

GURUNG DIALECTS

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1. Local opinion
2. Word lists
3. Isoglosses
4. Sound shifts
5. Intelligibility testing
 - 5.1. Method
 - 5.2. Results
 - 5.3. Sources of error; reliability
6. Conclusions

Every natural language shows dialectal variation, and the study of such variation contributes to our knowledge of the language as a living medium of communication. This study is especially important when approaching the task of communication across dialects, and it is in this context that the older "static" methods of lexical comparison are powerfully supplemented by "dynamic" studies of interdialectal intelligibility. The present study considers various kinds of evidence in defining dialects of Gurung, and compares the conclusions suggested by them.¹

The Gurung language is spoken chiefly in the seven jillas (districts) of Gandaki anchal (zone) of Nepal (Map 1). Table 1 gives latitude and longitude of the district centres and of the 14 villages chosen, in the course of the intelligibility survey, as reference and test points, together with their arbitrarily assigned index numbers, 1 to 14, which will be used on maps and tables throughout. The 1971 Census of Nepal reports 171,609 people as claiming Gurung as their mother tongue, of

whom 135,118 live in Gandaki anchal - 20,781 in Gorkha jilla, 13,031 in Tanahun, 36,742 in Lamjung, 3699 in Manang, 25,466 in Kaski, 9779 in Parbat, and 25,620 in Syangja. However not all Nepali citizens of the Gurung ethnic group speak the Gurung language. Those living in south-eastern Gorkha district and in much of Tanahun, and those who have grown up outside west Nepal, in general have never learnt Gurung and use only Nepali. Further, Gurungs in Gorkha jilla east of the Darondi Khola (river), speak the Ghale language,² even though they regard themselves as speaking Gurung. Even the most cursory examination of vocabulary shows this Ghale language (so called after the Ghale people of Barpak and Uiya, the main Ghale centres in northeast Gorkha), with 44% probable cognates with Ghachok Gurung (No.2 on maps), to be a radically more different form of speech from Gurung than either Tamang or Thakali, which share respectively 66% and 72% probable cognates with Gurung (Glover 1974:13). (Conversely, the Ghale of Lamjung district,

<i>Village</i>	<i>District</i>	<i>Index</i>	<i>Latitude (N)</i>	<i>Longitude (E)</i>
Besishahar	Lamjung		28° 14'	84° 23'
Damauli	Tanahun		27° 59'	84° 16'
Gorkha	Gorkha		28° 00'	84° 38'
Kusma	Parbat		28° 13'	83° 40'
Pokhara	Kaski		28° 14'	83° 59'
Syangja	Syangja		28° 05'	83° 53'
Bhangeri	Tanahun	1	27° 54'	84° 29'
Ghachok	Taski	2	28° 20'	83° 57'
Siklis	Kaski	3	28° 22'	84° 06'
Yangjakot	Lamjung	4	28° 16'	84° 06'
Ghandruk	Parbat	5	28° 23'	83° 48'
Sirubari	Syangja	6	28° 08'	83° 45'
Chiplag	Lamjung	7	28° 25'	84° 26'
Daduwa	Lamjung	8	28° 13'	84° 15'
Nepani	Gorkha	9	28° 06'	84° 35'
Badhagaon	Lamjung	10	28° 16'	84° 23'
Ghanpokhara	Lamjung	11	28° 17'	84° 20'
Ribang	Kaski	12	28° 19'	83° 55'
Torke	Syangja	13	28° 11'	83° 53'
Ghurung Khang	Syangja	14	28° 01'	83° 42'

Table 1. Latitude and longitude of district centres and test points.

Source: HMG Survey Dept. map (1974), drawn to 1:500,000 scale.

in villages such as Ghalegaon, speak Gurung, not Ghale.) As both groups - those Gurungs speaking Nepali as mother tongue and those speaking Ghale - may have been at least in part recorded in the census as Gurungs the figures cited are likely to be somewhat inflated, especially for Gorkha jilla.

1. LOCAL OPINION

The most easily accessible and obvious evidence on dialect divisions is the opinion of native speakers of a language as to whether other native speakers use the same form of the language, or even the same language. Thus Gurungs around Pokhara, in Kaski jilla, reported that the *bxaasi*³ (pronunciation or intonation) of Gurung varies from village to village, and more particularly from river valley to river valley, but that it is the one language (*bxaasa*) throughout. However, they say that Lamjung Gurung is not intelligible to them, and a few reported the same for the Gurung spoken in the Andhi (AAdhi) Khola basin, which includes most of Syangja jilla. Gurungs of Lamjung and, further east, Gorkha and Tanahun districts reciprocate: they feel they cannot understand Kaski Gurung (they did not mention Andhi Khola specifically) and the villagers of southern Syangja regard both Kaski and Lamjung Gurung as unintelligible. Local opinion, then, suggests a major dialect division between East (Lamjung, west Gorkha, and east Tanahun) and West (Kaski and Parbat), with the existence of a South (Syangja) dialect less strongly asserted.

Within these broad divisions the Gurungs of the West area claim that they can understand speakers from all over the West,⁴ while those in the East confess greater diversity. Thus the headman of Bhangeri village in east Tanahun (No.1 on maps) said that the Gurung in Lamjung district was hard to understand, and the headmaster of the school in Ghanpokhara (11) described six villages in Manang jilla as representing three or four distinct dialects, each not understood by the people of Ghanpokhara. He felt that the village of Chiplag (7) in northern Lamjung was different in dialect from Ghanpokhara (in, roughly, central Lamjung) but tended toward Lamjung speech rather than toward Manang. On this evidence one should perhaps postulate a North Gurung dialect, or group of dialects.⁵ Ghanpokhara itself was regarded by other villages in Lamjung district, such as Daduwa (8), Gilung, and Yangjakot (4), as being difficult to understand - but it was clearly a prestigious dialect as a number of people we met on the road in Lamjung jilla directed us to Ghanpokhara as the proper place to study the Gurung language. As noted below (Section 4.2.) Ghanpokhara shows some idiosyncratic sound shifts which

may contribute to the difficulty experienced by Gurungs from other places in understanding Ghanpokhara speech, and the relative absence of Nepali loanwords in Ghanpokhara speech (Don Messerschmidt, personal communication) also contributes to the difficulty, as the use of Nepali loanwords bridges dialectal disparity.

2. WORD LISTS

A second type of evidence on dialects is the comparison of word lists supplied by different speakers. Lexicostatistical examination of the Swadesh 100-word lists, using particularly stringent criteria for counting likenesses, show percentages of like forms between lists obtained over the Gurung area ranging from 58% to 91%. (These figures compare with 57% between Thakali and Ghachok Gurung and 51% between Tamang and Ghachok Gurung using similar criteria.) One reason for the more stringent criteria is that in studying dialect variation one notes differences, such as *nagi* and *nakyu* 'dog', which are diagnostic of geographical dialects and relevant for Gurung literature, but which probably represent reflexes of a common root form and so would not be scored as noncognates in a lexicostatistical survey of language relationships. A second reason is the desire to relate the lexicostatistical measures to mutual intelligibility scores (Section 5.3.3). Thus phonetic changes, as between *tI* and *dxI* 'house', were observed to impede comprehension of the taped speech samples and so such changes were scored as differences in the lexical comparisons, though they would not be so treated in a count of probable cognates. Further, where two lists give the same loan word from Nepali for an item the item is counted as a likeness for communication purposes, but in normal lexicostatistics it is either counted as noncognate (Gudschinsky 1964) or excluded (Glover 1974:8).

Table 2 shows the likeness percentages of pairs of 13 selected villages (the indexed 14, less Badhagaon where we neglected to record a word list!). The highest percentage recorded was 91% between Ribang (12) and Ghalel (not in the indexed list). Inasmuch as these villages both lie in the Mardi Khola Valley this supports the view of local people that Gurungs living in the one river valley tend to speak similarly. However the "river valley hypothesis" fails to account for the relatively low likeness percentage (75%) between Siklis (3) and Yangjakot (4), six hours' walk apart on opposite sides of the Madi river. Both villages show higher percentages with Ghachok (2) and Ribang (12), which are 7 to 10 hours' walk away, across hills and rivers, in each case.