

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS

36th SALA & 43rd LSN INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE, KATHMANDU

Krishna Prasad Chalise

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The chief guest, Prof. Dr. Dharma Kanta Banskota, Vice Chancellor, Tribhuvan University, Nepal;

The guests: Prof. Hem Nath Paudel, Acting Secretary, Nepal Academy; Prof. Kusum Sakya, Dean, Humanities & Social Sciences, TU; Prof. Dr. Abhi Subedi, former LSN president; Ms. Usha Hamal, Acting Chair, Language Commission Nepal; Prof. Dr. Balaram Prasain, Head, Central Department of Linguistics, TU; Mr. Mahendra Bahadur Pandey; Chairperson, Madan Bhandari Memorial College; Ms. Usha Kiran Bhandari, Chairperson, Madan Bhandari Foundation; Dr. Nabila Maussoumi, RELO Specialist, US Embassy Kathmandu; Prithvi Chaudhari, Country Director, SIL, Nepal.

The Key Note Speaker: Prof. Ayesha Kidwai-JNU, India;

The Former Presidents and life members, Linguistic Society of Nepal (LSN) and The South Asian Languages Analysis Roundtable (SALA).

Distinguished dignitaries and scholars from home and abroad, the plenary speakers, workshop coordinators, presenters, participants, media persons, ladies and gentlemen.

I would like to extend my sincere greetings to you on this promising occasion of 36th SALA & 43rd LSN International Conference jointly organized by Linguistic Society of Nepal and Central Department of Linguistics (CDL), Tribhuvan University. I feel honored and privileged to be here with you respectable and scholarly people from home and abroad. This gathering is really a historical mega event with people from different countries.

The South Asian Languages Analysis Roundtable (SALA) and Linguistic Society of Nepal (LSN) are contemporary organizations. The first was established in 1978 and the second one was established in 1979. But the first SALA conference and the first LSN conference were organized in the

same year, 1979. This is the first time that the SALA conference has been organized in Nepal, and this is the first time that the two conferences have been jointly organized.

These two organizations, LSN and SALA have justified their significance in the field of language and linguistics through their valuable contributions in the linguistic researches, especially, on the languages of Nepal and South-Asia. The forums have been useful platforms for the scholars working on the languages for the discussion and dissemination of the research findings.

LSN and Central Department of Linguistics have been playing an important role for the promotion of the studies on both minority and majority languages spoken in Nepal. At present, the scope has been wider. There are several cross-border languages that need cross-border studies. So, we are concerned about the languages of South Asia. In this context, the joint organization of the two conferences is meaningful.

LSN played the vital role in establishing the Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University. After its establishment LSN and CDL have been playing remarkable roles in shaping the language policy of Nepal. The political restructuring of Nepal has demanded the restructuring of the language policies. The experiences from the South Asian countries will be valuable for us.

I think this is a best forum to draw the attention of the concerned authorities towards some of the national and global linguistic issues.

The first issue I want to raise is related to the soon-to-be released census report of Nepal. Data collection for the 12th National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) is complete, and the findings are about to be publicized. We expect that it would bring out authentic language related information for the coming 10 years.

Here, I want to present two interesting cases concerning the census data collection.

- The fieldworker, in fact, did not visit my house for data collection. But later, I understood that she had already collected the information about my family from a nearby grocery shop. The shopkeeper reported that she asked the number of family members, gender, and approximate age. I heard the same story from several other people.
- The scenario before the census data collection was similar to that of the parliamentary election. Different organizations were directing people what they should answer to the language related questions using different means of communication.

These two evidences are sufficient to signify the degree of reliability of the coming census data. But our language policy and planning will be based on the data for the coming 10 years.

It is believed that the nation's supportive stance toward the minority languages aids in preserving them. Nepal's language policy has moved in favour of minority languages over the past three decades, but, surprisingly, a more massive LS is observed during this period than in the past. The case is the same with the minority languages of the world. Endangered Languages Documentation Program predicts that there exist about 6,500 languages in the world today and at least half of them will die by the end of this century. ELDP claims that it is because of economic, political and social pressures created by globalisation.

In this context, UN has proclaimed 2022-2032 as the International Decade of Indigenous Languages and the leading organization is UNESCO. We are at the end of the first year of the decade. There are several international and national agencies, community organizations, and several other agencies advocating for the preservation of the languages, the situation is getting worse.

- Are we just making noise?
- Are we in the wrong track? or
- Does it suggest that the support for minority languages in language policy could not withstand the forces of modernization and globalization?

Now is the time to honestly evaluate ourselves, our efforts, and the courses of action.

I think, we, certainly, are not ready to opt globalization at the cost of our languages and vice versa, we need both of them. They should go side by side. I believe that they can go side by side if we become multilingual. Our societies are multilingual, the language policies are multilingual, we are multilingual, but we never could have been multilingual. It means our psychology could not be multilingual. We want to establish our language replacing others' language. It means we are suffering from the psychology of monolingual language policy. As undemocratic psychology ruins the democracy, monolingual psychology ruins the multilingual language policy. If we could realize that plurality is our linguistic identity and started to think about 'our languages, not about our language', the problem will be solved for great extent.

I am thankful to the chief guest, the guests, the keynote speaker, the former presidents, the life members, the presenters, participants, media persons and well-wishers. From the depths of my heart, I would like to appreciate your valuable presence that has made this event a mega event.

I want to thank the editorial team of Nepalese Linguistics and Gipan, particularly, Bhim Narayan Regmi, Dr. Krishna Parajuli, and Ramesh Khatri, who made a very challenging task possible.

I am much grateful to the intellectual and technical contributions from Prof. Dr. Tanmoy Bhattacharya and his team. Likewise, I am grateful to Central Department of Linguistics and Madan Bhandari Memorial College for meaningful collaboration with us. Finally, I should thank the organizing committee of 36th SALA & 43rd LSN.

I wish you all a happy and fruitful time in Kathmandu.

Thank you all.

* This Presidential address was delivered at the Inaugural Ceremony of the joined conference 36th SALA & 43rd LSN at Madan Bhandari Memorial College, Anamnagar, Kathmandu on 26th November 2022.