

Need of Sociolinguistic Study in Nepal

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Abstract

Nepal has a rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Our language has such a linguistic property than no other so called developed languages possess. Historically, we belong to rich language families. Even most of the identified languages are struggling for existence. Can we compensate at any way if the two Sadhani speakers die? Are we ready to tolerate the blame for being observer and doing nothing? This is an important social issue today. The responsibility of our generation is to maintain those our identified languages are serious .

Keywords: controversy, dialect, diversity, dominance, heritage, overwhelming

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Introduction

Sociolinguistic seems sometimes controversial to balance between the two aspects: (i) to increase the prestige of speakers within the dominant community and its language, and (ii) to treat equally with all other language and not to dominate other languages by any means. But, we as language professionals-whoever a language teacher, learner, a linguist etc are faced with this stark reality [1,2].

Therefore, we can and must do something with it to preserve our heritage because we Nepalese are the owner of diverse culture and languages. The bitter fact in front of us is that day by day our linguistic heritage is being extinct and if we don't care there will be such a lost and grief that nothing could replace it. If language death continues, our future

generations will not be lucky enough to study as much as we do. Only being the observer and doing nothing we remain, we must be ready to bear the blame for having stood by and doing nothing. The future of a language is closely bound up with the influence and prestige of its speakers and who can predict such things? What will be the balance of power among the major nations of the world a century from now? Will American supremacy continue to underwrite the role of English? But people must have thought the way about Latin or Sanskrit once.

Language change

Languages have changed and are being changed over time. Pei in 1957 stated, "Languages change as human beings do but the changes are spread over periods of centuries instead of years" [3]. When lan-

guage changes to a greater extent, it may lose its own identity. The social and linguistic reasons for the development of regional differences are complex and by no means completely understood. They are clearly the result of language changing in different ways in different places, but the actual process of linguistic change is something we know very little about [4,5].

An interesting example of a linguistic feature that has spread in this way is the English word *item* in a Nepali dialect. When a primary level teacher in Humla heard the overgeneralized use of the word in a hotel in Nepalgunj to refer to a variety of things as said—"Yahan ta aitam ko khana painchha" (variety of food is available here)—he generalized it in his own dialect to refer to silly acts or tricks. I came to know this mystery of innovation for the first time when I listened to one of my grade seven students blaming her friend for his silly acts, saying—"Au timu aitam gadda bhachhau" (Oh yes, you deceive!) [5].

During one year and a half, I found the word used by seventy percent of the students and some of the villagers. What surprised me most was that even a third-grade student used the word to describe his own sister and said, "Ho sar, Chanda vyalo aitam gaddi chhin sar" (Yes sir, Chanda deceives a lot). It is now used by the overwhelming majority of the villagers in the school area, and it is probable that the word will spread over the mid-southern and eastern part of Humla [5].

Thus, we can frequently observe languages changing even by borrowing, imitation, etc. One language item may be interpreted differently in different settings.

Language dead

A language is said to be dead when no one speaks it anymore. It may continue to exist in a recorded form, of course. But unless it has fluent speakers, one would not talk of it as a living language. And speakers cannot demonstrate their fluency if they have no one to talk to. But what do we say if there are two speakers left, or 20 or 2007? The presumption is that any language which has a very small number of speakers is bound to be in trouble. So notwithstanding the exceptions, most people would accept that a language spoken by less than 100 people is in a very dangerous situation [1].

For native speakers of Nepali, Bhojpuri, Maithali, or any other thriving language, it is difficult to envision such a possibility. But the reality is easy to illustrate. For instance, during fieldwork in the

Mambila region of Cameroon's Adamawa province in 1994–95, I came across a number of moribund languages. For one of these languages, Kasabe, only one remaining speaker, Bogon, was found. (He himself knew of no other.) In November 1996, I returned to the Mambila region, with part of my agenda being to collect further data on Kasabe. Bogon, however, died on 5 November 1995, taking Kasabe with him, and several children and grandchildren, none of whom knew the language [4].

Therefore, on 4 November 1995, Kasabe existed; on 5 November, it did not. We need not wait for Sadhani and Asamise. When two or three of their speakers die, the languages will altogether cease to be spoken [4].

According to the Central Bureau of Statistics (2001) [6] report, there are 28 languages spoken by fewer than 1000 speakers; 17 languages have fewer than a hundred speakers, including Lingkhim (97 speakers), Kusunda (87), Sindhi (72), Munda (67), Hariyanwi (33), Magahi (30), Sam (23), and Karmali (13). Nine languages are spoken by ten or fewer people.

Koche language is spoken only by 54 people, and more than 96% of its speakers do not speak it natively or have shifted their mother tongue. Similarly, Baramu, Churaute, Kumal, Kisan, Pahari, and Sunawar languages are mostly influenced by other languages and are losing their native speakers to a great extent. However, Tharu, Dhimal, and Jirel seem to be less influenced. There are 1037 speakers of the English language in Nepal. Even Sanskrit is spoken by 823 people (and how can we say it is a dead language?). Meche language is spoken by 3301 people, while their population is 3763. Rajbanshi is spoken by 129,829 people, which is more than its own ethnic population of 95,812. Additionally, 33.7% of the Newars have shifted their mother tongue. All this shows that there is a great probability of language loss or death in Nepal [6,7].

Language death is a terrible loss to all who come into contact with it. Facing the loss of language or culture involves the same stages of grief that one experiences in the process of death and dying. People know they do not know enough. They know they lack resources. Therefore, they delay making decisions or pick up the problem instead of approaching it systematically. The forces that cause language death are so massive that it is difficult to see how any of them could be reversed. Therefore, it is an emerging need to preserve and promote our unique heritage of cultural and linguistic diversity and foster a sense of national unity and integration through mutual tolerance [8].

We are challenged by the lack of sufficient sociolinguistic studies in Nepal. The research reports that have already been carried out are controversial, and we do not even know the exact number of languages spoken throughout the nation [9].

Whether we are professional linguists and language planners or language students and teachers, we are in urgent need of addressing this issue. If we try to rebuild a community's self-confidence, often after several hundred years of cultural domination, anything other than a gloomy prospect seems remote. A slight delay may lead to a great loss [8].

Suggestions for Preservation

Most Nepalese may be very ready to agree that their languages need to be maintained but do not feel that they themselves have to be involved; they expect others to do it for them. They think that international organizations will perform necessary miracle. We must be able to see language as a part of culture; and so much of our culture is expressed in language that it is not possible to be a member of the community if one does not speak its language.

Prestige exists when people start to notice you. An endangered community, therefore, needs to make its presence felt within the wider community. Taking cognizance of the nation's linguistics situation and people's cultural rights, we must increase the prestige of Kumal, Jirel, Chapang. Darai, Tharu, Lepcha etc. by media such as radio, television, daily newspapers, etc [6, 7].

The closing decades of the twentieth century saw indigenous languages in many parts of the world benefiting from a trend in public opinion displaying increased sympathy towards cultural and linguistic rights. In Nepal, after the restoration of democracy (1990) people, also from the minority groups are involved in electing their representatives. But it is not satisfactory. Constitution must give indigenous languages official status in their own territories. In this connection, a report was submitted to HMG of Nepal in 1994 by the National Language Policy Recommendation Commission as a policy and plan for promoting the national languages and introducing them as the medium of primary education. The policy came into effect but could not be effective because of some reasons such as lack of writing tra-

dition in minority languages lack of test books and literature, alphabet, script and spelling etc. And no teaching program can succeed without good materials, and good materials are of no value unless there are teachers trained to use them [8].

Several Indo-Aryan languages like Nepali, Maithali. Awadhi, Tharu, Hindi, Darai as well as some Tibeto Burman languages like Newar have adopted Devanagari script as a writing system. Yadav in 1999 indicated that Bhojpuri sometimes employed its own script called Kaithi Script which was also used by Kayasthas (belonging to a caste of writers and clerks), especially in keeping written records at government and private levels and is now almost extinct [4]. It is perfectly possible for a minority language culture to make its presence felt on the internet, and this has begun to happen. What is significant, of course, the internet provides an identity which has no longer linked to a geographical location. People can maintain a linguistic identity with their relatives, friends, and colleagues, wherever they may be in the world.

Conclusion

Language death is a terrible loss, to all who come into contact with it. Facing the loss of language or culture involves the same stages of grief that one experiences in the process of death and dying. People know they don't know enough. They know they haven't the resources. They therefore, delay making decisions, or pick up the problem, instead of approaching it systematically. The forces which cause language death are so massive that it is difficult to see how any of them could be reversed. Therefore, it is an emerging need to preserve and promote our unique heritage of cultural/linguistics diversity and foster the sense of national unity and integration through mutual tolerance. We are in challenge as there is not sufficient sociolinguistic study in Nepal. The researches of the report that are already carried out are controversial and we even don't know the exact number of language spoken throughout the nation. We, either professional linguists and language planners or language students and language teachers, are in urgent need to start with the issue. If we try to rebuild a community's self confidence, often after several hundred years of cultural domination, anything other than a gloomy prospect seems remote. A bit delay may be a great loss.

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