

Fall 2012

# Person, Place, and Pronoun: an Examination of the Idiosyncratic Pronoun use and Language Ideologies in Dabhung Thanti, Nepal

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## Recommended Citation

Schwarz, Martha, "Person, Place, and Pronoun: an Examination of the Idiosyncratic Pronoun use and Language Ideologies in Dabhung Thanti, Nepal" (2012). *Independent Study Project (ISP) Collection*. 1642.  
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Person, Place, and Pronoun: an examination of the  
idiosyncratic pronoun use and language ideologies in  
Dabhung Thanti, Nepal

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Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Nepal: Development and  
Social Change, SIT Study Abroad

Fall 2012

## **Abstract**

Language, the content and form of what people choose to say, has the ability to both describe facts about the world and change aspects of the world. Thus, what people utter is a critical instrument for measuring current social situations as well as social change. The honorific hierarchy of Nepali's pronouns provides one particularly interesting tool for such measurement. This research examines the use and ideologies about second person pronouns in the village of Dabhung Thanti, Nepal in relation to their prescribed uses and ideologies in Kathmandu. Ultimately, this paper identifies the presence of two styles of Nepali spoken in Dabhung Thanti that create divisions between residents who have spent time in Kathmandu and those who have not.

## **Dedication**

To my “buddi aamaa” of Dabhung Thanti.

## Acknowledgements

As is the case with any research project, this is simply my compilation of many people's knowledge, help, and participation, all of whom deserve acknowledgement. Particularly, I would like to thank the village of Dabhung Thanti, and especially the Regmi family, for welcoming an American didi so enthusiastically and always being happy to answer my endless questions about pronouns. I would not have been able to ask these questions without the staggering amount of Nepali taught by Mina Rana, Sanjib Pokhrel, and Chandra Rana. In fact, without these gurus I never would have known that Nepali pronouns existed, so I suppose I owe the entire project to them as well.

A special thank you to my advisor, Bhim Narayan Regmi for connecting me with a village that became far more than an interesting speech community, and for answering questions along the way. I would also like to thank Amrit Yonjan, Dan Putnam, Uma Shrestha, and my parents for advising me and sharing in my excitement about honorifics.

I owe my interest in linguistics to the linguistics department at Brandeis University. Janet McIntosh's Linguistic Anthropology class proved particularly helpful, and the sources from that class provide the basis for this project.

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## **Introduction**

Watch your mouth. If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything. We all grew up hearing warnings like this, and we all learned that words can hurt someone as much as a punch. But why? We utter countless words each day, rarely conscious of how much impact they can have. Foundational theories in linguistic anthropology explain this by arguing that through words, language is capable of "doing things." That is, through utterances and communication people are capable not just of describing the world, but also of defining roles, creating change, and bringing ideas into the world. This is what makes language so powerful, and it is present in all parts of conversation, from word choice to sentence structure, to content. In Nepali, word choice – specifically pronoun choice – is particularly interesting in how it define roles. The Nepali pronoun lexicon includes four different second person pronouns ordered in an honorific hierarchy. Thus, every time a speaker addresses someone, they must choose which pronoun to use. Each carries with it a host of connotations rooted in culture, tradition, and notions of respect. Thus, patterns of usage can shed light on ideologies regarding respect and social roles. This paper intends to examine the usage and ideologies surrounding second person pronouns as both an indicator of social relations and a tool by which social groups are defined in Dabhung Thanti, Nepal.

Dabhung Thanti is a thirty household village in the Changchangdi Village Development Committee administrative unit. It is located in Syang Ja district of the middle hills region of Nepal, three hours south of Pokhara. It sits at the top of a steep hill approximately three kilometers from the main road. There is a dirt

road that allows jeeps to drive from the main road up to Dabhung Thanti. Personal vehicles (including motorcycles) are essentially non-existent. A jeep travels to and from the main road a couple of times each day, but most residents choose to walk up and down the hill. The village residents consist primarily of Nepali-speaking Magar, Dalit, Chettri, and Bahun (Brahman) families, and an assortment of other castes/ethnicities. Somewhat isolated yet accessible, Dabhung Thanti is in many ways representative of a typical Nepali *gau* (village). Some houses have television and radio and some do not. People all use cell phones, but there is no Internet and no computers. An overwhelming majority of the youngest generation leaves the village to study or work in Kathmandu, Pokhara, or cities abroad, resulting in a dearth of young adults and a huge difference between the education levels of this generation and their parents, particularly among women. Everyone in the *gau* knows each other, walks freely between houses, and addresses each other with kinship terms such as *aamaa* (mother) *didi* (older sister) and *bhai* (younger brother). This is common all across Nepali-speaking society, and in Dabhung Thanti reinforces the feeling of the *gau* as a larger family unit. Although the village is primarily Magar, none of the residents I interviewed could speak Magar. This extended back at least three generations. As a result, Nepali is firmly established as the mode of communication within homes and without, and the way it is spoken is central to the linguistic identity of the village.

In order to explore what the linguistic characteristics of Dabhung Thanti Nepali reveal about social structure, a foundation in speech act theory must be laid. Austin (1962) forms the base of this foundation by arguing that language can have both descriptive and performative functions. In other words, utterances

serve both to describe a fact of the world, and to be “a conventional verbal act through which the world is changed” (Duranti 1992; 31). When the sentence “Your shirt is ugly” is uttered, a few things may happen. The utterance a) identifies the shirt as unappealing to the speaker’s fashion sense, b) may cause a change in the relationship between speaker and shirt-wearer, (bring them closer because of the honesty of the statement, cause an argument because the shirt-wearer finds this statement offensive, etc.), c) perhaps affect the future dressing habits of the shirt-wearer, or possibly d) cause the shirt-wearer to return the shirt to the store. Any number of outcomes may be imagined, some intended and some unintended, all because of the sentence that was uttered. In this research, I use speech act theory to analyze language as both as a reflection of social values (its descriptive function), and as a tool for changing them (its performative function).

One important avenue through which social roles are created is by choosing a term of address such as a second person pronoun (Bonvillain 1993, Wardaugh, 2006, Brown and Gilman, 1960). All argue that in conversation, “choice of form is a sensitive indicator of personal relationships and societal values” (Bonvillain 1993). Word choice, sentence structure, tone, and style change based on whom one is addressing. An utterance asking a three-year old child to give a book back might sound something like:

“Give it back.”

The same request directed towards a professor would probably sound quite different. Perhaps something like:

“Excuse me Professor, if you don’t need the book anymore could I go to your office sometime and pick it up?”

These two requests, though they ultimately share a common goal of retrieving a book, construct entirely different dynamics of power and respect between the addresser and the addressee.

Bonvillain (1993, 82) describes terms of address as “[o]ne of the most sensitive features of language in reflecting speakers’ assessment of co-participants.” Thus, this research focuses on pronoun choice, and occasionally the verb conjugation morphology that agrees with each pronoun (see below) as a particularly revealing type of “form” that speakers may adapt to different situations. In contemporary English, there is only one second person pronoun – “you.” However, many other languages contain a set of second person pronouns, each conveying different levels of respect. In French, *tu* is the familiar or low-honorific pronoun, while *vous* is the polite or high honorific pronoun (Wardaugh 2006). Thus, the honorific pronoun split seen across languages is often referred to as T/V, where T (*tu*) is the term given to the less respectful pronoun and V (*vous*) represents the more respectful pronoun. Many other languages including Latin, Russian, German, Greek, Hindi, and other South Asian languages have a similar T/V distinction (Wardaugh 2006, Schmidt 1976). Nepali also has a pronoun honorific hierarchy, consisting of four to six different pronouns depending on the account. The system used in this paper is a four-pronoun hierarchy ranging from low honorific to high honorific (see chart below). There is also a hierarchy in third person pronouns, though they are beyond the scope of this paper. In some presentations of the honorifics system, each pronoun has its own corresponding verb conjugation. In Dabhung Thanti, the two highest pronouns shared one conjugation. There was some discrepancy regarding the honorific order of these pronouns, but the chart below presents the most common

ordering consistent with what is found in textbooks and in Nepali classes. Any divergences from this order are marked (i.e. inconsistent with the normal trend) and will be discussed later.

Table I:

| Rank        | Pronoun | Past         | Non-past       | Imperative |
|-------------|---------|--------------|----------------|------------|
| 1 (highest) | Hajur   | Vs + nubhayo | Vs + nuhunchha | Vs + nus   |
| 2           | Tapaai  | Vs + nubhayo | Vs + nuhunchha | Vs + nus   |
| 3           | Timi    | Vs + yau     | Vs + chau      | Vs + a     |
| 4 (lowest)  | Ta      | Vs + is      | Vs + chas      | Vs         |

The next chart shows the prescribed uses for each pronoun drawing on Watters and Rajbhandary (1998), Shrestha (2010) and the SIT (School for International Training) Nepal: Development and Social Change Nepali language curriculum:

Table II:

| Rank | Pronoun | Prescribed Use   |
|------|---------|--|
| 1    | hajur   | High ranking government official, others with “a great deal of power, prestige, and respect” (Shrestha 2010, 232), not taught at SIT |
| 2    | tapaai  | Husband, older relative, teacher, anyone higher in status, unfamiliar person of equal status   |
| 3    | timi    | Wife, younger relative, close friend, children   |
| 4    | ta      | Animals, young children, not taught at SIT   |

This chart shows a tendency for standard grammar to encourage *tapaai* and *timi* usage and neglect *hajur* and *ta*. Usually, foreigners are recommended to use only *tapaai* and *timi* (Schmidt 1976). Schmidt (1976) also describes a split corresponding to the T/V binary discussed above. Within these four pronouns, she groups *hajur* and *tapaai* as the formal (V) pronouns and *timi* and *ta* as the

lower (T) pronouns. Once the speaker makes the initial decision between T and V, they must then make a second decision between the two sub-distinctions (Schmidt 1976). This paper deals primarily with the V category of *hajur* and *tapaai*, and the secondary decision between these two pronouns, though T pronouns are brought in occasionally if relevant. The data presented later will show that the decisions Dabhung Thanti residents make differ drastically from the table above.

### **Methodology**

The data for this paper was collected in two and a half weeks in November 2012 in the village of Dabhung Thanti and its surrounding area. To conduct the research, I used a combination of semi structured interviews and conversation analysis. The research was based in a community of native Nepali speakers who currently lived in the village as well as Dabhung Thanti natives who had moved away to work or study but had come home for the holidays. In the interviews, I asked questions about the personal pronoun usage of the interviewee, their opinion of general usage trends in their community as well as elsewhere, and their ideologies about different pronouns. I also analyzed daily speech by listening to conversations in a variety of contexts and counting how many times each pronoun was used.

I will also bring in data gathered in Kathmandu. Some of this data comes from interviews and conversation analysis similar to those done in Dabhung Thanti, and some is based on my own anecdotal evidence as a resident of Kathmandu.

I found it most difficult to be a passive observer while recording conversations. As mentioned above, Dabhung Thanti is a fairly isolated village that rarely to never sees foreigners, and certainly none who stay for an extended period of time. Thus, when I would go to a house hoping to sit forgotten on the side and record typical daily conversations I ended up becoming the center of attention. Many pictures were taken, much tea was consumed, many questions about America were answered, but little “normal” speech was recorded. In the end, I found it easier not to attempt to formally record conversations. Rather, I would simply pay attention to whatever conversation was going on around me – on buses, in the office of the local school, while walking through the village – and take note of the number of times each pronoun was used. Thus, while I am not able to present many actual quotations or sentences from conversations, I do have numerical data for the frequency of each pronoun.

All interviewees gave consent through a verbal informed consent. By default all informants remain anonymous, though many chose to share their names. Informants gave further consent if interviews or other speech was recorded, as well as consent for utterances to be presented verbatim as data.

## **Research Findings**

The findings of this research can be broken down into two main sections of observed usage and ideologies: 1) when do people in Dabhung Thanti use each pronoun? and 2) what do they think are the connotations, implications, and appropriate contexts for each pronoun? For each question, the answers I gathered differ significantly from what is found in textbooks, previous papers about the honorifics system in Nepali, and typical pronoun usage in Kathmandu.

Essentially, people in Dabhung Thanti rarely, if ever, say *tapaai*. Instead, *hajur* is the most common and widely used respectful pronoun. It is also viewed by inhabitants of Dabhung Thanti as the only appropriate pronoun when speaking to elders.

#### 1. Observed Usage Patterns:

I noticed the prevalence of *hajur* throughout the village - in stores, on jeeps, when addressing parents, husbands, teachers, older siblings and acquaintances. I also formally counted each occurrence of *hajur* and *tapaai* in several different conversations. I found the following total distribution:

*Hajur*: 80 instances

*Tapaai*: 22 instances

Considering the way language textbooks prescribe pronoun use, it is astounding that people use *hajur* 80% of the time, but *tapaai* only 20% of the time. In Katmandu, pronoun usage follows the textbooks' outline of *tapaai* as the default V pronoun more closely. Until going to Dabhung Thanti, I had never heard *hajur* used as a pronoun. In fact, after two months of studying Nepali and living in Kthmandu I did not even know that a pronoun higher than *tapaai* existed. In a sample of conversations from buses and within households in Kathmandu, the ratio reflects this:

*Hajur*: 1 instance

*Tapaai*: 37 instances

*Timi*: 0 instances

Not only is *hajur* used more frequently in Dabhung Thanti than in Kathmandu, but it is used more frequently in Dabhung Thanti than locals believe it to be used.

According to Tika Ram and Baghwati Regmi, wives address husbands with *hajur*

in Bahun and Chettri families only, but use *timi* in Magar families. However, I found that in Dabhung Thanti Magar wives consistently reported using *hajur* with their husbands.

The distribution of pronoun use becomes even more interesting when the different conversations from Dabhung Thanti are presented separately. The conversations that I tallied were between people of different ages, genders, castes, ethnicities, occupations, and educational backgrounds. Across nearly every one of these divisions, *hajur* was universally spoken to anyone older than the speaker. The only demographic difference that affected pronoun use was what I term “the Kathmandu influence.” In other words, Kathmandu-influenced people are those who, at the time of this research were in Dabhung Thanti, but either lived in Kathmandu usually, or had spent significant time there studying. People who do not fit these criteria are referred to as non Kathmandu-influenced people. In conversations involving only non Kathmandu-influenced speakers the following distribution was observed:

*Hajur*: 53 instances

*Tapaai*: 0 instances

One conversation between a group of three Kathmandu-influenced speakers and one non Kathmandu-influenced speaker is especially interesting and merits a full description of the participants and their address practices. There were four participants in this conversation. The first, Tek Narayan Regmi, was a young adult who grew up in Dabhung Thanti but moved to Kathmandu several years previously to study and work. The second, here referred to as *dai* (lit. older brother), was older than Tek Narayan, grew up in the village, lived and studied in Kathmandu before becoming a lecturer in English. At the time of this research,

they were both in Dabhung Thanti for the holiday. The fourth participant was myself (Martha), and the fifth was T.N.'s *aamaa* (mother), who had never spent time away from Dabhung Thanti. While I am not a native of Dabhung Thanti and thus do not fit all the criteria of a Kathmandu-influenced speaker, I am certainly not a non Kathmandu-influenced, full-time Dabhung Thanti dwelling speaker. As will become clear, my speech was similar to the speech of Kathmandu-influenced speakers, I was spoken to in ways similar to Kathmandu-influenced speakers, and I will thus count myself as a Kathmandu-influenced speaker for the purpose of this research. The following chart shows the exchange of pronouns between each member of the aforementioned conversation:

Table III:

| Addresser → Adressee | Hajur | Tapaai | Timi |
|----------------------|-------|--------|------|
| T.N. → Dai           | 1     | 2      | 0    |
| Dai → T.N.           | 1*    | 1*     | 0    |
| Dai → Aamaa          | 8     | 0      | 0    |
| Aamaa → Dai          | 0     | 0      | 2    |
| Dai → Martha         | 0     | 3      | 0    |

Note: The asterisk (\*) above symbolizes that in one occurrence, neither pronoun was explicitly said, but rather, a verb conjugated with the high-honorific [-hunuhunchha] conjugation was used.

These were the only pronouns used during this conversation, and not every possible addresser → addressee combination is represented. Thus, I will fill in some missing channels based on qualitative evidence gathered from other conversations with these same speakers.

Table IV:

| Addresser → Addressee | Hajur     | Tapaai    | Timi   |
|-----------------------|-----------|-----------|--------|
| Aamaa → T.N.          | never     | never     | always |
| T.N. → Aamaa          | always    | never     | never  |
| Aamaa → Martha        | sometimes | sometimes | rarely |
| Martha → Aamaa        | always    | never     | never  |
| T.N. → Martha         | never     | always    | never  |
| Martha → T.N.         | never     | always    | never  |

The next conversation was between me and teachers at the local school. Many of these teachers had spent time studying in Kathmandu and thus categorize as Kathmandu-influenced speakers, but not all do. The distribution was:

*Hajur*: 16 instances

*Tapaai*: 12 instances

*Timi*: 0 instances

As is apparent by the lack of *timi* occurrences, the addresser/addressee patterns were either reciprocal *hajur* usage, reciprocal *tapaai* usage, or non-reciprocal *hajur-tapaai* usage.

Like the language used by teachers at the school, reciprocal *tapaai* usage is also common in Kathmandu. In my own language use in Kathmandu, I say *tapaai* to nearly everyone I converse with, and nearly everyone says *tapaai* to me. I have noticed this reciprocity with teachers, host-family members, shopkeepers, and other acquaintances. It is possible to attribute this to my position as a foreigner, but I see it elsewhere as well. In a conversation between

a middle-aged woman and her close friend in Kathmandu, they used *tapaai* to each other eight times. This is noteworthy because of its reciprocity as well as the choice of *tapaai* over *timi*, the pronoun prescribed for close friends. Tek Narayan also said that in Kathmandu siblings may use *tapaai* for younger siblings as well as older siblings.

## 2. Ideologies of Speakers:

In addition to observing the pronoun usage patterns, informants were asked a series of questions aimed to determine the language ideologies Dabhung Thanti residents hold about the different pronouns. Language ideologies are defined as “sets of beliefs about the language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use” (Silverstein, as quoted by McIntosh 2011). By interviewing speakers, I hoped to understand *why* the *hajur/tapaai* distribution presented above looks the way it does – how the users perceived the meanings and appropriate contexts of each pronoun and how they rationalized their pronoun choice.

In order to do this, I surveyed a total of thirty-three Dabhung Thanti residents. I first asked which pronoun was “*sabbandha Thulo*” or “*sabbandha raamro*.” These phrases translate roughly to “biggest” and “best,” but encompass more than the English version. *Thulo* can refer to size, but is also the term used to describe a person as respectable, deserving of respect, high-ranking, or important. *raamro* can mean anything from good, to great, to fancy, to fitting. Essentially, the pronoun that people described as *sabbandha Thulo* and *sabbandha raamro* is the pronoun they consider the top level of the honorifics hierarchy. The results are as follows:

*Hajur*: 26

*Tapaai*: 3

*Hajur and Tapaai are equal*: 4

One of the respondents who chose *tapaai*, Tek Narayan Regmi, described it as “*sabbandha* formal” or, “most formal.” Of all interviewees, T.N. spoke the most English and purposely chose to describe *tapaai* as “formal” rather than *Thulo* or *raamro*, as if neither of those terms were quite appropriate. All others used either *Thulo* or *raamro* to describe the pronoun.

*In the gau, do you usually use tapaai or hajur?*

The overall trend of these answers was to immediately answer “*hajur*” or “both *hajur* and *tapaai*,” but then to revise to a *hajur*-leaning preference. I asked one interviewee, Sabitaa Dhungana, what pronoun she used to address her husband. Her father, Tek Prashad Dhungana, quickly answered:

“*hajur ki tapaai banchha*” (“she says *hajur* or *tapaai*”)

She then corrected it to:

“*hajur. Hajur.*”

This pattern was common among many answers to this question, and interesting when compared to the data above, where *hajur* is overwhelmingly favored.

*Who do you say hajur to in the gau?*

To this question, I received the same answer from every person I interviewed: “*aaphno bhanda Thulo*” or, ‘people who are more *Thulo* than myself.’ This list includes everyone older in the village (siblings, parents, teachers, husbands, acquaintances, shopkeepers, etc. note: unknown people were

a rare occurrence in the village, but one eighteen year old addressed an unknown male of similar age as *hajur*. I did not hear what he said.). In return, the speaker is addressed as *timi*. To everyone else – described as “*aaphno bandha sanno*,” or “people who are smaller/younger than myself” *timi* is used. Presumably, being more *Thulo* than these interlocutors, they receive *hajur* in return. *Timi* is used reciprocally when conversing with a close friend.

Another important note is that there was never hesitation before this question was answered. To residents of Dabhung Thanti, the pronoun split is consistent, unambiguous, and based on the distinction between *Thulo* and *sanno*. If everyone is either *Thulo* or *sanno* compared to their addressee (excluding the case of close friends) it explains the absence of reciprocal *tapaai* or *hajur* use observed between non Kathmandu-influenced speakers.

*Why don't people in Dabhung Thanti use tapaai as much as hajur?*

The answers to this question were particularly interesting in light of what is taught in language classes and what I have observed in Kathmandu. In Kathmandu, *tapaai* is widely used as the default respectful pronoun. It is used to address teachers, strangers, and within some families. In Dabhung Thanti, however, attitudes about *tapaai* were overall negative. They ranged from “*ali na raamro*” (slightly not *raamro*), to “*na raamro*” to saying that *tapaai* sounds like *ta* (the lowest pronoun on the honorifics hierarchy). One interviewee explained that saying *tapaai* to someone *Thulo* demotes them and makes them feel *sanno*. Others felt that *timi* was a better pronoun than *tapaai*.

*Why is tapaai acceptable in Kathmandu but not in Dabhung Thanti?*

All interviewees had expressed that in Kathmandu *tapaai* is widely used, and also felt that in Kathmandu it does not have the negative associations it carries in Dabhung Thanti. Many people justified this by saying that language simply depends on the place. Just as there are many different languages spoken in Nepal, the way people speak the same language differs as well. The other main trend in answers attributed the discrepancy to the difference between village and city. Several interviewees identified the determining factor as size, stating that *tapaai* is used in Kathmandu because it is a big city. Others pointed to the difference in education levels in the village and the city, and Tek Prashad Dhungana specified that since literacy rates are higher, people in Kathmandu speak “better.” Mira Kafle explained that *tapaai* is used in Kathmandu because it is a modernized city. According to Tek Narayan Regmi, the interviewee who described *tapaai* as “formal,” one must use *tapaai* in Kathmandu because people in the city are highly educated and formal. Another felt that *tapaai* is appropriate in Kathmandu because many people in the city are unknown to each other. These ideologies about pronoun use in Kathmandu will be useful in constructing a picture of Dabhung Thanti residents’ view of Kathmandu society. It will also be interesting when compared to ideologies Kathmandu residents have about their own pronoun choices.

### **Discussion/Analysis**

Because of the scope of this research, I cannot make a comparison between Dabhung Thanti speech and general Kathmandu speech for a number of reasons. First of all, people in Kathmandu come from extremely diverse speech communities. Many of these speech communities speak different languages, and

many of these languages are not related to Nepali, nor do they have honorific hierarchies. Moreover, even in Nepali speaking speech communities address practices depend on the cultural norms of the community and might be completely different. There may be areas where *tapaai* is the only pronoun used, or other places like Dabhung Thanti where it is never used. It would be naive and presumptive to make a claim about the way language changes when it enters Kathmandu based on a single insular village. However, I will compare the language used in Dabhung Thanti to the ideologies speakers have about language in Kathmandu, and the language spoken by Kathmandu-influenced Dabhung Thanti natives (since they originally come from the same speech community). I have also brought in data from general Kathmandu Nepali and will later include ideologies from Kathmandu residents who are not connected to Dabhung Thanti simply as ways to account for the changes in Dhabhung Thanti speech caused by Kathmandu influence.

In this section I will argue that the data shows several key differences in second person pronoun usage between Kathmandu-influenced Dabhung Thanti speech and non Kathmandu-influenced Dabhung Thanti speech. As seen in the data above, non Kathmandu-influenced Dabhung Thanti speech is characterized by a strong preference for using *hajur* rather than *tapaai* as the V pronoun. It also lacks reciprocal usage of any pronoun besides *timi* in the specific case of close friends, and is also marked by non-ambiguous terms of address choices.

In contrast, Kathmandu language differs in these three main areas. The first difference is the “fuzziness” about which pronoun should be used in which contexts, the second is a preference for *tapaai* over *hajur*, and the third is a tendency for reciprocal use. Dabhung Thanti’s split is almost always a choice

between *hajur* and *timi*, and the choice is made based on *Thulo* and *sanno*. In such a small, tight-knit community, everyone knows exactly who is *Thulo* and who is *sanno* compared to themselves. In Kathmandu however, peoples' answers were more complicated. To Sanjib and Binita Pokhrel, *hajur* is appropriate within the family, but *tapaai* is appropriate on the street. Some felt that *tapaai* friends should be addressed as *tapaai*, while others choose *timi*. Descriptions of who Kathmandu dwellers address as *tapaai* tended to involve a list of people rather than one simple rule.

My experience communicating in Dabhung Thanti as a Kathmandu-influenced speaker reflects this fuzziness and led to some cross-cultural mistakes. At first I addressed older people in the village with *tapaai* until I found out how disrespectful it sounded. I could never get used to calling my eighteen-year old *bahinis* (younger sisters) *timi*. This probably had to do with their proximity to my own age, and also with the respective roles we had in the village. As an outsider in the village, I was quite helpless and thus relied on my *bahinis* to show me around, take me places, and tell me what to do. Whereas the only factor that should have been taken into account was their age, I wanted to recognize their leadership in our relationship. In the end, I sometimes used *tapaai*, sometimes *timi*, and generally tended to avoid saying any pronoun. This was surely also caused by being a native speaker of a language without an honorifics hierarchy, but had I learned Nepali in Dabhung Thanti I may not have had the same discomfort. This inconsistency is seen in Tables III and IV as well. Every addresser → addressee channel always uses the same pronoun, except for two: T.N. → *dai* (2 *tapaai*, 1 *hajur*) and *aamaa* → Martha (sometimes *hajur*,

sometimes *tapaai*, rarely *timi*). The variations speak to an uncertainty of which to use caused by an unprecedented relationship like that of an American daughter, or the conflicting styles of the *gau* and Kathmandu in the case of two Kathmandu-influenced speakers. I have also heard other Kathmandu Nepalis say they use *tapaai* because it is the fail-safe respectful pronoun, implying that they are worried about using the wrong one.

So why are the rules less clear in Kathmandu? Based on the interviews in Dabhung Thanti as well as the opinions of some Kathmandu residents I have several explanations to offer. In Kathmandu, one can never be quite certain about one's position compared to others. It is not always clear who is *Thulo* and who is *sanno*. This is part of its nature as a city rather than a closely-knit family style village. Thus, there is always the concern that one will accidentally use the wrong pronoun, and the tendency to decide on a case-by-case basis.

The next factor has to do with influences. While everyone in Dabhung Thanti grew up in the same speech community (or married into it and was expected to conform), that is hardly the case in Kathmandu. Different speech traditions collide in a city full of transplanted citizens, so one can never assume that one's interlocutor will be on the same page. Other influences from media, the Western world, or higher education further complicate social roles and relationships which, as we know, are reflected in language.

The third explanation has to do with ideologies of Kathmandu residents and the attitudes towards *hajur* in the capital city. According to four Kathmandu residents (Uma Shrestha, Raaj Karmacharya, Nirmala Karmacharya, and Sanjib Pokhrel), *hajur* was the language of the royal family, and the use of *hajur* identified the speaker as being close to the monarchy. In the eyes of those who

viewed the monarchy unfavorably, people who use *hajur* seem like social climbers trying to associate themselves with the ruling elite. In fact, the term “brown-nosing” came up in two separate interviews (Uma Shrestha, Sanjib Pokhrel). Not only is this an excellent example linguistic form constructing social relations, it adds to the complications of pronoun use the issue that in a heterogeneous society different listeners may hold different ideologies about the same words. A number of ideas about Kathmandu have arisen so far – big, modernized, highly educated, a collection of unknown individuals rather than an extended family, social mobility, and outside influences. All together, these add up to what one might call a cosmopolitan city, identifying its residents as cosmopolitan as well.

The second main characteristic of Kathmandu language when viewed from a Dabhung Thanti perspective is reciprocal *tapaai* usage. This trend is evident in the conversation between the middle-aged woman and her close friend mentioned above, the conversation among teachers at the Dabhung Thanti school, and the conversations cited by tables III and IV. These two tables show that *tapaai* was exchanged reciprocally between *dai* and T.N, and myself and T.N. While it was not recorded officially, *dai* and I addressed each other with *tapaai* as well. In other words, this was a phenomenon between the three Kathmandu-influenced speakers of the group.

The third main characteristic, and perhaps the most salient in this research, is the strong preference for *tapaai* over *hajur* in Kathmandu, and the tendency of Dabhung Thanti residents to consider it *na raamro* in the *gau*, but *raamro* in the city. The preference for *tapaai* can be attributed to any number of factors many of which have already been stated – prejudices against *hajur* dating

back to the monarchy, different practices of different speech communities, etc – and is beyond the domain of this research. The more interesting angle is found in the answers of villagers explaining why *tapaai* is favored in the city because it reveals their ideologies about the word and the city. If you recall, many felt that *tapaai* was appropriate for the city because Kathmandu is a big or modernized city, and people who live there were described as educated, formal, and unknown to each other. By extension, *tapaai* is viewed as a formal pronoun fit for large, highly educated, unfamiliar societies. It has a place in cosmopolitan Kathmandu speech but not in the speech of a small, rural, familiar and traditionally respectful *gau*. While *hajur* is a familial and familiarly respectful pronoun, *tapaai* is a more distantly respectful pronoun in the eyes of Dabhung Thanti locals. This sentiment is echoed in Tek Narayan tendency to use *hajur* within the family but *tapaai* on the streets of Kathmandu.

It is now clearer why it sounds so bad to address a family member as *tapaai* in Dabhung Thanti. Thus, the two different styles of speech – Kathmandu style and Dabhung Thanti style – must be kept separate and used only in their respective appropriate contexts. The data in tables III and IV show this separation of speaking styles even within one conversation as the speakers change between Kathmandu style and Dabhung Thanti style depending on whom they are speaking to. The name for this phenomenon in linguistic anthropological theory is codeswitching, and is defined as “an individual’s use of two or more language varieties in the same speech event or exchange” (Woolard 2004, 74). Woolard further explains that “[t]he topic of codeswitching is relevant to all speech communities that have linguistic repertoires comprising more than one ‘way of speaking’ ... Codeswitching can occur between forms recognized as

distinct languages or between dialects, registers, ‘levels’ such as politeness in Javanese, or styles of a single language” (Woolard 2004, 74). In tables III and IV we see that while everyone addresses *aamaa*, the only non Kathmandu-influenced speaker in the group, consistently with *hajur*, they address each other as Kathmandu-influenced speakers with *tapaai* rather than *hajur* or *timi*. In fact, in the whole time in the village, I only heard *tapaai* used when either the addresser or the addressee (or both) was a Kathmandu-influenced speaker. Kathmandu-influenced speakers only ever used Kathmandu style to address other Kathmandu-influenced speakers, and only used Dabhung Thanti style to address non Kathmandu-influenced speakers. By using different types of language to address different types of people, speakers reifies Gal’s (1988) statement that “codeswitching is a conversational strategy used to establish, cross or destroy group boundaries” and creates two distinct groups in Dabhung Thanti – those who have spent time in Kathmandu and those who have not (Gal 1988 as quoted in Wardaugh 2006, 100).

## **Conclusion**

This research has shown the pronoun usage patterns of Dabhung Thanti to favor *hajur* over *tapaai* as the V level respectful pronoun, to lack reciprocal V pronoun use, and to have clear rules determining when each pronoun is used. It further identifies Dabhung Thanti residents’ ideologies of Kathmandu language (and by extension, society) as cosmopolitan, standard, and distantly formal. Finally, it shows the way that Kathmandu-influenced Dabhung Thanti speakers switch language styles depending on who they are addressing, creating or highlighting divisions between those who have never spent time in Kathmandu

and those who have. At the time of this research, there was little adoption of Kathmandu-influenced speech by non Kathmandu-influenced speakers. However, a handful of signs indicated that this may be changing. Table IV shows that *aamaa*, a non Kathmandu-influenced speaker used *tapaai* to address me, even though this is a characteristic of Kathmandu-influenced speech. Other people in the village chose *tapaai* as the highest pronoun even if they never used it in conversation. Perhaps, as more Dabhung Thanti natives go to Kathmandu for studies or work, and as Western and media influences and outside ideologies continue to enter the village Kathmandu style pronoun use will become more prevalent in the village, softening the divisions and moving the whole village community towards the cosmopolitan style of Kathmandu.

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