

## Patterns of Language Use in Sheikhs of Kashmir Valley: A Study

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### Abstract

*The valley of Kashmir being ethno-linguistically an inordinately complex region has accommodated different language speakers in its overall linguistic stratification. Apart from major languages like Kashmiri, Dogri, Ladakhi etc there are a multitude of minority languages like Sheikhgal, Burushaski, Shina, and Balti etc. There is a lesser known language which is so far unexplored and understudied language of Sheikhs/ Watalis generally known as Sheikhgal. The community comprise a distinct identity in social ladder of the society and the popular profession associated with this community is scavenger or municipality jobs to clean roads. They address their language as [Opedigal] and [Phiri kathI]. It has speakers in all the main regions of Kashmir. In Srinagar they are concentrated in the areas like Parimpora, Nowhatta, Dargah, Natipora, Hawal etc. They are also found in Sopore (Baramulla), Lolaab, Lassipora (Pulwama), Kanthpora, Kulgam, Haihama, Magam, Handwara, Tarathpora (Kupwara). The linguistic repertoire of the people of the Sheikhgal speaking region mainly comprises of languages like Sheikhgal, Kashmiri and Urdu.*

*The objective of this paper is to study the patterns of language use with special reference to Sheikhgal;*

1. Across different domains
2. Across interlocutors in different domains
3. Across formal and informal contexts

**Keywords:** Sheikhgal, Opedigal, Linguistic repertoire, Language domains.

### 1. Introduction

Language is invariably, indeed necessarily, embedded in and given meaning by the situations in which it is used. All communities use language according to the situation of use and many communities go a step further and actually use different languages according to situation.

The sociolinguistic notion of domain was formalized by Joshua Fishman (1972), who stressed that different settings characteristically call for the use of different languages in a multilingual society ( or varieties of the same language in a monolingual society).

1) A domain of language involves typical interactions between typical participants in typical settings. Examples of these domains are family, education, workplace etc.

2) Domain as a technical term defines activity rather than place; it means the type of activity in which language is being used.

3) Domain is an extra-linguistic category. What are at issue are not categories of language but categories of discourse-situation: the situations in which language is used.

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4) Domain is the primary category for defining types of situation.

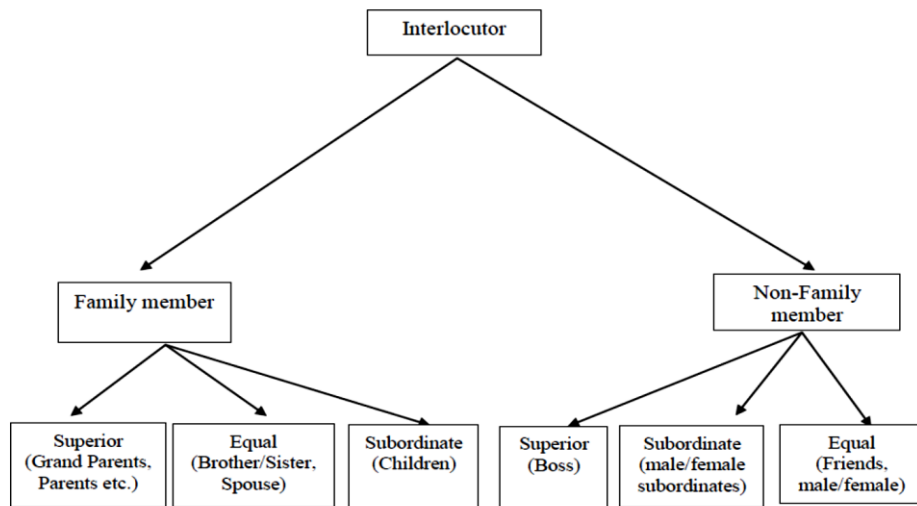
**2. Methodology**

The present study has been based on the data collected from 83 Sheikhgal speakers. The language respondents have been divided in social variables viz a) Age and b) Gender. The respondents have been taken from Fruit Mandi (Parimpora), Kathi Darwaza (Hawal) and Tujgari mohalla (Nowhatta) in Srinagar district. All the respondents are the native speakers of Sheikhgal.

The questionnaire has been the main tool employed for eliciting the sociolinguistic data from the Sheikhgal speech community. It consists of two sections. Each section has its own focus.

**Section I** focused on discovering the background information of the subjects such as age, gender, education level and occupation.

**Section 2** is aimed to obtain the data in terms of the language use in different domains: home, education, trade, work and, religion. It consists of 5 questions with subparts (Q1-a,b,c,d,e, Q2-a,b,c,d, Q3-a,b, Q4-a,b,c, Q5-a,b). Under each of the 5 main domains, there are sub domains determined by interlocutor, activities and setting.



The coding has been done as under:

<b>Sheikhgal</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Kashmiri</b>	<b>2</b>
<b>Urdu</b>	<b>3</b>

**Table 1.1: Scale for Patterns of Language Use**

After collecting the data for every respondent it has been codified, tabulated and quantified. SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) version 14 has been employed for the final analysis of the data.

**3. Analysis**

In this study language use of Sheikhgal, Kashmiri and Urdu in 5 domains i.e. family, education, market, workplace and mosque have been examined. These 5 domains have been determined by interlocutors, activities and settings as shown in table 1.2

Domains	Interlocutors	Activities	Settings
Family	Parents, spouse, children etc		
Education	Classmate and Teacher		In/out Classroom
Market	Sheikhgal/Non Sheikhgal speakers		
Workplace	Colleagues, Customers, Boss		
Mosque	Worshippers	Praying	

**Table 1.2: Domains of the Study**

In each domain there are sub domains with regard to interlocutors, activities and setting e.g. in the home domain, the interlocutors parents, spouse, children are listed as sub domains of the home domain.

**4.**

**5. Language Use in 5 Domains**

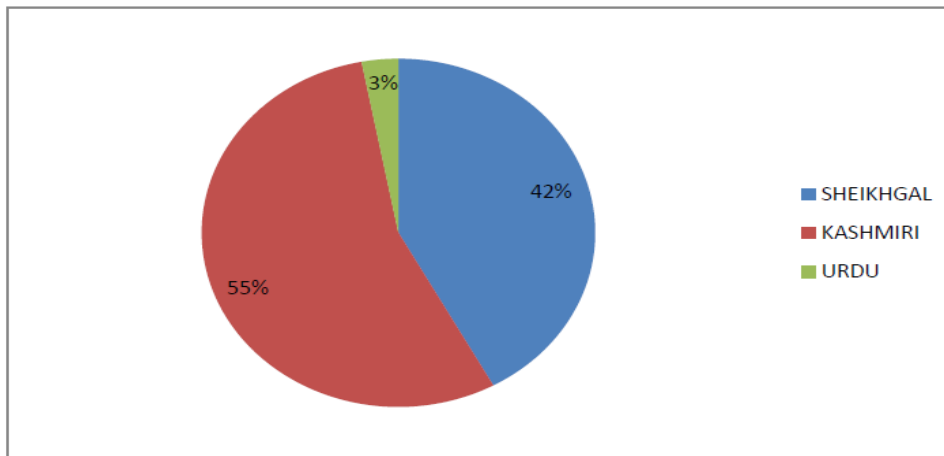
In the present study, 83 respondents have been interviewed for their language use in 5 domains i.e. family, education, market, workplace and mosque. Table 1.3 is the summary of language choice for each domain of communication. The columns marked Sheikh., Kash. and Urd. indicated that the respondents reported that they use Sheikhgal, Kashmiri and Urdu to communicate in the situation.

Q#	Question	n=	Sheikh	%	Kash.	%	Urd.	%
1.	What language do you speak at home?							
a	With grand parents?	63	58	92%	5	8%	0	
b	With spouse?	68	58	85%	10	15%	0	
c	With children?	65	45	69%	19	29%	1	2%
d	With father?	83	68	82%	15	18%	0	
e	With mother?	83	72	87%	11	13%	0	
2.	(If at school) what language do you speak at school?							
a	With teachers in the classroom?	22	0		15	68%	7	32%
b	With friends in the classroom?	22	0		16	73%	6	27%
c	With teachers outside the classroom?	22	0		20	91%	2	9%
d	With friends outside the classroom?	22	0		17	77%	5	23%
3.	What language do you speak at a market?	83	12	14%	71	86%	0	
a	With a Sheikhgal							

	speaker?							
b	With a non-Sheikhgal speaker?	83	0		83	100%	0	
4.	What language do you speak at your work place?							
a	Talking with your boss?	37	0		34	92%	3	8%
b	Talking with your customers?	5	0		5	100%	0	
C	Talking with your colleagues?	38	1	3%	37	97%	0	
5.	What language do you speak at a mosque?							
a	Praying to Allah?	83	35	42%	47	57%	1	1%
b	Talking with other worshippers?	83	10	12%	73	88%	0	
	<b>Total</b>	<b>862</b>	<b>359</b>	<b>42%</b>	<b>478</b>	<b>55%</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>3%</b>

**Table 1.3: A Summary of Language Choice**

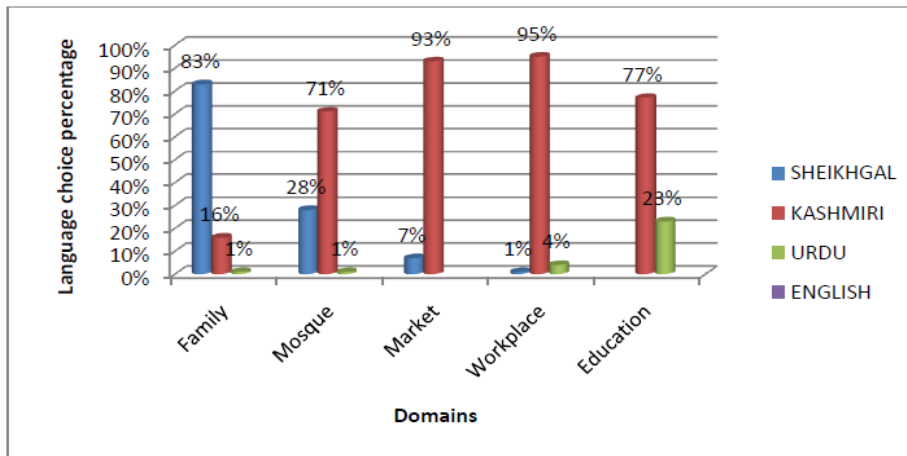
The table 1.3 shows that 42% (359 out of 862) of the total responses reported that they use Sheikhgal only in home (in-group) domain. The above table indicates that the community under study has shown more communicative tendencies towards Kashmiri language in comparison to Sheikhgal.



**Fig 1.1: Pie-Graph of Percentage of Language Choice in all Domains**

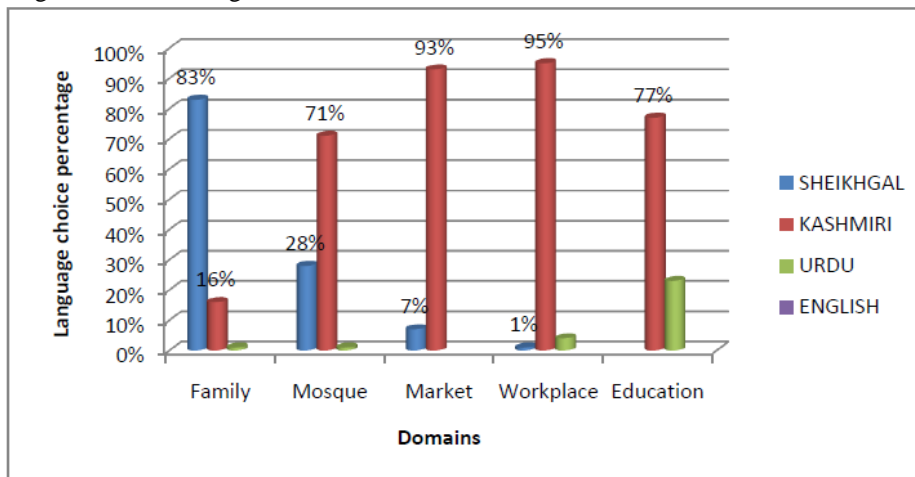
The pie-chart shows that Sheikhgal has low dominance in all the communicative domains. Among all 5 domains the choice of Sheikhgal is high in home domain. The use of Sheikhgal remains considerably low as compared to other languages spoken by the community as shown in the fig 1.1. The 5 domains and their corresponding questions are as following: family

(Question1 part a, b, c, d, e), education (Question2 part a, b, c, d) market (Question3 part a, b), workplace (Question4 part a, b, c), mosque (Question5 part a, b)



**Fig: 1.2: Language Use in 5 Domains**

The fig1.2 shows that the use of Sheikhgal can be categorized into three levels as above 80%-90%, 20%-30% and 0-10%. Based on these three levels the language use in 5 domains can be rearranged as shown in fig1.3



**Fig: 1.3: Use of Sheikhgal in 5 Domains**

In the home domain, over 80% of the respondents chose to use Sheikhgal in communication, while less than 30% of the respondents chose to use Sheikhgal in the mosque domain. In the market domain less than 10% of the respondents and in workplace domain 1% of the respondents chose to use Sheikhgal. From the above fig1.3 it is clear that the use of Sheikhgal choices stands out in education domain and the use of Kashmiri/Urdu is raised accordingly.

In the present study the further analysis pertaining to the use Sheikhgal has been carried out. The following domains have been established for the analysis:

- 1) Language use in the home (in-group domain).
- 2) Language use in an unpredictable mixed group domain.
- 3) Language use in predictable mixed-group domain.

**4.1 Language Use in the Home (in-group domain)**

Language use in the home domain is investigated in almost every research concerning language maintenance and vitality (YuanY.2001). Some studies labeled family as a low domain in contrast with a high domain, while some treat it as an informal domain contrasting with a formal domain and others refer to it as an intimate domain verses a non-intimate domain. The home domain is the fundamental and most important 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 home domain often remains the last stand.

In this study the language use of Sheikhgal in the home domain stands out to indicate the strong vitality of Sheikhgal. Table 1.4 is a summary of language use in the home domain.

Q#	Question	n=	Sheikh.	%	Kash.	%	Urd.	%
1.	What language do you speak at a mosque? Praying to Allah?							
a		83	35	42%	47	57%	1	1%
b	Talking with other worshippers?	83	10	12%	73	88%	0	
	<b>X Mean</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>

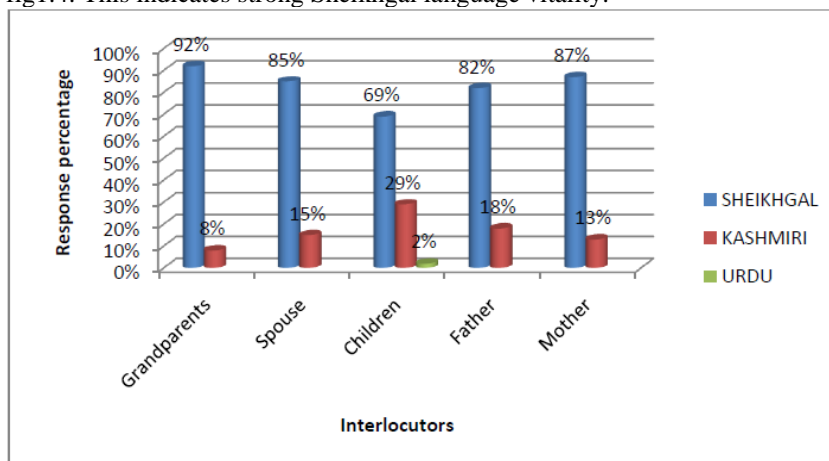
**Table 1.4: Language use in the home domain**

As can be seen in table 1.4 on an average 83% of the subjects reported that they only speak Sheikhgal in home domain. The percentage drops slightly when language vitality in favour of Sheikhgal has been tested among the children. The common factor underlying this trend has been associated with bright future and better opportunities of the languages of the surroundings in comparison to Sheikhgal.

Language use between generations has been the focus of various language maintenance studies. The change of language use between generations indicates a likely ongoing language shift.

In the Sheikhgal speaking community, 16% of the respondents feel that a shift to Kashmiri language in home domain is associated with high status and respect. In case of Urdu the response of the respondents has been 1% considerably negligible. Majority of the population speaking Sheikhgal are illiterate this may be one of the reasons for not using Urdu in home domain

Overall, Sheikhgal is the dominant language and strictly restricted in the home domain can be seen in fig1.4. This indicates strong Sheikhgal language vitality.



**Fig 1.4: Language use in the home domain**

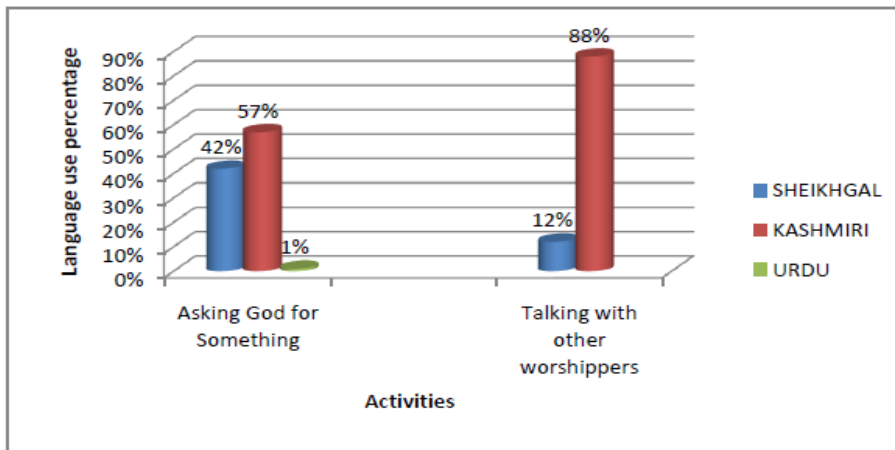
**4.2 Language use in an Un-Predictable Mixed Group Domain**

In some other studies the mosque domain is placed at the other end of the continuum from the home domain if a continuum of domains is ever used. The term un-predictable mixed group domain refers to the situation in which the initiator of the conversation cannot predict whether the interlocutor is Sheikh Speaker, because in this domain both Sheikh Speakers and Kashmiri speakers co-exist. As a result one cannot easily predict which language should be used to talk to the interlocutor. The table 1.5 is a summary of language use in mosque domain:

Q#	Question	n=	Sheikh.	%	Kash.	%	Urd.	%
1.	What language do you speak at a mosque?							
a	Praying to Allah?	83	35	42%	47	57%	1	1%
b	Talking with other worshippers?	83	10	12%	73	88%	0	
	<b>X Mean</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>45</b>	<b>28%</b>	<b>120</b>	<b>71%</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>

**Table 1.5: Language use in the Un-Predictable Mixed Group Domain**

In un-predictable mixed group domain, more than 70% of the respondents choose Kashmiri as the only language of communication. Less than 30% of the respondents choose Sheikhgal in their communication while Urdu stays very low i.e.1% at the bottom of the scale.



**Fig 1.5: Language use in the Un-Predictable Mixed Group Domain**

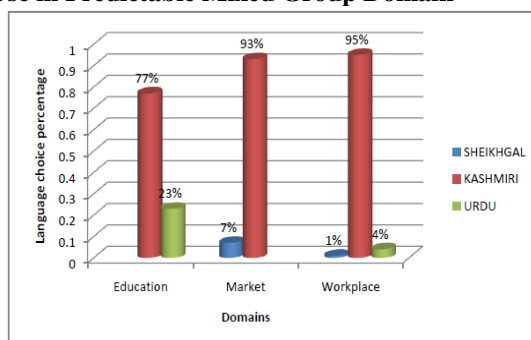
The fig 1.5 depicts that Sheikhgal is not the dominant language in an un-predictable mixed group. This indicates a weak vitality of the Sheikhgal language in unpredictable domain.

**4.3 Language Use in Predictable Mixed-Group Domain**

Education, market, workplace are grouped as the predictable mixed-group domain in which both Sheikhgal and Kashmiri speakers co-exist. Unlike in the un-predictable mixed group domain, the speakers in the predictable mixed-group domain predict whether the interlocutors are Sheikh. The context and the situation also set the norm for language choice when communication occurs in predictable mixed domain. The table 1.6 is a summary of language use in these 3 domains:

Q#	Question	n=	Sheikh	%	Kash.	%	Urd.	%	Eng.	%
2.	(If at school) what language do you speak at school?									
a	With teachers in the classroom?	22	0		15	68%	7	32%	0	
b	With friends in the classroom?	22	0		16	73%	6	27%	0	
c	With teachers outside the classroom?	22	0		20	91%	2	9%	0	
d	With friends outside the classroom?	22	0		17	77%	5	23%	0	
	<b>Total of question 2</b>	<b>88</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>68</b>	<b>77%</b>	<b>20</b>	<b>23%</b>	<b>0</b>	
3.	What language do you speak at a market?									
a	With a Sheikhgal speaker?	83	12	14%	71	86%	0		0	
b	With a non-Sheikhgal speaker?	83	0		83	100%	0		0	
	<b>Total of question 3</b>	<b>166</b>	<b>12</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>154</b>	<b>93%</b>	<b>0</b>		<b>0</b>	
4.	What language do you speak at your work place?									
a	Talking with your boss?	37	0		34	92%	3	8%	0	
b	Talking with your customers?	5	0		5	100%	0		0	
C	Talking with your colleagues?	38	1	3%	37	97%	0		0	
	<b>Total of question 4</b>	<b>80</b>	<b>1</b>	<b>1%</b>	<b>76</b>	<b>95%</b>	<b>3</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>0</b>	
	<b>Total of questions 2-4</b>	<b>334</b>	<b>13</b>	<b>4%</b>	<b>298</b>	<b>89%</b>	<b>23</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>0</b>	

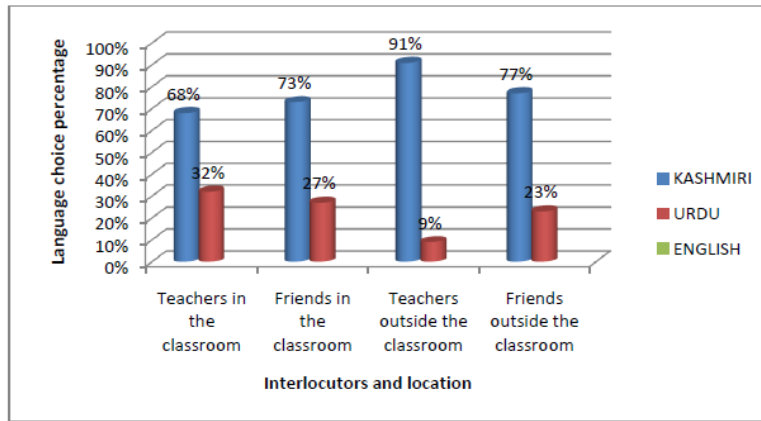
**Table1.6: Language Use in Predictable Mixed Group Domain**



**Fig1.6: Language use in the Predictable Mixed Group Domains**

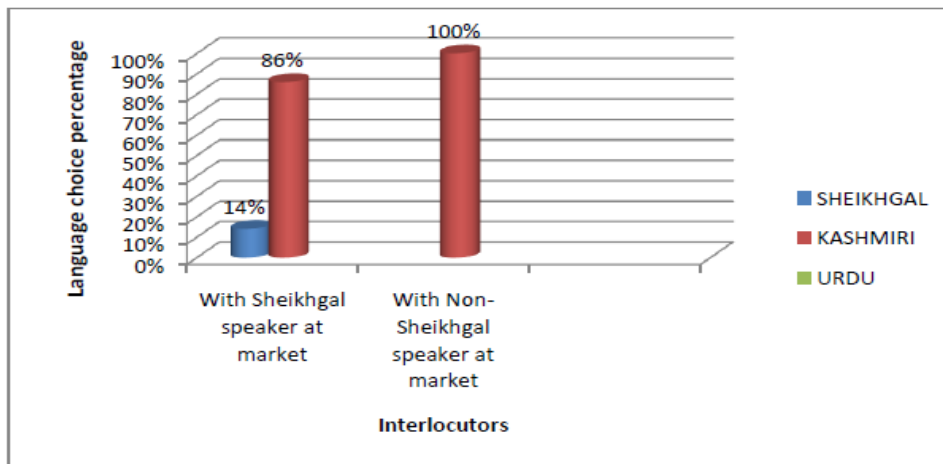


In these three domains i.e. education, market and workplace, the language use of Sheikhgal dropped to a great extent comparing the use of other languages such as Kashmiri and Urdu as fig1.6 shows. The use of Kashmiri language in these three domains is dominant followed by the use of Urdu and Sheikhgal. The use of English is nil because of less education that has resulted into less exposure towards English language.



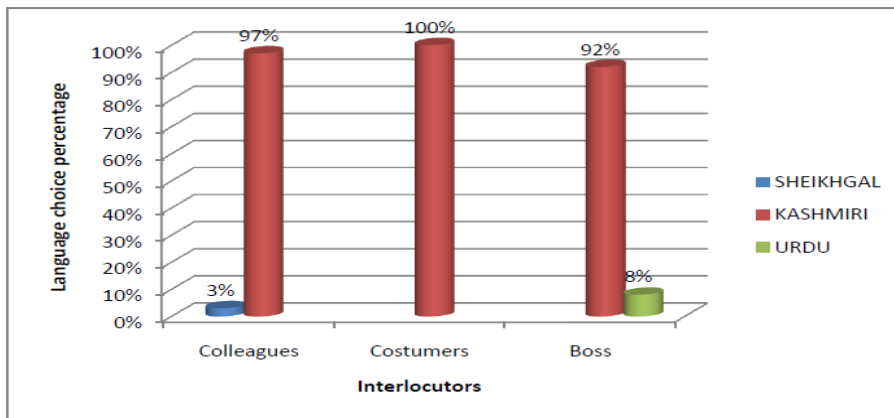
**Fig1.7: Language Use in the Education Domain**

Fig 1.7 shows the overall use of Kashmiri has a higher percentage in comparison to the Urdu language. The reason for it is that the much influence of the main stream Kashmiri students on Sheikhgal speaking students in school. The environment of the school can be attributed for the inclination towards the main stream language i.e. Kashmiri. Urdu stands second on the scale as being the medium of instruction in some schools and official language of the state. English finds no place in this domain.



**Fig1.8: Language Use in the Market Domain**

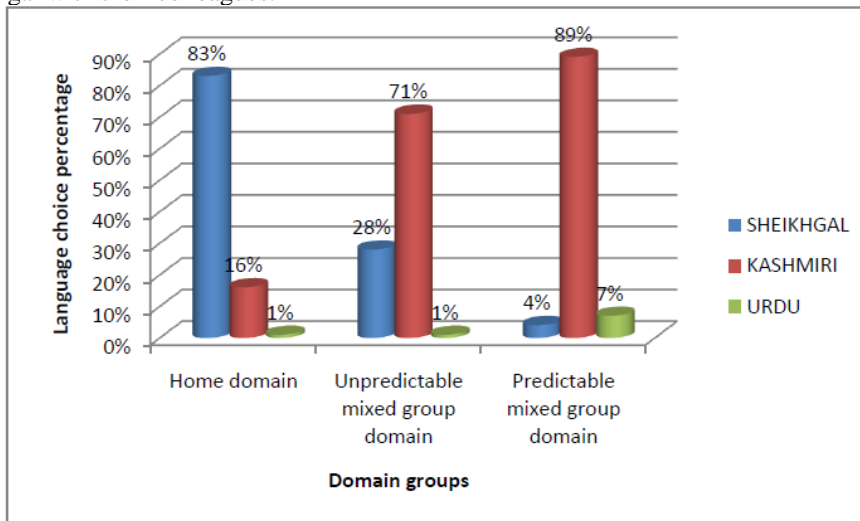
The fig 1.8 shows that in the market domain two languages i.e. Sheikhgal and Kashmiri are found to be used. While interacting with Sheikhgal speaker at market 86% of the respondents reported to use Kashmiri and 14% of the respondents used Sheikhgal. In case of interacting with Non-Sheikhgal speaker Sheikhgal stands out as 100% of the respondents tend to use Kashmiri. Regarding the market domain Kashmiri occupies a central position among the interlocutors.



**Fig1.9:**

**Language Use in the Work Place Domain**

The work place is the domain that exhibits the highest use of Kashmiri language. As fig 1.9 shows Kashmiri stays as the dominant language. On an average more than 90% of subjects chose Kashmiri to communicate in their work places being the dominant language as well as honour and prestige attached with it. Among the subjects of the study nearly 8% use Urdu in formal situations mainly with the authorities. Only 3% of the respondents reported to use Sheikhgal with their colleagues.



**Fig1.10: A comparison of Language Use in Three Domain Groups**

The fig 1.10 shows that in the home domain the use of Sheikhgal remains high. In the unpredictable mixed group domain the use of Sheikhgal declines and Kashmiri increases considerably. In case of predictable mixed group domain the use of Sheikhgal decreases while other languages increase accordingly. The use of English remains nil in all the three domain groups. However language use in all domains points towards one conclusion that Sheikhgal language vitality is very weak among the Sheikh community in Kashmir valley.

**6. Conclusion:**

The study has attempted to give brief sociolinguistic account of Sheikhgal speakers of the Kashmir valley. The study examined various features associated with the Sheikhs of Kashmir.

As a minority community Sheikhs have been living in Kashmir from several decades and settled as in various districts of Kashmir valley. In spite of being a minority community, Sheikhs have maintained their language and culture and have kept themselves distinct from the main stream society.

Language use in five domains i.e. family, education, market, workplace and mosque has been discussed respectively. Accordingly the use of Sheikhgal in five domains has been grouped into three main domain groups: The home domain, the unpredictable and the predictable mixed group domain. The present findings have shown that the Sheikhgal language has an absolute dominance in the home domain (fig1.4). Over 80% of the subjects speak Sheikhgal only in the home domain. This indicates the strong language vitality of the Sheikhgal language. In the unpredictable mixed group domains, the use of Sheikhgal declines to less than 30% and the use of Kashmiri increases considerably to more than 70% and the use of Urdu is 1%. In case of predictable mixed group domain the use of Sheikhgal decreases while the use of other languages increases. The use of English scores zero in all the three domain groups. However language use in all domains points towards one conclusion that Sheikhgal language vitality is very weak among the Sheikh community in Kashmir valley.

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