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Language use among the Bantawa: Homogeneity, education, access, and relative prestige

John Eppelle

SIL International

ABSTRACT

The focus of this article is patterns of language use within the Bantawa community, with attention to how these patterns are influenced by the relative homogeneity of each dialect area, access to education, access to the area, and its perceived prestige.

Bantawa is the largest language spoken among the *Kirat Rai* peoples of eastern Nepal. Gerd Hansson's work with the Linguistic Survey of Nepal (1991) gave a broad overview of Bantawa within the context of describing the "bewildering variety" of languages spoken by the Kirat Rai. This included a hypothesis of four major dialects of Bantawa spoken in and near Bhojpur district. My research builds on Hansson's work, interviewing mother-tongue speakers of Bantawa within Bhojpur district and adjacent areas.

Informal interviews with Bantawa people in each dialect area showed that intergenerational transfer patterns are not the same throughout the language area. Several key factors interrelate in different ways in each dialect area, allowing greater opportunity for vitality in some areas than in others. This study adds to the literature concerning Bantawa by contributing descriptions of the primary dialect areas and nomenclature from an emic perspective, as well as investigating patterns of language use within each dialect area.

KEYWORDS

Bantawa, language use, domains, vitality, dialect, Hatuwali, Dilpali, Amchoke, EGIDS, homogeneity, prestige, Kirati, Nepal languages

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Language use among the Bantawa: Homogeneity, education, access, and relative prestige

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1 Introduction

Patterns of language use are one important indicator of a language's *vitality* and the likelihood of that language continuing to be spoken in the future. A study of language use patterns attempts to describe which languages or speech varieties members of a community use in different social situations, referred to as *domains*. Domains are social contexts defined by who speaks the language, when, where and to whom (Fasold 1984: 183). An investigation of language use patterns can indicate the language(s) used in certain domains and reveal the current relative prestige and vitality of a language.

If a study is to evaluate the vitality of a language, the degree of interruption of intergenerational transmission patterns as well as its function in society must be considered. One current measurement of both functional use and transmission patterns is the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Transmission Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis and Simons 2010).¹ EGIDS is based on an elaboration of Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman 1991) and measures vitality on a scale of 0 (strongest vitality: *International*) to 10 (weakest vitality: *Extinct*). Category 6b (*Threatened*) describes a situation in which a language is used orally by all generations, but not being transmitted to all children.

In the case of Bantawa,² I found that intergenerational transfer patterns are not identical throughout the language area. However, it is not enough to merely consider which languages are used in each domain, but also what those patterns mean for language vitality. My data demonstrate that there is more disruption of intergenerational transfer in the *Dilpali* (northern) dialect than in other dialect areas. In this article, I demonstrate that patterns of language use among the Bantawa-speaking community are influenced by various combinations of factors such as homogeneity, access to education, access to the area, and relative prestige³ within each dialect area.

1 Lewis and Simons (2010) have proposed the EGIDS model as an elaboration of Joshua Fishman's Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (Fishman 1991).

2 All language names in this article employ current ISO standard spellings.

3 Landweer (p.c., 2010) points out that, "In spite of Fishman's caution, indicating that relative prestige is a notion that needs contextual qualification (1972: 132–136), as recently as Batibo (2005: 21, 63–65, and 93–95), following points made in Brenzinger (ed. 1992: cf. Sasse p. 21; Batibo pp. 86–89; Legère p. 101; and Sommer, p. 368), the concept of inter-language prestige is summoned as a motivating force for language maintenance and shift."

This research focuses on mother-tongue speakers of Bantawa, especially those originating from Bhojpur and adjacent areas (hereafter referred to as the Bantawa “homeland”). The majority of Bantawa speakers live in the eastern hills of Nepal. According to the 2001 census, the Bantawa language is the ninth largest in Nepal, numbering 371,056 mother-tongue speakers (Central Bureau of Statistics 2002). Thus, Bantawa is the largest language among the language varieties spoken by the ethnic group known collectively as the *Kirat Rai*.⁴ George van Driem (2001: 615) classified Bantawa as within the *Southern* branch of *Central Kiranti*.

Prior to this research, which took place in 2003, a handful of grammars, dictionaries, and linguistic articles had been published about the language of the Bantawa Rai. Of those, only a pair of works by Gerd Hansson (1988 and 1991) made any attempt at describing or comparing the dialects of the Bantawa language in a comprehensive manner. Grammars by Novel Kishore Rai (1985) and Dik Bantawa (1998) focused on particular dialects, *Rabi*⁵ and Dilpali respectively. Julianna Foltan (1992) and Karen Ebert (1994) used examples from Novel Rai’s work when describing Bantawa syntax and morphology. At the time of the survey, the *Ethnologue* listed 11 possible dialects of Bantawa, based on information from a variety of sources (Grimes 2000: 571). Since that time, other works have added to knowledge regarding Bantawa, notably a text collection by Kwang-Ju Cho (2007) and a grammar of the *Hatuwali* dialect by Marius Doornenbal (2009). This article adds to the literature concerning Bantawa by describing the primary dialect areas and their names from an emic perspective, as well as investigating patterns of language use within each dialect area and revealing differing vitality patterns among the dialects.

2 Methodology

The primary method used to investigate patterns of language use was informal interviews, as guided by an interview schedule. Background interviews were carried out with 32 Bantawa-speaking people in Kathmandu. This helped to guide fieldwork planning and the use of a more focused interview schedule with 70 additional subjects in Bhojpur district and adjacent areas in eastern Nepal. An example of this procedure would be asking “What language do you usually speak with your children?” as on the planned interview schedule. If the interviewee happened to respond with two or more languages, follow-up questions such as “Do you speak one of these languages more often than the other?” might be asked. This allowed the interviews to focus more on patterns of language use (and their impact on language vitality and shift) than on other topics, such as generalized trends of multilingualism.

No attempt was made to limit the subject selection during background interviews in Kathmandu, aside from ensuring that subjects were mother-tongue Bantawa speakers. The quota sampling plan for the fieldwork phase was based on the four variables of gender, age, education, and dialect area, as these are factors that commonly influence language use. Interviews were conducted with people from each of the four dialect areas described in section 3, *Dialects of Bantawa*. Twenty subjects were interviewed in each dialect area, with the exception of Dhankuta (the eastern dialect), in which ten subjects were interviewed, for a total of 70 field interviews.

4 The spelling *Kirant* (and its derivative, *Kiranti*) has been used previously in much of the literature. However, Novel Kishore Rai reports that *Kirat* (and *Kirati*) is currently the preferred spelling used by many Kirat Rai people (p.c., 2011).

5 *Rabi* is a dialect of Bantawa spoken in and around Ilam district, to the east of Bhojpur.

There are various limitations to the findings of this study. The original purpose for the survey itself was practical in nature (finding information to aid the establishment of Bantawa language development programmes), limiting the depth and breadth of the investigation. Geographic access and time available for unhindered travel to Bantawa villages were constrained due to the conflict in Nepal.⁶ These factors precluded the collection of detailed information about the forms of the Bantawa language, such as word lists. In addition, data gathered through informal interviews are limited in that subjects may only report what they want the researcher to hear, or what they believe the researcher would like to hear.

3 Dialects of Bantawa

On the basis of Hansson's linguistic analysis, I began with the hypothesis of four primary geographic divisions of language variation within the Bantawa homeland, evaluating them (as well as other potential dialects) from an indigenous perspective. In what he called a "tentative analysis", Hansson (1991: 7) postulated the following "main groups of Bantawa dialects": Eastern, Southern, Northern, and Western. The findings of my research support Hansson's hypothesis, while further defining those dialect areas and identifying the primary appellations used for each. I will speak of these four groupings as "dialects" and "speech varieties", with the recognition that there may be some degree of speech variation within the geographic areas where the dialects are spoken.

The primary names used for three of these four dialects (*Hatuwali*, *Amchoke*, and *Dilpali*) are related to those of three *thums* (*Hatuwa*, *Amchok*, and *Dilpa*, respectively), political units in the nineteenth century (Doornenbal 2009: 9). The eastern dialect, which is called *Dhankuta*, is related to the district by that name, east of Bhojpur. The Dhankuta dialect area, however, crosses into other districts as well.

During a three-week research trip, interviews were carried out with Bantawa speakers in Khoku Village Development Committee (VDC⁷) of Dhankuta district; Ranibas, Sindrang, Chhinamakhu, and Annapurna⁸ VDCs of Bhojpur District; and Bopung and Kahule VDCs of Khotang district. These data collection sites can be seen in Figure 1.

6 Fieldwork was carried out during a brief ceasefire in 2003.

7 A Village Development Committee (VDC) is a political subdivision of districts in Nepal.

8 Some maps and Bantawa people refer to this VDC as *Dilpa*.

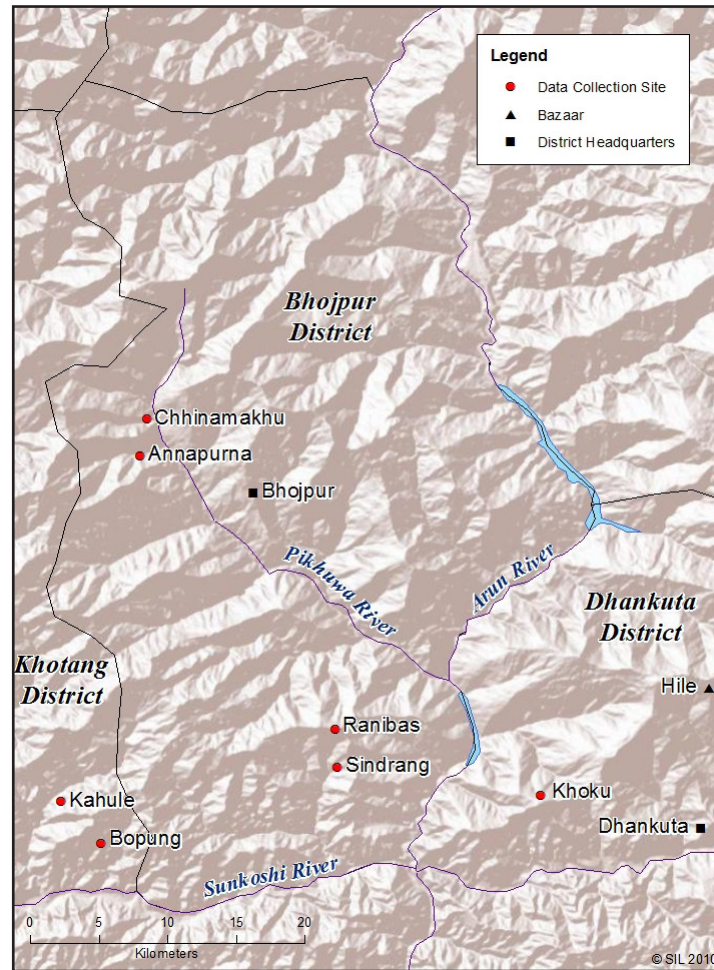


Figure 1. Data collection sites

The Pikhuwa River flows from a valley in the heart of the Dilpali (northern) dialect area. The valley leads to the district headquarters in Bhojpur bazaar. The Pikhuwa River creates a rough boundary to the north of the Hatuwali, or southern, dialect area where Ranibas and Sindrang VDCs were visited. Ranibas is located on a ridge to the south of the Pikhuwa River. The wide Arun River flows along the eastern boundary of Bhojpur district, dividing the Hatuwali area from *Dhankuta*, the eastern dialect area. The *Amchoke*, or western, dialect area is in the southeastern corner of Khotang district, where I visited Bopung and Kahule VDCs.

This survey confirmed Hansson’s hypothesis that there are four primary speech varieties of Bantawa spoken in Bhojpur district and its adjacent areas. In addition, it further defined those dialect areas and identified the primary indigenous appellations used for each: Southern (*Hatuwali*), Western (*Amchoke*), Northern (*Dilpali*), and Eastern (*Dhankuta*). These dialect areas, as well as some neighbouring languages, can be seen in Figure 2.

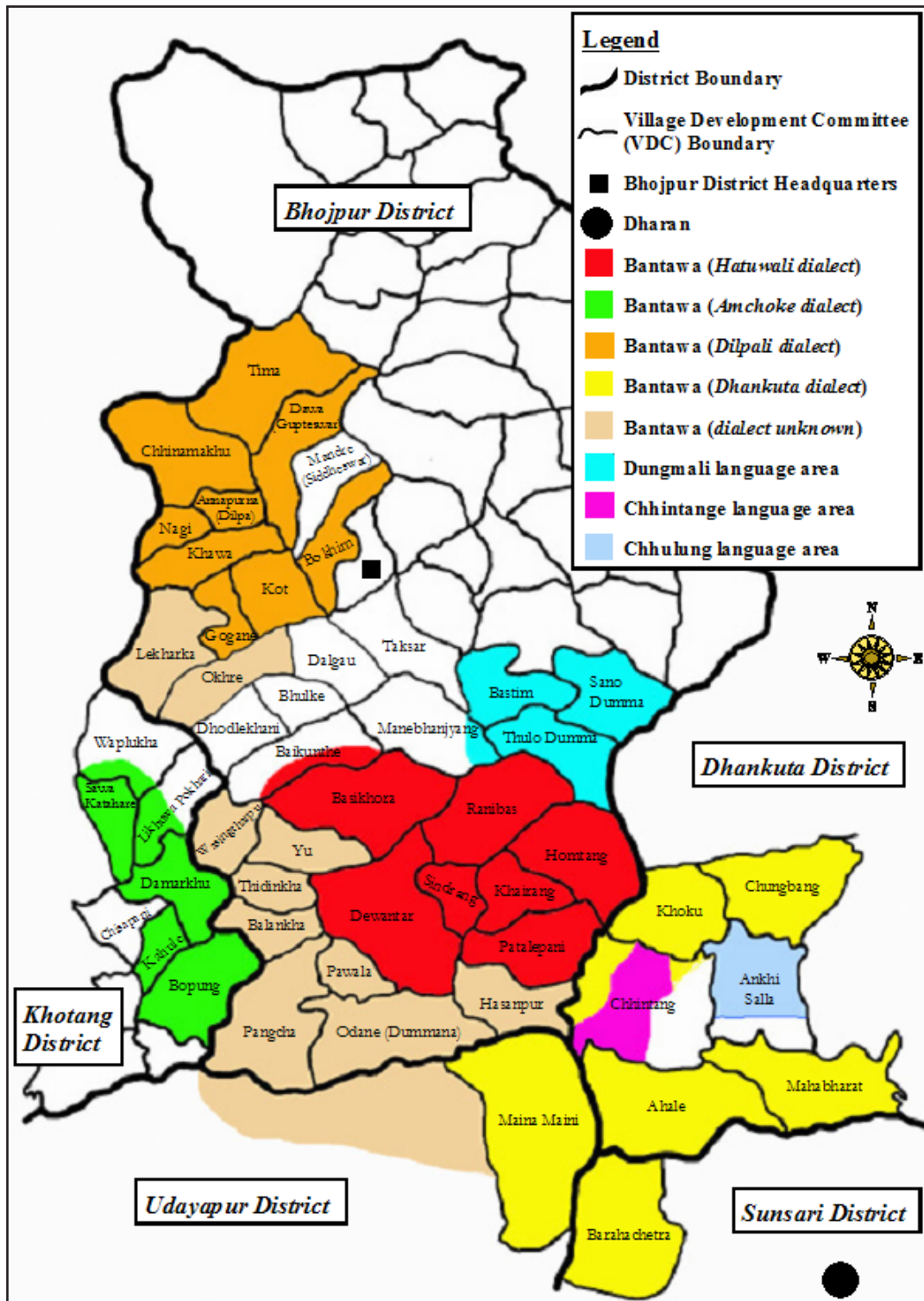


Figure 2. Language⁹ areas by VDC

⁹ All language names in this article employ current ISO standard spellings, as mentioned in footnote 2.

The four dialect areas shown in Figure 2 will be further described in this section, with attention to: indigenous names of dialects, locations, population, homogeneity of the language areas, access to education, access to the area, and the relative prestige of each dialect.

Dhankuta dialect (eastern)

Some subjects referred to Bantawa people in Dhankuta as speaking in a different way, although they did not mention any particular name for that dialect. Hansson (1991: 7) quoted Professor Novel Kishore Rai as referring to it as *Dhankuta dialect*. The Dhankuta dialect is reportedly spoken in Bantawa villages spread within the VDCs of Khoku, Chungbang, Ahale, Mahabharat, and Chhintang¹⁰ in southwestern Dhankuta district, as well as in Maina Maini VDC in northeastern Udayapur district and Barahachetra VDC in northwestern Sunsari district.¹¹ Khoku, Ahale, and Mahabharat VDCs are majority Bantawa. The Dhankuta dialect may be the least populous of the four primary speech varieties.

Both interviews and observation suggest that the Dhankuta dialect may be the most divergent of the four Bantawa varieties. That would concur with Hansson's (1988: 11) discussion of the eastern dialect: "this group shows the highest degree of deviation against other dialects in grammar, perhaps a result of a fusion with earlier dialects of Chhilling." Hansson (1991: 7) also suggests, on the basis of similarity in several phonemic features and lexical elements, that the Dhankuta dialect is most similar to the Southern dialect. This would seem to follow, given the geographic proximity of these two dialect areas.

It is not a long trek from the Dhankuta dialect area to Hile bazaar, so access to the area is not limited by geography. The Dhankuta dialect area is divided down the middle by a ridge that runs through Chhintang and Ankhi Salla VDCs. Chhintange and Chhulung are the Rai groups in these VDCs. Bantawa is spoken as a second or third language by many Chhintange. Bantawa is historically prestigious as a lingua franca in this corner of Dhankuta district (Bradley 1996: 773). Chhintange bilingualism in Bantawa has resulted in the misnomer among many Bantawa from other areas that Chhintange is a dialect of Bantawa.

The 2001 census reports that 79% of children attend school in Khoku VDC, the village visited in this dialect area during field work.

Hatuwali dialect (southern)

The Hatuwali dialect is spoken in southern Bhojpur district, in the VDCs of Ranibas, Sindrang, Homtang, Khairang, Patalepani, Basikhora, Dewantar, and villages in the southernmost parts of Baikunthe VDC. This variety may be spoken in the VDCs of Hasanpur and Pawala as well. Hodgson listed a dialect by the name of "Kiranti", which Hansson (1988: 12) has suggested may be grouped into the southern dialect area of Bantawa. People in the southern dialect area refer to their speech variety as *Hatuwali*. Many Bantawa people from other areas also use this name in reference to the southern dialect. However, it had not appeared in any other known publications prior to this study.

Hatuwali is the most populous of the Bantawa dialects in the region. Ranibas, Sindrang, Homtang, Khairang, Patalepani, Basikhora, and Dewantar VDCs were all reported to have a majority of Bantawa speakers. The 2001 census of Nepal reported that Ranibas and Homtang are

10 Bantawa is spoken as mother tongue for a minority of people in Chhintang VDC.

11 Hansson 1988 and 1991 are the primary source of information for the inclusion of Chungbang and Barahachetra VDCs. Ahale and Mahabharat are attested to by these sources, as well as Kwang-Ju Cho (p.c., 2010).

the most highly populated VDCs in Bhojpur district. The Hatuwali area is roughly bordered by higher elevation (near the border with Khotang district) to the west and rivers to the north, east, and south. Although there are also Dungmali and Nepali speakers in this region, it is fairly homogeneously Bantawa in composition.

Positive attitudes were expressed regarding the Hatuwali dialect by subjects in Kathmandu and throughout the research area. Those within the Hatuwali area had strong positive attitudes towards their mother tongue and their dialect in particular.

The 2001 census reports varying levels of access to education in the two VDCs visited during this survey, with 87% of children in Sindrang VDC attending school and only 61% of children in Ranibas VDC in attendance. This seemed unusual to me, as Ghoretar (the VDC headquarters) is well-known in the region as having several excellent schools.

Amchoke dialect (western)

Many Bantawa speakers refer to the western dialect as *Amchoke*, and the area that it is spoken in *Amchok*. Hansson (1991: 1) referred to this name in reference to a number of Bantawa dialects spoken among Rai minorities in Ilam and adjacent areas, well to the east of Bhojpur. It is possible that some of those people originally migrated from this dialect area.

Amchoke is spoken in most villages in the VDCs of Sawa Katahare, Kahule, Damarkhu, and Bopung in the southeastern corner of Khotang district. It is also spoken by Bantawa people in villages in Waplukha and Likuwa Pokhari VDCs, although it is unclear if these VDCs are majority Bantawa or Camling. The dialect may extend into southwestern Bhojpur district as well (into Balankha, Pangcha, Thidinkha, Yu, Wasingtharpu, and/or Odane VDCs), although it is not clear if people in these VDCs speak Amchoke, Hatuwali, or some mixture of the two.

Bantawa in the Amchoke area interact with Puma Rai (to their west) and Nepali people pass through the area. Bantawa was mentioned as being used with Puma-speakers for communication. Nepali is used for trade when Amchoke speakers head south to Udayapur district. Those from the Amchoke area rarely travel to other Bantawa areas, to their east. The main route for access to the outside world is hiking south, crossing the Arun River, and continuing south to bazaars in Udayapur district.

I saw several schools while hiking through the Amchoke area, but the 2001 census reports that the VDCs visited there have relatively low school attendance.

Dilpali dialect (northern)

Both Bantawa speakers and linguists sometimes refer to the northern dialect as *Dilpali*. It is spoken in Bantawa villages spread within the VDCs of Nagi, Annapurna, Chhinamakhu, Tima, Dawa, Khawa, Bokhim, Gogane, and Kot in the western parts of Bhojpur district, along both sides of the Pikhuwa River valley. It may also be spoken in Okhre and Lekharka VDCs. The percentage of villages that are Bantawa in most VDCs of the Dilpali area is unknown. Annapurna¹² VDC has only three wards in which Bantawa is spoken. Nepali is spoken in the other wards of Annapurna VDC. It was reported that Tima VDC is homogeneously Bantawa and that the Bantawa language is used to a high degree in all domains there.

Hansson (1991: 7) suggested that “Southern and Northern Bantawa show the fewest distinctions among the four main groups, so that they could be put together as ‘Intermediate Bantawa’ against Eastern and Western dialects.” However, Bantawa in both the Kathmandu Valley and the

12 Annapurna VDC is commonly referred to as *Dilpa* VDC.

Bantawa homeland seemed to differentiate between Hatuwali and Dilpali.

The Dilpali area is in a large valley, running northwest from Bhojpur bazaar, the district headquarters. I passed many people along the main trail to Bhojpur bazaar, including groups of school children, dressed in school uniforms. According to the 2001 census, school attendance was fairly high in Annapurna and Chhinamakhu VDCs (89% and 77%, respectively). Travel into the Dilpali area from Bhojpur bazaar took much less time than travel in or out of the Hatuwali and Amchoke areas. Due to the number of mother-tongue Nepali speakers living within the Dilpali area and the increased contact with Nepali in Bhojpur bazaar, Bantawa’s prestige in this area is low, relative to Nepali. This was reflected when nine of the 20 Dilpali subjects expressed that they prefer Nepali as the first language for their children. It appears that the economic and educational advantages of Nepali give it much higher status than Bantawa in the Dilpali area.

4 Analysis of language use

Table 1 displays the languages that Bantawa field subjects reported using in various domains.

| Domain | Question | n= ¹³ | Response | | |
|--|--|------------------|----------|--------------------------------|--------|
| | In what language do you usually speak... | | Bantawa | Bantawa & Nepali ¹⁴ | Nepali |
| Home | with (your) parents? | 70 | 86% | 1% | 13% |
| | with your brothers/sisters? | 69 | 81% | 4% | 15% |
| | with your spouse? | 53 | 81% | 2% | 17% |
| | with your children? | 49 | 57% | 2% | 41% |
| Religion | while doing puja ¹⁵ ? | 70 | 74% | 10% | 16% |
| | while discussing religion with friends? | 69 | 65% | 13% | 22% |
| Feelings | while discussing your deepest feelings? | 70 | 70% | 9% | 21% |
| Village | with your friends? | 70 | 57% | 13% | 30% |
| | with village leaders? | 70 | 38% | 11% | 51% |
| Market | while buying things at market? | 70 | 13% | 16% | 71% |
| Songs | while singing songs ¹⁶ ? | 68 | 10% | 15% | 74% |
| What language do Bantawa children use when they play together? | | 70 | 59% | 11% | 30% |

Table 1. Language use among subjects in the Bantawa homeland

13 The total number of responses for each question is listed in the column *n*=.

14 This column reports the percentage of subjects who said they use both Bantawa and Nepali about equally often in each given situation.

15 “Puja” refers to worship rituals, including prayer. It is traditionally a Hindu term, but is also used by adherents of other religions, including *Kirati Mundhum* (the traditional religion of the Kirat Rai).

16 The percentages for this row do not include the one response of “Hindi and Nepali”, which accounts for 1% of all responses.

Overall, subjects said that they use Bantawa more often than Nepali in most domains (e.g. in the home, religion, expressing one's feelings, and with friends in the village). There were, however, three situations in which subjects said that Nepali usage is more common than Bantawa: speaking with village leaders, buying things at the market, and singing. These are three situations in which interaction with non-Bantawa people is more likely. The inquiry about singing songs was made using the Nepali phrase /*git gaune*/ 'song singing'. Even if the subjects have a Bantawa musical tradition, it is likely the phrase made them think of Nepali music – which is listened to on radios throughout the Bantawa area.

Only 59% of the respondents stated their children primarily use Bantawa when playing with their friends, with 30% stating their children mainly use Nepali. In addition, only 57% of the subjects said that they primarily speak with their own children in Bantawa. This may be an indication of language shift among the younger generation. When there is a disruption of the intergenerational transfer of a language, that language's vitality may be in danger.

This data indicates that the Bantawa have not yet shifted towards Nepali usage on a large scale. But the degree of reported Nepali use by subjects in many of these domains indicates that there may currently be some degree of language shift towards Nepali. It is therefore necessary to look at language use more closely, to see if Bantawa subjects from any particular area or demographic group are influencing these figures towards Nepali.

The data was analysed to investigate any important differences in language use patterns between male and female subjects, between younger and older subjects,¹⁷ and between those with less and more formal education:

1. **Age:** Younger subjects are more likely than older subjects to speak Nepali in nearly all domains, but a majority of all age groups still use Bantawa in those domains (such as the home) that support the continuation of the mother tongue.

2. **Education:** Educated¹⁸ subjects reported using Nepali more than the uneducated in every domain. Education is well-documented as having impact on language choice, and the situation among the Bantawa is no different. However, there is still a fair amount of Bantawa language use. Education is a factor but, as I will demonstrate, not in the ways one might expect. In this case, the way in which education interacts with homogeneity and relative prestige is more important than education as an isolated factor.

3. **Gender:** Language use patterns appear to be somewhat similar between males and females. The two situations in which differences stand out the most (30% or greater difference) are that more females than males reported usually speaking Bantawa while discussing religion with friends and discussing their deepest feelings.

Perhaps the most interesting differences begin to appear when subject responses are compared according to the dialect area they reside within. Table 2 displays the percentage of subjects from each dialect area that reported the primary use of Bantawa. Table 2 focuses on the home domain, and reported language use of children, as these are important indicators of language shift.

¹⁷ "Younger" refers to those ages 15-30 while "older" refers to those 31 years and above.

¹⁸ In this report, "educated" refers to those who have completed at least through grade five. "Uneducated" refers to individuals who have completed four or fewer grades of formal education. Passing an exam at the end of fourth grade is considered to validate a student as literate in the Nepali education system.

| Paraphrased Responses | Dialect Area | | | |
|--|--------------------|---------------------|-------------------|--------------------|
| | Dhankuta (eastern) | Hatuwali (southern) | Amchoke (western) | Dilpali (northern) |
| <i>I primarily speak in Bantawa...</i> | | | | |
| with my parents. | 100% | 95% | 85% | 70% |
| with my brothers/sisters. | 90% | 95% | 84% | 60% |
| with my spouse. | 89% | 94% | 75% | 67% |
| with my children. | 88% | 69% | 60% | 27% |
| What language do Bantawa children use when they play together? | 90% | 75% | 55% | 30% |

Table 2. Primary use of Bantawa according to dialect area

I showed in Table 2 that subjects from the Dhankuta area and the Hatuwali area tended to use Bantawa in more domains than the subjects in the Amchoke area. The clearest trend is that Dilpali subjects reported the lowest use of the Bantawa language in these domains (e.g. 27% of the Dilpali subjects report primarily using Bantawa with their children, as opposed to 88% of the subjects in the Dhankuta area).

The Dilpali subjects use their mother tongue least often with their children and, in turn, their children were said to use Bantawa least often with each other. This trend stands out even more clearly when responses for Nepali use are observed, as seen in Figure 3.

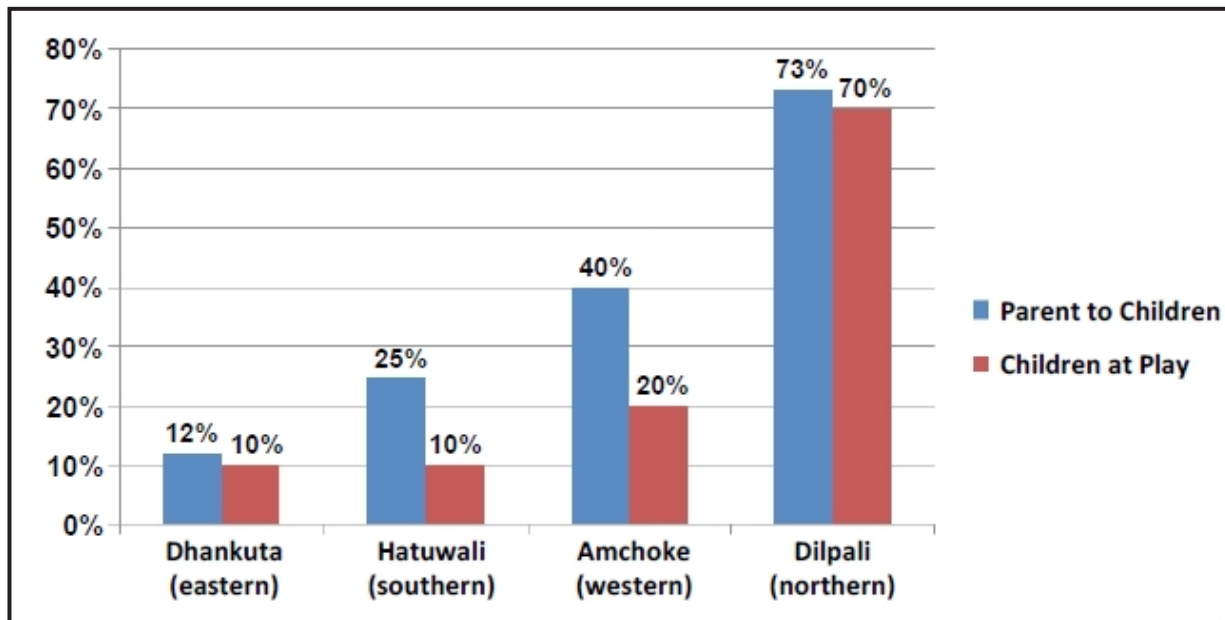


Figure 3. Primary use of Nepali, according to dialect area

Nepali use with and by children is much higher in the Dilpali area than in any other dialect area. Based on the literature, one might expect to see higher Nepali language use in this domain by educated subjects. However, there was practically no difference in the responses given to these two questions by educated and uneducated subjects in the Dilpali area. Instead, access to education (the opportunity for children to attend school locally) and the influence of relative prestige turn out to

be the most important factors influencing language choice among the Bantawa subjects.

As Bantawa parents in the Dilpali area choose to speak Nepali to their children, the children are naturally influenced to speak Nepali with each other as well. If education is not a key factor influencing that choice among parents, then *any* parent (well-educated or otherwise) may choose to speak Nepali with their children. “Any parent” can, in turn, become “every parent”. If that becomes the case, then there will be catastrophic disruption of intergenerational transfer of the Bantawa language in the Dilpali area.

As the mother tongue is used orally by all generations among the Bantawa, but is not being transmitted to children throughout the area, it would be described by EGIDS level 6b, *Threatened*.

5 Discussion

A question that naturally arises from observing this data is, “*Why is this happening?*” Why is Bantawa language use so much less in the Dilpali area than in the Dhankuta, Hatuwali, or Amchoke areas? In what ways do homogeneity, access to education, access to the area, and relative prestige combine to affect patterns of language use and transmission in each dialect area? Table 3 shows some generalities of these factors in each dialect area. In reality, these relationships are not binary values as the ‘+’ or ‘-’ might suggest, but displaying them in this way provides an introduction to describing their relationships.

| Dialect Area | Factor | | | |
|------------------|-------------|---------------------|----------------|-------------------|
| | Homogeneity | Access to Education | Access to Area | Relative Prestige |
| Dhankuta (east) | + | + | + | + |
| Hatuwali (south) | + | +/- | - | + |
| Amchoke (west) | + | - | - | +/- |
| Dilpali (north) | - | + | + | - |

Table 3. Key factors according to dialect area

The Dhankuta dialect area (specifically Khoku VDC, as the only Bantawa village visited there) is homogeneously Bantawa. There is access to education within Khoku VDC. There is also access to the Nepali-speaking bazaars in Hile and, further away, Dhankuta. However, most interaction is with other groups for which Bantawa holds higher prestige. Despite access to education, subjects in Khoku VDC continue to speak Bantawa with their children. The combination of homogeneity and relative prestige appear to be more influential than access to education in this area.

The Hatuwali area is homogeneously Bantawa. Access to education is mixed (more in some areas than in others). It takes longer to travel from the Hatuwali area to Nepali-majority areas, as compared to travel time from other Bantawa areas. Bantawa is prestigious in the Hatuwali area. These factors combine favourably for language vitality in the Hatuwali area, as reflected in their language use patterns.

The Amchoke area is also homogeneously Bantawa. Access to education is lower than in other dialect areas. The Amchoke area has more access to the outside world than the Hatuwali area, but is still somewhat remote. The Bantawa in this area interact with both Puma and Nepali

people, but they have more interaction with Nepali people, especially for economic purposes. Language transmission was reportedly lower in the Amchoke area than in Hatuwali or Dhankuta, yet markedly higher than in the Dilpali area.

Finally, the Dilpali area is less homogeneously Bantawa than the other dialect areas. They have good access to education, although I have shown that factor alone is, in isolation, not the primary factor interrupting intergenerational transfer of Bantawa. The high degree of contact with Nepali speakers, including the nearby district headquarters, has contributed to Bantawa having lower relative prestige in the Dilpali area. This is the key difference between the Dilpali and Dhankuta areas. The lack of homogeneity and relative prestige in the Dilpali area appear to interact with their access to education in such a way that parents are motivated to use Nepali with their children. This appears to be leading towards catastrophic disruption of intergenerational transfer of the Bantawa language in the Dilpali area.

In summary, it is not education alone that is influencing parents in the Dilpali area to use Nepali with their children, but perhaps hope for a better life that they perceive in the higher prestige of integration into the national scene through the Nepali language.

6 Conclusions

This article has added to knowledge about the Bantawa language by describing emic perspectives regarding the primary dialect areas and nomenclature, as well as investigating patterns of language use within each dialect area. The four primary dialects spoken in Bhojpur and adjacent areas are Dhankuta (eastern), Hatuwali (southern), Amchoke (western), and Dilpali (northern). Rates of intergenerational transfer vary between dialect areas, resulting in the threat of catastrophic disruption to the continuation of the Dilpali dialect.

This article has added to the field of sociolinguistics by giving a case study of the interaction of various factors involved in language choice, comparing their impact in various dialect areas of a single language group. I have shown that education alone is not a key factor in predicting choice of language use. Homogeneity, access to the language area, and relative prestige combine in various ways, affecting the impact that access to education plays in language choice in intergenerational transfer.

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