Chapter 3
Methodology

3.0 Introduction

Three distinct research methods were employed in this study. Two questionnaires, personal observations, and informal interviews were used among the Nepalis in Chiang Mai. These three methods elicited sufficient data to propose an answer to the research questions detailed in this study. The researcher used a stratified sample, based on gender and age.

During the data collection phase, the information gathered was stored and tabulated in Microsoft Excel. A chi-squared test was employed to measure the statistical significance of the responses for several of the questions, but the prevalent method for analyzing the data was descriptive statistics.

3.1 Questionnaire design

Questionnaires are a direct method for gathering data. According to Fasold (1984:149),

> The questionnaire represents a direct method of research in which subjects respond to direct questions regarding their behavior, attitudes, and opinions as opposed to indirect methods which are designed to keep subjects from knowing they are being investigated.

Two questionnaires were developed and pilot-tested. The first, titled The Screening Questionnaire was employed to assess if there were enough Nepalis in Chiang Mai to have a viable study. It can be found in Appendix 2. The Sociolinguistic Questionnaire was the main tool used in this research, and is located in Appendix 3. The Sociolinguistic Questionnaire (SLQ) included a mix of open-ended questions and quantifiable questions. Each question in the SLQ was selected to answer one or more of the research questions detailed in chapter 1. For example, Research Question 1 asks: What languages are being used in key domains by Nepalis in Chiang Mai?

The following questions for the SLQ were chosen to answer that research question:

What languages do you speak...

42. ... *with your parents?*

43. *...with your grandparents?*

44. *...with your siblings?*

45. *(if married) ...with your spouse?*

46. *(if have children) ...with your children?*

47. *(if old and have children)...with your grandchildren?*

48. *...for religious discussions at the temple?*

49. *.....to sing songs?*

50. *...to pray?*

51. *Do you ever speak a "bholi" or caste language?*

53. *What languages do Burmese-Nepali children in Chiang Mai speak first?*

54. *What language do they speak best?*

55. *What languages can Burmese-Nepali children speak before they start going to school?*

56. *What languages do Burmese-Nepali children speak after they start school?*

57. *What language do Burmese-Nepali children in Chiang Mai speak when they play with other Nepali children?*

Accordingly, the remaining questions on the SLQ are meant to answer each of the other research questions.

All the questions from the SLQ can be found in Appendix 3. The SLQ questions were selected from the researcher's previous surveys in India, over a four year period. This research also employed questions developed by other linguists working in South Asia (Kilgo Boehm 1997; Kelsall & Kilgo 1994; Varenkamp 1996). The researcher examined the questions used by the other linguists and matched the most appropriate questionnaire questions to her research questions, in order to answer her research questions effectively.

The questions of the current survey were written in Nepali and English. Nepali was the language of elicitation and response. The researcher was sufficiently fluent in Nepali to work without a translator for the interviews, yet a Nepali friend helped develop the questionnaire, in order to make the questions sound natural.

The SLQ was pilot tested with four Nepalis, each representing the stratified sample: old male, young male, old female, young female. Some of the questions were eliminated or reworded after the pilot test. The final SLQ contained 84 questions and took approximately 45 minutes to administer. The researcher read the questions in

Nepali and wrote down the responses in English on an answer sheet. The answers were translated on the spot and recorded in English. The 84 questions included the informants' background information, such as: age, name, mother tongue, residence, marital status, parents' mother tongue, occupation, and caste. This information was helpful in tracking any sociolinguistic trends based on these factors.

3.2 Administration of the sociolinguistic questionnaire

The SLQ was administered to 50 people. Each person was interviewed in Chiang Mai, his or her place of residence. The research was conducted in markets, tailor shops, restaurants, and private homes. The subjects were selected based on a sampling frame (see Table 2). Age and gender were the categories used. These categories proved relevant to language maintenance issues when this researcher conducted studies in India. Age and gender can be associated with language maintenance, shift, and language attitudes (Blair 1990). Within each category, all willing subjects were tested.

Table 2. Subject demographics

Question	n=	Male	%	Female	%
Gender	50	30	60%	20	40%
		Young (18-29)		Old (30+)	
Age	50	26	52%	24	48%

Nepalis were generous with their time, and every person approached was willing to participate in the study.

Chiang Mai was chosen as the site of this study for three reasons. The researcher previously lived in Nepal, and was intrigued by the number of Nepalis she met upon moving to Chiang Mai. Additionally, no previous known research on this community has been conducted in Chiang Mai. Finally, the fact that this is a people group which has maintained their mother tongue in two different countries (Myanmar and Thailand) and over multiple generations made it an interesting focus for research. However, there are large numbers of Nepalis living in Bangkok and Phuket. Further research in those locations could prove fruitful, but this study was limited by time constraints.

3.3 Observations and informal interviews

Observation is an indirect method of gathering sociolinguistic information. When the researcher was not administering questionnaires, she listened in the marketplace, and in Nepali neighborhoods to the languages Nepalis were using with each other,

and with their parents, friends, and children. She observed them while they ordered food in restaurants, and while they talked on cell phones. Many times they did not remark that she was there. Labov first applied this concept to the sociolinguistic research phenomenon, stating, "To obtain the data most important for linguistic theory, we have to observe how people speak when they are not being observed"(1972:113).

The researcher noted non-linguistic information as well: the types of idols Nepalis kept in their homes, the people they shared food with, and any indicators of Nepali culture or Hinduism, such as wearing a Brahmin string or pierced nose.

Informal interviews were conducted during the research process. If a subject had a topic he was interested in elaborating on, the researcher made time for these conversations, often asking questions about religious practices, films, music, dances, festivals, courtship rituals, arranged marriages, etc. These conversations were often filled with humor and good will, yet lent insight into how Nepalis view themselves in this society.

3.4 Methods of analysis

After recording the responses, the data was stored in Microsoft Excel ©[1]. The percentages of responses were calculated using a formula in Excel. Answers to follow up questions were entered at the end of each answer sheet. The answer sheets were checked twice to avoid data entry errors. Where there was significant variation in responses, the responses and statistical significance were analyzed using a chi-squared test.

3.5 Methodology evaluation

This study relied on self-reported data. It is believed that the subjects answered the questions truthfully, to the best of their ability. Since the subjects of this study had a wide range of education levels, the questionnaires were administered orally, to avoid a bias based on literacy skills. People were not paid for answering the questionnaire. However, a small gift of coffee and cookies was given to participants. Each subject was aware that his or her answers would be used for this sociolinguistic study and gave verbal consent.

There were struggles in this study when asking questionnaires. The questionnaires were designed to have some open questions, which can give the researcher a lot of

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[1] Microsoft Excel 2007

information but are hard to quantify. Some Nepalis enjoyed answering the open questions and talked about language issues for hours. It was then difficult to steer them toward the closed questions. Closed questions are necessary to balance the open questions, providing quantifiable data, and are easier to record. Some subjects appeared bored when answering the closed questions, especially those where their answers were all the same.

Data which is self-reported must be balanced with observation. Observing which language Nepalis choose in different domains was one way the researcher sought to solidify or challenge the data gathered from the questionnaires. Additionally, the researcher conducted participant observation in three ways:

1) She had a dress made by a Nepali tailor.

2) She ate many lunches at a Nepali restaurant.

3) She shopped at a market where there were several Nepali vendors.

Locating female subjects was difficult in this research. Apparently more men than women come to Chiang Mai from Myanmar, seeking employment. Also, when asked if wives could be interviewed, some married men claimed that their wives were busy with infants and that they lived too far away. Unfortunately, only 20 female subjects were interviewed for this study, whereas 30 men were interviewed. However, the answers based on gender did not seem to vary as widely as the answers based on the ages of the subjects.