.3	0.911
14	Language used with Parents	7 Point Scale	1.675	1.268
15	Language used with Spouse	7 Point	2.125	2.11

		Scale		
16	Language used with Brother/Sister	7 Point Scale	3.25	2.519
17	Language used with Children	7 Point Scale	2.825	2.217
18	Language used with Neighbours	7 Point Scale	1.75	1.48
19	Language used with Servants	7 Point Scale	1.45	1.084
20	Language used with Friends	7 Point Scale	3.85	2.142
21	Language used in the Market	7 Point Scale	2.75	1.480
22	Language used with Strangers	7 Point Scale	2.55	1.767
23	Language used with Community Members	7 Point Scale	2.725	2.342
24	Language used in Community Gatherings	7 Point Scale	2.75	2.157
25	Language used in Prayer (Mind)	7 Point Scale	1.6	1.215
26	Language used in Prayer (Song)	7 Point Scale	1.6	1.392
27	Language used when you are Emotional (Home)	7 Point Scale	2.875	2.322
28	Language used when you are Emotional (Away from Home)	7 Point Scale	2.7	2.197
29	When away from Home, the language used with Grandparents	7 Point Scale	1.45	1.084
30	----- Parents	7 Point Scale	1.45	1.084
31	----- Brother/Sister	7 Point Scale	3.25	2.391
32	----- Spouse	7 Point Scale	2.22	2.12

33	----- Children	7 Point Scale	2.625	2.00
34	----- Friends	7 Point Scale	4.10	2.273
35	Newspapers/Magazines available in your language	7 Point Scale	1.25	0.808
36	Language used in reading Newspaper	7 Point Scale	3.1	1.645
37	Language used in reading Magazine	7 Point Scale	1.80	1.453
38	Language used in reading Novel/Short Story	7 Point Scale	1.80	1.636
39	Language of Dream	7 Point Scale	1.15	0.533
40	Language used in Listening News	7 Point Scale	6.675	0.888
41	Language used in Listening Songs	7 Point Scale	5.4	1.691
42	Language used in Listening Drama	7 Point Scale	4.2	1.417

Analysis

A detailed study of all these variables was conducted among the informants. The different variables were then correlated to get a very clear picture about the language preferences in Kashmiri youth. The detailed analysis of different variables is as follows:

Languages Acquired at (VS. 10-12)

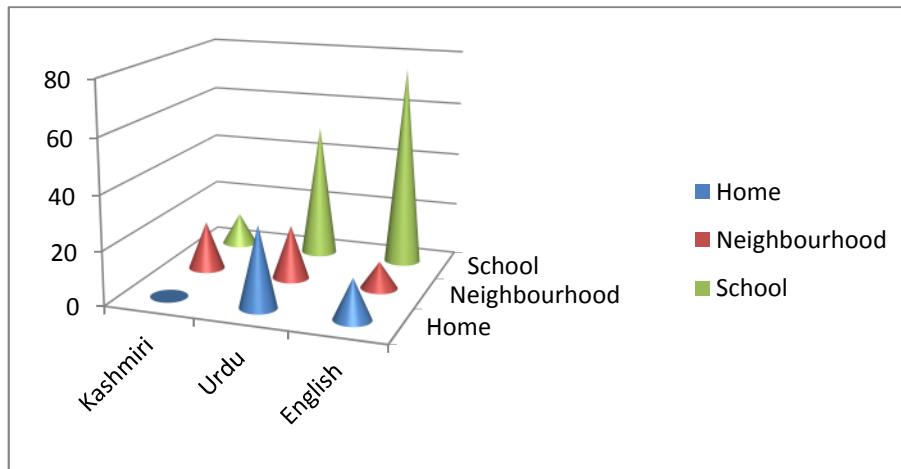


Fig.2: Kashmiri, Urdu and English Acquired at different domains

From the figure 2, it is clear that in both the genders i.e. males and females, around 70 % informants have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri from home domain. Around 18 % informants have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri from neighbourhood and 12 percent have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri from the school domain. In case of Urdu (which is the official language of Jammu and Kashmir state and is considered as the lingua franca of the state), around 50 percent respondents have claimed that they have acquired Urdu from school domain, 30% have claimed that they have acquired Urdu from home domain while as 20% have claimed that they have acquired Urdu from neighbourhood. The reason behind this might be that Urdu has become the lingua franca in the valley and a good percentage of youth is more comfortable with Urdu as compared to Kashmiri because of their family influence as well as their mobility to other places. In case of English more than 70 % have claimed that they have acquired English language from school. Around 15% have claimed that they have acquired English language from home domain, which is because of the exposure of their families to this language and around 10 % have claimed that they have acquired it from neighbourhood.

Kashmiri Acquired in (V.10)

	V.1	V.4	V.7	V.8	V.9
V.10	.203**	.204***	-.018**	.114***	.089***

V.11	V.25	V.35	V.39	V.40	V.41	V.42
.074**	.156**	-.098**	.267**	-.098**	.074***	-.223**

Table 1.1: Significant Correlations of V.10

V.10 i.e. Kashmiri acquired in correlates significantly positively with V.1 i.e. 'Gender' ($r=.203$), V.8 i.e. 'Knowledge of Urdu' ($r=.114$), V.9 i.e. 'Knowledge of English' ($r=.089$), V.11 i.e. 'Urdu acquired at' ($r=.074$), V.25 i.e. 'Language used in Prayers' ($r=.156$), V.39 i.e. 'Language of Dreams' ($r=.267$), and V.41 i.e. 'Language used in listening Songs' ($r=.074$). These positive correlations indicate that among both genders most of the males have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri in home domain as compared to females. It is also clear from these positive significant correlations that those who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain have less knowledge of Urdu and English as compared to those who have acquired Kashmiri from neighbourhood as well as school domain. The correlation i.e. V.25 'Language used in Prayers' indicates that those representatives who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain, language used in prayers is Kashmiri while as those who have acquired Kashmiri outside home domain, language used in prayers are Kashmiri, Urdu, English. Same is the case with the language of dreams. It means that those who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain, their language of dreams is Kashmiri and those who have acquired Kashmiri outside home domain, their language of dreams is Kashmiri as well as rest of the two languages. They also listen to songs from different languages such as Kashmiri, Urdu and English.

So, from the above positive significant correlations, it becomes clear that informants who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain have less

exposure towards Urdu and English as compared to Kashmiri, because they use Kashmiri for maximum duration and have much more fluency in Kashmiri as compared to the other two languages i.e. Urdu and English.

V.10 i.e. Kashmiri acquired at correlates negatively with **V.7** i.e. ‘Knowledge of Kashmiri’ ($r=-.018$), **V.35** i.e. ‘Newspapers/Magazines available in your Language’($r=-.098$), **V.40** i.e. ‘Language used in listening News’ ($r=-.098$) and **V.42** i.e. ‘Language used in listening Drama’ ($r=-.223$). These negative correlations indicate that those who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain, they have good exposure towards Kashmiri as compared to those who have acquired Kashmiri outside home domain. One interesting thing was found that those who have acquired Kashmiri in home domain, they don’t know that magazines or newspapers are published in their mother tongue while as those who have acquired Kashmiri outside home domain, they have the knowledge that newspapers/magazines are published in their language. Also for listening to news and drama, the other two other languages i.e. English and Urdu are mostly used.

Urdu Acquired in (V.11)

	V.1	V.2	V.5	V.6	V.7	V.8	V.9
V.11	- .321**	- .211**	-.118**	-.288**	.203**	- .376**	-.123**

V.10	V.12	V.13(a)	V.18	V.19	V.20	V.21	V.22
- .255**	.268**	-.327**	-.183**	-.253**	.304**	.383**	.117**

V.23	V.25(a)	V.27(a)	V.29(a)	V.36(a)	V.39	V.40(a)
.275**	.298**	-.427**	-.302**	-.256**	-.342**	-.426**

V.11 i.e. Urdu acquired at correlates significantly positively with V.7 i.e. 'Knowledge of Kashmiri' ($r=.203$), V.12 i.e. 'English acquired at' ($r=.268$), V.20 i.e. 'Language used with friends' ($r=.304$), V.21 i.e. 'Language used in the market' ($r=.383$), V.22 i.e. 'Language used with strangers' ($r=.117$), V.23 i.e. 'Language used with community members' i.e. ($r=.275$) and V.25(a) i.e. 'Language used in prayers'. These positive correlations indicate that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain also claim that they have acquired Kashmiri language in home domain as well. Same is the case with English. These correlations also portray that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain use Urdu with friends and those who have acquired Urdu outside the home domain, i.e., from educational institution and environment, use Urdu as well as Kashmiri and English with their friends. Same is the case with language used in the market and language used with strangers. Also it is clear from these correlations that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain their main language of communication with community members is Urdu and language of prayers is mostly Urdu. Those who have acquired Urdu away from the home domain, i.e., from institution and environment, use Kashmiri, Urdu, English and Kashmiri with Urdu and English with the community members. Same is the case with language of prayers.

So, from the above positive significant correlations, it becomes clear that the informants who have acquired Urdu in home domain, they lack the exposure of Kashmiri although they consider it their mother tongue and those who have acquired Urdu outside home domain, and they have good exposure of Kashmiri as well as Urdu.

V.11 i.e. Urdu acquired at correlates negatively with V.1 i.e. 'Gender' ($r=-.321$), V.2 i.e. 'Educational qualification' ($r=-.211$), V.5 i.e. 'Language preference of mother tongue' ($r=-.118^{**}$), V.6 i.e. 'Mother tongue acquired at' ($r=-.288^{**}$), V.8 i.e. 'Knowledge of Urdu' ($r=-.376^{**}$), V.9 i.e. 'Knowledge of English' ($r=-.123^{**}$), V.10 i.e. 'Kashmiri acquired at' ($r=-.255$). These negative correlations indicate that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain are mostly females and those who have acquired Urdu outside home domain are males. These correlations also give the clear picture that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain are

having higher educational qualification and those who have acquired Urdu outside home domain are having less educational qualification. These negative correlations also indicate that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain, they have acquired the mother tongue outside home domain i.e. from environment and institution and for them, the language preference of mother tongue is both Urdu and Kashmiri and those who have acquired Urdu outside home domain, their language preference of mother tongue is Kashmiri only. Also those who have acquired Urdu in home domain are having good exposure towards Urdu and English and they claim that they have acquired Kashmiri outside the home domain.

V.11 i.e. Urdu acquired at correlates negatively with V.13(a) i.e. 'Language used with family members' ($r=-.327^{**}$), V.18 i.e. 'Language used with neighbours' ($r=-.183^{**}$), V.19 i.e. 'Language used with servants' ($r=-.253^{**}$), V.27(a) i.e. 'Language used when you are emotional' ($r=-.427^{**}$), V.29(a) i.e. (when you are away from home, the language used with family members' ($r=-.302^{**}$). These negative correlations indicate that those who have acquired Urdu outside their home domain, they use Kashmiri with family members and same is the case with language used with neighbours and servants. Those who have acquired Urdu at home domain, language used with them is Kashmiri, Urdu, English and Kashmiri with both the two languages. These negative correlations also portray that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain, language used when one is emotional is both Kashmiri, Urdu, English and Kashmiri with both of them and for those who have acquired Urdu outside home domain, language used when emotional is Kashmiri only.

V.11 i.e. Urdu acquired at correlates negatively with V.36(a) i.e. 'Language used in reading newspapers' ($r=-.256^{**}$), and V.40(a) i.e. 'Language used in Listening' ($r=-.426^{**}$). These negative correlations indicate that those who have acquired Urdu in home domain, the language used is both Urdu and English for reading newspapers. Besides languages used in listening are Kashmiri, Urdu and English as well.

English Acquired at (V.12):

	V.1	V.2	V.5	V.6	V.7	V.8
V.12	-.201**	-.319**	-.317**	.371**	.263**	-.276**

V.10	V.11	V.20	V.21	V.36(a)	V.40(a)
-.267**	.256**	-.362**	-.263**	-.326**	.426**

V.12 i.e. English acquired at correlates significantly positively with V.6 i.e. 'Mother acquired at' ($r=.371$), V.7 i.e. 'Knowledge of Kashmiri' ($r=.263$), V.11 i.e. 'Urdu acquired at' ($r=.256$), These positive correlations indicate that some representatives claim that those who have acquired English in home domain also have acquired the mother tongue from home domain. Also these correlations show that Urdu is acquired from the same domain for those who have acquired English from home domain. They also have good exposure of Kashmiri.

V.12 i.e. 'English Acquired at' negatively correlates with V.1 i.e. 'Gender' ($r=-.201$), V.2 i.e. 'Educational qualification' ($r=-.319$), V.5 i.e. 'Language preference of mother tongue' ($r=-.317$), V.8 i.e. 'Knowledge of Urdu' ($r=-.276$), V.10 i.e. 'Kashmiri acquired at' ($r=-.276$), V.20 i.e. 'Language used with friends' ($r=.362$), V.21 i.e. 'Language used in the market' ($r=.263$), V.36(a) i.e. 'Language used for reading newspapers' ($r=-.326$) and V.40(a) i.e. 'Language used in Listening' ($r=.426$). These negative correlations indicate that few females claim that they have acquired English in home domain. Rest of the females and all males claim that they acquired English outside the home domain and those who claim that they have acquired English in home domain, their educational qualification is high as compared to those who claim that they have acquired English outside the home domain. These negative correlations also indicate that those who have acquired English in home domain, they have also good knowledge of Urdu as well. For them, the preference of mother tongue is Kashmiri, Urdu and English. Similarly, those who have acquired English outside the home domain, for them the preference of mother tongue is only Kashmiri and also these representatives claim that they have acquired

Kashmiri language in home domain. These negative correlations give the clear picture that those who have acquired English in home domain, the language they use with friends and in the market is Kashmiri, Urdu and English as well and those who have acquired it outside the home domain, language used with friends and in the market is mostly Kashmiri. Also these negative correlations indicate that language used in reading newspapers is mostly English followed by Urdu. These negative correlations also show that language used in listening news is English, Urdu and to some extent Kashmiri.

So, the above correlations clearly indicate that English and Urdu are being given first priority as compared to Kashmiri because the representatives have claimed that English language is the global language and is most job providing language as compared to Kashmiri and Urdu.

Besides studying the correlations alongwith mean and standard deviation of the different variables, it seems pertinent to provide tabulated figures of the knowledge of Kashmiri, Urdu and English languages and their use in interpersonal communication, writing letters and reading newspapers.

Knowledge of Kashmiri, Urdu and English in terms of Four Skills

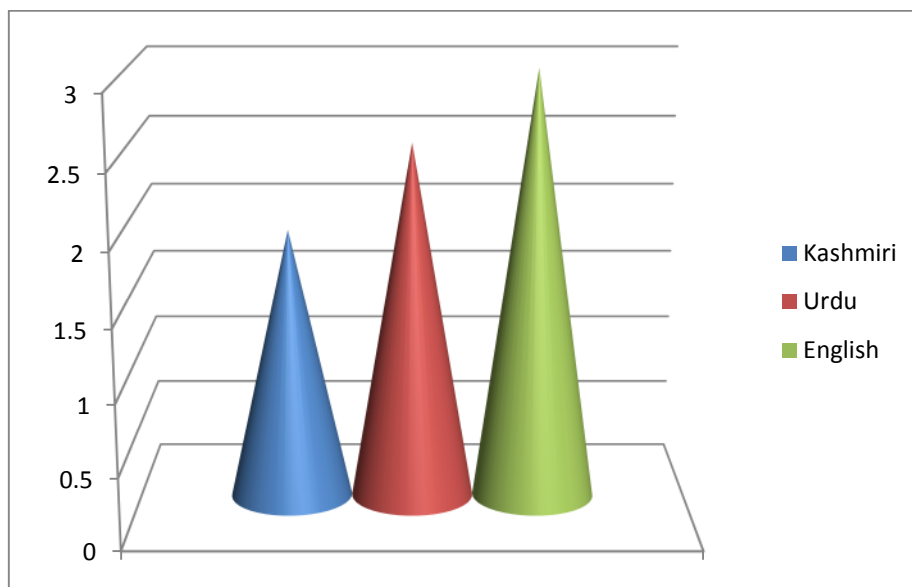


Fig.3: Mean Scores of Knowledge of Kashmiri, Urdu and English

From this figure, it is clear that informants claim that they have least proficiency in Kashmiri and maximum proficiency in English. Urdu comes in between Kashmiri and English. The reason behind this is that if we see in terms of four skills i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening, maximum informants have claimed that they are only fluent in two skills of their mother tongue(Kashmiri) i.e. speaking and listening. They don't have proficiency in the other two skills, i.e. reading and writing. One important reason might be that before 2003, Kashmiri was not taught in schools. English and Urdu seem closely related together and Kashmiri is quite below than Urdu and English. Here it becomes clear that youth is inclined towards English as compared to Urdu, the official language of the State, and Kashmiri, the mother tongue as well as the dominant language of the Kashmir Valley. It seems that the youth is aware of the fact that English is the gateway of jobs, which might be the reason that English is at higher level among the youth as compared to other two languages.

The knowledge of Kashmiri, Urdu and English visa-a-vis the four skills is tabulated below:

	Reading	Writing	listening	Speaking
Kashmiri	20	15	80	75
Urdu	75	67	95	87
English	95	83	75	65

Table 1: % use of Kashmiri, Urdu and English

The above table clearly shows that out of four components of proficiencies i.e. reading, writing, Speaking and listening in Kashmiri, two skills, i.e. reading and writing are low. Proficiency in terms of listening and speaking is still maintained by the Kashmiri youth. The reason behind this is that, in urban areas, most of the informants have claimed that they have been taught Urdu as first language than English and Kashmiri. Also females were found lagging behind the males in Kashmiri in terms of these skills.

From the table it can be observed that out of the four skills i.e. reading, writing, speaking and listening in Urdu, Urdu has quite high percentage in terms of all the skills as compared to Kashmiri. The reason being that Urdu is the official language of the state and it is a dominant language as far as

media in Kashmir is concerned. Urdu is mostly used both in print as well as the electronic media. Also in schools Urdu is taught from last so many decades. It was also the medium of instruction in government schools up to the year 2003 when English was made medium of the instruction. It is also quite interesting that in terms of Understanding, Urdu is most understood as compared to Kashmiri. During the field work it was observed that females gave first preference to Urdu in terms of communication as compared to males, mostly in urban areas. Some informants have also claimed that they are more comfortable with Urdu as compared to Kashmiri.

It emerges from the above table that out of the four skills in English, two skills i.e. reading and writing are much above than that of Urdu and Kashmiri. The reason behind this is that English is the medium of instruction in schools, colleges and at university level. English is found the most job oriented language in the whole state as well as the rest of the country. The preference for English is also due to its global status. In terms of other two skills i.e., listening and speaking, English has comparatively low scores in comparison to Kashmiri and Urdu. It is also clear from the above table that youth is not much fluent in English as compared to Urdu and Kashmiri. The reason might be that Urdu is the official language and major language of media and Kashmiri is the mother tongue of the informants.

Interpersonal Communication

The responses of the youth were also elicited about the languages they use in interpersonal communication, i.e., language used with shopkeepers, doctors, strangers, friends, family members etc. The responses of informants are tabulated below.

	Shopkeepers			Doctors			Strangers			Friends			Family Members		
	K	U	E	K	U	E	K	U	E	K	U	E	K	U	E

Males	65	30	5	55	35	10	47	32	21	70	22	8	80	15	5
Females	45	42	13	35	51	14	28	45	25	35	50	15	50	40	10

Fig: Language use (%) in inter-personal communication

From the table it becomes clear that with shopkeepers, Kashmiri is frequently used by males as compared to their female counterparts. Females use both Kashmiri as well as Urdu with the shopkeepers. In case of language used with doctors by males, Kashmiri is given the first preference, followed by Urdu and English, while as in the case of females, Urdu is being preferred as compared to Kashmiri and English. In the case of language used with strangers, among males, Kashmiri is given the first priority, it is followed by Urdu and English. But in the case of females, Urdu is being given the first priority, followed by Kashmiri and English. Similarly, in case of language used with friends by males, first preference is given to Kashmiri, then Urdu and English. While in the case of females, Urdu is mostly used as compared to Kashmiri and English. Finally, in case of language used with family members by males and females, foremost preference is given to Kashmiri, followed by Urdu. English is least used in talking to family members. So, here it can be said that language used in home domain is Kashmiri. Therefore, it becomes clear from the above discussion that females are shifting their mother tongue to other languages as compared to male counterparts.

Language Preferences in Writing

Here questions were asked about writing letters to family members and friends. The responses in this regard are provided below.

In case of writing letters to the family members, the below given table provides the responses of the informants.

	Kashmiri	Urdu	English
Male	4	17	79
Female	2	13	85

Table : % Writing use of Kashmiri, Urdu, and English.

As the table indicates English is the most widely used language here with 79% males using it to write letters to their family members. It is followed by Urdu which is used by 17% respondents. Kashmiri stands at the lowest position with only 4% males using it to write letters to their family members. In case of females, the same picture emerges where the figures for Kashmiri have decreased to a mere 2%. 13% females use Urdu while as vast majority of 85% females have reported that they use English for writing letters to their family members. In case of writing to friends the responses are presented in the below given table.

	Kashmiri	Urdu	English
Male	3	17	80
Female	Nil	11	89

Table : % use of Kashmiri, Urdu and English

Here, the picture becomes more dismal for Kashmiri because only 3% males use it to write to their friends while as no female respondent reported to use it in this domain. English is the leading language in both males and females with 80% males and 89% females using it to write to their friends.

The above results are in consonance with the responses got in case of knowledge of writing skill of the respondents where most of the respondents had indicated a very low knowledge as far as writing in Kashmiri is concerned

Language Preferences in Reading Newspaper

The respondents were asked a question in relation to the reading of newspaper. The responses got are given below.

	Kashmiri	Urdu	English
Male	0	40	60
Female	0	35	65

Table : % Reading use of Kashmiri, Urdu and English

As is clear from the table the respondents prefer English language in reading newspapers. 60% male and 65% female respondents reported that

they prefer reading English newspapers. It is followed by Urdu wherein 40% male and 35% female respondents reported reading Urdu newspapers. An interesting feature noted here is that more female respondents claim that they read English newspapers in comparison to the males.

Conclusion

The main objective of this study was to understand the language preferences in Kashmiri youth. In terms of language acquisition, most of the informants have acquired Kashmiri from home domain and some of them claim that their home language is Urdu. Urdu is being acquired in schools, home and environment and most of the informants have acquired English from school domain. It was also seen from the study that females are shifting from Kashmiri to Urdu and some of them claim that they have the Urdu as their mother tongue. In terms of the four skills, English is seen at the higher rank, followed by Urdu and Kashmiri respectively. The youth is of the belief that English is the global language and with good knowledge of English they can communicate with the rest of the world. They also regard it as the lingua franca of the world and the most job oriented language. In case of print media, Kashmiri youth gives first preference to English while as in electronic media, Urdu, followed by Kashmiri, is being given preference. Overall, it was found that outside the home domain, in terms of gender, females mostly shift from Kashmiri to Urdu and English as well.

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