

Linguistic Scenario in the Higher Education System of Jammu and Kashmir

Javaid Aziz Bhat*

Department of Linguistics, University of Kashmir, Srinagar-190006 (India)

*Corresponding author: javadazizbhat@gmail.com

Abstract: The state of Jammu and Kashmir is the northernmost state of India. This state is geographically varied and linguistically rich. Geographically the state is divided into three regions/divisions: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. All the three regions are linguistically rich adding to the overall linguistic richness of the state. The main languages of the state are Kashmiri--dominant in Kashmir region, Dogri--dominant in the Jammu region, and Balti- dominant in the Ladakh region. Besides these dominant languages there are many other minority languages in the state which include Gojri, Pahari, Kohistani, Pashto, Hindko, Burushaski, Siram, Pogli etc. making the state of Jammu and Kashmir a multilingual state in true sense. In addition to these indigenous languages there are some foreign languages like Persian, English and Arabic that add up to the multilingual structure of the state. In the academic institutions of the state, it is the non-indigenous languages that have secured better position than the indigenous languages of the state. The current paper is an attempt to give the general appraisal of the linguistic scenario in the higher education institutions of the Jammu and Kashmir state and the problems and issues related with it. The paper will highlight the peculiarities of the linguistic scenario of the Jammu and Kashmir state and the issues related to the languages of study, medium of instruction, etc.

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Key words: Language Scenario; Linguistic richness; Multilingualism; Indigenous languages; Non-indigenous

Introduction

Language and Education are intimately related; the first relationship between language and education can be established by considering the role of language in education. The relationship between education and language is bilateral; Education is imparted through language and language is developed through education. Every society has an education system of its own and most of the world societies are multilingual in their set up. It is therefore a challenging task to plan the language usage in the education system of a multilingual society. All the languages of a multilingual region don't get equal opportunities of development. This inequality results in the hierarchy of the status of languages. Languages used in the education system are considered as more prestigious than the languages which are not used in the education system. The hierarchy brings along it the issues like language rights, language empowerment, language promotion, language policy, language shift, language attitudes and language planning.

Jammu and Kashmir, like many other states of India, is a multilingual state. This state is geographically diverse having three geographical regions: Jammu, Kashmir and Ladakh. The geographical diversity is perhaps one of the factors responsible for the linguistic diversity of the state. The diversity in terms of the regions and the languages of the state is at the base of the unique linguistic scenario

of the state. The three regions of the state have their own dominant and minority languages. Kashmiri, Dorgri, and Balti are the dominant languages, in terms of number of speakers, in the regions of Kashmir, Jammu and Ladakh respectively. The minority languages are much more in number than the dominant languages. The minority languages include Gojri, Pahari, Kohistani, Pashto, Shina, Burushaski, Siram, Pothwari, Siraji, Parmi and many others. All these dominant and minority languages together form a group of the indigenous languages of the state. In addition to the indigenous languages there is a group of non-indigenous languages which includes the languages like English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit etc. The non-indigenous languages are predominant in the education system of the Jammu and Kashmir state especially at the higher education level. There are many reasons for this which range from geographical diversity to the religious and educational reasons. The predominance of non-indigenous languages in the education system has left the indigenous languages underdeveloped and has garnered negative attitude among the natives towards their mother tongues. The present paper is an attempt to summarize the overall linguistic scenario of the state and the issues that have arisen because of it.

Higher Education system in Jammu and Kashmir

Jammu and Kashmir has a well spread education system. There are 7 state universities and 2 central universities in the state. There is one autonomous

college i.e; National Institute of Technology, Srinagar. In addition to the universities, there is a large number of colleges, both government-run and private, operating in the state. The colleges are mostly affiliated to the Universities of Jammu and Kashmir.

The picture of the higher education institutions is given in the following table.

The tables 1 & 2 given below clearly depict that the higher education system is wide spread consisting of almost seventy five government-run institutions and 270 private institutions.

Table 1. List of Government Colleges in J&K

COLLEGES		
S.NO.	CATEGORY	NUMBER
1.	Jammu College of Engg. & Technology, Jammu	01
2.	Private Grant-in-Aid Colleges	03
3.	Colleges imparting Post Graduate Education	19
4.	College imparting Teacher Education	02
5.	College offering Job Oriented Courses	16
6.	BCA	09
7.	BBA	05
8.	Mass Communication & Multimedia Production	01
9.	College offering Add-on Courses	17
10.	Heritage College	02

Table 2. Private Colleges Functioning in Jammu and Kashmir State

Jammu Division	Kashmir Division	Total
B. Ed.	75 (3 de-affiliated)	B. Ed. 142 (3 de-affiliated)
M. Ed.	02	M. Ed. 02
Degree College	16	Degree College 20
PG Course	01 (English)	PG Course 01
BCA	31 (18 de-affiliated)	BCA 40 (18 de-affiliated)
MCA	04	MCA 07
BBA	27 (14 de-affiliated)	BBA 33 (14 de-affiliated)
MBA	05 (2 de-affiliated)	MBA 09 (2 de-affiliated)
Law	07 (2 de-affiliated)	Law 12 (2 de-affiliated)
PGDCA	05 (3 de-affiliated)	PGDCA 05 (3 de-affiliated)
Craft Management and Entrepreneurship Programme (CMEP)	Nil	Craft Management and Entrepreneurship Programme (CMEP) 01
Engineering College	03	Engineering College 04

The private institutions of higher education are almost exclusively meant for professional and technical courses where as the government run institutions are both professional and non-professional oriented. As shown in the table, the number of private institutions is much more than that of the government institutions. It is a fact that the private institutions are more oriented towards the technical and professional courses where English is the medium of instruction almost exclusively. The other languages, both foreign

and indigenous, have a very limited scope in the private institutions of the state. The government institutions are also having English as the dominant language which is used as the medium of instruction in these institutions. But as a matter of policy and planning, the government institutions offer many languages as subjects of study at the higher education level. These languages are offered as subjects of study only in the non-professional institutions while as the government-run professional institutions do not offer

languages as subjects of study. The languages offered as subjects of study in the government institutions are mostly non-indigenous like Persian, Arabic, Urdu etc. The indigenous minority languages as such are kept at bay which is having an adverse effect on these languages.

Language Use in Higher Education

Language has primarily two roles in education. It is studied as a subject, and is used as medium of instruction. The choice of language as a subject of study and also the choice of language as a medium of instruction has a direct influence on the language in education policy of the country and is determined by various socioeconomic and political factors. The choice of language in education is also related to language empowerment and the values of status and prestige.

As already mentioned, in the context of the higher education system of Jammu and Kashmir, it is the non-native languages which have a predominant role. This has evolved so historically. Looking back in history Persian was introduced as the official language during the Muslim rule beginning in the 14th Century. It was later replaced by Urdu, another non-native language, in 1907, which continues as the official language even after independence. Kashmiri and Dogri though spoken by the majority in the state are not even made associate official languages. Keeping in view the multilingual character of the State, the Constitution of Jammu and Kashmir recognizes seven languages: Kashmiri, Dogri, Ladakhi, Hindi, Urdu, Punjabi and Gojri. Looking at the Higher education institutions vis-a-vis language

usage it is evident that it is the non-indigenous languages that have intruded in the academic scenes with English heading the scene and considered as the most prestigious language. Urdu being the Official language is also widely used. Not only in the academic scenes but also in media these two languages are dominant. The foreign languages like Persian and Arabic are among other languages which have place in the higher education system of Jammu and Kashmir. Arabic has only got a religious importance. Arabic though being taught as a subject in colleges and Universities of the valley is not popular and can be called as a foreign language in the true sense of the word. The indigenous minority languages are nowhere in the scene. Therefore the minority communities are severely facing language shift. The use of the minority languages has diminished with respect to different domains.

Domains of usage of different languages at the higher education level

As mentioned earlier, language has primarily two roles in education. It is studied as a subject, and is used as medium of instruction. The different languages used in the Higher education institutions include English, Urdu, Persian, Arabic, Kashmiri, Dogri, Punjabi and Sanskrit. English is used both as a medium of instruction and a subject of study at the higher education level where as all other languages in the higher education of Jammu and Kashmir are used as subjects of study. The table 3 given below gives the clear picture of the usage of languages as medium of instruction and subjects of study at the higher education level.

Table 3. Usage of languages as medium of instruction and subjects of study at the higher education level

Language	Medium of instruction	Subject of study
English	Almost all the institutions	In academic institutions offering non-professional courses which are mostly government-run
Urdu	Limited to some institutions offering religious instruction.	In academic institutions offering non-professional courses which are mostly government-run
Persian	Limited to Persian literature and that too partly	With secondary focus that too in traditional institutions only
Arabic	Limited to Arabic literature and that too partly	In limited institutions
Hindi	In traditional institutions and mostly in Jammu region	Mostly in Jammu region and in traditional institutions only
Sanskrit	Partly	Limited to universities of Jammu and Kashmir

Issues arising out of multilingualism:

Multilingualism is not always a blessing, it comes up with a lot of problems and issues for language planners, educationists, teachers and students. Jammu and Kashmir being a multilingual state with some superimposed foreign languages in the scene also is full of issues having arisen from

multilingualism. The issues related to the higher education system are given below.

1. Religious issues:

Though a muslim-majority state in its overall demographic structure, Jammu and Kashmir has got a unique distribution of population in its regions viz-a-viz religion. All the religious minorities attach importance to a particular language. Languages like

Arabic and Sanskrit are surviving in the valley because of the religious faiths. A language planner has always to bear in mind the implications of language planning while doing it in a multi-religious territory.

2. Overload of Languages:

The overburden of languages is quite problematic for the students. In multilingual states like Jammu and Kashmir students have to learn many languages for different reasons: some for religious reasons, some for academic reasons, and some for maintaining ethnicity or identity. To cite an example, a student in a missionary school has to learn Hindi and English mandatorily. Apart from these two languages, he has to study one language which from religious perspective is important and also has to maintain his mother tongue for his identity. It is quite probable to see a college student having all the four subjects as language subjects. The flaw is with the university which allows such combinations and at times compels the students to take up such combination of subjects.

3. Stratification of languages and language shift:

In a multilingual society there is always a difference in the status of languages due to which the concept of stratification happens to be there and there languages come to be in hierarchical order with certain languages considered as more prestigious than others. The speakers of languages considered less prestigious tend to shift to the more prestigious languages because of negative attitude towards their languages which becomes a first step towards language loss. The minority languages in a phased manner become endangered and extinct respectively. The present case is no exception to this phenomenon.

4. Medium of Instruction:

This is one of the important issues in a multilingual setup. There is always a dilemma in a multilingual society as to which language should be the medium of instruction and Kashmir is no exception to it. There is a movement which favors the development of Kashmiri language by standardizing it at all fronts including the medium of instruction. Similarly other languages are recommended by other people for their standardization at different levels.

5. Language Development

Language Development is a big issue arising out of multilingualism. All languages in a multilingual society do not get equal opportunities of development as other languages remain confined to the home

domain. The language/languages used in the domains of media and education are better developed than the languages which are not used in these domains.

Conclusion:

It is a fact that multilingualism is not a blessing only but it has problems and issues associated with it. Kashmir is a multilingual territory and has a very unique and complicated linguistic scenario with the foreign or the non-native languages having the dominant character over the indigenous languages. The existing languages in the higher education institutions are not in a well organized order but have a lot of complicacies associated with them. This structure of multilingualism is very difficult for the academics and language planners to handle. The problems associated with this type of structure are very hard to solve because of the religious and socio-political reasons. There is a strong need to look into the language scenario of the valley and come up with the possible solutions.

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