COMPREHENSIVE DOCUMENTATION OF MEWAHANG: A FIRST LINGUISTIC FIELD REPORT

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The Mewahang language belongs to the Kiranti branch of the Tibeto-Burman family and is predominantly spoken in Sankhuwasabha district of eastern Nepal. No linguistic fieldwork has been undertaken so far and the language remains undescribed. The paper characterizes a first comprehensive documentation of Mewahang, and presents data collection and ethnography.

Keywords: Mewahang, Kiranti, field report, language documentation, language endangerment

1. Introduction

The Mewahang language is an undocumented and undescribed language of eastern Nepal until this linguistic documentation project is done. It is an entirely oral Tibeto-Burman language of the Kiranti subgroup (Upper-Arun). The present field report aims at presenting first linguistic fieldwork on Mewahang and at undertaking an update of the linguistic information given in the *Ethnologue*. The data were collected during a first field trip that has been conducted from March 2018 to September 2018, along with a numerous follow-up field trip. The filed work was aimed at comprehensively documenting the Mewahang language from the core speaking villages – Yaphu, Bala, Mangtewa, Chirkhuwa, Yamdang, Tamku, along with Khandbari and Kathmandu.

The organization of the paper is as follows. The language is discussed along with linguistics areas, dialects and genetic affiliation in section 2. Section 3 deals with the speakers, along with their demography, location, migration, occupation and neighbours. Language usage, attitude and identity deserves in section 4. While fieldwork and data is presented in section 5, the documentation team is discussed in section 6. Section 7 deals with language of elicitation whereas section 8 presents fieldwork remarks. Section 9 explores sociolinguistic observation. Finally, section 10 summarizes the conclusion of the paper.

2. The language

2.1 The language name

The terminology *Mewahang* serves both ethnic and linguistic designation which is pronounced as [mewāhāng]. Mewahang is an endonym which is their self-designated name for themselves and their language. It means the same term 'Mewahang' refers both to the people and the language they speak. Indeed, it is very common disposition within many neighbouring Kiranti languages, such as Puma, Bantawa, Chamling, Kulung, Lohorung, Yamphu, Sampang, Dumi and amongst others in which these names function both as the language and the people. We see such tendency in other Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Nepal such as Thakali, Gurung, Magar, Tamang, Sherpa and so on.

Mewahang is also called with different alternate appellations such as *Meohang*, *Newahang*, *Newahang Jimi, Meohang-Sam*, *Balali* particularly in the previous linguistics literature. Mewahang occurs as 'Balali in the Linguistic Survey of India (Grierson 1909: 350–351). Based on data collected during the linguistic Survey of Nepal carried out in the 1980s, Hanßon (1991) classifies the Mewahang language as belonging to the 'North-Eastern subgroup' of Central Kiranti, which he also calls 'Meohang-Saam'.

The language which is mentioned as 'Newahang' in the *Ethnologue* (Eberhard, Simons & Fenning 2020), but this seems to be identical to 'Mewahang', with the term 'Newahang' being a result of direct or indirect influence from the more famous ethnonym 'Newar', the indigenous group of Kathmandu and Dolkha (Hanßon 1991: 68). In the *Ethnologue* (Eberhard, Simons & Fenning 2020), Mewahang appears to have two different languages as Mewahang, Eastern with ISO 639-3 (emg) and Mewahang, Western with ISO 639-3 (raf).

According to the mythical reference, Mewahang were second eldest son of Chakuwahang. In fact, they were *hang* 'king or special respected people

at that time' used to put on hat with a jaunty *makwa* (a bird's name) plume. They were being known as *Makwahang* and in course of time, they were called as 'Mewahang' as of today (cf. Mewahang Rai Yakhomma 2017: 08) and their language also known as 'Mewahang' It is worth to note that the term 'hang' is commonly found in the Kiranti languages having mostly the same meaning 'king'.

The *Kiranti* group includes around more than thirty different Rai languages – Mewahang, Puma, Bantawa, Chamling, Kulung, Thulung, Hayu, Sunuwar, Yakkha, Belhare and Limbu. Mewahang themselves use the term *ikim pɨk* to refer to their language, a term meaning 'our language'.

2.2 The linguistic areas

Mewahang is predominantly spoken in the villages Yaphu, Bala, Mangtewa, and Chirkhuwa and Yamdang of Silichong Rural Municipality and Chhoyang of Makalu Rural Municipality in Sankhuwasabha district (Figure 1) of the Province 1 in Eastern Nepal, while in Tamku village of Silichong Rural Municipality, the Mewahang language is no longer spoken. Figure 1 shows the Eastern Mewahang (Yaphule Mewahang) and its neighbouring languages Lohorung, Yamphu, Sampang, and Kulung language areas of Sankhuwasabha district.

In addition to these core-speaking areas, Mewahang is also spoken in Khandbari Municipality, Shishuwakhola, Pathibhara, Diding, Matsepokhari, Shitalpaṭi and Dhupu villages of the same district. Besides Sankhuwasabha, it is spoken in Keurepani, Mulpani, Papung, Nepaleḍaṇḍa, Dobhane, Khaṭamma, Chaukiḍaṇḍa and Kulung villages of Bhojpur district (Mewahang Rai Yakhomma 2017). Several Mewahang people have migrated from their home villages to urban areas such as Dhankuta, Sunsari, Morang, Jhapa, Ilam, Udayapur, Kathmandu, Bhaktapur and Lalitpur districts and the language is found to be spoken in these areas.

Figure 1: Mewahang linguistic areas along with Yamphu and Lohorung

In our field trips, we have not met one single child speaking Mewahang or knowing even a few Mewahang words in Bala. All of them only speak Nepali. Again, this contradicts the sociolinguistic survey which reports that the parents in the village usually speak Mewahang with their children (Rai, Rai & Thokar 2014: 76).

2.3 The dialects

The Mewahang language has two dialects: Western Mewahang, which is equivalent with Hodgson's 'Balali'(1857: 194–215), spoken in the Sankhuwa Valley that may have been derived from the village of Bala (Hanβon 1991: 68; Driem 2001), and Eastern Mewahang, spoken in north of Mangtewa village (Gaenszle 1995; Eberhard, Simons & Fenning 2020). The Sankhuwakhola seems to be the boundary between Eastern Mewahang, and Western Mewahang.

Based on several field visits to the Mewahang core speaking areas and rich primary data (corpus) collected during the Linguistic Description and Comprehensive Documentation of Mewahang (2018-2020) (Sharma 2019), the Mewahang dialects can be designated as Balali Mewahang and Yaphule Mewahang. The names of the language derive from respective village names: Bala and Yaphu.

The Balali Mewahang is mostly spoken in the villages of Bala, Chirkhuwa and Yamdang while

the Yaphule Mewahang is largely spoken in the villages of Yaphu and Mangtewa. Figure 2 shows the Sankhuwasabha district, focusing on the Mewahang speaking villages.
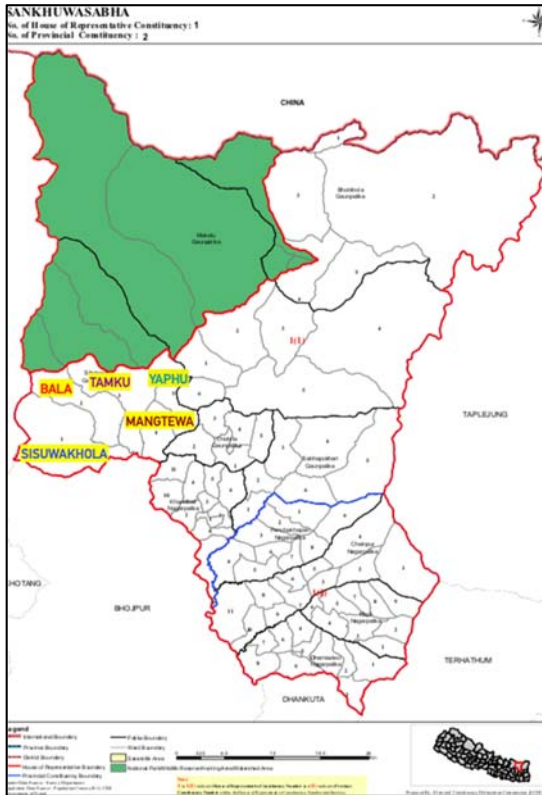

Figure 2: Mewahang villages in Sankhuwasabha district

In the village of Tamku, the Mewahang language has already been shifting to Nepali around 1970s, a lingua franca and the official language of Nepal while their language appears to be disappeared. Not only children but also young people and even adult people no longer speak the Mewahang language in Tamku. Tamku village is a few hours walk both from Yaphu and Bala.

With some exception, not only children but also young people only speak Nepali in Yamdang. Even within adults the use of the Mewahang for the purpose of communication is very limited. However, the girls originally from Bala and Yaphu who got married with the boys from Tamku village could speak the Mewahang language but they are unable to communicate into

ethnic language as none of the family members speak the language nor do they understand it.

Based on the report of sociolinguistic survey conducted by Linguistic Survey of Nepal (LinSuN) with collaboration of Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University Kathmandu (Rai, Rai & Thokar 2014), there are not any dialectal differences among the forms of speech in the Mewahang language; and most of the people participated in the survey prefer preparing a common reading materials. However, it seems very difficult to fully transcribe the texts recorded from the Yaphule Mewahang for the speakers from the Balali Mewahang. It means in practicality even about 20% dissimilarity between dialects makes a lot sense to the people.

2.4 Genetic affiliation

Genetically Mewahang can be grouped under the greater eastern branch of the upper Arun group of Kiranti languages, as it shares innovations with Yamphu and Lohorung. It should be noted that not enough is known yet to have a full understanding about the groupings within the Kiranti languages, and the exact genetic affiliation of most languages within the family is still a matter of dispute. The genetic affiliation of Mewahang is presented in Figure 3.
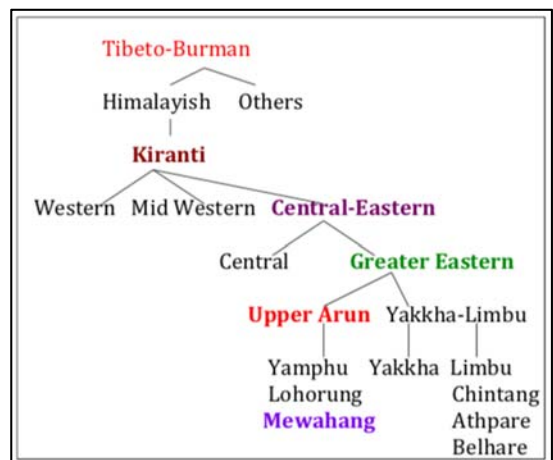

Figure 3: Genetic affiliation of Mewahang

The genetic affiliation of Kiranti can also be found on scholars such as (Michailovsky 1994; Driem 2001; Opgenort 2004; Bickel 2011a). This

division is based on shared phonological innovations in the initial plosives and has not been seriously contested. Bradley (1997: 16) offers a rather unspecific tree that sums up eight branches of the Kiranti group. Opgenort (2005) has refined Michailovsky's analysis, using an innovative method of combining lexical isoglosses, i.e. counting etyma that are shared between languages, with phonological isoglosses, i.e. counting shared phonological innovations (cf. Doornenbal 2009).

3. The speakers

The Mewahang people are one of small ethnic groups of Nepal mostly affected by migration, modernization and modification. They have their own language, rich cultural heritage and tradition. Despite the recent advances in modern science and technology as well as wider use of Nepali language as a *lingua franca*, they have retrained their distinct idenities in a remarkable way, particularly in rural areas where they have maintained their language and kept their original tradition.

There has also been an increase in their number of Mewahangs who have settled aboard such as United States of America, United Kingdom, Europe and Hong Kong.

The Mewahang people are educationally, politically and economicaly highly marginalised. *Baksa* 'pork' is their preferred meat, while eating 'goat meat' is forbidden for some Mewahang people. In the past, they were not allowed to touch goats either. But now goat husbandry is becoming a source of income.

Mewahang people are happy to entertain guests. The Mewahang community particularly in Yaphu is more generous for its hospitality. They often arrange programs like welcome and farewell to the researchers who specially work on their language and culture.

3.1 Population demography

The number of Mewahang speakers, according to the Central Bureau of Statistics, CBS (2001), were about 900 while the Central Bureau of Statistics 2011 records 4,650 Mewahang speakers (Central Bureau of Statistics 2014). Based on our frequent field visits in the Mewahang speaking areas both in the villages and urban areas, the number of the Mewahang speakers needs to be drastically revised as the number of fluent speakers in the whole Mewahang areas does not exceed 500 speakers.

The reason for increasing Mewahang speakers in the Census 2011 is that people were manipulated stressing their ethnic identity over linguistic competency when asked about their ethnic language. It is reasonable to assume about this fact that they are Mewahang and their parents or grandparents spoke Mewahang, so their mother tongue should be Mewahang too.

However, Mewahang people are unaware of their linguistic proficiency while they insisted that Mewahang is their first language. This notion does not refer to the actual linguistic competence but to the self-indicated ethnolinguistic identity. This kind of similar story can be observed within other Kiranti language, namely Nachiring (Grollmann 2018: 5).

What is important to point out here is that even the separate 'Rai' language is wrongly listed in the Census 2011 with about 160,000 speakers whereas the term is used just as generic. The speakers of this pseudo language seem belonging to the Bantawa language, the major language of Kiranti subgroup. The number of speakers of this language appears significantly reduced in the Census 2011 compared to the Census 2001, while there is not sharply decrease in the number of speakers of other Kiranti languages either. Furthermore, sometimes languages are erroneously listed as in this Census, while in the Census 2001 a couple of genuine languages are not correctly listed.

3.2 Geographical location

As already discussed above in section 2.2, Mewahang people are found in the Sankhuwasabha district of Eastern Nepal within Province 1. The inhabitants of Yaphu and Bala – wards numbers 2 and 5 of *Silichong gaunpalika* 'Rural Municipality' mostly speak the Mewahang language, while only a limited people of Mangtewa and Sisuwakhola – ward numbers 4

and 1 of the same rural municipality speak the Mewahang language.

Table 1 presents the geographical location of the traditional homeland of Mewahang recorded by the Global Positioning System (GPS) device adapted from (Rai, Rai & Thokar 2014: 15).

Fluent speakers of Mewahang are only found in the villages of Yaphu and Bala. A few individual speakers are found in Chirkhuwa, Chhoyang, Khandbari, and Kathmandu.

Table 1: Geographical location

S. N.	Village	Elevetion	North	East
1.	Bala	1353m	$27^0$30'32.7"	$087^0$05'0.24"
2.	Mangtewa	973m	$27^0$29'24"	$087^0$08'55.2"
3.	Tamku	1486m	$27^0$28'54"	$087^0$06'15.7"
4.	Yamdang	1329m	$27^0$28'54"	$087^0$04'13.4"
5.	Yaphu	1124m	$27^0$30'0.9"	$087^0$10'44.1"

3.3 Migration

Besides the Mewahang homeland in the Silichong area, they can be found in Khandbari and other areas of the country as a consequence of rural-urban migration. In developing countries like Nepal urban areas are magnets that attract people from the rural areas, because cities offer more hope of jobs, education, health care, and better living standards.

The Mewahang people have mostly migrated to Dhankuta, Morang, Ilam, Sunsari and Udayapur districts and to the Kathmandu valley.

3.4 Occupation

As Nepal is an agricultural country, the main occupation of Mewahang is also agriculture. Majority of people depend on agriculture for a living. As a consequence, Mewahang people are mostly sedentary agriculturalists. They are subsistence farmers and stock raisers, depending primarily on crops of rice, corn, and millet.

Mewahang people are also expert weavers. In addition, now some of them are army, cops, teachers, and civil servants.

3.5 Neighbours

The Mewahang people in the homeland are surrounded by the neighbouring Kiranti people: to the west are the Kulung (cf. Tolsma 2006), and their eastern neighbours are the Lohorung (cf. Driem 2001). The Yamphu are settled to the north of the Mewahang (cf Rutgers 1998), and to their south are the Sampang (Hanβon 1991).

The Lohorung and Yamphu people are linguistically very close neighbours of Mewahang people, while Kulung is their geographically close neighbours. This complex ethnic and historical interrelationship of language contact makes a study of this language especially interesting.

4. Language usage, attitude and identity

4.1 Language endangerment and usage

Nepali has become the main language of communication in the Mewahang homeland and the degree of Nepalization is remarkably high. The Nepali language is used in most of the major domains of language, such as counting, shopping, marriage, story-telling, singing and meetings.

The Mewahang language is used typically in domains of rituals performances like *gharchinta* 'wellbeing worship', *khamang* 'house worship', *dewa pooja* 'ancestors worship', *chari pooja* 'earth worship', *chula pooja* 'fireplace worship' and *nuwangi* 'planting and harvesting worship'.

All ethnic Mewahang speak Nepali as their first or second language. Some of the Mewahang also have some knowledge of other geographically neighbouring Kiranti languages such as, Kulung, Sampang, Yakkha, Lohorung, and Hindi and English as well.

As the Mewahang language in some villages appears to be disappeared and shifted to the Nepali language and the children's retention of the ethnic language is gradually reduced, the language endangerment is critically high.

4.2 Language attitude

In General, Mewahang people have a very positive attitude towards their native language. The attitudes towards language can be observed from the way of the language speakers in talking, in communicating, and in using the language itself. The positive attitudes support efforts to use the language in variety of domains, and this help people resist the pressure from majority group to switch to their language is the same as in (Holmes 2013: 63).

They have a strong understanding of their cultural and ethnic identity and feel proud to use their language and identify themselves as Mewahang. These positive language attitudes are a symbol of identity and symbol of unity. This positive language attitude has significantly contributed to the language maintenance, typically for preparing primers to start mother tongue education at the primary schools and promoting language activities. Mewahang people have regarded language as very important for preserving their identity among the multilingual community.

Mewahang people living in Tamku and Yamdang say that their language is once considered as 'men-eater language' even within the community, unusually, by some people who either do not speak their language or are in the high social status tend to be misled by the other language speakers and that they at that time feel ashamed to speak it. In consequence, Mewahang language has been replaced by Nepali in these areas.

4.3 Ethnic identity

Although the Mewahang people are of Rai ethnicity and are under the same umbrella of *Kirant Rai Yayokkha*, an association representing the Rai-Kiranti people as a whole, they now want to receive an independent recognition, both politically and socially as well as that of some other Kiranti group, such as Nachhiring (Grollmann 2018). The term *Rai* is an officially recognized minority group in Nepal, but *Rai* is only a generic and cover term for more than thirty linguistically heterogeneous but ethnically homogeneous groups within Kiranti.

The Mewahang community, represented by the *Mewahang Rai Yakhomma*, is striving making ethnic movements for recognition as an individual ethnic group rather than being confined within an umbrella body. Many Mewahang are now either replacing their ethnic surname *Rai* with *Mewahang* or adding Mewahang before Rai as in 'Mewahang Rai' and are even applying for an official change of their surname as a consequence of larger social unit. Similar processes can be observed within other neighbouring Rai communities, such as Puma (Sharma 2014) and Nachhiring (Grollmann 2018).

Conversely, Mewahang people do not feel comfortable but feel restrained instead by being erroneously lumped together with other larger Rai groups such as, Bantawa, Chamling, Kulung, Thulung, Sangpang etc.

Even within Mewahang, one group of Mewahang – Yaphule Mewahang have already got an official minority recognition from the Government of Nepal while other group – Balali Mewahang are also striving to secure the same kind of recognition for them from the government. This issue has negatively impacted on ethnic solidarity of Mewahang people.

5. Fieldwork and data

5.1 Documentation project

The most important rationale for undertaking the language documentation is about promoting interdisciplinary research that involves both oral language knowledge and its description for the purposes of preserving undescribed diversity. The main objective of the documentation was to record language practices in context, following the methodology of the ethnography of speaking. Attempts were made to record traditional religious ceremonies, ritual performances, and cultural practices which were being rapidly lost.

A major part of the documentation was the documenting of the very rare cultural practices found in Mewahang. The project under the official title 'Linguistic description and comprehensive documentation of Mewahang, undescribed Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal' which was funded by

the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) at SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom while the project was hosted by the Department of Linguistics at the University of Oregon, United States of America.

5.2 Data collection

The study of the Mewahang language is exclusively a field-based linguistic description based on the first-hand primary data collected by the author. The recording of speech, transcribing of texts and elicitation with speakers is the heart of the corpus. The language consultants were closely involved in the project in various roles.

Table 2: Archived corpus

S. N.	GENRES	SUBGENRES	HOURS
1	Narrative	Myth	18
		Story	
		Folktale	
2	Conversation	Dialogue	04
3	Ritual	Marriage	21
		ghar chinta	
		khamang	
		nuwangi	
		Origin	
4	Description	Daily account	35
		Autobiography	
		Life histories	
		Family histories	
5	Singing	Song	04
6	Poetry	Poem	01
7	Dance	*sili nach*	01
		hang sili	
		sorha sili	
8	Recipe	*allo*, nettle fiber	01
		millet husking	
	Total		85

Some were trained in transcription, and translation, which have facilitated collection of new data during the fieldwork. Audio-video data were collected from different speakers of different age groups, sexes, and education, covering a variety of genres (see Table 2). These types of data are unquestionably crucial for beginning the grammatical analysis, and are supported by targeted elicitation.

Data on morphosyntactic phenomena were gathered by various methods of elicitation – the recording of texts themselves, questionnaires, and cross-data verification.

For each elicitation session we should have prepared a list of specific questions that we wanted to ask the consultant in order to obtain data for hitherto unexplored areas of morphosyntactic structures. Eventually, the collected materials (data) were interpreted and analyzed using documentary linguistic methods as noted in (Himmelmann 1998; 2006).

5.3 Sample structure

More than 200 Mewahang individuals (Table 3) have been involved in data collection. The roles of these people have varied, from being the primary speaker(s), to being a research assistant and transcriber, to performing the cultural rites, to being participated during the recording of ritual performances. The language consultants mostly the primary speakers vary greatly in age, education, language proficiency and life experience.

Table 3: Language consultants

Speaking areas	Age groups (yr)								Total
	0-19		20-39		40-59		60-90		
	Sex								
	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	Male	Female	
Bala	00	01	04	06	06	07	10	10	44
Chirkhuwa	00	00	00	00	02	02	03	02	09
Kathmandu	00	00	01	03	02	00	03	00	09
Khandbari	00	01	01	07	01	00	01	00	11
Mangtewa	00	00	03	02	03	09	04	08	29
Tamku	00	00	00	02	00	02	04	00	08
Yamdang	00	00	00	01	00	00	00	03	04
Yaphu	09	16	07	09	09	13	19	09	91
Total	09	18	16	30	23	33	44	32	205

The language consultants group includes the consultants who were born in the traditional heartland speaking areas in the Sankhuwasabha district and have never left the village as well the speakers who were born and raised in the village but now are residing outside of their home

villages such as Khandbari and Kathmandu (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3).

The occupations of the consultants also vary greatly; speakers range from being ritual specialists, ritual experts, teachers, former teachers, school students, farmers, housewives, shopkeepers, and political leaders. All speakers speak the Nepali language as their second language, though no monolingual speakers were found in the village.

In contrast, one speaker belongs to Mewahang ethnicity is strikingly a monolingual Nepali speaker. He is the only sample from the Mewahang community that how the Mewahang language is being shifted to the Nepali language. There is a range of second languages spoken by the speakers as well. Even some of the uneducated speakers mainly women are highly god-gifted storytellers (narrators).

5.4 Data formats

With regard to technology and format, we recorded all audio files as .wav format in 48kHZ, 16bit, using a Zoom H6n recorder with an external stereo microphone. Sound files were directly transferred to a computer and we used the program ELAN (Figure 4) and Toolbox to transcribe the audio and video data.
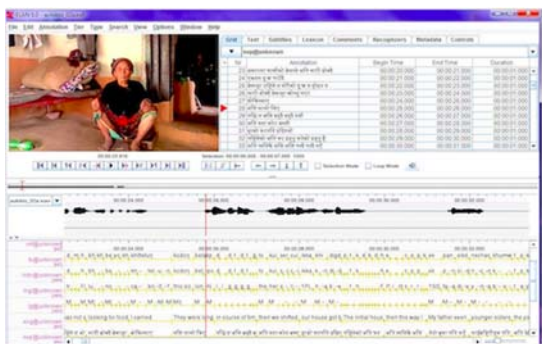

Figure 4: ELAN workflow

We used Arbil, a metadata editor for metadata management. For video we used a High Definition (HD) Canon camcorder (X-32). Photographs of individual speakers and the locality of language community were taken with an iPhone 8 plus and a Canon camcorder itself.

5.5 Annotations

The collected data were given metadata with brief descriptions of the context of setting. Approximately 20% of the recoded text has been glossed (Table 4). The archived corpus with English and Nepali translation is prepared and accessible via the ELAR archive (Endangered Language Archive, SOAS, University of London, United Kingdom) (Sharma 2019).

Table 4: Annotated corpus

S. N.	GENRES	SUBGENRES	HOURS
1.	Narrative	Myth	6
		Story	
		Folktale	
2.	Conversation	Dialogue	1
3.	Discourse	Daily account Autobiography Life histories Family histories	7
4.	Singing	Song	1
5.	Poetry	Poem	1
6.	Recipe	*allo*, nettle fiber	1
		TOTAL	17

5.6 Direct elicitation and fieldwork

For morphological and syntactic paradigms, standard elicitation methods were used. Eliciting verb paradigms was a really tedious, repetitious and challenging job. Both recording of text and direct elicitation are essential tools, which have their own variety of uses. Since neither of them is sufficient for all linguistic analysis, both of them should not be overlooked as noted in (Mithun 2001; Lüpke 2010).

Though both male and female speakers were selected as language consultants, preference was given to females because their language tends to be less influenced by the dominant languages (particularly Nepali) as they are less exposed to the outside world. Elderly people were chosen for the recording of folk tales, myths and legends because they are regarded as the guardians of the oral tradition.

5.7 Archiving and dissemination

The recorded audio and video recordings and accompanying transcribed and translated files have been submitted to the Endangered Language Archive (ELAR), SOAS, University of London upon completion of the project. The copies of recorded data with public access are left at the offices of Mewahang Rai Yakhomma of Kathmandu and Sankhuwasabha.

6. The documentation team

Depending on the involvement of the people in the Mewahang documentation and description project, and the amount of contribution they provided to the corpus, we categorize the role of each individual and use the terms 'consultants(s)', 'transcriber(s)', 'research assistant(s)' and the PI (Principal investigator) (cf. Sharma 2012) in reference to the study of the Mewahang language and their roles are as:

(i) Consultants:

being the primary native speakers of Mewahang who are happy to speak about the subjects in which they feel comfortable based on their expertise, such as narrative, myth, ritual, culture, singing, discourse, tradition and descriptive account.

(ii) Transcribers

native speakers of Mewahang who involve in the project to transcribing the texts and translating them into Nepali, and occasionally eliciting data.

(iii) Research assistants

native speakers of Mewahang who negotiate with the community, the consultants, and involve in transcribing and translating texts and eliciting data.

(iv) Principal investigator (PI) (author)

the author who works in close liaison with the research assistants, transcribers, and consultants, language community, host institution and funding institution for recording, transcribing, checking transcriptions and Nepali translations, and translating into English, glossing and analysis.

Four people in particular were of great assistance in the painstaking task of eliciting verbal paradigms, transcribing and translating texts, glossing texts, as well as being good teachers during elicitation sessions. They were Namita Mewahang Rai and Anjana Mewahang Rai of Bala, and Ganesh Mewahang Rai and Jiten Mewahang Rai of Yaphu. Namita Mewahang Rai was a research assistant for the project while Jiten Rai was a transcriber. Likewise, Ganesh Mewahang Rai was the main language consultant in the documentation project while Anjana Mewahang Rai was the next language consultant who contributed for elicitation and verification of data.

Furthermore, the project was able to get help from a few more people such as Januka Mewahang Rai and Yograj Mewahang Rai of Chirkhuwa and Krishna Mewahang Rai of Bala for cross-data verification.

7. Language of elicitation

The Nepali language is our medium of elicitation as the major *lingua franca* of the area where we worked is Nepali, which is also the official language of the country. In addition, as already discussed above, during fieldwork, no monolingual Mewahang speaker was found.

The scholars like Abbi (2001) makes a distinction between the target language, the contact language and the meta-language for eliciting data. As the main language consultant, research assistant and transcriber are well educated; English was occasionally used as a language of elicitation if the English examples are precise than the Nepali examples.

However, we need to pay special attention while using Nepali as the language of elicitation. There are different kinds of semantic and grammatical distinctions between Mewahang and Nepali. Nepali, for instance, does not have separate inclusive and exclusive pronouns in the first person plural. Similarly, Nepali has a dative construction, while Mewahang has a possessive construction. So, the researcher should always be careful while eliciting data for these kinds of constructions.

8. Fieldwork remarks

When we asked questions and requested Mewahang people to speak about any topics they would feel comfortable, they claimed ignorance and told us to see someone else 'knowledgeable' or 'who knows a lot about it', and would change the subject matter to ask why we were doing this, how it was different from other people who were already doing this business, about our family, or people we had met, or talked to whoever we happened to be with.

All the language consultants who we met during our frequent fieldtrip to the Mewahang core speaking areas have very positive attitudes towards the documentation of their language. They were happy being recorded as the Mewahang language consultants. All of them gave preference for a video recording rather than an audio recording and they became excited when they had a chance to watch their own video.

While the Mewahang elders in Yaphu had a mocking performance of visiting a girl's home for an arranged marriage exchanging their wooden vessels of liquor and chanting their rituals, we were lucky to be able to record a 'real' wedding of Mewahang and Yakkha at Khandbari.

In addition, besides a series of general recording on different genres, we were able to capture the rare moments of performing an important ritual called *gharchinta*, and other rituals *khamang* of a new and old house again in Yaphu. The cultural dance, *sili nach*, in the Mangtewa village, was recorded as a consequence of a group of self-inspired people from the village performed this ritual even in the unpleasant weather especially only for the purpose of recording to this project.

In contrast, a handful Mewahang people who have been Christianized by missionaries in the greed of the very poor incentive are found in Yaphu. This kind of conversion is wide spread among Rai-Kiranti communities. Another unusual practice that is found in Bala was that a girl who was forced to marry at the age of 15 and had son within a year at the age of 16.

9. Socio-linguistic observations

When there was a conversation between Kulung and Mewahang in Bala, it was interesting to know about the language they used during their conversation. Even in Bala area, Mewahang are in minority position compared to the neighbouring Kulung. As a consequence, Mewahang people speak and understand the Kulung language but not all Kulung people understand the Mewahang language. In contrast, if a Kulung person starts conversation in Nepali, then a Mewahang person gives his/her response in Nepali and if s/he starts conversation in the Kulung language, then the Mewahang gives his/her response in the Kulung language.

The other striking thing we noticed in the village was that sometimes wife's language could be dominant over husband's language especially in the patriarchal society. A couple from the Bala village is found speaking wife's ethnic language Kulung rather than husband's ethnic language Mewahang in home for daily communication, though neighbourhood is surrounded by the Mewahang speaking people.

The Mewahang language is no more medium of daily communication in Tamku where only some ritual rites are performed chanting ritual oral texts but majority of the ritual are performed using Nepali.

10. Conclusion

This first linguistic field report discloses the degree of endangerment of Mewahang is much higher than estimated in some villages, particularly in Bala, where endangerment is becoming higher day by day. In contrast, in Tamku the Mewahang language has already been shifted to Nepali and appears to be extinct as only very few ritual chants are used in the cultural performances.

With only a few hundred speakers left and even the adult speakers have shifted to Nepali, the national lingua franca, which is the language of daily communication, administration, education and media, the language ranks among highly endangered languages. As a consequence,

Mewahang language usage are alarming as the domains of language usage are significantly decreasing in daily communication. Conversely, the Mewahang community has positive attitudes towards their language and wants their language to be documented and preserved.

The demography of the Mewahang people is another disturbing matter as they are erroneously enumerated in the 2011 Census of Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal and in the sociolinguistic survey on Mewahang reported to LinSuN, which is most likely due to political circumstances created by some leaders and activists as well as the incompetency of the government which led to the emphasis of the ethnic identity and affiliation, rather than the linguistic proficiency and actual usage of the language. That is why there should be made a careful distinction between ethnicity and linguistic competence in the case of not only Mewahang but also many minority languages spoken in Nepal.

From a linguistic point of view, a comprehensive description of Mewahang, as a typologically fascinating language with complex verbal indexation, appears to be valuable and promising to bridge a major gap among the Upper Arun subgroup of the Greater Eastern Kiranti languages. This complex ethnic and historical interrelationship of language contact makes a Kiranti historical-comparative linguistics especially interesting.

The documentation and linguistic description of Mewahang will be a contribution for the linguistics of the Himalayan region, and ultimately for the Tibeto-Burman linguistics and typological studies of the languages in general.

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