

BI/MULTILINGUALISM AND LANGUAGE SHIFT IN CHHANTYAL

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This paper outlines various aspects of bi/multilingualism and language shift in Chhantyal, a minority language community in Nepal. The main objective is to find the domains of language use and the causes of language shift among the migrated Chhantyal in Kathmandu valley. This research is based on mixed methodology of socio-ethnographic survey data where the data were collected with the help of survey questionnaire, key informants interviews (KIIs) and informal discussions and narratives with Chhantyal people based on Gautam (2021). The findings indicate that there is continuous shifts towards Nepali, English and Hindi languages among the speakers influenced by market multilingualism, globalization, migration, travel and tourism.

Keywords: multilingualism, shift, Chhantyal, attitude, policy

1. Background

There are more than 124 languages in Nepal belonging to four major language families, namely Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian and a language isolate Kusunda (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023). These languages are distributed and spoken with various dialects in different places of the country. In this context, the use of various languages like Nepali, English, Hindi and many other heritage languages spoken by Nepalese people in different context, situations and activities increase the possibilities of language contact and shift in more urbanized places like Kathmandu valley where people migrate from different ethnic, sociocultural and geographical backgrounds. In multilingual and diversified societies, these multiple aspects bring changes in the linguistic, psychological, and social and cultural behavior of the people because of education, economy, social and cultural dominance where we find the use of multiple languages and the gradual shift towards majority languages

(Fishman, 1964; Gautam & Poudel, 2022a). The speakers of many minority languages are gradually leaving their heritage languages and shifting towards the languages of majority culture, population and economic or social power (Gautam, 2021). In the context of Nepal, many minority and ancestral languages are being shifted into Nepali, Hindi or English because of various socio-cultural impacts (Gautam, 2021) like globalization, urbanization and westernization.

This paper overviews the current sociolinguistic situation of Chhantyal speech community living in Kathmandu valley where various domains of language use and the clues towards language shift and its causes have been identified against the use and attitudes towards their heritage language. In the cosmopolitan city like Kathmandu, Nepali, Hindi and English languages are more dominant and useful because of market multilingualism and globalization. The paper describes the multiple aspects of multilingualism and the patterns of language shift in Chhantyal based on causes and impacts among the speech community residing in the Kathmandu valley.

2. Chhantyal people and language

Among several minority languages spoken in Nepal, Chhantyal is spoken by approximately 4282 people which represents 0.01% of the total population among the 11,963 (0.04%) ethnic Chhantyal population (NSO, 2023). These people primarily live in Baglung and Myagdi districts of Gandaki province of Nepal. The Chhantyls are divided into two major groups according to the geographical area they live viz. Myagdi Chhantyal and Baglung Chhantyal. The Chhantyal villages are Mangale Khani, Dwari, Ghyas Kharka, Chaura Khani, Kuine Khani, Thara Khani, Patle Kharka, Malamphar and Malkabang. However, the Chhantyal people have recently migrated to the nearest towns and cities like Beni, Baglung, Pokhara and Kathmandu for jobs, employments,

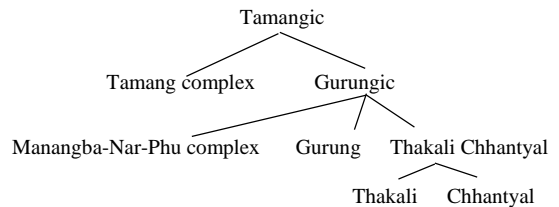
better education and many other opportunities. If we compare the Chhantyal speakers in two census data (9800 in 2001 and 4020 in 2011) we find a massive loss of native language speakers in a decade which is because of heavy migration (Noonan, 2006b; Gautam, 2021).

Chhantyal believe in Shamanism, animalism, worship their ancestor's spirits, and a variety of nature spirits by sacrificing animals (Noonan, 2006a). Most of them follow Hinduism and celebrate Hindu's major festivals popular in Gandaki-Dhaulagiri region. The early history of Chhantyal and their language use, according to Noonan (2006a), can be traced back to at least 1500 years ago with other people speaking similar languages that came down from Tibet and settled in the mountains of Nepal. Cattle raising, hunting, foraging were their primary economic activities; however, farming became the most important economic activity as compared to other economic activities. As Chhantyal were experts in mining work, they moved to the present locations in the Myagdi and Baglung districts in the late 18th and early 19th century to work in the copper mine there. The Chhantyal as the mine workers were so important to the Nepalese state that they were exempt from the military draft during the period of wars with British India in the early 19th century. Traditionally, Chhantyal were skilled miners. They used to work in copper mines without using any scientific tools. They had the traditional knowledge about mining and could taste, smell the soil and rock to locate material such as copper ore. One can visit and find lots of caves and mines which were made by Chhantyal during mining time. But these days they have left their traditional profession and converted to farming in the villages and some business like hotel, tourism in the city areas like Kathmandu and Pokhara. Many Chhantyal have joined to Indian and British army and gone to Middle East countries for employment. Hence, foreign remittance is also one source of income among the new generation.

Chhantyal is one of the Tibeto-Burman languages in the Chhantyal-Gurung-Manag-Tamang-Thakali [CGMTT] group spoken by Chhantyal people. Chhantyal is a member of the Tamangic group along with Gurung, Thakali, Nar-Phu and Tamang which is lexically and grammatically closer to

Thakali language (Noonan, 2006c). Noonan (2006b) classifies the genetic affiliation of Chhantyal language as in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Chhantyal among Tamangic



Chhantyal language is also known as *Chantel*, *Chhantel*, *Chantyal* or *Khamkura*. Linguistically, it is primarily suffixing and agglutinative language with a long and continuous contact with Nepali language. Chhantyal language is spoken within and among themselves while addressing and talking with other Chhantyal for the various domestic conversations. Almost all the Chhantyal are Nepali-Chhantyal bilinguals at least in their linguistic repertoire because the contact with non-Chhantyal is frequent and the situations exist requiring Nepali language even in interactions among Chhantyal. This situation is more frequent and usual among the Chhantyal living in Kathmandu valley.

3. Research methods

This research is based on mixed method of socio-ethnographic survey analysis where the primary data were collected with the help of survey questionnaire, KIIs, many personal interviews and narratives based on Gautam (2021). The questionnaire was written in English language and later it was translated into Nepali for data collection purpose. However, the medium for data collection was in Nepali language because almost all the informants were competent in Nepali. The data were collected from November 2021 to May 2022. Due to the number of small speech community, thirty informants were purposively selected for survey questionnaire in Kathmandu valley. The questionnaire included 20 questions to explore multilingualism and language shift in Chhantyal community. Only 15 out of 30 participants were administered for other qualitative tools like KII, interview and narratives for the languages they use in different activities in their day-to-day life. The consent was taken before

collecting data and the pseudonyms are used while describing the narratives and stories.

Table 1: Selection of the informants

SN	Districts	Place of origin		Total
		Myagdi	Baglung	
1	Kathmandu	9	4	13
2	Lalitpur	7	3	10
3	Bhaktapur	5	2	7
Total		21	9	30

Apart from primary data, different secondary sources like library, journals and publications which were based on the recent trends in multilingualism and language shift studies. The collected data from the questionnaire were analyzed using simple statistical tool Excel which helped calculate percentages and develop tables and diagrams. Other qualitative data from the KIIs, interviews and narratives were analysed thematically integrating with the quantitative data while describing and interpreting.

4. Language shift in various domains

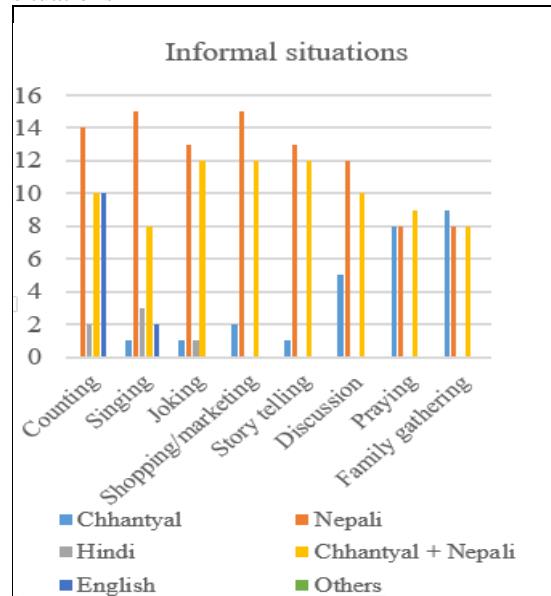
The concept of sociolinguistic domains refers to broadly defined and easily recognizable speech communities of various sizes such as a family, a school, a workplace, a church, a local or regional government as well as the nation state (Feng & Adamson, 2017; Gautam, 2020). However, multiple languages are used for multiple domains depending upon the various contexts and situations (Gautam & Poudel, 2022b). Chhantyal language speakers use different languages in different domains when they communicate with different people in different situations and activities. We have administered questionnaire that deals with the patterns of language shift on the basis of different domains of language use and the language attitude of Chhantyal speakers who have migrated from Dhaulagiri region and been living in Kathmandu valley for more than two decades in order to see the pattern of language shift among the speech community.

4.1. Informal domains

The informal use of language refers to the use of language in day-to-day activities which shows how the people have been socially and culturally ignored and dominated by using their heritage languages which indicates the internal linguistic

imperialism (Phillipson, 1992; Gautam, 2022b). Most of the activities and situations within and without the community reflect the informal activities and conservations that are linked with such domains where people speak their mother tongue along with other influential languages. The Chhantyal use their mother tongue into different domains such as counting, singing, joking, shopping or marketing, storytelling, discussing or debating, praying, quarrelling and family gatherings. The domain of informal situations and number of languages used by Chhantyal is presented in the diagram below.

Diagram 1: Domains of language use in informal situations



Source: Field data (2022)

Diagram 1 shows that Chhantyal use their mother tongue in various informal situations like discussion, praying, quarrelling and family gathering. They use Nepali language in counting, storytelling and shopping/marketing activities with other informal activities. The use of English and Hindi is very rare in these activities. This indicates that other languages except Chhantyal and Nepali are not common and frequent in this speech community. However, the use of both Chhantyal and Nepali language simultaneously in most of the informal situations shows stable bilingualism and gradual shift towards Nepali and other dominant

languages. We asked them the reason for using Nepali and Chhantyal simultaneously and Rabina (58F) replied ‘According our grandparents we were not allowed to speak languages other than Nepali to work in the mines and outside the community. So we all used both languages at home since our childhood.’ This indicates the government’s assimilation language policy during Panchayat system¹ in order to force people to speak Nepali for any job outside home.

4.2 Formal domains

The formal use of language refers to the use of languages in official, administrative and public purposes. In this situation, people mostly tend to use influential languages along with their mother tongue. In this study, the formal domains of language use include office or workplace, political or social gatherings, public activities, administration and the language with strangers among the migrated Chhantyal in Kathmandu valley is presented in the table 2 below.

Table 2: Domains of language use in formal situations

Domains of language	Chhantyal (C) (%)	Nepali (N) (%)	Both (C+N) (%)	English (%)	Hindi (%)
Office/ workplace	---	100	6.66	13.32	
Political/ social gathering	6.66	100	19.98	---	
Public activities	6.66	100	26.64	---	
Administr ation		100	---	---	
Strangers		100		---	8.66

Source: Field data (2022)

Table 2 shows that there are very less instances of mother tongue use in these activities except political/social gathering and public activities. In almost all the domains of formal situations, the Chhantyal use Nepali language as compared to their mother tongue and other languages like Hindi

and English. However, the use of both Chhantyal and Nepali can be seen in other formal activities except administration and strangers. During the field visit, we asked them about the reason for using Nepali in most of the time. Sharmila (53, F) says - “Nobody understands and speaks our language. If we speak it in public place with our friends and relatives, people tease us”. This indicates that many minority languages in the multilingual cities of the world have been shifting towards neighboring dominant languages because of social and cultural pressure.

4.3 Religious and cultural domains

Religious and cultural domains are related to the activities which are connected to Chhantyal ethnic identity and cultural practices. These religious and cultural activities include religious festivals, cultural programs, birth ceremonies, marriage ceremonies, death ceremonies and other activities commonly observed by the members of Chhantyal ethnic group which is presented in the table 3 below.

Table 3: Domains of language use in religious and cultural activities

Domains of language	Chhantyal (C) (%)	Nepali (N) (%)	Both (C+N) (%)	English (%)	Hindi (%)
Religious festivals	26.64	13.32	46.62	-	-
Cultural programs	26.64	13.32	46.62	6.66	6.66
Birth ceremonies	33.33	19.98	66.66	-	-
Marriage ceremonies	19.98	13.32	53.28	-	-
Death ceremonies	33.33	26.64	59.94	-	-
Cultural festivals	33.33	33.33	53.28	-	-

Source: Field data (2022)

Table 3 shows the use of multiple languages in various activities related to the religious and

¹ Panchayat System (1961-1990) adopted one language policy in Nepal.

cultural domains of Chhantyal people. The table shows that the frequency of the use of Chhantyal language is comparatively higher than Nepali but still less than the bilingual use of Chhantyal and Nepali in all different domains. The main reason for this is the gradual language shift towards the majority and dominant languages from the minority ones. We asked the reason for this and one of the informants (Bharat, 67 M) said “What to do sir? Most of the young people in our community like to speak Nepali and consequently we have also started speaking more Nepali. We love our language and culture but we left our village where we enjoyed much.” This story of Bharat indicates that many minority ethnic communities around the world have been compelled to speak language of wider communication because of migration and other social cultural influences.

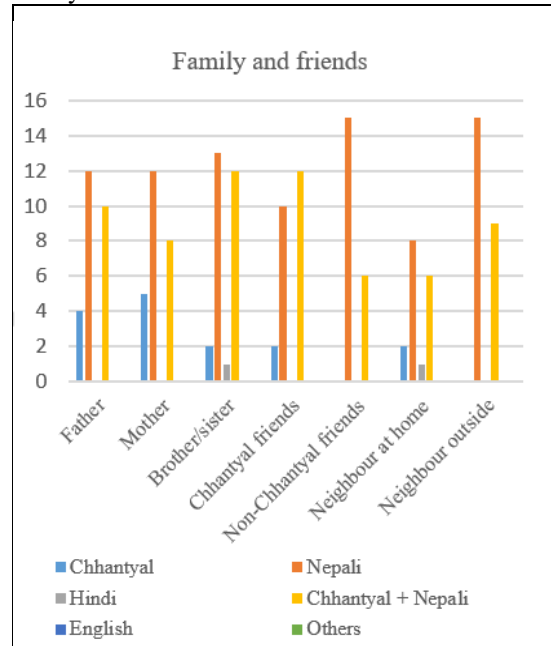
4.4 Family and friends

Two or more languages are used in among friends and family members among the Chhantyls living in Kathmandu Valley who generally possess nuclear family consisting of father, mother, brother or sister. Non-Chhantyal people who have frequent contact with Chhantyls are Chhantyal friends, non-Chhantyal friends, neighbors at home and neighbors outside. The languages which are used by Chhantyls among family and friends are presented in diagram 2.

Diagram 2 shows the use of different languages in with friends and family members. We can see that Chhantyal language is used with father, mother, brother/sister and neighbors at home while Nepali language is used in almost all the domains comparing to Chhantyal and other languages. The use of Hindi and English is negligible among the Chhantyal people living in Kathmandu valley. Interestingly, both Nepali and Chhantyal languages are used among all the family members and relatives. We also asked the reason for using both languages frequently. Nita (49, F) says “Using both languages is very easy for everybody in our community while we are in Kathmandu. We speak more Chhantyal when we go to Myagdi. We love to speak our own language but for business and communication Nepali is important”. This indicates the multiple use of language among Chhantyal people as social practitioners who negotiate their understanding and production of communicative

tasks by utilizing their linguistic and cultural resources (Gautam, 2019). Speaking more Chhantyal in Myagdi and more Nepali in Kathmandu shows their different language practices for different contexts.

Diagram 2: Domains of language use among family and friends



Source: Field data (2022)

5. Causes of language shift

There are various causes of language shift among the Chhantyal speakers which are influenced by socio-historical reasons. The older generations in the Chhantyal community believe that the existing government policy forced them to forget their heritage language and use Nepali language during Panchayat Era (1961-1990). Old Chhantyal speakers informed us that they were not allowed to speak and write their languages while working in the mines and other places during Panchayat Rule (Nolan, 2006b). However, after the restoration of democracy in 1990, they were given opportunities to learn and speak other languages as well. At present we find that Chhantyal people speak Nepali, English and other languages when they move out to the urban areas from their traditional homelands. Some other causes of language shift in

this minority speech community can be discussed below.

5.1 Societal multilingualism

Societal multilingualism is one of the most important causes of language shift through contact (Gautam, 2022a; 2022b) where multiple languages are in use among the speakers and they slowly move towards the dominant and influential languages by leaving their ancestral languages. Chhantyal speaking area is located in the eastern part of Myagdi district; however, the Chhantyal in Baglung normally do not use their mother tongue rather they speak Nepali, the national language of Nepal which is the common lingua franca of the region. The other neighboring speech communities with Chhantyal are Brahmins, Chhetries and some Dalits, Magars, Thakali and Newars. We discussed with the informants the number of languages used by the members of Chhantyal speech community residing in different places of Kathmandu valley. From the discussion with the informants, we found that all of them speak more than two languages in their day-to-day communication. This shows that, the Chhantyal people are multilingual by nature. They speak Chhantyal, Nepali, English and Hindi every day in different contexts and situations. They speak Chhantyal equally with Nepali while talking with their family members and relatives. Nepali language is spoken by them with the members of other speech community. They watch Hindi serials on television and listen to Hindi music and songs. English is used by their children in school and colleges as their most children go to English medium institutions. This indicates that societal multilingualism is very high among the Chhantyal living in Kathmandu valley.

5.2 Education

Education is another factor of language shift among Chhantyal population which is influenced by the unchecked expansion of English medium of instruction policy in Nepal's schools (Poudel & Choi, 2021). The constitution of Nepal (2015) has given the rights of primary education in mother tongue but due to the lack of proper coordination and implementation of educational policy, the Chhantyal ethnic students are deprived of studying in their mother tongue as they have not been able to learn in their ethnic language. Although

ethnicity and language policies have been widely discussed in Nepal's education policy making and development discourses (Poudel & Choi, 2022), the very agenda of empowering ethnic/indigenous languages in education and official use has not been well-implemented (Poudel et al., 2022). Moreover, as this study showed, they have to use either Nepali or English language in their schools during their study hours. The researchers discussed with the respondents the education of Chhantyal children. They said that the rich Chhantyal send their sons and daughters in English medium private schools and colleges and the middle and poor class family send to public school and colleges where they are exposed to Nepali and English languages. Consequently, this leads to Chhantyal students to learn and speak Nepali and English rather than their mother tongue at home. Most of the textbooks and teaching learning materials are also written in Nepali and English language and the educated people tend to shift towards dominant language because of education. We asked them the reason and Rupa (65, F) replied "Sir! If our children learn English well they can go to Australia, America by securing good IELTS score and if they know Nepali well, they can at least do good business in Nepal but there is no value of learning our language". This indicates a massive language shift in Kathmandu valley because of the influence of foreign languages in education and its attraction for business and other income activities.

5.3 Tourism, business and economy

Travel and tourism is another factor that causes language shift in Chhantyal community. Chhantyal people travel and visit into non-Chhantyal speaking area for employment and business. Moreover, they are engaged into different travel and tourism business such as running hotels and restaurants in Beni, Baglung, Pokhara and Kathmandu. People involved in this profession should speak English, Hindi, Chinese and many other languages in order to deal with the guests and clients. The researchers discussed with the respondents the consequences of travel and tourism in Chhantyal culture and language. Gopal (38, M) replied "What to do sir? We could not study well and the land in our village doesnot yield the crops for the whole year to eat. We got early marriage

and for the children we are running hotel in Kathmandu”.

Gopal’s story indicates that they are involved in this profession because of economic crisis and shifting into other languages. In diversified multilingual societies, culture commodification has been considered as a means to promote minority culture, and improve their way of life through an increased sense of identity and pride in one’s cultural and background, as well as the economic potential, including employment opportunities, offered by tourism (De Bernardi, 2019; Lonardi, 2021; Gautam, 2020)

Tourism, business and economy also demand the use of languages of wider community. For business work and economic benefits, Chhantyal people are leaving their traditional places and moving towards many new places and successfully running tourism and business related activities. During survey, we met many Chhantyal people who have been running shops, hotels, restaurants and travel and ticketing centers in different places of Kathmandu valley where they are using multiple languages one at a time.

5.4 Language politics and ideological shift

Language politics in the developing countries like Nepal has multiple effects (Gautam, 2022a). The political causes may also demand more instances of language shift within a particular language community. In the past, the Chhantyal were dominated as well as directed to use Nepali language for their job security (Noonan, 2006a) during Panchayat Era or before. The monolingual policy of the past in the history of Nepal has a very significant role among the Chhantyal community. In this context, the present ideological shift among the migrated Chhantyal people living in Kathmandu valley is moving towards the use of Nepali, English, Hindi and other languages. After 1990s political change, many minority language communities have been developing language awareness for the preservation and revitalization of languages with the support of local governments as prescribed in the constitution (2015) but Chhantyal people do not have local governance to use Chhantyal language in core speaking area even in ward offices. Consequently, they are obliged to use Nepali, the national language of Nepal for official

use in their place of origin. The local schools are run in either Nepali or English medium and people in local markets use Nepali language as basic language for everyday communication. So the attitudes to specific languages and their uses also change and evolve over people’s lifetimes, especially in multilingual societies where people tend to use different languages not only in different contexts, but also at different times of their lives, with different people, for different purposes, in different political and social realities (Sohami, 2006, p. 9).

5.5 Media, migration and mobility

People use different languages in the domains and activities related to media and entertainment. In this study, the domain of media and entertainment include watching television, listening to radio or music, listening interview and reading newspaper. The Chhantyal people use various languages in the domains of media and entertainments which are presented in table 4.

Table 4: Domains of language in media and entertainment

Domains of language	Chhantyal (C) (%)	Nepali (N) (%)	Hindi (%)	English (%)
Watching television		53.28	53.28	13.32
Listening radio/ music		79.92	53.28	13.32
Listening interview		66.66	13.32	6.66
Reading newspaper		100		19.98

Source: Field data (2022)

Table 4 shows that Nepali, Hindi and English languages are used by Chhantyal people living in Kathmandu valley. They do not use the heritage language i.e., Chhantyal in these activities any more. This indicates the impact of media and entertainment in this minority speech community where language shift process is very fast.

Migration also has far-reaching consequences for the social fabric of the three communities affected: the society of origin, the society of destination, and the migrants themselves (Gautam, 2012; Lewis, 1982; Kerswill, 2006). The analysis of the data and

discussion with the informants shows that both print and electronic as well as social media, migration and mobility trigger language shift in Chhantyal ethnic community when they are moving to different places from Myagdi and Baglung. The new generation is giving up their mother tongue and switching themselves towards Nepali, Hindi and English language. During discussion one of the respondents narrated that the ethnic Chhantyal people watch TV serials and films as well as they listen and read news in three different languages as Nepali, Hindi and English. The other cause of language shift among Chhantyal speakers is migration. There are various causes of migration as reported by the respondents during our field visit. They have been migrated to the urban areas for better education, business and employment that pushed the Chhantyal population from core speaking area. This kind of mobility of Chhantyal people in different places motivate them to speak new languages and socialize with new context and people.

6. Language attitude and impact

Language attitude either promotes or prevents language shift among the speakers of a particular language community which has diverse socio-cultural impacts. Grenoble and Whaley (1998) state that the subjective attitudes of a speech community towards its own and other languages are paramount for predicting language shift. However, a language is explicitly valued when it is used almost all domains of language use or it becomes as the marker of community identity. On the other hand, if a language is limited to only communication within the ethnic members and the young generation switch to the language of wider community e.g. Nepali and English in the context of Chhantyal that results into language shift. Regarding language attitude, the respondents were asked whether they love community people speaking Chhantyal language. They said that they feel proud to speak their mother tongue among the members of other language community. When we asked them "*How do you feel when you listen people speaking Chhantyal?*". One of the respondents answered that she often felt proud and prestigious in such situation and recalled her childhood days she spent in the village. Now she

regrets that she often mixes Nepali words while speaking her language.

Indeed, language shift and loss can be viewed as a fundamentally social process in which individuals react to social changes that in turn affect their linguistic ideologies, language use, and social identities (Gal, 1979, Kroskrity, 1993). The main cause for these changes is the dispersion of Chhantyal ethnic population from the core-speaking area. Now, Chhantyal population has been dispersed to different major cities of Nepal mainly in Pokhara, Chitwan, Butwal and Kathmandu. The causes may be education, employment, business, transportation, and other facilities. This trend of migration resulted into the gradual decreasing in the use of Chhantyal and increasing in the use of Nepali and English languages. The young generation are gradually leaving their mother tongue and switching into the mainstream lingua franca either Nepali or English.

7. Conclusion and implications

Language practices develop and are largely influenced by several external social contexts on the basis of beliefs and values of languages in which language management becomes an attempt to modify the values or practices of someone else (Spolsky, 2004, p. 186). Both language maintenance and shift go together leading to either convergence or divergence to a particular language and culture. The complex ethno-linguistic situation generated by the entangled relationship of the diverse languages of the different ethnicities and religions in a new mixed society like Kathmandu valley where multiple languages and dialects compete with each other has influenced language shifts. From the collected data and the narratives, it is clear that the members of the Chhantyal language speaking community are more desperate because of the ongoing language shift within their ethnic community. They are expecting more campaign for the preservation of language and culture through their community association i.e. *Chhantyal Sangh/Samaj* where they very often meet and talk about this situation. However, they are worried about not having any substantial progress towards revitalization of Chhantyal language in governance and education. They pointed out that it was due to the lack of political commitment at the national level.

Various other impacts like language contact and shift, neoliberal economical influences to the Global South and Englishization can also be noticed in this speech community. Bilingual and multilingual children differ from monolinguals, in that they produce mixed utterances, which appear from the beginning of speech production onwards (Romanowski, 2021, p. 22). Hence, a separate family language policy needs to be conducted in the Chhantyal community in order to see what is happening at the micro level of Chhantyal language practice. The media, migration, marriage, education, travel and tourism, business and economy, and political issues cause a particular language of minority people to use the language of wider community, which is much more an ideological factor (Poudel, 2019). On the other hand, learning English is deeply rooted among Nepalese people across the country driven by the market-logic, although the government seems reluctant to force the users to use English as a medium of instruction formally and officially. From the collected data and our frequent interviews and observations in this minority community, we can say that stable bilingualism with Nepali and frequent multilingualism is common. So for the successful intergenerational transmission of heritage language i.e. Chhantyal concerned authority need to establish bilingual educational programs for the young children (Schwartz & Minkov, 2022).

This paper has also provided an illustration of the importance of ideological multiplicity in discourse among the minority Chhantyls living in Kathmandu which can also be analysed in conjunction with ethnographic studies. It can offer various insights on the type of social change where cultural anthropologists, sociologists, policy maker and social scientists can develop new discourses through this study.

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