

Language Attitudes among Burushos of Kashmir Valley: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the language attitudes among Burushos of Kashmir valley and is based on the field work that investigators undertook. This paper utilizes a well-designed questionnaire for the problem in question.

Keywords: Language Isolate, Language Attitude, Burushaski, Cultural legacy, linguistic repertoire.

Introduction

Language attitude refers to people's feelings and preferences towards their own language and other speech varieties around them and what value they place on those languages. Some attitude studies are strictly limited to attitudes about language itself and some studies are broadened to include attitudes towards speakers of a particular language or a dialect. Further broadening of the studies treat all sorts of behaviour concerning language including attitudes towards language maintenance and planning efforts (Fasold 1984:148). There are positive and negative feelings attached to a language situation (Baker 1988). Attitudes develop through experience and can influence a person's linguistic behaviour. Language attitude studies have been carried out for at least two broadly defined reasons

- 1) to discover value judgments basically of high vs. low varieties, or of pidgins and creoles and
- 2) to understand the positive or negative effect of a language variety on the society.

Language attitudes are dynamic in nature because the social values that influence language attitudes also change from time to time. The discovery of people's attitudes play a very important role in predicting the language vitality and success in developing language programs because the success of language policy is predicated on attitudes surrounding that language

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In this study, language attitudes of Burushos were investigated. Twelve (12) questions have been used to elicit the language attitudes of Burushos from two perspectives.

1. Attitudes towards Burushaski language and culture.
2. Attitudes towards Burushaski Speakers.

Linguistic Composition of Jammu and Kashmir

Linguistically, Jammu and Kashmir state and its surrounding areas constitute a complex region in the sub-continent and its linguistic complexity is evident by the segmentation of population into the following language inventories:

1. Dard group which includes within it the languages/dialects like Kashmiri, Shina, Kashtiwari, Poguli, Siraji, Rambani and Kohistani (Grierson, 1919; Kachru, 1969).
2. Indo-Aryan language family which includes the languages like Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Dogri, Lahanda, Pahari and Gojri.
3. Tibeto-Burman family which includes languages like Ladakhi, Balti and Purki.
4. Eastern Iranian language-which includes Pashtu.
5. Language isolates like Burushaski.

Burushaski

Burushaski, also known by the names of Boorishki, Brugaski, Kanjut, Werchikwar and Mishaski is a language isolate spoken by some 87,000 Burusho people in Hunza, Nagar and Yasin area of Northern Pakistan. Linguistically, Burushaski has been termed as a language isolate because it does not characterize the genetic relationship with the surrounding language families like Indic, Sino-Tibetan, Dardic etc. Burushaski has been compared to almost every language on earth; no fully convincing relationships have yet been established. Modern taxonomic methods are, however, beginning to yield results. Ruhlen (1989) classified Burushaski as a language isolate: 'its genetic affiliation remains a complete mystery' but Ruhlen (1992) reports on a possible classification of Burushaski as a separate branch of a newly proposed Dene-Caucasian super stock. More recently, Blazek and Bengtson (1995) list tens of etymologies relating Burushaski to the Yeniseian languages, spoken by a hundred people along the Yenisei River in Siberia. None of these efforts has been accepted by scholarly consensus.

Burushaski Speech Community in Jammu and Kashmir State

Burushaski speakers of Jammu and Kashmir are settled in and around a small locality by the foothills of Hariparbat in Srinagar, the capital of Jammu and Kashmir. The locality is known as Mohalla Azur Khan, named after Raja Azur Khan, Jammu and Kashmir. Burushos are also reported to live in Tral (Pulwama), Batamaloo, and Dandusa in Bemina area of Srinagar.

Jammu and Kashmir Burushos refer to their language as *miśāski* (mi-our + śāski-language). Exact number of the speakers of Jammu and Kashmir Burushaski is

not available. Exact number of the speakers of Jammu and Kashmir Burushaski is not available. Munshi(2006) mentions that "Ethnologue (2005) mentions Burushaski speakers in India but does not provide the specific information about the number of speakers and their exact location." According to the members of this speech community, 300-350 Burushos live in Srinagar. The members of the Burushaski community in Srinagar form a tightly-knit subculture within the broader Kashmiri society. Almost all Burushos are related to each other. Burushos of Kashmir follow the Jaffaria School of thought. Most of the members of this community are the descendants of a tribal king who was originally from Nagar, Pakistan. It is for this reason that some members of the community claim to ascribe to a "higher" social status in terms of lineage, and while the rest are considered of a non-royal descent by this sub-group. J&K Burushos of the present day include some members who were originally from Hunza and probably migrated at a later stage. While Burushos enjoy a state domicile and have recently been offered a Scheduled Tribe status by the Government of India, in the state of Jammu & Kashmir under Mandal commission. The migration of Burushos to Kashmir valley from Hunza and Nagar has taken place in 1891. This migration is the result of various political upheavals at these places. Certain historical accounts believe that this group migrated in intervals from 1891 onwards.

The linguistic repertoire of Burushos settled in Jammu and Kashmir includes Burushaski, Balti, Kashmiri, Urdu and English. Language spoken at home is usually Burushaski. Balti, Kashmiri and Urdu are also used with varying degrees that is based on the linguistic proficiency of the individual and the social context in which they are used. The language that is used with the majority i.e. Kashmiri speakers is Urdu and Kashmiri. Being a highly educated community English is known to them. It is used as a language of communication for official and business purposes.

Methodology

The present study is based on the data collected from 76 language respondents during an intensive field work. The language respondents have been divided in social variables viz a) Age and b) Gender. Education although may be a significant social variable in some other studies but in the present study it has been observed that Burushos are educated across age and gender. The pilot survey has given the idea that education is not a relevant sociolinguistic variable to measure the issues related to the present study. The respondents were taken from Mohalla Azur Khan, Kathi Darwaza, Srinagar. All the respondents were the native speakers of Burushaski.

The questionnaire acted as a tool for eliciting the sociolinguistic data from the Burushos 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 II aims to discover Burushaski speaker's attitudes towards their own culture, language, in-group community feelings and related language development issues.

After collecting the data from a survey instrument, the data was codified and then quantified. The quantitative data was captured in a software program called Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 14.0 for its final analysis and tabulation purposes.

In this study, language attitudes of Burushos were investigated. Twelve (12) questions have been used to elicit the language attitudes of Burushos from two perspectives.

1. Attitudes towards Burushaski language and culture.
2. Attitudes towards Burushaski Speakers.

Attitudes towards Burushaski Language and Culture

Six questions were asked in the questionnaire focusing on eliciting Burushaski people's attitudes towards Burushaski language and Burusho culture.

The coding was done as under:

Yes	1
No	2

Table 1.1:Scale for Attitudes towards Burushaski Language and Culture

The following table sums up the responses:

Q#	Question	N	Y	%	N	%
1	Do young people in your area speak Burushaski well, the way the old people speak it?	76	76	100%		
2	Should a Burusho be able to speak Burushaski? Why?	76	76	100%		
3	Do you think that Burushaski has a written form? If yes which?	76	16	21%	60	79%
4	Should there be a Burushaski Orthography that records folk literature?	76	70	92%	6	8%
5	Should you keep speaking Burushaski? Why?	76	76	100%		
6	If there is no Burushaski language in use is there no Burusho culture?	76	62	81%	14	19%

Mean	456	376	82%	80	18%
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n=number of respondents, Y=yes; N=no

Table 1.2: Attitude towards Burushaski Language and Culture.

The below figure demonstrate the results of Table 1.2.

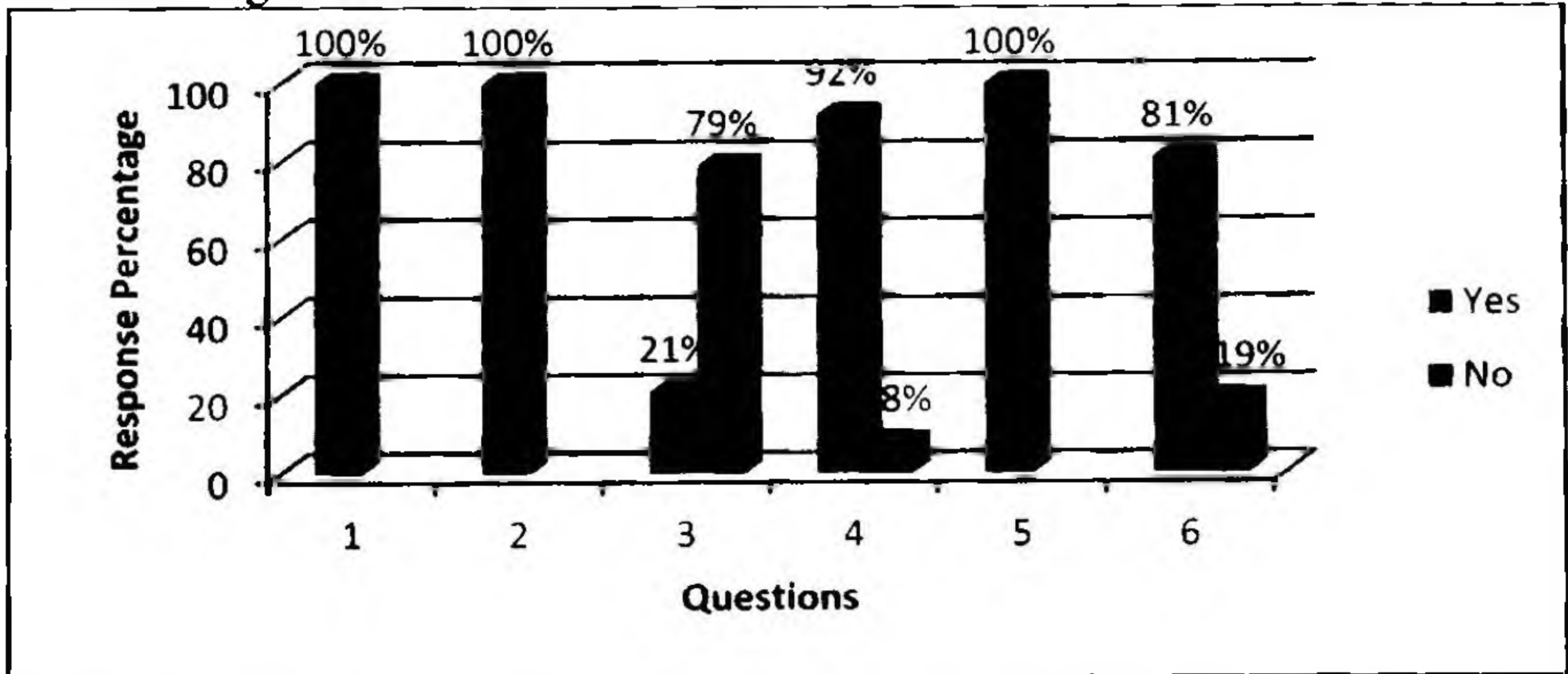


Fig. 1.1: Attitude towards Burushaski Language and Culture

When Question no 1 was asked "Do young people in your area speak Burushaski well, the way the old people speak it?" All the subjects (100%) gave a positive answer. The reason for it is that they have positive sentiments for their native language and desire to pass it from one generation to the other.

Question 2 elicited people's attitude towards speaking Burushaski. Generally speaking Burushaski peoples attitude towards this language related issue was positive. 100% of the respondents thought it necessary for a Burusho to be able to speak Burushaski.

Question 3 elicited Burushaski people's knowledge about their orthography. 79% of the respondents claimed that they do not possess knowledge about Burushaski orthography. Only 16 out of 76(21%) subjects have heard about Burushaski orthography. When asked about which one of the scripts they have heard or known used for Burushaski. The answer revealed by the respondents has been Persio-Arabic script.

When asked question 4 "Should there be a Burushaski Orthography that records folk literature etc?" The majority (92%) of the respondents thought it is important to records folk literature with Burushaski Orthography to preserve their cultural legacy. The recent information reveals that Burushos hailing from Hunza and Nagar have developed Persio-Arabic script for writing and teaching Burushaski language. According to the present study 8% of the respondents feel it to be not so important to preserve folk literature as they hold the view that one did not find any deep or wider applicability pertaining to their folk literature.

When question 5 has been asked "Should you keep speaking Burushaski? Why?" All the respondents (100%) reported that it was necessary to continue speaking Burushaski because it is the Burushos language and is associated with their culture. Thus respondents indicated a positive attitude towards speaking Burushaski.

When question 6 has been asked 62 respondents out of 76 (81%) believed that if the language dies then the culture will also disappear. While 14 out of 76 (19%) thought that there is no necessary connection between language and culture by holding the belief, "if they do not speak Burushaski any longer the culture will still remain".

To summarize what has been discussed above, the majority of Burushos have positive attitudes towards issues related to the Burushaski language. In the questions 1-6 more than 50% of the respondents gave a positive answer to each of the question.

Attitude towards other Burushaski speakers

People's attitudes towards a language can be revealed through their attitudes towards a speaker of that language. Six questions were designed to draw Burusho people's attitudes towards other Burushaski speakers. In each Question the respondents were asked to choose from three answers from a hypothetical situation in which both Burushaski speakers and Kashmiri speakers exist. The coding was done as under:

Burushaski	1
Kashmiri	2
Either of the two	3

Table 1.3: Scale for Attitude towards Other Burushaski Speakers

The responses revealed the respondents attitude towards the speaker. These hypothetical situations include trade, work, hospital, education, television and marriage. Table 1.4 is a summary of the responses for questions concerning attitudes towards Burushaski speakers.

Q #	Question	N	Burushaski	%	Kashmiri	%	Either	%
1	If you will go to market sell a goat if two people offer the same price at the same time, one speaks Burushaski and another speaks	76	64	84%	2	3%	10	13%

	Kashmiri. To whom would you sell goat?							
2	When two people come to your locality to hire labor, if both will pay same amount of wages, one speaks Burushaski and other speaks Kashmiri, for whom would you choose to work?	76	58	76%	4	5%	14	19%
3	When you go to see a doctor in a Hospital, if two doctors are specialized in the same area, one speaks Burushaski and another speaks Kashmiri. From whom would you like to treat yourself?	76	50	66%	10	13%	16	21%
4	If a play is shown on T.V one is shown in Burushaski and another shows its Kashmiri translation. Which one would you prefer to watch?	76	62	81%	9	12%	5	7%
5	If there are two schools in your locality one uses Burushaski and other uses	76	5	7%	70	92%	1	1%

	Kashmiri/Urdu/ English as medium. Which one would you, send your children to?							
6	If you wanted to marry, what would you want your spouse to be?	76	60	79 %	13	17 %	3	4%
	Total	45 6	299	66 %	108	23 %	49	11 %

n=number of respondents

Table 1.4: Attitudes towards Burushaski speakers

It can be clearly seen in Table 1.4 that out of the total 456 responses, 66% of the responses preferred a Burushaski speaker while 23% of the total responses preferred a Kashmiri speaker. While 11% of the total responses indicated that the language the speaker speaks in a particular situation makes no difference in their choice. In other words, language is not an important factor for their decision. Figure 1.2 is a summary of all six questions.

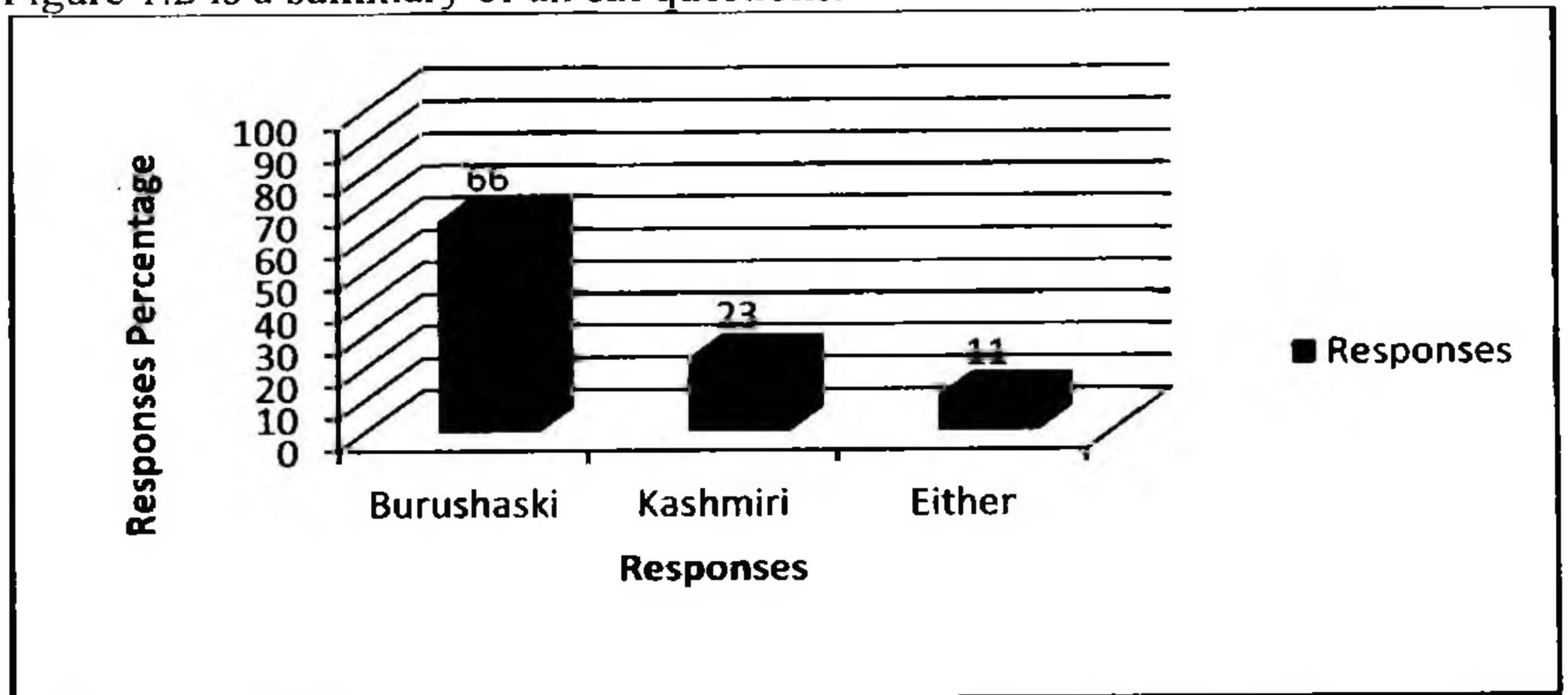


Figure 1.2: Attitude towards Burushaski and Other Speakers

Figure 1.2 depicts, that about 66% of the respondents have positive attitudes towards Burushaski speakers and 23% favored Kashmiri speakers. The remaining 11% of the respondents showed no preference towards either Burushaski or Kashmiri speaker.

The results showed that Burushaski people favored Burushaski speaker in certain situations, as Figure 1.3 shows

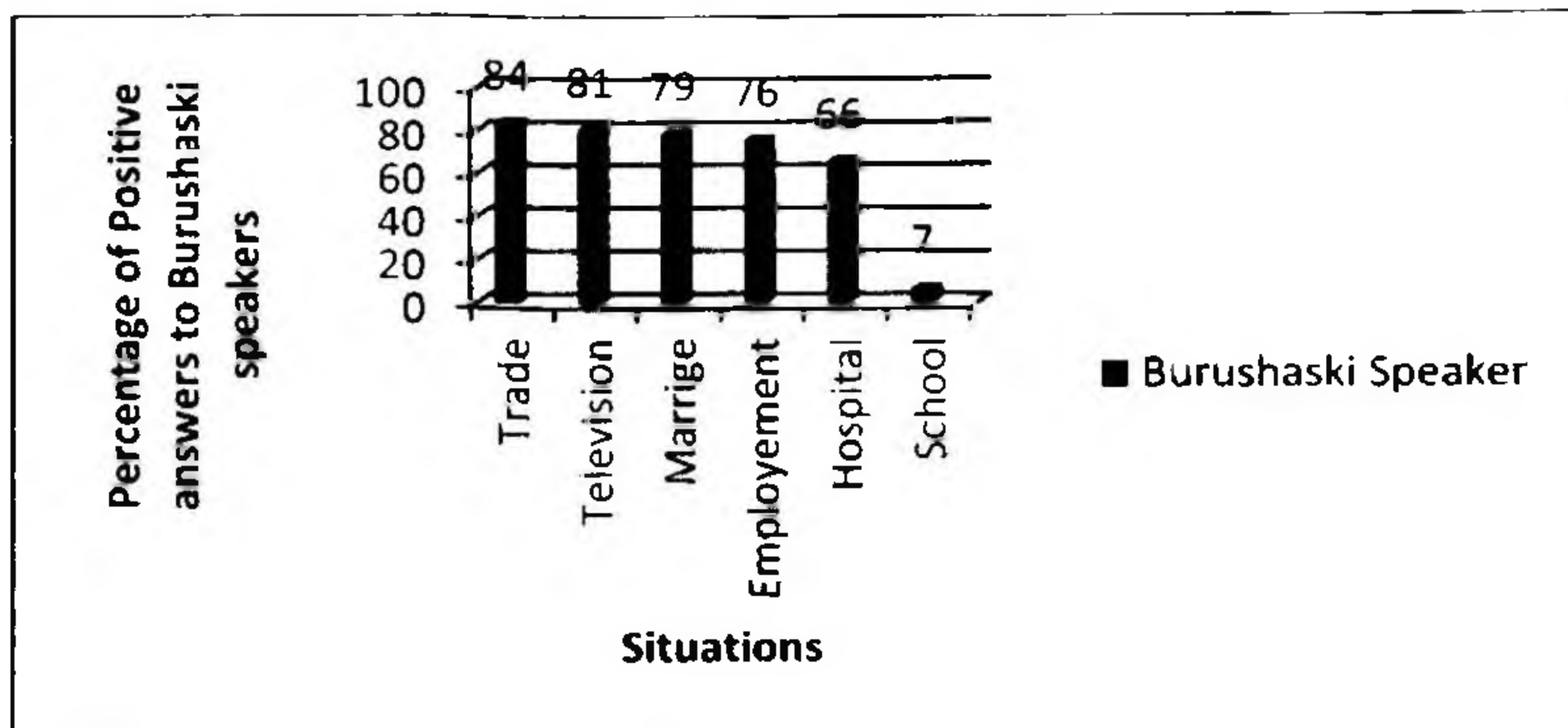


Fig. 1.3: Attitude towards Burushaski Speakers

From Fig. 1.3 it can be seen that in each of the five situations: Trade, Television, Marriage, Employment, Hospital and School 50% of the respondents favored a Burushaski speaker. The percentage dropped abruptly concerning their preference for school. All the situations will be examined in the following section:

In the trade situation (Question1), 84% of the respondents preferred to do business with a Burushaski speaker. The common reason given for their choice was that they are emotionally attached towards the people who speak Burushaski. 3% of the respondents preferred to sell the product to a Kashmiri speaker. The reason given for it was that Kashmiri people are people outsiders and have likings towards them. While 13% of the respondents reported that they would not make the decision based on the language of the customer, but on the quality of the products.

In the television program situation (Question 4) 81% of the total respondents preferred to watch Burushaski TV programs. The common reason for this preference has been that "Burushaski TV programs are closer to the heart". While 12% of the subject's favored Kashmiri T.V programs as it is exotic and more options are available. The 7% of the subjects reported that they will prefer to watch T.V in either of the two languages i.e. Burushaski or Kashmiri.

In the marriage situation (Question6) the majority 79% of the total respondents preferred to marry a Burusho because, "It is easy for them to communicate with Burusho people. Further they share the same culture and values and thus can transmit their feelings and thoughts well. Only 17% of the respondents thought it is better to marry Kashmiri people because they can know about new customs and traditions and thereby different culture. 4% of the total respondents answered that language is not the criteria for marriage and can marry with either of the two. They said that for marriage other factors need to be taken into consideration.

In the employment situation (Question 2) 76% of the total subjects choose to work for a Burushaski speaking boss. The common reason given was that, "it is easier to communicate with a Burushaski speaking boss as both are from the same community". 19% of the respondents showed preference for either of the two. While 5 % of the respondents were willing to work for a Kashmiri speaking

boss. The reasons given are as follows, "Kashmiri people are trustworthy and friendly people". Moreover the respondents stated that they can learn various skills from Kashmiri people.

In the hospital situation (Question 3) 66% of the respondents reported that they would prefer to see a Burushaski speaking doctor. The main reason for their choice was good communication with them. Some subjects assumed that Burushaski speaking doctor would be more close to heart since they all speak Burushaski language. 21% of the subjects showed no preference for either Burushaski or Kashmiri speaking doctor in this situation. While 13% of the total subjects showed negative attitude towards Burushaski speakers. They feel that Kashmiri speaking doctors have better skills.

In the education situation (Question 5) 92% of the subjects thought that it is better to use Kashmiri/Urdu/ English as the teaching medium because greater prestige and power is attached with these languages. Further some subjects mentioned that possessing knowledge of these languages can provide them more job opportunities. Only 7% of the respondent showed preference to the school using Burushaski as the medium of teaching. The reason stated was that it is one of the best way through which Burushaski can gain popularity and prestige. 1% respondents showed preference towards using of both Burushaski and Kashmiri/Urdu/English as media.

To summarize what has been discussed above, one can see that Burushaski speaker's attitudes towards other Burushaski speakers differ from situation to situation. However, generally speaking the majority of the Burusho people have positive attitudes towards Burushaski.

Language attitudes of Burushaski people were investigated from the broader perspective including attitudes towards Burushaski language and related cultural issues, and attitude towards other Burushaski speakers. The above Discussion revealed that most of the respondents had positive attitudes towards Burushaski language, Culture and other Burushaski speakers.

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