
RESEARCH ARTICLE

Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Poguli Spoken in Jammu and Kashmir, India

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ABSTRACT

The present paper involves a comprehensive language maintenance and shift of Poguli. It seeks to look at their sociolinguistic profile to understand the influence of the majority ethnic/linguistic community with their language on this group. It focuses on the language maintenance and language shift of the Poguli speech community living in Chinab valley of Jammu and Kashmir and tries to study and understand their linguistic usage, patterns of language use, identity, status, and patterns of language use occurring in this community. To make matters more interesting, this Poguli speech community is dominated by many neighbouring languages and attempts to look at the levels of influence of these languages on this community. The paper is an attempt to postulate where this linguistic battle is likely to lead.

KEYWORDS

Dialectology, Poguli, Contexts of Acquisition, maintenance and shift, retention, identity.

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1. Introduction

Jammu and Kashmir were the northern-most states of India. Now, it is India's union territory. After the Government of India repealed the special status accorded to Jammu and Kashmir under Article 370 of the Indian constitution in 2019, the parliament of India passed the Jammu and Kashmir Reorganization Act, which contained provisions that dissolved the state and reorganized it into two union territories- Jammu and Kashmir in the west and Ladakh in the east, with effect the from 31st October 2019.¹

Understanding the complex dynamics of language development in a multi-lingual region like Jammu and Kashmir is not only a challenging task but also important for creating informed opinions about the status of languages and their role in identity formation. A long history of language contact has often obscured the original linguistic differences between various languages spoken in the region, and sometimes, it is almost impossible to tell which language has influenced which language. As is the case of other parts of the subcontinent, multilingualism is mostly a norm in this region, especially in the areas of multi-ethnic contact.

In the context of Jammu & Kashmir, Urdu was the only official language before September 2020 and is the most used language in the public domain, especially in educational institutions, government offices and media, though now English appears to be steadily taken over Urdu. Urdu is also the main language of the Jammu and Kashmir media, which includes radio, television, and newspapers. Now, from September 2020 onwards, Kashmir, Dogri, Hindi, Urdu and English are now official languages of Jammu and Kashmir. With respect to second language proficiency in Urdu, Hindi, Dogri, Siraji, Kashtiwari and Kashmiri, there are varying degrees of multilingualism among Poguli speakers based on various social factors.

¹. *Jammu Kashmir Article 370: Govt revokes Article 370 from Jammu and Kashmir, bifurcates state into two Union Territories". The Times of India. PTI. 5 August 2019.*

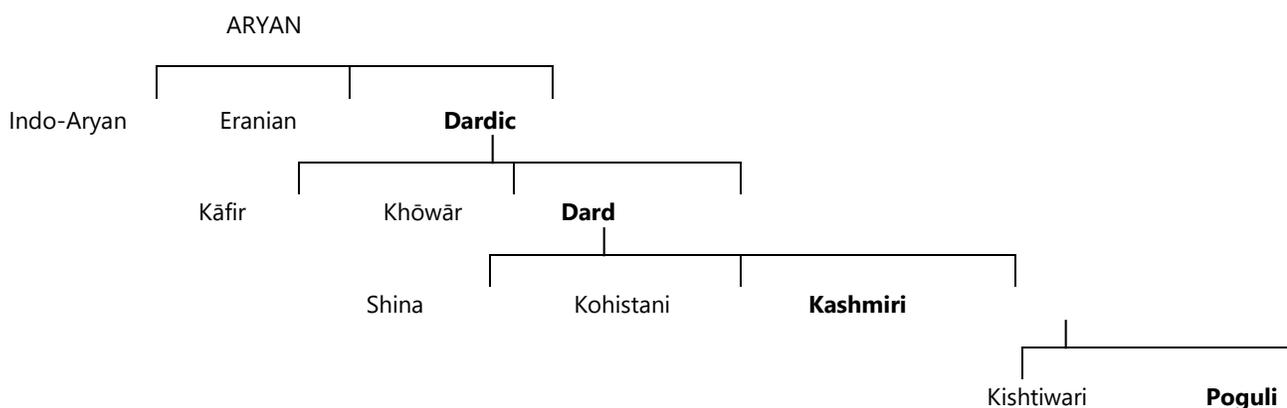
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1.1 Linguistic Composition of Jammu and Kashmir

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

1. Dard, which includes within it the languages/dialects of Kashmiri, Shina, Kashtiwari, Poguli, Siraji, Rambani and Kohistani (Grierson, 1919; Kachru, 1969).
2. Indo-Aryan language family which includes languages like Punjabi, Urdu, Hindi, Dogri, Lahanda, Pahari and Gojri.
3. Pashtu (Eastern Iranian language) speakers, immigrants from Afghanistan and the North-West Frontier, are now in Pakistan and some parts of the Central Asia region. The major concentration is at Gotlibagh in Ganderbal (District Ganderbal), Wantrag in Anantnag (District Anantnag) and some belts of district Ramban.

Grierson (1919) places Dardic as an independent group between Indo-Aryan and Iranian. The term Dardic has taken a strong basis in the literature that appeared during the 20th century on this subject. 'Dardic', as per Kachru (1969), is a cover term used for a group of geographically contiguous languages of Indo-Iranian origin that share several linguistic features characteristic of themselves. In Sanskrit, the term Dard means 'mountain' and was perhaps used because most of the Dardic area is mountainous.² Grierson (1906) conceived the theory that Dardic should form a separate linguistic group in the Indo-Iranian subfamily of the Indo-European family of languages with its linguistic similarities and dissimilarities with both Indo-Aryan and Iranian languages.³ These factors have become pivotal for making Dardic linguistic inquiry as Kashmiri-centric. According to him, the ARYAN language branched into three distinct sister groups, with further sub groups as follows:



1.2 Kashmiri Dialectology

The study of Kashmiri dialects is one of the most interesting fields of inquiry in the context of the linguistic scenario of the sub-continent.

Grierson's account of Kashmiri dialects is treated as a pioneering attempt, unlike other languages spoken in the subcontinent. Kashmiri dialect studies have remained nearly unexplored in terms of current principles to date. Grierson states that Kashmiri spoken in the valley has more or less a unified and homogeneous speech pattern, whereas geographical dialectology has the least influence over linguistic diversity.

According to Grierson (1919), "Kashmiri has only one true dialect – Kashtwari, spoken in the valley of Kashtiwari. Poguli, spoken in the Pogal-Paristan area, Siraji of Doda, and Rambani are the other dialects which are of mixed type and about which nothing certain is known". Historically, Kashmir valley has been divided into three regions viz.

1. Kamraaz: northern and north western region
2. Yamraaz: the central Kashmir
3. Maraaz: the southern and south western region.

Outside the Kashmir valley, the people of the belt stretching from Banihal to Doda speak a number of dialects of the Kashmiri language and a few other languages as well. Speech forms are either grouped as dialects of Kashmiri or distinct languages. One

² Kachru, B. B. 1969. 'Kashmiri and other Dardic languages.' In Sebeok T A (ed.) Current trends in linguistics 5, Linguistics in South Asia. Paris: The Hague. p.285.

³ Grierson, G.A. 1906. The Pisacha Languages of North Western India, London: Royal Asiatic.

also finds some other languages that have been influenced by the Kashmiri language, such as Poguli, Siraji, Kashtwari, etc., that bear strong resemblances to Kashmiri. Koul and Schmidt (1984) have observed that Kashmiri has two main regional dialects outside the Valley, namely:

1. Poguli: spoken in the Pogal and Paristan valley of Ramban district
2. Kishtawari: spoken in the Kishtiwari district.

1.3 People, Poguli and Society

Poguli is spoken in the Pogal-Paristan area (Pir Panjal⁴) of tehsil Banihal, district Ramban of Jammu and Kashmir. Ramban District was carved-out of the erstwhile District Doda, keeping in view the backwardness, remoteness and aspiration of the people of the area. District Ramban started functioning as an independent unit on April 01, 2007. District Ramban shares its boundary with Reasi, Udhampur, Doda, Anantnag and Kulgam. About 95 kilometers of National highway NH 1A connecting Jammu and Srinagar run through District Ramban. Ramban is located at 33°14' N and 75°017'E longitudes with an altitude of 1000 meters from sea level. District Ramban is comprised of two tehsils-Ramban and Banihal, and four CD blocks, namely Ramban, Banihal, Ramsoo and Gool. As per the 2011 Census, the total population of District Ramban is 2,83,713⁵. Banihal is geographically located at latitude (33.42 degrees) 33° 25' 12" North of the Equator and longitude (75.2 degrees) 75° 12' 0" East of the Prime Meridian.⁶ Located at the foothills of the Pir Panjal range, it is mentioned in many ancient and medieval writings. Rajtarangini mentions this place, a very narrow mountain valley, as Visalta. This region, in King Uccalas' time, was an escape route from Kashmir for unwanted or disgruntled elements of the Valley. In Jaysimha's time (1128-49), a small fort is said to have existed just below the old Banihal Pass, called by the name of Bansalla, which literally meant a jungle or grove of trees. As of 2001 India census, Banihal Tehsil has a total population of 94,487⁷. Males constitute 52% of the population and females 48%. Banihal town has fewer Poguli speaking people than the upper areas, where more Poguli speakers can be found. Poguli is spoken throughout Ramsoo Block, and more than 80% of the population of Poguli speakers in Ramsoo are permanent residents. As per the 2001 census, the total population of Poguli speaking areas where its major concentration is found is 60,342⁸ and is tabulated village wise below, where Poguli is exclusively spoken.

S.No.	Name of the Tehsil with code	Name of Constituency	Name of Revenue Village	Area Census code	Population census-2001 ⁹		
					Male	Female	Total
1	(0001)	Banihal	Pogal	00311400	4498	4188	8686
2	0001	Banihal	Paristan	00312000	1136	982	2118
3	0001	Banihal	Targan	00309000	2742	2397	5139
4	0001	Banihal	Dhanmasta	00310500	2438	2237	4675
5	0001	Banihal	Bohrdhar	00310600	1782	1724	3506
6	0001	Banihal	Khari	00311000	3720	3412	7132
7	0001	Banihal	Neel	00311300	2224	2044	4268
8	0001	Banihal	Alanbass	00311500	991	942	1933
9	0001	Banihal	Sujmatna	00311600	2230	1970	4200
10	0001	Banihal	Panchal	00311700	1276	1180	2456
11	0001	Banihal	Hoochak	00311800	1257	1138	2395
12	0001	Banihal	Bangara	00311900	1087	963	2056
13	0001	Banihal	Senabati	00312100	1096	1031	2127
14	0001	Banihal	Shagan	00312300	1108	1013	2121
15	0001	Banihal	Sarbhangi	00312400	1331	1287	2618
16	0001	Banihal	Sumber	00312600	2103	1846	3949
17	0001	Banihal	Bhajmasta	00312700	483	486	969
Total					31502	28840	60342

Table 1.1: Census report (2001) of Poguli spoken villages

⁴ Pir-Panjal mountainous range of western Himalayas runs through J&K and separates Kashmir from Jammu division of the state.

⁵ <http://www.censusindia.gov.in/pca/default.aspx>

⁶ The locations related to Banihal are represented by the shortest path as the crow would fly between any two points and may not be nearest by road. Banihal has remained the gateway to the valley of Kashmir.

⁷ <http://ramban.gov.in/dseo/dshb2011-12.pdf>

⁸ <http://ramban.gov.in/dseo/vad2011-12.pdf>

⁹ 2011 Census data of the area is not available.

Poguli has been classified as a dialect of Kashmiri (Grierson 1919). Poguli has no written tradition and no published literature other than some folk songs printed locally. After the early sketches published by Bailey (1908), Grierson (1919), Hook (1987) and Wani (2014), Poguli has received very little attention from linguists. Poguli is bordered on the east by Kishtawari, on the south by Rambani and Siraji, and on the west by mixed dialects of Lahanda and Pahari. The speakers of Poguli are found mainly in the south, southeast, and southwest of Banihal. Poguli shares many linguistic features with Kashmiri, including approximately 70% of the vocabulary (Koul and Schmidt 1984). Both Muslims and Hindus of this region speak Poguli. In the main Pogal-Paristan area, the majority of the population is Muslims; however, in the outlying areas, the ratio of Muslims and Hindus is almost the same. In the Poguli society, Poguli is the language used in the household domain, whereas Urdu/ Hindi, Dogri, Siraji, etc. are used as languages of communication across cultures.

As per the local narratives of the Pogal-Paristan area, Poguli is simply the language of the people who live in an area covered by 'poh' trees - a local species. So this area came to be known as *poh gully*- the alleyway of Poh trees and the speech variety became Poguli. According to another narration by the natives of Pogal-Paristan, the dialect acquired its name from one of the months of the year called 'Poh', which literally means the month of spring; thus, the valley got the name of Pogal and came into existence. The Poguli people have settled in the region for generations. Their socio-economic status is low, and their living standards are not very high. One important socio-political feature of the area is that due to Reserved Backward Area (RBA) provisions, most families seek government employment. The general literacy rate of the community is not high, but the youth of this community have positive attitudes towards education. These people prefer marriages within the community, but inter-community marriages also have social acceptance. The speakers of Poguli are both followers of Islam and Hinduism. Due to two different religions, their rituals and customs vary from one another, but they take part in one another's customs and rituals. Languages spoken by the Poguli community in Jammu and Kashmir are Poguli, Urdu/Hindi, Kashmiri, Siraji, Kistiwari, etc. With respect to second language proficiency other than mother tongue, there are varying degrees of multilingualism among Poguli's based on various social factors.

2. Method

This study is based on the analysis of the speech of the one hundred and seventy (170) language users of the Poguli community. Three age groups, i.e., old aged (45 years onwards), middle-aged (25 years to 45 years) and young (up to 25 years), have been selected for the collection of data, and all of them are native speakers of Poguli.

The study of 'Language Maintenance and Language Shift of Poguli Spoken in Jammu and Kashmir' was carried out by means of a sociolinguistic questionnaire, which was administered to one hundred and seventy language users at one test site, i.e., Pogal-Paristan area of Ramban district, Jammu and Kashmir. Language users were asked questions about which domain they had acquired the languages and their views about their language and identity.

2.1 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 Poguli, Urdu/Hindi, Kashmiri, Kistiwari and Siraji	170 subjects from Pogal-Paristan area

3. Contexts of Acquisition

The acquisition contexts of Poguli, Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri are represented in Figures 1 to 3. In these figures, H stands for Home, E for Environment (other than Home and School) and S for School. Also, OM stands for old aged males, OF stands for old aged females; MM stands for middle aged males, MF stands for middle aged females. YM stands for young aged males, and YF stands for middle-aged females.

3.1 Acquisition contexts of Poguli

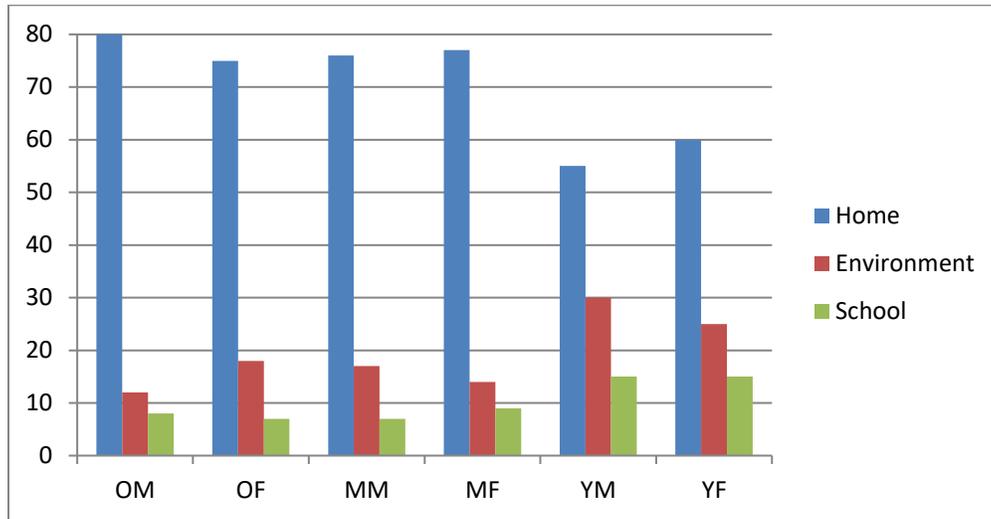


Fig. 1: Acquisition Contexts of Poguli

It is clear from Fig. 1 that most of the language users among all age groups have acquired Poguli from the home domain. Some language users among these age groups claim that they have acquired Poguli from environment and school domains because these language users claim that they have spent their childhood in the Kashmiri domain or another environment, which was their maternal place. However, in general, it is clear that Poguli is the language of home, and that is where it is generally acquired. Also, it is surprising that if we see a graph of young males and females, there is some decrease in the acquisition of Poguli in the home domain. The reason behind this is that the Poguli community is conscious about their future, and they put them in other environments from childhood so that they will get good exposure to the future.

During the field survey, it was seen that the Poguli language is mainly used in the home domain and in their intimate personnel domain. Other domains, such as the language used with friends in the market and interpersonal communication, such as Poguli, kashmiri, Urdu, etc., are used. Also, it has been seen that most of those whose mother tongue is Poguli have to acquire Kashmiri, Siraji, because of language contact with Kashmiri speakers. The majority of the community has to find jobs in other speech-dominant communities. Also, it is worth mentioning that the Pogal-Paristan area is surrounded by the Kashmiri speech community, and they have no choice but to shift from their mother tongue. This discussion clearly shows that the Poguli language is restricted only to the home and personal domains.

3.2 Acquisition Contexts of Urdu/Hindi

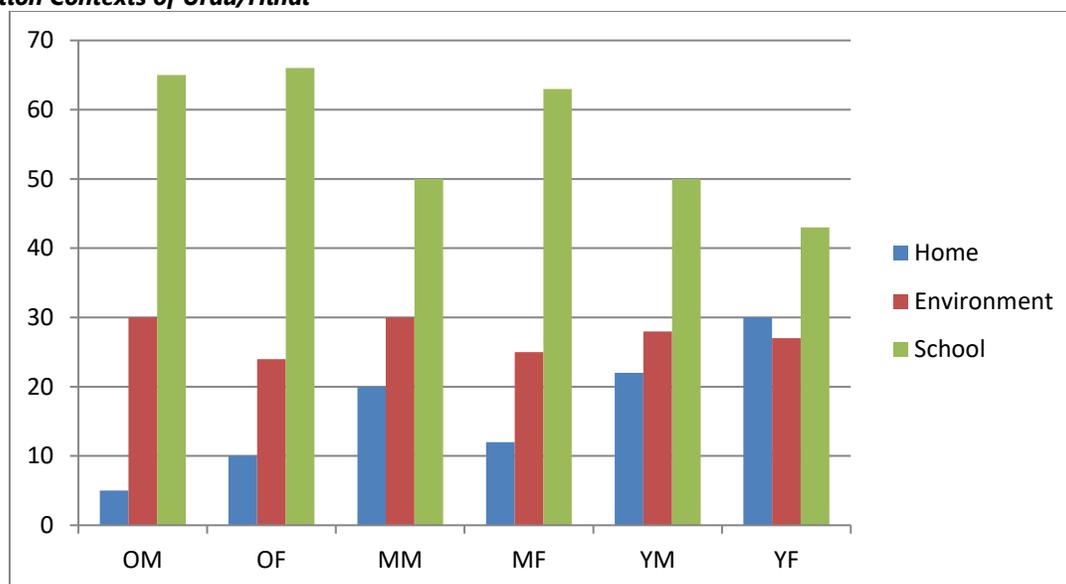


Fig. 2: Acquisition contexts of Urdu/Hindi

It is clear from Fig. 2 that Urdu/Hindi has been acquired from different domains. As compared to Poguli, Urdu/Hindi is largely acquired from schools by all age groups. Among the old age groups, more than 60% claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from the school domain. However, 30% of old aged males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from the environment, and more than 20% of old aged females claim that they have acquired it from the environment. Also, among old aged males, hardly 5% claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from their home domain. In comparison to old aged males, 10% of females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from the home domain. In the case of middle aged, almost 50% of middle aged males claim that they have acquired the Urdu/Hindi language from the school domain, while more than 60% of middle aged females claim that they have acquired the Urdu/Hindi from the school domain. Among old aged males, almost 30% claim that they have acquired the Urdu/Hindi language environment and below 25% of middle aged females claim that they have acquired the Urdu/Hindi from the environment. Similarly, 20% of middle aged males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from their home domain, and more than 10% of aged females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from their home domain. Finally, in the case of youth, almost 50% of young males claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from the school domain; more than 40% of young females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from the school domain. Also, below 30% of these young males and young females claim that they have acquired Urdu/Hindi from their home domain.

If we move from the old aged group to the young aged group, it is clearly seen that the acquisition of Urdu/Hindi is increasing from the environment and home domain and decreasing from the school domain. The reason might be that Urdu is the official language of Jammu and Kashmir and is the lingua franca of Jammu and Kashmir. In both print and mass media, Urdu/Hindi is mostly used. Also, Urdu/Hindi is taught in schools up to 10th level. Urdu/Hindi is the best option to communicate with non Poguli speakers. So, this is the main reason that all the language groups have more exposure to Urdu/Hindi.

3.3 Acquisition contexts of Kashmiri

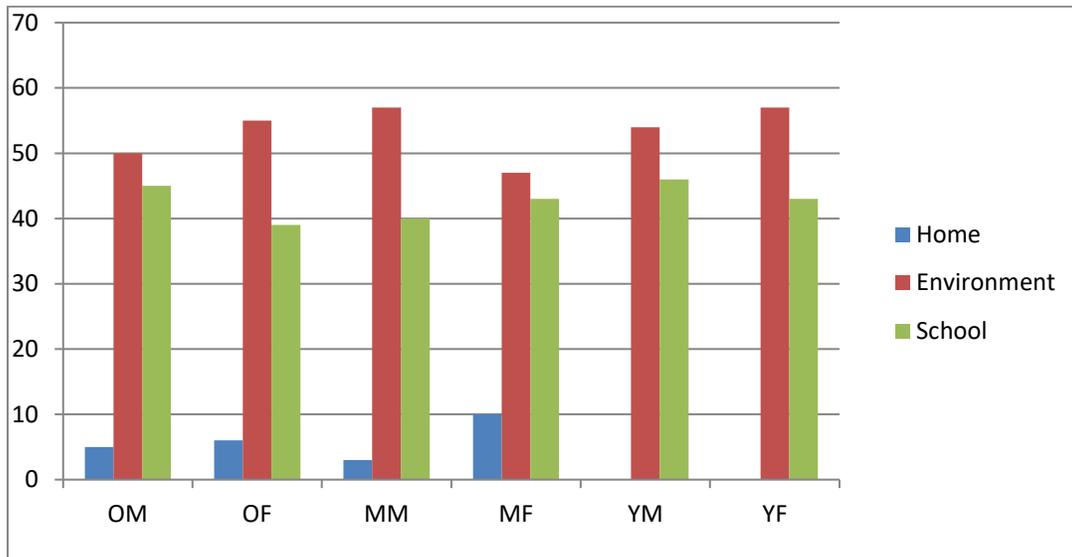


Fig. 3: Acquisition context of Kashmiri

Fig. 3 shows the contexts in which language users have claimed to have acquired Kashmiri from different domains. Among old aged and middle aged, there are few language users who claim that they have acquired the Kashmiri language from their home domain. The reason behind this is that for some decades, marriages were solemnized with the Kashmiri community, and they border areas with Kashmiri speaking areas. One important trend has also been seen among all the age groups: a maximum number of language users have claimed that they have acquired the Kashmiri language from the environment and then followed the school domain. Among the youngsters, both groups have claimed that they have acquired Kashmiri from the environment and school domain. During the field survey, it was found that Pogulis, who know Urdu/Hindi well, also know Kashmiri, which is more prevalent among male speakers. It is because they find their job avenues in Kashmiri-speaking areas. It has also been seen that their acquisition in Kashmiri is limited to listening and speaking skills only, and reading and writing skills in Kashmiri are absent among them because Kashmiri is not being taught in schools of Poguli speaking areas.

3.4 View about giving up Poguli language and identity

Towards the end of the questionnaire, the language users were asked whether or not the Poguli language and Poguli identity should be given up. In spite of what was previously indicated in terms of the declining popularity of Poguli, the responses of the language users were overwhelmingly opposed to giving up the Poguli language and Poguli identity. The responses in terms of retention of Poguli language and identity are graphically represented as under.



Fig. 4: View about retaining Poguli language and Identity

From Fig. 4, it is clear that there is an overwhelming response by the language users in favor of the retention of the Poguli language. This appears to be contradictory to the overall linguistic profile and most of their attitudes and views. It appears that Poguli is the language 'closest to heart', with the language users appearing to have an emotional attachment to it. Poguli language is a minority language in Jammu and Kashmir and is not the medium of instruction. Poguli language is mostly dependent on two skills, i.e., speaking and listening, and they don't have the availability of Poguli literature. So, they shift from Poguli to Urdu/Hindi, and they consider Urdu/Hindi to be their own language because most of the religious materials are available in Urdu/Hindi.

From the above Fig. 4, it is clear that among all the age groups, nobody wants to give up the Poguli language and adopt some other one. When they were asked why they did not want to give up the Poguli language and adopt someone else? Their response was simple: that they are known by their own language throughout, and their language is their main identity; also, their claim was that language comes before religion. If somebody wants to go close to God, he/she should go close to his/her mother tongue so that they can find the ultimate goal.

From Fig. 4, it is also clear 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, and language are their identifications, so they do not want to lose them.

4. Conclusion

Poguli is spoken in the Ramban district of Jammu and Kashmir. Both Hindus and Muslims speak this language in the Pogal-Paristan area of the Ramban district. Poguli is not being taught in schools, and no literature is available in this language. Poguli is extensively used exclusively in personnel and home domains. Kashmiri and Urdu/Hindi are used exclusively, which gives a clear picture that they shift from their mother tongue to other respective languages. Urdu/Hindi is influencing the Poguli speakers because of its association with language contact, media, religion, culture, etc. Urdu/Hindi and Kashmiri have been acquired from outside the home domain. Urdu/Hindi was mostly acquired from schools, the environment, and then the home domain. They have a positive attitude towards their language and identity.

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