

The Fall and Rise and Fall of the Chantyal Language

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0. Introduction¹

In this paper, I will discuss the history and current status of the Chantyal² [ts^həntjal] people and their language, a Tibeto-Burman language in the Chantyal-Gurung-Manang-Tamang-Thakali [CGMTT] group, spoken in Nepal.³ I will show how the language underwent the curious, simultaneous ‘fall and rise’ of the title, and how the language is currently undergoing a slow and, mostly likely, inexorable decline, the last ‘fall’ of the title.

1. Demographics

The Chantyal people are a relatively small ethnic group, numbering no more than 8000 or 9000, though for reasons that will be discussed below, an accurate estimate of their population is not yet possible. The Chantyal can be divided into two groups, the Myagdi Chantyal and the Baglung Chantyal, named for the districts they inhabit within the Dhaulagiri Zone of central Nepal. Until the recent immigration to towns and cities, the interaction between the two groups was, in general, quite limited. The Baglung Chantyal ceased to speak the Chantyal language some time in the 19th century and now know only the national language, Nepali; the majority of the Myagdi Chantyal continue to speak Chantyal in their home villages. This paper will be concerned primarily with the Myagdi Chantyal, in particular the 2000 or so who speak the Chantyal language.

The Chantyal speaking villages⁴ are located in the eastern portion of the Myagdi district in a region known as Aṭh Həjar Pərbət [Eight Thousand Hills], which is bounded on the north by Dhaulagiri [8167m], on the east by the Thulo Khola Valley, on the south by the Tharakha Khola Valley, and on the west by the Marang Khola. It is a very rugged region, difficult to move around in and difficult to farm. None of the Chantyal speaking villages has yet been connected to an electricity grid. Medical personnel and police make only periodic visits to the villages.

The Chantyal are a minority within the Myagdi District. Brahmins, Chetris, Nepali speaking Magars, and a few Thakalis and Newars make up the bulk of the population. Within the villages, alongside the Chantyal, live Nepali speaking Kamis, an

¹ I would like to thank Ram Prasad Bhulanja for comments he made on an earlier version of this paper. Needless to say, all mistakes and misinterpretations are my own.

² The transcription system used for the Chantyal and Nepali names in this paper is somewhat inconsistent. Save for the ethnonym Chantyal, all Chantyal words are transcribed in the system described in Noonan *et al* (in preparation). Nepali words referring to places and ethnic groups are transcribed in the informal manner usually found in non-technical books and maps. Less familiar Nepali words are given a more accurate transliteration described in Noonan *et al* (in preparation).

³ Work on Chantyal has been going on continuously since 1989 and will be reported in Noonan *et al* (in preparation). The work has been supported by the National Science Foundation, grant No. DBC-9121114.

⁴ The villages are: Məŋgəle Khani, Dwari, Gḥyās Khərka, Cəwra Khani, Kwine Khani, Thara Khani, Patle Khərka, Malampfiar, and Məlkabaŋ.

untouchable caste of blacksmiths, who are always addressed in Nepali. When Chantyal and other peoples live on the same slope, the Chantyal farm the highest land: on the slopes below them live Magars and members of the Hindu castes, all of whom are addressed in Nepali.

2. *Early History of the Chantyal Language and People*

The CGMTT languages and the Tibeto-Kanauri group combine to form the Bodish branch of the Bodic section of Tibeto-Burman. Within the CGMTT group, Chantyal is most closely aligned with Thakali, both grammatically and lexically.

The ancestral CGMTT speakers came down from Tibet at least 1500 years ago and settled in the mountains of Nepal. At first, cattle raising, hunting and foraging were their primary economic activities, but farming became increasingly important, eventually overtaking the others as the primary economic activity.

At some point the Chantyal became specialists in mining. The first trace of them as a separate group finds them living in the west of Nepal, working in mines and quarries and moving gradually eastward. They seem to have arrived in their present locations in the Myagdi and Baglung Districts in the late 18th century or early in the 19th century, having a patent from the King of Nepal to mine the copper found there.

3. *Origin of the Modern Chantyal*

The Chantyal who moved into the Myagdi and Baglung Districts were a very different group from the people currently calling themselves Chantyal. There is strong evidence indicating that a single clan, the Għərəmja [or Għərəbja], served as the nucleus for the entire group. The twelve [or thirteen⁵] other clans derive from non-Chantyal who were inducted into the Chantyal ethnic group. Chantyal oral tradition preserves memory of the origin of most of these clans. This memory is reinforced by the fact that many of the clan names are identical to clan names of other nearby ethnic groups.⁶

It is not known at this time how many Chantyal clans there were at the time the group moved into the Dhaulagiri Zone, but it seems likely that most of the existing clans assumed Chantyal status after the move.⁷ It must have been very attractive at that time to be a Chantyal; the profits from mining must have been considerable and the role of the Chantyal as miners was so valuable to the Nepalese state that Chantyal were exempt from the military draft during the period of wars with British India early in the 19th century.⁸ Further, the patent assigned to the Chantyal specified that only they

⁵ The members of the Nəṅrəkuti clan are regarded by some as not being true Chantyal: the clan is descended from Newars.

⁶ For example, the Burathəki are derived from the Magar Buḍhathokī, the Għyapcən from the Yhulkasummi Thakali Gyabcən, the Khərka from the Chetri Khəḍka, and so on.

⁷ This problem and the problem of the specific origin of each of the clans will be discussed in Bhulanja and Noonan (forthcoming).

⁸ One indicator of the importance of the Chantyal mines to the state was the presence of a mint at the mine in Jhij Khani.

could do the mining, so the Chantyal themselves must have been in need of additional labor.

The social and linguistic effects of this influx of non-Chantyal into the community must have been considerable. The Chantyal had for long been a small group living among Nepali speakers [the west of Nepal is primarily Nepali speaking]. But after moving into the Dhaulagiri Zone, native speakers of Chantyal became a minority within their own communities. The massive influx of non-Chantyal speakers, almost all of whom must have had Nepali as their native language, resulted in the large-scale use of Nepali within Chantyal villages. This overwhelmed the Chantyal language in the Baglung District. In the Myagdi District, the Chantyal language survived, but the presence of so many non-native speakers in the community had profound effects on lexicon and phonology.

The Chantyal lexicon is now overwhelmingly Nepali, and changes in the phonology took place which are characteristic of contact induced substratic influence. I'll mention just three such effects here. First, Chantyal lost the tone system which characterizes the other CGMTT languages. Nepali has no tone system. Second, Chantyal lost the distinction between the dental and retroflex series of stops, a distinction which also characterizes the other members of the CGMTT languages. This distinction is found also in standard Nepali, but not in the western dialects of Nepali, and it is speakers of these dialects who were assimilated into the Chantyal ethnic group. The third effect involves the simplification of clusters. Inherited initial clusters of *CrV and *CIV were broken up by an epenthetic vowel identical to the original vowel following the cluster. So, for example, we have Chantyal p̄hara 'flour' next to Gurung prohq, Tamang pra:h and Thakali 'prah, and Chantyal piri-wa 'let loose' next to Gurung p̄riq-ba.

It was during this period of assimilating large numbers of non-Chantyal into the Chantyal community that the Chantyal language underwent the 'fall and rise' of the title. The 'fall' occurred in the Baglung District, where the language ceased to be spoken altogether. The 'rise' occurred in the Myagdi District, where the language acquired a large number of new speakers, even if the language was much changed in the process.

The Chantyal language continues to survive in the Myagdi District, though even there it has been losing ground. In Thara Khani, the upper village speaks Nepali, while the lower village continues to speak Chantyal.⁹ The language has ceased to be spoken in the villages of Gurja Khani and Nharja Khani. The loss of the language in the last two villages must have occurred fairly recently: Michl (1974) reported that old people in Gurja Khani could still understand Chantyal. Now the only natives of these towns who know the language are a few daughters of women who married in from a Chantyal

⁹ This is one way to view the situation in Thara Khani. Another way to view it is in terms of clans: the Bfulanja and Burathaki clans, who inhabit the lower village, speak Chantyal, while the Purane clan, who inhabit the upper village, mostly speak Nepali. The special situation of Thara Khani will be discussed in §4.3.

speaking village.¹⁰ In the next two sections, I will discuss the social and economic factors affecting the survival of the Chantyal language.

4. *Social Forces Affecting the Chantyal Language Today*

There are five basic social considerations affecting the maintenance of the Chantyal language: contact with Nepali speakers, official language policy, marriage patterns, the attitude of Chantyls toward Chantyal language and ethnicity, and attitudes toward the ethnic languages.

4.1 Contact with Nepali Speakers

Speakers of Nepali are encountered both within and outside the village. Chantyal is only used in addressing other Chantyls. Since contact with non-Chantyls is frequent and since situations exist requiring Nepali even in interactions among Chantyls, all Chantyls are Nepali-Chantyal bilinguals.

As noted above, Chantyal villages contain within them families of blacksmiths who are always addressed in Nepali. These people, the Kamis, no doubt understand Chantyal – they have lived among Chantyal speakers from birth – but never speak the language. Pedlars coming through the villages must also be addressed in Nepali: these include goldsmiths, who are native speakers of Nepali, and Tibetans from Mustang, who sell chilies, clothes, needles and thread, wild garlic, medicines, yeast starters for brewing, and various other things. In the past, Thakalis would come to the villages selling salt: they, too, were addressed in Nepali. Police and health workers must also be addressed in Nepali.

It was noted above that there are instances when Chantyls must address each other in Nepali. For example, when the mayor or deputy mayor addresses the villagers in an official capacity, s/he is required by law to speak Nepali. Further, only Nepali may be used in the village schools. It is often the case that there are non-Chantyal children in these schools. But even when both teacher and children are Chantyal, only Nepali is used, as required by law. The incantations of a shaman are likely to be in Nepali. And, of course, when Chantyls encounter fellow Chantyls from non-Chantyal speaking villages, they must use Nepali.

Interactions with local non-Chantyls, both within and outside of Chantyal villages, are always in Nepali. Chantyls traveling to regional centers to buy supplies speak Nepali to shopkeepers. Nepali must be used with any official of the Nepalese state. Chantyls leaving their home villages to find work must, of course, speak Nepali.

4.2 Official Language Policy

The official policy in Nepal as regards the indigenous languages is not one of overt discouragement or repression, but since the government is concerned with forging a national consciousness, there is no encouragement given to the preservation of local lan

¹⁰ I know of no instances where under these circumstances a son learned the language from his mother.

Some of the women who have learned the language from their mothers are fairly fluent: one woman I interviewed could converse quite well in the language and was able to provide a long list of vocabulary items from a questionnaire used to elicit dialect differences among native speakers.

guages. The legal obligation to use Nepali on the part of mayors and teachers was mentioned earlier. Legal documents and ballots are written only in Nepali, and only Nepali may be used in legal proceedings. Partly as a consequence of this policy, there are now few natives of Nepal who do not speak at least some Nepali. Further, the relatively small size of virtually all the non-Nepali speaking ethnic groups has also contributed to a situation where Nepali is an essential tool for interethnic communication, a daily occurrence for many.

4.3 *Marriage Patterns*

Marriage patterns are another factor affecting the maintenance of Chantyal. Ignoring here various complexities¹¹, marriageability is determined by degree of relatedness and clan membership. The thirteen clans, all exogamous, are divided into two groups: the first consists of the Għərəmja and Purane clans, and the second consists of all the remaining clans. The Għərəmjas and Puranes may marry each other and they may marry members of any other clan; the other clans can marry only Għərəmjas and Puranes. The result of this system is that marriage partners usually have to be sought outside one's village. This necessitates a certain amount of wandering around among the villages by young men and women, which is done both in groups and individually. Women come to live in their husband's village, but may, and often do, return to their native villages to visit relatives. This situation has had two notable effects: as regards the Chantyal language itself, it has helped keep down much in the way of dialect variation between the villages. It has also hastened the decline of the language in places like Gurja Khani and Nħarja Khani, where wives frequently come from the non-Chantyal speaking Baglung District, and in Thara Khani, where wives sometimes come from Gurja Khani. In the Chantyal speaking villages, Thara Khani apart, marriages with non-Chantyal speaking Chantyls are still relatively rare.

The case of Thara Khani deserves special comment. As noted before, the upper village is mostly Nepali speaking, while the lower village is Chantyal speaking. The lower village is inhabited by members of the Burathəki and Bħulanja clans. The Burathəki are relatively wealthy, both from the quality of their land and from service in the Gurkha regiments. The men are able to obtain good marriages with high status Għərəmja women, all of whom are Chantyal speakers. The constant influx of these women helps preserve the Chantyal language in that part of the village. The Bħulanjas are recent Chantyal speaking migrants to the lower village and thus have reinforced the Chantyal language there. The upper village is inhabited primarily by members of the low status Purane clan; it also contains a few families of the low status Nəħərkuti clan and some families of mixed ethnicity. The land farmed by these people is relatively poor. The low social status of all these people¹², as well as their relative poverty, make them unattractive as marriage partners. The result is that spouses must often be ob

¹¹ Marriage patterns are discussed in detail in Noonan *et al* (in preparation) and Bħulanja and Noonan (forthcoming).

¹² The low status of the Purane is illustrated by the fact that they are believed to pollute millet mush upon touching it. As for the Nəħərkutis, they are not even regarded as Chantyls by some people.

tained from remote, non-Chantyal speaking villages. The presence in the upper village, then, of non-Chantyal speaking women, as well as people of other ethnic groups, has contributed to the loss of the language there.

4.4 The Attitude of Chantyls toward Chantyal Language and Ethnicity

Chantyal ethnic identification is quite strong, and the efforts of the Chhantyal Pərivar Səngħə [The Chantyal Family Organization] to establish the Chantyal as an official caste and to promote the general welfare of Chantyls have been well supported. However, the Chhantyal Pərivar Səngħə has not so far taken any concrete action to support the language. Indeed, the president and founder of the organization, Dil Bəhadur Ghərəbja Chhantyal, does not speak Chantyal. In this he is typical of Chantyls, since at most only a quarter speak the language. When Chantyal-speaking and non-Chantyal-speaking Chantyls get together, the conversation is always in Nepali: the non-speakers are never pressured to speak the language or made to feel uncomfortable for not speaking it.

One's identity as a Chantyal is not, then, in any way related to one's ability to speak the language. This is both a product of the de facto language situation and of the peculiarities of the Nepali social system. The process of Hinduization that preceded the establishment of the state of Nepal and that has been fostered by the government since the inception of the state has resulted in an interpretation of the various ethnic groups of Nepal as separate castes.¹³ Chantyls are thus Chantyls and cannot be anything else; that is, they cannot merge into some mainstream Nepali society and lose their identity as Chantyls. Everyone in Nepal belongs to a caste.¹⁴ So, even as Chantyls migrate to the cities in increasing numbers and cease to have contact with those living more traditional lives, they remain Chantyls and, in the ordinary course of things, must search for another Chantyal to marry.

4.5 Attitudes toward the Ethnic Languages

In the towns and cities, one often hears coethnics speaking to each other in Nepali, even though all the participants in the conversation can speak the ethnic language. This is especially common among those who wear Western clothes and have adopted the manners and style of the city. Knowledge of the ethnic language is not, therefore, something one shows off under ordinary circumstances. It should be noted here that knowledge of Nepali is not something that ordinarily could be used to hide one's ethnic identity. Racially, Nepal's people are a mosaic of three distinct strains: Caucasoid, Mongoloid, and Australoid/Dravidian. The various castes and ethnic groups partake of these strains in varying degrees and most Nepalis insist that they can identify a person's ethnicity easily by his or her appearance. So, a group of Gurungs, say, will be visually identified in Pokhara as Gurungs regardless of the language they speak.

¹³ This is, of course, an oversimplification. The Newars, for example, have a large number of castes within their ethnic group. The ethnic groups described as 'hill peoples', however, have in general been assigned the status of a single caste. See Bista (1991) for a discussion of the relation between ethnicity and caste in contemporary Nepal. For a discussion of the caste status of the Chantyls, in their own perception and in the perception of others, see Bhulanja and Noonan (forthcoming).

¹⁴ See Bista (1991) for ways in which this statement must be qualified.

Speaking Nepali is not, therefore, a way of hiding one's ethnic identity, at least not in the ordinary course of things.

The decision to speak Nepali is not about ethnicity, it is about economics and status. Since the languages of the hill peoples are, with few exceptions, spoken only by poor people, it should not be surprising that most Nepalis regard them as signs of backwardness and poverty. It is understood by everyone that knowledge of these languages is never a means to economic success in the larger world, unlike knowledge of Nepali and English. There is, therefore, no encouragement from the outside to promote these languages or even to preserve them. Within the ethnic communities themselves, families are concerned that children speak Nepali well and that they learn some English; making sure children learn the ethnic language is seldom a concern.

For those who speak the ethnic languages, their main value would appear to be one of expressing solidarity with coethnics. But as an increasing number of coethnics do not know the language, the value of the language as an expression of ethnic solidarity decreases. So, as the languages of the hill peoples have no economic value in the larger world and lose their value as expressions of ethnic solidarity, they continue to lose ground.

5. Economic Forces Affecting the Chantyal Language Today

Economically, the saga of the Chantyls over the last century is one of increasing relative impoverishment. This has come about as a result of several factors. The first of these, both historically and in terms of importance, was the abandonment of mining. Early in this century it was becoming increasingly clear that mining was no longer a profitable activity. The mines were playing out, but the taxes owed the government for the privilege of mining remained constant. The Chantyal petitioned the king of Nepal to allow them to stop mining; their petition was accepted and by 1930-1 mining activity had ceased. Even before this date, many Chantyls had turned to agriculture. Their problem was that the better land had already been occupied by other groups, and therefore the Chantyal were stuck with the highest and least productive land. All Chantyal villages are too high to grow rice, which is the favored grain and which they buy when they can afford it. Disputes erupted between Chantyls and Magars and between Chantyal villages over land, many of which took years to resolve and over which there was much lingering hard feeling.

Even with their relatively unproductive land, the Chantyal were able to live reasonably well due to a couple of additional sources of food and wealth. First, a few decades ago, the forests in their region were still rich with game, and hunting, using locally made muskets, was a profitable activity. Second, Chantyal men for many generations have enlisted in the Gurkha units of the British and then Indian armies. Since the Chantyal were not listed among the 'warrior races' that the British preferred for their Gurkha recruits, the Chantyal pretended to be Magars, usually taking the Magar clan name 'Poon'. This deception brought them income in the form of salaries and pensions whose value to the community increased as mining ceased to be profitable. In order to protect this source of income, the Chantyal for years identified themselves to outsiders

as Magars, and were so counted in the official census. Virtually all of the few references to Chantyal in the popular or anthropological literature identify them as 'Chantel Magars'. The work of the Chhantyal Pərivar Səŋghə has now changed the group's official status, and the British and Indian armies no longer officially inquire as to the ethnicity of applicants into the Gurkha units. A number of men now serving in the British army are endeavoring to change their official surnames to 'Chantyal'.

The wealth of the forest and remittances from the army made life tolerable for a number of decades. A number of things happened which have changed this for the worse. First, public health measures, even the fairly primitive ones undertaken by the Nepali government, resulted in a decreased rate of child mortality and thus an overall increase in population in Nepal. This increase strained the resources of the fields and the forests. Further, the productivity of the fields has been inadequately replenished, with the result that yields are low.¹⁵ The forests, which have to supply wood for fires and construction and game for the pots, have been over utilized. People must go increasing distances to find wood, and game has all but disappeared. To add to the problems, the British and Indian armies now enlist few Gurkha soldiers. The result is that life in the villages has become increasingly difficult and the pressure on men to leave the area – and, often, the country – to find work has become intense.

Even now a significant number of people who grew up speaking Chantyal live outside the Myagdi District. Many are single men, working in the cities or abroad, who plan someday to return to their villages. But many others come from families of veterans of the British and Indian armies, people who had lived in army camps and had become used to the relatively comfortable – and sanitary – conditions to be found in the larger towns, but not yet in the villages. Some live in Pokhara and Kathmandu, but many more live along the Indian border in places like Butwal, where they have access to services provided for veterans by the Indian government. Children growing up in such households often learn Chantyal only imperfectly, if at all. This was true in the past also for children of servicemen who grew up on army bases. As adults, such people often prefer to live in towns rather than settle in their ancestral villages. Economic considerations are, of course, a major factor in their decisions, but their lack of control over the language no doubt contributes to their unwillingness to resettle in the villages.

6. *Status of the Chantyal Language Today*

It has already been noted that there are no longer monolingual Chantyal speakers. Indeed, it has probably been a number of generations since anyone would fit that characterization. All Chantyls, even children, possess an active command of Nepali. The transition, then, to a Nepali speaking environment is not a difficult one for a Chantyal. In principle, it would be possible for all Chantyal speaking villages to shift immediately to Nepali without any serious disruption in communication. But most Myagdi Chantyls have not done so. Why haven't they?

¹⁵ Recently the green revolution has reached the Chantyls, bringing them better cultivars and improved techniques for cultivation. This has not reversed the decline, merely slowed it down.

A part of the answer lies in their relative isolation and poverty, which has assisted in the retention of the language in a variety of ways. As to their isolation, they are currently two day's walk from the nearest road.¹⁶ There are, therefore, few strangers passing through their district and their poverty offers little incentive for others to do so. No trekking routes pass through their territory. Because they are poor and ill educated, they do not subscribe to magazines or newspapers. Few radios exist in the villages, and these must be powered by batteries, which are expensive and have to be purchased in Beni, a day's walk away. Their poverty has assisted in the maintenance of the traditional structure of their communities: because their land is relatively unproductive, members of other ethnic groups have not been tempted to move to the region and buy their land, as happened, for example, to the Kiranti peoples of eastern Nepal.¹⁷ Out migration apart, their communities have thus remained intact. Where land transactions between Chantyal and non-Chantyal take place, they invariably go in the opposite direction, with Chantyal, usually army veterans with money saved during their time of service, buying more productive land in non-Chantyal districts.

Their isolation and poverty have not kept them free of Nepali influence, as has been noted often enough above. All Chantyal speakers are bilingual in Nepali. What we find in the Myagdi District, then, is a diglossic situation where the two languages exist in a situation of functional distribution, each having its specified domain, a situation similar to that of Spanish and Guaraní in Paraguay and, closer to home, of various caste languages in India. As discussed earlier, in the villages Chantyal is used solely – but also exclusively – for communication among Chantyal in non-institutional settings. Nepali is used in interactions with outsiders, including interactions among Chantyal involving institutions, such as the school or local government, created by outsiders.¹⁸ An index of the outsider status of the resident Kami blacksmiths is the fact that they must be addressed in Nepali.

Instances of long-term diglossia seem to result in a high degree of syntactic convergence. While this is certainly true of the relation between Chantyal and Nepali, it is perhaps no more so than that which exists between Nepali and any of the other CMGTT languages. However, in the area of lexical borrowing, Chantyal is unique among these languages in the degree to which its vocabulary derives from Nepali: a rough count in the over 400 pages of the Chantyal-English dictionary reveals that 74% are of Nepali

¹⁶ This situation may change when the Chinese-built road that will ultimately connect Pokhara with Mustang reaches Beni, the chief town of the Myagdi district. When this happens, the Chantyal will be one day's walk from the nearest road.

¹⁷ Van Driem (1993) describes how the Dumi became a minority in their own region and how devastating the effect of this was on their language.

¹⁸ It has struck me as curious – though perhaps this would not surprise an anthropologist – that Chantyal never sing in their own language. All songs are in Nepali. Ram Bhulanja has told me a story of an incident, presumably in the late '60s, when an anthropologist came to Məŋgəle Khani and wanted to record a Chantyal song. He refused to accept the people's assertion that they had no songs in their own language and kept prodding them to sing one for him. So, a local jokester obliged by making one up on the spot. The anthropologist duly recorded the song and villagers found the whole spectacle hilarious.

origin, 4% are of English origin,¹⁹ and only the remaining 22% are of Tibeto-Burman stock. In running text, the percentage of Nepali roots hovers remarkably consistently at around 41% of the total.²⁰ The borrowed words include not only the expected items referring to high culture, religion, and technology, but they also include among their number numerals, almost all kinship terms, almost all names for plants and animals, almost all names for domestic items and clothing, names of colors, etc. Verbs show more resistance to borrowing than nouns, but even with verbs, the great majority are borrowed. It is in the area of grammatical morphemes that Chantyal shows real autonomy: virtually all grammatical morphemes save conjunctions and subordinators are native. Chantyal has even resisted modeling its dative on Nepali *-lai*: a number of Tibeto-Burman languages of Nepal have refashioned the inherited *-la/-ra* dative – cf Gurung *-lay* with Chantyal *-ra*.

Within the lexicon, there is an amorphous boundary between Chantyal and Nepali: apart from the copulas, deictics and pronouns, some basic locative and temporal forms, and a few common verbs, there is virtually no Chantyal word that cannot be replaced by a Nepali one. Whether one replaces a common Chantyal word with a Nepali one depends on the impression one is trying to make: the more formal the situation, the more educated one wants to seem, the more likely one is to use Nepali words even when a common Chantyal word is available.

7. Outlook

In principle, it is possible for diglossic situations to be relatively stable, with each of the languages assigned its own functional niche. The question is whether the Chantyal-Nepali diglossia described above is likely to continue or whether Chantyal will be lost in the communities that now speak it.

According to Paulston (1994: 12), maintained group bilingualism is unusual if the opportunity to speak the dominant language is present and there are socio-economic incentives that motivate a shift to the dominant language. In the case of the Chantyal, there is surely opportunity to speak the dominant language, and there are at least some socio-economic incentives to do so as well. On the basis of this general principle, then, one would expect that the Chantyal language will continue to lose ground.

There are a number of additional factors which lend support to this pessimistic analysis. First, as things stand now, it is still possible for most Chantyal speakers to find Chantyal-speaking spouses.²¹ If any of the villages where Chantyal is now spoken

¹⁹ The English borrowings were counted separately, though most must have entered Chantyal through Nepali. A few, however, may have entered the language directly from English, having been picked up by soldiers in the British army.

²⁰ As speech becomes more formal, and consequently more Nepalized, it increases in level of syntactic complexity. This increased complexity results in a greater use of the copular verbs and certain other common verbs used in grammaticalized constructions. The result, in crude counts of roots, is an almost perfect exchange: the increased number of Nepali content words is balanced by the increased number of Chantyal verbs in grammaticalized constructions.

²¹ For some clans in some villages, the problem of finding acceptable spouses, regardless of their native language, has already become acute. It has led, for example, to an acceptance in Gurja Khani of mar-

come to use Nepali exclusively, the pressure on the language in the other villages will intensify. That is, the marriage pool is now only just large enough to accommodate Chantyal speakers looking for Chantyal-speaking partners: decrease the size of the pool and many more Chantyal-speaking men will have to go to Nepali-speaking villages to find wives. Further, as more Chantyal speakers migrate to the cities, the odds of marrying non-Chantyal speakers increases: this has become more likely since the Chhantyal Pərivār Səŋghə began to organize get-togethers for Chantyals away from home. If I am correct in assuming that the importation of non-Chantyal-speaking wives into Gurja Khani, Nharja Khani and Thara Khani was an important factor in language shift in those villages, then a similar situation would likely produce a similar result in the other villages. And it would likely do so at an accelerating rate, resulting in a sort of domino effect.

The second factor is that Chantyals themselves perceive that language maintenance is not necessary for cultural maintenance and for the preservation of ethnic distinctiveness. As noted before, the Chhantyal Pərivār Səŋghə has not included among its immediate goals the establishment of any programs to preserve the language. Too few members of the organization know it. ‘Chantyalness’, therefore, does not include the ability to speak Chantyal among its characterizing features. As out-migration continues and – most likely – intensifies over the next few years, Chantyal speakers will come into increasing contact with non-Chantyal-speaking Chantyals, a situation which can only diminish their sense of the importance of the language for the preservation of group identity.²² To the extent language plays a role in defining Chantyalness, it is the Chantyal accent in Nepali which fulfills this function, a situation similar to that found among the people of Ireland, for whom Irish-accented English, rather than the Irish language, serves as the linguistic symbol of their identity.²³

The third factor involves schooling. All schools are run in Nepali, but most children of Chantyal speaking parents are able to attend school up to the fifth grade in a Chantyal village. High school education [sixth through tenth grade] often requires that children leave home and live in a Nepali-speaking environment; education beyond high school necessitates moving to a large city.

There is increasing pressure on children to acquire an education beyond the fifth grade. The poverty of those who remain in the villages and the obvious lessening of the possibility of maintaining the traditional standard of living due to the deterioration of the environment suggest even to the traditionally minded the importance of obtaining an education for young people. Education increases one’s status in the community and

riage between members of different sub-clans within the Bfulanja clan. Outside the village, many view such marriages as illegitimate.

²² A number of people from Məŋgəle Khani and environs have told me that they had never met any Ba-glung Chantyals until they had left Myagdi as adults. As more people leave Myagdi, and leave at a younger age, these contacts are bound to increase.

²³ On the basis of personal reports and my own observations, the Chantyal accent in Nepali differs from other local Nepali accents in intonational characteristics and, to a lesser degree, in lexical choice.

may positively affect one's marriage prospects.²⁴ It also increases the likelihood of successfully obtaining work abroad or of serving in the British or Indian armies. With education comes an increased knowledge of Nepali, and a knowledge of 'proper' Nepali acquired in school is, therefore, a source of pride. Further, the more educated one is, the more likely one is in speaking Chantyal to use Nepali words in place of native ones, and the more likely one is to find excuses for using Nepali.

The fourth factor involves technology, broadly interpreted. Literacy involves learning the technology of writing. There has been an increase in literacy among the Chantyal in recent years due to the establishment of government schools in the villages. There is no tradition of writing in the Chantyal language²⁵ and there is still even no agreement among Chantyls as to the proper spelling of clan names.²⁶ Writing of all sorts, including the writing of intimate letters, is always done in Nepali. As more Chantyls leave home to find work, letters assume increasing importance for maintaining family connections. Messages to aged [and often illiterate] parents, intimate details of life, etc. are expressed in Nepali, a language otherwise reserved for dealings with outsiders. While this is in itself a relatively minor consideration, combined with the others, it has the effect of weakening the status of Chantyal. It is worth noting that the periodical publication *Chantyal*, started recently [Feb., 1995] by the Chhantyal Pərivar Səŋghə and containing a number of poems and personal narratives, some of which are authored by Chantyal speakers, is written exclusively in Nepali.²⁷

Other technologies favor Nepali also. Even Chantyls who would ordinarily address each other in Chantyal will often speak to each other in Nepali when using a phone. This may simply reflect the public nature of phone conversations in Nepal: few Chantyls in Nepal have a private phone yet, so calls must be made at prearranged times in public places in the presence of non-Chantyls. Further, the Chhantyal Pərivar Səŋghə had recently arranged for a special broadcast by Chantyls on Radio Nepal: all of it – songs, poetry, prose – was in Nepali.

Few factors support maintenance of the language. There is, of course, the simple fact that maintaining the status quo in the Chantyal-speaking villages is in some sense simpler than changing it. There is also the fact that there is some pride among the Chantyal in being the only ethnic group of any size in Myagdi to have retained its own language.

²⁴ One person has told me that his status as a college man influenced his future in-laws to accept him as a son-in-law. Though his clan was acceptable to his in-laws, the fact that his mother was a Purane, the lowest ranking of the clans, would have disqualified him as a marriage partner for their high-status daughter had he not proved his worth by getting into college.

²⁵ Ram Bhulanja and I have prepared a set of stories in Chantyal for Chantyal children. We had to invent a set of orthographic conventions for writing the language in the Devanagari script.

²⁶ For example, variants such as Għərəbja and Għərəmja and Bħələŋja and Bħulanja exist for clan names. Dil Bəhadur Għərəbja Chhantyal, the president of the Chhantyal Pərivar Səŋghə, has strong feelings about the proper spelling of the clan names and his influence may eventually prevail.

²⁷ There is one article, by Jəg Man Chhantyal, which discusses the Chantyal language, listing a few correspondences between Chantyal and Nepali. The article assumes no knowledge of Chantyal.

Some decades ago in Myagdi, being a Chantyal speaker may have been perceived by many as a characteristic of Chantyalness and may thus have been a factor in maintaining the language there: in those days, contact with Chantyls in Baglung was practically non-existent. Even today, people in eastern Myagdi cannot name Chantyal Baglung villages and are often uncertain as to which clans are represented among their Baglung brethren. But the presence of many non-Chantyal-speaking Chantyls is now firmly established in the minds of people in the Chantyal-speaking villages, and knowledge of the language is no longer at the core of ethnic identity, as it once must have been.

The combined weight of the factors favoring loss in the absence of any strong countervailing factors favoring retention does not bode well for the maintenance of Chantyal. Indeed, some Chantyls have expressed to me their belief that the language cannot last long. Among all the factors, the crucial one, it seems to me, is the fact that knowledge of the Chantyal language is not regarded as a defining characteristic of Chantyal ethnicity: without this, it is hard to see how the language can survive.

8. Summary

We have seen that during the 19th century the Chantyal language was lost entirely in the Baglung District but underwent a considerable expansion in the Myagdi District. In the 20th century, the language has been slowly losing ground even in Myagdi, having ceased to be spoken in the western portions of the district and, to a degree, in the village of Thara Khani. I have argued that this trend is likely to continue, resulting, in the not distant future, in the death of the language.

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