

Language Documentation and Description

ISSN 2756-1224

This article appears in: *Language Documentation and Description, vol 13*. Editor: Peter K. Austin

Language Contexts: Syuba, also known as Kagate (Nepal)

LAUREN GAWNE

Cite this article: Lauren Gawne (2017). Language Contexts: Syuba, also known as Kagate (Nepal). In Peter K. Austin (ed.) *Language Documentation and Description, vol 13*. London: EL Publishing. pp. 65-93

Link to this article: <http://www.elpublishing.org/PID/147>

This electronic version first published: June 2017



This article is published under a Creative Commons License CC-BY-NC (Attribution-NonCommercial). The licence permits users to use, reproduce, disseminate or display the article provided that the author is attributed as the original creator and that the reuse is restricted to non-commercial purposes i.e. research or educational use. See <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

EL Publishing

For more EL Publishing articles and services:

Website:	http://www.elpublishing.org
Terms of use:	http://www.elpublishing.org/terms
Submissions:	http://www.elpublishing.org/submissions

Language Contexts: Syuba, also known as Kagate (Nepal)

Lauren Gawne

Department of Linguistics, SOAS University of London

Language Name: Syuba

Language Family: Central Bodic, Tibeto-Burman

ISO 639-3 Code: SWY

Glottolog Code: kaga1252

Population: ~1500 (Mitchell & Eichentopf 2013)

Location: 27.349813, 86.071987

Vitality rating: EGIDS 6a (Mitchell & Eichentopf 2013: 8)

Syuba is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Central Bodic group spoken in the Ramechhap district of Nepal, and has long been known by the exonym *Kagate*. The speaker population is around 1,500 people, and the language is in use across all age groups in daily life. *Syuba* is the name for both the language and the community, and some speakers are also taking it as part of their name, either officially or unofficially. Both the language and community have been known in government records and the linguistic literature as *Kagate*, and this name is still in use in the community, however growing interest in representation as a distinct ethnic minority in Nepal has seen an increased desire among speakers to be known by the endonym *Syuba*.

Syuba is part of the larger group of Yolmo¹ dialects, and is mutually intelligible with the majority of them, however many *Syuba* speakers consider their variety to be a separate language. The largest Yolmo population is spread through the Melamchi and Helambu Valleys north of Kathmandu (see Figures 1, 2 below). Throughout this paper, I refer to Melamchi Valley Yolmo, as this is the region where the language has been documented (Hari & Lama 2004; Hari 2010), although populations exist outside of the specific confines of the valley. From somewhere in this area historically at least three large populations migrated and settled in other areas of Nepal. One of these was the *Syuba*, who settled in Ramechhap. There are also populations in Lamjung and Ilam. They refer to their language as Lamjung Yolmo and Ilam Yolmo

¹ Yolmo is also known as Helambu Sherpa, and is also spelled Yohlmo, Hyolmo or Yholmo, with the ‘h’ included to represent the low tone on the word. Throughout this paper I use acute accents to mark high tone and grave accents to mark low tone on *Syuba* words.

respectively, although there are some complexities which I discuss in Section 6 below. The Yolmo varieties are most closely related to Kyirong, and sit within a larger group of Central Tibetan languages that also includes Standard Tibetan (see Section 3 below for further discussion). The history of migration and language name preferences for the groups are discussed in detail in this paper as they are integral to understanding the relationship between the varieties.

This paper provides an overview of the Syuba language and the community of Syuba speakers. I begin by tracing the history of Syuba speakers (Section 2), focusing on their migration away from the Melamchi Valley. I then look at the relationship of Syuba to Yolmo and other Tibetic varieties (Section 3) as well as the current state of Syuba language use (Section 4). I then outline the contemporary linguistic neighbourhood of the Syuba in Ramechhap (Section 5). This is followed by a discussion of the use of the names Syuba and Kagate by this community (Section 6) and an overview of key literature on Syuba (Section 7). This is followed by a discussion of social features that illustrate the relationship between the Syuba community and other Yolmo groups, or are relevant to ongoing language maintenance (Section 8).

I first met a small number of Syuba speakers in 2009, and stayed in touch while working on the documentation of the Lamjung variety of Yolmo (Gawne, 2016a). Since 2013 I have been working with the Syuba community to document use of their language in stories, songs and oral history (Gawne 2015). Materials mentioned in this article are archived with Paradisec² and ELAR,³ and are available as open access to registered users. Each item will be referenced with a short code. Searching for this code in the ELAR or Paradisec archive will locate the relevant item. For example, the Crow story is SUY1-140128-02. Searching for this code will take readers to the page with the video and audio recordings, and an interlinearised ELAN⁴ transcription, along with additional metadata about the recording and participating speakers. ELAN transcriptions and translations into Nepali and/or English are being added to the archives as they are completed, and not all materials are transcribed yet. I do not use pseudonyms in this paper when referring to recordings, because all recordings are publically accessible and include people's names. Those who have contributed to the documentation project are happy to be identified as speakers of their language.

² <http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SUY1> [accessed 2016-09-01].

³ <http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0388> [accessed 2016-09-01].

⁴ <http://tla.mpi.nl/tools/tla-tools/elan/> [accessed 2016-09-01].

2. History

An account of the history of Syuba is important for understanding the relationship between Syuba and other Yolmo varieties. According to oral history accounts, the Syuba have lived in the district of Ramechhap for one to two centuries. Prior to that they lived in the Melamchi Valley area,⁵ which is mostly populated by Yolmo villages on the upper slopes. Syuba speakers refer to the *Pawa Kohmba* area (the villages around the *gompa*, or Tibetan Buddhist monastery, of Pawa) as their original home village (Hari 2010: 1), and some people have also mentioned *Pa Yang* as another village in Melamchi area that their families migrated from. This history is based on narratives from Syuba people I interviewed, although it is possible that some documentary evidence exists either in the Melamchi Valley records, or the records of the local *gompa* in Ramechhap. The history told to me matches that attested in Hari & Höhlig (1976: 1), who write that at the time of their work with the Syuba in the early 1970s the community's self-reported history was that they migrated four generations ago as there were food shortages in the Melamchi Valley and few opportunities for the community members to support themselves. Although the events match, the timespan of the settlement may have been longer than the four generations they reported at the time. The *gompa* in Nobra, established after the arrival of a Yolmo/Syuba speaking population community, has a founding date of 1866BS (1809CE).⁶

Syuba speakers say that their forefathers purchased uncultivated land high in the Ramechhap hills from local *Brahmin*⁷ and *Sunwar*,⁸ who still farm the lower valley areas. Some of the villages undertook extensive logging to raise

⁵ The Yolmo villages spread across the Nepali administrative districts of Melamchi, Helambu and Rasuwa. In this section I refer specifically to the Melamchi area from which the Kagate migrated. This is near where Anne Mari Hari worked for many years (see Hari & Lama 2004; Hari 2010). Hari suggested that I refer to the specific variety that she worked on as 'Melamchi Valley Yolmo', as it differs somewhat from the 'Helambu Valley' variety spoken further north (p.c. 2010-04-28). In previous research I have referred to these combined varieties as 'Melamchi and Helambu Valley Yolmo' but for ease of reading here I refer to 'Melamchi Valley Yolmo' as this is the variety that has been documented.

⁶ In SUY1-160428-02 and SUY1-160428-03 Ringjin Lama discusses the history of the Nobra *gompa* (see <http://catalog.paradisec.org.au/collections/SUY1/items/160428> [accessed 2016-09-01]).

⁷ Brahmin are a Hindu 'high caste', although many in Ramechhap are farmers like their Sunwar and Syuba neighbours. There are also local Chetri, who are also a Hindu caste, but do not share the same high status as Brahmin.

⁸ Sunwar is a Tibeto-Burman language of the Kiranti branch, and (ISO 639-3 *suz* Glottocode *sunw1242*) and is mutually unintelligible with Syuba. Local Sunwar are Hindu.

money to build houses, and to clear land for agriculture. Subsistence agriculture and temporary labouring outside of the village have formed the basis of Syuba life in Ramechhap. For many, Ramechhap was not the end of the migration path, and many people living in the area have family residing in India, the UK or larger urban centers of Nepal.

The Syuba of Ramechhap were not the only group to migrate away from the Melamchi Valley area. At the same time the Syuba settled in Ramechhap, a group travelled further east to Ilam, just within Nepal's border with India (Thokar 2009), and there are further populations of speakers on the other side of the border in Darjeeling as well. A third group migrated west to Lamjung, reportedly around a century ago (Gawne 2013). It is possible that other groups have migrated away from the Melamchi Valley area as well, but the populations in Lamjung, Ilam and Ramechhap are notable for their size, maintenance of language and similar timeframe of migration (the linguistic relationship between these varieties is discussed in Section 3). All three groups have had little contact with each other and the main population in the Melamchi Valley area until recently. There are reports of sizable populations of Yolmo in Darjeeling, India, although these groups appear to have more ongoing contact with the main Yolmo community.

The exonym *Kagate* means 'papermaker' in Nepali, as papermaking was a major occupation for Syuba speakers of Ramechhap. Community members I spoke with suggested that they brought those skills with them to Ramechhap and continued to make paper up until living memory, although they no longer make paper today. They cite a number of reasons for this, including lack of market, a change in government regulation of forestry, and overuse the specific papermaking tree leading to depletion in the area. Lamjung Yolmo speakers also recall papermaking being a local occupation, while older Ilam Yolmo speakers recall their language being called *Kagate*, however there is no local memory of papermaking. It is possible that all three groups were already producing paper before migrating away from the Melamchi Valley area, hence this shared history.

The *Linguistic Survey of India* (Grierson 1909/1966) includes discussion of Syuba (given as *Kagate*), and provides one of the few early sources on any of the Tibet-Burmans language of Nepal's hills. The survey has a wordlist and text (*The Prodigal Son*) in Syuba, collected in Darjeeling. The Syuba of Ramechhap are proud that their language was recognised over a century ago. This also formed part of SIL's motivation to document the variety in the 1970s, with missionaries spending several years with the community (Höhlig & Hari 1976; Höhlig 1978).

As can be seen from the map in Figure 1, the groups who migrated away from the Melamchi Valley spread out across different parts of Nepal, all of which are at lower altitudes than the original villages in the Melamchi valley. While they have all maintained Yolmo language use, they have maintained different nomenclature and different aspects of traditional cultural practices. I discuss the cross-group variation in more detail in Gawne (2016b) and discuss features of Syuba daily life in Section 9.

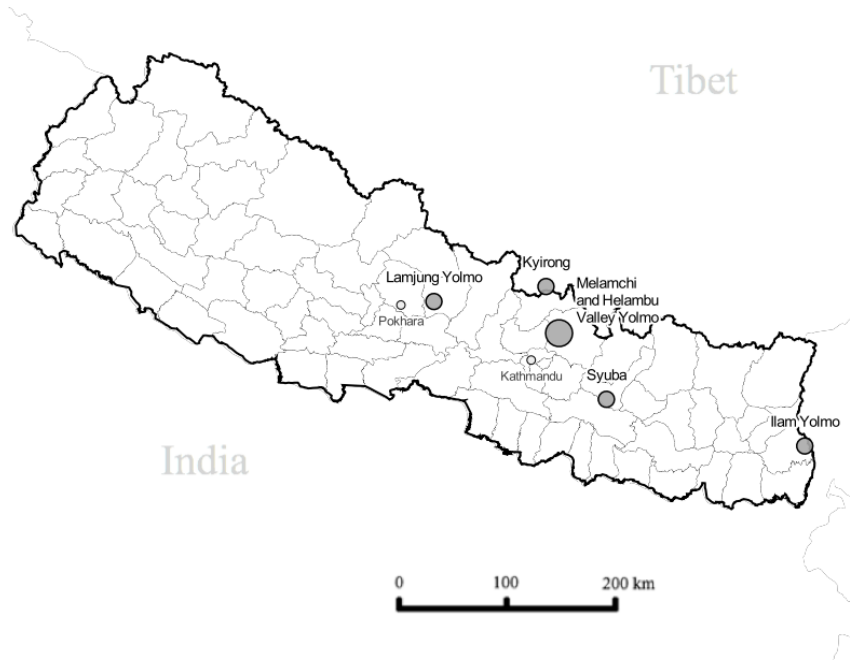


Figure 1. A map of Nepal with the different Yolmo varieties marked (© Lauren Gawne).

I have also included Kyirong on the map. The ancestors of current Yolmo speakers are generally thought to have taken up residence in the area when male Lamas migrated from the Kyirong area around 400 years ago to build monasteries in the valleys (Clarke 1980s, 1980b). I discuss the linguistic relationship between Kyirong and Yolmo in Section 3.

Höhlig & Hari (1976: 1) reported that the Syuba population was approximately 1,000 people. The most recent estimation of the number of Syuba speakers puts the total at about 1,500 people (Mitchell & Eichentopf 2013). This is based on discussions with village leaders and observation. Only 99 people put Kagate as their ethnic identity in the 2011 census (see Mitchell & Eichentopf 2013: 3), and 99 people put Kagate as their mother tongue, with no record of the use of Syuba. This is an increase from the 2001 census, where 10 people listed Kagate as their mother tongue and there is no record of Kagate in the question on ethnic identity. Earlier census data do not distinguish Kagate or Yolmo from ‘others (hill)’ and ‘others (mountain)’. These low numbers illustrate the

fact that formal census tools are not particularly useful for small languages of Nepal, where speakers learn to interact with government through aligning with a more well-known ethnic group (see Section 5 for more on this). There were also around 1,000 speakers of Yolmo living in Lamjung two generations ago, but this number is now greatly reduced, with fewer than 500 speakers still living in the villages. Ilam Yolmo speaker numbers are not known, but speakers report of a sizable population similar to that in Ramechhap.

These migrant communities are small in comparison to the estimate of 10,000 Yolmo speakers in the Helambu and Melamchi areas, with Hari & Lama (2004: 703) suggesting that accounting for people living outside the Melamchi Valley area and the challenges of census taking in remote and isolated areas, there may even be as many as 50,000 speakers. The 2001 census gives the earliest data on Yolmo as a specific group. The census listed 3,986 Yolmo speakers and 579 people who listed Yolmo as their ethnic group, by the time of the 2011 census these numbers were up to 10,176 mother tongue speakers of Yolmo and 10,752 people who identified Yolmo as their ethnic identity.

Syuba in Ramechhap live exclusively in Syuba-speaking villages. Figure 2 is a map of Syuba villages that I have visited in my fieldwork to date. These villages form small social clusters, e.g. Phedi as the largest village acting as a local centre and school for Dhungare, Kosmere and Ningale, While students from Phake and Banauti attend primary school in Mulkarka. Belauri is the closest market village, and further on from there is Dobi where buses to Kathmandu depart. All of these villages are on the east-facing side of the slope, except Nobra, which is just over the crest of the hill on west face. The lighter grey route from Belauri to Phedi, via Dhungare, is a road that is currently under construction. Local government funds were used to start the road-building in late 2015, but further work is needed to clear large boulders before tractors and jeeps can use the path. This will make it possible to bring food and supplies directly to Dhungare and Phedi, rather than carrying them up by hand.

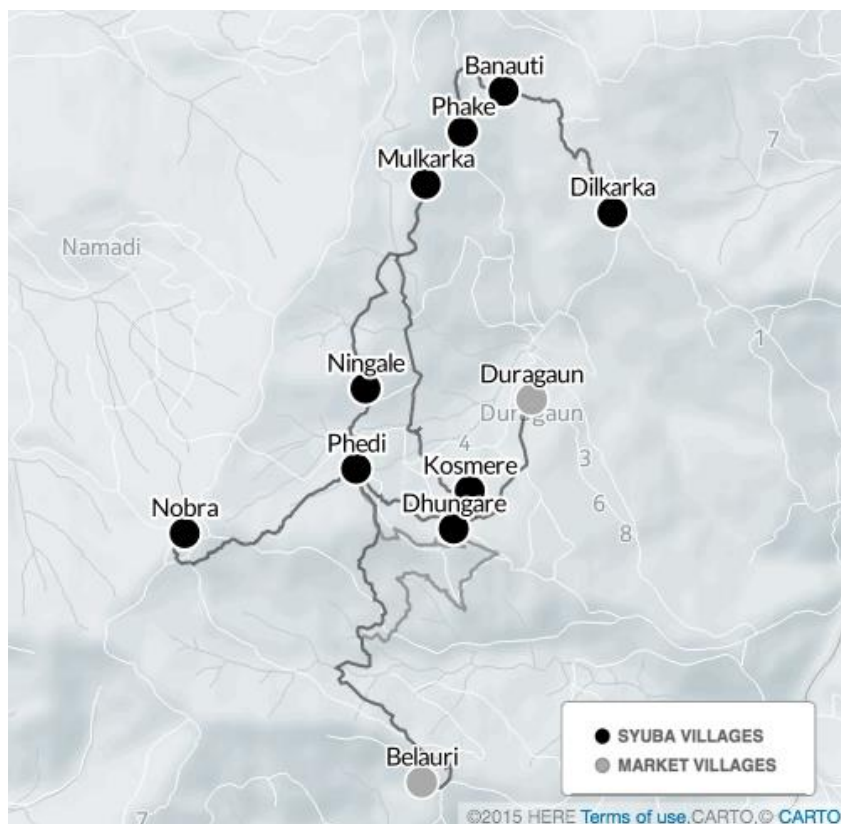


Figure 2. A map of some of the Syuba villages. Villages in grey are non-Syuba villages that have shops that Syuba speakers travel to (basemap © 2015 HERE, data © 2017 Lauren Gawne).

There are also a number of other Syuba villages beyond Nobra, near Namadi. People from the villages around Phedi see speakers from these other villages at weddings and other large social events. There is a small amount of linguistic variation between the group mapped here and the other group in the northwest. Phedi speakers claim that Dilkharka speech demonstrates some different intonation patterns to their own, however I am yet to work with any speakers from that area. Mitchell & Eichertopf (2013: 3) report that the people they spoke to indicate no difference in accent across Syuba, although their survey did not include speakers from that area.

Life in Ramechhap mainly focuses on subsistence agriculture, with crops of millet, wheat, potatoes and corn. As with other Yolmo groups, their fields are too high altitude for rice, but unlike the Melamchi Valley Yolmo they are

low enough to grow corn. Animals kept include buffalo, goats, pigs and chickens, as well as oxen. Although some people have told me that yaks were kept many years ago, there is no current practice of yak herding, such as that in the Melamchi Valley region (Bishop 1989, 1998). Up until about a decade ago Syuba villages in Ramechhap kept large flocks of sheep. According to people in Phedi there were over 2000 sheep grazing in the forest that belonged to that village.⁹ The Nepali government banned forest grazing, and there are fewer young men around to spend time as shepherds away from the villages. There are only a few sheep now kept, mostly out of sentimentality.

Syuba speakers have reported that the climate in their villages has changed in recent decades, and this has had an effect on agricultural cycles. Long snow-bound winters are no longer common, and longer warm periods mean that corn thrives with greater success than it once did. So drastic has the change been that some families are now able to sew a second cycle of corn, which is dried as additional grassy fodder for livestock. In SUY1-141022-03 Sangbu Syuba describes the winters of his youth, 20-30 years ago, when they would receive at least a meter of snow at winter, and the range and success of planted crops was much poorer and lean winters more common.

Syuba speakers are proud of their language, and its relationship to Yolmo and the wider Tibetan Buddhist community in Nepal and abroad. Nepal's population is predominantly Hindu (81.34%, Central Bureau of Statistics 2013), with the 9% that are Buddhists predominantly coming from Tibeto-Burman language-speaking communities in the hills and mountain. Although there has historically been little contact between the Syuba of Ramechhap and other Yolmo varieties, this is now changing. In recent years, the communities in Lamjung and Ramechhap have established ties with other Yolmo communities through the Yolmo Social Service Association (YSSA), which was formalised in 1998.¹⁰ The main unifying factor for these Yolmo groups is that they speak mutually-intelligible dialects, and have histories that situate their ancestors in the Melamchi Valley, so even though the Syuba from Ramechhap prefer a different name they still participate in larger Yolmo events. The increase in cross-group events and meetings, particularly those organised by the YSSA, indicates there are positive relationships being built. Individuals are also using social media to connect in ways that were previously not possible. The recently built Yolmo *gompa* in Kathmandu is

⁹ For more on Kagate sheep raising see Larkel Syuba's recollections of sheep herding SUY1-141010-02.

¹⁰ www.hyolmo.org.np [accessed 2016-09-01]. This website is not currently active, but has some historical pages cached through the Wayback Machine at The Internet Archive web.archive.org.

also central to this connection, serving as a meeting place in Kathmandu for the different Yolmo groups.

The Syuba have also started their own social organisation *Syuba Welfare Society Nepal*.¹¹ The Syuba are also interested in developing literacy materials in their own language and maintaining language use. Since 2013 the community have been working with SIL International and Nepali language NGOs¹² on orthography development, a Syuba-Nepali-English dictionary,¹³ and a website with recordings and information shared by Syuba speakers.¹⁴

Identification with a larger Yolmo identity is also seen in the adoption of traditional Yolmo clothing, which follow a style seen across Tibetan communities in Nepal, India and the larger Tibetan region. Particularly popular is the long, straight Tibetan *boko* dress worn by women, while men will often wear Tibetan silk shirts with their regular trousers. These outfits are usually worn for occasions such as Losar, or weddings. Identification as people of Tibetic culture in this community is still very much grounded in also being citizens of Nepal, for example people drink sweet milk *chia* rather than the salted butter tea traditionally found in Yolmo in the Melamchi Valley. With ease of access to market towns in recent decades many households now follow a somewhat typical ‘Nepali’ diet, consisting predominantly of *dāl bhat* (daal and rice), instead of millet meal, which is a traditional staple in many Nepali hill communities. I discuss the way that members of the Syuba community engage with both their Tibetan ethnicity and Nepali citizenship in Gawne (2016b).

3. Language family

Syuba is classified as being in the Central Bodish (also known as Central Tibetan) group of the Tibeto-Burman family, most often considered to be a branch of the larger Sino-Tibetan family. Grierson (1909/1966), Shafer (1966) and Voegelin & Voegelin (1977) all maintain this classification, as do Thurgood & LaPolla (2003: 9). Other languages frequently included in this group are Yolmo, Sherpa, Tibetan, Nyamkat and Jad. Tournadre (2014)

¹¹ स्युबा कल्याण समाज नेपाल syuba kalāñ samāj nepāl
www.syubawnsn.wordpress.com [accessed 2016-09-01].

¹² Orthography development was done through the Mother Tongue Centre Nepal (MTCN), and the dictionary through Himalayan Indigenous Society (HIS) Nepal.

¹³ Technically this is a translation wordlist, and not a monolingual Kagate dictionary. Members of the community refer to it as a dictionary, and hence so do I.

¹⁴ <http://www.syuba.org> [accessed 2017-03-06].

further breaks the group down, dividing the ‘Central section’ languages such as the variety spoken in Lhasa from languages of the ‘South-Western section’, which include Syuba and Yolmo as well as Kyirong, Tsum, Nubri and other varieties.

As mentioned in Section 2, Syuba is one of the Yolmo dialects, sharing a common history that only diverged in recent centuries. Gawne (2010) offered a small-scale lexical survey of Melamchi Valley Yolmo, Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba. Syuba and Lamjung Yolmo have a higher lexical affinity with each other than with the main Yolmo language, which may lend weight to a concurrent migration, or migration away from the same area. Ongoing documentation of these Yolmo varieties indicates that there are features that Syuba has in common with the Lamjung variety that distinguish the two from the variety found in the Melamchi Valley area. Lamjung Yolmo and Syuba lack verb stem alternations and have a greatly reduced honorific vocabulary (also noted by Hari 2010 for Syuba). This is not to say that Syuba and Lamjung Yolmo are entirely the same. They have different forms of the plural (=kya in Syuba, =ya in Lamjung and Melamchi Yolmo) and have taken different forms of the basic egophoric copula (*in*ge in Syuba, *yimba* in Lamjung Yolmo), amongst other differences. *yimba* is attested in Melamchi Valley Yolmo as alternatives for the form *yin*, as is *yin-gen* (the most likely source of Syuba *in*ge) (Hari 2010: 49), indicating that this is a change over time to preference for an alternative rather than innovation of form.

Syuba is mutually intelligible with Yolmo. I have observed Syuba speakers in conversation with Yolmo speakers from Lamjung and Ilam, and people have told me they are able to communicate with Yolmo speakers from the Melamchi area. Although communication is possible, Syuba people will often overstate the differences between their variety and others. In conversation, Sangbu Syuba told me that Syuba was at best ‘80 percent’ the same as Lamjung Yolmo, indicating a greater focus on differences as part of a desire to maintain a separate identity. Syuba speakers do note that they find it easier to converse with speakers from the lower Melamchi Valley villages of Yolmo speakers, from places such as Sermathang, rather than those further north in the Helambu Valley area.¹⁵ Further variation in the Yolmo varieties spoken around the Melamchi Valley area and of the variety spoken even further north in the Langtang valley needs to be done to ascertain these claims.

The affinity between Yolmo and Syuba is stronger than with other Tibeto-Burman languages identified as part of the same branch of the family. In a survey by Hari (2010: 3), Yolmo has a lexical similarity of 65% with Standard

¹⁵ When I asked Sangbu Syuba how they were different he said the people in the north ‘are comparable with Tibetan’ compared to the Yolmo in the lower areas and Syuba (originally in Nepali: *Tibetan saṅga milēkō cha*).

Tibetan, 61% with Sherpa, and 89% lexical similarity with Kyirong. These numbers indicate that Syuba and Yolmo are most closely related to Kyirong, followed by other members of the Central Tibetan group, including Standard Tibetan and Sherpa.

There are a number of features that make Yolmo and Syuba immediately distinct from other varieties, including Kyirong. They share the loss of the front rounded vowels /y/ (high close), /ø/ (mid-close), as well as the front unrounded vowel /ɛ/ (mid-open) that is found in Kyirong (see Hedlin 2011: 32; Gawne 2013). Yolmo and Syuba also only have two level tones (Teo et al. 2015), while Huber (2005) posits three for Kyirong.

Tournadre's (2005, 2014) classification of Tibetic languages¹⁶ includes the sub-grouping of Kyirong-Kagate. While there is no argument that Yolmo, Syuba and Kyirong are sufficiently closely related to be included in a single group, the choice of group name is unfortunate. The choice of 'Kagate' over 'Yolmo' in the group name clearly reflects the greater awareness of Syuba over Yolmo in the linguistic literature of the 20th century. The name 'Kyirong-Kagate' however, is problematic for a number of reasons. Firstly, there are many more Yolmo speakers (at least 10,000) than Syuba speakers (~1,500). Secondly, more individual groups of speakers identify as Yolmo, with those in Lamjung and Ramechhap as well as the Melamchi Valley and other areas where Yolmo is spoken. Thirdly, the name 'Kyirong-Yolmo' more accurately reflects the history of migration waves south from the Tibetan area. Yolmo is distinct from Kyirong in a number of ways, but the differences between Yolmo and Syuba are fewer. Finally, the use of the name 'Kagate' is a culturally sensitive issue (see Section 6). Lamjung and Ilam Yolmo speakers find this term pejorative. The name 'Kyirong-Yolmo' would also solve the more general problem of Kagate referring to an occupation in Nepal, and thus meaning that other peoples who may be named 'Kagate' will not be inadvertently grouped with Yolmo speakers, even if they speak a completely different language. Finally, as Syuba speakers are abandoning the exonym Kagate, in favour of the endonym Syuba, that community decision should be reflected in the family category name.

From a linguistic perspective, Syuba can be treated as a dialect of Yolmo, however the beliefs of the speakers that their dialect is separate, and recognition as such in the ISO 639-3 list have helped in the shaping of their unique identity as Syuba rather than Yolmo.

¹⁶ Those languages that descend from Old Tibetan.

4. Language use and attitudes

4.1 Language use

Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013) report strong intergenerational transfer to younger speakers. Using a survey of Syuba speakers and the Expanded Graded Intergenerational Disruption Scale (EGIDS) (Lewis & Simons 2010), they give the language a rating of 6a. This classification is used for languages with strong oral transmission across all generations in the home, but no sustained literacy. I would agree that this assessment realistically reflects the state of Syuba use today.

Syuba is still the language of daily communication in the household, and within the village. Mitchell & Eichentopf report that 96% of Syuba people living in the village use Syuba with their children (2013:10), and many children speak exclusively Syuba before attending school around five years of age. Interactions with the school, government, and people outside the community are in Nepali. It would appear that the Syuba have been functionally bilingual in Nepali at least since arriving in the Ramechhap district, with all Syuba being able to at least carry out basic conversations in Nepali. With this level of bilingualism it is perhaps unsurprising that codeswitching or borrowing is not uncommon. Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013: 12) report that only 12% of the Syuba who they interviewed reported that they ‘never’ codeswitch, while 78% reported ‘a little’, 8% ‘some’ and 2% ‘a lot’. Now that we have developed a corpus of Syuba it will be possible to quantify the amount of codeswitching that occurs. While speakers codeswitch in recordings, when it comes to producing transcriptions of these recordings there is a preference to replace Nepali borrowings with Syuba words and constructions in written outputs, indicating that while it is a common strategy for daily interaction, there is still a preference for ‘unmixed’ language as an ideal form.

Individual Syuba people may speak other languages; it is now common to send children to English-medium schools, and adults who travel overseas for work may acquire languages where they are employed. Some speakers also may know small amounts of languages from neighbouring villages in Ramechhap, such as Sunwar, which I discuss in Section 5. Some men in the Syuba community also learn to read Written Tibetan to allow them to practice as Buddhist Lamas.

Historically, there has been a very low rate of literacy for Syuba speakers. Most children in the Syuba villages attend school until at least the fifth year, with those who live in urban centres or abroad having easier access to higher levels of education. Schooling is conducted in Nepali, and most Syuba have some degree of literacy using the Devanagari alphabet. Schooling also includes some English language teaching, and introduction to the Roman

alphabet. Historically the only pathway to literacy was for Buddhist Lamas, who were trained to read the Ucen (Tibetan) script.

Syuba speakers are interested in developing literacy materials in their own language and maintaining language use. Since 2013 the community has been working with SIL International and partner NGOs on language development projects. This has included language documentation and orthography development through SIL Nepal and the Mother Tongue Centre Nepal (MTCN) in 2013-2014, as well as publication of a Syuba-Nepali-English dictionary¹⁷ through SIL Nepal and Himalayan Indigenous Society (HIS) Nepal in 2014. These activities involved quite large-scale participation, with at least 40 Syuba speakers attending the 10 day dictionary workshop based on the Rapid Words methodology.¹⁸ In that workshop 12,608 words were collected, resulting in a dictionary with 3,723 unique entries.¹⁹ The dictionary was published in 2016 and is also available online.²⁰

The group consensus favours an orthography that is a slightly modified Devanagari script, as this is the most accessible to the majority of speakers. The most readily noticed difference with standard Nepali Devanagari conventions is the use of a colon to mark low tone. SIL Nepal have developed a version of their Annapurna font for Devanagari which includes this tone marker.²¹ Although the consensus decision has been to use a Devanagari-based orthography, this decision was not unanimous. Some community members felt that the Ucen script was better for Syuba, as it reflected their Tibetan Buddhist heritage. How the Devanagari orthography is adopted, and whether speakers will begin to use the language in the written medium as well as speech remains to be seen. In my work, the community has asked for the production of picture books and other materials to complement the dictionary being written. At the schools in villages like Phedi where the students are all Syuba speakers, there is some possibility for introducing extracurricular Syuba education.

Beyond the use of Syuba in daily life, there are some specific genres of language use that are worth mentioning. The analysis of the grammar of the

¹⁷ Technically this is a translation wordlist, and not a monolingual Kagate dictionary. The community refers to it as a dictionary, and hence so do I.

¹⁸ The Syuba community and colleagues at SIL Nepal kindly allowed me to attend the dictionary workshop in December 2014. For more information on Rapid Words see www.sil.org/dictionaries-lexicography/rapid-word-collection-methodology [accessed 2017-03-06].

¹⁹ www.rapidwords.net/report/syuba [accessed 2017-03-06].

²⁰ www.syuba.webonary.org/?lang=en [accessed 2017-03-06].

²¹ www-01.sil.org/asia/nepal/fontsandsoftware.html [accessed 2017-03-06].

language has only just begun, and only passing observation can be made regarding any change in linguistic register in these genres. There is a cultural history of story-telling in the language, with over a dozen traditional tales recorded to date.²² These stories most often involve animals who have identifiable personalities and behaviours. For example, in both the story of *Jackal and Pheasant* (SUY1-140126-15) and *Jackal and Horse* (SUY1-140128-03) the jackal is a mischievous trickster. These animal characters and their personalities are those common to Nepali folkstories, rather than Tibetan ones. For example, the story of *Jackal and Bear* (SUY1-140128-01) is told by other Nepali communities (see Lal 1991: 4-6), while folktales in Tibet usually involve animals such as the wolf and the rabbit (cf. Kajihama 2004, Shelton 1925/2009), which are not as common as characters in Nepal.²³ The stories do not always have to involve animals; in the story of the *Misunderstood Children* (SUY1-140126-09) the main characters are two children who speak in riddles.

Song is another genre where Syuba speakers are actively using their language. These songs are usually the creation of the singer, rather than traditional Yolmo songs. The themes of these songs reflect concerns of everyday life, including family, hardship and faith. Kabire sings of the hardship of life in Syuba villages (SUY1-140127-04), while Pasang Maya's songs are about love of family (SUY1-140128-05). Jit Bahadur sings of life as a village Shaman (SUY1-140127-05).

These songs are notable for the repetition of key verses, and the use of epenthetic vowels to regulate rhythm. Songs are not accompanied by instruments, but are usually sung for the entertainment of the performer and close associates. There is a historical memory of musical accompaniment for singing, including use of a *ṭāmyen* (a fiddle-like stringed instrument) or a *yāndzi* (an instrument resembling a dulcimer), however these instruments are no longer played. There are a small number of traditional songs that are still sung, such as those songs and dances that are often performed at weddings and other events (see SUY1-140129-03 for a performance of such a dance).

In recent years, Syuba speakers have had increasing access to digital media, thanks to more affordable smartphones and some limited mobile internet access in villages. While many speakers still prefer to use phones to make calls, literacy is being applied to text messaging and social media. Facebook is particularly popular at present, and rapid uptake of smartphones

²² Some of these have been audio and video recorded as part of my project on the documentation of Syuba, while others were audio recorded as part of the SIL Nepal and MTCN project to document the language in order to build an orthography. I am currently discussing with MTCN archiving these stories and other texts.

²³ Thanks also to Jackson Sun (p.c.) who also pointed out that many of the actors in the Syuba narratives differ to those he has observed north of the Himalaya.

is likely to continue. Syuba speakers will use Nepali on Facebook, but also Syuba. Some people, particularly those with access to computers, will use a Devanagari script, while those with phones have an ad hoc use of both Devanagari and Roman orthography. Adaptation of the Roman orthography for Syuba is currently notable for the use of ‘h’ to indicate low tone, which is also a common strategy when typing Syuba in Devanagari. Whether a particular orthography will stabilise in future remains to be seen, and the digital communication landscape for Syuba speakers, as for all Nepalīs, will likely change rapidly in coming decades.

4.2 Language attitudes

In their Sociolinguistic survey of Syuba Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013) report positive attitudes by speakers towards their language. Mitchell & Eichentopf used a variety of interview questions to assess speakers’ attitudes towards the language. In their survey 90% of participants (44/49) said that of the languages that they can speak, Syuba is the language that they love the most. When asked which languages in the Ramechhap district (including Nepali) were the most beneficial to speak 82% of respondents (40/49) reported that Syuba was the most beneficial.

I have also observed this positive attitude in my own work with Syuba speakers. When I first met several members of the Syuba community in 2009 they asked for help to document their language, which led to my ongoing work with them. The Syuba community have also set about their literacy development work with SIL with demonstrable enthusiasm, during both the language recording workshops and dictionary workshop SIL staff commented that the Syuba speakers had exceeded the amount of work that they had expected from them.

While speakers of Syuba acknowledge their language is related to Yolmo, they also see their language and culture as separate. This self-identification, unique among the groups that migrated away from the Melamchi Valley, may in part be an effect of contact with missionary linguists several decades ago (Höhlig & Hari 1976), which yielded an awareness of the distinctness of their language.

Speaker attitudes towards their language, and the development of the ‘Syuba’ identity in relation to the *larger* Yolmo group is discussed in more detail in Gawne (2016b).

5. Linguistic environment

The Syuba live at the highest elevations in their area, with Brahmin and Chetri²⁴ Nepali speakers as well as Sunwar, and Tamang (ISO 639-3 taj Glottocode east2347) speakers living in lower-lying villages. Syuba speakers do not go down to the Tamang or Sunwar villages to trade, but people from these lower villages will travel up to Syuba households. A Syuba household will maintain an exclusive trade relationship with Tamang and Sunwar households. These relationships are often built within the Nepali concept of मीत *mīt* ‘friendships of mutual obligation’. Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013: 14) indicate that these trade relationships appear to only occur in Phedi and Nobra, with their survey participants in Dhungare and Banauti reporting that they do not trade with outsiders. Trade interactions are conducted mostly in Nepali, which is the first language of the local Chetri and Brahmin and which Syuba and Sunwar can use with basic conversational proficiency.

Some Sunwar and Tamang speakers from the closest villages who are in regular contact with the Syuba have learnt basic conversational Syuba. Sunwar is also a Tibeto-Burman language, but of the Kiranti branch, and is not at all mutually intelligible; Syuba speakers claim to know no Sunwar beyond basic greetings. The local variety of Tamang is more closely related, and while it is not mutually intelligible, Yolmo speakers are aware of many cognates. Syuba speakers employ a variety of speech involving paraphrase to avoid having speakers of Tamang, and Sunwar and Hindu speakers who have learnt some Syuba, understand them when they are in their company.²⁵

Syuba people rarely travel outside their own village for local trade or employment, with Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013:9) finding that 86% of 49 surveyed Syuba people reported travelling outside the village once a month or less. At least one member of each household will go to the market in Dhobi that is held on Wednesdays. There they can buy foodstuffs that are unavailable on the farm such as rice and oil, as well as clothing.

Although they do not frequently travel locally, Syuba speakers are active participants in the international labour market. Even in 1909 Syuba speakers were living in Darjeeling as labourers and were documented in Grierson’s *Linguistic Survey of India*. These days, many Syuba will go overseas for 2-3 years just before marriage, as workers in the Middle East, Malaysia, Singapore, India, and other markets. Although it is more common for men to travel for work, young women are also travelling for employment as cleaners or carers. The money they earn is then invested in the household.

²⁴ The Chetri are Hindu and historically a lower caste than the Brahmin.

²⁵ Two Syuba men discuss this ‘secret language’ in SUY1-160427-05, however this recording is only available to members of the Syuba community for now.

Therefore, individuals may speak a number of different languages, such as English, Arabic or Hebrew, depending on where they have worked. Over a third of participants in Mitchell & Eichentopf's (2013: 14) survey had travelled overseas for more than one year to find work, with the majority returning within five years. This is quite a different migration pattern than is found in Lamjung, where Yolmo men will often leave for 10-20 years, and families will use the resulting capital to move to urban centres. In the Syuba villages there is no traffic from trekking, unlike in the Melamchi Valley, upper parts of which are situated in the Langtang National Park, a popular trekking route, therefore village life does not entail a great deal of contact with foreigners.

Syuba people still overwhelmingly marry other Syuba speakers. Mitchell & Eichentopf (2013: 12) note that of their 43 survey participants who were married, only three had non-Syuba spouses: one man married a Sherpa woman, another married a Nepali woman, and a woman married a Tamang man. The woman self-identified as a Christian, which may account for why she married outside the community but was still living in her paternal village. All three interviewees who married non-Syuba spouses reported that they spoke with them in Nepali, although two of those participants reported that they spoke Syuba with their children.

Primary schooling begins at 4 or 5 years of age, and is in Nepali. For many children, attending primary school is their first sustained contact with the Nepali language. Education is esteemed, and seen as a tool of economic betterment. Beyond the fifth grade however, school is much more difficult to reach; students in the Ramechhap villages have to travel several hours a day, down and back up the steep mountains on foot, and completing high school is uncommon. Parents who live in Kathmandu or other large cities are increasingly choosing English-medium schools for their children's education.

6. Language name

Use of the glottonym and ethnonym *Syuba* is closely woven around language attitudes, social structures and the history of the community. In this section I discuss the terms Syuba, Kagate, Yolmo and Tamang, and how they are used by this community, and touch on their use by other Yolmo groups to illustrate their differences. As is a common practice in Nepal, speakers of Syuba may take the family name Syuba either on official identification or unofficially, or may use one of these other names. Therefore, while discussing the language name I also mention family name choice, which also reflects community ideas about identity.

Community decisions about language name and community name appear to be currently in a state of flux. This is possibly best illustrated by

Mitchell & Eichtenopf's (2013) sociolinguistic study of Syuba, in which individuals identified themselves as 'Yolmo', 'Kagate', 'Syuba', 'Tamang' or some combination of those terms (e.g. 'Kagate Yolmo'). Below I discuss all of these terms, their associated connotations and current patterns of usage among the groups in Ramechhap and Lamjung. The only term I do not discuss is *Langanga*, which is the name of one of the patrilineal clans (see Section 8), and is sometimes used as a preferred form of personal identification.

6.1 Kagate

The name Kagate comes from Nepali *kagate* 'paper', referencing the profession of papermaker that the Kagate of Ramechhap performed. Papermaking was low caste work in Nepal's historical caste system. Although the caste system is no longer in effect, social attitudes are still influenced by its legacy.

The name Kagate was historically also used for Yolmo speakers of Lamjung and Ilam, reflecting a shared historical occupation, which may have even started before they left their villages in the Melamchi Valley area. In fieldnotes from his time among the Gurung of Lamjung, von Fürer-Haimendorf observes that the group of Buddhists who had come to settle in the area in recent decades were 'sometimes described as "Kagate Bhote"' (von Fürer-Haimendorf 1957: 278).²⁶ In Lamjung people have actively tried to move away from the term Kagate.

In Ilam there is a recollection among older speakers that their language was referred to as Kagate. They are willing to refer to their language as Kagate, but not their ethnic group, and do not have the same strong dispreference found in Lamjung and among some members of the Ramechhap community.

In Ramechhap there are different preferences: Kagate still has currency as the name of both the language and the ethnic group. Many who want to move away from the name Kagate wish to do so in order to move towards *Syuba*. This is, however, not a unanimous preference in Ramechhap. There are some people who are not happy with the Kagate or Syuba identity, and who prefer Yolmo. The village of Nobra in particular caused a great deal of upset five years ago, when they decided that the recently built *gompa* (Buddhist temple) would not be a Syuba *gompa*, but a Yolmo *gompa*. This upset those who prefer to have a Syuba identity that is distinct from their Yolmo heritage.

²⁶ *Bhote* 'people of Tibetan origin' in Nepali (Adhikary 2007: 270).

People often engage in prolonged discussion of these matters, and it does not appear that consensus will be reached any time soon.

6.2 Syuba

Increasingly, the Kagate of Ramechhap prefer the term *Syuba*, which, like *Kagate*, also means paper, but in their own language. This name has been gaining ground with many speakers in recent years, as it asserts a unique identity separate from Yolmo, without the same negative connotations of the name Kagate. The recently completed dictionary has been called the *Syuba-Nepali-English Dictionary*, and there is the Syuba Welfare Society; these are institutional-level uses of Syuba as the preferred name for the language and social group. Syuba was noted as the local endonym by Höhlig & Hari (1976: 1), however it is not known in Lamjung and Ilam.

6.3 Yolmo

Although it is not true of all Syuba people in Ramechhap, for some *Yolmo* is now their preferred name. This identification has been strengthened for some as links with other Yolmo communities are re-established, and follows the preference in Lamjung and Ilam where the Yolmo name is used for both the language and community.²⁷ This is likely because the Yolmo are already acknowledged as an ethnic group within the *Janajati* ‘Ethnic Minority’ movement in Nepal, allowing a degree of visibility that Syuba does not enjoy. It also allows them to demonstrate their connectedness to other Yolmo groups. Even those who prefer the Syuba for the language and social group still acknowledge their close historical relationship to Yolmo.

6.4 Tamang

Nepal’s Tamang population is a widely-spread Buddhist group who have resided in Nepal since around the 7th century (see Zeisler 2009). Their language is Tibeto-Burman and is not mutually intelligible with Syuba, although there are many lexical similarities. Table 1 shows that Syuba can self-select from a variety of names, however almost every person is given

²⁷ Although, as I note in Gawne (2016b) the Lamjung Yolmo also have a local ethnonym *Lama* and their language is known to neighbours as *Lama Bhāṣā* ‘Lama language’.

the surname Tamang in official documents, even though they have never considered themselves to be Tamang. The government has often demonstrated a lack of clear distinction between Tamang people and other Buddhist groups (Tamang 2009: 273), indicating that this is not exclusive to the Syuba.²⁸

7. Existing literature

The inclusion of ‘Kagate’ in Grierson’s (1909[1966]) *Linguistic Survey of India* is the earliest reference to the language in the Western literature. In comparison, it wasn’t until Clarke’s work in the 1980s and 1990s that Yolmo was discussed coherently as a distinct cultural group (e.g. Clarke 1980a, 1995). Grierson’s reference to Syuba meant that, although it was a smaller language, it received much more attention from linguistic researchers. Höhlig & Hari (1976) is a detailed phonemic summary, and Höhlig (1978) is about speaker orientation. This earlier work fed into the secondary literature (Hodson 1913, 1914; Bonnerjea 1936; Shafer 1947: 189; Nishi 1978, 1986; DeLancy 1981: 649). I have published several articles on Syuba, most of which are referenced throughout this paper. For all publications see the Syuba Glottolog page.²⁹

8. Village life

In this section I touch on a number of areas of daily life for the Syuba community that are either relevant to ongoing language maintenance or illustrate their relationship to other Yolmo-speaking groups. This is by no means an exhaustive description, and there is scope for further ethnographic documentation.

8.1 Clans

The Syuba have a system of patrilineal clans, with those in Ramechhap including some documented in Helambu and others not attested there. The clan names I have noted to date are *çàngba*, *sárpa*, *dòngba*, *teàba*, *bikule*,

²⁸ Small or under-recognised communities in Nepal have been known to co-opt the identity of other ethnic groups, particularly when dealing with government officials who have constrained ideas and expectations of ethnic categories. Shneiderman & Turin (2006: 103) discuss how Thangmi often represent themselves as Rai or Gurung.

²⁹ www.glottolog.org/resource/languoid/id/kaga1252 [accessed 2017-03-06].

yimba, *lánganga* and *lama*. These clan names are not semantically transparent. There is not the same distinction between ‘Lama’ and ‘non-Lama’ clans as found in the Melamchi Valley; none of the specific ‘Lama’ clans mentioned in Hari & Lama (2004: 675) appear in Ramechhap, rather the lineage Lama clan has the name *láma*.³⁰ Clan inheritance is patrilineal; married women maintain their premarital clan affiliation, but may participate in events held by their husband’s and children’s clan. Marrying a member of the same clan is taboo. Some consultants indicated that there are marriage preferences or alliances, e.g. between the *èàngba* and *teába*. Patrilineal inheritance of land by sons means that many villages show a limited number of clans, e.g. Ningale and the upper half of Phedi are *sárpa*, the lower half of Phedi is *èàngba*, Kosmere is predominantly *yimba* and *teába*, while Dungare is *èàngba*, *teába* and *dòngba*.

A subset of these clans is also found in Ilam and Lamjung, adding further weight to shared oral histories of migration and linguistic similarities. In Lamjung, *èàngba*, *dòngba* and *teába* clans are found, and in Ilam there are *èàngba*, *sárpa* and *dòngba*. When Syuba meet Yolmo from Ilam or Lamjung, establishing clan affiliations is a common early topic of conversation, with mutual clan membership creating immediate social connections. A detailed conversation about clan history and practice between members of the *dòngba* clan from Lamjung and Ramechhap occurred when Ningmar Tamang, a *dòngba* clan member from Ramechhap came with me to Lamjung to meet members of their *dòngba* clan (SUY1-160516-02).

Many of the clans in Ilam and Ramechhap also have sub-groups; the names denote the home *gompa* area from which they originally migrated. For example, the *sárpa* have two sub-groups in Ramechhap: *páwa sárpa* and *pháltuk sárpa*. The *páwa sárpa* are from the *Pawa Kohmpa* area, as noted by Hari (2010: 1). These subgroups are not attested in Lamjung, but are found in Ilam. Further documentation of the clans and their subgroups may help trace and compare migration histories.

An understanding of the dynamics of these clans is useful to understanding the linguistic context of the Syuba language for a number of reasons. Firstly, it needs to be taken into account when exploring potential sociolinguistic variation. There has been no observed effect of clan affiliation on language use impressionistically, but once basic documentation is complete we will be able to focus on understanding variation that arises. Syuba speakers from various clans do not necessarily live in the same village, so keeping track of clan affiliation is necessary. Secondly, understanding clan membership can help piece together the historical relationship between Syuba and other Yolmo

³⁰ For more on the lineage Lamas in the Helambu area see Clarke 1980b. There is currently no detailed study of the clans and their social organisation in Ramechhap.

varieties, particularly in relation to the sub-clans that give more specific details about potential places where Syuba speakers migrated from. Thirdly, looking forward, as demonstrated in the case of the *dôngba* of Ramechhap and Lamjung, clan membership can help maintain ongoing linguistic vitality across the different Yolmo varieties by drawing on the social bond that exists for clan members.

8.2 Houses

Syuba houses are made from local stone, with wooden supports. External skilled house builders come in to build the houses, with families adding additional labour. Syuba households are currently well-off enough to afford slate roofs, with some replaced with corrugated tin after the 2015 earthquakes. Most modern houses are two stories, with a balcony as well as an open courtyard space just near the house. Households use a combination of red clay and white paint for decoration. Figure 3 shows Banauti with both smaller houses with no balcony and larger houses with space for balconies visible.



Figure 3. Banauti houses.

Inside the house is usually one large room, with a fire pit for cooking, shelving for plates and cups and bench beds. Some houses may have a side room with an additional fire pit for general cooking. The floor is packed earth. If a house has a second floor it will be used for sleeping quarters and storage, and have a wooden floor. These are quite different to Yolmo houses, as

described in Cüppers, Tamot & Pierce (1996: 9-11), where there is one large room with a fireplace to the side and wooden shelves filling the back wall.

Three or even four generations of a family will live together in the same house. Young children are often cared for by their grandparents, which increases the chances for Syuba language transmission for at least the next generation. Most of family life takes place in the large central room of the house, or out on the front balcony during the day. The structure of Syuba houses in the village therefore facilitates family language transmission.

Many households in Ramechhap were damaged in the earthquakes of April and May 2015. Figure 4, taken by Ningmar Syuba, shows the damage to his house in Duragaun, shortly after the April quake. There were no fatalities in Syuba villages, which people attribute to the quakes happening in the middle of a Saturday when the children were not in school. In April and May 2016 we made recordings of over twenty people narrating their experiences of the earthquakes and life afterwards. These recordings can be found in the ELAR archive.



Figure 4. After the 2015 earthquakes. Image © Ningmar Syuba.

Schools in Phedi and Mulkarka were declared unsafe for use, and have since been replaced with buildings with prefabricated metal frames and low stone walls topped with wood.³¹ The network of filtered groundwater taps funded by the Gurkha Welfare Scheme³² in 2003 no longer function at full capacity as the local groundwater has shifted. The smaller streams and springs that run through Phedi have completely dried up. Those able to rebuild are choosing, where possible, to tin roofs and walls that are stone at the base and wood from waist-height, considered to be safer in the event of future earthquakes. I am not aware of anyone who has chosen to leave their village because of the quakes, and even those who are still living in temporary accommodation do plan to rebuild eventually. Therefore, it does not appear that the earthquakes will have any long term effects on population numbers in Syuba villages in Ramechhap, and therefore on language maintenance, although they have left an indelible mark on local memory.

8.3 Religion

This section touches on two key features of Syuba spiritual life: Buddhism and Shamanism. It should be noted that Syuba refer to themselves as Buddhists when asked about their religious beliefs (except, of course, for the Christians, although some Christians still participate with their family in major Buddhist events).

Buddhism and Shamanism two have long co-existed in Yolmo society (see Desjarlais 2003), and are both practiced in Ramechhap. The local Tamang population are also Buddhists and have their own Shamanistic tradition too.

The practice of Nyingma Buddhism includes local Lamas who inherit their role and title, and like everyone else in the villages continue to tend their own farms when not called on to perform religious duties. There are also non-lineage Lamas who are trained by the other Lamas to perform readings and ceremonies (although they are not lineage Lamas this role tends to be performed by men of particular families). This non-monastic local Lama structure is very similar to Clarke's (1980b: 5-6) description of Buddhist practice amongst the Melamchi Valley Yolmo. Historically these

³¹ The building in Phedi was funded in part by the community and in part by HIS Nepal, the building in Mulkarka was funded by the Himalayan Light Foundation (www.hlf.org.np, accessed 2017-03-06).

³² The GWS provide funding for materials and engineers, and the community provide labour. www.gwt.org.uk/structure [accessed 2017-03-06].

were the only people in the community who would be educated and today are the only people literate in Written Tibetan. Maintenance of Buddhist religious practice is the exclusive domain in which proficiency in Written Tibetan is maintained in Syuba life.

Shamans are full participating members of the community, and like the Lamas, run their own farms. Shamans are called for when someone is ill. They use a combination of medical plants and chants to communicate with the spirits.³³ As far as I am aware, Syuba Shamans do not often practice animal blood sacrifices, something that is also on the wane in the Helambu area, as people continue to evaluate the relationship between Shamanism and Buddhism (Torri 2016). There are both fully initiated Shamans (currently three amongst the Syuba in Ramechhap) as well as a number of other men who are given the title Shaman, but mostly use locally-gathered plants and rituals to heal minor illnesses. There is no detailed examination of Shaman practice in Ramechhap; it is not currently clear the extent to which their practices are a continuation of traditions from the Helambu area, or how much local practice in Ramechhap has influenced Syuba Shamanism.

For Syuba speakers their faith and their language are inextricably linked.³⁴ A discussion of the language without the cultural context in which it is spoken would be to neglect an important part of the picture. Religious ceremonies like weddings and funerals also represent one of the most important public domain uses of Syuba. These events provide an opportunity for people from individual houses and villages to come together.

9. Conclusion

Syuba is closely related to the Yolmo varieties which are also spoken in Nepal. Since migrating to Ramechhap, the community has maintained some features of Yolmo culture, while also adapting to life in this area. In many ways Syuba can be considered a variety of Yolmo, however the community also has a strong sense of their unique identity. The relationship between the Syuba and different Yolmo groups is strengthening, and offers new opportunities for connections and language development, especially as Nepal begins to give more recognition to ethnic and linguistic minorities. Some Syuba are interested in aligning

³³ Norpu Tamang discusses his role as a Shaman, and the tools of his work in SUY1-160425-06.

³⁴ This is true not just for Buddhist Syuba, the Christians in the community are using the literacy development work they have done with SIL to begin work on translating Christian religious texts.

themselves with the larger and better recognised Yolmo population, as can be seen with the Yolmo *gompa* in Nobra village. Others are interested in pursuing a uniquely Syuba identity, such as those who were involved in the creation of the *Syuba Welfare Society*. Syuba is currently a vibrant language, used by people of all ages in a variety of contexts, including innovative genres like song and social media. Community attitudes towards the language are generally positive, and recent work on both orthography development and dictionary making will only help to further build positive attitudes. The continuation of village life will be an important way to ensure the long-term use of Syuba, particularly in the maintenance of knowledge in domains such as agriculture, ethno-pharmacology and history. This has to be balanced against a need to improve access to basic amenities, healthcare and education, in both Syuba and Nepali.

Acknowledgements

My greatest thanks go to the Syuba community; their enthusiasm for their language has made it a pleasure to spend time with them. Thanks particularly to Sangbu Syuba, who bears the brunt of transcription work with me, and to Ningmar Syuba, who provided feedback on an earlier draft. Funding for the fieldwork that this paper draws on came from a variety of sources: The Firebird Foundation, Stack Exchange and The Awesome Foundation (Ottawa) for an initial short documentation, a Nanyang Technological University (NTU) Centre for Liberal Arts and Social Sciences Postgraduate Research Fellowship, NTU Tier 1 Grant ‘The development of Artistic and Participatory Means of Recording, Writing and Transmitting the Stories and Knowledge of Kagate, an Endangered Language of Nepal’ with Joan M. Kelly, and the Endangered Languages Documentation Programme (ELDP) for the project ‘Documenting and describing Kagate, an endangered Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal’.

References

- Adhikary, Kamal Raj. (ed.) 2007. *A concise Nepali-English dictionary*. Kathmandu: Kamal Adhikary.
- Bishop, Naomi H. 1989. From zomo to yak: Change in a Sherpa village. *Human Ecology* 17(2), 177-204.
- Bishop, Naomi H. 1998. *Himalayan herders*. London: Harcourt Brace College Publishers.
- Bonnerjea, Biren. 1936. Phonology of some Tibeto-Burman dialects of the Himalayan region. *T'oung Pao* 32(4), 238-258.
- Central Bureau of Statistics, Nepal. 2013. *Statistical Year Book of Nepal - 2013*. Kathmandu: Central Bureau of Statistics.
- Clarke, Graham E. 1980a. Lama and Tamang in Yolmo. In M. Aris & A. S. S. Kyi (eds.) *Tibetan Studies in honor of Hugh Richardson*, 79-86. Warminster: Aris and Phillips.
- Clarke, Graham E. 1980b. A Helambu History. *Journal of the Nepal Research Centre* 4, 1-38.
- Clarke, Graham E. 1995. Blood and territory as idioms of national identity in Himalayan states. *Kailash* 17(3-4), 89-131.
- Cüppers, Christoph, Kashinath Tamot & Philip Pierce. 1996. *A Tibetan-Newari lexicon cum phrase book*. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- DeLancey, Scott. 1981. An interpretation of split ergativity and related patterns. *Language* 57(3), 626-657.
- Desjarlais, Robert R. 1992. *Body and emotion: the aesthetics of illness and healing in the Nepal Himalayas*. Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press.
- Desjarlais, Robert R. 2003. *Sensory biographies: lives and deaths among Nepal's Yolmo Buddhists*. Berkeley: University of California Press.
- von Fürer-Haimendorf, Christoph. 1957. Unpublished fieldnotes. Nepal, no. 12 *Gurung*.
- Gawne, Lauren. 2010. Lamjung Yolmo: a dialect of Yolmo, also known as Helambu Sherpa. *Nepalese Linguistics* 25, 34-41.
- Gawne, Lauren. 2013. Notes on the relationship between Yolmo and Kagate. *Himalayan Linguistics* 12(2), 1-27.
- Gawne, Lauren. 2015. Documenting and describing Kagate, an endangered Tibeto-Burman language of Nepal. London: SOAS, Endangered Languages Archive. URL: <http://elar.soas.ac.uk/deposit/0388>. Accessed 2015-12-07.
- Gawne, Lauren. 2016a. *A Sketch Grammar of Lamjung Yolmo*. Canberra: Asia Pacific Linguistics.
- Gawne, Lauren. 2016b. My name is Maya Lama/Syuba/Hyolmo: Negotiating identity in Hyolmo diaspora communities. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. 47: 40-68.

- Grierson, George Abraham. 1909[1966]. *Linguistic survey of India*. 2nd edn. Delhi: M. Banarsidass.
- Hari, Anna Maria. 2010. *Yohlmo Sketch Grammar*. Kathmandu: Ekta books.
- Hari, Anna Maria & Chhegu Lama. 2004. *Hyolmo-Nepālī-Āṅgrejī śabdakośa = Yohlmo - Nepali - English dictionary*. Kathmandu: Central Dept. of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University.
- Hedlin, Matthew. 2011. *An Investigation of the relationship between the Kyirong, Yòlmo, and Standard Spoken Tibetan speech varieties*. MA thesis, Payap University, Chiang Mai.
- Hodson, T. C. 1913. Note on the numeral systems of the Tibeto-Burman dialects. *The Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain and Ireland* 45(2), 315-336.
- Hodson, T. C. 1914. Note on the Word for “Water” in Tibeto-Burman Dialects. *Journal of the Royal Asiatic Society of Great Britain & Ireland (New Series)* 46(01), 143-150.
- Höfer, András. 1979[2004]. *The Caste Hierarchy and the State in Nepal: A study of the Muluki Ain of 1854*. Kathmandu: Himal Books
- Höhlig, Monika. 1978. Speaker orientation in Syuwa (Kagate). In Joseph E. Grimes (ed.) *Papers on discourse, Volume 50*, 19-24. Kathmandu: Summer Institute of Linguistics.
- Höhlig, Monika & Anna Maria Hari. 1976. *Kagate phonemic summary*. Kathmandu: Summer Institute of Linguistics Institute of Nepal and Asian Studies.
- Huber, Brigitte. 2005. *The Tibetan dialect of Lende (Kyirong)*. Bonn: VGH Wissenschaftsverlag.
- Kajihama, Ryoshun. 2004. Folk Tales from Eastern Tibet. Daramasala: Library of Tibetan Works and Archives.
- Lal, Kesar. 1991. *Folktales from the Kingdom of Nepal*. Kathmandu: Ranta Pustak Bhandar.
- Lewis, M. Paul & Gary F. Simons. 2010. Making EGIDS assessment for the Ethnologue. www.icc.org.kh/download/Making_EGIDS_Assessments_English.pdf. [accessed 2012-10-31].
- Mitchell, Jessica R. & Stephanie R. Eichentopf. 2013. *Sociolinguistic survey of Kagate: Language vitality and community desires*. Kathmandu: Central Department of Linguistics Tribhuvan University, Nepal and SIL International.
- Nishi, Yoshio. 1978. Tense-high versus lax-low registers in Kagate - a Central Tibetan Dialect. *Computational Analyses of Asian & African Languages* 9, 25-37.
- Nishi, Y. 1986. A classification of Tibetan dialects. [in Japanese]. *National Minority Studies Museum Research Report* 11, 837-901.
- Sato, Seika. (2007). Crossing 'capture' out: On the marginality of the capture marriage tactics in Yolmo, Nepal.[in Japanese]. *帝京社会学* (20), 71-100.

- Shafer, Robert. 1947. Hruso. *Bulletin of the School of Oriental and African Studies* 12(01), 184-196.
- Shafer, Robert. 1966. *Introduction to Sino-Tibetan*. Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz.
- Shelton, A.L. 1925[2009]. *Tibetan Folk Tales*. Sandhurst: Abela Publishing.
- Tamang, Mukta S. 2009. Tamang activism, history, and territorial consciousness. In David Gellner (ed.) *Ethnic activism and civil society in South Asia*, 269-290. New Delhi: Sage.
- Teo, Amos, Lauren Gawne & Melissa Baese-Berk. 2015. Tone and intonation: A case study in two Tibetic languages. Paper presented at *The 18th International Conference on Phonetic Sciences*, Glasgow, UK, 10-14 August 2015.
- Thokar, R. 2009. Linguistic fieldwork in Jhapa and Ilam districts. Paper presented at *Linguistics Society of Nepal Annual Conference*, Kathmandu, 25-26 November 2009.
- Thurgood, Graham & LaPolla, Randy J. 2003. *The Sino-Tibetan languages*. London: Routledge.
- Tournadre, Nicholas. 2005. L'aire linguistique tibétaine et ses divers dialectes. *Lalies* 25, 7-59.
- Tournadre, Nicholas. 2014. The Tibetic languages and their classification. In Tom Owen-Smith & Nathan Hill (eds.) *Trans-Himalayan linguistics, historical and descriptive linguistics of the Himalayan area*, 105-130. Berlin: Mouton de Gruyter.
- Torri, D. 2016. To kill or not to kill? The issue of blood sacrifice and the transformation of ritual patterns in Hyolmo Shamanism. *European Bulletin of Himalayan Research*. 47: 15-39.
- Voegelin, Charles Frederick & Florence Marie Voegelin. 1977. *Classification and index of the world's languages*. New York: Elsevier.
- Zeisler, Bettina. 2009. Reducing phonological complexity and grammatical opaqueness: Old Tibetan as a lingua franca and the development of the modern Tibetan dialects. In Enoch Aboh and Norval Smith (eds.) *Complex processes in new languages*, 75-95. Amsterdam and Philadelphia: John Benjamins.