

Title: Language Variation and Change: A case study of Kohima village

Kelhouvinuo Suokhrie

PhD Research Scholar

Department of Linguistics

University of Delhi

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0.1 Introduction

The present study is an extension of my earlier study on language variation in Kohima village (Suokhrie 2015). The study suggested that ‘clan’ is a major factor in understanding language variation in Kohima village. The present study intends to build up on the findings of the earlier preliminary study and take it forward by systematically testing the role of clan in language variation, the contact among clanlects caused by a number of factors, particularly exogamy; the implications of the clanlectal contact on the phonetic orientation of learner in the speech community and the social embedding of language change.

1.1 Clan and Clanlectal contact in Kohima village

Marriage practices: Kohima village consists of four major clans with each clan having its own clanlect.¹ The village is strictly a clan based society made up of four major clans: L clan, T clan, P clan and D clan² (see Figure 1). The four clans practise exogamous marriage system and women generally marry outside their clans and settle in the husband’s clan after marriage. Exogamy has been maintained, though not without changes from the old practice. The four clans consisted of several sub-clans (see Figure 1). In the present context marriages are taking place across the same sub-clans as illustrated in maintaining distance only between those which are

¹ Clanlect refers to the speech variety spoken by a clan in Kohima village. The term is borrowed from Stanford (2007).

² Also known as Khel.

more closely related sharing the same surname, for example, *Suokhrie* and *Suokhrie* cannot marry. Exogamy has contributed largely to the contact among the four clans. In this scenario, a single clan consists of families with parents belonging to same clan as well as families with mixed clan parents. In case of mixed clan marriages, women continue to speak their own clanlects showing very little or no feature of the husband’s clanlect in their speech after living in the husband’s clan for a substantial period of time. Hence, in each clan we find families where both spouses speak the same clanlects as well as families where the spouses speak different clanlects. The children in the latter case have no binding to use patrilineal alone as is reportedly the case with some other clan based societies, such as Sui (see Stanford, 2007, 2008a).

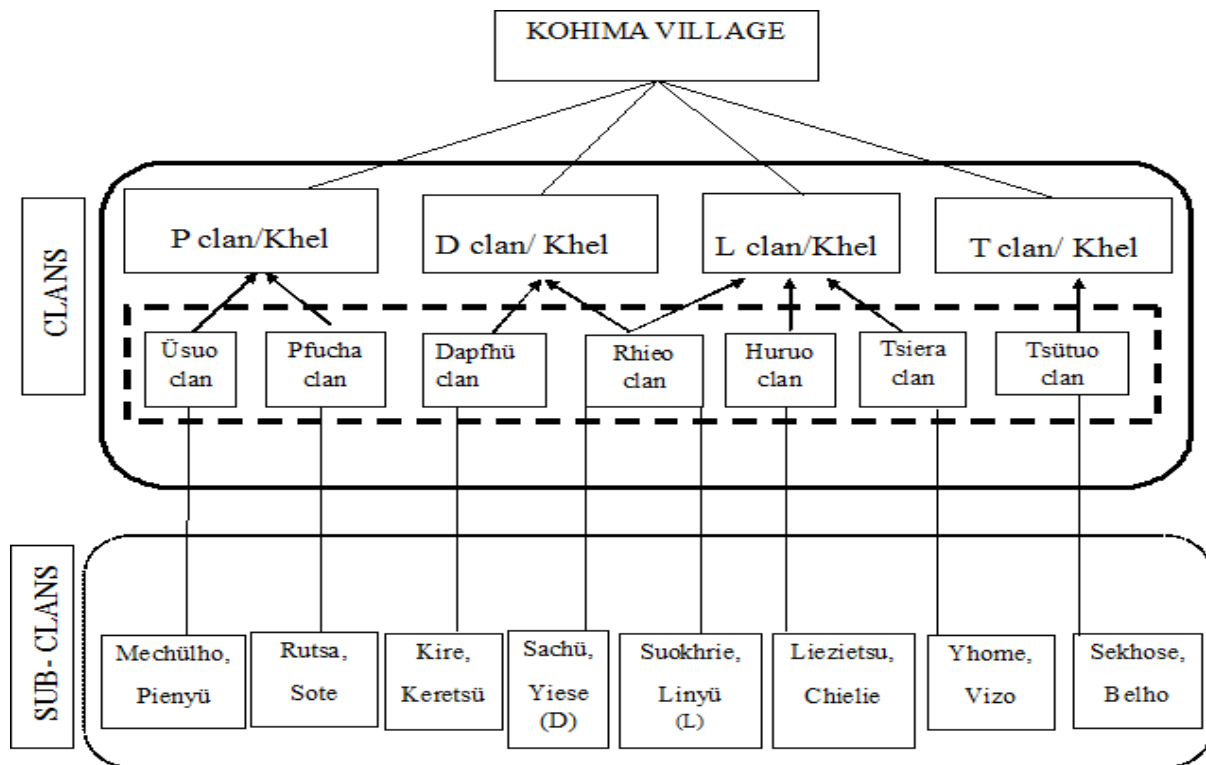


Figure 1: Clan structure of Kohima village (from Suokhrie, 2015)

Language variation across clans: The four clans in Kohima village show variability with regard to the alveolar and palatal affricates and fricatives. As shown in Figure 2 the overall variability shows that L and T clans favour the alveolars, and D and P clans favour the palatal

(Suokhrie, 2015). Based on the use of alveolars and palatals, the four clans are grouped into two major clans: Alveolar clans (L and T), and Palatal clans (D and P).

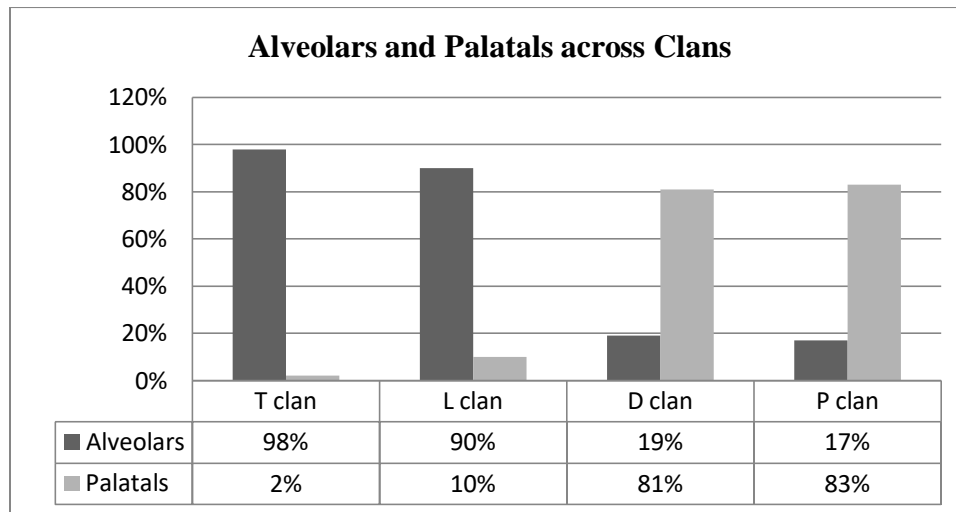


Figure 2. Alveolars and Palatals across clans (from Suokhrie, 2015).

Linguistic impact of marriage practices

Exogamy has contributed to linguistic variation within the Kohima village across the four clans. The practice of cross clan marriages has brought people speaking different clanlects into contact besides a number of other factors resulting in routine contacts (such as churches and schools). Some of the findings from Suokhrie (2015) are:

- The findings of the study suggest that in Kohima village, clan which forms the social structure remains one of the major predictor for linguistic variation.
- Linguistic accommodation between the husband and wife speaking different clanlects do not take place.
- In Kohima village peer group does not necessarily form the target model over parents neither parental clan forms the target. This finding is different from the various studies reported in Labov (2014) and Stanford (2008). In Kohima village clanlects of both the parents are significant.
- A change is change in progress is reported. The third generation speakers (age group 15-30) are showing a different pattern from the other two older generations (age group 40-70, and 70 above).

1.3 Sociolinguistic studies on contact, variation and change

The speech community of Kohima village is different from other western communities in several aspects. In Kohima village it is clan which forms the social basis of the society and egalitarian in nature. Linguistic accommodation and style-shifting which are reported in the western societies are irrelevant in the community. There is also no prestige attached to any of the clanlects.

English is the official language of Nagaland state. The multi-lingual fabric of the state is very much vibrant as each of the Naga groups maintains their respective languages yet uses Nagamese as a lingua franca. In addition, one can find that in a community like the Angamis who are settled in Kohima there are further linguistic variation based on dialects and within the village variability exists at the clan level.

Major findings of language variation and change in sociolinguistics studies are largely drawn from societies in the west where **social class** acts as a dominant source of social differentiation (see various studies cited in Labov, 2001; Ash, 2003, Meyerhof, 2006). Social class along with ethnicity (Wolfram, 1969; Labov & Harris, 1986; Ash & Myhill, 1986), gender (Trudgill 1974; Chambers & Trudgill, 1980; Labov, 1990; Eckert, 1998, 2000; Eckert & McConnell-Ginet, 1998), education (Cedergren, 1986) are some of the social factors studied.

Likewise, the findings on language contact, acquisition, and change too are mostly derived from the class-based societies. The discussion of innovation, diffusion and leaders of linguistic change thus reflect the way in which the society is build up on. An innovation is required for a change to take place (Labov, 2007). Labov also points out that transmission is confined 'within' a speech community and diffusion takes place across speech communities. As discussed in Labov (2001) the leaders of linguistic change are those individuals with dense social network. Furthermore, Labov points out that these leaders in linguistic change are people who do not stand at the extreme end of the continuum, but those at the middle dealing with people from both the extreme ends in the given network or locality. Sex/gender is another entity which shows a distinction between men and women in further advancing change. Women are considered the as the principal leaders of innovation of linguistic change in general. But men are more advanced

when the change concerned is a change from below. Women, on the other hand, are more sensitive to variant attached to the prestige (see Labov, 1990; 2001).

As mentioned in the first issue of Asia Pacific Language Variation journal (2015), the findings from variation and change in the field of sociolinguistics shows a ‘standard continuum’ in the societies which at one point of time underwent industrialization as a result of which the social stratification of societies also came into being. Furthermore, in the context of Asia-Pacific the linguistic situation does not only show multi-lingualism, multi-dialectism alone but multi-lectism is present.

The speech communities in India come under the Asia-Pacific region. Caste (McCormack, 1960; Ramanujan & Bright, 1972 [1964]; Sunny, 2013), ethnicity and gender (Dey, 2010), clan (Suokhrie, 2015), religion (Sunny, 2013) are some of the social factors which are considered in the study of Indian speech communities. According to Satyanath (2015), Labov’s (1966, 1972) and Bells’ (1984) models of style shift, for instance, ‘do not necessarily cover language use in all situations and speech communities’, and fail to ‘capture the Indian situation’ in a satisfactory manner. She concludes that the concept of standard language in the Indian context differs from the Western societies in that the languages in India show a relationship that is ‘horizontal’ in nature and that the Indian studies in many contexts offer a ‘binary opposition’ between the ‘literary’ and ‘vernacular’ variety and other relationships, and not a ‘standard-nonstandard continuum’.

Another study from this region by Stanford (2007) shows clan as an important sociolinguistic factor. Stanford (2008a) does not find any type of hierarchy based on socio-economic status, neither any prestige being attached to any of the ‘clanlects’. As such Stanford (2009a) suggests that inclusion of such lesser known communities and their languages would throw more light on the workings of speech communities. Labov (2011, NWAVAP-I) adds, as sociolinguistic research expands to lesser known communities; it may throw light on social facts other than the ones, which has been represented thus far in sociolinguistic studies of prominent societies in the West.

A number of studies have reported on the acquisition of dialects by children as well as the **role of family and peer** (Payne, 1980; Labov, 1989; Chambers, 1992; Kerswill, 1996; Kerswill and

Williams, 2009; Roberts & Labov, 1995; Roberts, 1997; Stanford, 2007; Tagliamonte, & Molfenter, 2007; Takemura, 2010, 2012). The study of 'short *a*' in Philadelphia by Payne (1980) concludes that in order to acquire the variable, the children need to have parents who are born and raised in Philadelphia. However, Payne has also points out that peer group has a huge impact on the children's speech. Labov (1989:96) has found that it is the 'social and stylistic constraints on variation' that children were initially learnt. Additionally, many variable constraints are acquired early on by children. In Chambers' (1992) study of Canadian children living in Southern England has shown that age of the speaker strongly affects acquisition of the phonologically complex features of the local dialect. Similarly, Kerswill (1996) also reports that the speaker's age is important for acquisition of certain features, but also suggests that the adolescents are responsible for linguistic changes in general. Roberts (1997), Takemura (2010; 2012) both reports that parental background of the children impact the process of acquisition.

While in general findings on language acquisition among children have suggested that when children acquire language it is the pattern of the community that children are aiming at though the influence of parents is still found at some level (Labov, 2014). However, among the Sui community, the acquisition of language in this case is based on 'clan line' where the target is set at the father's clanlect which is the basis of their clan identity (Stanford, 2008a). This is different from the other studies from the west.

Language contact deals with various linguistic scenarios of contact. On the one hand, studies in contact deals with different languages. Contact at this level addresses issues related to bilingualism and acquisition, borrowing, code-switching, language shift, language endangerment, language death, vitality, ethnicity, and including the study of creoles and pidgins (see Weinreich, 1953; Haugen, 1950; Sankoff, 2002; Hickey, 2010; Gardner-Chloros, 2010; Winford, 2010; Holm, 2010; Romaine, 2010).

More relevant to the present study is the contact of dialects. The nature of contact in this respect is concerned with people who speak different varieties of the same language. This kind of contact as reported in (Trudgill, 1986; Kerswell, 2010; Britain, 2010) often leads to the formation of new varieties or koines. Trudgill (1986) points out that accommodation and attitudinal factors are important in diffusion of innovation in contact situations. Likewise, Britain (1997, 2010) includes issues of accommodation and dialect levelling in such scenarios. Britain

(2010) furthermore highlights the outcome of contact keeping in mind the nature of contact at amore local level which includes everyday accounts of mobility.

There are also findings related to dialect contact in societies which are clan based where no linguistic accommodation is attested in general. Women in Kohima village (Suokhrie, 2015) and Sui women in China (Stanford, 2007) show a similarity in maintaining their respective clanlects, with no accommodation even after being in contact with their husband's clan for a long period of time.

1.4 Aims and objectives of the study

The primary objective of the study is to investigate language change in Kohima village. The aims and objectives include the following:

1. To locate the locus of the origin of change and to study the nature diffusion of innovations in an egalitarian society.
2. To consider the other social factors likely to have impact on language change besides clan.
3. To address issues of transmission and diffusion in the context of clanlectal contacts in Kohima village.
4. To compare the findings of language change from class-based societies of the west with clan-based-society like Kohima village.

1.5 Data and methodology

Methodology for collecting data will include the following:

1. To conduct sociolinguistic interviews for obtaining spontaneous speech data. In addition, elicitation method will be used for the relevant variables.
2. The collected data will be transcribed and statistical analysis will be conducted with the help of Goldvarb.

1.6 Tentative Chapters

- Chapter 1 Theoretical and methodological perspectives
- Chapter 2 Language variation and change
- Chapter 3 Linguistic and social predictors of language variation and change
- Chapter 4 Findings from Kohima village in comparison with findings reported in sociolinguistic literature from other speech communities

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