A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Languages of Manang, Nepal: Co-Existence and Endangerment

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Introduction

With over one hundred languages from four major families (and at least one isolate), and a similarly high number of caste-clan and ethnic groupings, Nepal is a country of undisputed ethno-linguistic diversity (CBS 2012; Kansakar 2006; Gurung 1998). It is also a country of increasingly rapid social, cultural, political and economic change with ensuing geographic movement and language displacement (Angdembe 2013; Rai 2013; Tumbahang 2012). The purpose of this study is to examine the intersection of traditional language practices and cultural diversity with these modern changes as they are relevant for a group of four languages spoken inside of the political boundaries of Manang, Nepal.

Sociolinguistic surveys have many goals (Mallinson et al, eds. 2013). They provide an assessment of speaker practices and factors behind structural variation and mutual intelligibility across codes. They do this by reporting on lexico-grammatical similarity and differences, but they also include reports on speaker attitudes, feelings and beliefs about language use in their worlds. Adjusted slightly to fit the Nepal context, such surveys also can provide a valuable assessment of language promotion or vulnerability in private and public contexts such as the home and daily community environment, in schools and the work-place, and also in official and public contexts. We take as our central focus in this paper an examination of residents' personal histories, practices and attitudes that may simultaneously promote and compromise the survival of mother tongues in a multi-lingual setting like Manang.

Background and Goals

In Nepal there have already been several surveys published on individual languages. These include reports on Balami Newar (Pradhan 2012), Kinnauri (Negi 2012), Tamang (Thokar 2008), Baram (Kansakar et al 2009, 2011), Raji (Sah 2011), Byansi (Nawa 2004), Bantawa (Eppele 2011), and also on varieties of Gurung spoken outside of the Manang district (Glover & Landon 1980). In contrast, there are comparatively fewer surveys on multilingual practices/attitudes in larger regional settings (but cf. Japola et al 2003, Webster 1992, Eppele 2003 for practices in Mustang, Gorkha, Kiranti diaspora in Kathmandu). Steven Watters has also published a typology of sociolinguistic research in Nepal (2008).

This report focuses on results of language attitude and usage surveys in the Manang District presented in a cross-linguistic and cross-community perspective. Geographically, Manang is known as the Inner Himalayan Valley, as it is virtually surrounded by the Nepal Annapurna mountain range (Gurung 1998). Manang is located in the Gandaki zone, where it is the second largest district. It is approximately 2,246 square kilometers in area and is bordered to the south-east by Lamjung District, to the north-east by Gorkha District and to the north-west by Mustang District. It is roughly

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bisected by the major river, the Marsyangdi, although other smaller rivers like the Nar Khola and Phu Khola are important geographic landmarks too.

Map of Manang District. Languages include Nyeshangte (N), Nar-Phu (NP), Gyalsumdo (G) and the Manang variety of Gurung (MG).

Although it has a low population density in relation to its overall geographic area (with 1,448 households reported in the 2012 Nepal Central Bureau of Statistics census), the Manang District is also multi-lingual and multi-ethnic, with four local languages. Three of these languages are from the TGTM sub-grouping of Tibeto-Burman (Nyeshangte, Gurung, Nar-Phu) and one is a Tibetan variety (Gyalsumdo)[1]. The distribution of these languages in Manang is plotted in the map above[2]. The map suggests that the overall distribution is largely a north-south one, with Manange and Nar-Phu clustered in the north and north-east portions of Manang (some Nar-Phu have relocated to lower Manang), and Gyalsumdo and Gurung largely concentrated in the south.

In the early 2000's, a motor road project was commissioned by the Nepal government with funding assistance from other countries in order to connect the Manang District headquarters (Chhame) with the main road networks of the country. District politicians and activists have likewise raised additional money to extend the road through upper Manang. This initiative benefits rural communities by connecting them to business and other opportunities available to more centrally connected places of Nepal, but it also has adverse consequences as local residents (particularly younger residents) emigrate

[1] Manange has the Ethnologue ISO-639 entry *nmm*; Gurung has the Ethnologue ISO-639 entry *gvr*; Nar-Phu has the Ethnologue ISO-639 entry *npa*; Gyalsumdo does not have an Ethnologue entry.
[2] This map was created by Shunfu Hu. The map may be accessed at http://www.siue.edu/~shu/nepal7.html. For information on the design and implementation of this map, refer to Hildebrandt and Hu (2013).

away from their areas of traditional language practice for education and job opportunities. This introduces new scenarios and potentials for language contact and language endangerment to the Manang languages and further motivates this study.

Methods

The original plan behind this survey was to establish a ratio of residents to interview across the four languages based on individual village household counts. This represents a "quota sample" because the entire sample ideally has the same proportion of individuals as the larger population (Patton 2005). However, we have found in our visits of Manang villages that household census counts are unreliable, and many houses in various villages have been abandoned or else sub-let to recent migrants from other parts of Nepal (e.g. Lhomi and Thakali-speaking families and people from Gorkha district). Therefore our alternative interviewee sampling approach has been a combination of "snowball" (where interviewees help direct us to additional people) and "sample of convenience" (where we interview any lifelong Manang resident who is available). These sampling approaches come with their own drawbacks (Biernacki and Waldorf 1981), but they have allowed us to interview residents from a wide range of backgrounds from every Manang village. We summarize our interviewee sample by various demographic factors in the next section.

Our survey instrument (questionnaire) is included as an appendix at the end of the paper. Modeled on similar surveys conducted in Nepal (Kansakar et al 2011 and LinSuN), it contains five sections: General and personal information; Family background and language practices; Current family situation and language practices; Work and education language practices; Subjective contemporary (opinions on language/variety locations and mutual intelligibility and opinions on future language prospects in official and cultural domains), and a question that was devised part-way through data collection in 2012 on opinions about the number of languages spoken in Manang. All interviews were conducted in person, in Nepali language, and all interviews were audio-recorded.

Demographic Summary

Between 2012 and 2014 a total of 87 interviews were conducted across the four language groups, with the distribution by Manang Village Development Committee (VDC) and by language outlined in the chart below.

VDC	Gurung	Gyalsumdo	Nyeshangte	Nar-Phu
Taal	3	2		
Gyerang	2			
Kotro~Karte	2	1		
Dharapani	3	3		
Thonce	1	1		
Tilce	3			
Nace	2			
Tace	3			
Otar	3	4		
Bagarchhap~Danakju				

Temang~Thancowk	9			
Chhame~Koto	2	6		2
Pisang			3	
Humde			3	
Braagaa			3	1
Manang~Tengki			6	
Khangsar			4	
Ngawal			2	
Ghyaaru			2	
Nar				7
Phu				3

The following charts show the division of interviewees by gender and by average age.

GENDER	Gurung	Gyalsumdo	Manange	Nar-Phu
Male	19	12	13	9
Female	15	5	10	4

AGE	Gurung	Gyalsumdo	Manange	Nar-Phu
Males	59	59	50	58
Females	37	40	38	28
All	45	54	42	44

More males than females were interviewed, and Gyalsumdo interviewees are on average older than interviewees from other groups. Part of this skewing towards older age is due to the difficulty we had in locating participants between the ages of 18 and 35, as many of these people have relocated to other parts of Nepal or overseas.

The following charts show the division of interviewees by highest degree of formal education attained and by reported occupation. These numbers are reported as percentages of the population of each language group.

EDUCATION	Gurung	Gyalsumdo	Manange	Nar-Phu
None	27%	20%	35%	61%
Between 1-9 years	16%	40%	39%	31%
Up to SLC	14%	13%	0%	0%
10+2	47%	13%	26%	8%
University	3%	7%	0%	0%

OCCUPATION	Gurung	Gyalsumdo	Manange	Nar-Phu
Hotel/Tourism	3%	35%	0%	0%

Agriculture	25%	20%	22%	61%
Teaching/ Student	10%	12%	9%	0%
Combination of Above	67%	28%	61%	31%
Government	5%	5%	4%	8%
Retired/None	0%	5%	4%	0%

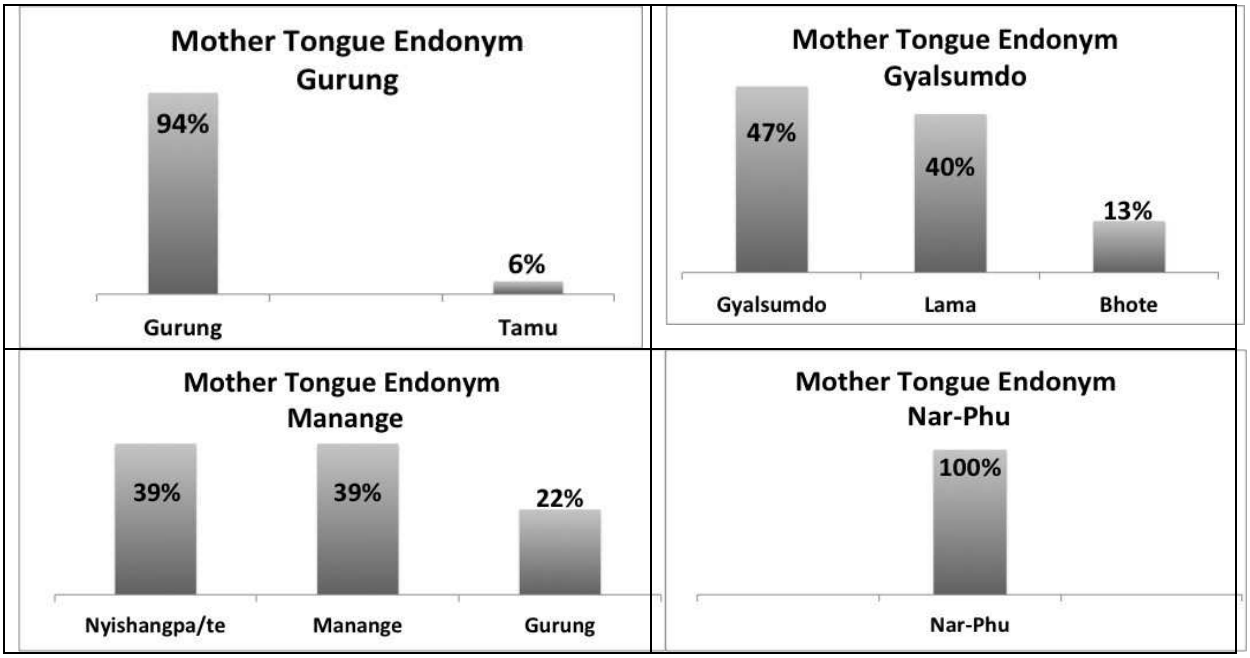
Most interviewees reported between somewhere "none" and "up to 9th year" for degree of formal education, but we did interview some teachers (who had completed their 10+2 education in a more specialized subject such as education or commerce). Reported occupations are largely a mix of agriculture, combined with local or tourist business like hotel operation, although we did interview some government employees. The remainder of this manuscript provides an overview of responses to questions on self-perception of language use in private and public settings, selected responses on intelligibility across languages and varieties in Manang, attitudes about language use in private and public settings, and also attitudes about future prospects of the Manang languages.

Part One: Self-Perceptions

All local languages of Manang belong to the Tibeto-Burman family, although there has been some confusion or mis-information in various reported sources about their sub-grouping and locations of use. The Ethnologue entry for Gurung (www.ethnologue.com) includes the endonym/autonym *Tamu* or *Tamu Khyui* 'Tamu voice/language' and the exonym *Gurungkura*. The entry for Manange includes the endonyms *Nyeshang* and *Nyeshangte*, and three exonyms: *Manangpa*, *Manangba* and *Manangbhot*. The entry for Manange includes the endonyms *Chhyprung* and *Nartwe*. Gyalsumdo is not listed. Genealogically, Manange, Gurung and Nar-Phu are all TGTM languages (along with Tamang, Seke/Tangbe and Thakali), while Gyalsumdo is a Tibetan variety (with probable close affiliation to Kyirong and Nupri, as reported in Hildebrandt and Perry (2011)).

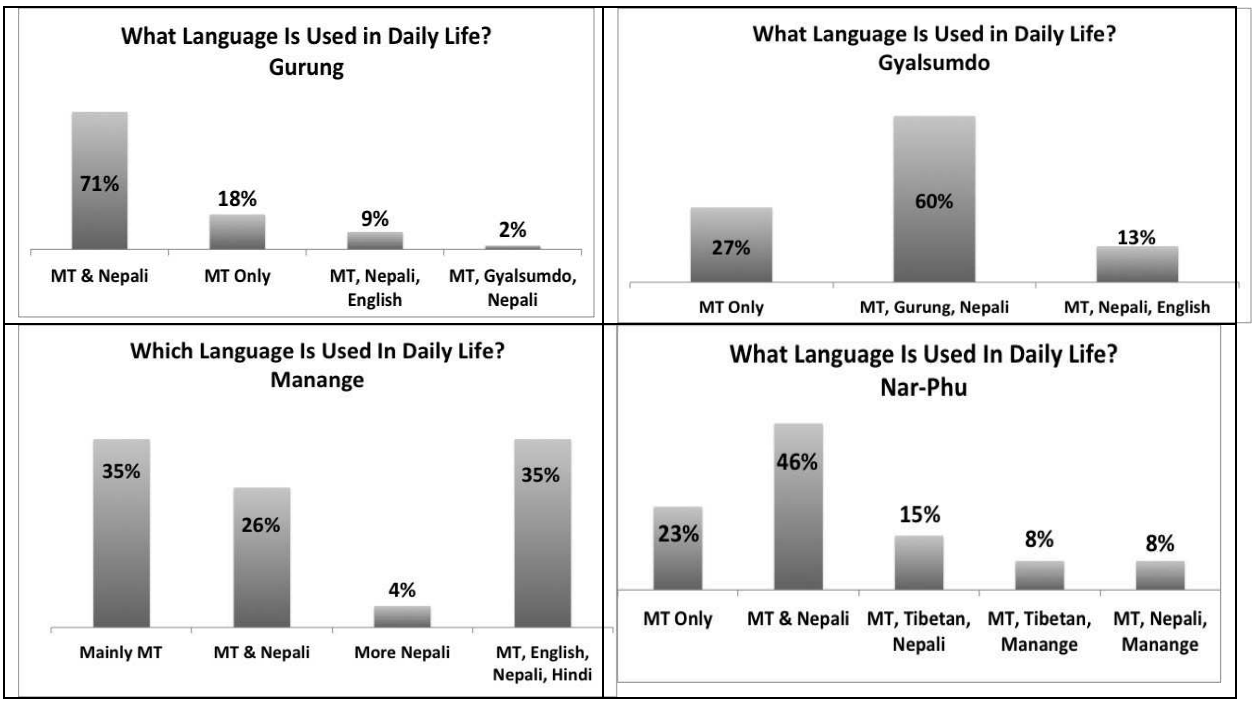
The 2012 Nepal CBS report notes that Gurung has over 200,000 speakers spread across the Western Development Region, but little is known about the variety spoken in Manang. The CBS also reports that Manange has under 400 speakers and they mistakenly locate it in Central Development Region (outside of the Manang District). Gyalsumdo has been mistakenly identified as a TGTM language in van Driem (2001). Nar and Phu are probably further differentiated in their lexico-grammatical properties than their name bundling would suggest, as Phu displays both Tibetan-type and TGTM features (Noonan 2003).

Given this conflicting information, the purpose of this section of the interview was to ask Manang residents themselves what they refer to their language/variety as (endonym/autonym). As most Manang residents are bilingual at least in their mother-tongue and in Nepali (and possibly in other languages), we also wanted to learn which languages they preferred to use in different public and private domains.
The following charts show speaker reports (as percentages of each group) for their own endonym/autonym label for their language.



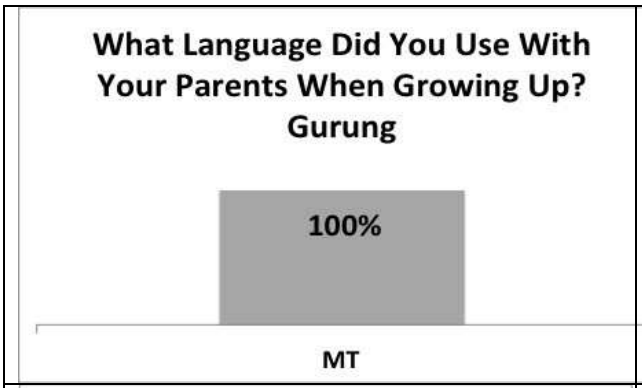
Despite historical endonyms with origins in Tibeto-Burman, the Gurung and Nar-Phu interviewees we encountered in 2012-2014 seemed generally content with adopting Indic-originating language names. Manange and Gyalsumdo interviewees, on the other hand, were split in their preference of naming conventions. It should also be noted that Gyalsumdo and Gurung communities are spatially overlapping, and while Gyalsumdo regularly refer to Gurungs as "Gurung," the names assigned to Gyalsumdo by Gurungs include "Lama Bhāsā," "Tibetan," "Bhote" and "Gyalsumdo."

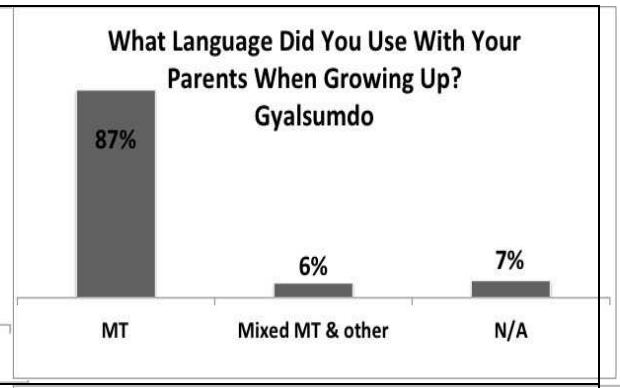
A second question asked interviewees what language they make use of the most in their daily lives. The responses are shown by language here, with "MT" representing the mother tongue in each language group.

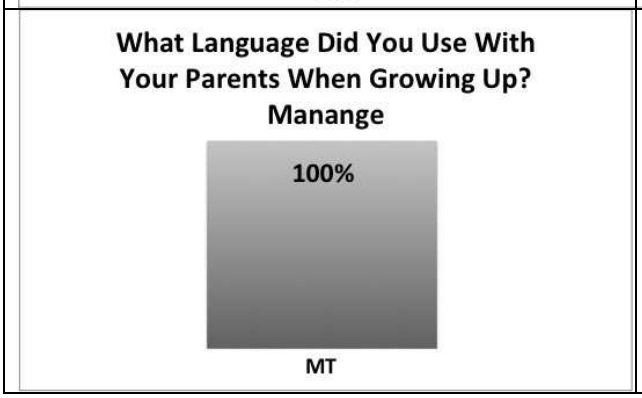


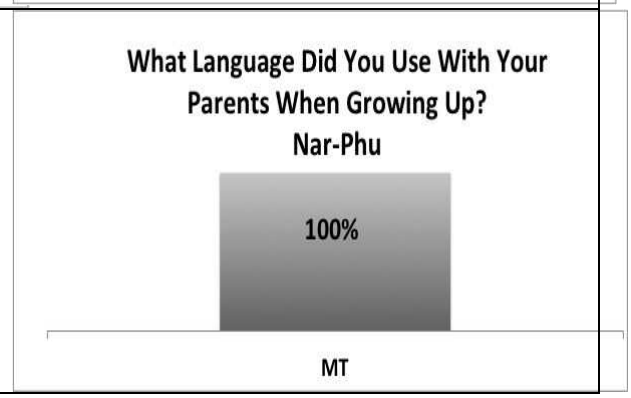
Interviewees from all four language groups indicate that they are bilingual in their mother tongues and in Nepali on a day-to-day basis. However, more speakers of Manange, Gyalsumdo and Nar-Phu than of Gurung report daily use of mainly/only their mother-tongue. In short: Gurung speakers a fully bilingual to a greater extent in their day-to-day comings and goings, while this is less so for the other three languages.

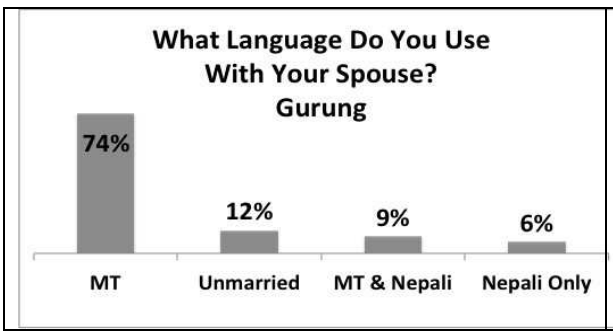
It is useful to compare contemporary language use reports with reported language use in childhood, and with language use in private/domestic settings. This paints a historical picture of practices through time. The following tables show reported language use with family (parents) during childhood, and reported use with current family members (spouse, if interviewee is married).[3]

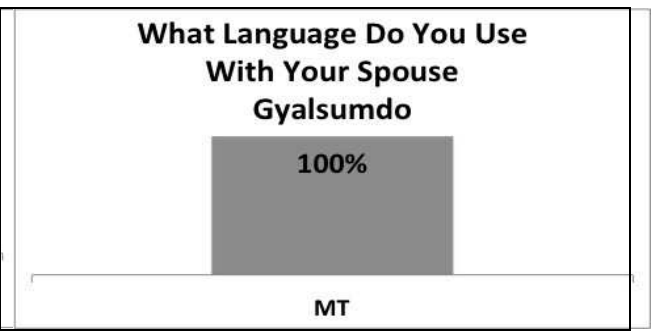




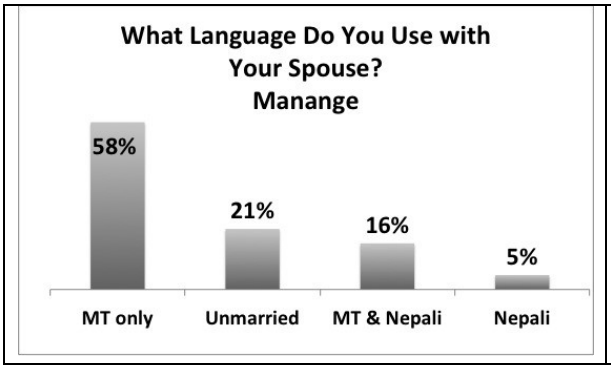


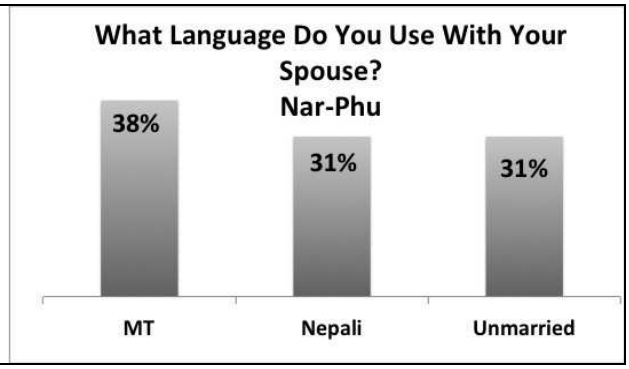




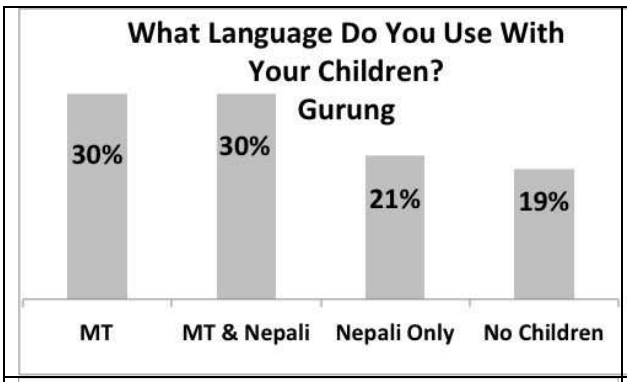


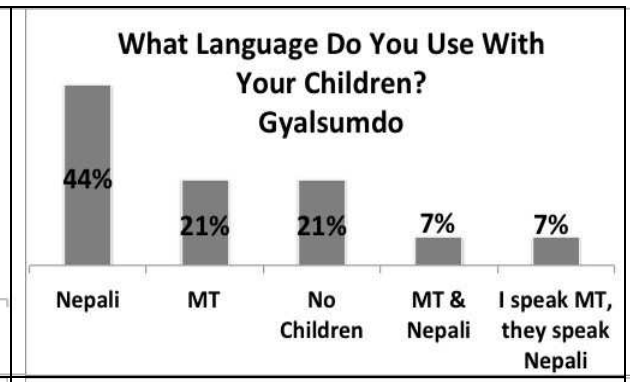
[3] Not all of the interviewees were married at the time of data collection. The number of unmarried Gurung, Manange and Nar-Phu interviewees was 4 each; the number for Gyalsumdo was 1. All of the married interviewees reported their spouses came from the same language groups, although several Gurungs have married other Gurung speakers from Lamjung District.

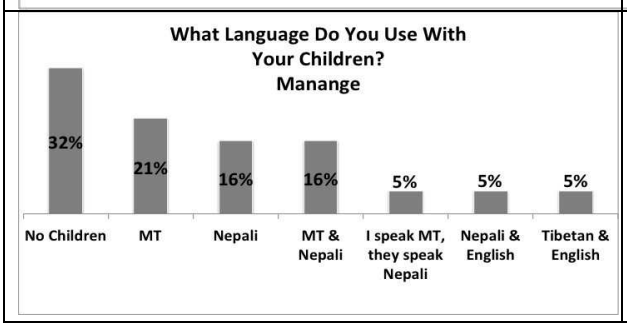


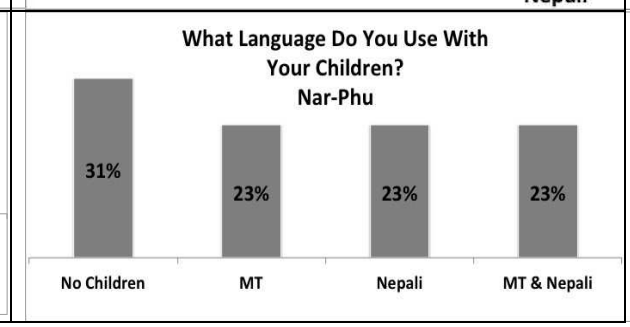


Unsurprisingly, these tables indicate a change in language practices through time; where interviewees used only their mother tongues with their parents in childhood, they report using more Nepali with their spouses now, even when those spouses also speak the same mother tongue. This change is even more noticeable with reports on language use with children (for those interviewees who have children, or who have contact with their children). This is shown here.



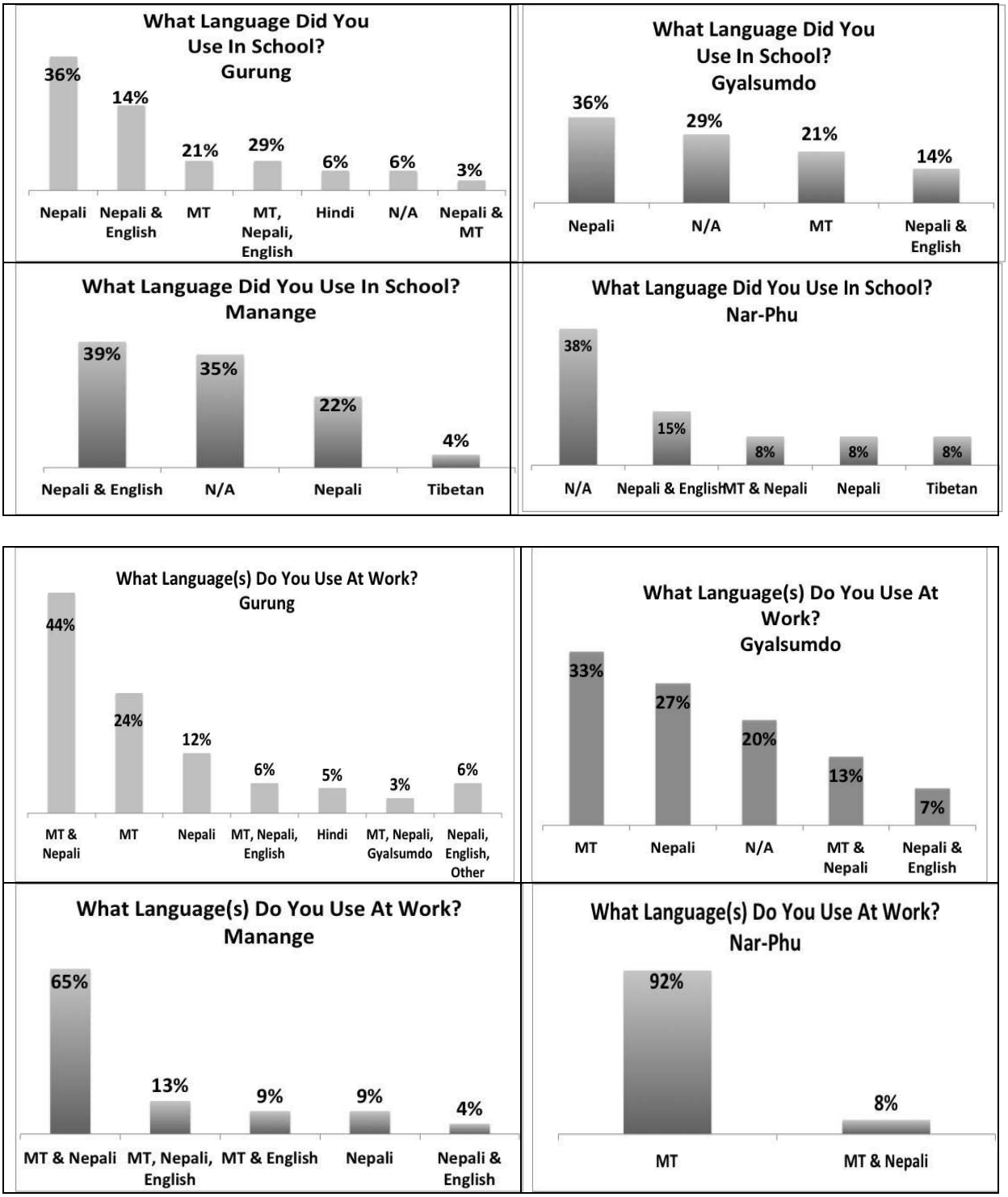






In these cases, we see a greater amount of Nepali-only language use with children. This is particularly true when interviewees elaborate that their children either live in Kathmandu with relatives, or else are attending boarding school in another part of the country. It is also worth noting that Gyalsumdo and Manange parents report speaking to their children in their mother tongues, but that children respond in Nepali. This suggests a rise in a passive acquisition only of the mother tongue.

In public contexts, the access to and use of Nepali is even more profound. The following charts show interviewee self-reports on language use in formal schooling and in work settings. The value "N/A" indicates either no formal education, or else the interviewees are unemployed.

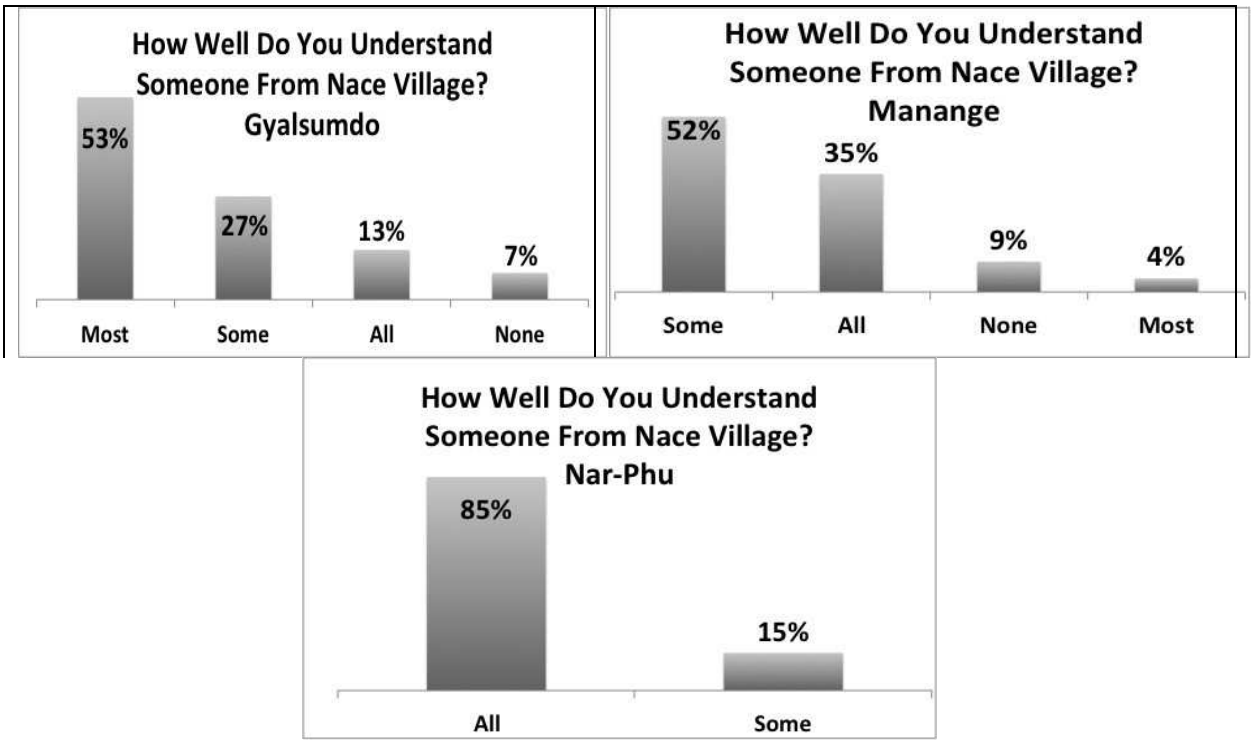


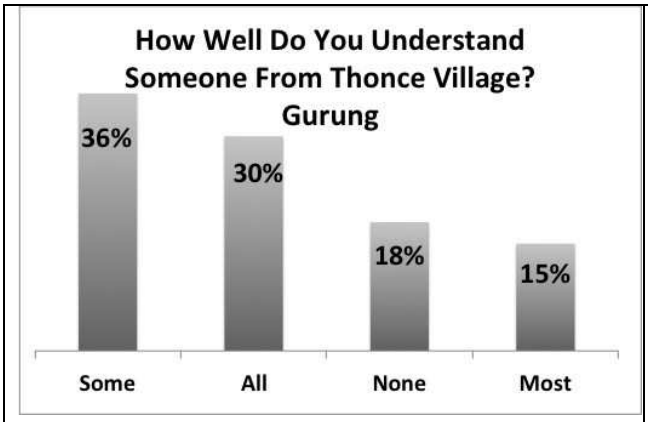
Nepali is the main language of formal instruction, but interviewees have reported that they have encountered English and Tibetan as well (there is a Tibetan school in upper Manang and the Manang village schools are now including some Tibetan instruction). Those interviewees who used their mother tongue in school did so in early years, in cases when local teachers would use the mother tongue in the classroom as a pathway to learning Nepali. It should be noted that use of the mother tongue remains high when work environments are largely local (e.g. agriculture, domestic work), and that use of Nepali and other languages rises when interviewees deal with outsiders (e.g. tourism)

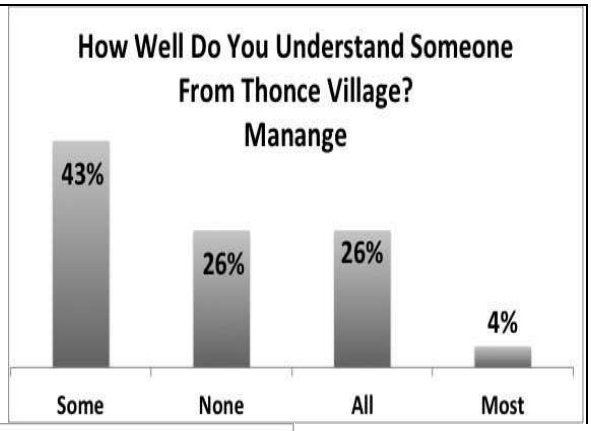
or work in government offices. We return to the issue of language in educational contexts in Manang in the final section of this report.

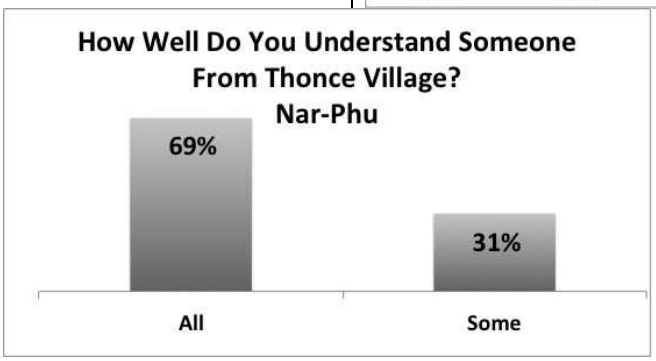
Part Two: Mutual Intelligibility Self-Assessments

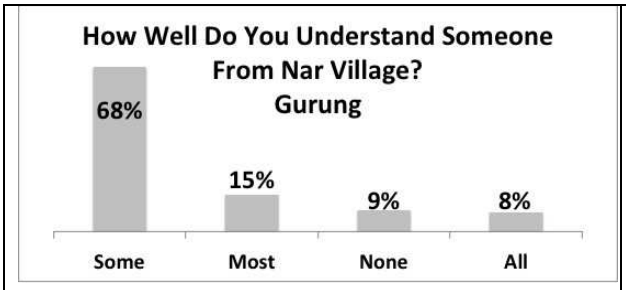
As mentioned in the previous section, persistent mis-information about the affiliation and location of the Manang languages creates an opportunity to investigate speakers' own assessments about the mutual intelligibility or differentiation of these languages/varieties. While we asked several questions about mutual intelligibility across all Manang villages, we report here intelligibility ratings on villages that are considered "typical" Gurung/Gyalsumdo/Manange/Nar-Phu. This is based on a separate question that we asked regarding "the best place for someone to stay if they want to learn Gurung/Gyalsumdo/Manange/Nar-Phu." Based on responses, we determined Nace village in lower Manang to be a "typical" Gurung village, for Thonce village in lower Manang to be a "typical" Gyalsumdo village, for Nar village in upper Manang to be a "typical" Nar village, for Phu village in upper Manang to be a "typical" Phu village, and for Manang village in upper Manang to be a "typical" Manange village. The intelligibility ratings are shown in these charts (mother tongue speakers are left out of the ratings for each village).

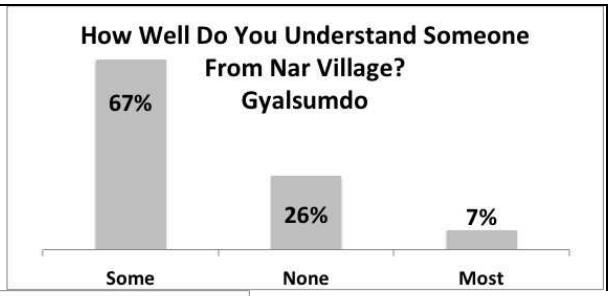


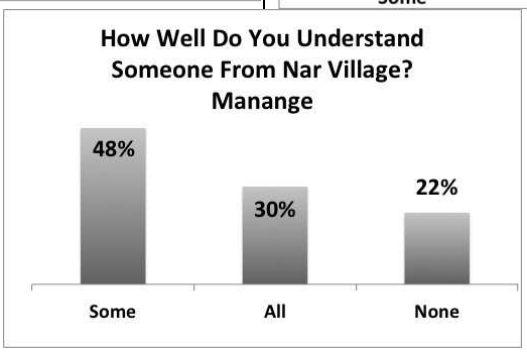

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Thonce Village? Gurung
36%
30%
18%
15%
Some
All
None
Most

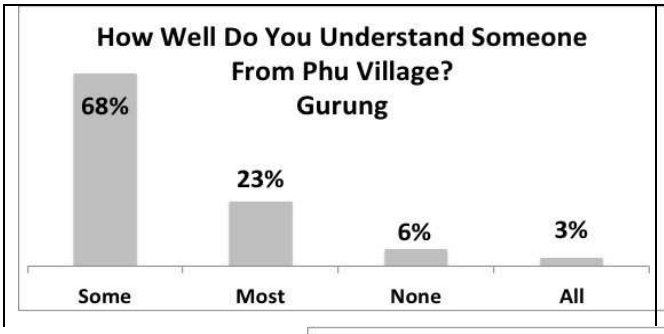

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Thonce Village? Manange
43%
26%
26%
4%
Some
None
All
Most

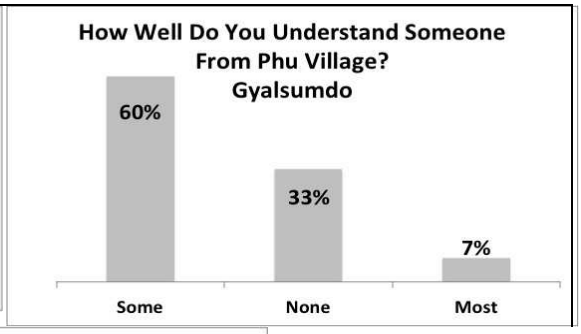

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Thonce Village? Nar-Phu
69%
31%
All
Some

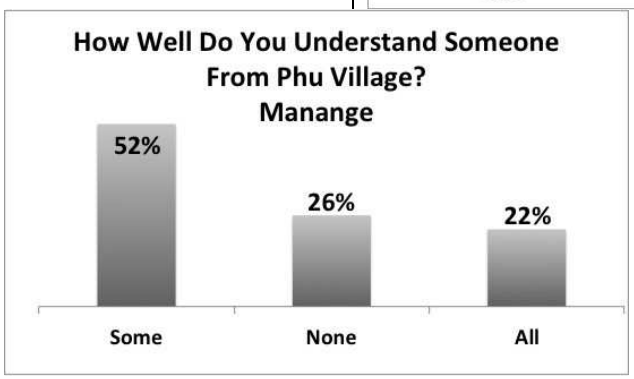

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Nar Village? Gurung
68%
15%
9%
8%
Some
Most
None
All

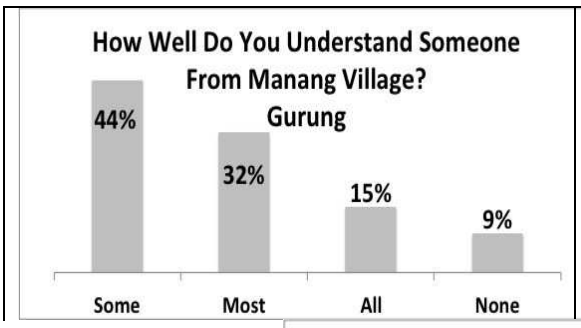

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Nar Village? Gyalsumdo
67%
26%
7%
Some
None
Most

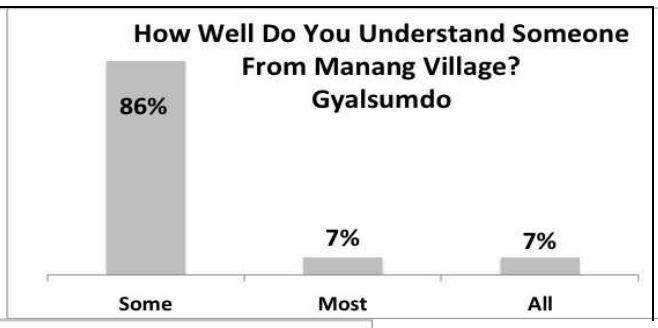

How Well Do You Understand Someone From Nar Village? Manange
48%
30%
22%
Some
All
None

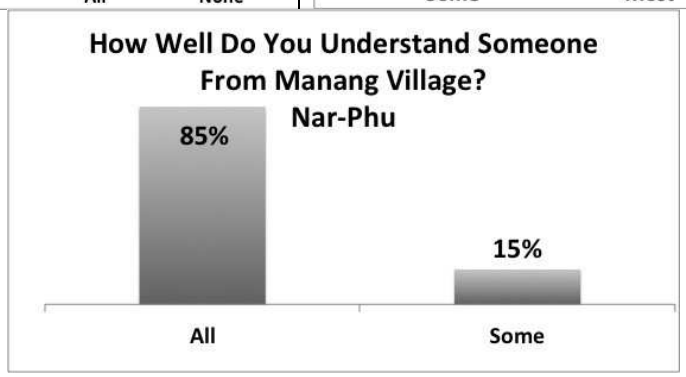








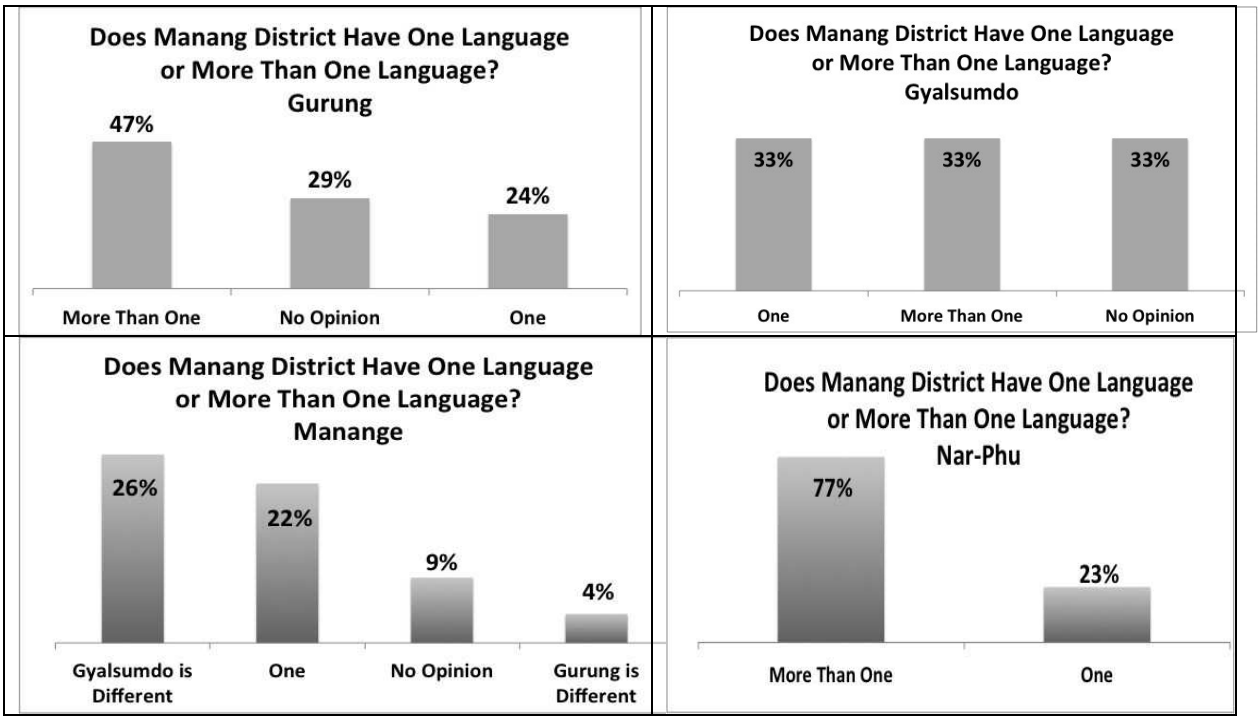




These charts show that overall, other-intelligibility of Gurung is universally high. With respect to Gyalsumdo, only Nar-Phu speakers report higher degrees of "some" or "all" intelligibility, and this may be due to the high amount of Tibetan influence in the lexicon and grammar that the languages share. For Nar-Phu, only Manange speakers report higher degrees of "some" or "all" intelligibility, while the other language representatives report higher degrees of "some" or "none." And for Manange, Nar-Phu speakers overwhelmingly report "all" as an intelligibility rating, while the other representatives rate "some" or "none" more frequently. This suggests a kind of intelligibility chain within the TGTM languages, whereby languages of upper Manang show higher degrees of mutual intelligibility, but the intelligibility with Gurung in lower Manang is one way

only. Unsurprisingly, only speakers of languages with higher Tibetan influence find Gyalsumdo easy to understand upon first contact.

We also asked a follow-up question: Is Manang home to one language, or to several languages? The results of this question are shown in the charts here.



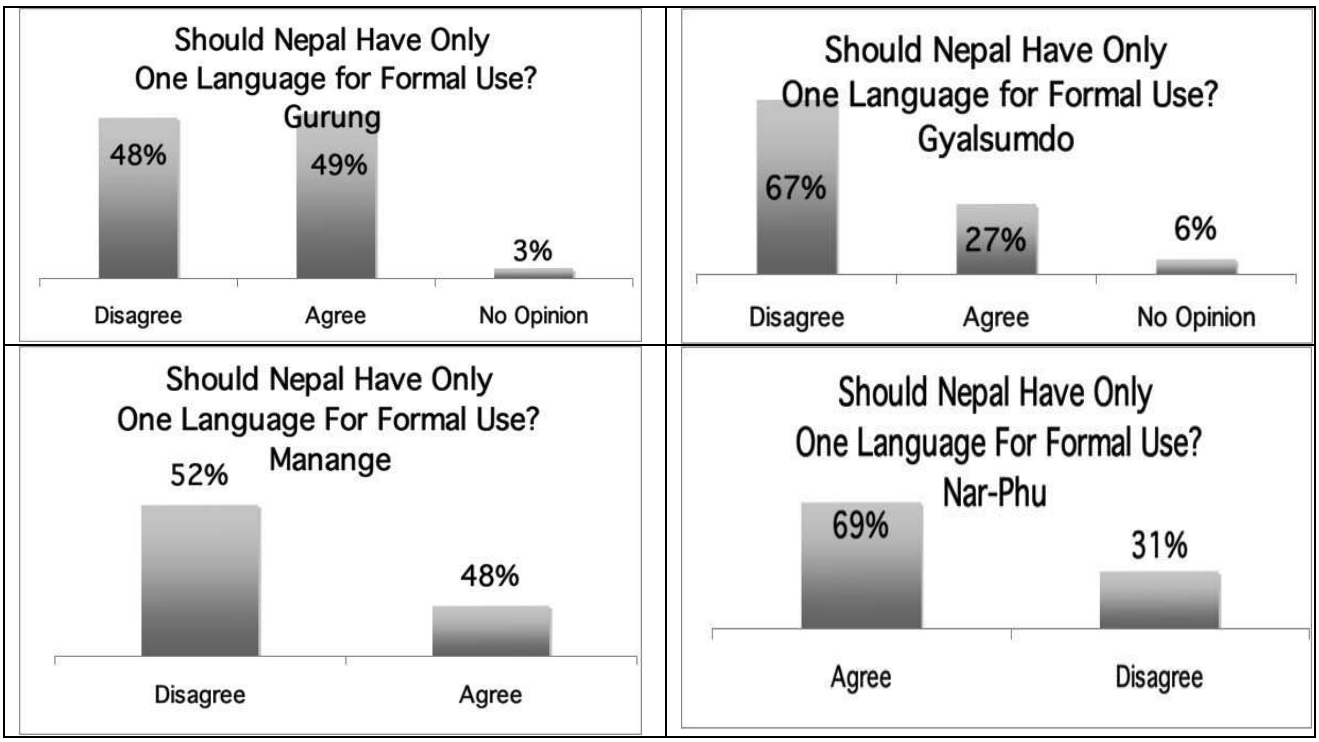
Only Gyalsumdo speakers are evenly split in their opinions about language diversity in Manang, while interviewees from Nar-Phu and Gurung speakers overwhelmingly feel that there is more than one language spoken in Manang. Interestingly, a number of Manange speakers feel that Gyalsumdo is different, but that Gurung, Manange and Nar-Phu can be considered as a single language. The general feeling across communities is that "more than one" language is spoken in Manang.

Another pattern that seems to emerge from these responses is the regional roles that the languages play. A lingua franca is a language that is adopted when people who speak different languages encounter each other, typically in work or official contexts. While Nepali is a both the official language of Nepal and quite commonly national and regional lingua franca in many parts of the country, it is not necessarily the case everywhere in Nepal. In Manang, while most people do speak Nepali at least to some extent, they are just as inclined to use a local language in public encounters. In lower Manang, Gurung seems to play this role, while in upper Manang, Manange is a regional lingua franca.

Part Three: Attitudes About Language Function

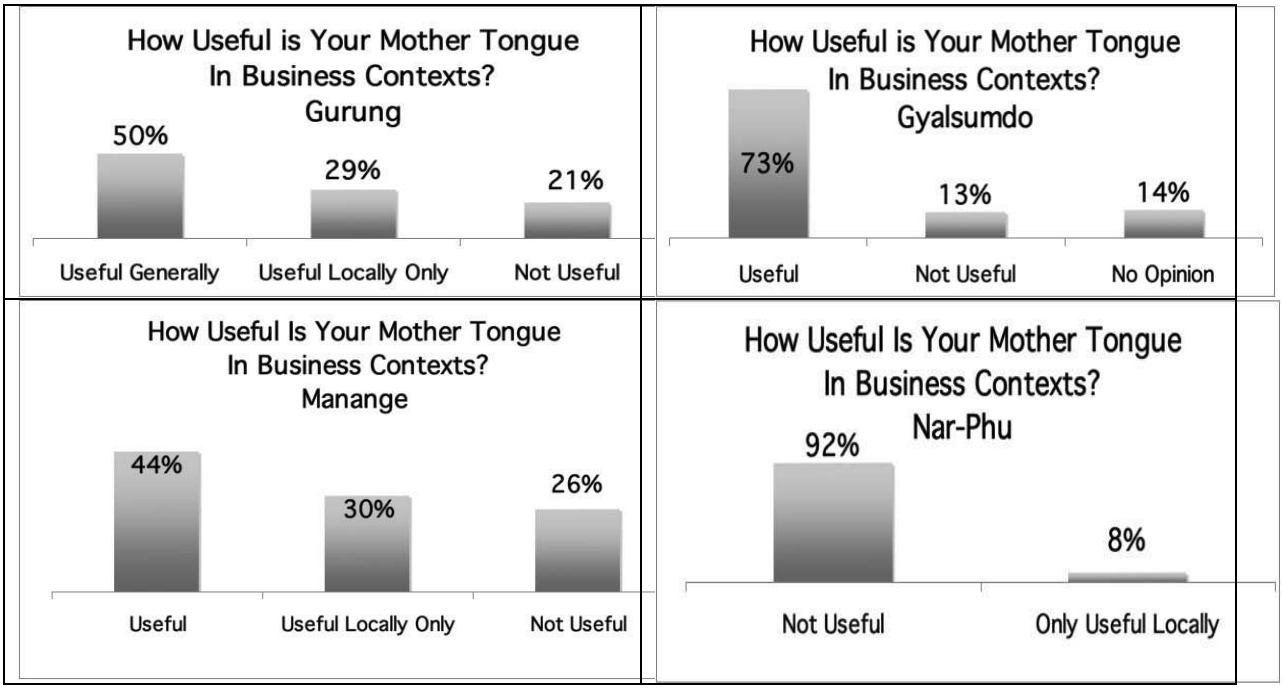
This research takes place in the larger context of language endangerment in Nepal. One indicator of endangerment is the shrinking contexts or domains in which the speech community finds its language as relevant or useful (Grenoble and Whaley 2006). Another indicator is the rise of an official language in status and usage such that the local language eventually becomes seen as irrelevant or useless for any registers of

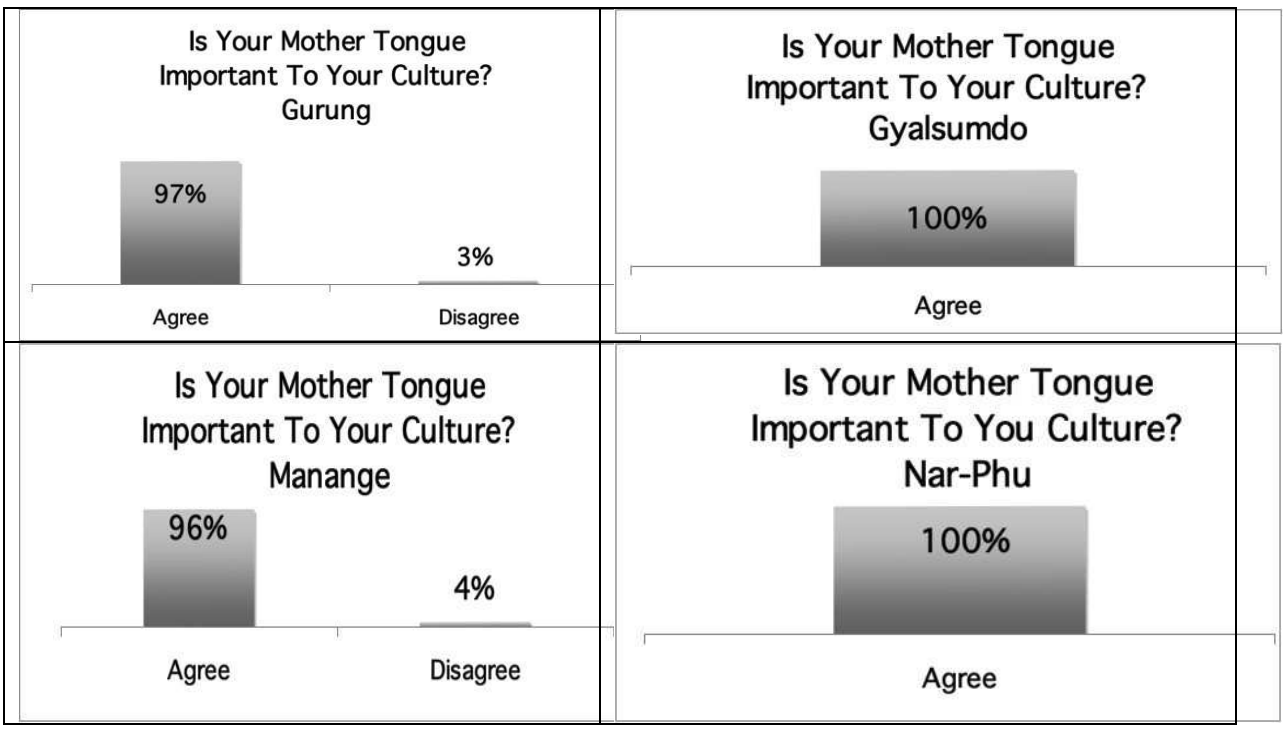
communication except for family/peer. In order to investigate speaker perceptions about the function or value of their local languages in different public or official contexts, we asked a series of questions about contemporary language practice attitudes. One of these questions situates the language in national-level debates about the place of local languages vis-a-vis Nepali: Should Nepal have only one language for official use? The interviewee responses are shown here, organized by language community.



It is evident that there is some disagreement across Manang residents regarding the role of a single official language. The majority of interviewees disagree; in other words, they feel that local languages should have some place in local environments, such as banks, police stations and in courts. Those who agreed with the proposal often commented that it would be impractical to incorporate local languages, and that most people are already familiar with Nepali.

We also asked speakers to report on their attitudes about the value and usefulness of their mother tongue in both business and cultural (religious, holiday, festival) contexts. The responses are shown here.





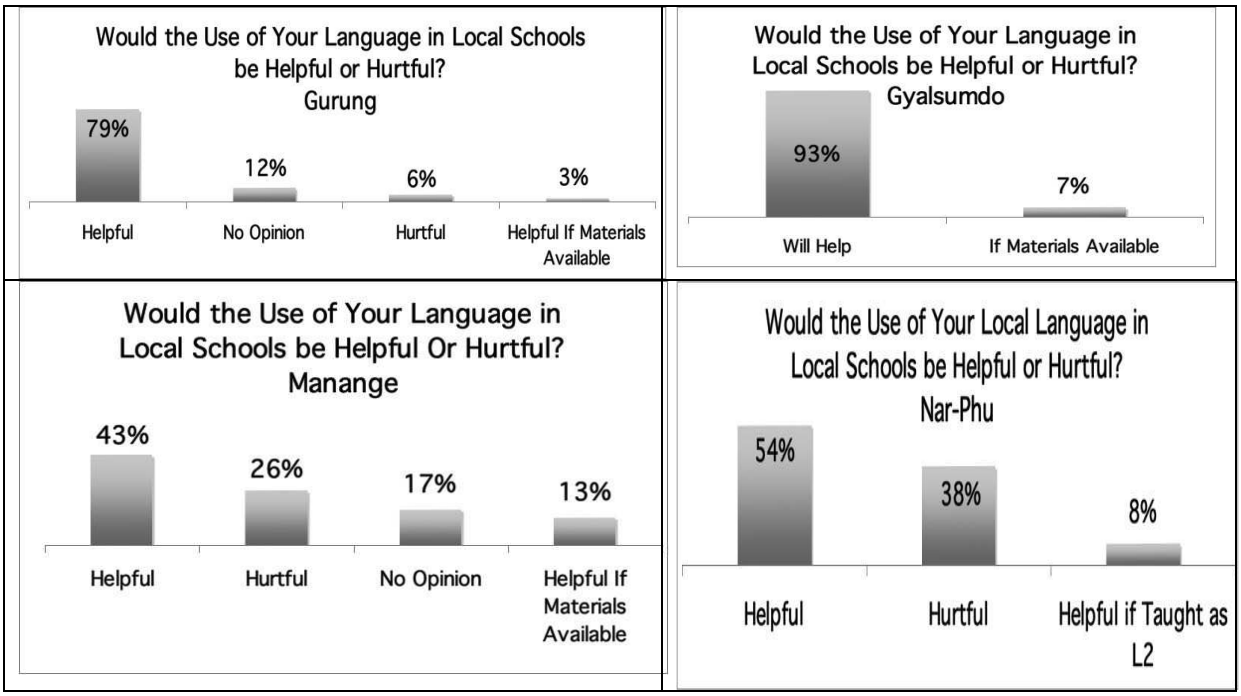
With the exception of Nar-Phu, most interviewees report that their mother tongue is useful in business contexts, although they frequently qualify this by limiting it to local environments (agriculture, interacting with other locals in hotels or offices). Conversely, interviewees as a whole overwhelmingly feel that their mother tongue is useful in cultural contexts. Those who disagree with this statement identify Tibetan as the ritual language of holidays and festivals.

These observations are significant, because it is not necessarily the case that Manang residents carry an overwhelmingly negative attitude about their language in public settings. Negative attitudes are commonly cited as a reason for language endangerment

(Andgembe 2013). In opposition to this generalization, Manang residents are aware of the limits of local languages in public domains, but they do see them as of some use, and they view local languages as important to cultural practices and traditions.

Part Four: Attitudes About Language Prospects

Despite the positive attitudes conveyed in the interview responses, it is the reality that at least some Manang languages are losing speakers and that their speech communities are shrinking through time. Most interviewees in Nar and Phu villages and in Gyalsumdo villages report that village populations are slowly dropping off (which is supported by CBS 2012 reports of population loss in Manang). We observed this drop-off in the number of empty or sub-let houses in the villages. Lifelong residents are aware that loss of younger speakers is a problem for the future of their languages. The final three questions that we report on here are related to future prospects of these languages, including interviewee advice on how the Manang languages can be best promoted for future maintenance.

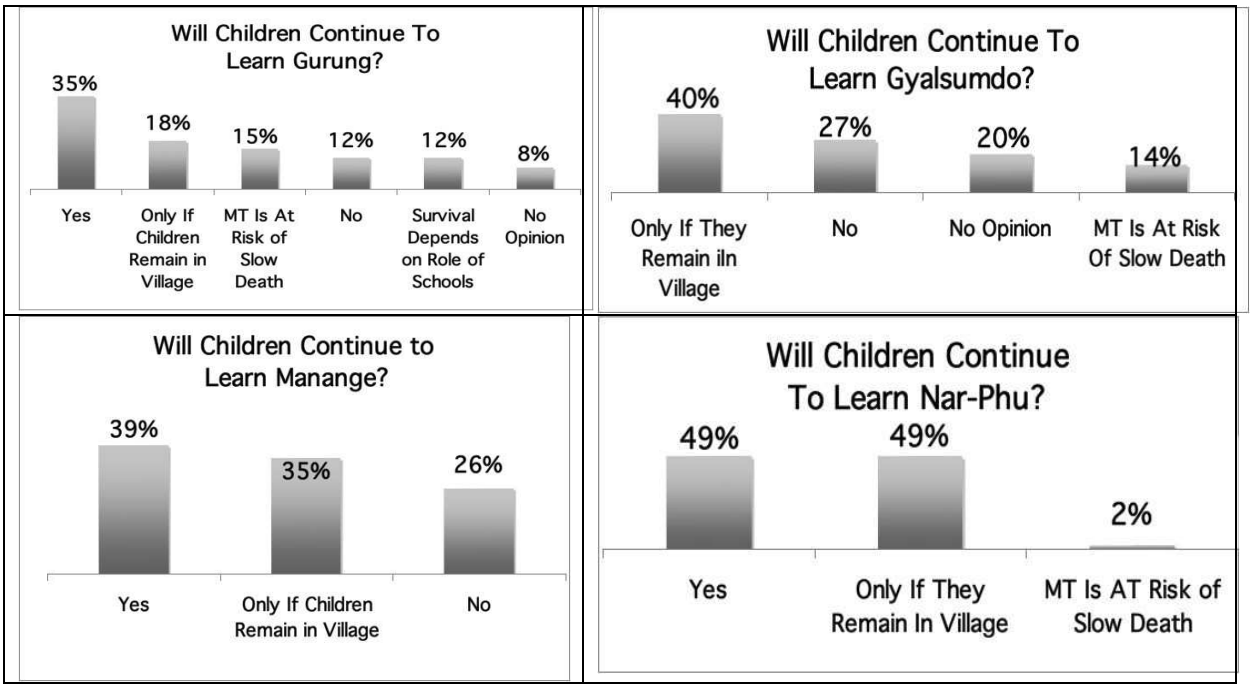


The question asked in the above chart set addresses the issue of local languages in formal schooling in Manang villages. All of the Manang VDC's have at least primary schools, and some offer secondary schooling too. As in many Nepal villages, most teachers and head masters do not speak the local languages, but in at least some cases the teachers are local residents. This means that it is at least technically feasible that the local languages could be introduced into primary and secondary schooling in Manang, if not in content-and-language-integrated context (e.g. subjects are taught in local languages), then as an optional or compulsory subject alongside English, for example.

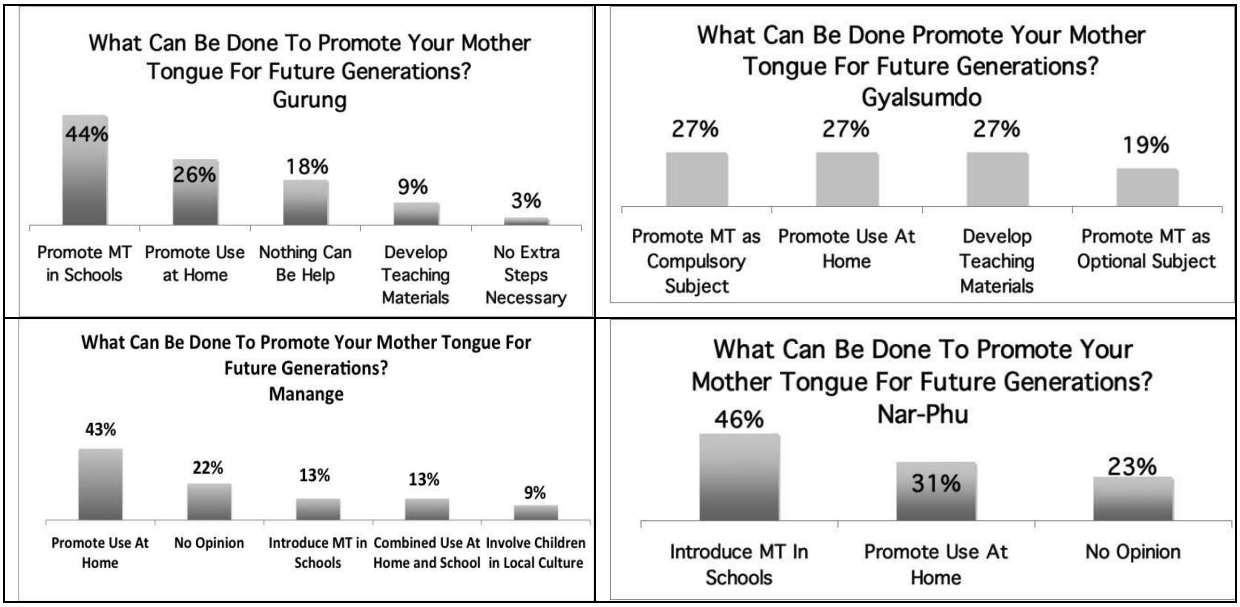
The Nepal Ministry of Education is sympathetic to the desire of ethnic groups to include local languages in schools. One response has been the formulation of the Research Center for Educational Innovation and Development at Tribhuvan University (CERID) to discuss issues and concerns related to mother tongue education in Nepal

(www.unesco.org). In addition to top-down initiatives like those sanctioned by the federal government, the feelings of local residents regarding the feasibility and impact of mother tongue education must also be taken into consideration. Overall, most interviewees in this study feel that introduction of local languages into Manang schools would be helpful, but they are also realistic about existing obstacles. They understand that materials are not readily available or economically practical to create and disseminate, as reflected in their responses in the above chart.

Another question addresses the issue of endangerment more directly. It asks interviewees their opinions about the likelihood of future speakers of their respective mother tongues. The responses are shown in this chart.



In all cases, less than 50% of interviewees sampled in any language community are unequivocally optimistic that there will be future speakers. All interviewees view locality as an important factor in the survival of their languages; if children leave the villages in the numbers that they recently have been doing (for education, for work, for an 'easier' way of life in Kathmandu), then the languages are going to become increasingly threatened. When asked what advice they might like to give to promote the survival of their mother tongue, a variety of responses were given, as shown in this chart.



The majority of responses involve making greater use of the local schools, but many interviewees also see the ultimate responsibility of promotion of local languages as belonging to the family and the community itself. As elaborated on in the closing section, the role of the community becomes compromised when the community structure itself is fractured across generations in a scenario of outward migration.

Closing Observations

The goal of this study was to update demographic and locational information about the languages of Manang, and also to provide deeper insight into the language practices and attitudes in each of the language communities. The four communities are united in their overall sense of pride about the function of their languages in cultural and private/domestic contexts, but they also realize the limited roles that their languages play in public or formal contexts. All communities would also like to see local schools play a greater role in the promotion of the languages to future generations, but they see a number of practical problems in this (school infrastructure, lack of resources, etc.)

As it currently stands, Gyalsumdo and Nar-Phu are in the most imminent danger of extinction over the next couple of generations, due largely to outward migration of younger community members. Manange occupies of somewhat precarious middle ground scenario, with a larger number of overall speakers, but similar issues of outward migration and lack of language practice in younger generations. Gurung is the most viable of the four Manang languages. The villages show higher populations across age groups, children practice the language daily, and many local teachers are Manang-Gurung mother-tongue speakers.

We close this study with some questions for future consideration. Landweer (2000) predicts that a language spoken within urban confines is more affected by those confines, and is thus weaker/more vulnerable than is a language whose speakers are in more remote and isolated areas. However, we ask: what counts as "urban" vs. "rural" in the Manang context? If Landweer is referring to émigré speech communities in large metropolitan areas who are cut off from their traditional speech network, then this is

not the case for any of the Manang communities. The Manang district is characterized by a continuous chain of semi-to-fully populated small or mid-sized villages, many of which are a patchwork of traditional and introduced (Nepali, English) languages.

Landweer also notes that home is the foundational domain in which language socialization takes place, followed by cultural events, then external social events. As such, a vernacular's vitality level is higher if it is used in all domains. Likewise, a strong ethnic identity facilitates survival. This observation, while intuitively logical, is difficult to test in Manang. All languages spoken there show high levels of ethnic pride and strong identities. The mother tongue is also favored in public (work) domains if the context is local and appropriate. So what factors most accurately predict the vitality levels for the Manang languages?

We have learned from this study that a phenomenon (not unique to Manang, but still worth noting) that we call the "boarding school/work emigration phenomenon" seems to be responsible for more sudden and dramatic speaker drop-off rates in Manang. Children and younger adults leave Manang (and even Nepal) to seek educational and employment opportunities elsewhere, effectively cutting themselves off (and their own offspring) from the communities of practice that are necessary for ongoing language maintenance and preservation. As such, both spatial/movement, as well as social factors, should be considered as carefully as the "traditional/usual suspects" in language endangerment situations (e.g. exogamy, Nepali in schools, negative attitudes, oppression, majority language dominance). The danger to Manang languages comes from a combination of external pressures (national and international) as well as internal pressures, including decisions to leave or stay in order to compete in the national marketplace, and the great spatial and temporal distances these decisions may create.

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