

LANGUAGE USE AND ATTITUDE AMONG THE SHERPA SPEAKING COMMUNITY IN THE KATHMANDU VALLEY

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This paper aims to explore the status of language use and attitude among the Sherpa speaking community in the Kathmandu valley, the multilingual capital city of Nepal. It focuses on language contact situations in different domains viz. social, cultural, personal, and official as well as media related activities where the Sherpas make use of different languages along with the use of their own mother tongue. Based on 45 questionnaires from different informants, this paper presents interesting patterns of language use and attitudes among the Sherpa speaking community in Kathmandu.

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

1. Introduction

This paper explores the status of language use and attitude among Sherpa speaking community in the Kathmandu valley. The Sherpas have been migrating to the capital city from various hilly and mountainous regions of Nepal namely, Solukhumbu, Dolakha, Taplejung, Sindhupalchok, etc. Most of the migrated Sherpas have been living in different areas of Kathmandu valley mainly at Chabahil, Bauddha, Jorpati, Kapan, Mandikhatar and Gongabu. Based on the primary data collected by using questionnaire, this paper 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 using different languages along with the use of their own mother tongue. The questionnaire was administered on 45 informants with various economic, social, cultural, professional and academic backgrounds (i.e. housewives, business people, teachers, students, government officials, politicians and social activists). They were mainly asked to provide their views on language use and attitudes in Sherpa, Nepali, English, Hindi and other languages they use in different domains and contexts. The data 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 have been widely used among the migrated Sherpas. The different language ideologies have been contributing to this state of language use and attitudes in migrated Sherpas in language contact situation in the Kathmandu Valley.

This paper is organized into six sections. Section 2 briefly presents the ethno-linguistic situation of Sherpas in Kathmandu Valley. In Section 3, we discuss the research methodology employed and section 4 deals with the pattern of language use in the Sherpa community in the Kathmandu Valley. In Section 5, we examine the language attitude in Sherpa community and section 6 summarizes the finding of the paper.

Gipan 3:2. 26-37.

2. The Ethno-linguistic situation of Sherpas in the Kathmandu valley

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 major language families viz. Tibeto-Burman branch of Sino-Tibetan , the Indo-Aryan branch of Indo-European , Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian 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 2068 B.S., the ethnic population of the Sherpas is estimated 112,946. 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. The 1990 Political movement brought a lot of changes in Nepalese societies, cultures and politics. Party less Panchayat System changed into multiparty system and the powerful monarchy became ceremonial so that the dominated and minority groups from all aspects of society including languages flourished automatically. On the other hand, people started migrating to the nearest cities from the villages and to the capital because of job opportunity, better education and political opportunities. Many Sherpa people have been migrating and living in Kathmandu first as seasonal migrants and then permanently. Census 2001 shows that there were 15,537 Sherpa living in Kathmandu valley whereas 2011 census records 24,778 Sherpa population in Kathmandu valley. Migrated Sherpas speak different languages in different domains and purposes. Kathmandu is a cosmopolitan capital city because people from different cast, religion and ethnic groups live together and shares the common feeling of brotherhood and nationality. It 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. Gautam (2012) states:

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.

The Kathmandu valley has been the politically and culturally dominating part of Nepal. Its legendary and documented histories are so inter-related that these are difficult to separate. A political establishment of the area is dated to the beginning of Christian era,

the Kirati period. This was followed by the Lichhabi Dynasty from the 3rd to 9th centuries. Patan is believed to have expanded into a consolidated town by the end of the 7th century. The town of Kathmandu was established by a later Lichhabi king. After the 9th century, there is a dark period until 14th century and the arrival of Mallas, which was an important period for the flourishing of Nepalese arts and architectures. These developed into a growing spiritual orientation towards *tantrism*, making it difficult to separate purely Buddhist from purely Hindu art. From the middle of 13th century the city of Bhadgaon (Bhakatapur) prospered and became a major training center. The valley was divided into three rival kingdoms competing between themselves and bringing the artistic expressions to the highest point by the mid-18th century. In 1769 the valley was conquered and united by a leader coming from the outside, Prithvi Narayan Shah. 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 at present 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 historical connection of Kathmandu valley even before the unification movement e.g., Kirat, Lichhabi and Malla kings.

3. Research methodology

This is primarily based on the primary data collected with the help of questionnaires related to language use and attitudes. The source of data is also based on researcher's informal field study like social talking, business talking, debate and conversations etc. rather than written sources. The data are collected from the different areas of Kathmandu valley like Boudda (Jorpati), Kapan, Gongabu, Chabahil and some other typical areas where Sherpa people are living at present.

There were 45 questionnaires altogether containing metadata information and questions for language use and attitude. The questionnaires were developed in 2014 at *Dynamique du Langage Laboratory* (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. The data was collected mainly from the different people of Sherpa communities like Housewives, Teachers/academician/monks, Politician/language activists, Businessman/Shopkeeper, Trekking Guide/Worker/Vendor, and Students. All the informants were selected on A1 (15-30), A2 (30-55) and A3 (55 and above) group classifying into male/female, literate/illiterate when possible.

4. Language use in the Sherpa community

The Sherpa community exhibits different patterns of language use in different domains. They are briefly discussed as follows;

4.1 Patterns of language use in general domains

Sherpas employ different languages in different domains and purposes. They use language according to their need and interest. Table 1 presents the patterns of language use in the Sherpa community in Kathmandu Valley.

Table 1: Patterns of language use in the Sherpa community in Kathmandu Valley (N=45)

	Domains	Languages				
		Sherpa	Nepali	Hindi	English	Others
1.	Joking	68.8%	80%	4.4%	2.2%	
2.	Counting	68.8%	75.5%		24.4%	
3.,	Quarreling	77.7%	84.4%		2.2%	2.2%
4.	Singing inside	68.8%	48.8%	15.5%	11.1%	
5.	Bargaining	8.8%	91.1%		13.3%	2.2%
6.	Abusing	57.7%	77.7%		6.6%	2.2%
7.	Praying	91.1%	8.8%			6.6%
8.	Singing outside	40%	84.4%	15.5%	11.1%	
9.	Discussing	71.1%	75.5%		24.4%	
10.	Family gathering	88.8%	26.6%			
11.	Telling stories to children	20%	82.2%		4.4%	
12.	Telling stories to others	20%	88.8%		4.4%	
12.	Village/community meeting	71.1%	73.3%			2.2%

Source: Field study, 2015

Table 1 shows that Sherpa and Nepali used in most of the domains in comparison to Hindi, English and others. The influence of English is much higher than that of Hindi because of education, globalization and tourism connected to Sherpa people.

4.2 Patterns of language use in different cultural and religious festivals and ceremonies

The Sherpa community in the Kathmandu Valley presents a different pattern of use of mother tongue and Nepali in different activities related to culture and religion. Table 2 presents the pattern of language use in different cultural and religious festivals and ceremonies.

Table 2: Patterns of language use in different cultural and religious festivals and ceremonies (N=45)

	Specific Domains	Languages		
		MT	Nepali	English
1.	Religious festivals	44 (97.8%)	4 (8.9%)	2 (4.4%)
2.	Cultural programs	44 (97.8%)	15 (33.3%)	-
3.	Death ceremonies	45 (100%)	7 (15.5%)	-
4.	Marriage ceremonies	45 (100%)	8 (17.8%)	-
5.	Birth ceremonies	45 (100%)	7 (15.5%)	-
6.	Cultural festivals	41 (91.1%)	12 (26.7%)	-

Table 2 shows that Sherpas mainly use their mother tongue in most of the religious and cultural activities. Only in religious festivals like Lohsar where they enjoy many music and cultural foods as well. In this community, Nepali is noticeably used in cultural programs and festivals. English is also used in religious festivals; however, it is not significant at all. This pattern of language use in specific domains among the Sherpa community in the Kathmandu Valley is presented in Figure 1.

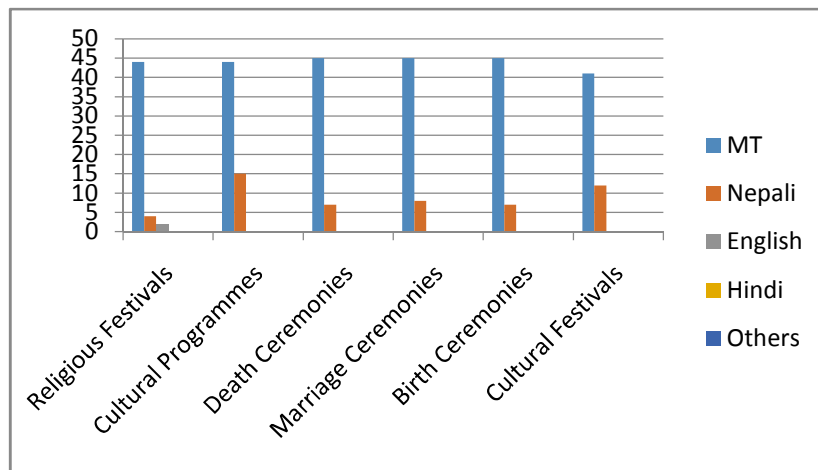


Figure 1 : Patterns of language use in different cultural and religious festivals and ceremonies

4.3 Patterns of language use in official and public activities

The Sherpas in the Kathmandu valley present a interesting pattern of languages use in the domains of official and public domains like office and workplace, political and social

gathering, funfair and public activities, administration and with strangers. Table 3 presents the pattern of language use in domains of official and public domains.

Table 3: Patterns of language use in official and public domains (N=45)

	Situations	Language use			
		MT	Nepali	English	Hindi
1.	Office/ Workplace	7(15.5%)	35(7.8%)	15(33.3%)	8(17.8%)
2.	Political/ Social gathering	1(2.2%)	33(7.3%)	5(11.1%)	-
3.	Public activities/ Fun fair	10(22.22%)	32(7.1%)	6(12.33%)	2 (4.4%)
4.	Administration	-	42(93.3%)	4(8.9%)	-
5.	Strangers	1(2.22%)	43(95.5%)	7(15.5%)	2(4.4%)

Table 3 shows the use of multiple languages and multiple activities. Nepali and English are dominantly used in almost all the official and public activities. Sherpa is not very much used in these domains because of its use and impact. Both Nepali and English are official as well as contact languages for national and international relations. This pattern of language use in the Sherpa community in Kathmandu valley is presented in Figure 2.

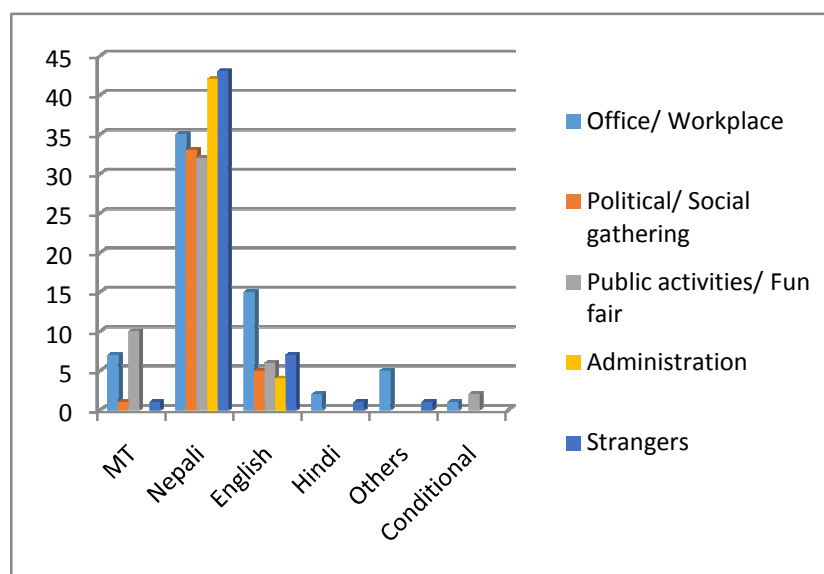


Figure 2 : Patterns of language use in official and public domains

4.4. Patterns of language use in media related activities

The community also presents an interesting pattern of language use in the domains media related activities. Such activities include watching movies and serial in TV, watching news, listening news and programs in radio, reading newspaper, reading horoscope etc. Table 4 presents the patterns of language use in media related activities in the community.

Table 4: Patterns of language use in media related activities

	Activities/ Languages	Language use				
		MT	Nepali	English	Hindi	Others
1.	Watching movie/ serial	2(4.44%)	44(97.8%)	18(40%)	29(64.45%)	1(2.2%)
2.	Watching news	2(4.4%)	45(100%)	15(33.3%)	7(15.5%)	1(2.2%)
3.	Listening music	23(51.1%)	36(80%)	13(28.9%)	15(33.33%)	3(6.6%)
4.	Listening radio/news	2(4.4%)	43(95.5%)	14(31.1%)	6(12.3%)	1(2.2%)
5.	Listening interview	3(6.6%)	43(95.5%)	11(24.4%)	4(8.9%)	
6.	Reading newspaper	3(6.6%)	37(82.2%)	16(35.5%)	1(2.2%)	
7.	Reading horoscope		37(82.2%)	8(17.9%)	1(2.2%)	

This situation of language use among the Sherpa community in the Kathmandu Valley is clearly presented in Figure 3.

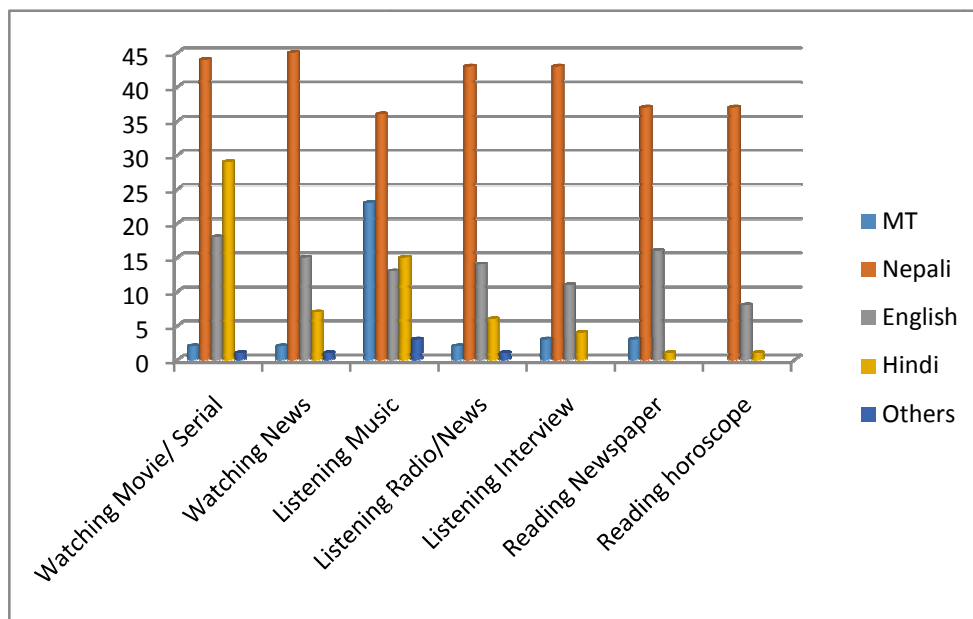


Figure 3: Patterns of language use in Media related activities

5. Language attitude in the Sherpa community

Attitude can be defined as subjective evaluations of both language varieties and their speakers, whether the attitudes are held by individuals or by groups (Scotton 2005). This 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, i.e., Sherpa 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. Scotton (2005) notes "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 is a geographical opportunity for one language to spread into the domains of another language or other languages." The Sherpas of Kathmandu valley have been migrating from different districts thinking that Kathmandu and the city centers are better than their previous places in terms of employment, education, development and civilization.

A set of questions were administered to the informants in order to understand the attitudes towards different languages including Sherpa. "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?" around two-third of the informants replied that they choose the one with the mother tongues whereas slightly more than one-third of the informants prefer either (Nepali or Mother tongue).

Figure 4 presents the different attitudes of common Sherpa people between Nepali and Sherpa.

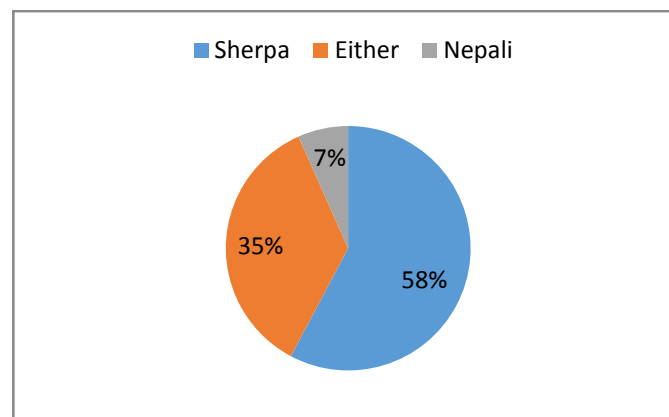


Figure 4: Attitude towards Sherpa and Nepali

During the interview we 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 the language they know i.e. Nepali or Sherpa creates various difficulties in bargaining and working condition.

Figure 5 presents the responses to the question "How often do you speak Nepali?"

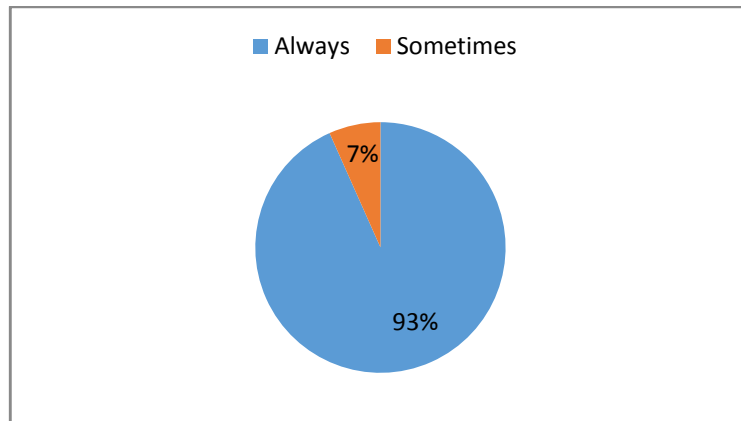


Figure 5: Frequency of the use of Nepali among Sherpa

Similarly we asked people about their reasons for using Nepali, the official and contact language of Nepal and English, the lingua franca of the world. They responded differently.

Figure 6 presents the responses to the question "Why do you like to use Nepali?"

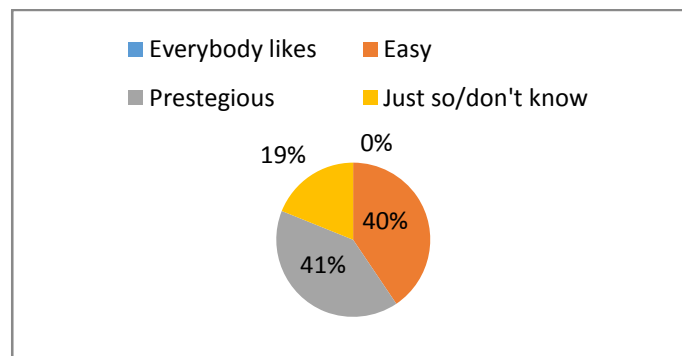


Figure 6: Reasons for the use of Nepali

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 a unequal power relationship.

Figure 7 presents the responses to the question "Why do you like to use English?"

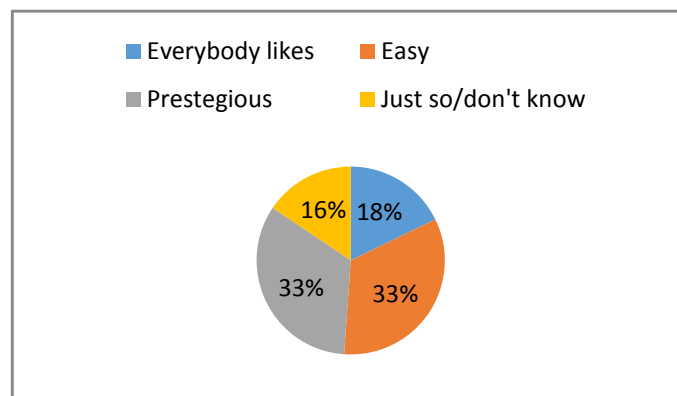


Figure 7: Reasons for the use of English

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. Labov (1972) notes “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”

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. Giles and Billings (2004) notes "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.”

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. Nepal is a developing country in south Asia where we can see the impact of globalization in education, trade and business and the shifting life style of the people in the towns and cities. 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.

6. Conclusion

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 much higher than Hindi which indicates that Sherpas are motivated towards globalization and western traditions. Sherpas have been directly involved in tourism and trekking and the contact with many foreigners motivates them towards English rather than other languages.

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. Migrated Sherpas living in the capital city have been influenced directly and indirectly by the globalization and international linkage and communication. Moreover, they have been involved in various social, cultural and ceremonial activities with the new mixed society which motivates them to shift into new target languages from the ancestral source language. In this context, 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. Existing political, social and economic factors contribute to language use and attitude. Nepali being the dominant language in the capital city, the lingua franca of the country and English being the international language of various purposes is becoming more valuable and influencing in Sherpa community which is the indication of language shift and endangerment.

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