

## **English Study in Nepal: Journey from Past to Future**

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### **Abstract**

English is a popular language in Nepal. Its use is increasing day by day. English in Nepal is used as the foreign language but its importance is not less than that of second language. This study reports on the growing popularity of English language in Nepali academia, socio-economic as well as political showground. Further, the study explores that English in the past was called elites' language, however this notion has been changed and now it has become everyone's language. The study was conducted using archived resources such as journals, articles and books. Findings of the study highlight the past history, present situation and future prospect of English language in Nepal with the conclusion that English language has become everybody's language from the elites' language.

*Key words:* English language, hegemonic, lingua franca, Nenglish, nativization

### **Introduction**

Nepal is a multilingual and multi-ethnic country. According to census report 2011, there are 125 castes and 123 languages (Statistics, 2014). However, many of them are already on the verge of extinction because of dominance of Nepali language and also due to the widespread popularity of English language. Even though Nepali is our official language, Statistics (2014) shows that there are many other languages spoken in Nepal such as Nepali 48.61%, Maithili 12.3%, Tamang 5.19%, Newari 3.63%, and Magar 3.39% as reported by census 2011. Besides the above languages, there are many other minor languages including English. According census report, there are 2045 (0.01%) people who speak English as the first language (Statistics, 2014).

English is considered as the foreign language for Nepali language speakers (Bista, 2011). In Nepal, English is not the official language neither is it the language of wider communication (Shrestha, 1983). However, it is being used as the medium of instruction and even means of communication within the certain periphery of most of the private schools of Nepal. Even some of the government schools are adopting English as the medium of instruction in order to lure the students and moreover, those students who have come from English medium schooling background are found to be enrolled in jobs and they are supposed to have higher social status in the eyes of public. Therefore, the charm of English language is increasing and English study in Nepal is taking a new dimension.

### **Historical Perspective**

Different Historical documents show that English language in Nepal entered as early as in the 17<sup>th</sup> century as Malla kings used English as lingua franca for their trade and business transactions. One of the Malla kings was English literate and he could speak English well (Hodgson, 1864). However the first entry of English in Nepal can be traced back to 1628 when the missionary named Craybrawl entered Nepal for religious preaching and another missionary named Dorbell came to Nepal in 1661 for the same purpose (Sharma, 2000). After the entry of Nepali youth into British Army as the subsequent result of Sugauli treaty signed in 1815, English got more popularity Nepal and its significance, too, increased as the Nepali British Gurkha had to communicate in English and thus, learning English before recruiting into the British Army was mandatory (Ram Ashish Giri, 2009).

The formal entry of English education in Nepal dates back to 1854 A.D. when Junga Bahadur Rana returned to Nepal from his first visit to Great Britain (Sharma, 2000). According to (Sharma, 2000) Junga Bahadur Rana had hired some of the teachers from Great Britain and opened Durbar high school, but it was only for Rana family and some handful elite people. Till 1950, there were limited number of schools even though the first English

school had been established in Nepal nearly a decade before. There were 13 secondary schools and Tri-Chandra college which was established in 1918 A.D. until 1950 (Sharma, 2000). After the advent of democracy, a large number of schools and colleges get established rapidly. Tribhuvan university was established in 1959 and it imparted education in English medium (Sharma, 2000). ELT in Nepal started after the implementation of National Education System Plan (NESP 1971-76) as T.U. started B.Ed. in English education (Giri, 2014). Hence, English as the foreign language was clearly defined and in the mean time a lot of private educational institutions came into existence opening numbers of English medium private schools and colleges (Bhattarai, 2006). The issue of Nepaliness in English was first raised by Shisir Kumar Sthapit in 1980s while presenting a paper for discussion entitled *The Sounds of English and Nepali* (Pandey, 2020). However, there has not been much study about formal aspects of English in Nepal.

English writing in Nepali came into practice much later than its spoken form. Nepalis writing in English goes back to 1950s when Laxmi Prasad Devkota started writing in English. Devkota had translated his *Sakuntal* in English and written poems like *The Lunatic* and *Bapu* and other poems in English. Nepalis writing in English got its momentous turning point with the publication of Samrat Upadhyaya's *Arresting God* in Kathmandu in 2000 and Manjushree Thapa's *The Tutor* in 2001, however, most of the Nepali writers in English started writing after 1990's political change, yet there is much of volatility in them (Pun, 2017a). Pun (2017) mentions that the corpus of Nepalis writing in English has been spreading after the restoration of multiparty democracy as it stands as a separate body of literature and has expanded its own horizon in global arena. Sushma Joshi, Rabi Thapa, Sheeba Shivangini, Ajit Baral, Richa Bhattarai, M.K.Limbu, Aditya Man Shrestha are some notable Nepali English Writers of the Present day.

## **Present Status**

English Users in Nepal are increasing by leaps and bounds. Now it has been changed from elite's language to everyone's language. Further it can be noted that English entered Nepal as the guest language and now it has been the best language. Nearly, half of the total number of schools are English medium schools and the number is increasing even more (Bhattarai, 2006). Bista (2011) reports that a lot of English language training centers are mushrooming day by day, even the poorest parents wish to enroll their children in the English medium schools. As a result, government is also compelled to introduce English medium schools from grade one. Similarly, National Curriculum Framework (2005) has given emphasis to English stating that medium of instruction in educational institutes will be either English or Nepali (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005). Moreover, many government schools are imparting education in English medium as the fulfillment of demand of the people. In addition to this, there are more than 50 regular publications including weekly, daily and magazines in English and besides that, most of the academic journals of universities are published in English language (Bhattarai & Gautam, 2010). They further mention that English in Nepal is taught for specific purposes like law, forestry, banking and financial studies and Nepal as the part of south Asia has influence of Indian English i.e. South Asian standardized English. Rai (2006) explores that Nepal has its own variety of English that is different from British English, American English, Australian English or Canadian English, rather it has its own peculiarities known as Nepali English or Nenglish. Nenglish has its own phonological features that are different from that of standard English. Phyak (2016) illustrates that English language has been used as commodity for multiple domains, the government offices accept documents written in English or Nepali and there is likelihood that Nenglish will be developed in the future. However English language has not gained its official position

in Nepal because we have not been able to codify English properly (Poudel, 2016) and there are very small numbers of people who speak English as their first language.

Out of three concentric circles of English Nepal can be placed in the expanding circle that English in Nepal does not play institutional role (Kachru, 2005). But functions of English in Nepal according to model of (Kachru, 1978) are as follows:

- i) Instrumental functions
- ii) Regulative functions
- iii) Interpersonal functions
- iv) Creative functions
- v) Innovative functions

They can be shortly elaborated as follows:

### ***Instrumental Functions***

As instrumental functions of English in Nepal, it is used as an instrument of education. Nepali English follows the British standard. Even during and post Rana period English was preferred language in education and it was used as the medium of instruction. NNEPC survey 1954 showed more than half of Nepal's population wanted English as the medium of instruction (Sonntag, 2003). At present, English is medium of instruction as well as means of communication in most of the private schools of Nepal.

### ***Regulative Functions***

English carries out a number of regulative functions as well. It is being used as the lingua franca in international trade and business, tourism and hotels, education, science and technology (R. Giri, 2015). In Nepal, most of the academia take place in English and it has been one of the prominent languages in print as well as in electronic media (Khatri, 2003). The various programs presented in radio and television use English- mixed language (Yadav,

1990), a large number of diaries are in English (Verma, 1996) and English has become language of all socio-economic levels (Jha, 1989).

### ***Interpersonal Functions***

The interpersonal functions of English refers to two main functions in the expanding and outer circle as the symbol of elitism, prestige and in addition it serves as a link language in multifold forms of Nepal (Pandey, 2020). English in Nepal is a significant means of interpersonal communication. In Nepal from the beginning of school education English has served as the means of interpersonal communication primarily to share one's ideas, thoughts, opinions and feelings (Shrestha, 1983).

### ***Creative Functions***

In academic field, English is being used for creative and artistic purpose (R. Giri, 2015). The literary works written by Laxmi Prasad Devkota, Manjushree Thapa, D.B. Gurung, Abhi Subedi, Peter J. Karthak etc. come under English Creative Works in the context of Nepal (Pandey, 2020).

### ***Innovative Functions***

A new variety of English is being developed in Nepal with distinctive features at all levels (Rai, 2006) and this process is the focus for linguistic innovation as well as adaptation. (Rai, 2006) contends that English is localized in Nepal with newer features as different kinds of written and spoken varieties are emerging. There are several words borrowed from English such as camera, radio, TV, bag, sir, motorcycle doctor etc. and they have been already localized in Nepali context (Pandey, 2020). Nepali people inhabiting in different English-speaking countries are also contributing for linguistic innovations in Nepal. Moreover, linguistic code switching is observed on radio, television and different other social media.

English in Nepal is widespread and popular language in terms of its usage as it is spoken by many people of any socio-economic background. Even illiterate people are being

used in speaking in this language. In this concern, Eagle (1999) illustrates that English in Nepal is used in different socio-cultural gatherings as such; family weddings, birthday celebrations and interpersonal communicative activities without knowledge and skill of it and it is almost impossible to get job without the knowledge of English. English has been acclimatized, according to Nepali soil, Nepali culture and Nepali accent; to justify it more specifically, English is getting localized and some kind of Nepaliness in it (Karn, 2006). Moreover, Nepali English is not confined to spoken domain only; it has been able to expand its horizon in literature too with its own peculiarities. Thus, English in Nepal seems to be directing towards what Kachru (1978) calls nativization stage from the exonormative stabilization stage as it still retains the interest of politically, economically and socially elite people and they run after the standard variety i.e. British English or American English. Nevertheless, there is no way to claim anything as there has not been much study about the formal aspects of English in Nepal.

Today, the need of English knowledge is even more realized because of the rapid development of modern technology which is closely connected to education; it is because when technology is accepted, knowledge of English language is felt necessary. The knowledge of English is indispensable in order to understand innovative technological methods, tools, devices, materials, system, and strategies. Similarly, new technology is better acquired through English language according to current pedagogical theories. Therefore, the attraction of English in the world is increasing and Nepal is not an exception.

### **Future Prospect**

Future of English in Nepal cannot be easily predicted in the current situation because we don't have recorded history and corpus of English. Regarding the future of English language, Crystal (2003) states that there are no any clues to predict the future of English as there has never been a language so widely spread or spoken by so many people as English,

there are no precedents to help us to see what happens to language when it achieves world status and thus, there are contradictory trends about the future of English. The above quote is further supported by Graddol (1998) as he mentions that the future of English as the foreign language will take into long account because of complex model to identify key variables and difficulty in bringing together baseline statistics. English in Nepal is still used as the foreign language not as the first or second language. English in Nepal is not spoken in the south Asian context rather Nepali people learn English in the context of Australia, UK or USA however, at present Nepali English is within Nepal. Thus, it is very difficult to say where the Nepali English is directed to. Studies as such of (Phyak, 2016) claim that there is likelihood of developing Nenglish in Nepal. On the other hand, (Poudel, 2016) opines that there is less chance of developing Nenglish because English language has not gained its official position and we have not developed its corpus yet. Similarly, Duwadi (2010) perceives development of Nenglish just as mirage and he further claims that nativization of English in Nepal will turn into anarchy. The influence of English language in Nepal is and will always be determined by political and socio-economic power.

There are three kinds of speakers of English language in the world namely Native English speakers, English as the second language speakers and English as the foreign language speakers, and those who speak English as the second language or the foreign language will determine the future of English language (Graddol, 1998). Nepali English speakers are grouped in the third category and therefore, the future of English in Nepal will be determined on the basis of where the speakers will be directed to. Thus, it can be agreeable to what Michael Bakhtin (Carter, 2016) says the English of the world will move to centrifugal tendencies and so will be that of Nepal too. Since English is always an evolving and flexible language, Nepal's English too will continue to evolve with the changing roles and identities of its speakers.



Future of English in Nepal will be complex, more demanding of understanding and more challenging (Graddol, 1998). English in future will spread its significance as the global language of liberty, diplomacy, business, employment, human rights promotion, administration, governance, IT and many more (Bhattarai, 2006). The attraction of English language in Nepal will more rapidly increase. Many of the language institutions in private sectors will be established and huge amount of money will be spent for English language development. Youth will be attracted towards TOEFL, IELTS and other standardized tests. The trend will go even higher as a result; allurements of English in universities, colleges and higher education centers will never decline.

### **Conclusion**

English in Nepal entered as the language of elite people and now it has been everyone's language as it has penetrated into Nepalese socio-cultural, academic, and economic aspects. The use and usage of English has been considerably changed. In the context of Nepal English has become a hybrid language making its own kind of variety. English as the second language is a demanding course in Nepalese academia because of its growing need in different domains and broad functional allocation. It is unlikely that the role of English in Nepali education will recede. In addition to this, English in Nepal in several contexts serves either as primary language or alternate language. Nepali people have their own English not like that of the native speakers. The way people perceive English has changed. Therefore, the journey of native English to Nepalese English itself is beckoning the wave of nativization and is not going to stop if its direction does not change. Language users seek their identity in the language they use and thus, they prefer context-based Nepali English or Nenglish.

Therefore, it is noticeable that the future of English in Nepal is very bright and it has a kind of positive linkage with future career English learners. Growing opportunities for

English speakers will lure the Nepali young generation to move from their traditional location to profession. However, the lack of corpus, legitimacy, and inadequate study will often be questioned in Nepali English. English language in Nepal is at the greater dilemma of its affluent past established as the outcome of colonial project, its declining standards in public from the eyes of native speakers, its diverse role in the community and its unpredictable future due to several Englishes in one hand and on the other hand, its ever-growing demand in all socio-political, economic and developmental aspects is creating an insolvable debate in policy matters and further planning. Thus, there is need of further research, explicit policy reliable study for stability and identity of English language in Nepal.

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