

## Kundal Shahi: A Severely Endangered Language

*Kfirwaja A. Rehman*

**Introduction:** Kundal Shahi Language is spoken in Kundal Shahi which is located in the Neelam Valley at the point where the Jagran Nallah joins the Neelam river (Kishan Ganga). The settlements belonging to Kundal Shahi are found on both sides of the Jagran Nallah and are a few minutes walking distance from the Neelam Valley highway. In the census of 1998 the total population of Kundal Shahi, including other clans, was 2666 with Dolur, which has been listed separately, having a population of 676 thus giving a total population for the combined settlements of 3342 people. Rehman and Baart (2005:5) estimated a population of 1,500 to 2,000 in Kundal Shahi belonging to the Kundal Shahi community, however, my current detailed survey shows that the total population of the KS (Kundal Shahi) community is around 3371 living in 537 households that are scattered throughout eight *mohallas* 'hamlets' namely: Rait, Graan, Gujhaan, Sinji Nakka, Dolur, Frashian/Khujhaani, Gheelan and Sattrra.

In an earlier research; it was concluded that the KS language is most probably a descendant of an archaic form of Shina (Rehman and Baart 2005), which itself belongs to the Indo-Aryan branch within the Indo-European language family.

In February 2003, a wordlist of 199 items was recorded on audiocassette in Kundal Shahi with seven native speakers of the Kundal Shahi language. This wordlist was based on the one used in the Sociolinguistic Survey of Northern Pakistan (Rehman and Baart 2005, O'Leary 1992).

The KS wordlist was compared with the wordlists of Shina, Hindko, Gojri and Indus Kohistani as found in O' Leary (1992). A wordlist of Kashmiri was also used for comparison. As the Kashmiri wordlist was not available in the Sociolinguistic Survey, it was based on the speech of this author, who is a native speaker of Kashmiri.

In scoring lexical similarity, a simple binary classification for each pair of items, namely *similar* versus *not similar* was used. The results, given as percentages of similar lexical items, are presented in the table below:

Language	Lexical Similarity Scores
Shina (Astar and Jalkot)	49
Hindko (Balakot)	47
Kashmiri (Khawaja Seri)	45
Gojri(Subri)	40
Indus Kohistani (Jijal)	34

**TABLE 1: Lexical Similarity Scores Between KS and Neighboring Languages in Percentages**

(Rehman and Baart 2005)

Relatively higher scores of lexical similarity with Shina and oral history of the community is indicative of the fact that the language is genealogically related to Shina (ibid). However, a detailed study of the language is required to determine the connection precisely.

**Level of Endangerment of KS:** The level of endangerment of KS as listed in the *Atlas* was based upon limited information and moreover, further language attrition has been observed in recent years. This section establishes the precise nature and level of endangerment of KS.

There are currently two dominant frameworks to measure the degree of endangerment of a language. One is the UNESCO scale, the other is Krauss (2007). Krauss (2007: 1-8) classifies languages into three major categories — safe, endangered and extinct. He classifies the endangered languages into five subcategories: stable, instable/eroded, definitively endangered, severely endangered and critically endangered. Krauss has given designators a+ to e to all categories while

his sub-classification of endangered category is given a, a-, b, c and d grades. His endangered category also includes those languages which are potentially endangered in the near future. On the top of the scale in the endangered category are those languages which are still learnt by the children as mother tongues. Languages in this category are vibrantly used at home. However, another replacing language/s may be increasingly used in work, school, and religion. Though languages in this category may be threatened by external factors, they remain stable. He uses the term *instable/eroded* (designated *a-*) for the second subclass of endangered languages. This includes two types of situations. Type one situation is where some of the children speak the language for sometimes, e.g., they speak the language with their elders while speak the replacing language among themselves. The second subtype of *instable* or *a-* is *a* situation where all children speak the language in some parts of the village/community, while in other parts of it only some children speak the language. The next subclass of endangered languages is *b*, the definitively endangered. Definitively endangered languages are those which are no longer transferred to the children at home. Sometimes parents may use the endangered language with the children but they are allowed to respond in the replacing language. The fourth subclass on the scale is severely endangered category, designated as *c*. The youngest speakers are of grandparental generation and middle aged. In this situation the parents cannot teach the language to their children. The age of the youngest speakers ranges from 35 to 60. The last subclass is critically endangered (*d*), where the youngest speakers are of the great-grandparental generation and are also few in numbers, often fewer than 10. Critically endangered languages are close to extinction.

Krauss's model of assessing endangerment does not envisage a situation like KS, where the language is no longer regularly transmitted to the children but a few children still learn it. The proportion of children is not more than 1%. The second problem with the model is that it does not explain the status of speakers clearly. For instance in the KS community we have different categories of speakers. A great many individuals above 60 can speak KS and Hindko with equal proficiency. On the other hand, those below 60 can speak KS but not usually as well as Hindko.

The second major indicator of language endangerment is language attitude which includes the attitude of the speakers as well as the attitude of the other communities towards the community that speaks the language. The model proposed by Krauss does not include this factor, among others. A single factor cannot provide a full picture of KS's vitality.

Safe			a+	
Endangered				
	Stable		a	used at home; replacing language/s may be in increasing use in work, school, and religion
	Instable; eroded		a-	
	Instable	Type 1		some of the children speak the language for sometime e.g. they speak the language with their elders while speak the replacing language among themselves
	Eroded	Type 2		all children speak the language in some parts of the village/community, while in other parts of it only some children speak the language
	Definitively endangered			no longer transferred to the children at home
	Severely endangered		c	youngest speakers are of grandparental generation; age of the youngest speakers 35 to 60
	Critically endangered		d	youngest speakers are of the great-grandparental generation and are also few in number
Extinct			e	

**TABLE 2: Krauss's Framework for Classifying Languages**

The second framework for measuring the level of endangerment is the UNESCO Model. This model has been developed by the UNESCO Ad hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages. (Brenzinger et al. 2003). Including Michael Krauss, the group comprised top experts in endangered languages from all over the world. The adequacy of the UNESCO framework was successfully evaluated in a study that examined "a broad sample of 100 of the languages of the world" (Lewis 2005). Instead of relying upon a single factor, the group has identified nine major factors affecting language vitality. These nine factors capture nearly all possible situations of a language shift. By looking at these factors one can determine the nature of language endangerment with more accuracy. I have therefore adopted the UNESCO model in my analysis. With the exception of two factors, a scale has been proposed in the model which allows us to assign a score from 0 to 5 for each factor.

UNESCO's nine factors include:

- 1) Intergenerational Language Transmission

- 2) Absolute Number of Speakers
- 3) Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population
- 4) Trends in Existing Language Domains
- 5) Response to New Domains and Media
- 6) Materials for Language Education and Literacy
- 7) Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies
- 8) Community Members' Attitudes towards their Own Language
- 9) Amount and Quality of Documentation.

**Inter-Generational Transmission:** The key measure of a language's viability is not the number of people who speak it, but the extent to which children are still learning the language as their native tongue (Turin 2007).

There is a wide gap in KS proficiency between age groups and the language is no longer being transmitted to children. Interviews and personal observation have shown that only two households in the village sometimes use KS with their children. Almost 98% of households have switched to Hindko completely. Although the youngest speakers of the language are parents themselves, they no longer speak the language with their children. Only a few members of the KS community still use a few phrases for secrecy purpose. Regarding the intergenerational transmission, as discussed above, it is obvious that the language is more than *definitively endangered* and closer to grade 2, defined as a *severely endangered* language on the UNESCO scale.

(Brenzinger, et al 2003).

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Speaker Population
<i>safe</i>	5	The language is used by all ages, from children up.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	The language is used by some children in all domains; it is used by all children in limited domains.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	The language is used mostly by the parental generation and up.

<i>severely endangered</i>	2	The language is used mostly by the grandparental generation and up.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	The language is used mostly by very few speakers, of great-grandparental generation.
<i>extinct</i>	0	There exists no speaker.

**TABLE 3: UNESCO's Intergenerational Transmission Chart**

**Absolute Number of Speakers:** The expert report does not elaborate on this indicator, but Lewis (2005) has proposed a more robust system to evaluate population statistics in terms of a scale of endangerment as with the other factors proposed by the committee. He proposes the following factors to be taken into consideration to evaluate the significance of the population regarding the level of language endangerment:

- The general norm for the region for language group size
- The number of speakers who use the language as their first language
- The number of speakers who use the language as their second language

Total population of the KS community is 3371 living in 537 households. Although a few linguistic groups in the Neelam Valley are smaller than the KS community, their languages are widely spoken elsewhere and therefore constitute larger communities. KS is the only language not spoken anywhere else, making KS speakers the smallest linguistic community in the region.

So far as the second factor is concerned, in some cases it would be tricky to find out whether the respondents have native speaker proficiency in KS as they claim. For instance, by asking the question which language feels easiest in speaking 700 people claim KS as easiest language. While 400 claim both Hindko and KS. Interviews revealed, however, that the latter are not actually competent speakers of KS. In the total population of 171,000 in the Neelam Valley (Government of Azad Jammu and Kashmir 2010) there are only 700 native speakers of KS and another 400 have less than native speaker proficiency. Small native speaker populations are a strong indicator of endangerment.

**Proportion of Speakers within the Total Population of the KS Community:** According to the Expert Report the proportion of speakers in a broader population is another significant indicator of language vitality. Combined with the absolute number of speakers, it provides an accurate measure of the level of endangerment (Lewis 2005).

*Severely Endangered* is the degree of endangerment reserved for those languages whose speakers are in minority within the total reference population. My data suggests that only 49% of the respondent claim to have the status of 'Speakers' (Rehman PhD thesis in preparation: chapter 5). Even taking the respondents as a representative sample, the KS speakers are not in the majority within the KS community as required for the degree of definitely endangered on the scale (Brenzinger et al. 2003: 9). Keeping in view the absolute number of the competent speakers and proportion of speakers within the total reference population, the level of endangerment of KS is higher than this degree and it comes under grade 2 described as *severely endangered* on the scale. Moreover, it is pertinent to mention that the prevalent situation is even worse than what the respondents claim. As mentioned earlier; around 20 % of the members within the community have actually native speaker proficiency, i.e., the status of 'Speaker'.

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Reference Population
<i>safe</i>	5	All speak the language.
<i>unsafe</i>	4	Nearly all speak the language.
<i>definitively endangered</i>	3	A majority speak the language.
<i>severely endangered</i>	2	A minority speak the language.
<i>critically endangered</i>	1	Very few speak the language.
<i>extinct</i>	0	None speak the language

**TABLE 4: UNESCO Chart for the Proportion of Speakers Within the Total Population**

**Trends in Existing Language Domains:** The use of a language in different functional domains directly affects whether or not the language will be transmitted to the next generation. The UNESCO report classifies functional domain in terms of the social contexts, the types of interlocutors, and the subject matter for which a language is used. This factor has been graded into universal use, multilingual parity, dwindling domains, limited domains, and highly limited domains and extinct (no use).

If we look at the current situation in the KS community, we can see mostly the language is used in limited domains and for a few functions especially for secrecy purposes. This limited use is assigned grade 2 in the UNESCO Model which is only one step up from the extinct level (Brenzinger et al. 2003: 10).

Degree of Endangerment	Grade	Domains and Functions
<i>universal use</i>	5	The language is used in all domains and for all functions
<i>multilingual parity</i>	4	Two or more languages may be used in most social domains and for most functions.
<i>dwindling domains</i>	3	The language is in home domains and for many functions, but the dominant language begins to penetrate even home domains.
<i>limited or formal domains</i>	2	The language is used in limited social domains and for several functions
<i>highly limited domains</i>	1	The language is used only in a very restricted domains and for a very few functions
<i>extinct</i>	0	The language is not used in any domain and for any function.

**TABLE 6: UNESCO Chart Showing Trends in Existing Language Domains**

**Response to New Domains and Media:** If communities do not adjust themselves to emerging domains with their languages, the languages become increasingly irrelevant, out of use and even sometimes stigmatized. It is never used anywhere in the print and electronic media; it is hardly used in formal discussions outside the home in speeches, etc. All evidence indicates that KS is not used in new domains at all, and is therefore classified as *inactive*. All other languages of the area (the Neelam Valley) have created a limited space in the new domains. For instance, all of them are used in a few programs in radio and TV broadcasts.



Degree of Endangerment	Grade	New Domains and Media Accepted by the Endangered Language
<i>dynamic</i>	5	The language is used in all new domains.
<i>robust/active</i>	4	The language is used in most new domains.
<i>receptive</i>	3	The language is used in many domains.
<i>coping</i>	2	The language is used in some new domains.
<i>minimal</i>	1	The language is used only in a few new domains.
<i>inactive</i>	0	The language is not used in any new domains.

**TABLE 6: UNESCO Chart for Response to New Domains and Media**

**Materials for Language Education and Literacy:** Existence of written material in a language is also an important measure of its vitality. If a language has an established orthography and tradition of literacy, with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and access to everyday media, it is more likely to be safe. And if this language is used in administration and education and has adequate materials for language, education and literacy, it is assigned the highest grade, i.e., 5 (Brenzinger et al. 2003). A language without orthography places it lowest on the scale. KS does not have orthography and has no literary tradition. It does not even have an oral literary tradition. According to the UNESCO report if a language does not have orthography, its grade on the scale is '0' (see Table 7). The position of KS on the scale is the lowest, i.e., '0'.

Because significant populations elsewhere speak the other Neelam Valley languages, they have access to written materials, although the only language in which a substantial body of literature is available is Pashto.

Grade	Accessibility of Written Materials
5	There is an established orthography, literacy tradition with grammars, dictionaries, texts, literature, and everyday media. Writing in the language is used in administration and education.
4	Written materials exist, and at school, children are developing literacy in the language. Writing in the language is not used in administration.
3	Written materials exist and children may be exposed to the written form at school. Literacy is not promoted through print media.
2	Written materials exist, but they may only be useful for some members of the community; and for others, they may have a symbolic significance. Literacy education in the language is not a part of the school curriculum.
1	A practical orthography is known to the community and some material is being written.
0	No orthography available to the community.

**TABLE 7: UNESCO Grading of Written Material for Language Education and Literacy**

**Governmental and Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies Including Official Status and Use:** Governments and other institutions may have more or less clearly stated language policies which may be motivated by ideological and political considerations. For instance, in Pakistan, all the regional, local and minority languages are consciously discouraged, while Urdu, which is the mother tongue of only 7.57% of the total population (Cheema et al. 2010) has been adopted as a national language and is used as a medium of instruction along with English, the former colonial language. The state has established Urdu as a symbol of Pakistani identity and national integration (Rahman 2005). Promoting indigenous local languages is thought to threaten Muslim unity and national interests. At the national level in Pakistan, language and educational policies are meant to enhance a 'national' and 'religious' agenda. (Ibid).The government in Azad Kashmir similarly ignores minority languages, evidenced by the absence of KS from any listing.

The degree of support on the scale devised by the UNESCO expert group ranges from equal support for all languages (all of a country's languages are valued as assets, all languages are protected by law, and the government encourages the maintenance of all languages by implementing explicit policies) to prohibition (minority languages are prohibited from use in any public domain but may be tolerated in private domains) assigning similar grades 0-5. The degrees in between include: differentiated support, Passive assimilation and forced assimilation. The government policies and attitudes regarding the minority languages in general and KS in particular do not exactly fit into any level. However, it is closer to grade 2, *active assimilation*

While Pakistani language policy does not actively discourage minority languages, only Urdu and English have official status. They are the languages of all official communication and almost all media and education. This situation impinges on the prestige of regional languages and local languages, as well as on the social domains in which they are used.

UNESCO defines 'active assimilation' as "[t]he government encourages minority groups to abandon their own languages by providing education for the minority group members in the dominant language. Speaking and/or writing in non-dominant languages is not encouraged" (Brenzinger et al. 2003: 13). At the institutional level official language policies encourage shift from minority languages and assimilation to the customs, culture and the language of the local majority and dominant group, as well as to Urdu and English.

Degree of Support	Grade	Official Attitudes toward Language
<i>equal support</i>	5	All languages are protected.
<i>differentiated support</i>	4	Minority languages are protected primarily as the language of the private domains. The use of the language is prestigious.
<i>passive assimilation</i>	3	No explicit policy exists for minority languages; the dominant language prevails in the public domain.
<i>active assimilation</i>	2	Government encourages assimilation to the dominant language. There is no protection for minority languages.

<i>forced assimilation</i>	1	The dominant language is the sole official language, while non-dominant languages are neither recognized nor protected.
<i>prohibition</i>	0	Minority languages are prohibited.

**TABLE 8: UNESCO Chart for the Degree of Official Attitudes and Support**

**Community Members' Attitude Towards their Own Language:** Members of a speech community may value their language and see it as essential to their community and identity or they may see it as a hindrance they actively avoid (Brenzinger et al 2003). UNESCO assigns a grade of zero where no one cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language. Grade five is a situation where all members value and promote their language. When speakers' attitude towards their language is quite positive, the language may be seen as a key symbol of group identity. Just as people value family traditions, festivals and community events, members of the community may see their language as a cultural core value, vital to their community and ethnic identity. Most KS speakers have a positive attitude towards their language but they do not want to teach their ancestral language to their children. As a result, the intergenerational transmission has nearly stopped; the language is only spoken by the older generation and parents no longer use it in their daily conversations with their children except for occasional instances where they do not wish outsiders to understand. Most of the members of the language community want their language to be promoted and have a positive attitude towards it but in practice do not pass the language to the younger generations. In spite of the positive attitude of the community members expressed in formal and informal interviews, in reality only a few members — 2 households — have passed their language to their children and still use it actively with them. The dichotomy between the positive attitudes expressed by the majority and their actual maintenance of the language may be explained by Baker's (1992: 12) concept of 'disharmony between the cognitive and affective part of attitude'. Though no grade set by the UNESCO team covers exactly the situation, it is closer to grade 1 on the scale. In the UNESCO document grade 1 is assigned to a situation where "only a few members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss" (Brenzinger et al. 2003: 15).

Grade	Community Members' Attitudes toward Language
5	All members value their language and wish to see it promoted.

4	<i>Most</i> members support language maintenance.
3	<i>Many</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
2	<i>Some</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
1	Only <i>a few</i> members support language maintenance; others are indifferent or may even support language loss.
0	<i>No one</i> cares if the language is lost; all prefer to use a dominant language.

**TABLE 9: UNESCO Chart for Community Members Attitudes towards their own Language**

**Amount and Quality of Documentation:** The type and quality of existing language materials give a clue to understanding the level of language endangerment. It also helps to formulate policies to promote and strengthen the languages.

Judging within the UNESCO framework KS was in the lowest level, i.e., grade 0 on the scale before 2005 when Joan Baart and I published a working paper (Rehman and Baart 2005). Since then, I have presented papers on the language at international conferences (Rehman 2009, 2007, in press; Akhtar and Rehman 2007). I have also started compiling a trilingual (KS, English, Urdu) mini dictionary; recorded texts, wordlists, stories and life histories have also been added to the language archives. Consequently, the documentation of KS has risen almost to grade 2, *fragmentary description*, in the framework.

Factor	Grade	Description of the grade
Intergeneration Language Transmission	2	Severely Endangered
Absolute Number of Speakers		Total population of the competent speakers around 700
Proportion of Speakers within the total Population	2	Majority has abandoned KS
Trends in Existing Language Domains	2	KS used only in limited domains for a few functions

Response to New Domains and Media	0	Inactive and never used in new emerging domains
Materials for Language Education and Literacy	0	No oral or written tradition
Governmental & Institutional Language Attitudes and Policies including Official Status & Use	2	Not national language No official use Language policy implicitly discourages use of KS
Community members' attitude towards their own language	1	Nearly all members claim to have positive attitude towards their ancestral language but do not pass their language to the younger generations for pragmatic reasons
Amount and Quality of Documentation	2	Preliminary notes on different aspects of language and unpublished data both written and recorded.

**TABLE 10: Estimated Degree of Endangerment of KS**

The description of the factors given briefly above is only a guideline for assessing the level of language endangerment and vitality, as the vitality of languages varies according to different conditions and situations of the speech communities. This has also been pointed out in the case of KS, especially in terms of attitude. However, taken together, the grades are a useful instrument for assessing the situation of a community's language. Table 10 above presents different grades of KS together. This can help to understand the level of KS clearly.

The majority of the population of the community has abandoned the language with only around 700 competent speakers left, with no oral or written literary tradition or orthography. It has become completely inactive with regard to emerging domains. Though attitude of the community is positive towards the language, the members have almost stopped transmitting the language to the younger generations. This may be the result of the negative official national language policies of the government. Until recently, no documentation of the language existed. However, some work on the language has been going for the last few years. All these factors give rise to a situation where the future of the language seems bleak. Unless there is a radical shift in attitude towards speaking it with children, it is doomed. KS rates as the most

endangered end of the UNESCO scale on every indicator. Without urgent moves to arrest and reverse its decline; KS is likely to be extinct within half a century.

The current situation contrasts sharply with the situation before the incursion of the road in the 1960s. At that time, the language was not only actively learnt and used by the KS community but also by the members of the other linguistic groups. This small linguistic minority maintained their ancestral language with full vigor and strength for centuries.

**Conclusion:** The Present study shows that KS is under tremendous threat. If the current situation of language loss continues unabated, It is estimated that after 50 years; only few words and expressions of KS will survive. Few community members will be using these words, perhaps, just occasionally for conveying secret messages or quoting them when they recall their ancestral language.

The degree of endangerment of KS, when measured against the comprehensive model developed by the UNESCO Ad Hoc Committee (Brenzinger et al. 2003), is not higher than the category of *severely* endangered languages. The major indicators which determine the degree of endangerment include: disruption in intergenerational transmission, small proportion of the KS speakers as compared to Hindko speakers in the region and attitude of both Hindko and KS speakers towards KS. It was also found that until the intergenerational transmission was robust, a stable bilingualism existed and KS was not threatened. The moment when parents stopped teaching language to their children; the decline of KS started. The smaller proportion of the KS speakers within the larger Hindko population is further eroding fast, and it is anticipated that as a result of the ongoing shift; even this smaller proportion will disappear altogether.

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