ABSTRACT

This dissertation is a study of a minority language, Kohistani, which is embedded in a multilingual context in Ganderbal District in Jammu and Kashmir. In Ganderbal, Kohistani is surrounded by Kashmiri, the dominant language of the state and another minority language, Gojri. Therefore, the Kohistanis are multilingual, having competence in Kashmiri, Gojri and Urdu. Urdu, the state official language, is used as a lingua franca for any communication among the various linguistic communities in Ganderbal. So in this study, we intend to explore what happens to a minority language like Kohistani in a complex multilingual situation. This dissertation is organized in five chapters.

In chapter I, we provide an introduction to the dissertation. In this chapter, we have discussed the theoretical and methodological framework that we have followed in this study. A comprehensive account of the literature on various areas of language contact was given. We have also discussed the existing literature on Kohistani. We have provided a description of the Kohistani speech community in Ganderbal.

In chapter II, we have described the phonology and phonotactics of Ganderbal Kohistani. There are thirteen vowels and thirty-four consonants in Ganderbal Kohistani. Ganderbal Kohistani possesses diphthongs (au, ei, au), a feature that is absent in Kupwara Kohistani (Ganai 2012). Like the other Dardic languages, nasalization and palatalization operates in Ganderbal Kohistani as well. But unlike Kashmiri, these processes are not phonemic in Ganderbal Kohistani. Ganderbal Kohistani has retained three sibilants /s, ʂ, ʃ/ of the OIA. Ganderbal Kohistani shows voiced aspirated plosives, a feature that is lost in many Dardic languages.

In chapter III, we have analysed some essential morpho-syntactic features of nominal and verbal categories in Ganderbal Kohistani. Ganderbal Kohistani demonstrates number, gender and case distinctions. Nouns show two-way number distinctions:
singular versus plural. The plurality in nouns is denoted either by ‘suffixation’ or by ‘vowel change’ (ablaut). The animate nouns follow natural gender system; masculine and feminine. The feminine forms are derived by suffixation, prefixation, vowel or consonant change and suppletion. The affixes or the process of ablaut that operates in Ganderbal Kohistani differ from that of Kashmiri. However, Ganderbal Kohistani aligns with other Dardic languages in reflecting split ergativity. The verbs in Ganderbal Kohistani show tense and aspectual distinctions. Ganderbal Kohistani does not distinguish between habitual and progressive aspect.

In Chapter IV, we have discussed the linguistic outcomes of language contact on Ganderbal Kohistani. Though the Kohistanis have been able to maintain their language, they have incorporated a massive amount of lexicon from other languages, especially, Urdu. The borrowed lexicon encompasses all parts of speech. The highest percentage of borrowed words are represented by nouns (53.9%), followed by adjectives (20.1%) and verbs (16.2%). This finding is in sync with other studies on language contact (Haugen 1950, Poplack et al 1988, Sankoff 2002). A majority of the borrowed words have been phonologically integrated with the phonology of Ganderbal Kohistani. However, about 35.6% borrowed words in Ganderbal Kohistani have retained their own phonology. In addition to lexicon, Ganderbal Kohistani has also borrowed some affixes (plurality and gender) from Urdu.

In Chapter V, we have summarized the analysis and findings.