**Multilingualism in Kathmandu Valley: A study on Language Use and Attitude in Sherpa**

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**Abstract**

This paper aims to explore the status of language use and attitude among Sherpa speaking community in the Kathmandu valley, the multilingual capital city of Nepal. The Sherpas have been migrating to the capital city from various hilly and mountainous regions of Nepal such as Solukhumbu, Dolakha, Taplejung, Sindhupalchok, etc. Most of the migrated Sherpa people have been living in different areas of Kathmandu valleymainly at Chabahil, Bauddha, Jorpati, Kapan, Mandikhatar and Gongabu. The research focuses on language contact situations in different domains viz. social, cultural, personal, and official as well as media related activities where the informants were found to use different languages along with the use of their own mother tongue. The study is based on the questionnaire developed in 2014 during a research sojourn at the *Dynamique du Langage Laboratory (*March-May,2014 )during the ASLAN Fellowship(WP.4 Academic Training) .

In order to carry this research, people with various economic, social, cultural, professional and academic backgrounds( i.e. housewives, business people, teachers, students, governments officials, politicians and social activists ) were asked about their views on language use and attitudes in Sherpa, Nepali, English, Hindi and other languages they use in different domains and contexts. It is based on 45 questionnaires which were administered to different informants, and the data obtained were analyzed taking into account different parameters such as age, gender, profession and the location they live in the Kathmandu valley. Existing political, social and economic factors contribute to language use and attitudes for different perspectives. Nepali and English languages have been widely used among the migrated Sherpa people rather than their mother tongue and other languages.

The different language ideologies have been observed while analyzing the data on language use and attitude in migrated Sherpas in language contact situation.

**Keywords:** Language use, attitude, domains, language contact

1. **Introduction**

Nepal is diverse in culture, language, ethnicity and ecology. According to 2011 census, Nepal has more than 123 languages. These 123 plus languages of Nepal have been classified into four language families viz. Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetian (86 languages), the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European (29 languages), Austro-Asiatic (3 languages) and Dravidian (1 language) and a language isolate called Kusunda. Multilingualism is a natural and historical identity of Nepal. The linguistic, cultural and ethnic diversity are the essences of Nepalese society since long.

According to the census report of 2011 B.S., the population of the Sherpas is estimated around 145,000. They mainly live in the Khumbu and Solu Khumbu regions of the south of Mount Everest. . In addition, Sherpas inhabit the valleys of the Dudh Kosi and Rolwaling Rivers west of Solu-Khumbu, and they are also found in the Lantang-Helambu region north of Kathmandu. Kathmandu itself has a sizable Sherpa population, while small numbers of Sherpas can be found throughout Nepal, even in the Terai. Sherpa communities are also present in the Indian state of Sikkim and the hill towns of Darjiling and Kalimpong. Sherpas are the newly migrated people living in Kathmandu valley.In the beginning they were the seasonal migrating people in the Kathmandu valley. After 1990s revolution many Sherpa people have been migrating and living in Kathmandu as permanent residents. Census 2001 shows that there were 15,537 Sherpa living in Kathmandu valley whereas 2011 census records 21,044 Sherpa population in Kathmandu valley. Migrated Sherpa speak different languages in different domains and purposes.  
Kathmandu, a cosmopolitan capital city, has got a very long cultural and political history in Nepal. The major population of Kathmandu valley is dominated by different language speakers migrated from the various parts of the country. Nepali is the official language as well as lingua franca in Kathmandu. Kathmandu has now become a multilingual city where we find people speaking at least 3 or more languages .Because of urbanization, a large number of other language speaking peoples like Indo Aryan (Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, etc.) and Tibeto-Burman (Sherpa, Tamang, Gurung , Rai, Limbu etc.) are migrating in the capital city day by day especially after 1990s political revolution in Nepal . This movement of people has offered a lot of possibilities to study language contact and linguistic convergence in Nepal.

As Buddhism and Hinduism developed and changed over the centuries throughout Asia, both religions prospered in Nepal and produced a powerful artistic and architectural fusion beginning at least from the 5th century AD. Nepali is being used widely for official, business and other purposes in Kathmandu valley since the unification movement in Nepal. It has very long history and relationship with other languages mainly spoken in Kathmandu and other places. Contact Nepali has become the part of daily lives of all the people in Kathmandu valley these days.

Multilingualism and language contact in Kathmandu valley is very complex comparing the contact situations in the other places in the world. The reason behind is the present socio-political condition as well as the historical connection of Kathmandu valley even before the unification movement e.g. Kirat, Lichhabi and Malla kings.

My concern in this study is connected with the socio-political factors/variables where different language communities/speakers share different contexts and situations. So the multilingualism in Kathmandu valley has become an obligatory part of people living in this city.

1. **Methodology**

**Data Collection**: The primary data is collected with the help of questionnaire .Questionnaire is used for language use and attitudes. The source of data is based on researcher’s informal field study like social talking, business talking, debate and conversations etc. rather than written sources. The secondary data will be collected from different libraries and sources available.

The data is collected from the different areas of Kathmandu valley like Boudda(Jorpati) , Kapan, Gongabu, Chabahil and some other typical areas where Sherpa people are found.

**Tools for the study**: There were 45 questionnaires altogether containing metadata information and questions for language use and attitude. The questionnaires were developed in 2014 at DDL Lyon, France and the pilot testing was done in 2014 by the researcher himself. The collected data is analyzed by following the recent developments of language contact and sociolinguistic studies.

**Selection of informants**

The data was collected mainly form the following people of Sherpa language communities like Housewives ,Teacher/academician/monks, Politician/language activist, Businessman/Shopkeeper, Trekking Guide/Worker/Vendor, Students All the informants were selected on A1,A2 and A3 group classifying into male/female, literate/illiterate when possible.

**C. Language use in Sherpa**:

Sherpa use different languages in different domains and purposes. They use language according to their need and interest. The table below shows how different people use language for different domains and activities.

Table 1: Social activities

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Domains** | Sherpa | Nepali | Hindi | English | Others | Conditional |
| Joking | 31 | 36 | 2 | 1 |  |  |
| Counting | 31 | 34 |  | 11 |  |  |
| Quarreling | 35 | 38 |  | 1 |  | 1 |
| Singing inside | 31 | 22 | 7 | 5 |  |  |
| Bargainig/Shopping/Marketing | 4 | 41 |  | 6 |  | 1 |
| Abusing (Scolding/Using taboo) | 26 | 35 |  | 3 |  | 1 |
| Praying | 41 | 4 |  |  | 3 |  |
| Singing outside | 18 | 38 | 7 | 5 |  |  |
| Discussing/Debate | 32 | 34 |  | 11 |  |  |
| Family gathering | 40 | 12 |  |  |  |  |
| Telling stories to children | 9 | 37 |  | 2 |  |  |
| Telling stories to others | 9 | 40 |  | 2 |  |  |
| Village/community meeting | 32 | 33 |  |  |  | 1 |

From the data we can easily guess that Sherpa and Nepali languages are used in most of the domains comparing to Hindi English and others. The influence of English is very high than Hindi because of Education, globalization and tourism connected to Sherpa people. On the other hand we find different language attitude among migrated Sherpas in Kathmandu valley.

Diagram 1: Culture &religion

This diagram shows that Sherpa mainly use their mother tongue in Nepali in most of the religious and cultural activities. Only we find the use of English language in religious festivals like Lohsar where they enjoy many music and cultural food as well.

Diagram2: Official &Ceremonial

For official and ceremonial activities we find the use of multiple languages and multiple activities. Nepali and English are dominantly used in almost all the official and ceremonial activities. This is because of being official language in the country.

Diagram 3: Media related activities

While analyzing the media related activities, we see that Nepali, English and Hindi languages are used than Sherpa. This is because of the influence of media and television as well as attraction of western music and culture.

**Language Use: Some Observations**

The data presented above in various questionnaires show that mother Tongue is highly used in cultural and religious activities. Nepali is dominantly used in social, official, ceremonial and media related activities. English and Hindi languages are used in media, ceremonial and official activities. The influence of English is higher than Hindi which is the indication of Sherpa people motivating towards globalization and western culture.

1. **Language attitude**

Attitude can be defined as subjective evaluations of both language varieties and their speakers, whether the attitudes are held by individuals or by groups. The study of language attitude can help researchers understand two important relations: the relation between particular linguistic forms and social power, and the relation between language and literacy shows the attitude of speakers. Although the apparent softening of attitude towards indigenous languages among the population as a whole might seem a positive development in terms of support for language maintenance measures, negative attitude towards indigenous and minority languages and dialects have been included and internalized over centuries.

How personal and group beliefs, mindsets and psychological or cognitive orientations affect the decision that speakers and even nation states make about becoming or remaining bilingual. Condition for a language to spread is that there be a geographical opportunity for one language to spread into the domains of another language or other languages. There must be routes of some kind or another. The following questions and their responses can be useful to see the different attitudes of Sherpa residing in Kathmandu valley.

* If there are two people coming to work at your place having same skills and experiences, one speaks Sherpa and another speaks Nepali, whom would you choose?

A) Sherpa-26 B) Nepali-2

C) Either -18 D)None

During the interview I asked people the reasons for choosing languages. The people who chose Sherpa said that it is very easy for them to communicate and handle because of cultural and ethnic similarity. They said that language makes people to be close each other.

On the other hand some people responded either and they described that the knowledge of language creates various difficulties in bargaining and working condition.

* How often do you speak Nepali?

(a) Every day-43 (b) Sometimes-3 (c) Rarely (d)Never

* Why do you like to use Nepali?

a. Easy-29 b.Prestigeous-2

c. Everybody likes-14 d. Just so/don’t know

These responses provide reasons for using Nepali language in most of their everyday domains and activities. Endangered and minority languages are not spoken in isolation. Language shift is a response to a situation which involves contact with at least one another community in an equal power relationship.

* Why do you like to use English?

a.Easy-7 b.Business-8 c. Everybody likes-7

d.Just so/don’t know-13

These responses about English suggest that language attitudes and ideologies are of course impossible to observe directly, so they have to be inferred using various techniques. Market research and opinion surveys assume that attitudes can be deduced through direct questions, using standardized questionnaires.*The aim of linguistic research in the community must be to find out how people talk when they are not being systematically observed; yet we can only obtain these data by systematic observation ( Labov(1972) Sociolinguistic Pattern ).*

Negative attitudes towards minority languages are common around the world. A commonsense assumption can be made that descendents of immigrants are less likely to speak the indigenous language. Sherpa living in Kathmandu city have been concerned and connected with various professions and academia that reflects their attitude towards languages in multilingual setting. On both a societal and an interpersonal level, the language that a person is able to speak is an index of that person's position society. A person’s linguistic repertoire is source of symbolic power.

*Sociolinguistics often wants to understand what people think about the language they use or that other people use. People’s beliefs and feelings are related to their linguistic behavior; and feelings about language forms impact people who use those forms, beliefs and feelings are also interesting in them and have practical implications, for examples in language policy and planning.* ***Giles,H & billings.A.C.(2004)***

Towns and cities are very important factors in achieving 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. A shift in a language often brings about a shift in identity and there may be resistance to adopting a new language. The new language and the new identity may be actively promoted or persuaded.

Linguistic ideology is not a predictable, automatic reflex of the social experience of multilingualism in which it is rooted; it makes its own contribution as interpretive filter in the relationship of language and society.

**E. Conclusion**

Multilingual institutions, such as workplaces, are prime sites for exploring multilingual language use and for examining the processes of second language socialization (Clyne and Ball 1990).The multilingual workplace is increasingly the norm in our evermore globalized economy. However it will remain a site of struggle with the relationship between dominant and minority language use played out across issues of identity, rights and opportunities. Nepali is the official as well as contact language for all Sherpa people in Kathmandu. Contact Nepali among Sherpa speakers seems to be a connection of ideas and the feelings among the different ethnic groups who do not speak and understand each other’s language i.e. Mother Tongue. This study tries to find out the various hidden language ideologies between and among the people living in the capital city after the 1990s revolution in the country’s history.

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