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Today, sociolinguistics has become a recognized area of study and research in the field of linguistics. There has been the widespread interest in sociolinguistics all over the world. Sociolinguistics is a fascinating and challenging field of enquiry. It is rightly concerned with the ways in which language interacts with society. The scholars of sociolinguistics have been taking keen interest in language problems like language use in multilingual and bilingual settings, language maintenance and language shift, language standardization and language modernization, language and culture, ethnography of communication, communicative competence, language choice, language change and language variation.

Variation in language is a common phenomenon. A language varies according to the social characteristics of the speaker. It also varies according to situation in which a speaker finds himself. No living language can remain static. It must vary according to given circumstances.

Language choice on the other hand takes place in language contact situation. Both language variation and language choice occur in the Kashmiri speech community. I, as the native speaker of Kashmiri, was very much fascinated by the phenomena of language variation and language choice. That is why I selected the topic “A Sociolinguistic Investigation of Language Variables and Language Choice in the Kashmiri Speech Community” for my Ph.D. thesis.

The present study has been divided into seven chapters. The first chapter deals with some theoretical considerations of language variation. In this chapter various
theories of variation propounded by various scholars have been discussed. In the same chapter, I have also discussed various variation studies and their findings.

The second chapter discusses the research design. The present study follows the same pattern of research methodology as adopted by various other scholars of sociolinguistics. The study is purely data oriented. The data was collected directly by myself from a sample of 205 respondents who are the native speakers of Kashmiri. They are the true representatives of the different social groups of the Kashmiri speech community.

In the third chapter, the linguistic variables have been identified and their correlation with social variables have been established.

In chapters 4, 5 and 6 an attempt has been made to explain how the speakers of Kashmiri vary in the use of their language at various levels of linguistics such as phonology, morphology and syntax respectively. These chapters explore how the Kashmiri speakers show variations in their linguistic behaviour with respect to social variables like religion, region, age, sex, education and occupation.

The Kashmiri speakers not only vary in their linguistic behaviour, but they also switch over from their mother tongue to other languages considerably. In chapter seven an investigation has been made as to how the Kashmiri speakers switch over to some other languages.
The present work was directly supervised by my esteemed teacher Dr. M.K.A. Beg who is now the Chairman of Department of Linguistics, A.M.U., Aligarh. Words are not enough to express my deep sense of gratitude to him. It was his able guidance, constant help and constructive criticism that led me to complete this work. Despite his preoccupations, he always kept himself available to me and went through the manuscripts of my thesis making corrections and suggesting ways and means for the improvement of the documentation and presentation and even the style of the presentation. In fact, he has always been the source of inspiration for me. I admit that without his guidance and help this work would not have seen the light of the day.

I am also obliged and must not forget to extend my thanks to all those respondents from whom I collected the data.

(NISAR AHMAD KOKA)