

A Sociolinguistic Study of Language Proficiency among the Kashmiri Speech Community of Ratnipora, Pulwama

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Dates	Abstract
Summation: 15/08/2026	
Revised: 20/08/2026	The present study examines the claimed language proficiency of Kashmiri speakers of Ratnipora, Pulwama, in four languages—Kashmiri, Urdu, English, and Hindi. It focuses on four basic language skills: understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. The study aims to assess the proficiency of the respondents in each language and examine variations across these skills. It also seeks to provide an understanding of the multilingual abilities of Kashmiri speakers in the selected area.
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1. INTRODUCTION

Kashmir is a multilingual region where Kashmiri, Urdu, English, and Hindi are used in different social, educational and communicative contexts. Kashmiri also known as kə:ʃur is an important regional language and a significant part of the linguistic and cultural identity of its speakers. It belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch of the Indo-European language family and has traditionally

been classified within the Dardic group (Grierson, 1919). Kashmiri holds an important constitutional and administrative status, being one of the 22 Scheduled Languages of India and one of the five official languages of the Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, along with Dogri, Urdu, Hindi, and English, as provided under the Jammu and Kashmir Official Languages Act, 2020.

According to the Census of India (2011), around 6.8 million people reported Kashmiri as their mother tongue. The present study focuses on the Kashmiri-speaking population of Ratnipora, Pulwama, and examines their claimed proficiency in Kashmiri, Urdu, English, and Hindi across four language skills—understanding, speaking, reading, and writing. The study aims to identify variations in proficiency across these languages and to understand the multilingual abilities of the respondents.

2. METHODOLOGY

This study is based on data collected from 60 Kashmiri native speakers, drawn from Ratnipora, one of the highly educated areas of Pulwama district. The sample included respondents of both genders. A questionnaire served as the primary instrument for eliciting sociolinguistic data from the Kashmiri speech community.

The questionnaire was divided into two sections. Section One elicited background information about the respondents, including age, gender, occupation and family type. Section Two focused on the respondents' claimed language proficiency, aiming to examine their self-reported proficiency in Kashmiri, Urdu, and English across four language skills — understanding, speaking, reading, and writing.

The data for each respondent was codified, fed into a Microsoft Excel spreadsheet and tabulated. Overall claimed proficiency in languages has been obtained by using latest version of SPSS. Inferential tests like Independent t-test and ANOVA has been employed to check out the significant differences in language proficiency.

3. ANALYSIS

1. Overall Mean Score and Standard Deviation of Claimed Proficiency across the Four Languages

<i>Languages</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Kashmiri</i>	3.08	0.23
<i>Urdu</i>	4.56	0.15
<i>English</i>	3.75	0.08
<i>Hindi</i>	1.10	0.23

Table 1.1

The mean proficiency table 1.1 clearly indicates that Urdu (M=4.56, SD=0.15) has the highest mean score, reflecting a very high level of proficiency. English (M=3.75, SD=0.08) also reveals high competence, closely following Urdu. In contrast, Kashmiri (M=3.08, SD=0.23) shows a moderate mean score, while Hindi (M=1.10, SD=0.23) records the lowest mean score, indicating the least proficiency among the four languages.

Based on these results, Urdu emerges as the most linguistically competent language among respondents, followed by English. Notably, despite being the dominant language in the home domain, Kashmiri's overall proficiency level remains comparatively low, suggesting that home-domain use alone does not translate into higher formal proficiency.

2. Rank Order of Language proficiency

<i>Languages</i>	<i>Mean Rank</i>	<i>Rank</i>
<i>Urdu</i>	4.00	1
<i>English</i>	2.95	2
<i>Kashmiri</i>	2.05	3
<i>Hindi</i>	1.00	4

Table 2.1

The table 2.1 shows the mean ranks of proficiency across the four languages. Urdu recorded the highest mean rank (4.00), followed by English (2.95), Kashmiri (2.05), and Hindi, which recorded the lowest mean rank (1.00). This indicates that respondents reported the highest proficiency in Urdu, followed by English, while Kashmiri and Hindi were ranked comparatively lower.

Friedman Test Results for Claimed Language Proficiency

<i>N</i>	<i>χ^2 (Chi-Square)</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
60	177.765	3	0.001

Table 2.2

As shown in the table 2.2 above, a Friedman test was conducted to determine whether there were statistically significant differences in proficiency across the four languages. The results revealed a statistically significant difference, $\chi^2(3, N = 60) = 177.765$, $p < .001$, indicating that respondents' proficiency levels differ significantly across Urdu, English, Kashmiri and Hindi.

The data reveal a clear distinction between language use and language proficiency. While Kashmiri dominates in the home domain, Urdu exhibits the highest level of proficiency, indicating its strong role in formal education and wider communication. This reflects a functional distribution of languages within the community.

3. Family type and claimed language proficiencies across the Four Languages

<i>Language proficiency</i>	<i>Family Type</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Claimed Urdu Proficiency</i>	Joint	33	4.5303	.17408
	Nuclear	27	4.6111	.12659
<i>Claimed English Proficiency</i>	Joint	33	3.7652	.08704
	Nuclear	27	3.7407	.08439
<i>Claimed Hindi Proficiency</i>	Joint	33	1.0985	.20672
	Nuclear	27	1.1204	.26285
<i>Claimed Kashmiri Proficiency</i>	Joint	33	3.1515	.30580
	Nuclear	27	3.0000	.00000

Table 3.1

As shown in the table 3.1 above, group statistics reveal minor differences in language proficiency between joint and nuclear families. For Urdu proficiency, nuclear families ($M = 4.61$, $SD = 0.13$) slightly exceed joint families ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.17$). For English proficiency, both groups are almost equal, with joint families ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.08$) and nuclear families ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.08$). Hindi proficiency remains very low in both groups, with joint families ($M = 3.76$, $SD = 0.08$) and nuclear families ($M = 3.74$, $SD = 0.08$). While for Kashmiri proficiency, joint families ($M = 3.15$, $SD = 0.30$) score slightly higher than nuclear families ($M = 3.00$, $SD = 0.00$). Overall, differences between the two-family types are minimal across all languages.

Independent sample t- test for Family type across the Four Languages

<i>Languages</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p- value</i>
<i>Urdu</i>	-2.014	58	0.049
<i>English</i>	1.096	58	0.278
<i>Hindi</i>	-0.361	58	0.719
<i>Kashmiri</i>	2.571	58	0.013

Table 3.2

As shown in the table 3.2 above, the results of the independent samples t-test indicate that Urdu proficiency and Kashmiri proficiency show statistically significant differences between joint

and nuclear families (00.49 and 00.13). However, no significant differences were found in English proficiency and Hindi proficiency. This suggests that family structure influences proficiency in Urdu and Kashmiri, while English and Hindi proficiency remain largely unaffected by family type.

4. Gender and claimed proficiency across the Four Languages

<i>Language proficiency</i>	<i>Gender</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Claimed Urdu Proficiency</i>	Male	30	4.6000	.15536
	Female	30	4.5333	.15720
<i>Claimed English Proficiency</i>	Male	30	3.7500	.09285
	Female	30	3.7583	.07996
<i>Claimed Hindi Proficiency</i>	Male	30	1.1083	.25158
	Female	30	1.1083	.21459
<i>Claimed Kashmiri Proficiency</i>	Male	30	3.0917	.24986
	Female	30	3.0750	.22885

Table 4.1

As shown in the table 4.1 above, a comparison of language proficiency across gender indicates negligible differences between male and female respondents. Male respondents ($M = 4.60$, $SD = 0.16$) show slightly higher proficiency in Urdu compared to females ($M = 4.53$, $SD = 0.16$), while English proficiency remain nearly identical across both groups, with mean scores of 3.75 ($SD = 0.09$) for males and 3.76 ($SD = 0.08$) for females. Similarly, Kashmiri proficiency shows minimal variation between males ($M = 3.09$, $SD = 0.25$) and females ($M = 3.07$, $SD = 0.23$), while Hindi proficiency is identical for both genders ($M = 1.11$). Overall, these results suggest that gender has little to no meaningful effect on language proficiency across the four languages.

Independent sample t- test			
<i>Language</i>	<i>T</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Urdu</i>	1.652	58	0.104
<i>English</i>	-0.372	58	0.711
<i>Hindi</i>	0.000	58	1.000
<i>Kashmiri</i>	0.269	58	0.789

Table 4.2

As shown in the table 4.2, an independent samples t-test was conducted to examine gender differences in language proficiency. The results indicate that there are no statistically significant differences between male and female respondents across all languages. For Urdu, male respondents ($M = 4.60$) show slightly higher proficiency than females ($M = 4.53$), but the difference is not significant ($p = 0.104$). Similarly, no significant differences are observed for English ($p = 0.711$), Hindi ($p = 1.000$), or Kashmiri ($p = 0.789$), indicating comparable proficiency levels across genders.

5. Occupation and Claimed Proficiency Across the Four Languages

a) Mean and Standard Deviation of Kashmiri proficiency

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Student</i>	35	3.0786	0.22501
<i>Govt. employee</i>	4	3.0000	0.00000
<i>Private employee</i>	11	3.0455	0.15076
<i>Business</i>	10	3.1750	0.37361
<i>Total</i>	60	3.0833	0.23769

Table 5a.1

It is evident from the above table 5a.1 that business respondents have the highest mean Kashmiri proficiency ($M = 3.1750$, $SD=0.37361$), followed by students ($M = 3.0786$, $SD=0.22501$) and private employees ($M = 3.0455$, $SD=0.15076$). Government employees show a constant score ($M = 3.0000$, $SD=0.0000$), with no variation. Overall, the differences across occupational groups are minimal, indicating a relatively uniform level of Kashmiri proficiency.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Kashmiri Proficiency

<i>Languages</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Between the groups</i>	0.128	3	0.043	0.748	0.528

Table 5a.2

As shown in the table 5a.2 above, the results of the one-way ANOVA revealed that there is no statistically significant difference in Kashmiri proficiency across occupational groups ($p = 0.528$). This indicates that occupation does not have a significant effect on Kashmiri language proficiency among the respondents.

b) Mean and Standard Deviation of Urdu Proficiency

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Student</i>	35	4.5357	0.15028
<i>Govt. employee</i>	4	4.6250	0.14434
<i>Private employee</i>	11	4.6364	0.17189
<i>Business</i>	10	4.5750	0.16874
<i>Total</i>	60	4.5667	0.15856

Table 5b.1

As shown in the table 5b.1 above, the descriptive statistics of Urdu proficiency across occupational groups indicate that the mean scores are relatively similar. Private employees ($M = 4.6364$, $SD=0.17189$) and government employees ($M = 4.6250$, $SD=0.14434$) show slightly higher levels of Urdu proficiency compared to business respondents ($M = 4.5750$, $SD=0.16874$) and students ($M = 4.5357$, $SD=0.15028$). The standard deviation values are low across all groups, indicating minimal variation in responses.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Urdu Proficiency

<i>Languages</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Between the groups</i>	0.101	3	0.034	1.368	0.262

Table 5b.2

As shown in the table 5b.2 above, results of one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in Urdu proficiency across occupational groups ($p = 0.262$), indicating that occupation does not significantly influence Urdu language proficiency among respondents.

c) Mean and Standard Deviation of English proficiency

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Student</i>	35	3.7786	0.08070
<i>Govt. employee</i>	4	3.6875	0.12500
<i>Private employee</i>	11	3.7045	0.10113
<i>Business</i>	10	3.7500	0.00000
<i>Total</i>	60	3.7542	0.08601

Table 5c.1

The above table 5c.1 shows slight variation in mean proficiency scores of English language across occupational groups with students (M=3.7786, SD=0.08070) recording the highest mean score, followed by business respondents (M=3.7500, SD=0.00000), private employees (M=3.7045, SD=0.10113), and government employees (M=3.6875, SD=0.12500) respectively. This pattern may reflect greater and more recent exposure to structured language learning among students compared to working respondents.

Standard deviation values were generally low across groups, indicating limited variability within each category. The business group recorded a standard deviation of 0, indicating no variation among respondents in this group.

One-Way ANOVA Results for English Proficiency						
<i>Languages</i>		<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
<i>Between the groups</i>		0.066	3	0.022	3.319	0.026

Table 5c.2

As shown in above table 5c.2, the ANOVA revealed a statistically significant overall difference in English proficiency across occupational groups; however, post-hoc comparisons showed no statistically significant pairwise differences ($p > .05$), suggesting the overall effect was not attributable to any specific pair of groups.

d) Mean and Standard Deviation Hindi proficiency

<i>Occupation</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
<i>Student</i>	35	1.1000	0.22029
<i>Govt. employee</i>	4	1.1875	0.23936
<i>Private employee</i>	11	1.1591	0.32157
<i>Business</i>	10	1.0500	0.15811
<i>Total</i>	60	1.1083	0.23183

Table 5d.1

The above table 5d.1 shows mean scores of Hindi language across occupational groups are similar across occupational group with Government employees (M=1.1875, SD=0.23936) recording a

marginally higher mean, while business respondents ($M=1.0500$, $SD=0.15811$) records the lowest mean.

One-Way ANOVA results for Hindi Proficiency					
	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Between the groups	0.090	3	0.030	0.54	0.654
				4	

Table 5d.2

As shown in the table 5d.2, one-way ANOVA revealed no statistically significant difference in Hindi proficiency across occupational groups ($p = .654$), indicating that occupation does not influence Hindi proficiency among respondents.

6. Age and Claimed Proficiency across the Four Languages

a) Mean and Standard Deviation Kashmiri proficiency

Age group	N	Mean	SD
16–18	20	3.0625	0.19660
19–23	20	3.0875	0.27236
24–30	20	3.1000	0.24868
Total	60	3.0833	0.23769

Table 6a.1

As shown in the table 6a.1 above, descriptive statistics indicate that mean scores of Kashmiri proficiencies are very similar across all age groups, with only minimal variation. Respondents aged 24–30 show a slightly higher mean ($M = 3.1000$), while those aged 16–18 show a slightly lower mean ($M = 3.0625$). The standard deviation values indicate low to moderate variability within groups.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Kashmiri Proficiency					
Source	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	p-value
Between the groups	0.015	2	0.007	00.125	0.883

Table 6a.2

The table 6a.2 above indicates that one-way ANOVA showed no statistically significant difference in Kashmiri proficiency across occupational groups ($p = 0.883$), indicating that age does not influence Kashmiri proficiency among respondents.

b) Mean and Standard Deviation Urdu proficiency

<i>Age group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
16–18	20	4.5375	0.16771
19–23	20	4.5375	0.16771
24–30	20	4.6250	0.12825
Total	60	4.5667	0.15856

Table 6b.1

As shown in the table 6b.1, the descriptive statistics indicate that the mean scores of Urdu proficiency are very similar across all age groups. Respondents aged 24–30 show a slightly higher mean ($M = 4.6250$), while those aged 16–18 and 19–23 have identical mean scores ($M = 4.5375$). The standard deviation values indicate low variability within groups.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Urdu Proficiency					
	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>Df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p-value</i>
Between the groups	0.102	2	0.051	2.106	0.131

Table 6b.2

The results of above 6b.2 table indicated no statistically significant difference between groups ($p = 0.131$), suggesting that age does not significantly influence Urdu language proficiency among respondents.

c) Mean and Standard Deviation English proficiency

<i>Age group</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
16–18	20	3.7750	0.07695
19–23	20	3.7500	0.08111

24–30	20	3.7375	0.09851
Total	60	3.7542	0.08601

Table 6c.1

As shown in the table 6c.1, the descriptive statistics indicate that the mean scores of English Proficiency are very similar across all groups, with only slight variation. Respondents aged 16–18 show a marginally higher mean ($M = 3.7750$), while those aged 24–30 show a slightly lower mean ($M = 3.7375$). The standard deviation values indicate low variability within groups.

One-Way ANOVA Results for English Proficiency					
Source	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	p -value
Between the groups	0.015	2	0.007	0.985	0.380

Table 6c.2

The results from above table 6c.2 revealed no statistically significant difference between groups ($p = 0.380$), indicating that age does not significantly influence English language proficiency among respondents.

d) Mean and Standard Deviation Hindi proficiency

Age group	N	Mean	SD
16–18	20	1.1500	0.26157
19–23	20	1.1000	0.26157
24–30	20	1.0750	0.16424
Total	60	1.1083	0.23183

Table 6d.1

As shown in the table 6d.1, the descriptive statistics indicate that the mean scores of Hindi proficiency are nearly identical across all age groups, with only minimal variation. Respondents aged 24–30 show a slightly higher mean ($M = 1.1250$), while those aged 16–18 and 19–23 have

equal mean scores ($M = 1.1000$). The standard deviation values indicate moderate variability within groups.

One-Way ANOVA Results for Hindi Proficiency					
<i>Source</i>	<i>Sum of squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>p- value</i>
<i>Between the groups</i>	0.058	2	0.029	0.534	0.589

Table 6d.2

The results from above table 6d.2 revealed no statistically significant difference between groups ($p = 0.589$), indicating that age does not significantly influence Hindi language proficiency among respondents.

4. CONCLUSION

The findings of this study reveal a clear functional hierarchy in language proficiency among the respondents, with Urdu and English emerging as the dominant languages of competence, followed by Kashmiri with moderate proficiency, and Hindi as the least proficient language. The Friedman test confirmed that these differences in proficiency across the four languages are statistically significant, indicating a consistent and non-random pattern of competence rather than chance.

This pattern can be understood in light of the functional roles each language occupies within the respondents' social and educational environment. Urdu's high proficiency ranking reflects its status as the lingua franca, used widely for everyday communication across diverse linguistic groups, which naturally reinforces fluency through constant use. Similarly, English's position as a global language and the medium of instruction in schools explains its strong proficiency ranking, as formal education provides structured, sustained exposure that builds competence in both oral and written domains over time.

Notably, although Kashmiri is the mother tongue and is used extensively in the home domain, it ranks only moderately in overall proficiency — below both Urdu and English. A closer look at this finding reveals an important asymmetry: respondents demonstrate good oral proficiency in Kashmiri, consistent with its natural acquisition through home and community use, but comparatively weaker written proficiency. This gap likely stems from the fact that Kashmiri has

only recently been introduced into the school curriculum, meaning respondents have had little formal, sustained exposure to reading and writing in the language. In contrast, Urdu and English benefit from either widespread functional use or formal instructional support, which develops competence across both oral and literate domains. This finding suggests that oral fluency acquired informally at home does not automatically translate into literacy skills, which typically require structured, school-based instruction to develop. The moderate overall proficiency score for Kashmiri, therefore, masks a deeper skill-specific divide between strong oral competence and underdeveloped written competence.

Hindi's position as the least proficient language further underscores this functional distribution, suggesting minimal institutional presence or everyday utility for this group of respondents.

The near-absence of influence from sociodemographic variables such as gender, occupation, and age suggest that language proficiency in this context is shaped less by individual demographic characteristics and more by broader structural and functional factors — namely, the roles languages play in education, public life, and social communication. However, the significant role of family type in shaping proficiency in Urdu and Kashmiri points to the continued importance of the immediate social environment, particularly household structure, in language transmission and reinforcement, especially for languages tied closely to home and community identity.

Overall, these results highlight multilingual situation, wherein different languages serve distinct, complementary functions. English for formal engagement, Urdu for wider communication, Kashmiri for heritage, identity, and oral communication within a still-developing formal/literate domain, and Hindi occupying a marginal position. This functional distribution has important implications for language planning and policy, particularly regarding the need to strengthen curricular support for Kashmiri literacy — reading and writing — to help bridge the gap between respondents' strong oral heritage-language skills and their comparatively underdeveloped written competence.

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