

Linguistic Archeology of the Kirati Hydronyms

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Abstract	Article Info
<p>This paper delves into the settlement patterns of the Kirati communities through the lens of linguistic archeology. The findings reveal that the hydronyms are not only the archeological evidence but also the indicator of the historical development and cultural ties. It focuses on the linguistic landscape of settlement and distribution of place names (toponyms), and water body names (hydronyms) across the Kirati indigenous communities. Employing a qualitative method, the study draws on both primary and secondary sources, including historical documents, linguistic data to examine the spatial and temporal dimension of migration and settlement. The key tools for data collection contains the ethnographic fieldwork, oral history recordings, interviews and the focus group discussion. The findings reveal that the analysis of the hydronyms in the Kirati languages bear the affixes < wa, ku~ k^hu, -ti>, indentifying the settelement pattern within the Kirati territories, extending into the Kathmandu valley. This furthe expands to the western part of Nepal, specifcally among the Magar with the suffix <-ti-di>.</p> <p><i>Keywords:</i> cognate sets, indigenous communities, migration routes, proto-forms, settlement patterns</p>	<p><i>Email</i> tara.raai@cdl.tu.edu.np</p> <p><i>Article History</i> Received: 2025, June 11 Revised: 2025, July 26 Accepted: 2025, August 22</p> <p><i>Cite</i> Rai, T. M. (2025).Linguistic archeology of the Kirati hydronyms. <i>Gipan</i>, 7(1), 33–42. https://doi.org/10.3126/gipan.v7i1.84233</p>

Introduction

The term ‘hydronym’ is derived from the Greek words *hydor* ‘water’ and *onoma* ‘name’ (Hough, 2016). It refers to a specific type of the toponym, that identifies bodies of water like rivers, brooks, lakes, seas and water-related features. Hydronyms are often among the oldest and most stable names in a region, as water bodies are geographical features that may interconnect with the settlement patterns, trade routes and historical legacies. Hydronyms reflect the language and traditions of the people who originally named them. It preserves the ancient languages and the dialects that might otherwise have disappeared (Room, 1996; Nicolaisen, 1976).

The study of hydronyms provides valuable insights into the historical, cultural, and geographical characteristics of a region. It also helps to trace settlement patterns of the ethnic and indigenous communities. Hydronyms, thus are the tools to reconstruct past cultural interactions and migration routes (Jackson, 1991, pp.7-9).

Highlighting the importance of hydronyms, Hulden (1994) states:

“Names and places are inseparable, regardless of how the name is formed etymologically. A name is a key to memories and experiences. Sharing the same name creates a sense of familiarity and connection. Names act as

social signals of solidarity; the more names' people share, the stronger their bond" (p. 33).

Nepal is home to more than 60 indigenous communities and is characterized by significant geographical and cultural geographical diversity (National Foundation for Development of Indigenous Nationalities Act, 20001). The country consists of three distinct ecological belts: the Mountains, the Hills and the Tarai. A number of hydronyms (water-related toponyms) originate in the Himalayan ranges and extend through the Tara region of Nepal into India. These hydronyms not only highlight the interconnectedness but also reflect the historical, cultural, and linguistic ties between the communities and their inhabiting areas.

Even though Nepal is rich enough in the hydronyms, there are not extensive studies related to the hydronyms. Out of few scholars, Witzel (1991), Malla (2015), Shrestha (2010), Rai and Chamling (2017) are there to name for scholarship in the onomastics or the toponyms. Mall (2015) discusses the hydronyms being confined to the Kathmandu valley. Shrestha (2010)'s work is the glossary of the toponyms available in Nepal. Similarly, Rai and Chamling (2017) focuses the toponyms of the Kirati languages that exist in the Kirati territories, historically known as Ollo, Majh and Pallo Kirat.

Witzel (1991) states that Nepal's early history is not well documented due to the absence of major cultural and political centres like Kapilvastu in ancient times or Kathmandu valley, and Jumla in the mediaval period. Consequently, written records are not available much. In his research 'Nepalese hydronyms', Witzel emphasizes their historical significance, noting that many original names were replaced due to Sanskritization and later Hindunization. This process led to the loss of earlier linguistic identities.

Besides the existing literatures, no specific studies have been conducted on the hydronyms of the Kirati territories that are related to the Kirati languages. In this sense, this study may the

landmarks not only adjoining the eastern Kirat to the Kathmandu valley which is believed to have been ruled by the ancient kings.

Methods and Materials

This study employs the comparative approach to examine hydronyms existing in the territories of the Kirat indigenous groups. The study reveals the historical connections and cultural ties between the eastern and the central Kathmandu. The research employed the qualitative method, with primary data gathered through fieldwork in the Kirat speaking areas. As the hydronyms are broader in its area and the interconnectedness with the historical legacies, the secondary data sources are also entertained. In addition to the linguistic analysis, the study even observed how the Kirati people perceive their historical identity in relation to the hydronyms. The theoretical basis of this study is drawn from linguistic archaeology. This framework allows for the examination of hydronyms by analyzing their origins, meanings and linguistic features. The analysis includes the phonological and morphological patterns that can offer the further insights in understanding the evolution of the hydronyms. Key concepts were drawn from Benedict (Benedict (1972), Matisoff (2003), Ehret (2012), Malla (2015), Carling (2024) and Gautam et al. (2025). Some of the meanings may not have been clearly defined in the hydronyms that offer the further studies.

Context of the Study

The written documentation of the toponyms or the hydronyms in the Kirati residing in eastern part of Nepal is limited. However, the Kirati along with indigenous communities, possess rich oral history and myths. The most prevalent myth among the Kirati communities is their migration route (Gautam et al. 2025). The myths reveal that the Kirati people arrived in Nepal via Khuwalung, situated at the confluence of the Arun, Sunkoshi, and Tamor rivers, collectively known as the Barahakshetra, Saptakoshi of the Sunsari, Udayapur, Bhojpur. The ancestors of the Kirati, who crossed the Dudhkosi and the Sunkoshi rivers towards the western and

northern Himalayan regions, were known today as Wambule, Jerung, Bayung, Chamling, among others. Conversely, those who followed the Arun River were identified as Lohurung, Yamphu, and Mewahang, while those who migrated towards the

eastern part were categorized as Bantawa and Puma among others. Additionally, those who followed the Tamor river were known as Limbu. Thus, these myths explore the narrative of their ancestral lands and territories.

Map 1

Patterns of the Suffixes



The term ‘Khuwalung’ comprises two morphemes signifying ‘water’, namely $<k^hu>$ and $<wa>$. These two morphemes form the compound words (Rai, 2022, p.76-82). Both $<k^hu>$ and $<wa>$ are prevalent in the Kirati communities and may have originated from distinct water sources, possibly representing water from the ‘land’ and the sky, respectively. Over time, there occurred the semantic fusion that unified into one denoting ‘water’.

Within the Kirat Rai communities, the Lohorung, Yamphu, and Mewahang people dwell in almost in the same areas of the upper Arun River. In contrast, the Limbu community inhabits territories extending towards the Tamor River. The nomenclature of the brooks among Lohorung, Yamphu, and Mewahang indigenous are derived from the linguistic and cultural heritage. The lexicon may vary among the Kirati languages as in Limbu *wa* denotes sometimes existential verbs and locative markers besides water. On the other hand, the languages like Chamling, Puma and

Tilung pertain the lexicon *wa* to denote ‘water.’ A number of the brooks or the rivers along the route from Dhankuta area to Sankhuwasabha that begins with the suffix $<-wa>$.

The suffix $<-wa>$ tends to appear as a common morpheme of hydronyms as evidenced in (1).

1) $<-wa>$ ‘raining water’

- | | |
|-----------------------------|---|
| <i>leguwa</i> | <i>leg>lemma</i> ‘to lick’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the place where water is drunk licking or the lack of water. |
| <i>irk^{hu}wa</i> | <i>irk^{hu}</i> ‘herbs’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or where herbs grow around the water. |
| <i>tsirk^{hu}wa</i> | <i>tsirk^{hu}</i> ‘Chiraito also, Swertia chirayita, scientific name’+ <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or where Chiraito herbs are available. |
| <i>mayou>ma</i> | <i>ma</i> ‘mother’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ the water regarded as mother (In Lohorung language) |

<i>sə-wa</i>	(<i>sab^ha</i> , corrupt form) <i>sə</i> ‘?’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ the place named after hydronyms
<i>kewa</i>	<i>ke</i> ‘oil’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water is like oil.
<i>k^hewa</i>	<i>k^he</i> ‘hardly reach’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ the water where the people have to bring water hardly.
<i>piluwa</i>	<i>pilu</i> ‘oil’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water is like oil.

Notably, along the Arun River, within the Bantawa territory, analogous naming conventions for brooks are observed, as presented in (2).

- 2) *tsukuwa* *tsuk* ‘small’ + *wa* ‘water’ or the small brook but remain running throughout the year.

<i>tsənraŋwa</i>	<i>tsənraŋ</i> ‘moon’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the brook where the moon is supposed to be reflected.
<i>məkuwa</i>	<i>mak</i> ‘tear’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water full of tears where the tears of the Bantawa flowed a lot.’
<i>rəkswa</i>	<i>rakas</i> ‘?’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water full of tears where the tears of the Bantawa flowed a lot.’
<i>kuntsəkwa</i>	<i>kuntsək</i> ‘dark or black’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the dark water or black water in Bantawa language.
<i>luwa</i>	<i>lu>ləma</i> ‘heavey’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water heavy in weigh in Bantawa language.
<i>tsokriwa</i>	<i>tsokri</i> ‘pointed or’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the water heavy in weigh in this is rather forest.
<i>pək^huwa</i>	<i>pək^h</i> ‘slop area’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the slope are where water flows.
<i>reluwa</i>	<i>relu</i> ‘?’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or the slope are where water flows.
<i>rontowa</i>	<i>ronto^h</i> ‘hole’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ or

	the place of the water where there is hole or the water flows through the hole.
<i>fiŋtsewa</i>	<i>fiŋ</i> ‘king’ + <i>tse</i> ‘spoken’ + <i>wa</i> ‘the place where the king had spoken or the King had handed the place over.
<i>bəsuwa</i>	<i>bəs</i> ‘settled’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water or the place’ or the area where there is the settled place.
<i>littsakwa</i>	<i>littsakwa</i> ‘to search’ + <i>wa</i> ‘?’ the place where was discovered by searching.
<i>wawək</i>	<i>wa</i> ‘water’ + <i>wək</i> ‘land’ the land where there is water.
<i>fiətuwa</i>	<i>fiət</i> ‘blood’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ the water where there was poured blood; it has the historical importance in which place there was war between the two forced groups of the ancestors.’
<i>sawa</i>	<i>sa</i> ‘meat or flesh’ + <i>wa</i> ‘?’ place where was discovered by searching.
<i>k^henwa</i>	<i>k^hen</i> ‘wound’ + <i>wa</i> ‘?’ the people who drink water of this place he or she might be caused by wound.
<i>kenwa>kāwa</i>	<i>ken</i> ‘cold’ + <i>wa</i> ‘?’ the water which is too cold, now this brook is known as <i>kāwa</i> which is the corrupt form of <i>kenwa</i> .
<i>pik^huwa</i>	<i>pit>pik^h</i> ‘cow’ + <i>wa</i> ‘?’ the cows are heared in the top of this river where the cow dungs were blown
<i>buŋwa>būwa</i>	<i>buŋa</i> ‘flower’ + <i>wa</i> ‘water’ (Source: Hatuwali, 2021)

Yakthung/Limbu also retain the hydronymes suffixed with <-*wa*> as can be seen in the example (3).

- 3) *mouwa* > *məkwa~məʔ* + *wa* = the root and original Yakthung/Limbu term is *məʔwa* ‘hot water’ derived *məkwa*. The place where there is emerged hot water. There is still a small tap in this place.

tumbewa *tumbe* ‘hill top’ + *wa* ‘?’ , the water that is available at the top of the hill.

pan̄tuwa *pan̄tuwa* (derived from *Pan̄duwa* ‘pan̄du or pan̄duma ‘the herbs’

namluwa ~ *namləkwa* *nam* ‘sun’ + *lək* + *wa* ‘trip or thokkine’

kʰuŋwa *kʰuŋwa* > *kʰuŋa* (corrupt form), the name of the river

pəŋwa > *pūwa* *pūwa* (corrupt form), *puwāma* meaning ‘play’. This play traces back to the mythology of the Namsami ‘the brother man’ and Kesami ‘the tiger’ totem of the Kirat

pouwa ~ *pəʔwa* *pouwa* is the corrupt form of *pəʔwa* meaning ‘sitting down’ now it has been the word of Nepali. Now, *pəʔwa* *pʰaŋdzan̄* has been *pouwa* *bhandzjyang*’

pʰemswa > *pʰenmaswa* *pʰenmas* + *wa* = *pʰemeswa* derived from *pʰenmaswa*; *pʰen* ‘dhoti’ *masu-wa* ‘lost’

sidzowa *sidzo* + *wa* ‘the place’ *sidozwa* was inclined to *sidziyangdʰok*, the corrupt form.

sewa > *sjaʔwa* *sewa* was derived from *syaʔwa* ‘deer’ was inclined to *sidziyangdʰok*, the corrupt form *sewa* *sjakmawa* > *sjakmawa* > *sewa*

fiəŋtʰuwa > *fiəŋtʰəkwa* = *fiəŋ* ‘king’ + *tʰək* + *wa* (*fiəŋtʰəkwa* is the corrupt form of the *fiəŋtʰuwa*. The place is believed that there was the

king beaten. When the horse of Papohang king of this place was killed in Antha:k beaten by Samba, the King of Taplejung.

Source: Kurumbang (2019)

Chamling language exhibits the hydronyms suffixed with <-*wa*> which are presented in (4) and the data are gathered from the Diktel-Rupakot-Majhuwagadhi and Haleshi-Tuwachung municipalites of Khotang.

- 4) *dikʰuwa* *djukʰa* > *dikʰu* ‘troublesoem’ + *wa* ‘water’ there was the trouble of the water in Buipa of Khotang district (Chamling, 2022)

pakʰūwa *pakʰū* ‘a type of stone’ + *wa* ‘rain’ *seluwa* *selu* ‘dried’ + *wa* ‘rain’

dʰiwa *dʰi* ‘huge’ + *wa* ‘water’ the brook is of enough water

kʰawa *kʰa* ‘the land in the boarder’ + *wa* ‘water’ water is on the boarder land.

kʰamkʰuwa *kʰam* ‘the cultivated land’ + *wa* ‘water’ the cultivated land with enough water.

kʰamkʰuwa *kʰam* ‘the cultivated land or the residing place’ + *wa* ‘water’ the cultivated land with enough water.

buikʰuwa *bui* ‘carrying’ + *wa* ‘water’ the anecdote explores that the people hither went to thither carrying crops with them and the place later named after it.

tsʰiwa *tsʰi* ‘little’ + *wa* ‘water’ or the place of little water.

tapkuwa *tap* ‘warm’ + *wa* ‘water’ or warm water

kirləwa *kir* ‘Kirati’ + *lə* ‘?’ + *wa* ‘water’ or it is believed that the Kirati people used to come to take bath in this place.

dinuwa *din* ‘?’ + *wa* ‘water or the initial morpheme is not yet discovered its meaning.

There are some hydronyms that exhibit the suffix <-wa> in the infix position that are presettled in (5).

- 5) *buwaluŋ buwa* ‘brother’ + *wa* ‘water’ or any branches of the water body.

luwaluŋ *l^hwa>lu* ‘covered stones’ + *wa* ‘water’ the water covered with the stones.

Some of the hydronyms are prefixed with <-wa> that are exemplified in (6).

- 6) *watto wa* ‘water’ + *to* ‘emerged’ or the place where the water flows.

wab^hirma *wa* ‘water’ + *b^hirma* ‘clif’ or the water appearing in the cliff.

waduŋ *wa* ‘water’ + *duŋ* ‘to drink’ or the place where the water is drunk by the shepherds and cattle rears.

waliŋ *wa* ‘water’ + *limma>liŋ* ‘to return’ or the water which can be moved or turned.

wanamla *wa* ‘water’ + *nam* ‘sun’ + *lam>la* ‘path’ the place from where the rainbows are seen clearly and frequently.

In the geographical regions inhabited by Kirat communities, suffixes like <-ku~k^hu> are commonly used and are semantically associated with the ‘mouth’ or origin of water bodies, often referred to as ‘headwaters’. In Khaling, for instance, the morpheme <*kāku*> consist of <*kā*> meaning ‘enough’ and <*ku*> meaning ‘water’, that collectively denote ‘enough water’. Similarly, in Dumi, the morpheme <-ku> denotes ‘water’, as seen in <*bats^her-ku*>, where <*bats^her*> means ‘head’ and <*ku*> signifies ‘water’, forming the meaning ‘head water’. Another example from Dumi, <*halku*>, combines <*hi ~hal*> meaning ‘blood’ with <*ku*> indicating ‘water’, illustrating the metaphorical association of water with blood color. In Thulung, <*saraku*> merges <*sarak*> meaning ‘fountain’ with <*ku*> meaning ‘water’, to denote ‘water full of fountains’. Likewise, in Thulung, <*baipku*> combines <*baip*> referring to ‘bobwhites’ with <*ku*> meaning ‘water’, indicating

‘water associated with bobwhites’. In the the Koits-Sunuwar language, the westernmost subgroup within the Kirati cluster, hydronyms as <*liku*> or <*lik^hu*> are preserved, where <*li*> means ‘arc’ and <*k^hu*> denotes ‘water’. This pattern extends to the Kathmandu Valley, where several hydronyms also contain the morpheme <-k^hu>.

The suffix <-ku~k^hu>, commonly used among the Kirati people in eastern Nepal is also found in Kathmandu Valley, where it denotes water <-k^hu>. Since Kirat Kings historically ruled Kathmandu (formerly known Nepal), the presence of this linguistic remnants suggests a lasting connection between the Kirati people of the Kathmandu Valley and those in the eastern Nepal. The linguistic legacy highlights the enduring influence of Kirati culture across different geographical regions of Nepal.

There are some of the hydronyms suffixed with <-k^hu> in the Kathmandu Valley. Some of the lexicon around more than 200 are supposed to be non-Sanskrit are probably the Kirati words (Regmi, 2009). This is, indeed the toponyms related to the Kirati languages as they retain even in the Kirati-speaking area. If we look at the examples like Tēk^hu [today known as [Tek^hu > Teku], Nwak^hu [Bagmati], meaning ‘mouth’, Balk^hu [Ratnawati, Hindunized name, however, the name Balkhu is still in existence in Kathmandu], Hhijak^hu [Rudramati, Sanskritized name, now it is called Dhobighat in the Khas Nepali terminology], Sank^hu [Manimati, Sanskritized name], Jaṭik^hu, fūdik^hu, pik^hu that are suffixed with <k^hu> (Witzel, 1991). These examples explore the presence of the Kirati linguistic terminologies in the toponymy of the Kathmandu valley that reflects the historical and cultural connections between the Kathmandu Valley and the Kirat communities presently available at the eastern part of Nepal.

There suffix <-ti> is used to denote water in both the territories eastern and western territories of Kathmandu. This can be observed in place names such as k^himti and Dolti [Bhote Koshi]. The presence of <-ti> is notable across the regions, where it commonly appears in names of associated with water bodies. Examples include Milti (found

in the north), *Migristi* and *Risti* (both tributaries of the eastern *Modi Khola*), as well as *Kalesti*, *Nisti*, and *Lasti*, tributaries of the Kali Gandaki River (Sinjali Magar, 2021). The consistent use of <-ti> to denote water related features highlights its linguistic significance and suggests a shred toponymic heritage across these geographical areas. The extension of the suffix as <-di> is productive in the Western part of Nepal as Madi, Ridi, Myagdi, Daroudi, etc.

Results and Discussion

In historical linguistics, the term 'Proto-Form' refers to reconstructed hypothetical form considered to be the ancestral source from which

a group of related languages or dialects developed (Hock & Joseph, 2019). Scholars use comparative methods to analyze cognates (words with shared origins) across these languages to deduce features of the ancestral language. For example, in the study of Sino-Tibetan languages, scholars like Benedict (1972) and Mattisof (2003) have proposed various proto-forms of the Tibeto-Burman languages. The proto-form for water, reconstructed as <*k(yu)~k^hu or wa>, is believed to have originated in the proto-form of the Sino-Tibetan languages. Another form, <*ti(y)> diverges from the proto-form of water in the Tibeto-Burman languages, eventually extending to forms such as <-di~ ri> as can be seen in Table 1.

Table 1

Suffix Denoting to Water Among the Kirati Languages

Suffixes	Indigenous communities
<-wa>	Limbu, (Rai group of Arun, Sunkoshi)
<-ku, -k ^h u >	Rai Group (Central Himalaya), Sunuwar and Newar
<-ti>	TB – features and Magarat areas

Contemporary Kirati languages mostly use similar words to refer to 'water'. In Chamling and Puma, the word *wa* means water. Languages like Bantawa, Mugali, Belhare, Chhintang and Phangduwali, Chhiling share the cognate *tsuwa* whereas Yatkthung/Limbu uses *tswa* for water.

However, Kirati languages spoken in Central northern and western regions of the Kirati language speaking areas use a different lexicon. These languages often have words for water that include the suffix <-ku> or <k^hu> as can be seen in Table 2.

Table 2

Cognates Denoting for 'Water'

Cognate Set 1	
Chamling	w--a
Newahang	w--a
Puma	w--a
Cognate Set 2	
Bantawa	ts --a --ʔ--wa
Belhare	ts --u--wa
Maugali	ts--u--wa
Chhintang	ts --u--wa
Phangduwali	ts--u--wa
Chhiling	ts--u--wa
Athpare	ts-- ə--wa
Yakthung/Limbu	ts--w--a

Cognate Set 3	
Kulung	<i>k--au</i>
Sampang	<i>k--wa</i>
Nacchiring	<i>k--ou</i>
Khaling	<i>k--u</i>
tilung	<i>k--u</i>
Cognate Set 4	
Wambule	<i>k—a--k--u</i>
Jero/Jerung	<i>k—a--k--u</i>
Cognate Set 5	
Koyee	<i>k--ə--ŋ--k^h--a</i>
Dumi	<i>k—ə--ŋ--k--u</i>
Cognate Set 6	
Bayung	<i>ɓw--a--k</i>
Koits-Sunuar	<i>ɓw—ə---k</i>

Note. (Rai, 2024)

The cognate sets mentioned in the Table 2 shows the historical relationships among the Kirati languages. In Cognate set1, the form *w--a* appear in Chamling, Puma and Mewahang as the shared root. Its similarity across these languages could point to a common origin in the eastern Rai Kirati group. Cognate set 2 includes *ts—u—wa* or *ts--ə--wa* which appear in the languages like Bantawa, Belhare, Chhintang. These forms show a consistant root -ts-, followed by a vowel, and ending in the suffix -wa. The repeation of the suffix -wa suggests that the Kirati langauegs may have been a common a suffix in Proto-Kirati. There are very slightly differences in vowels or added sounds, i.e. the glottal sound stop in Bantawa show how each lanague has changed in its own way. In Cognate Set 3, we see the initial sound k- and ending with either -au or -wa or -u. There can be realized the changed in the sound over time like vowel shifting. Cognate

set 4 includes *k-a-k-u* in Wambule and Jerung which are similar and show that they are closely realted. Cognate Set 5 features a nasal sound *ŋ* as in Koyee and Dumi whereas difference is in the case of the aspiration. Cognate set 6 is interesting that the languages Bayung and Koits-Sunuwar share the bilabial implosive sound which is less common among other Kirati languages.

These cognate sets show regular sound patterns and shared word parts across Kirati langauges They help us trace how the langauges are connected and how they have changed over time. The similarities suggest a shared origin, while the diffrences show how langauege evolve in different areas. There are non-cognate sets for denoting the term ‘water’ in the Kirati languages which are presented in Table 3.

Table 3

Non-cognates Denoting for 'Water'

Lohorung	<i>jə--wa--</i>
Nacchiring	<i>jə-ou</i>
Yakkha	<i>sw--a</i>
Dunmali	<i>ts--o--u</i>

As can be seen in Table 3, the term ‘water’ shows a lot of variety, even though they all mean the same thing. In Lohorung, and Nachhiring, both words begin with *jo-*, which might be a shared part that relates to ‘water’. Lohorung ends with *-wa*, which might be a variation. Yakkha uses *swa*, which sounds different from the others. It may be a completely separated word, though the *-a* at the end could just be a marker. Dungmali uses *ts-o-u*, which is similar to the Limbu lexicon *tswa*, suggesting some connection. Even though these words are not directly related, some share sounds or patterns. The means that over time, these languages may have influenced each other or developed similar way of sharing the term ‘water’.

The morpheme *<-wa>* is common in the Kirati languages of the eastern most-especially among the Yakthung and the Rai Kirati communities living near the Arun and Sunkoshi rivers. In addition, suffixes like *<-ku_ k^hu>* are used by the the Rai Kirati groups living along or around the Dudhkoshi rivers and the Koits-Sunuar. This evidence extends to the hydronyms of the Kathmandu valley, i.e. *Tēk^hu > Teku*, *Balk^hu*, *Sank^hu*, *Malek^hu* and *Pik^hu* (Malla 2015). Interestingly, the hydronym *Pik^hu* is resembled to the *Pik^hu-wa* of Bhojpur district.

The water related lexicon and the affixes *-wa*, *-ku*, *-k^hu* and *-ti_{di}* show a clear distribution from east to west across Nepal. In Some cases, the both water denoting affixes may appear as in *K^huwalu_ŋ* that includes *k^hu* and *wa* both. In Samapang language, there is *kwa* meaning ‘water’ has also both terms to denoting water.

Conclusion

Hydronyms or name of the water bodies, provide valuable insights into the historical development, cultural interconnectedness, and settlement patterns of indigenous communities, particularly the Kirati groups. This study used the linguistic archeology to examine the distribution of hydronyms within Kirat territories, uncovering patterns of cultural exchange and environmental adaptation. In these regions, hydronyms often include suffixes such as *<-wa>*, and *<ku-k^hu>*

which reflect the linguistic traditions of the Kirati people. It also pertains the common proto-form likely rooted in Proto-Kirati or Proto-Sino-Tibetan. While many languages maintain cognate sets that show clear patterns of phonological evolution, others exhibit the non-cognate forms that suggest language contact or localized innovation. Despite the some regional variation, the hydronyms serve similar functions across the Kirati territories, suggesting consistent settlement practices and shared linguistic heritage. By analyzing linguistic heritage through hydronyms, this study explores the linguistic archeology of the Kirati hydronyms and their historical development and legacy connected to the Kathmandu Valley and further extending to the Western part of Nepal.

This study carries significant implications across the multiple domains. Historically, it provides valuable insights into the migration and settlement patterns of the Kirati communities, linking their legacy to the Kathmandu valley. Culturally, it plays a crucial role in preserving the endangered linguistic and cultural heritage of the Kirati people, emphasizing their deep connection to the geographical distribution. This study identifies cognate sets like **-wa*, **ku*, **k^hu* and **ti* that help to reconstruct Proto-Kirati connecting to the Sino-Tibetan roots. Since this is the interdisciplinary nature of the research, it bridges the linguistics, archeology, and anthropology that bring the interconnections to trace the historical development. Also, this study challenges the influence of Sanskritization and Hinduization by reclaiming the indigenous Kirati hydronyms, promoting a decolonized approach to historical narratives. These implications show the academic, cultural, societal significance, offering the foundation for future research on the hydronyms.

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