

Limbu News Bulletins in Radio Broadcasting: A Study of Present Status and Future Adaptation

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Abstract

Radio, as an audio medium, requires clear and concise scripting. It speaks directly to individuals, creating a personal bond between broadcaster and listener. News and current affairs remain central to radio journalism, and news bulletins play an important role in promoting languages, particularly indigenous or minority ones such as Limbu. However, with the rise of new media and technology, radio listenership has declined. This study examined Limbu news on radio for two purposes: to assess its current state and explore ways it can adapt in a rapidly evolving media environment. Guided by cultural imperialism and technological determinism theories, the research analyzed how dominant cultures and advancing technologies influence minority languages. A multi-method approach was used-15 days of content analysis, along with interviews and observations involving Limbu news listeners, producers, and presenters. Systematic questions explored listenership, popularity, usefulness, and audience feedback. Findings reveal more challenges than opportunities, largely due to declining daily use of the mother tongue and the dominance of new media. Nonetheless, strategic adaptation-embracing the internet and digital platforms- could enable Limbu radio news not only to survive but to expand its reach and relevance.

Keywords: *Radio journalism, Mass communication, News media, Media landscape, Digital generation*

Introduction

Nepal has a rich diversity of ethnic groups and languages, and the Limbu people are one of the prominent indigenous communities, primarily residing in Eastern Nepal. In a country where Nepali is the official language, news in indigenous languages helps keep them alive and vibrant. Nepal has gone through some big political changes. A ten-year Maoist insurgency ended, the monarchy fell, and a new constitution was introduced in 2015. This new constitution brought several key changes, like federalism and more inclusion and rights for indigenous peoples. The 2015 constitution recognizes all languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal as "languages of the nation" (Article 6). While Nepali remains the official language, Article 7(2) allows provinces to determine one or more languages used by the majority within the state as official languages in addition to Nepali. The Language Commission of Nepal recommended Limbu and Maithili as official languages for Koshi Province (formerly Province 1), in addition to Nepali.

This constitutional provision has provided the legal basis and impetus for state media like Gorkhapatra and Nepal Television to offer content in own languages. Even before the 2015 constitution, Radio Nepal was a pioneer in multi-language broadcasting.

In the era of globalization, every minority language is endangered on the other hand. Limbu language broadcasting has been ongoing for 31 years in Nepal. It can be seen that after Limbu language news and programs started broadcasting on radio stations, the organizations themselves faced various ups and downs, but with a few exceptions, some continued.

"Language attitude and word economy are some of the factors which has made Limbu as an endangered language. Speakers and writers won't find the appropriate words whenever they want to use them. So, they have to opt the code switching or code mixing for their convenience. It is also a fact that middle class educated people concentrate more on dominant international language like English for the employment opportunities as the world is influenced by globalization" (Subba, 2016, p. 143). Radio, formerly a highly effective medium, facilitated extensive interaction, thereby earning it the designation of a public sphere. According to Kharel (2013), Nepal has experienced enormous growth in radio broadcasting since the mid-1990s. This is not only a growth of radio coverage across the country but also a fundamental change in the nature and characteristics of it. In many least developed and developing countries, there is a strong presence of government in radio broadcasting.

"From 1951 to 1997, Radio Nepal was the only one radio station and had more coverage. Transmitters with FM frequency bands became popular in Kathmandu after those protesting against the Panchayat System-a controlled "democratic" model that had the king at the helm of affairs" (Bhattarai & Ojha, 2010, p. 9). Community radios are arguably the most vital players in promoting and preserving indigenous languages such as Limbu, especially at the grassroots. Although they are deeply involved in language promotion, commercial radios, motivated by profit, also contribute. "Community radio is owned and maintained by the community. The legitimacy of the operation of collective goals is also provided by the community itself, and the members of the community communicate freely and actively" (Mainali, 2015, p. 37).

Radio Sagarmatha was a foundation for many other radio stations in community as well as private-commercial sectors. The Constitution of Kingdom of Nepal 2047 BS, National Communication Policy 2049 BS, National Broadcasting Act 2049 BS and National Broadcasting Regulations 2052 BS provided ground for establishing FM radios across the country. The constitutional recognition of linguistic rights has emboldened indigenous communities to demand more content in their mother tongues across all media, including radio. This increased advocacy puts pressure on broadcasters and policymakers to provide such services. Thus, this article has been prepared to discuss the present status and future outlook of Limbu news bulletins being broadcast on radio with such legal validity.

Radio News Bulletin

Radio news is a piece of information on current events and issues broadcasted through radio, which can have certain impacts on the listeners and listeners have curiosity to know about that. A number of news item put together makes a news bulletin. But a bulletin is not just a string of individual news items broadcast at the scheduled time.

The bulletin is a collective form in which the separate news items are brought into a coherent order and some relationship. The radio is often on the air bringing you the latest news every time. No radio programme can be conceived without its component of a news bulletin of general or special interest (Bhatt, 2012). "Since, Radio medium is only to listen, its writing is colloquial. As the content of the radio is purely auditory sound is sufficient for this medium" (Khanal, 2021, p. 102).

Localness is the biggest strength of broadcasting news on local radio is that it gives a station its sense of being truly local. In an increasingly competitive marketplace, news is one of the few things which make a local station sound distinctive and close to you. News from around the corner is often just as important to a listener as news from around the world.

Limbu Language, a Prominent Language of Nepal

"Limbu is an ethnic group of Mongoloid physiognomy inhabiting the area from the east of Arun-river to the eastern border of present Nepal, popularly known as Limbuwan specially after the annexation of the part of Kirata land into Nepal in 1774" (Subba, 1998, p. 12). The Limbu community refers to themselves as "Yakthung" and their language as "Yakthung Pa:n". According to the "Limbu-Nepali-English Dictionary" (2010) compiled by Kainla, the Limbu language is an Eastern Kiranti language of the Himalayan group within the Bodic sub-branch of the Tibeto-Burman family. The Limbu language is fundamentally divided into four linguistic groups based on the major rivers, streams, and difficult hills in the original Limbu settlement areas: Panchthare, Phedappe, Tamarkhole, and Chhathare. The Limbu language is a writing system based on pronunciation. The Limbu language has its own script for expression. It is called 'Kirat Sirijanga Script' (Rai, et al. 2021).

According to the National Population and Housing Census 2021, among the 124 languages spoken in Nepal, the Yakthung/Limbu language is a prominent national language with a long history of written tradition. The number of Limbu mother tongue speakers in Nepal is 3,50,436, which is 1.2% of the total population. The ethnic population of Limbu is 4,14,704, which is 1.42% of the total population. Nowadays, most of the words of different dialects are reflected in dictionaries, stories, novels, plays, poems, movies, radio, internet etc. They are used as synonyms. So, Limbu is a universal language to all the Limbus of the world. The community is losing some of its sub-dialects due to the language shift and language invasion and other factors. The Limbu speakers and writers have to face an acute word economy.

Methodology

For this study, I analyzed 15 days of news, from 17 to 31 August 2024, aired from Radio Nepal Dhankuta for content analysis. I also listened to Limbu news aired from other FM stations during the same period and collected information and ideas. Then, I interviewed Limbu news listeners first, and then the presenters. I listened to 15 news bulletins daily, with each broadcast lasting 7 minutes, aired from 5:52 p.m. to 5:59 p.m. every evening. In this study, I engaged deeply in studying the news content and gathered insights from listeners and presenters. Observation, content analysis, and interview methods were used to collect data for this study. These methods were developed and conducted according to the objective of the study.

Results and Discussion

This study observed that mobile phones are an easy and portable device for radio listening. Initially, it was quite hard to find listeners for Limbu news broadcast on the radio, despite presenters claiming a regular audience still tunes in. The majority of news listeners complained about the use of complicated words and sentences during news presentation. However, they still listen to the radio to gain language knowledge rather than information, admitting they feel ownership while listening. Listeners said they didn't find any effect on their daily life even if they listened to Limbu news regularly, but they agreed that broadcasted Limbu news somehow supports the radio listening habit among Limbu language speakers.

Nowadays, people are not keenly interested in any specific media. The main reason for this situation is the availability of various media options. Radio sets are hard to find in village

areas and also need electricity to be charged. Older people love to listen to the radio, but they don't have easy access to mobile phones and other devices. Radio operators claim they receive positive responses from Limbu news listeners. However, the fact is that the majority of target listeners do not listen to Limbu news, and they don't have much concern about their language development and preservation.

There is no two-way communication between radio and listeners nowadays, as there used to be. Both radio operators and listeners agree on this point; listeners have stopped sending letters and comments to the radio station. Simply listening to the radio is not the main issue; the main issue is whether they perceive the content well or not, or if they are benefiting from the news. Thus, listener's socio-economic condition, education, and awareness level also matter.

It is noticeable that radio is helping to preserve and promote the Limbu language by broadcasting Limbu news daily. However, the major concern is the effect and impact Limbu news is creating. While studying the content, it is hard to easily understand the meaning of translated Limbu news from the Nepali language. Many unused and unusual Limbu words and phrases are being used in Limbu news. Presenters are creating new words themselves instead of making words easier to understand. A single translated word may vary from one radio station to another. There are synonymous words in the Limbu language, but the proper words have not been selected for use in the news. It is true that listeners speak the Limbu language fluently, but the majority of the population does not understand radio Limbu news. Here lies a paradox between the intended message and the received message.

Review of Limbu News Bulletins

Until a few years ago, news and programs were broadcast in Limbu language from many community and commercial radios in former Eastern Nepal. Now, due to reasons such as expensive radio broadcasting, decreasing listeners, and FM bands becoming digitized, only a few countable radio stations are broadcasting news and other materials in Limbu language. Talking about the history of radio broadcasting, formal journalism in the Limbu language began when Gantok Kendra of Akashvani started broadcasting programs in Limbu language twice a week from April 3, 1983.

In Nepal, its formal beginning was made after Radio Nepal Singhadarbar started broadcasting daily Limbu news from Bhadra 1, 2051 BS. The news broadcasting from Radio Nepal Singhadarbar continued until Chaitra 19, 2053 BS. After that, the Limbu language news started broadcasting from Radio Nepal Regional Broadcasting Center Dhankuta from Chaitra 20, 2053 BS, but only news was broadcast.

At the private level, Kirat Yakthung Chumlung, the umbrella organization of Limbu started broadcasting Limbu language programs from HBC FM and Metro FM in Kathmandu Valley from Ashar 7, 2065 BS, and from Saptakoshi FM in Itahari of Eastern Nepal from Ashar 18, 2065 BS. However, all these broadcasts have completely stopped. After that, Koshi FM Biratnagar and many other local FMs in other districts have given some space to the Limbu language, but now the local language programs run on those FMs are also gradually stopping. Programs in mother tongues have stopped even when there is a demand for them on most radios.

In the past, news and programs in Limbu language were broadcast from Koshi FM Biratnagar, Sumhatlung FM Panchthar, Gorkha FM Kathmandu, Eagle FM Panchthar, Ilam FM Ilam, Radio Mangsebung Ilam, Makalu FM Dhankuta, Dhankuta FM Dhankuta, Singhalila FM Panchthar, Saptarangi FM Damak, Taplejung FM Taplejung, and Vijaypur FM Dharan Sunsari, but all Limbu language broadcasts have now stopped.

Sighak (2018) concludes that radio operators claim that they have full support and positive response from Limbu news listeners. But the fact is majority of the target listeners do not listen Limbu news carefully. They do not have much concern about their language development and its preservation. Perhaps they haven't realized the necessity. There is no two-way communication between radio and listeners nowadays as it used to be before.

Current Status of Limbu News Bulletins

The two theories, technological determinism and cultural imperialism are strongly affecting the decline of language-based media, particularly in radio broadcasting, for indigenous languages like Limbu. Technological determinism suggests that the nature of new technology is dictating social change. For Limbu news on radio, the argument would be that the inherent nature and widespread adoption of internet-based media will inevitably lead to a decline in traditional radio listenership, regardless of content. If Limbu news doesn't effectively transition to these new platforms, it faces decline. A technological determinist like Marshall McLuhan might argue that the very interconnectedness fostered by the internet (the "global village") inherently prioritizes communication in lingua francas, reducing the practical necessity or perceived value of local languages in a rapidly shrinking world.

"Based on historical experience, it can be said that news is closely related to the most widely used communication technology. After the achievement of democracy, cartoons were included in the mainstream of news. Over time, news started to be presented in Nepal in various forms such as radio, television, online, etc. Nowadays, news can be heard, read or watched from mobile phones. The trend of distributing news through social networks is also increasing in Nepal" (Acharya, 2021, p. 382).

Meanwhile, Cultural imperialism directly contributes to this decline through the domination of global content, shifts in audience preference, economic disadvantage, and brain drain. For Limbu news on radio, this means competing with a deluge of Nepali news, music, and entertainment, as well as global content that might appeal more broadly to listeners, potentially leading to declining listenership for Limbu programs.

As these concepts indicate, it's safe to say that the current state of Limbu news broadcast via radio is dire. Currently, Radio Nepal Provincial Broadcasting Dhankuta, Radio Menchhyayem Tehrathum, Radio Tamor Taplejung, Radio Taplejung and Kabeli FM Taplejung are continuously broadcasting news and programs in Limbu language. These five radio stations are broadcasting Limbu news bulletins from the eastern part of Nepal, and arguably from all of Nepal. Radio Nepal has a history of being the first radio in Nepal and recently transformed into a public service broadcaster.

Radio Menchhyayem is the first radio station in Tehrathum district. This community radio has been broadcasting Limbu news for 18 years since its establishment in 2064 BS, with regular reports, and claims to be the only community radio continuously broadcasting Limbu news for such a long time. Radio Tamor is also the first radio in Taplejung and has been broadcasting Limbu news since its establishment.

Limbu news now is broadcast daily from Radio Nepal Provincial Broadcasting Center Dhankuta from 5:52 PM to 6:00 PM. News in Limbu language is broadcast from Radio Tamor Taplejung at 11 AM and 5 PM daily. Similarly, from Radio Menchhyayem Tehrathum, broadcasts Limbu news daily at 8 AM and 5 PM. Radio Taplejung airs Limbu news at 8 am in the morning but it's not continuous, whereas Radio Kabeli has been continuously broadcasting Limbu news

for three years, with timings at 7:15 AM and 7:15 PM twice a day. These five radio stations are broadcasting Limbu news during prime time.

Content analysis was performed for 15 days of Radio Nepal Provincial Broadcasting Center, Dhankuta. The news produced from this radio station sounds standard in terms of word selection, sentence formation, and the creation of new words during translation. Radio Nepal has three staff members for Limbu news, and they collectively produce news on a rotational basis. They discuss and form new words if they occur. As mentioned earlier, Radio Nepal started broadcasting daily Limbu news from 2051 BS, giving it a long history of three decades. Thus, the standardization of news is obvious, but there are pros and cons.

It was found through content analysis that the news produced by Radio Nepal is standard but not easy for listeners to understand. I found many reasons for this. Radio Nepal broadcasts Limbu news with pure translation, without adding and mixing imported languages. However, listeners speak Limbu by mixing Nepali. It is obvious that daily spoken Limbu language is mixed with Nepali in every Limbu village. Herein lies a contrast between the news delivered by radio and the everyday language of listeners. It seems like listeners are helpless if the radio's motive is to standardize the Limbu language. They listen to Limbu news for many purposes and by guessing what was broadcast in Nepali news just before. Sentences used for news are also lengthy.

Furthermore, this radio prioritizes the Panchthare dialect while writing news, making it difficult for listeners except those from Panchthare to understand the news. Radio Nepal Dhankuta has reporters in all 14 districts in Koshi province. The Limbu news team translates the news sent by these reporters, so there are no boundaries for the types of issues to be translated. Listeners might expect less news as there is no uniformity. Limbu news begins with national news as the first story, primarily related to politics or governmental activities.

Radio Nepal Dhankuta operates with a paperless studio concept, eliminating paper noise during news reading. The presenter prepares news by typing on the computer and then reads it. The presenter reads five to six news items during the 7-minute slot. It is considered that the news presenter should have a bold voice and speed while reading. However, the Limbu news presenter is never seen hurrying while reading the news. They always try to pronounce words and read sentences correctly, which sounds good.

Radio Nepal news is broadcast through FM band, live from digital platforms such as Facebook, mobile apps, and websites. During the content analysis period, no comments or feedback were received. Even the news producers and presenters are hopeless in this regard. They stated in an interview that they are doing their best to promote the Limbu language and serve the listeners, but the listeners complain that they literally don't understand the news.

Future Adaptation: Opportunities and Challenges

Limbu journalism has become an easy medium to bring its grammar and dictionary into practice for the development of the Limbu language and script. This presents the best opportunity for future adaptation. Mother tongue-based journalism is making a significant contribution to the preservation of the Limbu language. However, professionalism is essential here, just as it is in other professions.

"There is a challenge to be oriented towards professionalism to disprove the argument that mother tongue-based journalism is based on tribal sentiments. Investment is needed to make the journalism profession professional and sustainable, and one must also be knowledgeable about technology and management" (Sighak, 2019, p. 39).

I have found many challenges compared to opportunities for the future adaptation of Limbu news bulletins in radio broadcasting. The most important reason, however, is the daily decline in the practice of the mother tongue in daily life. The rapid emergence of new media and technology, especially the internet, is aggravating all the aforementioned reasons behind the crisis of Limbu news bulletins in the present and near future.

Language shift is creating significant challenges for mother-tongue journalism and other linguistic practices, as individuals increasingly prefer speaking Nepali over Limbu, and English over Nepali. This shift often leads to feelings of embarrassment when speaking or writing in one's own language, alongside a perceived lack of employment and opportunities within that linguistic sphere.

One aspect of this issue is related to language contact and policy in educational and institutional settings. Pradhan (2019) explores how state-driven processes of transformation and standardization in Nepal reshape linguistic authority, frequently favoring dominant languages such as Nepali and English over minority ones like Limbu. This prioritization tends to reinforce the use of Nepali and English in public and professional domains, while minority languages like Limbu are marginalized and assigned a lower status. Systematic language shifts foster feelings of inadequacy in mother tongue language, affecting identity and professionalism in fields like journalism. Giri (2010) notes how Nepali and English dominance prompts continual disconnections and assimilation. Hakala (2014) reports that educational and media policies promoting Nepali diminish the status of language like Limbu, accelerating their decline in both perception and practice.

This study indicates that Limbu news bulletins in radio broadcasting are soon to be closed, except for Radio Nepal. It is uncertain how long Radio Nepal will continue if listenership is almost zero. This requires deep, large-scale research. Limbu news listeners are still there, belonging to different categories. Limbu men or women who are aware of their identity and have a habit of listening to the radio since childhood still listen to Limbu news. Interestingly, they are found to tune into the radio to listen to Limbu news by any means. However, they are very few in number.

Youths and children have no interest in news or in their own mother tongue. They don't enjoy tuning into the radio for news, programs, or any content. They are part of a new generation for a new era. They are busy on social media platforms and are creating their own content. They will directly choose AI platforms for any news, updates, or authenticity. This scenario showcases a crisis in generation transformation.

Conclusion

Currently, it is not easy to attract the digital generation to radio, let alone in their mother tongue. It is essential to create appropriate news content on platforms they prefer and to encourage new generations to listen for the conservation and development of the language being broadcast on radio. For this, it is necessary to formulate policies from the state and concerned stakeholders to operate programs, thereby embracing diversity in unity. Therefore, it is necessary to make the concerned community understand that if the language survives, culture remains alive, and if the culture remains, the ethnicity survives.

Many Limbu youths seem attracted to the journalism profession; however, they often face linguistic problems. Ultimately, the first criterion for a journalist working in their mother tongue is to be proficient and expert in their own mother tongue. It can be easily estimated that the effectiveness of Limbu that started from various broadcasting centers has diminished due to a

lack of regularity. Language cannot be transformed from one generation to another by just one way transmission. Language is not a theory, but a practice. It is for the person who uses it, not for any particular caste. If someone loves his/her mother tongue but don't use it, the result is linguistic death.

This study suggests that radio needs immediate in-house review meetings and internal studies in their coverage area. This will help them realize and figure out their strengths and shortcomings. It would also be beneficial if radio prepared yearly or half-yearly action plans including research. A strong group of human resources working in the broadcasting sector needs to prepare a mechanism that can address younger generations.

In the context of Limbu news bulletins, future adaptation is highly needed to tackle the rise of digital media. This could involve adapting content, such as creating shorter, more shareable audio clips for social media, or longer, in-depth podcasts for on-demand listening.

Another idea is adopting new platforms for streaming broadcasts online, developing mobile apps, and actively using social media. Likewise, investing in new skills by training journalists in digital content creation, social media management, and data analytics is another. Exploring new funding models to support digital infrastructure and content development could be another major idea. These ideas are about being forward-looking and agile to navigate an uncertain future successfully.

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