

Budhali as a Contact-Induced Variety: A Study of Linguistic Variation in Budhal (Rajouri District, Jammu and Kashmir)

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Abstract

The present study examines language contact and linguistic variation in the speech community of Budhal in Rajouri district, a highly multilingual region of Jammu and Kashmir. The area is characterized by the coexistence and interaction of several languages, including Kashmiri, Pahari, Gojri, Dogri, Poguli, and Siraji, resulting in intense multilingual contact and structural convergence. A central focus of the study is Budhali, a local speech variety functioning as a link language across different ethno-linguistic communities. Although classified under Pahari in the Census of India, Budhali exhibits distinct phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic features that distinguish it from closely related varieties. The study also analyzes Budhal Kashmiri, highlighting regional variation from standard Valley Kashmiri. The analysis reveals significant contact-induced changes across linguistic levels. At the phonological level, features such as [h]-dropping, vowel nasalization, glide insertion, and the use of the high central vowel [i] demonstrate structural adaptation under language contact. Morphosyntactic variation is evident in the progressive marker alternation ([-a:n] vs [-an]), deletion of dative case markers, and changes in pronominal usage. Additionally, lexical comparison shows that Budhali shares vocabulary with both Kashmiri and Urdu/Hindi, while also adopting plural formation patterns similar to Indo-Aryan languages. The findings suggest that Budhali has developed as a contact-induced and convergent variety, shaped by prolonged interaction among multiple linguistic communities. Despite lacking a standardized script and written tradition, Budhali plays a crucial role as a functional lingua franca in the region. The study contributes to the understanding of language contact, dialect continuum, and linguistic change in multilingual Himalayan settings, highlighting Budhali as an important but understudied variety.

Keywords: Budhali, language contact, multilingualism, linguistic variation, palatalization, [h]-dropping, vowel [i], lexical borrowing, morphosyntactic variation, dative case deletion, progressive marker, plural formation, link language.

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Introduction

The Jammu and Kashmir region presents a rich linguistic landscape, providing vast scope for the study of language contact phenomena. This is primarily due to the close interaction among languages and dialects from diverse language families, including Indo-Aryan languages, Dardic languages, Tibeto-Burman languages, and Eastern Iranian languages. The coexistence of these languages within the same geographical and social space has led to dynamic processes of linguistic convergence, borrowing, and hybridization. (Grierson 1903–1928; Masica 1991; Koul et al. 2012)

One area that exemplifies this complex multilingual environment is Budhal, a tehsil headquarters of Rajouri district. Budhal is home to three primary ethno-linguistic communities: Kashmiri, Pahari, and Gojri, all of which maintain regular interaction in social, cultural, and economic domains. In addition to these dominant communities, speakers of other regional varieties such as Dogri, Poguli, and Siraji also engage in close contact with the people of Budhal.

A particularly notable feature of Budhal's linguistic landscape is the presence of Budhali, a local speech variety that functions as a link language among the different communities. Although the Census of India classifies Budhali speakers under the broader Pahari category, linguistic evidence suggests that Budhali is a distinct speech variety with its own phonological, lexical, and syntactic characteristics. While Budhali shares certain similarities with Pahari, these similarities are largely superficial, and the two varieties remain linguistically distinguishable. (Grierson 1903–1928; Koul et al. 2012)

Currently, Budhali serves as the mother tongue for a significant portion of the population in Budhal and surrounding villages such as Dandoot, Keval, and Phalni. The language has undergone extensive lexical borrowing from neighboring languages, including Kashmiri, Pahari, Gojri, Dogri, and Poguli. Such interactions have enriched Budhali's vocabulary and contributed to its role as a functional medium of communication across multiple linguistic communities. (Haugen 1950; Winford 2003)

In light of these dynamics, Budhal offers a unique context to examine the effects of language contact, multilingualism, and the emergence of intermediary varieties. Studying Budhali and its interactions with surrounding languages provides important insights into the processes of language change, convergence, and

maintenance in a multilingual Himalayan setting. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

Methodology (Data Collection)

The present study on language contact and linguistic variation in Budhali and Kashmiri in Budhal of Rajouri district is primarily based on qualitative and descriptive fieldwork methods. The research adopts a sociolinguistic and contact linguistics framework to document and analyze linguistic variation across phonological, lexical, and morphosyntactic levels. (Gumperz 1982; Winford 2003)

Primary data was collected through direct field visits to Budhal and surrounding villages such as Dandoot, Keval, and Phalni. The researcher engaged in participant observation and informal interaction with native speakers belonging to Kashmiri, Pahari, and Gojri speech communities. Natural conversational data was recorded in different social settings, including households, markets, and community gatherings, to capture spontaneous language use, particularly the role of Budhali as a link language. In addition to natural speech data, structured elicitation sessions were conducted with native speakers.

Secondary data was also consulted from existing literature on Kashmiri dialects, language contact, and Indo-Aryan linguistics. This included grammatical descriptions, dialect surveys, and theoretical works on language contact to support and contextualize the primary findings. (Kachru 1969; Sachdeva et al. 2011; Koul et al. 2012)

Kashmiri of Budhal

The multilingual environment of Budhal has resulted in shared linguistic features across the various languages spoken in the region. One of the most noticeable areas of influence is at the phonological level, where the Kashmiri spoken in Budhal exhibits significant differences from the standard Kashmiri of the Valley (Srinagar). (Kachru 1969; Raina 2002; Koul et al. 2012)

A prominent feature of Budhal Kashmiri is the loss of the voiceless aspirated dental affricate [tʃh], which is characteristic of Valley Kashmiri. In Budhal, this sound is systematically replaced by the fricative [s] in both initial and medial positions. This phonological shift is not unique to Budhal; rather, it is observed among almost all Kashmiri speakers across the Rajouri region. The change reflects the influence of

neighboring Indo-Aryan languages, including Pahari, Gojri, and Dogri, which are widely spoken in the area. (Kachru 1969; Koul et al. 2012)

Illustrative Examples:

Standard Kashmiri	Budhal (Kashmiri)	Gloss
/tʃha:vul/	/sa:vul/	'goat' (mas.sg.)
/tʃha:vɪl/	/sa:vɪl/	'goat' (mas.pl.)
/tʃha:vidʒ/	/sa:vidʒ/	'goat' (fem.sg.)
/tʃha:vdʒi/	/sa:vdʒi/	'goat' (fem.pl.)
/gɔ̃:tʃhi/	/gɔ̃:si/	'moustache'
/vatʃhir/	/vasiɾ/	'calf' (fem.sg.)
/vatʃhiri/	/vasiri/	'calf' (fem.pl.)

These examples illustrate how the replacement of [tʃh] with [s] has become a stable feature in the local variety. Such phonological adaptations highlight the impact of prolonged language contact, where interaction with Indo-Aryan languages has shaped the sound patterns of Budhal Kashmiri. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

The Kashmiri speech community in Budhal thus presents a unique case of regional phonological variation, reflecting both the influence of multilingualism and the adaptability of speakers in a contact-rich environment. The study of such variations provides important insights into language change, convergence, and regional dialectal differences. (Trask 1996; Winford 2003)

The phonological phenomenon observed in Budhal Kashmiri, namely the replacement of the voiceless aspirated dental affricate [tʃh] with the fricative [s], is not unique to Budhal. Similar patterns have been reported in other Kashmiri-speaking areas of Jammu and Kashmir, including Gool, another locality in the Rajouri region. (Sachdeva et al. 2011; Koul et al. 2012)

In Gool Kashmiri, the replacement process exhibits an additional layer of phonetic sensitivity: the palatalization feature of the original [tʃh] is preserved in the replacement [s]. Specifically, if the [tʃh] is palatalized, the corresponding [s] is also

palatalized; if the [tʃh] is plain (non-palatalized), the resulting [s] remains plain. This indicates that while the affricate is being simplified to a fricative, secondary articulatory features are retained, reflecting the community's phonological awareness and the subtleties of regional speech patterns.

Standard Kashmiri	Gool (Kashmiri)	Gloss
/katʃh/	/kas/	'armpit'
/tʃhjoʈ/	/sjoʈ/	'left-over'
/tʃhjon/	/sjon/	'broke'
/tʃhoʈ/	/soʈ/	'dwarf'
/tʃhaːj/	/saːj/	'shadow'
/tʃhal/	/sal/	'trap'
/tʃhaːviɖʒ/	/saːviɖʒ/	'goat'
/tʃhoːʈi/	/soːʈi/	'pistil'
/tʃhoʈi/	/soʈi/	'dwarfs'

These examples demonstrate that regional Kashmiri varieties in the Rajouri area exhibit systematic phonological adaptation. While the voiceless aspirated affricate [tʃh] is consistently replaced by [s], the replacement respects the secondary articulatory features of palatalization, highlighting a subtle interplay between simplification and phonetic preservation. (Bhat 2008; Bhaskararao et.al 2009)

This phenomenon provides insight into regional dialectal variation, contact-induced change, and the phonological adaptation processes in Kashmiri outside the Valley, emphasizing the role of local multilingual ecologies in shaping speech patterns. (Trask 1996; Winford 2003)

Palatalization in Budhal Kashmiri

Palatalization, a salient phonological feature of standard Kashmiri, is also present in Budhal Kashmiri, but its distribution and usage differ significantly from the Valley varieties. In particular, some words that exhibit palatalized consonants in Srinagar or Anantnag Kashmiri lose palatalization entirely in Budhal. In such cases, the expected palatalized consonant is either simplified or compensated by other

phonetic strategies, reflecting local phonological adaptation. (Bhat 2008; Bhaskararao et.al 2009)

For instance, the word for “stone,” which is /kənɪ/ in Srinagar Kashmiri, is realized in Budhal as /kə̃j/. Here, the nasal consonant at the coda position is deleted, but the loss is compensated by the addition of the glide [j] and nasalization of the preceding vowel. Similar processes are observed in words like /hũj/ (‘bitch’), /tɕj/ (‘coal’), and /sɕj/ (‘dishes’), corresponding to /hu:nɪ/, /tsinɪ/, and /sinɪ/ in Srinagar Kashmiri, respectively.

This phonological pattern is not limited to Budhal but also distinguishes it from other Valley dialects such as Maraz Kashmiri. The following examples illustrate these differences:

Maraz (Kashmiri)	Budhal (Kashmiri)	Gloss
/hu:nj/	/hũ:j/	'dogs'
/anjar/	/ãjar/	'blindness'
/da:nji/	/dã:ji/	'paddy'
/kənɪ/	/kə̃j/	'stone'
/benji/	/bēji/	'sister'

These examples demonstrate several important phonological processes in Budhal Kashmiri: Deletion of coda nasals – The final nasal consonant is often omitted. Glide insertion – A compensatory [j] is introduced to maintain syllable structure. Vowel nasalization – The preceding vowel is nasalized to retain phonetic prominence. Loss or reduction of palatalization – Contrasts with standard Valley Kashmiri. Such variations illustrate that Budhal Kashmiri exhibits region-specific phonological adaptations, likely influenced by prolonged contact with Indo-Aryan languages like Pahari, Gojri, and Dogri. These changes underscore the dynamic nature of language in contact zones, where phonetic simplification, compensatory strategies, and regional dialectal innovation interact to produce a distinct local variety. (Bhat 2008; Koul et al. 2012)

The analysis of Budhal Kashmiri further clarifies the nature of palatalization in areas outside the Kashmir Valley. In standard Valley Kashmiri, palatalized consonants, particularly at word-final positions, serve a grammatical function, such as marking

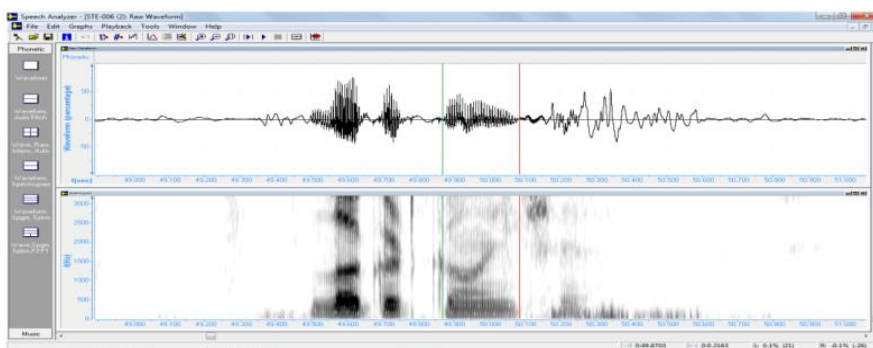
pluralization. In Budhal Kashmiri and other regions outside the Valley, the palatalized consonant is often deleted altogether, but its phonological function is preserved through compensatory strategies: a glide [j] is added at the word-final position, preceded by nasalization of the preceding vowel. Importantly, this compensatory mechanism occurs consistently across all vowels—front, central, and back—demonstrating its robustness as a phonological adaptation. (Bhat 2008; Bhaskararao et.al 2009)

Although the grammatical role of palatalization remains intact outside the Valley, the phonetic realization differs markedly. The following examples illustrate this contrast for the word ‘stone’:

- Valley Kashmiri (Srinagar/Anantnag): /kənʲ/ – the final palatalized nasal consonant is retained.
- Budhal Kashmiri (outside the Valley): /kə̃j/ – the nasal consonant is deleted, a glide [j] is inserted, and the preceding vowel is nasalized.

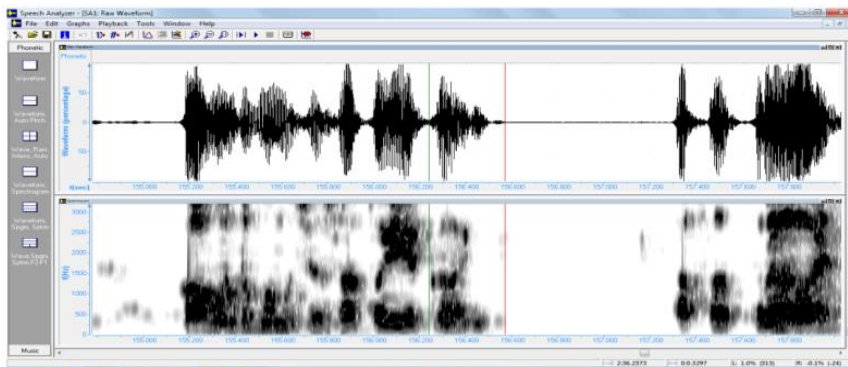
This difference is further supported by waveform-cum-spectrogram analysis:

Budhal Kashmiri /kə̃j/ – The spectrogram shows a glide at the end of the highlighted portion, with no visible coda consonant. The nasalization of the vowel is evident in the formant structure preceding the glide. This demonstrates the compensatory nature of Budhal phonology, where phonetic simplification coexists with functional retention of pluralization.



(Waveform-cum-spectrogram of word ‘stone’ which phonetically retrieved as [kə̃j] in Kashmiri outside Kashmir valley. The highlighted area (between the two lines) represents the word ‘stone’).

Valley Kashmiri [kənʲ] – The spectrogram highlights a clear coda nasal consonant, with palatalization spread around the consonant. Bhaskararao et.al (2009:15) notes that palatalization in Kashmiri consists of three parts: onset, nucleus, and offset. While the offset is often not distinct for word-final palatalized nasals, the onset and nucleus components remain observable in the Valley variant.



(Waveform-cum-spectrogram of word ‘stone’ which is phonetically retrieved as [kənʲ] in Kashmiri spoken within valley. The highlighted area (between the two lines) represents the word ‘stone’).

This comparison illustrates that Budhal Kashmiri exhibits region-specific phonological adaptations. While palatalization continues to serve its grammatical function (e.g., plural marking), its phonetic realization differs markedly from Valley Kashmiri. Budhal speakers achieve functional preservation through glide insertion and vowel nasalization, a pattern likely influenced by contact with neighboring Indo-Aryan languages such as Pahari, Gojri, and Dogri. (Bhat 2008; Bhaskararao et.al 2009)

Overall, these processes highlight the dynamic nature of language in contact zones, where structural simplification, compensatory mechanisms, and regional innovation interact to produce distinct local varieties. Budhal Kashmiri thus provides a compelling example of contact-induced phonological change in a multilingual Himalayan context.

While Budhal Kashmiri exhibits a notable reduction or loss of palatalization in word-final [n] consonants, the acoustic pattern of palatalization for other word-final consonants remains largely consistent with the Kashmiri spoken in the Valley. In particular, Budhal retains the retroflex [ɾ] feature, as seen in Anantnag Kashmiri,

which differentiates it from the Srinagar variety. This indicates that, despite regional simplifications in some phonemes, certain phonological features are preserved, likely due to their functional load in the language and their stability across dialects.

The similarity of Budhal to Anantnag is further corroborated by comparative examples, which also include data from Banihal, another area outside the Valley. The following table illustrates the palatalized word-final consonants across these varieties:

Srinagar	Budhal	Banihal	Anantnag	Gloss
/ʃur ⁱ /	/ʃur ⁱ /	/ʃur ⁱ /	/ʃur ⁱ /	'children'
/hur ⁱ /	/hur ⁱ /	/hur ⁱ /	/hur ⁱ /	'scrubber'
/gur ⁱ /	/gur ⁱ /	/gur ⁱ /	/gur ⁱ /	'horses'
/nər ⁱ /	/nər ⁱ /	/nər ⁱ /	/nər ⁱ /	'sleeves'

These examples demonstrate several points:

Retention of retroflexion [ɽ]: Budhal, Banihal, and Anantnag maintain the palatalized retroflex feature, which contrasts with Srinagar, highlighting a regional phonological consistency outside the central Valley.

Dialectal alignment: Budhal aligns more closely with Anantnag than Srinagar, suggesting geographical and contact-influenced continuity in this feature.

Stability of palatalization in non-[n] consonants: Unlike word-final [n], which undergoes deletion and compensatory strategies, other palatalized consonants retain their acoustic and articulatory integrity, indicating selective phonological change.

Overall, this pattern shows that Budhal Kashmiri preserves key aspects of palatalization while simultaneously adapting certain consonants to local articulatory and phonetic norms. The combination of innovation in [n]-final words and stability in other consonants underscores the complex interplay of regional variation, functional load, and contact-induced phonological change in Budhal and neighboring varieties.

This variation highlights several important points:

Regional morphosyntactic innovation: Budhal Kashmiri simplifies the progressive marker to [-an], differentiating it from the Valley varieties.

Dialectal fluidity: The coexistence of [-an] and [-a:n] forms in Budhal indicates ongoing interaction and influence from Valley Kashmiri.

Contact-induced variation: The presence of both forms may reflect bilingualism or partial convergence with other Kashmiri-speaking regions.

In terms of pronominal usage, Budhal Kashmiri largely aligns with other Kashmiri varieties. The only notable difference occurs in the third-person singular feminine pronoun. While Srinagar Kashmiri uses [sɔ] for 'she', Budhal Kashmiri employs [si], a form also attested in the Baramulla variety. This indicates that, although pronominals are largely stable across dialects, regional variation exists for specific forms, possibly influenced by geographic and contact factors. (Sachdeva et al. 2011; Koul et al. 2012)

A more significant divergence is observed in case marking, particularly in the dative. In Srinagar Kashmiri, dative case suffixes are realized as bound morphemes [-as/-is], appended to the noun. For example: (Kachru 1969; Wani 2014)

Standard Kashmiri (Valley variety)

1(a)							
Kashmiri	əsɪ	ʃʰi	sə:nis	garas	māz	kə:ʃruj	bo:la:n
English	we	be-pr	our	home-dat	in	kashmiri-only	speak-prog
Gloss	(We speak only Kashmiri in our homes.)						

2(a)									
Kashmiri	sə:nɪ	baʃʃi	ti	ʃʰi	sə:nɪs	garas	māz	kə:ʃur	bo:la:n
English	our	children	also	be-pr	our	home-dat	in	kashmiri	speak-prog

Gloss	(Our children also speak Kashmiri at homes.)
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In contrast, Budhal Kashmiri shows deletion of dative case markers, as seen in the corresponding examples:

Budhal Kashmiri

1(b)							
Kashmiri	əʃi	ʃʰu	so:n	garas	māz	kə:ʃruj	bo:la:n
English	we	be-pr	our	home-dat	in	kashmiri-only	speak-prog.
Gloss	(We speak only Kashmiri in our homes.)						

2(b)									
Kashmiri	sə:nj	baʃi	ti	ʃʰi	sə:nj	garas	māz	kə:ʃur	bo:la:n
English	our	children	also	be-pr	our	home-dat	in	kashmiri	speak-prog.
Gloss	(Our children also speak Kashmiri at homes.)								

This deletion suggests a simplification of morphological marking in Budhal Kashmiri, possibly under the influence of neighboring Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Pahari, and Gojri, where explicit dative marking is often absent or expressed via postpositions rather than bound suffixes. (Masica 1991; Winford 2003)

Further examples show Budhal Kashmiri in direct contact with Hindi/Urdu, which may have facilitated the loss of bound dative markers:

The deletion of dative case markers in Budhal Kashmiri appears to be contact-induced, reflecting influence from neighboring Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi/Urdu, Pahari, and Gojri, where explicit dative marking is often replaced by prepositional phrases. In Budhal, syntactic structures align more closely with Hindi/Urdu patterns, where the role of the dative is indicated through prepositions rather than bound suffixes. (Masica 1991; Thomason and Kaufman 1988)

For example:

3						
Kashmiri	əsj	ʃʰi	ala:ka	budal	māz	ro:zan
English	we	be-pr	area	budha	live	prog.
Gloss	(We live in Budhal area.)					

In this sentence, the noun phrase ‘Budhal area’ is marked by the postposition ‘māz’ (in) rather than a dative suffix, demonstrating a shift from synthetic to analytic marking, typical of Indo-Aryan influence.

4											
Kashmiri	kə:ʃur	sapd'o:	tʰə:ɖ pʰo:rt hᵢ	mā z	intraɖu: s	le:ki n	ba:das	mā z	korukʰ	ji	kensal
English	kashmiri	happen- pst	3 rd 4 th	in	introduc e	but	after-that- dat	in	do-pst	thi s	cancel
Gloss	(Kashmiri was introduced in 3 rd 4 th but latter it was cancelled.)										

Here, the postposition /māz/ again replaces a dative suffix, marking the indirect object of the action. The sentence illustrates structural convergence with Hindi/Urdu, which uses prepositions instead of bound morphemes for indirect objects.

5										
Kashmiri	vinikis	ʃʰi	asi	nɪʃ	kita:bi	jimi	kə:ʃri:	māz	ʃʰi	likʰitʰ
English	now	be-pr	we	have	book-pl	which	kashmiri	in	be-pr	write-perf
Gloss	(We do have the books now which are written in Kashmiri.)									

In this example, /kə:ʃri: māz/ (‘in Kashmiri’) shows the same analytic pattern, reinforcing that the dative role is expressed via prepositional marking rather than a bound morpheme.

These examples collectively demonstrate that Budhal Kashmiri has undergone morphosyntactic simplification in case marking due to prolonged language contact. The loss of bound dative suffixes in favor of prepositional structures reflects both substratum influence from neighboring languages and the tendency of contact varieties to adopt analytic strategies for expressing grammatical relations. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

The morphosyntactic features of Budhal Kashmiri reveal a combination of innovation and retention:

- Progressive marker simplified: [-a:n] → [-an]
- Minor pronominal variation: [sɔ] → [si]
- Deletion of dative suffixes [-as/-is]
- Increased use of analytic postpositional constructions
- Strong influence from neighboring Indo-Aryan languages

These changes illustrate how Kashmiri spoken in Budhal has developed into a contact-influenced regional variety, shaped by multilingual interaction. The morphosyntactic simplification observed in Budhal Kashmiri aligns with broader tendencies in contact situations, where bound morphology weakens and analytic structures emerge. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

Budhali as a Link Language

Budhali is regarded by its speakers as the language of the descendants of Raja Budh Pal. According to local oral tradition, Raja Rood Pal of Jammu had four sons, one of whom—Raja Budh Pal—migrated to the region now known as Budhal and settled there. The speech variety associated with him came to be known as Budhali. Over time, this variety was influenced by the neighboring languages spoken in the area and gradually developed into a distinct local form of communication. It is commonly believed that the descendants of Raja Budh Pal originally spoke Budhali as their mother tongue, and from them the language spread to other communities in the region.

In the present sociolinguistic situation, Budhali functions as a link language among different speech communities. Although Kashmiri, Pahari, and Gojri are used within their respective home domains, speakers often shift to Budhali when interacting outside their homes. Thus, irrespective of their linguistic background, individuals from different communities tend to use Budhali for inter-group communication, particularly in markets, workplaces, and public settings. This widespread use has

strengthened Budhali's role as a common medium of interaction in the multilingual environment of Budhal.

Despite its importance as a lingua franca, Budhali remains largely unstandardized. The language has no established writing system and lacks a recognized script. Moreover, there is virtually no written literature available in Budhali, and the language continues to exist primarily in oral form. The absence of written documentation has limited its formal development, although it continues to thrive in everyday communication. This situation highlights the need for linguistic documentation and descriptive studies to preserve and analyze Budhali, especially given its central role in facilitating communication across diverse speech communities in Budhal. (Crystal 2003; Winford 2003)

In Budhal, approximately 40% of the population consists of Kashmiri speakers, for whom Kashmiri serves as the mother tongue. Despite this, most Kashmiri speakers in the region are multilingual and regularly use other local languages in addition to Kashmiri. This multilingual competence is shaped by the contact situation in Budhal, where speakers frequently interact with members of different speech communities. As a result, Kashmiri speakers often employ Budhali and other neighboring varieties in wider communicative domains such as markets, workplaces, and social gatherings.

Language consultants have also pointed out a notable resemblance between Budhali and Bhaderwahi, particularly at the lexical and phonological levels. These similarities suggest possible historical connections or prolonged contact between the two varieties. Such resemblance may also reflect shared features common to the western Pahari zone, where languages influence one another through continuous interaction. The observation further supports the view that Budhali has evolved as a contact-induced variety, shaped by multiple neighboring languages rather than developing in isolation. (Grierson 1903–1928; Masica 1991)

[h]-Dropping in Budhali

One of the prominent phonological features reported in the Kishtwari dialect is [h]-dropping or h-lessness in words where Kashmiri or borrowed lexical items originally contain the consonant [h]. This phenomenon is particularly significant in borrowed vocabulary, where the deletion of [h] represents a clear case of nativization. Through this process, borrowed items are phonologically adapted to fit the sound system of the receiving language. (Haugen 1950; Koul et al. 2012)

A similar feature is also observed in Budhali spoken in Budhal, where the consonant [h] is frequently deleted, especially in initial position. The loss of [h] results in simplified phonological structures, aligning borrowed words with the phonotactic patterns preferred in Budhali. The following examples illustrate this phenomenon:

Urdu/Hindi	Budhali	Gloss
/hatho:ɖa:/	/tho:ɖa:/	'hammer'
/sirha:na/	/sira:na:/	'pillow'
/ha:th/	/ath/	'hand'
/həɖi:/	/əɖi:/	'bone'
/kaha:ni:/	/kã:ni:/	'story'

These examples show that word-initial [h] is systematically deleted in Budhali. In some cases, the deletion is accompanied by vowel nasalization or slight vowel adjustment, further indicating phonological restructuring. This pattern suggests that [h] is either weakly articulated or absent in certain phonological environments in Budhali.

The presence of [h]-dropping in Budhali, similar to Kishtwari, indicates shared phonological tendencies across regional varieties. Such similarities may arise due to areal influence, historical connections, or common phonotactic preferences within the broader linguistic region. The process also highlights how borrowed words from Hindi/Urdu are adapted and integrated into Budhali, reinforcing its status as a contact-influenced variety. (Haugen 1950; Thomason and Kaufman 1988)

Overall, [h]-dropping in Budhali represents an important contact-induced phonological feature, demonstrating both simplification and nativization of borrowed vocabulary within the multilingual setting of Budhal.

Use of High Central Vowel [i] in Budhali

Another noteworthy phonological feature of Budhali is the use of the high central unrounded short vowel [i], which is typically associated with Kashmiri and is considered a distinctive feature of the linguistic varieties of the Kashmir region. This vowel is generally absent in most Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the surrounding areas, such as Pahari, Gojri, and Dogri. Its presence in Budhali therefore suggests

contact-induced borrowing from Kashmiri due to prolonged interaction between speech communities in Budhal. (Kachru 1969; Raina 2002)

The adoption of [i] in Budhali reflects phonological convergence with Kashmiri. Since Kashmiri speakers form a significant portion of the population and maintain regular interaction with other communities, certain phonetic features—such as the high central vowel—have diffused into Budhali. This diffusion illustrates how Budhali has incorporated elements from neighboring languages and developed as a contact-influenced variety. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

The following examples demonstrate the use of the vowel [i] in Budhali:

Word	Gloss
/ambi/	'mango'
/ʃikid/	'mud'
/sabiz/	'green'
/mandir/	'temple'

These examples show that [i] occurs in word-final as well as medial positions, indicating that it is not restricted to a specific phonological environment. The presence of this vowel in Budhali strengthens the argument that the language has undergone phonological borrowing from Kashmiri. (Haugen 1950; Winford 2003)

Overall, the use of [i] in Budhali highlights the impact of language contact on vowel systems and demonstrates how Budhali incorporates distinctive phonetic features from Kashmiri while coexisting with other Indo-Aryan languages in the region.

Lexical Similarities Between Budhali and Kashmiri

Budhali and Kashmiri share a considerable number of lexical items, reflecting the close contact between the two speech communities in Budhal. These similarities may be attributed to prolonged interaction, bilingualism, and borrowing, as Kashmiri speakers constitute a significant portion of the population. As a result, many words in Budhali are either directly borrowed from Kashmiri or inherited through shared linguistic influence. (Haugen 1950; Winford 2003)

The following examples illustrate identical or near-identical lexical items found in both Budhali and Kashmiri:

Budhali	Kashmiri	Gloss
/k ^h and/	/k ^h and/	'sugar'
/dand/	/dand/	'teeth'
/kan/	/kan/	'ear'
/ga:v/	/ga:v/	'cow'

These examples show complete lexical correspondence between the two varieties. Such similarities indicate strong lexical diffusion from Kashmiri into Budhali, reinforcing the role of Kashmiri as an influential language in the region. The borrowing is not limited to cultural vocabulary but also includes basic lexical items, which usually remain stable within languages. This suggests deep and prolonged contact between the two speech communities. (Haugen 1950; Thomason and Kaufman 1988)

The presence of shared vocabulary further supports the view that Budhali has developed within a multilingual contact environment, incorporating lexical material from Kashmiri while also maintaining features from other neighboring languages. Consequently, Budhali represents a contact-induced variety with a mixed lexical base shaped by continuous interaction among different linguistic groups.

Lexical Similarities with Urdu/Hindi and Plural Formation in Budhali

Budhali not only shares a significant portion of its lexicon with Kashmiri, but it also exhibits lexical similarities with Urdu/Hindi, reflecting the multilingual contact situation in Budhal. Due to frequent interaction with speakers of Urdu and Hindi, Budhali has incorporated several lexical items that closely resemble those found in these languages. Some of these items show minimal phonological variation, while others remain almost identical. (Haugen 1950; Masica 1991)

The following examples illustrate lexical similarities between Budhali and Urdu/Hindi:

Budhali	Urdu/Hindi	Gloss
/nak ^h /	/na:k ^h /	'nose'
/dʒi:p ^h /	/dʒi:b/	'tongue'
/anḍa:/	/anḍa:/	'egg'

/ha:tʰi:/

/ha:tʰi:/

'elephant'

These examples demonstrate that Budhali has borrowed or retained lexical items similar to Urdu/Hindi, particularly in basic vocabulary, which further highlights the role of language contact in shaping its lexicon.

Although Budhali is lexically closer to Kashmiri, its plural formation patterns in certain nouns resemble those found in Urdu/Hindi. This suggests that Budhali has adopted morphological strategies from neighboring Indo-Aryan languages, especially in nominal inflection. (Masica 1991; Winford 2003)

Plural Formation in Budhali

Singular	Plural	Gloss
/kuta:/	/kute:/	'dog' (m)
/bila:/	/bile:/	'cat' (m)
/bili:/	/bilijā:/	'cat' (f)
/kukṛi:/	/kukṛijā:/	'hen' (f)

The above examples show that masculine nouns form plurals by changing -a: → -e, while feminine nouns often take the suffix -jā. This pattern closely parallels plural formation in Urdu/Hindi, indicating morphological borrowing or convergence. (Masica 1991)

These observations suggest that Budhali has developed a mixed grammatical system, where lexical influence from Kashmiri coexists with morphological patterns similar to Urdu/Hindi. Such blending of features further supports the view that Budhali is a contact-induced variety, shaped by continuous interaction among multiple speech communities in the region. (Thomason and Kaufman 1988; Winford 2003)

Conclusion

The linguistic situation in Budhal of Rajouri district presents a clear example of language contact and linguistic convergence. The coexistence of Kashmiri, Pahari, Gojri, and other neighboring languages has created a multilingual environment in which Budhali has emerged as an important link language used across speech communities. Although Kashmiri, Pahari, and Gojri are maintained within home

domains, Budhali functions as the primary medium of inter-community communication, thereby strengthening its sociolinguistic significance in the region.

The phonological features discussed in this study demonstrate that Budhali and Budhal Kashmiri have undergone contact-induced changes. These include the loss of certain consonants, [h]-dropping, glide insertion, vowel nasalization, and the adoption of the high central vowel [ɪ], a feature typically associated with Kashmiri. Such adaptations reveal the influence of Kashmiri on Budhali, while also reflecting simplification processes common in contact varieties. At the same time, some phonological features show similarity with neighboring dialects such as Kishtwari and other varieties spoken outside the Kashmir Valley, indicating broader areal influence.

Morphosyntactic features also highlight regional variation. Budhal Kashmiri differs from Valley varieties in the use of progressive markers, deletion of dative case suffixes, and minor pronominal variation. These changes suggest a shift from synthetic morphology toward more analytic constructions, likely influenced by neighboring Indo-Aryan languages such as Hindi, Pahari, and Gojri. The plural formation patterns in Budhali further support this observation, as they resemble Urdu/Hindi morphological structures rather than Kashmiri ones.

Lexically, Budhali shows strong similarities with Kashmiri, sharing a considerable number of basic vocabulary items. However, it also includes lexical elements from Urdu/Hindi and other surrounding languages, indicating extensive borrowing and lexical diffusion. The presence of shared vocabulary from multiple sources reinforces the idea that Budhali has developed within a multilingual contact zone and reflects features from different linguistic traditions.

Overall, the linguistic evidence suggests that Budhali is a contact-induced variety shaped by prolonged interaction among different speech communities. It incorporates phonological features from Kashmiri, morphological patterns resembling Urdu/Hindi, and lexical items from multiple neighboring languages. Despite lacking a standardized script and written literature, Budhali continues to function as a vital medium of communication in Budhal. The study of Budhali therefore provides valuable insights into language contact, dialectal variation, and the emergence of intermediary varieties in multilingual settings.

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