

Language Acquisition and Language Attitudes in Kishtwar Community

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Abstract

The present paper is an attempt to study the various aspects of language acquisition and language attitudes among the native speakers of Kishtwar community. It provides an insight to the complex dynamics of language development in the multilingual society of Kishtwar.

Keywords: Multilingualism, Dialect, Language and Identity, Language Attitude,

Introduction

The state of Jammu and Kashmir is the northern-most state of India and shares its boundary with Pakistan in the West, China in the North, Tibet in the East, and Punjab in the South. The state of Jammu and Kashmir is divided into three provinces Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh, which are geographically, ethnically and linguistically separate from each other.

Understanding the complex dynamics of language development in a multi-lingual state like Jammu and Kashmir is not only a challenging task but also important for creating informed opinion about the status of languages and their role in identity formation. Often described as a three-storied edifice founded upon bonds of history and geography, the Jammu and Kashmir State presents a fascinating mosaic of cross-cultural interaction.

Kishtiwari

Kishtwar is a mountainous district which lies between 33°.10' and 33°.25' latitude and 75°.25' and 76°.10' longitude. It is bounded on the north by Kashmir and Zanskar valleys, on the south by Bhandarwah and Doda Tehsils, on the east by Himachal Pradesh and on the west by Anantnag and Ramban districts. Kishtwar district branches off in three valleys of MarwaWarwan, Paddar and Chatru with their terminal at Kishtwar town.

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Kishtwar is the land of harmonious culture and variety of spoken languages and dialects. Historically Kishtwar has been inhabited by the population of diverse ethnic stocks as well as by the people pertaining the cultural and linguistic pluralism. It is a multilingual district of Jammu and Kashmir. People speak Kishtwari-Kashmiri, Pahari, Gojri, Paddari and Saroori languages. Hindus of Kishtwar, Marwa and Chatru tehsils speak Kishtwari and Muslims of these areas speak Kashmiri whereas Paddari is spoken by all communities in paddar Tehsil. Hindus of SaroorPargana and Bawanjwah speak Saroori- a variant of Bhaderwahi. Kishtwari, though unwritten, has many varieties of its own in Dachan, Udil, Nagseni, Kontwara, Trigam, Thakarie, Keshwan, Palmar, Chingam, Pogal, Paristan, Dessa and Siraz. Urdu/Hindi is the 'lingua franca' and English is the medium of education and administration.

In the context of the state of Jammu & Kashmir, Urdu- the state's official language is most commonly used language in public domain, especially in educational institutions, government offices and media, though now English appears to be steadily taken over Urdu/Hindi. Urdu/Hindi is also the main language of the state media such as radio, television and newspapers. With respect to second language proficiency in Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri, there are varying degrees of multilingualism among Kishtwaris based on various social factors.

Educated Kishtwaris know English, which is a common language of communication for official and business purposes in India. Kishtwari has about 50,000 speakers (no current census figure is available). It is not used for the language any more. Kishtwari is not used in education, administration and mass media. There are no textbooks or printed literature available in this language. There has been never any movement for the promotion of Kishtwari language in the area.

Classification

Grierson, while adapting the scale of linguistic correspondences between speech forms of Kashmiri, when spoken outside Kashmir valley on the South-East border across Pir Panchal range, developed the following scheme for dialect classification of Kashmiri language, "Kashmiri has one true dialect – Kishtwari spoken in the valley of Kishtwar lying to the South-East of the valley of Kashmir. Kashmiri also overflowed the Pir Panchal range into the Jammu Province of the state, and in the valley between the southern hills of the range between the water shed and the valley of Chenab, there are a number of mixed dialects such as Poguli, Siraji of Doda and Rambani. The first of these two represents Kashmiri merging into Western Pahari while the third rather represents Kashmiri merging into Dogri." (1919: 233). Koul and Schmidt (1984) have observed that Kashmiri has two main regional dialects when it spreads outside valley namely Poguli and Kishtwari spoken. Kishtwari shares most of the linguistic features of standard Kashmiri.

Method

This study is based on the analysis of the speech of the twenty-eight language users of Kishtiwari community. Three age groups i.e. old aged, middle aged and young have been selected for the collection of data and all of them are the native speakers of Kishtiwari.

The study of sociolinguistic setup of Kishtiwari was carried out by means of sociolinguistic questionnaire, which was administered to twenty-eight subjects at one test site i.e. Kishtiwari district. Subjects were asked questions about the domain in which they have acquired the languages and their views about their language and identity.

Overview of the Method

Study	Method	Brief Description	Focus	Sample Size
Contexts of acquisition, language and identity	Sociolinguistic questionnaire	16 questions	Contexts of acquisition of Kishtiwari, Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri	28 subjects from Kishtiwari

Contexts of Acquisition

The acquisition contexts of Kishtiwari, Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri are represented in Figs. 1 to 3. In these figures

H stands for Home

E for Environment (other than Home and School) and

S for School

Acquisition contexts of Kishtiwari

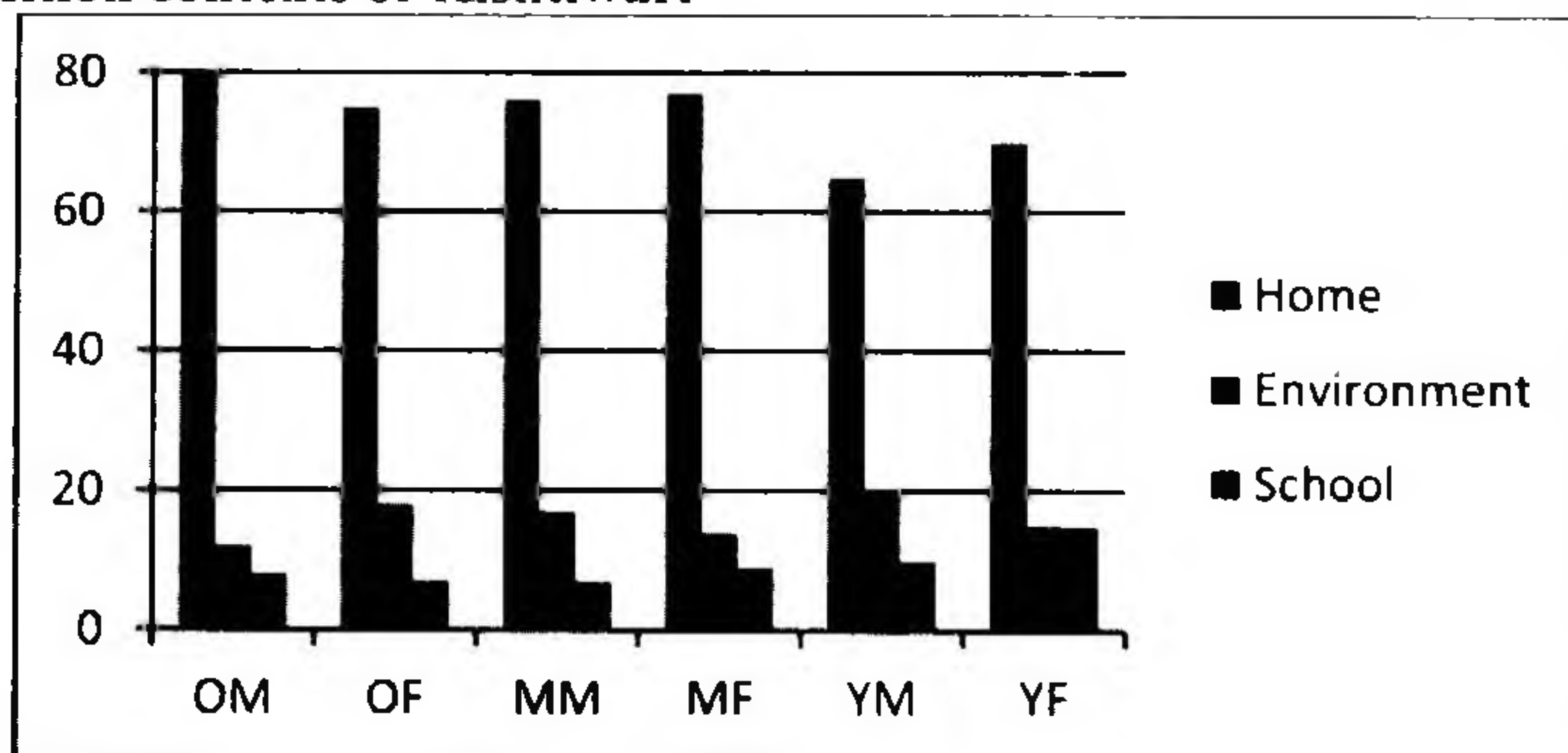


Fig. 1: Acquisition Contexts of Kishtiwari

It is clear from Fig. 1 that most of the informants in all age groups have acquired Kishtiwari from home. Also, among these age groups there were some language consultants, who claim that they have acquired Kishtiwari from environment and school domains because these language consultants claim that they have spend their childhood in Kashmir or other environment which is their maternal place.

However, in general it is clear that Kishtiwari is the language of home and that is where it is generally acquired.

During the field survey, it has been seen that Kishtiwari language is mainly used in home domain and in their intimate personnel domain. Other domains, such as language used with friends, in the market, interpersonal communication Kishtiwari, Kashmiri and Urdu are used. Also it has been seen that the informants whose mother tongue is Kishtiwari, most of them have to acquire the Kashmiri language and Kashmiri native speakers don't use the Kishtiwari language. So, this gives the clear picture that Kistiwari language is only restricted to home and personal domain.

Acquisition contexts of Urdu/Hindi

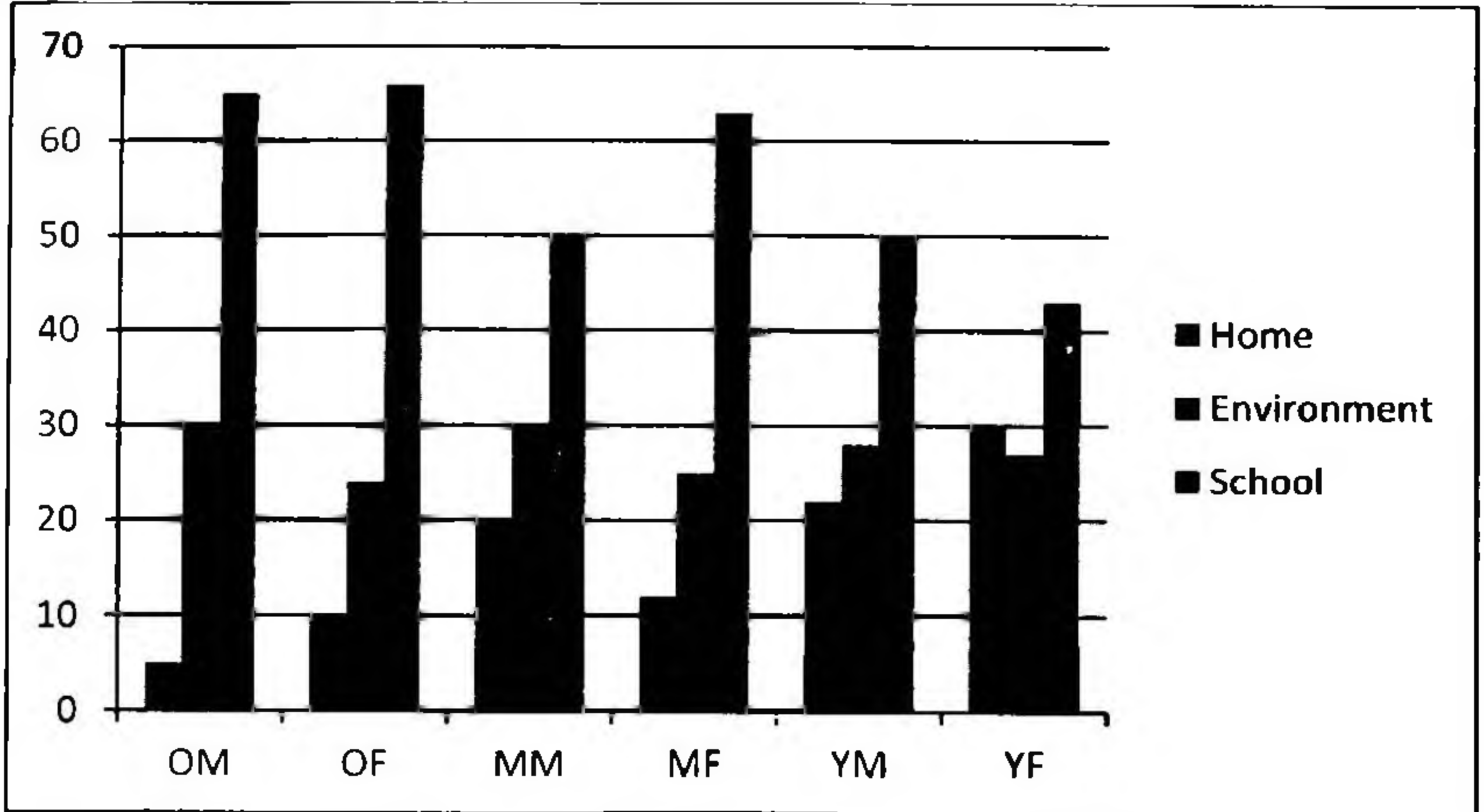


Fig. 2: Acquisition contexts of Urdu/Hindi

It is clear from Fig. 2 that Urdu/Hindi has been acquired from different domains. As compared to Kishtiwari and Kashmiri, Urdu/Hindi is largely acquired from schools by all the age groups. Among old age groups, more than 60% have claimed that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi language from school domain. However 30% among old aged males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from environment and more than 20% among old aged females claim that they have acquired it from environment. Also among old aged males, hardly 5% claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from home domain, in comparison to old aged males, 10% females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from home domain. In the case of middle aged, almost 50% middle aged males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi language from school domain, while as more than 60% middle aged females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from school domain. Similarly, 20% middle aged males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from home domain and more that 10% old aged female's claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from home domain. Finally, in the case of youth,

almost 50% young males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from school domain; more than 40% young females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from school domain. Also, below 30% these young males and young females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from home domain.

Acquisition contexts of Kashmiri

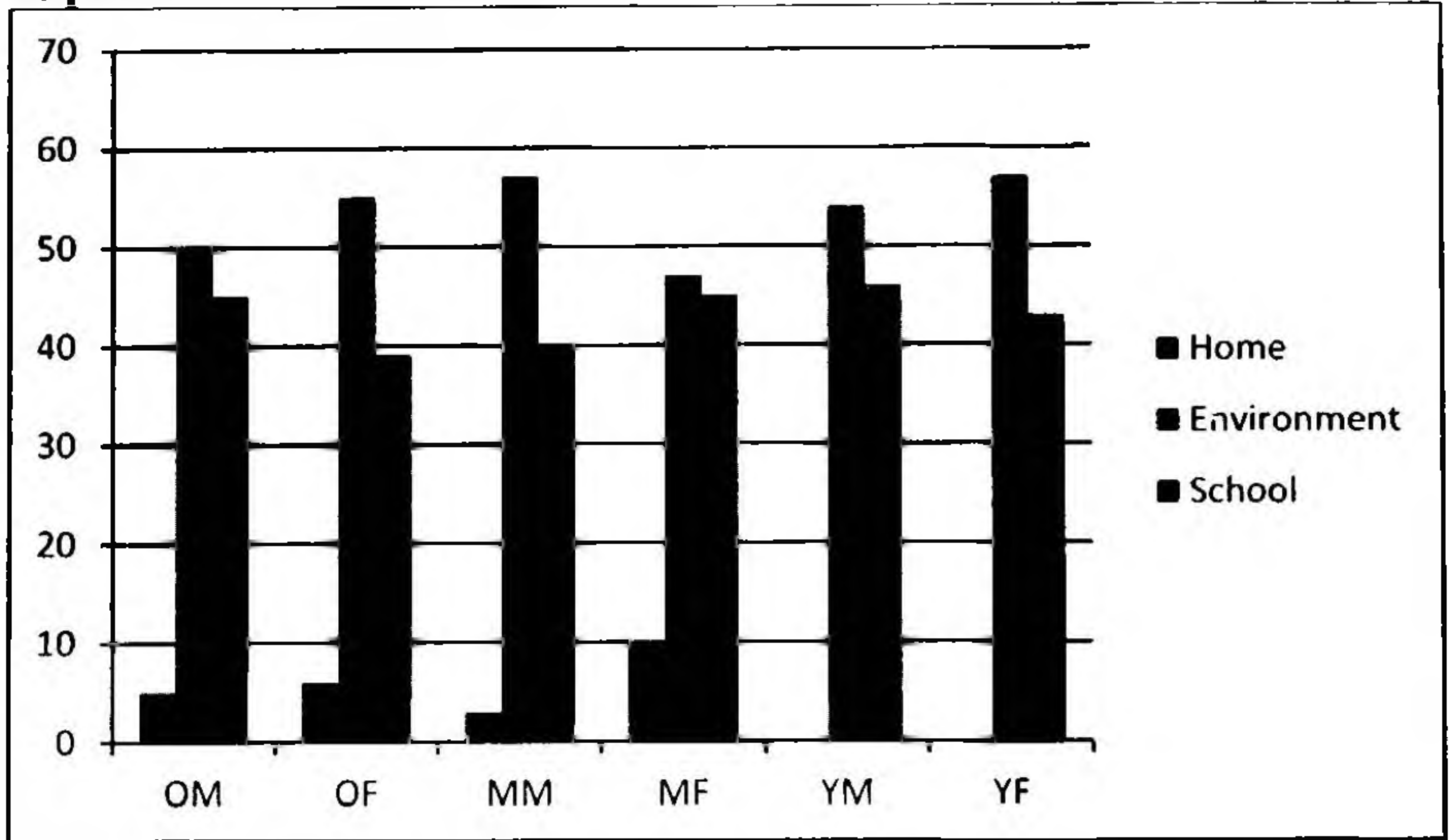


Fig. 3: Acquisition context of Kashmiri

Fig. 3 shows the contexts in which language consultants have claimed to have acquired Kashmiri. Among old aged and middle aged there are only few language consultants who claim that they have acquired Kashmiri from home domain. The reason might be that before some decades they married within the Kashmiri speaking community and may be mobility of neighbors. One important trend has also been seen among all the age groups that maximum number of language consultants have claimed that they have acquired the Kashmiri from environment followed by the school domain. Among the youngsters, both the groups have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri from environment and school domain. During the field survey, it has been found that Kishtiwaris who know Urdu/Hindi well, also know Kashmiri but this is more true for males. But their acquisition are limited to only listening and speaking skills and reading and writing skills are absent among them because it is not being taught in schools. Now in Kishtiwari district, there is one satellite campus of Jammu University, where M.A. Kashmiri has been started in the year 2012. From schools to college level, Kashmiri is not being taught.

Views about giving up Kishtiwari and Kishtiwari identity

Towards the end of the questionnaire the language consultants were asked whether Kishtiwari and Kishtiwari identity should be given up (Fig. 4). In spite of

what was previously indicated in terms of the declining popularity of Kishtiwari, the responses of the informants were overwhelming opposed to giving up Kishtiwari and Kishtiwari identity. The responses in terms of retention of Kishtiwari and identity are graphically represented as under.

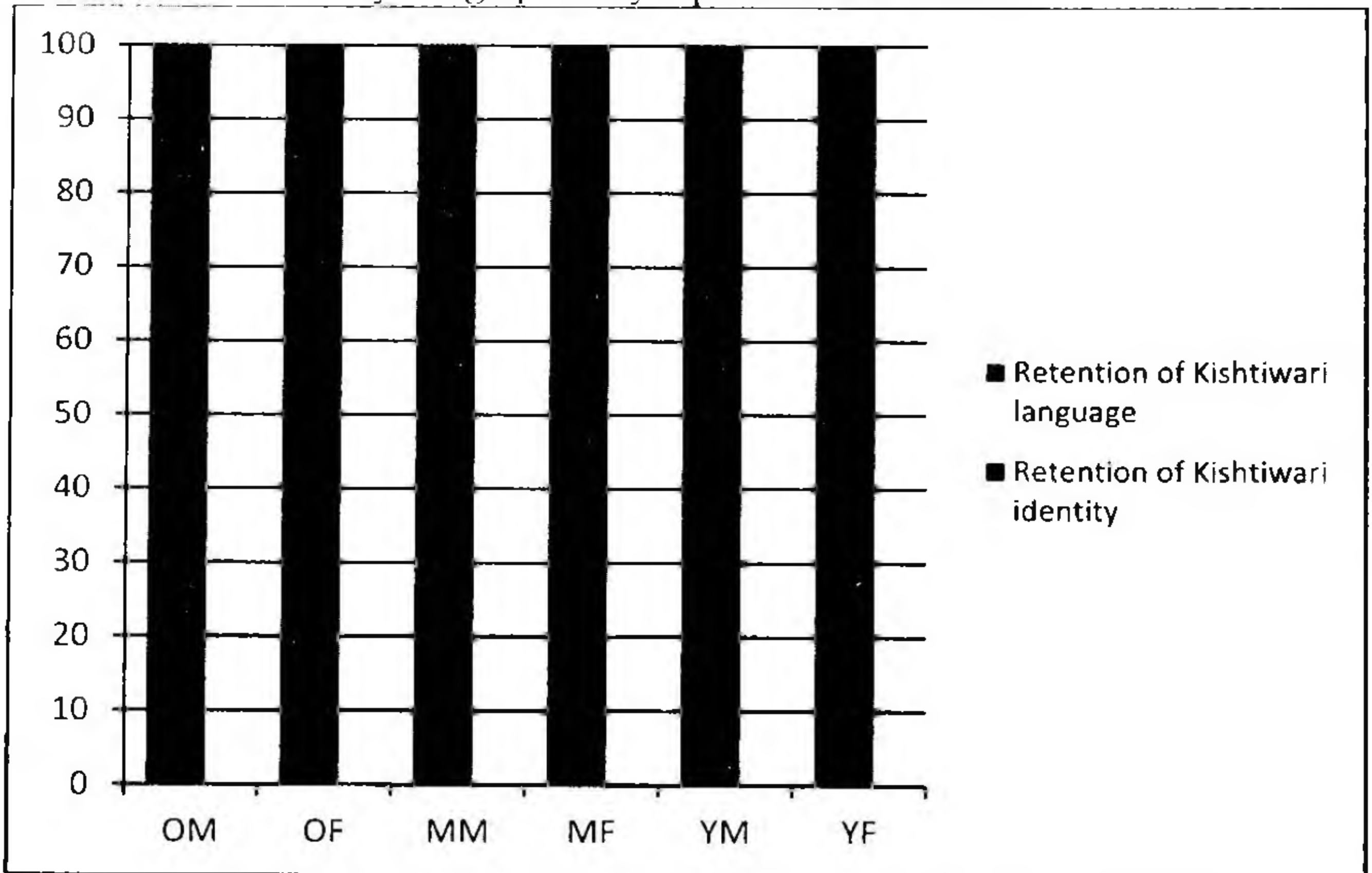


Fig. 4: View about retaining Kishtiwari and Identity

From Fig. 4 it is clear that there is an overwhelming response by the language consultants in favour of retention Kishtiwari. This appears to be contradictory to overall linguistic profile and most of their attitudes and views. It appears that Kishtiwari is the language 'closest to heart' with the language consultants appearing to have an emotional attachment with it. As we are aware that Kishtiwari is a minority language in the state of Jammu and Kashmir and is not the medium of instruction and in Kishtiwari they are not having the availability of literature, hardly any of the informants know how to write and read in Kishtiwari. So they shift from Kishtiwari to Urdu/Hindi because they are also considering Urdu/Hindi as their own language. That is why, the entire religious material is mostly available in Urdu/Hindi, and also Urdu/Hindi is the best option for the way of communication with non Kishtiwaris.

From the graph it is clear that among all the age groups, nobody wants to give up Kishtiwari and adopt some other one. When the informants were asked why they do not want to give up Kishtiwari and adopt some other language? They gave a simple answer, they are known by their own language throughout the world and their language is their main identity, also they told that language comes before religion, and so if somebody wants to be close to God, he/she should go close to his/her mother tongue, so that they can find the ultimate goal.

The graph also indicates that their view about the retention of their identity is very strong as all the aged groups have supported 100% about the retention of their identity. As per them, their culture, religion, language is their identification, so they do not want to lose it.

Conclusion

Kishtiwari is spoken in the Kishtwar district of Jammu and Kashmir. This is the language of Hindu speaking community of Kishtwar district. Kishtiwari is not being taught in schools and no literature is available in Kishtiwari. It is mostly used in personnel and home domain exclusively. Outside these domains, Kashmiri and Urdu are used. Urdu/Hindi is influencing the Kishtiwari speakers because of its association with media, religion and culture etc. Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri have been acquired from outside home domain. Urdu/Hindi is mostly acquired from schools and also from the environment followed by the home domain. They have a positive attitude towards their language and identity.

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