A Grammar of Bantawa : grammar, paradigm tables, glossary and texts of a Rai language of Eastern Nepal
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Chapter 1

Introduction

In this introductory chapter, I shall first mention some methodological issues and give acknowledgements of sources (§1.1). Next, the necessary background on the Bantawa language (§1.2) will be given. Introductory notes on the culture and life of the Bantawa people are added to the texts in Appendix A.

1.1 This grammar

1.1.1 Aims

This book is a grammar of the Bantawa language. Previous grammars of this language have been published, viz. Bāntāvā (V.S. 2055), Rai (1985), and a few articles have been published on the language as well. However, I believe that there is still ample scope for new work on Bantawa. This grammar differs from previous grammars in several ways.

Central Dialect

First of all, this grammar describes a dialect different than those published before, cf. §1.2. The dialect used as a basis for this description is spoken in the Hatuvā area, in Bhojpur district in eastern Nepal. More specifically, I focused on the language as it is spoken in Sindrāṅ, an area in the southeast corner of Bhojpur. This area is the centre of Hatuvā, and the language is known as Hatuvālī. Hatuvā is arguably the centre of the Bantawa speaking area. An alternative title for this grammar could have been *A Grammar of Hatuvālī*.

Comprehensive

Second, though incomplete, this grammar is more comprehensive than any grammar previously published. The data upon which this grammar is based are more plentiful. This description covers more subjects than the previous studies mentioned above. The sections on phonology, noun and verb morphology contain more detail than

earlier studies of the Bantawa language. Moreover, this grammar not only gives a descriptive overview of the morphology of all word classes in Bantawa, but also offers data on usage and syntax.

Analytical points

Every language deserves a description in its own terms. To try and apply foreign terminology to a language does not always clarify the issues. In the case of Bantawa, this consideration has not led me to invent or reinvent terminology that may obscure obvious and common linguistic similarities or facts. However, given that Bantawa needs a description in its own terms led me to focus on the issues that are significant for Bantawa. While I do not suggest that these grammatical features are unique to Bantawa, the linguistic facts regarding verbal agreement, nominal and verbal compounding, nominalisation and clause combining are of particular linguistic interest. In §1.3 the main points of the Bantawa language are highlighted.

1.1.2   Sources

The civil war in Nepal has been an obstacle in collecting reliable data to support this grammar. The conflict has not only caused immeasurable grief to the Nepali population in terms of lives, but has also cost dearly in economical, ecological and social terms. Remote areas have become insecure and more isolated. The rural areas of Nepal have become depleted of people who can till the land and sustain the rural culture. Boys and girls and other unwilling victims were confronted by the choice to either join the rebel side or flee to the city and perhaps join the, then Royal, Nepalese army. These developments have complicated the collection of data and effectively precluded a long-term stay for research purposes in Bhojpur. As a result, many recordings were made in the city rather than in the village in the midst of the language community.

There are by and large three data sources for this grammar: a) informants and on-site recordings, b) the magazine *Bungwakha* (Rāī 2004) and c) other publications on the language.

Language informants

The data for this grammatical description and analysis were collected over a period of three years in varying circumstances and locations. After a first field trip to Bhojpur in October 2003, it was getting increasingly difficult to move around freely for both security and personal reasons. A second trip to Dharān in the summer of 2005 was very fruitful for getting a head start on the verb inventory. However, while most of the corpus was recorded in Bhojpur, most of the elicited data were collected far from Bhojpur, in Pokharā.

Throughout, the aim was to stick to a single dialect of the language. Variation in dialects can easily jeopardise data integrity and any sort of analysis.

Mitra Rāī[1] introduced me to his language and family and aroused my interest in his language and culture. In Dharān, I was taught by Kṛṣna Bahādur Rāī[2] and Bhuvan Rāī[3], who were very fast and effective language teachers. Kṛṣna is from the Bāsikhorā area in Hatuvā, while Bhuvan hails from Āmcok. In Pokharā, I spent many hours with Viśvahāṅ Rāī[4]. He is one of those rare Bantawa residents of Pokharā who speaks his mother tongue even on a daily basis. Viśvahāṅ lives with his extended family on a compound, where he runs a trekking business. As Viśvahāṅ is also from Sindrāṅ, he was the best teacher imaginable.

Figure 1.1: Language informants

Viśvahāṅ Rāī   Mitra Rāī   Thām Jīt Rāī

Additional questions were answered by Rudra Rāī[5], Ravin 'Robin' Rāī and Śyam Rasaili[6], Prakāś Rāī[7] and Thām Jīt Rāī[8].

The narratives were told by Kājīmān Rāī[9], Thām Jīt Rāī and Viśvahāṅ Rāī. In the course of my work I met many other Rai, whom I shall not mention here. They are all people of great patience. I cannot recollect having met a less than cheerful Rai, let alone an angry one. The language is theirs. The analysis and the errors are mine.

Literary Bantawa

In the year 2004, Padam Rāī started publishing a monthly Bantawa Rai language magazine entitled *Bungwakha*, written *Buṅvākhā* in Devanāgarī script. This invaluable periodical is a real treasure trove of linguistic, anthropological and sociocultural

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[1] from Choṭīḍā̃ḍā, Sindrāṅ, Bhojpur (educated up to SLC, School leaving certificate, 38 yrs.)

[2] from Bāsikhorā, Bhojpur (Ed. IA, 29 yrs.)

[3] Prem Kumār 'Bhuvan' Rāī, from Devāṇṭār, Bhojpur (24 yrs.)

[4] from Yaṅmākhā Ṭole, Sindrāṅ (class 10, 31 yrs.), married to Vidyā Māyā Rāī, from Monten village. Trekking business: http://www.rai.com.np.

[5] from Ā̃khisallā, Dhankuṭā (32 yrs.)

[6] from Pāṅcā, Bhojpur.

[7] from Choṭīḍā̃ḍā, Sindrāṅ (educated up to SLC, School leaving certificate, 23yrs)

[8] from Lākpurāṅ, Homtāṅ (educated up to SLC, School leaving certificate+2, 28 yrs.)

[9] from Choṭīḍā̃ḍā, Sindrāṅ (no formal education, 65 yrs.)

data. Even so, I have been cautious to use data from this magazine. I have not always been able to trace the geographical source of texts and was wary of having literary Bantawa mix with my oral data. Also, the uncomfortable Devanāgarī spelling used for Bantawa does not always accurately represent real forms. Nevertheless, the editor Padam Rāī must be highly commended for his relentless efforts to advocate and develop his mother tongue. *Bungwakha* is a unique magazine of a remarkably high quality.

In the course of a research project for the Tribhuvan University of Kathmandu, Kwang-Ju Cho published a number of annotated Bantawa texts (2007). Kwang-Ju Cho kindly gave me access to his collection. His collection stretches far wider than the published selection. In spite of good progress in the course of the past several years, the shortage of Bantawa literary texts is still an impediment for Bantawa language development.

While I have used the texts of literary sources for my investigations, all analyses remain mine.

Other publications

Previously, several scholars have published on the Bantawa language. Their works can be found in the references.

The earliest published data on Bantawa are found in the *Vocabulary of the languages of the broken tribes of Népál* (Hodgson 1857). Then, more than a century of silence followed. Since the 1980s, the major contributions have come from mother tongue speakers, Bāntāvā and Rai. Ḍik Bāntāvā published a grammar (V.S. 2055) and a dictionary (2001), both in Nepali. Prof. Dr. Noval Kiśor Rāī has written an English-language grammar of the language (1985), and created a dictionary from Bantawa to English in cooperation with Werner Winter and Timta Rāī (1985). Furthermore, Keith Sprigg and Boyd Michailovsky have published on Bantawa subjects on the basis of original data.

There are quite a few secondary publications on the language. Most of these publications rely on the grammar and articles published by Rai, e.g. Foltan (1992), Ebert (1994). Rai's grammar was based on the Rabi dialect of the language (1985: 15), spoken slightly eastward from the area that is the designated heartland. Indeed there are easily notable differences between the two dialects, but not so, it is claimed, that understanding is ever hampered. Rai's grammar differs quite obviously from Ḍik Bāntāvā's grammar in phonology, but also in other, less obvious respects.

1.1.3   Methodology

A descriptive grammar is ideally written inductively and based on a solid foundation of evidence. For this grammar too, the text corpus informed the description and analysis. Previous descriptions of the Bantawa language in particular and the Kiranti languages as a group were also used, albeit in a critical way. Complete agreement tables for verbs, necessary in order to present paradigms and discover conjugation patterns cannot be distilled from a text corpus. For that reason, agreement tables and grammaticality judgments were elicited.

Theoretical background

Wary of theoretical feuds, I have tried, but not always succeeded, to avoid statements or terminology that would fit one theory but not another. This grammar has been put as much as possible in general, theory-neutral terms. If there is a unifying, underlying theory, then this framework would be the 'basic linguistic theory, the typological and functional framework of linguistic analysis in terms of which most grammars are cast.' (Aikhenvald 2004: xi).

For some terminology, I shall assume that the meaning is known from and equivalent to that of common linguistic practice. For potentially vague terms and words that are problematic for Bantawa, the reader finds some paragraphs in the text that are dedicated to the definition of terminology.

At certain points in the text, I have referenced some more-or-less theoretical works that have informed analytical or terminological choices. The rather extensive article by Bickel and Nichols (2006) contains many definitions of morphological units of description, of the concepts of word and formative, etc. The works by Givón (2001) and Payne (1997) offer many insights on grammatical description in general. On the topics of complex verbs, evidentiality and word-hood I consulted Aikhenvald and Dixon's works (2002, 2004, 2006).

1.2 The language

In this section, we discuss the historical, geographical and linguistic situation of the Bantawa language, i.e. where the language is spoken and what languages and people surround the Bantawa speakers.

1.2.1 Language situation

Numerically, Bantawa is the largest language among the Kiranti languages. The number of people identifying themselves as Bantawa was 371,056 in the 2001 census of Nepal. The majority of Bantawa speakers reside in the hills of eastern Nepal (Figure 1.2).

Geography   From west to east, the country of Nepal is divided into five development regions. The Eastern Region is the easternmost of these. The development regions are subdivided into zones, and further into districts. There are 75 districts in Nepal, and Bhojpur is one of these. Bhojpur is situated in eastern Nepal, and is central in the Eastern Region. The hills of the Eastern Region are mostly populated by Rai, Limbu and other groups of Kiranti origin. Further north of the Bantawa-speaking area there are other non-Kiranti groups of what used to be referred to as the Mongoloid racial stock, e.g. the Sherpa and the Lhomi, and also speakers of Tibetan dialects. Towards the south one finds people who speak languages of Indo-Aryan origin, e.g. the speakers of Tharu, Rajbangsi and Maithili. Even small pockets of speakers of Austroasiatic languages are found.

Figure 1.2: Overview map of Nepal
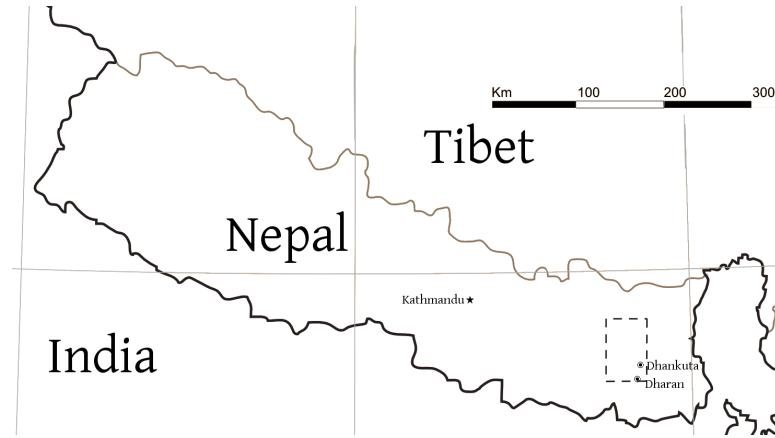
Overview map of Nepal
(Bantawa speaking area marked)

The chief Bantawa speaking areas are in the districts of Bhojpur, Dhankuṭā, Sunsarī, Udayapur and Khoṭāṅ, all of which are in the Eastern Region.

The geographical centre of these five districts is Bhojpur. Bhojpur is the perceived heartland of the Bantawa people, cf. Hanßon (1991: 6: 'the recent main area') and Eppele *et al.* (2003). The Bantawa language is also spoken further east, in Moraṅ, Tehrathum, Pãcthar and Ilām, and even beyond the border in India, i.e. Sikkim, and Bhutan, cf. Rai (1985: 15) and Eppele *et al.* (2003). An eastern variety of Bantawa is reportedly used as a *lingua franca* between Rai minorities in Limbuwan, Sikkim and Bhutan and as a first language by Rai of other ethnic origin.

Endangered   By strict criteria, Bantawa as a language is not immediately endangered. The language will probably last another century. The number of Bantawa speakers is relatively high. In Bhojpur there are quite a few villages with a majority of Bantawa speakers. The inhabitants of these villages use Bantawa every day, and children learn Bantawa as their mother tongue. My main informant did not speak Nepali until the age of 10 when he entered school. Some children still learn Bantawa as their mother tongue and only learn Nepali when they enter school.

However, even where Bantawa is quite vital and still passed on to the next generation, the pressure on the language from the national language Nepali is immense. Many Bantawa speakers switch code frequently and use many loans in everyday speech. Nepali slowly nibbles away at the language, and it is hard to see how this tendency can be reversed in the current context. Nowadays, there are some efforts and initiatives to strengthen language development. While most Bantawa speakers still feel that their children should first learn Bantawa (Eppele *et al.* 2003:

Figure 1.3: Location of Bhojpur district and Sindrāṅ village

Location of Sindrāṅ,
home to the dialect described in this book

26), the language suffers heavily from modern pressures. The language will dwindle unless the use of the language in communication outside of the house is promoted.

1.2.2 Speakers

Not all speakers of Bantawa identify themselves as ethnic Bantawa Rai. Many speakers of Bantawa belong to another Kiranti group, e.g. Kulung or Chamling, who happen to have migrated to a Bantawa speaking area. Similarly, there are non-Kiranti inhabitants of Bhojpur of Indo-Aryan stock who speak Bantawa as a mother tongue. In Sindrāṅ, the last stronghold of Bantawa, the vast majority of the population identifies themselves as *Kirawa* 'Kiranti' and speak Bantawa as a mother tongue.

Kiranti Bantawa speakers generally identify themselves as *Kirawa*, and their language as *Kirawa yiŋ*. The term *kirawa* no doubt has some relationship with the Nepali word *kirãtī* that is used nation-wide. This etymon is as old as the Vedas, dating back to 1000 BC (van Driem 2001: 594).

The term 'Kiranti' designates the groups of Tibeto-Burman stock that peopled the Himalayas from the east in prehistoric times. These people reached at least as far as the Kathmandu valley. It has been suggested that the progenitors of the current inhabitants of the Kathmandu valley, the Newar, were also part of this prehistoric *Völkerwanderung*[10].

Nowadays, different subdivisions of the Kiranti people are proposed. In common parlance, a distinction is made between Rai, who are the largest group of Kiranti people, Limbu, the largest single unit of Kiranti people who are not Rai, and smaller groups such as the Yakkha and Sunwar people who are neither Rai nor Limbu. Some

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[10]Cf. Van Driem (2003: 24)

Kiranti groups reject the designation 'Rāī', as this word is of Nepali origin. Other groups recently started to shed the epithet *Rāī*, e.g. the Bahing people. In any case, currently most Bantawa people are known by the name *Rāī* in Nepal's registry offices. Due to the present increase in awareness and status of minorities, it is becoming increasingly popular to choose 'Bantawa' or a clan name as a surname.

Bantawa   The name 'Bantawa' has been used for the Bantawa speakers for a long time. In the 19th century, Hodgson (1857: 162) noted that his 'Rúngchhénbúng, Chhingtáng and Wáling languages 'could be unitised under the common name of Bontáwa'. The spelling *Bontáwa* is not as outlandish as it would seem. Even today some authors write *bantāvā*. In Devanāgarī script, the 'a' designates the 'implicit' vowel, short a, that is realised as [ɔ] or [ʌ]. As one walks down from Bhojpur to Dharān, this pronunciation is heard more often. The northern form [bantawa] is gradually replaced by the southern form [bantawa] or even [bantʌwa]. For his grammar (V.S. 2055), Bāntāvā chose the orthography *Bāntavā*, but for his dictionary (2001) he switched to *Bāntāvā*. The latter form is the standard now, used in the magazine *Bungwakha* and in most other publications.

The term *Bantawa* sometimes includes groups that are not strictly Bantawa-speaking Rai. For example, even though Chintang is considerably different from standard Bantawa, the Bantawa themselves call that language *Chintāṅe Bāntāwā*. The etymology of the word *Bāntāwā* is unclear. The term can be analysed as 'weapon-bearer', i.e. warrior, as (1). This etymology, however, is speculative.

(1)   ban-tat-wa
      weapon-bring-APm
        'weapon-bearer'

1.2.3   History

Political history   Throughout historical times, the Hatuvā area has been a Kiranti-speaking area. What happened in prehistory remains a matter of conjecture.

Hatuvā apparently was a political unit at the time of the unification of Nepal. Hatuvāgaḍhī, just above Sindrāṅ's central town Ghoḍeṭār, was the fortress of the last king of Hatuvā. Hatuvāgaḍhī is a heritage site that has lain in ruins for over a century. The ruins of Hatuvāgaḍhī were further destroyed by the Royal Nepalese Army. The Royal Nepalese Army set up their base in this safer spot after their base in Ghoḍeṭār was overrun by Maoist rebels. Hatuvā is found in many historical records and is mentioned amongst other Kiranti kingdoms, e.g. Vijayapur-Moraṅ and Cauḍā̃ḍī, that fought against the *Śahī* armies in the last quarter of the 18th century[11].

The strongest memory alive amongst Bantawa speakers in the area is the history of the subjugation by the armies of Pṛthvi Nārayaṇ Śāha. After Pṛthvi Nārayaṇ Śāha himself conquered the strong Newar kingdoms of Kathmandu valley, he and his successors subdued eastern Nepal by conquest. This unification was a traumatic experience for the Kiranti people. It is ingrained in the collective memory of the

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[11]Cf. e.g. Neupane (2001)

Kiranti people that the Hindus usurped land by unfair land laws and forbade the Kiranti to eat cows. The last kings of Hatuvā are kept alive in oral history.

Language contact   Historically, the Bantawa language has developed from the language of Proto-Kiranti immigrants who arrived in eastern Nepal in prehistoric times. In Bantawa, we also find traces of the influence of Sanskrit-based languages. There is evidence in Bantawa of both old and more recent borrowing from some Indo-Aryan language, which points to long standing contact, cf. §2.4. However, even now that this contact has intensified dramatically with two centuries of political unity, the grammatical structure of Bantawa is still distinctly Kiranti and very unlike that of Indo-Aryan languages.

1.2.4   Dialects

Hatuvā is the region that linguistically forms the centre of the Bantawa speaking area. Currently however, Hatuvā is not a political unit. Area names like Hatuvā, Āmcok and Dilpā are the names of *thum*s. *Thum*s were political divisions under the early Śāha government in the 19th century, that are now also known as *upakendra* 'subcentre'. The past Hatuvā *thum* includes 7 modern villages, namely Bāsikhorā, Rānībās, Homtāṅ, Devānṭār, Pātlepānī, Khairāṅ and Sindrāṅ.

   Distinct dialect areas have been identified by Eppele *et al.* (2003) and Hanßon (1991). Eppele's findings are more detailed with regard to Bantawa and, I believe, linguistically most reliable. Basing themselves on numerous interviews and comprehension tests, Eppele *et al.* distinguish four dialects. West of Hatuvā, towards and in Khoṭāṅ lies the Āmcok area, that lends its name to the *Āmcoke* dialect. To the north, the Dilpālī dialect is spoken, which is the basis for the description by Bāntāvā (V.S. 2055). Towards the east lies the Dhankuṭā area, where the eastern dialect is spoken that forms the material for Rai's descriptions (1984, 1985, 1988). The dialect used as a basis for the current description is spoken in the Hatuvā area, Bhojpur.

   The differences between Bantawa dialects must not be exaggerated. All speakers claim that they fully understand speakers from other dialect areas. The dialects of the Rabi and Dhankuṭā area are of the same stock.

   In this grammar, incidental references can be made to clear dialectal differences, e.g. in the ordering and nature of verbal prefixes, pronunciation of hiatus, or realisation of some phonemes. Within the Hatuvā area there are subtle differences in pronunciation and even lexical differences. These differences will be discussed in the text where necessary. The present grammatical description, however, does not contain a dialect study.

Dialects or languages   Within the context of Kiranti languages, Bantawa holds a central position, geographically as well as linguistically. At least numerically, Bantawa is the largest Rai language. Bantawa has exerted strong influence on surrounding languages, which makes it difficult to tell whether relationships between neighbouring languages are historical, signalling a genetic relationship, or recent, in the form of loans and replacement. Some languages close to Bantawa are Chintang

towards the east, Chamling towards the west, and Dungmali in the north-east. These languages show many similarities to Bantawa. On closer study however, real differences can be found that are deeper than the surface. Around Dhankuṭā, there are some languages that are close to Bantawa, but are still languages in their own right, viz. Chiling, the various Athpahariya dialects, including Belhare, and Yakkha. From the data I collected of the eastern Bantawa variety as spoken by, for example, Rudra Rāī, it must be concluded that there are many similarities between eastern Bantawa and the languages of the Yakkha cluster. See below §1.2.5.

1.2.5 The language family affiliation

The Bantawa language is a member of the Kiranti group of languages. The scholar who tries to assign the Kiranti languages to the right language family runs into trouble right from the start. Obviously, the Kiranti languages are part of the same group of languages that also includes Chinese, Tibetan, Burmese and all languages that can be related to these three. However, the proper name for this family is a point of contention. Matisoff, the author of the reference work on 'Sino-Tibetan' reconstruction, splits off Sinitic from the rest of the family (2003). This split is reflected in the choice of 'Sino-Tibetan' as a name for the family. Others, e.g. Van Driem (2005) and Sagart (2006), have pointed out the absence of evidence that would set apart Sinitic languages from the rest of the family. In order to establish the validity of a division of the family in two major branches, viz. Sinitic and non-Sinitic, there must be evidence of linguistic innovations that are shared by all non-Sinitic languages that are not found in the Sinitic branch. The lack of such evidence should lead any scholar to adopt an agnostic stance and avoid unwarranted propositions regarding historical relationships. Sinitic is then best treated on a par with the rest of the family, i.e. just a branch on equal footing with Karenic, Himalayish or Bodish, Lolo-Burmese etc. Proponents of this default theory (van Driem 2005) prefer to call the language family 'Tibeto-Burman.'

The position of the Kiranti languages within the Tibeto-Burman language family is not fixed. It has been suggested that the Kiranti languages together with the Magaric[12] and Newaric[13] languages form a sub-branch of Tibeto-Burman called 'Himalayish' (Bradley 1997). The Himalayish sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family apparently further belongs to the Bodic[14] branch of the Tibeto-Burman language family.

The position of Bantawa within the Kiranti language group   There are some 30-odd different Kiranti languages, and several subgroupings have been proposed. Michailovsky (1994) established a major divide between Western Kiranti, comprising

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[12]Kham, Magar and Chepang, (Watters 2004)

[13]A proposed taxon that includes Newaric and Kiranti languages was labelled Mahakiranti by van Driem (2001). Later, van Driem (2003) no longer entertained the Mahakiranti hypothesis, but retained '... the name 'Mahakiranti' for the sake of argument to designate the proposition that Newaric and Kiranti together form a coherent subgroup within the Tibeto-Burman family.' (2003: 24).

[14]Bradley (1997) calls this branch Bodic or Western Tibeto-Burman, while (Matisoff 2003: 6) uses 'Himalayan'.

Figure 1.4: Kiranti family tree, after van Driem (2001)
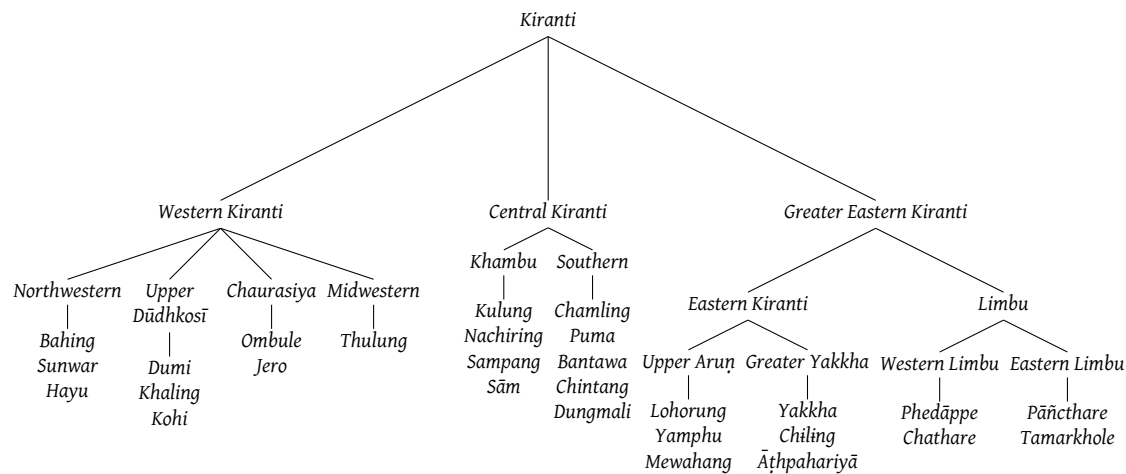
of Hayu, Bahing, Sunuwar, Dumi, Khaling and Thulung on the one hand, and Eastern Kiranti, comprising of Kulung, Chamling, Bantawa and Limbu on the other. This division is based on shared phonological innovations in the initial plosives of these languages and has not been seriously contested. Later, Bradley (1997: 16) offered a rather unspecific tree that sums up eight branches of the Kiranti group.

Opgenort (2005) has refined Michailovsky's analysis, using an innovative method of combining lexical isoglosses, i.e. counting etyma that are shared between languages, with phonological isoglosses, i.e. counting shared phonological innovations.

Van Driem (2001: 615) offers a genealogical tree for the Kiranti language group as represented in Figure 1.4. On the basis of the work of Michailovsky and Opgenort, we know this model to be largely correct. The subclassification situates Bantawa in the Southern branch of Central Kiranti. What the model does not show is that the distance between Bantawa and Western Kiranti languages is greater than that between Bantawa and Eastern Kiranti languages. The distance between languages not only surfaces in the phonological form of etyma as shown by Michailovsky (1994) and Opgenort (2004), but also in specific items in the vocabulary.

Bantawa shares many etyma with Eastern Kiranti languages that are not shared with Western Kiranti languages. Particularly, my data suggest that Bantawa shares some etyma with the languages of the Yakkha cluster[15,16], that these languages do

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[15] The Chiling, Āṭhpahariyā, Belhare and Yakkha languages were grouped under the heading 'Dhankutic' by Bickel (1996: 22). Van Driem (2001: 684) labels this taxon as 'Greater Yakkha', contends that Belhare is an Āṭhpahariyā dialect and further writes that these languages 'show greater affinity with Limbu than do other Kiranti languages, yet they share salient, basic lexical roots with Rai languages to the west.' Examples of these shared roots are indeed plentiful, for example we might add Rai *hik* 'wind' vs. Limbu *surit*, *namniŋ* 'last year' vs. Limbu *metliŋ*, etc. However, there are also many roots that Central and Eastern Kiranti share but are not found outside of these two taxa, for example *asen* 'yesterday' and *met-ma* 'to apply' and 'causative'. These data suggest that the differences between Limbu and other Kiranti languages with regard to the phonological development of initial plosives, cf. Michailovsky (1994), are not unambiguously

not share with languages outside the Central Kiranti taxon.

1.3   Overview of the Bantawa language

Bantawa is a central Kiranti language that shares many features with its neighbouring languages. On the basis of some simple sentences we'll highlight the main characteristics of the Bantawa language.

Word classes   In Bantawa the nominal and verbal word classes can be clearly distinguished by morphology, syntactical function and, less clearly, meaning. Within the nominal class we can distinguish nouns, proper nouns and pronouns. All nominal classes have a shared morphology that includes affixation of case, locative and other nominal suffixes, and possessive prefixes.

The class of verbs forms the core of the Bantawa lexicon. Verbs have a restrictive phonological structure. The class of verbs is not just formally very regular on the surface but it also can be shown that many relationships pertain between the verbs, such that we find verb families maintaining causative, applicative, transitivised and detransitivised relationships between them. Verb morphology is very rich. Verbs are inflected for tense and participant agreement; nominalisations and other forms account for another seven conjugational forms for each verb. Verb paradigms easily comprise more than a hundred different forms.

Aside from these main classes, it is meaningful to distinguish the adjectival and adverbial word classes as well for Bantawa. Other word classes are numerically smaller, such as conjunctions and the epistemic and pragmatic particles.

Ergativity   Bantawa is a split-ergative language. With regard to case marking, the main participants are marked according to an ergative / absolutive opposition. In this grammar I'll mark the main participants as subject (S) for intransitive sentences and agent (A) and patient (P) for transitive sentences. Subjects and patients have no overt case marking while the agent is marked with the explicit ergative marker <-ʔa> (ERG). In this respect, S and P are aligned, while A stands apart, which we shall call an 'ergative pattern'. However, we also find that agreement suffixes on the transitive finite verb correspond to either agent or patient, such that we find a mixed alignment pattern. Finite verb prefixes always correspond to either A or S, but never to P: this we shall call an 'accusative pattern'. Throughout this grammar alignment patterns will be put in this terminology.

(2)   araŋ ni ik-tet haŋhon-ʔo ten-da   ik-cʰa   kʰokpa mina
      once NAR one-qual country-GEN village-LOC one-qhum old man man

      yuw-a-ŋ-a   ni
      be-PT-PROG-PT NAR

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parallelled in lexical differences.
[16]Discussing the data collected by Gvozdanović, Van Driem (1994) notes some Yakkha words that have cognates in Central Kiranti but not in more Eastern Kiranti languages, e.g. *mokma* 'to hit'. Cf. also Hanßon *et al.* (1997).

'Once, in a village in some country, there was an old man, it is told.' [Om]

(3) hiŋ-yaŋ-sa   yuŋ-yaŋ-sa mi-kʰar-a-ŋ-a-hida   ik-len mo kʰokpa
live-PROG-SIM sit-PROG-SIM 3pl-go-PT-PROG-PT-SIMp one-day that old.man
sarima-ʔa dʰir-u-ki im-kʰa-da-ŋa   ims-a-ʔo;   ims-a-lis-a
disease-ERG find-3P-SEQ sleep-PNOM-LOC-EMPH sleep-PT-NOM sleep-PT-become-PT
ni
NAR

'While they were living easily that way, one day a disease struck that old man, and he lay down on the bed; lay down and stayed there.' [Om]

Word order and sentence syntax   Bantawa is a clear-cut verb-final language, with the proviso that sentence embedding morphology, the nominalizer <-ʔo> and the epistemic particle <ni> (NAR) can follow the verb. We see the narrative particle *ni* in the sentences (2, 3) above. The clause-embedding morphology <-hida> 'while' and <-ki> 'after' is suffixed to the verbs in (3). The nominalizer in Bantawa, very characteristically, operates as a sentence marker as also shown in example (3). Its meaning here is to punctuate the story by marking the fact that the man lay down as a fact, after which the story continues.

While Bantawa is clearly verb-final, the order of the other constituents is not rigidly determined by syntax, but rather influenced by pragmatic considerations. Adjuncts and modifiers generally precede the nominal verbal arguments, as shown in the examples above: *araŋ ni iktet haŋhonʔo tenda* 'Once, in a village in some country...' (2) or *hiŋyaŋsa yuŋyaŋsa mikʰaraŋahida* 'While they were living easily that way...' (3). In transitive sentences, the agent tends to precede the patient; however, this tendency is not very strong and counterexamples are found easily. The topic of the sentence is often, but not obligatorily, marked with the clitic topic marker <-na> (TOP). Particularly if the patient precedes the agent, it is marked with the topicalizer

Nominals   No noun is a count noun in Bantawa; in order to form a quantified noun phrase, a prenominal qualifier is required. Qualifiers are specific to the type of noun. Different qualifiers are used for inanimate nouns, human nouns or nouns that represent objects of specific shapes. Sentence (2) shows two examples: *ik-tet haŋhon* one-qual country 'one country' or *ik-cʰa kʰokpa* one-qual old.man 'an old man'.

Nominal morphology consists of prefixed possessive markers and case suffixes, including locational or functional suffixes. Case suffixes may be stacked, resulting in reification (cf. §3.5). The genitive case may combine with a nominal phrase to form a postpositional expression that expresses a complex nominal relationship (cf. §3.3.2). Nouns can also be formed by compounding; two types of noun compounding are discussed in §3.1.3.

Verbs   In Bantawa, finite verbs are conjugated to reflect and agree with the participants in a verbal situation. Bantawa has a very rich verbal morphology, with up to 10 slots for agreement inflection. The three grammatical numbers that can find expression in verbal agreement are the singular, the dual and the plural. The first,

second and third persons are distinguished in Bantawa verbal flection; in the non-singular, the first person inclusive and exclusive have separate agreement suffixes. There is a clear distinction between the transitive and intransitive conjugation of verbs. Transitively conjugated verbs express a transitive verbal situation. The intransitive verb inflection pattern is used for intransitive predicates and transitive predicates expressing little or no effect on the patient, which we shall call the antipassive conjugation of verbs, cf. §6.2.

The transitive finite verbs show agreement with both patient and agent, according to a split-ergative pattern. As a pattern, the suffixes on transitively conjugated verbs show person agreement with the highest ordered participant first, i.e. the first or second person participants, and show number agreement with the higher-numbered participants. In §4.4, the verb affixes are described in a classical slot analysis. While a slot morphology approach may suffice to describe simple facts of morpheme ordering, some non-linear phenomena such as the copying of phonetic material in simplex finite verb morphology are perhaps not captured easily in terms of slots and ordering, cf. §4.5.2.

Complex predicates   Bantawa has many strategies for forming complex verbal predicates. Apart from lexically causative verbs, there are some processes to form causative predicates morphologically. Similarly there are processes to form reflexive and reciprocal predicates. A very eye-catching feature of Bantawa is the very productive formation of complex verbal predicates that contain two or more similarly inflected verbs in a sequence, such as shown above in (3): *ims-a-lis-a* he-slept-he-became 'he became bedridden'. Even compared to other Kiranti languages, Bantawa shows very prolific verbal compounding. The progressive paradigms are a grammaticalised form of this type of complex verbs. Only verbs with formally parallel morphological suffixation can be compounded in this way. Quite a few pages of this grammar have been spent to describe the morphological formation of this type of non-root compounding. In the chapter on complex predicates, §7.2, the ordering of affixes in slots is put to use to give an adequate description of the formation of this type of complex verb. In contrast with simple, single-root verbs, serial verbs of this type express direction, aspect and other semantic nuances.

Clause embedding and nominalisation   Bantawa has essentially two strategies to combine two clauses. One clause combining strategy involves the embedding of a non-finite clause in a matrix clause, cf. §5.1. Verb participants may be shared in complex clauses formed according to this pattern, and often obligatorily so. An example of this pattern is shown in example (3), *hiŋyaŋsa yuŋyaŋsa mikʰaraŋ* 'while they were living easily', where the simultaneous converb suffix <-sa> (SIM) marks the non-finite verb forms that are sub-predicates of the entire clause.

The same sentence also demonstrates the other pattern: *mikʰaraŋ-hida ... sarima-ʔadʰiru-ki ... ims-a-ʔo* 'while they were going ... after a disease struck him ... he lay down.' The other major pattern used to combine multiple clauses is that of subordination by clause-final suffixes such as the phrasal simultaneous <-hida> (SIMP) and the

sequential suffix <-ki> (SEQ). These sentence-final suffixes correspond to European sentence-initial subordinating coordinators such as 'while' and 'after'.

Nominalisation   Bantawa has a nominalising suffix <-ʔo> (NOM) that has many functions in the language. Suffixed to and in between nominal phrases, the nominaliser functionally resembles a genitive. This general nominalizer can, however, affix to phrases of any type, forming an adnominal modifier phrase to any nominal phrase that may follow. The general nominaliser <-ʔo> is also affixed to finite clauses, marking a relative clause that may be subordinated to nouns. However, the nominaliser occurs independently on finite phrases as well, without further dependent context. In this position, the nominaliser indicates a factitive, background or assertive status of the sentence. In sum, this marker functions as a general nominaliser and subordinator, marking constituents for a specific grammatical role. On the other hand, the general nominaliser functions in 'stand-alone' position and can be intentionally added to sentences as an epistemic category, and as an information structuring device. The Bantawa nominaliser shares many features with similar nominalising markers in related languages in the Himalayas, and thus reflects an areal typological feature (van Driem 1993a, Bickel 1999, Watters 2008).

Figure 1.5: On the verandah