The Rise of Ethnic Consciousness and the Politicization of Language in West-Central Nepal

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> The paradox is this: if economic rationality tells us that the next century will be the age of global integration of the world's economies, cultural "irrationality" steps in to inform us that it will also be the century of ethnic demands and revived nationalisms.
> *Carlos Fuentes (1997)*

1. INTRODUCTION

A while ago, my friend and colleague, Ram Prasad Bhulanja, told me that he had received an email from his cousin, a man I know, who had journeyed from Beni, in the Myagdi District of west-central Nepal, to the capital Kathmandu. After discussing the content of the letter, the man's situation and so on, I asked him what language the email was written in. Ram and his cousin are native speakers of Chantyal, a Tibeto-Burman language; both are also fluent speakers of Nepali, the national language. He replied that the email was in Nepali, and on further questioning he revealed that he had never received an email or conventional letter in Chantyal, even from close relatives, though phone conversations with these same people are always in Chantyal.

It's worth noting in this context that the email was written in an internet shop in Kathmandu and that in such shops the keyboards are configured for English and the screens display only roman characters, not the Devanagari used to write Nepali. Nepali was thus de-privileged in this context, and Ram's cousin had to transliterate Nepali into roman characters in order to send Ram a message. Presumably, it would have been just as easy to render Chantyal in the roman alphabet, but this wasn't done, and indeed is seldom, if ever, done.

A further consideration worth noting is the fact Ram's cousin has been involved in the 'Nepal Chhantyal Association' [Nepāl Chhantyāl Saŋgha[1]], the organization of Nepal's Chantyal ethnic group.[2] He has had a hand in producing some of the publications of this group, including a book titled *Chhantyāl bhāṣākā kehī śabda jān, vyākarañ paddhati ra sādhārañ kurākānī* ['Some vocabulary, the grammatical system and general conversation of the Chantyal language'] which contains wordlists with Nepali and English translations, some grammatical discussion, and even some 'practical' dialogue with translations in Nepali and English. So, he has actually helped produce a publication which included written Chantyal, but it never occurred to him to send his cousin a written message in that language.

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[1] Until recently, the organization was known as the *Chhantyāl Parivār Saŋgha*.

[2] The spelling <Chhantyal> is used when transliterating from Devanagari script and in the name of the ethnic organization, which has used this English spelling in its publications. In general references to the ethnic group and their language, I use here, as I have done in other published works, the spelling <Chantyal>. The work reported on in this paper has been supported by the following grants from the National Science Foundation of the United States: DBC-9121114, SBR-9600717, and SBR-9728369. See Noonan (1996) for a list of the villages in which Chantyal is spoken and a discussion of the current status of the language; Noonan (2003) is a grammatical sketch.

In this paper I would like to provide a bit of background for this state of affairs and in the process describe the state of play between the rise of ethnic consciousness, attitudes toward language, and the state of language endangerment of some Tibeto-Burman speaking peoples of west-central Nepal. The main points to be discussed are that language issues have not yet been pushed to the forefront of the political agenda in this part of Nepal, that ethnic organizations are still at the beginning stages of dealing with matters of documentation, standardization, and orthography of their ancestral languages, and that primary education in minority languages is vital for language preservation. One consequence of all this is that the uses of print and electronic media that have been important in language preservation efforts of minority languages in other parts of the world are having little effect in this region of Nepal. After a general discussion of the state of minority languages in Nepal, I'll illustrate these matters with examples taken from the experiences of the Chantyal, Gurung, Magar, and Tamang communities, speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages spoken primarily in west-central Nepal.[3]

2. ETHNIC IDENTITY AND ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS

In traditional cultures ethnic identity, as a component of one's social identity, may be asserted to a greater or lesser extent dependent on contingent factors, in particular its instrumental value in gaining some economic or political advantage. It is, moreover, a much more flexible concept than modern-day nationalists and ethnic activists would like to admit, with boundaries that may be fluid rather than static and where ethnic identities may be multiple or overlapping.[4] Further, the language one speaks may or may not be a determinant of, or even a major component of, one's ethnic identity. Indeed language shifts are a perennial feature of human affairs, as the examination of the history of virtually any inhabited region of the planet will demonstrate.

Over the last two centuries, we have witnessed a phenomenon, most prominently in the West and then increasingly in the rest of the planet, of politicizing ethnicity, thereby transforming ethnic identity into something I will refer to as *ethnic consciousness*. Ethnic consciousness manifests itself in attempts to 'define' the ethnic group, establishing what it means to be a member of the group; in this way, ideas like language, dress, religion, history are used to 'define' the group, and thus become both conscious and politicized — subject to debate both within the community itself and in the larger political arena. The ideology that underlies this rise in ethnic consciousness accords language a central role: a proper ethnic group, this ideology maintains, should have its own language, and the group should have rights with regard to its language.

In traditional cultures, shift in language [which may result in language death when whole ethnicities are involved in the shift] is commented on and may be the source of regret, but is seldom the launchpad for political or social action with the aim of preserving the language, although socio-political states of affairs that have the effect

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[3] Chantyal, Gurung, and Tamang are members of the Tamangic branch of the Bodish languages, a section of Bodic. Magar is also Bodic, but is usually placed in the Kham-Magar branch of Himalayish, another section of Bodic.

[4] See especially Anderson (1983), Brown (1989), Hobsbawm (1990) for discussion of these points.

of inducing language loss may be the object of political or social action.[5] With the ideology that underlies modern ethnic self-consciousness comes the potential for politicizing language issues. In what follows we will examine some ways in which the rise in ethnic self-consciousness has been played out among certain ethnic groups in west-central Nepal, in particular about how issues relating to language have become politicized.

3. LANGUAGE AND THE NEPALESE STATE
Nepal is an undeveloped country which has experienced relatively little investment in either infrastructure [communications, transportation, etc.] or education. It has also experienced despotic regimes which have actively discouraged expressions of ethnic identity that were at variance with the official state promotion of Nepalese nationalism and the Hindu religion. One result of all this was that ethnic, religious, cultural, or political activism for much of the 20thc was mostly confined to exiles. The lack of infrastructural and educational development served the nationalist and Hindu-supremacist interests of the state since it helped maintain a population uninfluenced by outside — and potentially subversive — ideas.

        The constitution established in the aftermath of the 1990 people's movement reaffirmed the status of Nepal as a Hindu state and Nepali as the sole national language, but legalized the establishment of ethnic organizations and the use of indigenous languages other than Nepali in the schools. [English and Sanskrit had been long established in education, though in different spheres.] Prior to the establishment of the new constitution, indigenous languages other than Nepali were effectively banished from the public sphere, and only Nepali was permitted in education, in broadcasting and, to a significant degree, in the print media. The new constitution recognizes "the right of every citizen to develop and promote their languages, script and culture" [Article 18], and the government has recognized twelve minority languages to be used on a regular basis on the national broadcast media. Other than these radio and television broadcasts, however, very few concrete steps have been taken to promote the use of minority languages in the country. For example, there has been almost no progress in the development of minority languages in primary education, and recent court decisions have prohibited the use of indigenous languages at the local government level, while at the same time, the government continues to subsidize Sanskrit at all levels of education (Gurung 2003).

4. ETHNIC CONSCIOUSNESS AND LANGUAGE
Against this background, it is not surprising that ethnic consciousness [the politicization of ethnic identity] has been slow to develop in rural west-central Nepal. Moreover, it has developed in a climate of increasing economic and cultural pressures. Demo-

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[5] For example, economic or religious oppression may lead to political action, as numerous peasant revolts and religious wars attest. Language issues, however, have seldom been a major source of political unrest until recent times: such unrest requires a modern type of ethnic self-consciousness, and this in turn requires, minimally, the leadership of a literate elite.

graphic pressures reduced productivity of the land and accelerated a process of ecological decline that is rapidly rendering subsistence farming in the hills unsustainable. The search for wage employment, once confined to a few men only, is now the norm among younger adults, with many moving to the cities and foreign countries in search of work. This, combined with fear of induction into the Maoist army, has led to an out-migration of young people, leaving many villages without young adults. Additional cultural pressures include the spread of Nepali-medium schooling, Nepali-medium radio and television, consumer capitalism, foreign tourism, and the desire to participate in Nepalese national Hindu culture.

While the effects of the cultural pressures have been profound, the effects of the economic pressures are easier to understand and articulate, and so the political demands of the ethnic organizations have mostly been in the form of what might be called 'civil ethnicity': the demand for a more equitable allocation of resources within the Nepalese state. As a result, ethnic political activism has seldom placed language issues at the forefront for several reasons:

- economic grievances are considerable and well grounded in the experience of ordinary people;
- most people don't see a link between their economic grievances and the official status of their mother tongues;
- bilingualism in Nepali is sufficiently widespread among ethnics so that few could claim lack of access to economic resources on the basis of language alone;
- there has been no tradition of privileging local languages other than Nepali on a national level, and few traditions [even 'remembered' traditions] of privileging these languages on a local level *vis-à-vis* Nepali; that is, for the last 200 years, no indigenous language has been in a position to challenge the dominance of Nepali, not even locally;
- and ethnic consciousness translatable into political action has not penetrated deeply into Nepalese society, despite the strength of ethnic identity.[6]

As a result, language issues have been largely backgrounded, despite the attempts by some activists to foreground them.

Despite the fact that language issues have seldom been foregrounded on the national level, ethnic organizations have devoted considerable attention to them. In general, however, the reach of the ethnic organizations is not great; that is, the activities of the ethnic organizations, with few exceptions, have little impact, intellectually or otherwise, on the populations they claim to represent. Language issues are largely the concern of educated elites, but this is not to say that ordinary people are insensitive to these issues. A recent poll reveals that there is considerable support for government efforts to preserve indigenous languages, though there is much less support for using them as the medium of education.[7] Further, the rise in percentages of ethnics claiming their ances-

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[6] Ethnic identity in this part of Nepal is strong, but not unproblematic. As Gellner (1997:15) notes: "the differences *within* [Nepalese] ethnic categories may be greater than those *between* them."
[7] http://www.nepalresearch.org/publications/resistance.htm

tral language as their mother tongue has increased, as documented by the latest census figures, attesting to the success of the ethnic organizations in promoting ethnic consciousness.[8]

But the poll failed to address the question of how important the promotion of indigenous languages was compared to other issues, *e.g.* economic issues. All the evidence suggests that the promotion and use of indigenous languages does not rank high in importance compared to other issues, mostly because the case has not been made that the use of Nepali seriously disadvantages minority ethnic populations. The only language issue to surface at the national level in recent times has been the teaching of Sanskrit, which had been compulsory from the fourth grade but was recently made an optional subject.[9] Sanskrit was seen to privilege unfairly certain castes and ethnicities. It is unlikely that language issues will assume a high degree of importance to ethnic minorities until one of two contradictory situations occurs: the state substantially improves the lot of ethnic minorities so that economic issues no longer dominate the list of grievances, or the state is perceived as failing utterly to provide peace and economic stability and there are political movements aiming to break up the state.[10]

5. THE STATE OF THE MINORITY LANGUAGES
Finally, there is the state of the minority languages themselves. Despite an increase in the last census in the percentages of ethnics reporting their ancestral languages as their mother tongues, the true state of affairs with regard to the Tibeto-Burman languages of west-central Nepal is that the percentage of fluent speakers is declining rapidly as young people either fail to learn the language or learn it only imperfectly. What the census numbers reveal is an increase in ethnic consciousness, while at the same time hiding the true condition of the languages.[11] Further, these languages have no tradition of literacy and have only recently come to be written, and even then not often, and when they are written they are written so as to provide examples of writing in the language rather than as media of communication. Most of the existing documentation comes from foreign linguists, though there are hopeful signs that this may change.

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[8] A close examination of the figures would likely reveal that they are inflated for many of the ethnic groups: the Chantyal figures, for example, report mother tongue identification that is approximately three times the actual number, as discussed below.

[9] *Kantipur Online,* Dec. 7, 2002: "Govt announces 29-point education reform programme." The Maoists played a central role in pressuring the government to take this action.

[10] In recent times there have been few genuine separatist movements in Nepal, the major exemplar being that of the Tarai-based Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Gurung 1997:529).

[11] One anecdote will suffice to illustrate how rapidly the status of a language may change. When I first began working with the Nar-Phu people in the mid-90s, their language was spoken by an integral community of young and old. By 2002, however, the young people had almost completely ceased to speak the language, though they could still understand it when older people addressed them in it. The young people used Nepali among themselves and explained to me that Nepali was the language they would need to make their way in the world, and that they wanted to feel comfortable speaking it. Small children are increasingly addressed in Nepali. At this rate, the language will effectively die with the death of the older generation.

6. PROGRESS IN EFFORTS AT PROMOTION AND STANDARDIZATION

I'll now briefly report on the progress of the efforts of the Chantyal, Gurung, Magar, and Tamang communities to standardize and promote their languages.

Magar: In the 2001 census, 1,622,421 people claimed to be Magars, while 770,116 claimed the language as their mother tongue. Less has been done to standardize and promote Magar than any of the other languages considered in this study. This no doubt is in large part a reflection of the fact that a considerable percentage of those now considered ethnic Magars do not speak Magar as well as the fact that those who do may speak dialects which are very different and not fully mutually intelligible.[12]

It should be noted that until quite recently many non-Magars have claimed Magar status. These groups, which include the Chantyal, Kham, Kaike, Kusunda, Raute, and Raji ethnic groups, were all too small or remote to be classified in the Muluki Ain of 1854, the national legal code which classified Nepalis according to a single caste hierarchy. These groups *claimed* to be Magars because Magars were officially classified as 'clean' [in the Hindu sense] and 'unenslavable', and because the British were interested in hiring Magars for their Gurkha regiments. These people *had license* to call themselves Magars because until recently there was little sense of a larger Magar ethnicity and hence no core Magar community which could challenge these claims.[13] The fact that these people had their own languages whose relationships to Magar is not obvious to non-linguists [and non-existent in the case of Kusunda] apparently did not affect their claims, though their distinct languages were important later for claims to separate ethnic identities.

The Nepal Magar association conducts meetings in the national language Nepali, and the *Magar Studies Center* website[14] is entirely in English. There has been very little publication in Magar and the ethnic organization has not broached the subjects of orthography and standardization to any significant extent.

Gurung: In the 2001 census, there were 543,571 Gurungs, of whom 338,925 claimed to have Gurung as their mother tongue. Like the Magars, the Gurungs were also classified in the Muluki Ain as clean and unenslavable, and also like the Magars, Gurungs served as Gurkha soldiers. As a result, the Gurungs too were an attractive group for others to claim association with, and even today ethnic groups which now claim separate status still use 'Gurung' as a surname: these groups include Ghales [I refer here to those who speak the Ghale language, which is only distantly related to Gurung], Mananges, and

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[12] See Grunow-Hårsta (in preparation) for documentation of the differences between the dialects.

[13] Tofflin (1981) asserts that "classifications of the Tibeto-Burman hill tribes into Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Rai, Thakali, etc. correspond only very imperfectly to reality and can only be accepted as working hypotheses. In fact, none of these groups form a homogeneous ethnic group, either culturally or linguistically." It should be noted that questions about who is and who is not a Magar have not been settled: as De Sales (2000) shows, the Khams are still subject to claims on their Magar identity.

[14] http://www.magarstudiescenter.org/

Nar-Phus, the last two speaking languages which are related to Gurung within the Ta-mangic family of languages though not especially close to Gurung within that family.

The Gurungs are much in advance of the Magars as regards publication in their language and attention paid to orthography and standardization, though many issues have been contentious and few issues have been resolved. There have been advocates for four distinct scripts in recent years (Glover 2002): the Tibetan script, particularly among Gurung Buddhists; the Khemaa lipi खेमाँ लिपि, an indigenous adaption of the Devanagari script; the roman script, advocated mostly by veterans of the British and Indian Gurkha regiments; and the Devanagari script. While the other scripts still have their adherents, Devanagari is clearly the script of choice for publication in Gurung.

There have been a significant number of publications in Gurung,[15] at least by the standards of minority languages of Nepal that have recently come to be written. This literary activity is at least in part owing to the fact that a number of Gurungs have achieved literacy and some degree of economic well-being as a result of their service in the Gurkha regiments; it is also a result of the geographic location of some key Gurung settlements in and around the tourist resort of Pokhara and the popular trekking district around Annapurna. Within the general conventions imposed by the Nepalese version of the Devanagari script, each author has felt free to invent his own spellings. Glover (2002) proposes a number of spelling conventions for Gurung publications, in particular those that would be used for a Gurung-Nepali-English dictionary. It remains to be seen if these spelling conventions will be generally adopted.

Chantyal: In the 2001 census, 9814 people claimed to be Chantyal and 5912 claim the language as their mother tongue. The last figure cannot possibly be correct since the language is only spoken in a few villages whose combined population does not exceed 2000. The figure attests, however, to the dramatic rise in ethnic consciousness that has occurred over the last couple of decades.[16]

Because only about one in five Chantyals speak the language, meetings of the ethnic organization are always conducted in Nepali. There were no publications using the Chantyal language until 1987 (Chhantyal 2044 [1987]), and indeed there have been no publications exclusively or even primarily in Chantyal save Bhulanja & Noonan (1995), the only publication in Chantyal and the only one not somehow associated with the Nepal Chhantyal Association. The first publication in 1987 and the few publications by the Chantyal community which have appeared subsequently have all used the Devanagari script: unlike all the other languages discussed in this paper, there has been no discussion about the use of any other script for this language. Bhulanja & Noonan proposed Devanagari spelling conventions for Chantyal, appended to a collection of

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[15] See Noonan (2005) for some references.
[16] For example, in the late 1980s, Chantyals who were serving in the Gurkha units of the British army began changing their surnames from the Magar name 'Pun', which they had been using as long as they had been serving in these units, to 'Chhantyal'.

children's stories that were distributed to schools in Chantyal-speaking villages. These conventions have not been observed in subsequent publications.

Chantyals have engaged in an interesting kind of language planning by inventing out of whole cloth a set of numbers and a set of calendar terms, with the intention, one presumes, of replacing the terms long ago borrowed from Nepali.[17] This kind of language planning is unique in this part of Nepal, but it remains to be seen if these terms will actually be used. No doubt, the motivation for this was a realization of the extent of borrowing of vocabulary from Nepali [80-85% of the total] that became obvious when Chantyal phrases where provided Nepali translations, an important feature of all but one of the publications that have so far appeared.

Tamang: Tamang has the largest number of speakers of any Tibeto-Burman language in Nepal: in the 2001 census, there were 1,282,304 Tamangs, of whom 1,179,145 claimed Tamang as their mother tongue. Tamangs are, even by the standards of Nepalese peasants, economically depressed and have never had good relations with the Nepalese government. In the Muluki Ain of 1854, Tamangs were classified as clean but enslavable. There was a Tamang peasant rebellion as late as 1951 (Gurung 2003:14), and recent ethnic activism had taken on a much more defiant tone than other groups considered here, even before the recent upsurge in Maoist activity.

Despite a common sense of grievance, Tamangs have had until recently very little sense of shared community. Indeed, Sonntag has referred to Tamang as "a language in search of an ethnic group" (1995:113). Macdonald (1989:176) has maintained that "Tamang identity insofar as it can be said to exist is a Nepalese administrative invention and a concept formulated by non-Nepalese researchers to facilitate written communications between themselves. There does not seem to be much evidence to show that isolated Tamang villagers are conscious of belonging to a pan-Tamang social identity." [18] While much the same could be said of other Nepalese ethnicities, it appears to be true of the Tamang to an unusual degree. This state of affairs is partly due to the fact that Tamang settlements are widely scattered throughout the 'middle hills' of Nepal [*i.e.* the area lying between the flat, malarial Terai and the high Himalaya], and partly due to the fact that Tamangs lacked the shared experience of serving in the Gurkha regiments, which has had a formative influence on the Gurungs' sense of common ethnicity.

Still, there is the Tamang language: though riddled with deep dialect divisions, Tamang is still recognizably a single language, and it is this sense of shared ancestral language which can, and now does, serve to bring Tamangs together. Tamang has come to be written only recently. Choice of writing system often divides activists: for example, while almost all publication in Tamang has thus far been in the Devanagari script,[19] there are vocal advocates in the Tamang community for the Tibetan script, including a simplified version of the script referred to as *Tamyig*. As with the other lan-

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[17] See Noonan (ms) for a discussion of these interesting case.

[18] See also similar comments by Levine (1987:73) and Holmberg (1989:13).

[19] The websites http://www.tamangs.com/tmgorgs.htm and http://www.tamangghedung.org/ contain listings of publications in Tamang.

guages considered here, problems of orthography and standardization have not been addressed, which means that written Tamang isn't used for real communicative purposes among Tamangs: there are several Tamang websites, a couple of which post announcements of community activities. The language used in these websites is primarily English, with translations of some, but not all material in Nepali; where Tamang is present, it is either the subject of discussion or a translation of something displayed more prominently elsewhere: the basic function of Tamang on these websites is simply to display the language, not to use it as a medium of communication.

One stark fact which unites all these languages is this: while speakers know these languages *can* be written [*i.e.* literates have typically seen examples of them in writing], none of them is *used* in writing to any significant degree, even in correspondence between native speakers. This follows from a situation widely observed throughout the world: people ordinarily write the languages they were taught to write in school unless there is a strong local tradition of literacy in another language. If the school system ignores minority languages, as it does in Nepal, minority languages are unlikely to be used in writing, even between coethnics. I personally have observed similar situations elsewhere in the world: people I know in the Lango community of Uganda write letters home to their relatives in English, even though their elderly relatives do not speak English and require someone to translate the letters for them. These letter writers know how to write their native language [they have seen them written and can write them on request], but have had little experience doing so and prefer to write in the language in which they had received explicit instruction in writing. In Nepal, since virtually all adults know Nepali, the disincentives for writing in Nepali are even fewer than those for the Langi writing in English.

Literacy in minority language communities is not necessary for language documentation efforts since documentation can be carried out by outsiders using conventional fieldwork techniques, recordings, and so on. It is necessary, however, for standardization if the minority communities are to carry out this work themselves, and for language preservation efforts. This suggests that educational reforms promoting the use of minority languages in the early years of schooling is the best way to encourage literacy in the minority languages. Literacy in these languages would, in turn, encourage the use of minority languages in writing, and this could have a major impact on language preservation efforts.

The use of minority languages in the schools involves a kind of chicken-and-egg problem: languages can't be used in the schools until there is an agreed-upon orthography and a standardized form that can be used in textbooks and other educational materials, and so far language activists have failed to provide such standard forms. Were there the political will, the government could step in. Given the current political climate in Nepal, the will is lacking. We can hope that a future government will make such a move a priority.

In sum, language activists have not succeeded in creating a political situation that would encourage language preservation. Their failure is understandable, given all the obstacles that they have had to overcome in the larger political arena. But even within their own communities, they have barely begun to address issues of orthography and standardization and have, in general, ignored suggestions by foreign linguists regarding them (Noonan 2005). Further, for many of these languages [Gurung, Magar, and Tamang], there are significant differences between dialects which will have to be resolved before a standard can emerge. If these languages are ever to serve as vehicles of education or administration, these problems will have to be resolved. Ethnic organizations, for the most part, have not begun to address these issues seriously, and most language activists of my acquaintance do not seem to grasp the fact that these issues must be dealt with before their languages can achieve the official status they desire for them.

7. CONCLUSION: GLOBALIZATION, MEDIA, AND LANGUAGE PRESERVATION IN WEST-CENTRAL NEPAL

In this paper I've tried to sketch the political, economic, and cultural pressures faced by some ethnic communities in west-central Nepal and what concrete steps have been taken by the communities themselves to preserve their languages and make them suitable vehicles for educational and other purposes. Ethnic consciousness has indeed risen in west-central Nepal, and language issues have been politicized by activists. Nonetheless, it is safe to say that, at this stage, not very much has been accomplished, and the current political and economic climate of Nepal must necessarily divert attention from issues that no doubt seem to most people of secondary importance.

Globalization, broadly defined, has been responsible in large part for the growth of ethnic consciousness in west-central Nepal, but the forces of globalization have affected Nepal more recently than many parts of the world and their effect has been less profound to date. The extreme poverty of Nepal and its peculiar history — the fact that it had not been colonized by Europeans and had remained effectively isolated from global ideologies until relatively recently —explain this state of affairs and explain why the languages considered here have undergone so little development. Conventional print media and the newer electronic media [*e.g.* websites and chat rooms, so important in language preservation efforts elsewhere[20]] cannot do much to help preserve endangered languages without literate populations who can access them.

So, what can be done? If the minority languages of Nepal are to remain healthy, they will require some help from the state in the form of support for primary education in the minority languages, though as noted above there is not yet a consensus even among minority language speakers that this would be a good idea. Further, if the ethnic communities are to take a leading role in preserving and standardizing their languages, they need both time and trained personnel. For many of the minority languages of Nepal, time is running short: many languages will cease to be spoken by integral communities in the near future. Trained personnel are in still in short supply,

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[20] For an example of how such media can play an important role, see Mensching (2000).

though the faculty at Tribhuvan University are working valiantly to produce them.[21] For the time being, foreign linguists will necessarily play a leading role in documenting these languages, but in the final analysis standardizing them and developing orthographies for them are tasks that must fall to the ethnic communities themselves.[22]

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[21] See Yadava (2004) on the uses of digital technology in support of Nepal's minority languages. Linguists at Tribhuvan University have initiated a program to train Nepalese fieldworkers for the Linguistic Survey of Nepal.

[22] I would like to thank John Manoochehri for helpful comments on this paper.

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