

Language Changes in Baram

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This paper investigates some of the factors for the language change in Baram. The paper also gives some possible explanations to the factors that cause the change in vocabulary, phonological change, and changes in the grammatical structures. The main sources of data are Kansakar (2011a, b,c)

Baram is a Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal. It is a seriously endangered language with only a few fluent speakers left. Based on the corpus of the data gathered for the documentation, borrowing of lexical items can be attributed to the 'gaps' in the vocabulary of the Baram. We find more borrowings as we move to the modern technology. By contrast, the language retains more vocabulary related to animals, and insects.

The evidence to claim the phonological changes are not very strong, but it seems that there are at least some phonological changes. They include the loss of aspiration in consonants, and loss of vowel length. The most plausible reason for this is the changes towards simplification. On closer examination there are a few words in which aspiration is also a feature of lateral sounds in Baram as reported in Hunter (1868), i.e. *kalhok* 'long' and *alhok* 'short'. Grierson (1909) also reports aspiration in lateral in the word *alham* 'large'. Similarly, Hodgson (1880) also reports words such as *walhe* 'now' *kailhe* 'then'. Although this does not exist these days aspiration as a phonological feature can be found in the word *nhis* 'two'. Similarly, the consonant cluster is simplified compared with the earlier data. A few words recorded by Hunter (1868) further show that the second member of the onset cluster could be *r*, such as *traka* 'within'. However, there are not any such cluster except the

The grammatical borrowing in Baram can be attributed to the contact-induced change. Baram borrows more inflectional affixes than derivational affixes. Baram borrows the plural marker *-həru* from Nepal as shown in (1).

- (1) ghās rə siŋ-həru ni-lik
grass(<NPL) and(<NPL) wood-PL(<NPL) NPST-become
'It can be (used as) fodder and firewoods.'

The plural marker is also adjusted in the second and the third person pronouns. Similarly, the numeral classifier *-ʈa* and *-dzəna* and the genitive marker *-ko* are also borrowed from Nepali. The borrowed morphemes have replaced the native morphemes in these cases (also see Dhakal 2014).

There are cases in which both the native and the borrowed constructions are used. For example, Baram makes use of native and borrowed constructions for the causative construction. Similarly, Baram also make use of the object marker *-lai* along with the native accusative marker *-gəi*. There are also other cases in which both the native and borrowed constructions are used, such as the emphatic marker, desiderative construction, and evidential marking. In addition, there is a double-marking in which both the native and borrowed morphemes are used for the same function.

- (2) balə-i dəlin-həru cun-o-chə
man-ERG purlin(<NPL)-PL (<NPL) put-EVID-EVID(<NPL)
'The men fixed (lit. put) the purlin (unexpectedly).'
(The men seem to have fixed (lit. put) the purlin).

In addition to this, there are some constructions in which the borrowed constructions are found only in the case of code switching. This mainly occurs when the speaker switches to the Nepali vocabulary. In such extreme cases, Baram makes use of this kind of constructions. They include the sequential converb, locative case. The borrowings in Baram can be attributed towards the simplified constructions in phonological features, and most of the changes in Baram can be attributed to the contact-induced changes. The rate of borrowing in grammatical structures is very fast in the case of endangered languages like Baram.

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