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Language politics in Nepal: A socio-historical overview

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Abstract: This paper aims to outline the language politics in Nepal by focusing on the influences and expansions shifted from Global North to the Global South. Based on a small-scale case study of interviews and various political movements and legislative documents, this paper discusses linguistic diversity and multilingualism, globalization, and their impacts on Nepal's linguistic landscapes. It finds that the language politics in Nepal has been shifted and changed throughout history because of different governmental and political changes. Different ideas have emerged because of globalization and neoliberal impacts which are responsible for language contact, shift, and change in Nepalese society. It concludes that the diversified politics and multilingualism in Nepal have been functioning as a double-edged sword, which on the one hand promotes and preserves linguistic and cultural diversity and on the other hand squeezes the size of diversity by vitalizing the Nepali and English languages through contact and globalization.

Keywords: Christianity; democracy; diversity; globalization; ideology; politics

1 Introduction

Nepal is a multilingual, multicultural, multiracial, and multi-religious country. Despite its small size, Nepal is a country of linguistic diversity with four major language families, namely, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian (Munda), and Austro-Asiatic, and one language isolate, Kusunda (Poudel and Baral 2021). The *National Population and Household Census 2011* (Central Bureau of Statistics 2012) records the number of speakers for 123 languages and some other includes an additional category of 'other unknown languages' with close to half a million speakers. The state intervention to preserve and promote these languages remained inconsistent throughout history, as some governments intentionally discouraged the planned promotion compared to others which designed some

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measures to promote them. Both monolingual and multilingual ideologies remained as points of debate in political and social spaces.

Language politics is the way language is used in the political arena in which people can observe the treatment of language by various governmental and non-governmental agencies. Research related to language politics focuses on identifying and critiquing any sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization or justification of perceived language structure and use (Dunmre 2012: 742; Silverstein 1979: 193). In this context, every political movement is the outcome of different conflicting ideas between language users and linguistic differences running through any society (Pelinka 2018). The politics of language choice becomes particularly difficult when institutional choices have to be made in what language(s) the government will conduct its business and communicate its citizens, and, above all, what the language(s) of education will be (Joseph 2006: 10). Nepal's language politics and democratic movements question whether democracy can promote linguistic diversity, or narrow down diversity by marginalizing ethnic/minority languages. In Nepal, linguistic diversity and democracy have been challenged by the contradiction between the normative assumption of existing demos and the reality of a society that is too complex to be defined by one orientation only by nation, culture, and religion (Pelinka 2018: 624). Nepal's language politics has not been explained from such a perspective where we can see several factors influencing the issues related to language, culture, and society. Hence, this paper tries to overview the language politics in Nepal which has been influenced by various external and internal factors.

2 Brief history of language politics in Nepal

Following the Gorkha¹ conquest, Gorkhali or Khas (now known as Nepali), the language of ruling elites and mother tongue of many people in the Hills, was uplifted as the national official language in Nepal. After unification,² a hegemonic policy in terms of language and culture was formulated which promoted the code (linguistic and dress) of the Hill Brahmins, Chhetries, and Thakuris to the ideal national code (i.e. Nepali language and Daura Suruwal Topi-dress³). This has been interpreted as one of the attempts to promote assimilatory national policy (in terms of language and culture) that contributed to curbing both linguistic and cultural diversity. However, for the rulers then, it was an attempt to establish a stronger

¹ A hilly district from the western part of Nepal where Prithvi Narayan Shah ruled in 1743–1775.

² The movement started in 1736–1769.

³ Formal national uniform of Nepal.

national identity and integrity. The Rana regime further prolonged this ‘one nation-one language’ policy by uplifting the Nepali language in education and public communication. The Rana, during their rule, suppressed various language movements (Newar, Hindi, Maithili, etc.), which serves as evidence of their deliberate plan to eliminate all but one language, viz. Nepali. In this sense, we can understand that Nepal’s diversity and multilingual identity were suppressed historically in the name of nation-building and promoting national integration among people with diverse ethnic and cultural orientations.

Following the end of the Rana oligarchy in 1950, with the establishment of democracy, some changes were noticed concerning the recognition and mainstreaming of the other ethnic/indigenous languages. This instigated the policy change in terms of language use in education as well. However, the status quo of the Nepali language further strengthened as it was made the prominent language of governance and education. The *Education in Nepal: Report of the Nepal Education Planning Commission* (Sardar et al. 1956), the first national report on education, basically reflected the ideology of monolingualism with the influence of Hugh. B. Wood. It stated, “If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other languages will gradually disappear” (Sardar et al. 1956: 72). Though this report formed the backbone of Nepal’s education system, it also paved the way for minimizing the potential for empowering the languages of the nation. Pradhan (2019: 169) also writes that this commission attempted to “coalesce the ideas of Nepali nationalism around the “triumvirate of Nepali language, monarchy, and Hindu religion”. The same idea was reinforced by K. I. Singh’s government in 1957 by prescribing Nepali as the medium of instruction in school education.

The Panchayat regime also promoted the use of Nepali as the only language of administration, education, and media in compliance with the Panchayat slogan ‘one language, one dress, one country’ (*eutaa bhasha, eutaa bhash, eutaa desh*), again providing a supportive environment for strengthening the monolingual nationalistic ideology (i.e. the assimilatory policy). Not only in education but also in governance, English or Nepali language was made mandatory in recording all documents of companies through the *Nepal Companies Act 1964* (Government of Nepal 1964). Following the Panchayat system, with the restoration of democracy in 1990, the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990* (Government of Nepal 1990) provisioned the Nepali language written in Devanagari script⁴ as the national language, and also recognized all the mother tongues as the languages of the nation with their official eligibility as the medium of instruction in primary education. The *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063* (Government of Nepal 2007), which

4 The common script of many Indo-Aryan languages.

came as a collective outcome of the various political movements and Andolan II continued to strengthen the Nepali language, but ensured (in Part 1, Article 5.2) that each community's right to have education in their mother tongue and right to preserve and promote their languages, script, and culture as well.

The recognition of all the mother tongues as the languages of the nation was a progressive step ahead provisioned by the *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063*. Apart from further confirming the right of each community to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civility, and heritage, the *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063* (Part 3, Article 17) clearly explained the right to each community to acquire basic education in their mother tongue as provided for in the law. The same was well articulated in the *Constitution of Nepal 2072* (Government of Nepal 2015) as well, and each state was given the authority to provide one or many languages spoken by the majority population as the official languages. Along with this, the language commission was established in 2016 to study and recommend other issues related to language and multilingualism (Part 1, Article 7 of the *Constitution of Nepal 2072*). However, it can be realized that these policy provisions that embrace diversity will have less effect if the concerned communities or agencies do not translate them into practice.

3 Research method

This study, following a qualitative approach, is based on a small-scale case study with primary and secondary data sets.

The author has obtained the primary data from semi-structured interviews with two selected individuals who have spent their lives in politics and especially language movements and advocacy for language preservation and promotion in Nepal. They were observed and interviewed informally on many occasions from 2019 to 2020 related to language issues like constitutions, language movements, language diversities and democracy, and so on. The interviews (altogether 3 h each) were recorded, transcribed, and translated into English, and were checked for accuracy and reliability.

Mr. Yonjan and Dr. Thakur⁵ have been selected from two different political and linguistic backgrounds. Mr. Yonjan is a liberal democratic fellow who has been working as a freelance language activist for more than 40 years, involving himself in many governmental and non-governmental policies and programs related to language issues. Dr. Thakur worked as a politician (left-wing) and teacher educator who later joined Radio Nepal, engaged in various cultural advocacy

⁵ Pseudonyms are used to protect the privacy of interviewees.

forums of the ruling Communist Party of Nepal, and again moved to politics at the later part of his life. He was a member of the parliament in the Constituent Assembly. Mr. Yonjan is the native speaker of Tamang (a major Tibeto-Burman language) and Dr. Thakur is a native speaker of Bhojpuri (a major Indo-Aryan language), and both of them learn Nepali as a second language. In that, both of the individuals have active engagement in language politics and planning, however, are from different cultural, linguistic, and geopolitical backgrounds. It is assumed that their ideas would make the understanding of language politics in Nepal more enriched.

The secondary data is obtained from a detailed reading of available literature about language politics. Nepal's language and educational history, various political movements, constitutions and legislative documents, policy documents, and other published research papers and documents have been carefully utilized.

4 Findings and discussion

Language politics in Nepal has a very long history since the beginning of modern Nepal. After the victory of Prithvi Narayan Shah, a Gurkha King whose mother tongue was Khas (Nepali), in Kathmandu valley (1769), Nepali became the language of law and administration (Gautam 2012) where the vernacular language was Newar spoken by the majority of people. Since then, language politics has become the center of democratic and political movements in Nepal.

Nepali language was highlighted and became the language for all public and private activities after the Unification Movement (1736–1769) in Nepal. Janga Bahadur Rana's visit to the United Kingdom and his relation to British India made it possible for the Nepalese rulers to start English Education formally in Durbar High school in 1854. After Rana Regime, Nepal experienced an unstable political scenario for 10 years before the establishment of the Panchayat Regime in 1961 which employed assimilatory language policy until 1990. The country was converted into a multiparty democratic system and eventually, most of the ethnic and minority linguistic groups flourished for the preservation and documentation of their ethnic and cultural heritages. At present, Nepalese politics has been influenced by ethnic, cultural, and language issues at the center.

4.1 Legal and constitutional provisions

Nepalese constitutions are the main sources of language politics in Nepal. Before the construction of the constitution in the country, some government policies

played a vital role in creating language issues debatable all the time. The first legal court Muluki Ain⁶ (1854) enforced Hinduisation and Nepalization in Nepal by ignoring most of the other ethnic languages. The establishment of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) by the recommendation of the National Education Board of the Government of Nepal emphasized the Nepali language by implementing it as a medium of instruction in all levels of education.

The medium of instruction should be the national language (Nepali) in primary, middle, and higher educational institutions because any language which cannot be made lingua franca and which does not serve legal proceedings in court should not find a place. The use of national language can bring about equality among all classes of people. (Sardar et al. 1956: 56)

This excerpt indicates the emphasis given to the Nepali language by the government then. The use of Nepali in education was further reinforced by the K. I. Singh government in 1957 by prescribing Nepali as the medium of instruction. The case of Nepali was again strengthened during the Panchayat regime. In 1961, the National System of Education was introduced to promote the use of only Nepali in administration, education, and media in compliance with the Panchayat's popular slogan of 'one language, one dress, and one country'. In addition, the *Nepal Companies Act* was passed in 1964 directing all companies to keep their records in English or Nepali. The Panchayat constitution followed a nationalist assimilation policy to promote the Nepali language in different ways.

The *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990* (Government of Nepal 1990: 4) framed after the restoration of democracy recognized languages other than Nepali and made the following provisions about the non-Nepali languages:

- (1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script is the language of the nation of Nepal. The Nepali language shall be the official language. (Part 1, Article 6.1)
- (2) All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal. (Part 1, Article 6.2)

In addition, the constitution also made a provision for the use of mother tongues in primary education (Part 1, Article 18.2). It also guaranteed a fundamental right to the people to preserve their culture, scripts, and their languages (Part 1, Article 26.2).

Similarly, the Maoist movement that started in 1996 brought new changes and dynamics among all the ethnic minorities of Nepal. This political campaign motivated them to preserve and promote their languages and cultures which has been documented in the *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063*. The *Interim*

⁶ The first legislative document of Nepal.

Constitution of Nepal 2063 (Government of Nepal 2007: 2), an outcome of the people's revolution (Andolan II), made the following provisions for languages:

- (1) All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in Nepal are the national languages of Nepal.
- (2) The Nepali Language in Devanagari script shall be the official language.
- (3) Notwithstanding anything contained in clause (2), it shall not be deemed to have hindered to use the mother language in local bodies and offices. State shall translate the languages when they are used for official purpose. (Part 1, Article 5)

Regarding education and cultural rights, the *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063* (Government of Nepal 2007: 8) enshrined the following provisions:

- (1) Each community shall have the right to receive basic education in their mother tongue as provided for in the law.
- (2) Every citizen shall have the right to receive free education from the State up to secondary level as provided for in the law
- (3) Each community residing in Nepal has the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization and heritage. (Part 3 Article 17)

The *Interim Constitution of Nepal 2063* was more progressive and liberal than the constitution of 1991. For the first time, this constitution recognized all the languages spoken in Nepal as the national languages. Apart from further confirming the right of each community to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civility, and heritage, this constitution (Part 3, Article 17) discussed the right to each community to acquire basic education in their mother tongue as provided for in the law. However, the role of the government was to facilitate the speech communities to materialize these rights which still are not effective.

Likewise, the latest *Constitution of Nepal 2072* (Government of Nepal 2015: 4) has clearly stated the following provisions:

Languages of the nation: All languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation. (Part 1, Article 6)

Official language: (1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script shall be the official language of Nepal. (2) A State may, by a State law, determine one or more than one languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State as its official language(s), in addition to the Nepali language. (3) Other matters relating to language shall be as decided by the Government of Nepal, on recommendation of the Language Commission. (Part 1 Article 7)

The *Constitution of Nepal 2072* (Government of Nepal 2015) conferred the right to basic education in mother tongue (Article 31.1), the right to use mother language (Article 32.1), and preservation and promotion of language (Article 32.3). This constitution states that each community shall have the right to preserve and

promote its language, script, culture, cultural civility, and heritage. Unless the constitution articulates the responsibility of the government to preserve and promote the endangered languages, the efforts of the communities will be useless. Observing and analyzing the legal provisions, Nepal has manifested significant progress and gradual development in the use of languages along with historical events. 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. The *Constitution of Nepal 2072* (Government of Nepal 2015) also made the provision of establishing a language commission in article 287 which was a landmark in Nepalese history.

4.2 Democracy and political movements

Nepal's language politics is guided by various democratic and political movements in different periods. The *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (United Nations 1948) asserts that democracy assures the basic human rights for self-determination and full participation of people in the aspects of their living such as decision-making about their language and culture (Article 27). Nepal's political parties and the ruling governments never understand the seriousness of political movements and democratic practices. Human rights also provide them with ways of assuring social benefits such as equal opportunities and social justice. In Nepal, diversity was promoted by democracy through the policy provisions, especially after the promulgation of the *Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal 1990*. The basic rights for the use of indigenous languages were assured in the constitution as well as other educational acts formed as outcomes of democratic political turns. The changes in the policy provisions provided opportunities for linguists, language rights activists, and advocacy groups or individuals to explore more about their languages and cultures. Due to their attempts, also supported by the democratic political system, new languages were identified, and some others were streamlined through the preparation of educational materials such as textbooks for primary level education. However, pragmatic actions remained fragile for education in the schools to support the aspiration for promoting diversity, which ultimately resulted in squeezing multilingualism. The statistical data shows that the number of languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal is 129,⁷ some scholars still doubt whether these languages functionally exist in reality (Gautam 2019a), or if they are there, then the practice may be fragile. In having such a very weak practice in the field, it can be noted that various factors played key roles, including lack of

7 <https://english.khabarhub.com/2019/05/53137/> (accessed 3 January 2021).

community participation, hegemonic attitude, and agency of the individuals who could have purposive actions.

For instance, the recognition of linguistic diversity in Nepal can be observed clearly after the establishment of multiparty democracy in 1990. Sonntag (2007: 205) stated that “the Nepali-only policy was discarded in favor of an official language policy that recognized Nepal’s linguistic diversity”. This shows that the democratic political system that remained open to the neoliberal economy embraced linguistic diversity as a resource, due to which the multilingual identity of Nepalese society was officially recognized. However, at the same time, this political system could not preserve the minority/indigenous languages as expected, which prompted us to question the co-existence of diversity and democracy. Also, “[i]t is very much a matter of democracy that everyone has the right to language and that society has a common language that everyone can understand and use” (Rosén and Bagga-Gupta 2013: 59). As democratic states (e.g. Nepal, India, and Sweden) which address the contradictory discourses of language rights and develop equal access for everyone to a common language (e.g. Nepali in Nepal) are struggling to settle the language issues. However, the fundamental question still not well-answered, at least in the case of Nepal, is whether democracy can, in a real sense, promote linguistic diversity, or it narrows down the diversity by marginalizing the ethnic/minority languages. While responding to this unanswered concern, this article finds that diversity as a resource and diversity as a problem are the two distinct discourses that emerged during the evolutionary process of democracy in Nepal, which is also emphasized by the two participants.

4.3 Linguistic diversity and politics

Linguistic, cultural, and geographical diversities are the essences of Nepalese democratic practices in different periods in history. Nepal’s modern history starts with the unification campaign of Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first Shah King of Nepal. Prithvi Narayan Shah’s unification modality worked indirectly to promote the politics of assimilation in nation-building, national integration, and identity. Roughly, all other systems of governance following the unification adopted similar ideological orientations, which (in) directly contributed to the marginalization of other mother tongues. Mr. Yonjan expressed his view as, “Historically, even before the unification movement of Nepal, there were several territories in which the state Kings used to speak their own languages, and the linguistic diversity was preserved and strengthened”. He further claimed, “The geopolitical, historical, socio-political, and anthropological history recognized the multilingual social dynamics, however, the national policies after the unification too could not

embrace such diversity”. By saying so, Mr. Yonjan expressed that the current political systems and the ideologies of Nepali nationalism were guided by the notion of ultra-nationalism. Dr. Thakur also emphasized that the government’s multilingual policies would not operate as the practice had largely shaped people’s orientation towards Nepali and English, side-lining the regional and local languages. The same perception was reported by Mr. Yonjan as, “Though careful efforts were made in the policy level to promote the regional/local languages through status planning, there still existed the attitudinal problem which undermined the potential of bringing local and minority languages into practice”. Their claims also adhered to the statements made in the documents which reflect the hidden language politics of Nepal.

Both informants in this study argued that diversity has two different outcomes viz. as a resource and as a problem. Mr. Yonjan claims, “If any language of a community dies, the culture and lifestyle of that community disappears and it reduces biodiversity, and that ultimately will be a great threat to humanity”. He understands linguistic diversity as a part of the ecology and strongly argues that it should be protected. Agnihotri (2017: 185) also echoes a similar belief as “Just as biodiversity enriches the life of a forest, linguistic diversity enhances the intellectual well-being of individuals and groups, both small and large”. But Dr. Thakur views that “In Nepal, along with the history, there remains an ideological problem that diversity is understood as a construct for division, rather than understanding it as a potential tool for nation-building”. He further clears that this community-level ideology and practice has led to the fragmentation of values associated with their languages, most probably harming the socio-historical harmony among languages. Mr. Yonjan further added, “No language should die or move towards the edge of extinction in the name of developing our own existence and condition”. Both Mr. Yonjan and Dr. Thakur pointed out that the discourse on diversity and multilingualism in Nepal had been strengthened and institutionalized after 1990 when the country entered a multiparty democratic system.

However, Mr. Yonjan thinks that the current legislative provisions have partially addressed the diversity needs to fit Nepal’s super diverse context. Dr. Thakur again indicates that the rulers for long “undermined the potential of the linguistic diversity and wished to impose a monolingual national system that marginalized the use of these languages”. Mr. Yonjan also provided a similar view as “in Nepal, throughout the history, there remained a political problem that diversity was understood as a construct for division, rather than a potential tool for nation-building”. His understanding also reflects what was discussed in the western countries as Nettle (2000: 335) clarifies “the linguistic and ethnic fragmentation relates to low levels of economic development since it is associated with societal divisions and conflicts, low mobility, limited trade, imperfect markets, and

poor communications in general”. Therefore, the direct economic benefits from learning a language were a great motivation for the people in the communities. In other words, they have preserved the sentimental functions of the minority languages while they have embraced the dominant languages associating them with educational and economic potential gains. This community-level politics and practices have led to the fragmentation of values associated with their languages, most probably harming the socio-historical harmony among languages. Gautam (2018) has pointed out this concern as a cause of intergenerational shifts in languages among the youths of indigenous languages (such as Newar, Sherpa, and Maithili in Kathmandu Valley). Consequently, this trend has influenced the participation of the relevant communities in campaigns for the revitalization of their languages that points to the influence of the Global North in bringing ultra-nationalist values in Nepal’s language politics and diversity.

4.4 Impact of globalization

The international political-economic structure seems stacked against a substantial or near future diminishment of “the North-South gap” (Thompson and Reuveny 2009: 66). The neoliberal trends that emerged from the Global North have traveled to the Global South, influencing these countries through the language and culture of the countries in the Global North. The unprecedented expansion of English as a global phenomenon (Dearden 2014) can be a good example of such an effect. It involved various combinations of developmental states recalling domestic markets from foreign exporters (import substitution) and the recapture of domestic business (nationalization). The outcome, aided by investments in education, was a new elite of technical managers and professionals who could build on historical experiences and opportunities in the post-war environment to manufacture and market commodities involving increasing product complexity and scale. Migration and demographic changes have had variable impacts on the North-South gap. Nepali youths’ labor migration and their English preference have also influenced the generational shifts in languages (Gautam 2020: 140). The youths’ migration to the countries in the Middle East, and their participation in the global marketplaces in the Global North countries have contributed to the reshaping of their ideologies towards the home languages and English. Mr. Yonjan states, “We have made lots of choices in our society and education systems (e.g. choice of language for education, western culture, and lifestyles) attracted by the politics and ideologies created even by our immigrant Nepali population usually in the western world”. Among many, this expression can be understood as one of the causes for stressed deviating tendencies in language shifts, usually from mother tongues or heritage

languages and dominant national languages to English. In the context of Nepal, either English or Nepali has been highlighted even though there have been lots of attempts of implementing mother tongue-based multilingual education.

4.4.1 English and globalization

English has become the global language because of its use, function, and popularity in most of the social, cultural, and academic areas. A sizeable body of scholarship has addressed the topic of globalization and its impact on the modern world (Giddens 1991; Levitt 1983). Among several definitions, globalization refers to the multifarious transformations in time and place that influence human activities through the creation of linkages and connections across geographical borders and national differences (Giddens 1991; Held et al. 1999). In the context of Nepal, these linkages and connections are often facilitated through various globalized activities, such as marketing, transportation, shipping, telecommunications, and banking. Similarly, sociolinguists and language planners have examined the phenomenon of global English and its impact on the linguistic landscape around the world. Crystal (2012) maintains that a language attains a global status once it has gained a distinctive role in every nation-state around the globe. This special role is manifested in three ways: functioning as the mother tongue of the majority of citizens, being assigned the official status, and/or playing the role of the major foreign language. Many observers view English as the global language *par excellence* of the Internet, science and education, entertainment, popular culture, music, and sports. The emergence of global English is also attributable to some factors, notably the economy, military, and politics.

Historical records show that English was used in Nepal as early as the seventeenth century (Giri 2015). However, English language education started formally after Janga Bahadur visited the UK during British rule in India. He knew the importance of English and started English Education in Durbar School for selected Ranas. It was the first government-run English medium school in Nepal. It was only established for the Rana family as the Ranas saw an educated person as a threat to their control (Caddell 2007). The first post-secondary (higher) educational institution in Nepal was Trichandra College (1918) where the language of instruction was English. The main purpose was to shelter students of Durbar School and to stop them from going abroad (India) for further education. The underlying purpose was to prevent Nepalese from getting radical ideas that could be dangerous for them and the entire Rana regime. Tri-Chandra College was affiliated with Patna University, India. It borrowed the syllabus and assessment system from there; therefore, there was a direct influence of the British Indian Education System in the Nepalese system. Another very important reason for the spread of English

was the recruitment and the retirement of the Nepalese British army. As English was mandatory for their recruitment in the British army, the youngsters willing to join the British army learned English. After their retirement, these armies returned to their homeland and inspired their younger generations to learn English. In South Asian countries, English is viewed as a language of power and as a means of economic uplift and upward social mobility (Kachru et al. 2006: 90). It led to the establishment of many private schools and colleges and made English indispensable to the Nepalese curriculum. Later, it became the language of attraction for all academic activities. The spread of global English as an international lingua franca intensifies socio-economic disparities both within and between speech communities. Tollefson (1995) and Pennycook (1995) explain that the promotion of English as an international language is driven by social, economic, and political forces, thereby giving rise to economic inequalities. In the same way, Canagarajah (1999) noted that generally, native speakers of English are presented with better compensation and benefits packages compared to non-natives, regardless of their academic qualifications. In Nepal, the state's neoliberal ideology in the post-1990 era, however, has valorized the commodity value of English as a global language, creating a hierarchy of languages in which minoritized languages like Newar, Sherpa, Maithili, Tharu, Limbu, etc. remain at the bottom (Gautam 2021). Following the state's neoliberal structural reforms, a large number of private schools popularly known as 'English medium' and 'boarding' schools have been established with private investments in many parts of the country (Sharma and Phyak 2017: 5). The establishment of various international non-governmental organizations like the United Nations Organization (UNO), the World Health Organization (WHO), the United National Education, the Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), and regional organizations like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) have spread the use and demand of English. After the restoration of democracy in 1990, Nepal's active participation in such organizations made English vital in Nepalese society. Although it has a sort of colonial liability, it is now accepted as an asset in the form of a national and international language representing educational and economic processes (Kachru et al. 2006: 90). As Kachru (2005) opines that Nepalese learners do not learn English to communicate in their homeland but they learn to talk in their work abroad. Now, this view is partially true since mostly Nepalese learn English to talk in their workplace either it can be at home or abroad. Therefore, from the time of commencement of English education, English has been learned and taught for professional development, scientific and technological knowledge, international communication, mass media, travel, and tourism. Globalization and its impact on the flourishing of English in Nepal have been very productive in recent days when the country was converted into a Federal republic state after the 2006/2007

political change. Learning English is deeply rooted among Nepalese people across the country, although the government seems reluctant to force the users to use English as a medium of instruction formally and officially (Gautam 2021).

4.4.2 Language contact and shift

The present world is diversified and multilingual by nature and practice. Language contact is the common phenomenon of multilingualism where people choose their codes in their conversations and discourses. Social, historical, political, and economic power relations are major forces that influence the linguistic outcome of language contact (Thomason and Kaufman 1992) as they may shape ideologies and attitudes that social actors hold toward such languages. Consequently, there is always a change in the linguistic behavior of language communities in contact which may even result in language loss due to displacement (Sankoff 2001). In the context of Nepal, language contact has been the common phenomenon in Nepalese discourse of all aspects of society which is moving slowly towards code-mixing, switching, translanguaging, and the shifting from the heritage languages to the dominant and global languages.

In multilingual countries like Nepal, speakers tend to switch back and forth between two languages (or more) in different situations, formal and informal contexts, and even within the same conversation. People may code switch for various reasons. They sometimes shift within the same domain or social situation depending on the audience. A speaker might code switch to indicate group membership and similar ethnicity with the addressee. The linguistic situation of Nepal is very complex since people in their daily lives often use their respective mother tongues, Nepali, Hindi, and English within the same conversation (Milroy and Muysken 1995). Language practices are inherently political in so far as they are among the ways individuals have at their disposal of gaining access to the production, distribution, and consumption of symbolic and material resources, that is, in so far as language forms part of the process of power (Heller 1995: 161) which we can easily observe and experience in Nepal. Code-switching in Nepal is shifting towards Nepali and English among the minority and other language communities (Gautam 2019b) as a mark of modernization, high socioeconomic position, and identity with a certain type of elite group; and in stylistic terms, it marks what may be termed as “deliberate” style. A marker of “modernization” or civilization is the impact of western music and culture in Nepal (Gautam 2021: 20). Dr. Thakur says “Our political leaders speak multiple languages in different places to collect the emotional feelings of the speakers attached with their mother tongues. Many Madhesi politicians speak Hindi, Maithili, and Bhojpuri in Terai and Nepali in

Kathmandu”. This indicates that language contact and shift have also been the center of Nepalese politics for collecting votes to win the election.

4.4.3 Christianity and neoliberal impact

Christianity started when Father Juan Craybrawl (Portuguese) entered Nepal in 1628, during the reign of Laxmi Narsingha Malla in Kantipuri Nagari.⁸ He had permission from the King to preach Christianity in Kathmandu valley. But basically, the gospel was brought to Nepal by Nepalese who were outside Nepal, as they come in and go. Slowly, missionaries started to enter Nepal during the 1950s but were not directly involved in preaching the gospel. They focused on social services like hospitals, education, and development works. Two major missionary organizations to serve Nepal, the United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and the International Nepal Fellowship (INF), came into existence in the early 1950s (Kirchheiner 2016). The Nepal Christian Fellowship (NCF), now the National Churches Fellowship of Nepal (NCFN), played a significant role during the first 30 years from the 1960s to the 1990s. From just a single secret Christian residing in Nepal in 1951, the number of Nepali Christians grew to about 40,000 baptized believers by 1990 and has increased more rapidly since then. Groups of International Christian agency made United Mission to Nepal and founded Saint Xavier School in Godawari, Patan Hospital, and Tansen Hospital which provided grade one services to the people of Nepal. It was possible only after Nepal became a democratic country and many people accepted Jesus Christ as their personal Lord and savior. Christians in Nepal were overjoyed when Nepal has declared a secular state in 2008. The Christian population in Nepal outgrew to triple in 2011 from 2001, but this record is not accurate. Now, according to the World Christian Database, which tracks global trends in Christianity, Nepal has seen the fastest-growing Christian population. Times are changing in Nepal, not only because of democracy but also because of globalization. The influx of media, computers, and new types of secular education is guiding young generations into fields where Nepalese habits, customs, and traditional ways of approaching matters are challenged.

Christianity has developed cross-cultural practices in the country developing various neoliberal activities in the Global South. The new generation has become more concerned about the use of foreign goods, music, and activities in the name of religion or westernization. Many ethnic language communities (e.g. Tamang, Limbu, Newar, Magar, Gurung, etc.) are motivated towards English and Nepali by following Christianity through Bible translation. As a result, their cultural festivals have been converted into birthday, anniversary ceremonies in the churches with

⁸ The kingdom of Kathmandu valley then.

lots of western music and songs. Neoliberal ideology has influenced the construction of institutional language policies and the corporatized individual subject in the socio-historical context of Nepal (Sharma and Phyak 2017: 4). Migrated urban areas are very important sites in imposing language dominance, particularly capital cities and trade and commercial centers; towns tend to dominate the surrounding rural areas and their influence radiates out those areas (Gautam 2021: 127). People's motivation and migration for economic benefit have also been noted as keys to encouraging people to adopt languages that deploy more instrumental functions in their job market (Gautam 2021: 151).

4.4.4 Ideological impacts on Global South

Nepal's growing engagement with the international community (through its membership in UN, WTO, IMF, etc.) and its political systems have largely influenced the attitudinal patterns in Nepalese society. From a geopolitical perspective, as Nepal is sandwiched between two giant countries, India and China, the changes in the neighborhood would influence it on a larger scale. In addition, the development of the Global North would always have a chain effect on the countries of the Global South. For instance, the British colonial government of India then promoted English amidst other languages, and a similar trend emerged in Nepal with the effect of a similar environment in the neighborhood. Such geopolitical conditions and the waves gravely influenced the closely related communities to the development of nationalism and the creation of nation-states, including a new Europe perceived as superior to other parts of the world (Bagga-Gupta 2010; Gal and Irvine 1995; Rosén and Bagga-Gupta 2013; Shohamy 2006). The ideologies of the countries of the Global North have influenced the countries of the Global South in many ways, including ideologies of language planning and policy (Gautam and Poudel 2021). This has generated a perception and a social space that differentiates "us" and "the other" through the formation of linguistic-cultural ideologies (Gynne et al. 2016) in the communities that have multiple languages in place. This made some languages valued more than others in the domains of governance and educational spaces (Poudel 2019; Poudel and Choi 2021). In the case of Nepal, the first educational commission (Sardar et al. 1956) was influenced by Hugh B. Wood's ideologies and politics. He formed out of his involvement in the Indian and the western world, and the committee under the huge influence in collaboration with academia and Nepalese politicians, and then recommended for streamlining the education systems through monolingual ideology. The same politico-ideological structure continued for a long. And even today Nepali is the national language to be used in governance and education, while at the same time the constitution allows other regional or ethnic languages for such purposes as an

outcome of democratic political development. It can, in a sense, be understood as an ideological link with the Englishization efforts of many developing countries in the world.

5 Conclusion

This paper discusses the way Nepal has undergone a process of democratizing its macro-policies for the promotion and preservation of its linguistic diversity and provides evidence that such practices have minimal impact on the substantial results due to the processes of glocalization (Choi 2017). The identification of new languages and recognition of multilingualism have been the visible results of democratic governance. However, largely monolingual and bilingual practices in governance, education, and public communication remain rooted in every community throughout the country. Nepal's language politics has been largely influenced by various political movements and changes in the governments over history. The interviews and the secondary data indicate that Nepal's language politics has been influenced by globalization and neoliberal impacts which indicate massive language shift and change from minority to the major and dominant languages. It can be concluded that democracy in Nepal functioned as a double-edged sword (Gautam and Poudel 2021), which on the one hand promoted efforts of preservation and promotion of cultural and linguistic diversity, while on the other hand, contributed to clutching the size of diversity by vitalizing Nepali and English relegating the prospective of indigenous languages as pointed out by the informants above in various contexts and the reality of Nepal's language politics.

The democratic ideology fundamentally borrowed from the Global North had done more justice at the policy level while creating inequalities in the practice, and that consequently made the investments and attempts in promoting linguistic diversity futile. Democracy also promoted monolingual/bilingual ways of thinking about multilingualism, which became counterproductive to the mission of protecting linguistic diversity in Nepal (Gautam and Poudel 2021). Piller's (2016: 32) critical understanding of the monolingual ways of seeing multilingualism entails a focus on the product of the monolingual academic texts which was equally applicable in the case of Nepal. The democracy in Nepal did not practically contribute to promoting linguistic diversity though it developed awareness of the linguistic rights of the individuals and communities of minority languages. The state's intervention to preserve and promote these languages remained inconsistent throughout history, as some governments intentionally discouraged the planned promotion compared to others which designed some measures to promote them. Both monolingual and multilingual ideologies remained as points of debate

in political and social spaces in the context of Nepalese society where we can see the conflict among the languages, language users, and policymakers.

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