

Abstract of 'About Chaurasia'

Jean Robert Opgenort

About Chaurasia. Paper presented at the 8th Himalayan Languages Symposium. Universität Bern, Bern, Switzerland, 21 September 2002.

In *The Rai of Eastern Nepal: Ethnic and Linguistic Grouping*, Gerd Hanßon (1991) classifies the Rai languages known as 'Umbule', i.e. Wambule, and 'Jerung', i.e. Jero, as members of the Western group of Kiranti languages. He points out that the differences in phonology and lexicon between Wambule and Jero plead in favour of a definition of the latter as a language of its own. The Wambule and Jero peoples also insist on differentiating between two distinct groups, but they acknowledge the intimate relationship between their ethnicities and speeches.

In my dissertation *The Wāmbule Language* (Opgenort 2002), I present some lexical data which contrast Wambule spoken in the village of Hilepānī and Jero spoken in the southern village of Mohaṅṭār. These data show that the linguistic differences between the Wambule and Jero dialect groups appear to be quite marginal and actually do not exceed the differences between Germanic languages such as Dutch and German. Therefore, I tentatively propose that Wambule and Jero do not constitute two distinct languages, but rather two separate but mutually intelligible sets of dialects of a single language.

I also suggest that a suitable name for the language combining the Wambule and Jero dialect groups may well be 'Chaurasia'. This name is a slight modification of Brian Houghton Hodgson's (1857) 'Chouras'ya' or Sten Konow's 'Chourasya' (Grierson 1909), which are anglicised versions of the historical Nepali name Caurasiya 'eighty-fourth'. This name may originally have been the ordinal number collectively designating the Wambule- and Jero-speaking district in the old system of His Majesty's Government of Nepal for the designation of excise domains, as one of my consultants claimed. On the other hand, the term may originally have referred to the number of village headmen or principal households which the district may have comprised.

Today I will present additional, mostly unpublished data which show the lexical, phonological, morphological and syntactic similarities and differences between the Wambule and Jero dialect groups. These data further support my thesis about the Chaurasia linguistic unit.

Bibliography

- Grierson, George. 1909 (ed.). *Linguistic Survey of India. Vol. III. Tibeto-Burman Family. Part I.* General Introduction, Specimens of the Tibetan Dialects, The Himalayan Dialects, and the North Assam Group. Calcutta: Government of India [Reprinted: Delhi, Varanasi, Patna. Motilal Banarsidass 1967. xxiii. 641 pp].
- Hanßon, Gerd. 1991. *The Rai of Eastern Nepal: Ethnic and Linguistic Grouping. Findings of the Linguistic Survey of Nepal.* Edited and provided with an introduction by Werner Winter. Kirtipur/Kathmandu: Linguistic Survey of Nepal and Centre for Nepal and Asian Studies, Tribhuvan University.
- Hodgson, Brian Houghton. 1857. 'Comparative Vocabulary of the Languages of the broken Tribes of Népāl', in *Journal of the Asiatic Society of Bengal* XXVI: 333-371.
- Opgenort, Jean Robert. 2002. *The Wāmbule Language. Grammar, Lexicon, Texts and Cultural Survey of a Kiranti Tribe of Eastern Nepal* (xxix + 615 = 644 pp., 39 illus.). Amsterdam: Jean Robert Opgenort.