
Standardization of the Tharu Language: A Critical Analysis

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Abstract

This research paper highlights the importance and rationale of standardization in the Tharu language spoken in Nepal. It has some variants throughout Nepal and is being used on the individual styles of accent and pronunciation. These individual styles of speaking and writing the language have created some confusion and occasional linguistic disputes. This research project aims at mitigating such linguistic controversy. The native speakers of the Tharu language are found to have been pronouncing cerebral and dental sounds haphazardly. It happens so because the language hasn't been authentically standardized so far although it has had lots of literary activities with quite a good folk literature too. The Tharu language is the fourth largest language of Nepal. It's the major language of southern Nepal from the east to the west but it doesn't have any authentic linguistic guidelines. Being centred on these points, the paper advocates for the standardization of the Tharu language with the authorized publication of grammar books, dictionaries, etc. Views of various authors regarding the standardization of language have been presented in this paper that has adopted the qualitative research method. The analysis and discussion have been made primarily based on the secondary sources of data with the conclusion that the Tharu language is in dire need to be standardized for its spread and quality as well.

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Introduction

Tharu people have been living in large numbers mostly in the plain lands of Nepal since centuries ago. "They are the indigenous people of the southern Terai belt of Nepal and some of the Indian states like Bihar and Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand." ("Tharu People"). They have varieties in their tradition, culture, religion, and costumes. All the people of this caste do not write 'Tharu' as their family name, rather only a few of them do so; others write *Chaudhary*, *Rajbanshi*, *Mahato*, *Singh*, *Rana*, and the like. Whatever last name they use, they agree that the language they use is the *Tharu language* which has several forms. There are three major dialects of the Tharu language itself: *Eastern*, *Midwestern* and *Western Tharu language*. Eastern Tharu dialect consists of *Morangiya*, *Saptariya*, and *Rajbanshiya* languages as sub dialects whereas midwestern Tharu dialect includes *Chitwaniya* and *Nawalpuriya* sub-dialects. Similarly, the western Tharu dialect consists of *Daugaura*, *Deukhuriya*, *Kathriya*, *Deshauri*, and *Rana* as sub-dialects in the Tharu languages. These subdivisions of the Tharu languages naturally vary according to the topography. Linguistic belief is that even the same language differs at every 10 Kos i.e. 23 miles.

Ramlan describes that the purpose of the standardization of language is to maintain linguistic forms and social-communicative purposes because the language gets standard due to this process (27). He also stresses the necessity of well-preparedness and systematic steps and procedures for the standardization of any language that is divided into two kinds: standard language and non-standard language. According to Holmes standard variety is generally written, and undergone some degree of codification that makes the language prestigious and standard in the community where it is spoken (79). Wardhaugh gives his opinion that through the process of standardization a language is systematized, updated, and codified in some way and the process mostly involves the development of grammar, spelling books, dictionaries, and possibly literature as well (101). Tharu language in particular has had some natural improvements along with its exposure at national and international levels, but these are not enough.

Like that of Nepali, Hindi, and Sanskrit languages, the Tharu language is also written in the Devanagari script, the fourth most widely adopted writing system in the world. It is a matter of astonishment that the fourth largest language of the country remains very far as the matter of the development of the language is concerned both in the case of written and oral forms. The very obvious reason, out of so many others, is that the Tharu people have always been kept at the margin elsewhere for centuries. Sometimes the caste has marginalized itself simply by being indifferent in those crucial times when it could certainly have done for the upliftment of the language. The scholars have remained negligent in the case of bringing their language in the front foot by working collaboratively with the government and other concerned stakeholders. Recently some initiations seem to have been done but they are not enough for the holistic development of the Tharu language and literature.

Diversity within a language is undoubtedly its salient feature, but it can create massive confusion if it's not brought under a written and all-accepted system. A language is bound to follow certain grammatical rules and regulations for its systematization. That is why the Tharu language also essentially needs standardization. It has to be practised -in written and oral forms both- under a criterion or standard; not only for the prosperity of the language at the present but also for the convenient and academic use of the language by the upcoming generation in the future. According to Sarbahari, unless a proper survey of Tharu dialects is made, it cannot be confirmed that all the dialects spoken by Tharu people are the same. No

significant study regarding the Tharu dialect has been done by the government so far; even though Mahesh Chaudhary, in association with Nepal Academy, has had a scientific survey of the Tharu language, but his work remains unpublished (17). All these efforts are meant to standardize the Tharu language.

The standardization process seems to have taken place in almost all the major languages spoken around the globe sooner or later. It is an act of unifying the norms of the languages within the language itself because one language is always at risk of getting affected by all of the major languages spoken in its periphery. Discussing the standardization of the Tharu language Gopal Dahit, former minister and researcher of the Tharu language and literature expresses his opinion that the Tharu language has had an abundance of effects on other major languages spoken in Southern Nepal and the Indian states that border with the Tharu language-speaking zone of Nepal (“Tharu Manak Bhasha Bahas 15” 02:35-03:23). He further opines that this nature of the language has invited a kind of crisis of existence in the Tharu language itself. That’s why also the standardization of the Tharu language is essential. Similar views on the standardization of the Tharu language have been expressed by Shushil Chaudhary, Tharu artist, author, and litterateur, takes the Tharu language as common psychology and identity of the people; he says that language which is associated with politics too, might get extinct in the absence of standardization, so the standardization of the Tharu language must be taken seriously by all the stakeholders (“Tharu Manak Bhasha Bahas 11” 18:56-19:15). In this regard, Professor Madhava Pokhrel suggests that Tharus have to proceed with the process of standardization of the their language by accepting the fact that they have unity in ethnicity and culture, but diversity in the language (“Tharu Manak Bhasha Bahas 18” 45:02-45:52). The standardization of the Tharu language is bound to play a significant role in the development of Tharu literature equally because “the development of any literature heavily depends on the development of that particular language” (Tharu 129).

The main objective of this research paper is to draw the attention of the concerned people and the authority to the necessity of standardization of the Tharu language. The research is also aimed at making the Tharu scholars agree on a common point of standardization of the language because the disagreements and confusions are vividly seen on this issue up to today's date. Stressing the advantages of standardization for the convenience in its use that would sound more natural not only to speakers and listeners within the Tharu caste but also to all the people who deal with it, is also the equally important objective of this study.

Tharu language has its variants. The researcher's stress is on the standardization of all of the Tharu dialects, but the references presented in the paper mention more about the western Tharu dialects –*Dangaura*, *Deukhuriya*, and *Deshauriya* only for the reason that the texts of the rest of the Tharu dialects and the scholars on those dialects couldn't be contacted. The study of this research paper is limited to the linguistic, phonological, and lexicon study of the above-mentioned two Tharu dialects only, even though the standardization of holistic Tharu language has to be done at the earliest.

Review of Literature

There are some disagreements on how to standardize the Tharu language. Scholars, who have contributed for so long time to the preservation and publication of the language have not been able to find a common point of agreement simply for the reason that their perception and outlook on looking at the language differs. Since the language is being used in the way it was transmitted to them orally by their forefathers, some scholars argue that its standardization

should be done in such a way that it would not lose its originality. They are worried much about the fact that there might be some drastic change in the ways words are pronounced. They also seem equally concerned about keeping the language unaffected by other languages. They argue that there should not be any linguistic invasion in the Tharu language. They want just minor changes to take place in the standardization process whereas other class of scholars strongly advocate that the standardization process must abide by the essential rules of adoption and change as per the changing linguistic scenario nationally and internationally as well. They argue that the theory of adoption of words from other languages should be accepted without any fear of being affected by them. They have the opinion that the survival and prominence of the language primarily depend on whether it can assimilate the new words as its own or not.

Standardization of the Tharu language is an urgent need of the present time in the sense that many Tharus of the young generation are not much emotionally attached to their native language for they find it, in some way, not equally standard like that of other major languages. That is why they just don't remain monolingual even among the family members at home. Most of the Tharus have been multilingual using Nepali, Hindi, Avadhi, and Maithili, Bhojpuri, and English languages on most occasions. 'This language shift has not been felt strongly yet in the community, the competence in the language has been found gradually decreasing among the young generation. Code mixing and switching are found among the community.' The newsletter further mentions the syntactic structure of the language:

Tharu language has 29 consonants and 8 vowels. Nasalization is also contrastive in this language. Tharu has two numbers (singular-plural) and two genders (feminine-masculine) systems. There are nominal classifiers in the language. Ergative, instrumental, accusative, dative, genitive, and locative cases are marked with suffixes in the language. There are three tenses (past, present, and future), and four moods (indicative, interrogative, imperative, and optative) found in the language. Tharu is a S(ubject)-O(bject)-V(erb) language which has interrogation, negation, causativization, and passivization syntactic processes. Subordination and Coordination as clause combining processes found in the language. (Nepali Folklore and Folklife, 2008).

Standardization of the Tharu language begins with the uniformity in a particular dialect of the language in written and oral form, irrespective of the habitation of the speaker. For this, the publication of the grammar is very important. A speaker of the *Dangaura* dialect might reside in the eastern part of Nepal but can exercise the language based on the grammatical rule, otherwise, s/he might simply be affected by the people of other Tharu dialects and vice versa. Although grammar has not been published yet authentically, other Tharu dialects have faced almost no problems and disputes except in the western Tharu dialects viz. *Dangaura*, *Deshaura*, *Kathariya*, and *Deukhuriya*. It is because the rest of the dialects have followed the theory of adoption in the case of making their languages sound more natural both in written and oral forms. For example, *Morangiya*, *Saptariya*, and *Nawalpuriya* dialects have some similar kinds of pronunciations of cerebral and dental like that of Maithili and Bhojpuri languages.

The western Tharu language possesses more literary writings in comparison to other Tharu dialects as per the research carried out by various researchers at various times. It has more distinct features than those of the others. This is why it is necessary for it to be standardized so that it can be accessed by readers outside of Tharu as well. Sadly, the present condition is that it has not been able to tie up all the Tharu readers to this date due to its linguistic drawbacks and some kinds of inconvenient use of the words in the language itself.

Regarding the issue of improvements in the Tharu words Mahesh Chaudhary, ex-state minister, Tharu scholar, and researcher writes in his article *Tharu Bhashik Suddhatama Prashna* (The Question of Tharu Linguistic Correctness) published on the *Gorkhpatra* daily on 25th July 2020 that 'the question of identity has arisen due to the co-ordination of the page called *Naya Nepal*'. Chaudhary further opines that the columnist Sarbari, who is the coordinator himself has used the term *Bandabandi* (*/bəṇḍabəṇḍi/* 'बन्डाबन्डी'), intending to mean 'lockdown'; but according to Chaudhary, it means 'to divide'. The columnist should have written */bəṇḍabəṇḍi/* ['बन्दाबन्दी']. He opposes this type of writing where cerebral like */t/ /ṭ/* (tall), */ṭ/ /th/*, */d/ /ḍ/* (dark) and */ḍ/ /dh/* are used even in the place of the dental like */ṇ/ /t/, /θ/थ, /ḍ/ḍ,, /ध//dh/*. The present situation is that some scholars have denied using the dental even in the *Agantuk* or borrowed/loanwords. This is a clear indication that the issue of standardization of the Tharu language is not cut and dried, rather it has got theoretical differences among the scholars. Chaudhary argues that some of the words used in the Tharu language have to be used based on their origin- from which language those words are included in the language. Such words in Nepalese grammar are called *Agantuk* or borrowed/loanwords. He argues that these words in the Tharu language should also be used as they are used in their original language. Doing that could be one better step of standardizing the Tharu language. Using the *Agantuk* or loanwords in their root form is most likely to do away with confusion and paradoxes in the meaning of the words. In his above-mentioned article, Chaudhary writes 'The use of loanwords does not make a language impure rather it makes it prosperous. Elkartea has a similarity in opinion with Chaudhary as he says that "each language is different from others for that reason each speech community has to adjust and adapt the written code to its needs, giving rise to the different alphabets" (15). So, the loanwords of the prosperous languages are generally used as they are used in the source language. But the *New Nepal* Tharu page on Gorkhapatra didn't seem to have done so. Chaudhary further accuses Sarbahari of distorting the loanwords while using the Tharu language by giving several examples of distortion. His dissatisfaction continues further as he mentions:

A language cannot prosper due to someone's whim. "Tharu Literary Convention" was held in Butwal on 18-19th of Chaitra 2076 BS (1- 2 March 2020) in the presence of the representative of all the Tarai districts. Two and half an hour panel discussion agreed with the author, but Sarbahi boycotted saying that he wouldn't accept it. He has been coordinating the *New Nepal* Tharu page on Gorkhapatra and writing and editing it in his style. This is something to think about (*Gorkhapatra*, 25th July 2020, page no. 5).

The opinions expressed by author Chaudhary vividly put the reality that Tharu scholars and writers themselves have not reached a solid agreement on how to prosper the language. Chaudhary and Sarbahari's opinions might just be the representative voice of two categories of Tharu scholars of the Western Tharu language. The arguments presented by them might have their logic or rationale but the necessity is that the Tharu language can't remain in the situations without getting standardized as per the changing time. A language of course needs to undergo certain changes; should be able to accept the words of other languages as well so that it could expand itself. Using the loanwords in the way they are used in their source language could be a common point of agreement among the Tharu scholars in the case of standardization of the language. Hari Timilsina, a critic and an ex-member of the Academic Council of Nepal Academy, has the same opinion on the uniformity of the language in written and spoken forms by following the specific rules for borrowing words from other languages (40). The need for

this is to realize and accept the fact that a language is acceptable to all only if it is liberal, practical as well and naturally convenient to the people not only of that particular group and caste but also to all interested in it. Expressing his opinion on how the Tharu language needs to be modified, modernized, and standardized Bholu Ram Chaudhary, a grammarian, writer, and editor of *Tihkari Weekly* in mid-eastern Tharu Language writes in his blog:

Everyone living in the Tarai speaks the Tharu language which is jumping up for its development at present. It's not so easy to limit it in a language with a single linguistic feature to that language which is spoken in the eastern to the western part of Nepal. Tracing the features within its feature is not only a tough job but also a task of being criticized. Unless a language gets systematized and all-acceptable, the uniformity in the language cannot be brought. Tharu language is being used independently and has no standardization so far.

According to Professor A.M. Ghatage, one of the basic assumptions of historical linguistics is that language undergoes a constant change in the course of time, and such a change cannot be arrested if the language is to be alive means of continuous use (51-56). Standardization in language implies a choice of a particular form of speech giving it a wider scope in use, with the necessary adjustment, to cope with new situations. In theory, any dialect or even an idiolect can be thus standardized. Ghatage says that it is not completely under the control of the policymakers to decide the way and forms of standardization of both the spoken and written formats of the language; however, it's possible to do so. In the same reference, he also makes clear that 'desirability' should necessarily be the basic criterion of choice, involving non-linguistic considerations.

The arguments made in the preceding passage also agree that the standardization of the Tharu language, in particular, needs to be done keeping view in mind that the process should capture a wider scope as far as its acceptance is concerned. The process must abide by the theory of adjustment while introducing some new words from other source languages. As Ghatage says the scholars working for the upliftment of this language have to let the change take place in phonetics, lexicons, morphology, grammar, and in many such aspects of the language for making it alive means of communication in the changing global scenario linguistics. Still, the real problem in language standardization is to get to know and be able to put into operation the means of making the choice acceptable to all concerned and help it spread at the cost of the discarded alternatives.

Fromkin and others claim that the development of language is linked to the evolutionary development of the speech production and perception apparatus. Words are, according to them, an important part of linguistic knowledge and constitute a component of our mental grammar. The production of the words is also attached to how a word is expressed in both writing and oral forms (59). The language is developed with the exercises of people of many generations who naturally make some sorts of changes in the forms of the words and their pronunciation. They keep using the borrowed words too if they do not find the words to address a certain thing in their languages. The language is developed evolutionarily. Making a language standard is intricately linked to grammar also, which is one of the most effective ways of standardization of any language for the simple reason that it's a guideline the user/speakers accurately use the language. So, "the grammar can be used to refer to the knowledge that every speaker has of the language they speak" (Thornborrow and Wareing 52).

Methodology

This research project is a qualitative research work that is based on the study and analysis of the information available in books, journals, websites, blogs, newsletters, and journals both online and offline related to the language, its structure, the Tharu language, and people as the primary sources of data. Besides that, scholars of the Tharu language and literature have also been consulted for an overall analysis of the Tharu language and its attempts for standardization. Secondary sources of data have been used while studying the topic-related works: *Youtube* videos discussing the issues of standardization of the Tharu language have minutely been analyzed with an attempt to include the latest views on the Tharu linguists and scholars. The research work is primarily focused on highlighting the importance of the advancement of the Tharu language in both written and oral forms through the urgent necessity of a standardization process to be efficient enough for the people of the new Tharu generations. The research article is highly expected to be beneficial for future research on the analysis of the Tharu language in particular.

Results/Findings

Language is not merely a medium of communication rather it is also a medium of exposure to people. It is concerned with the lifestyle, geography, culture, and attitude of the people. So, people can be studied in the way they use their language. Their linguistic presentation is capable enough to tell others where they stand. That is why language plays a vital role in a person's life as far as his evaluation and understanding are concerned. Knowing a language well and studying the language are quite different things: people can't be understood through their languages but they can be known through the study of their languages. The standard language is comparatively easier for people to study systematically. The study of a standard language as a linguistic and socio-cultural phenomenon is today a well-established field of study.

Santillan and Rodas consider language standardization as a process of social struggle and dynamics that influence the language for its betterment (1). Deumert connects the standardization of the language with the social-communicative functions having a strong linguistic form and she further explains that the standardization processes are accompanied by the developments of specific discourse practice(2). Discussing the opinion of Deumert what can be said about the standardization of the Tharu language is that people's social class, religion, sex, and the things as such also need to be studied because they are connected with the way they use their language. The accent of the people manifests their capacity, status of their sex, and religion as well. This study demonstrates that standardization of the Tharu language has positive effects on language preservation and development. On the one hand, standardization contributes to the creation of a standardized system of grammar, orthography, and pronunciation that can be used in diverse communities and regions. This facilitates easier communication and comprehension between Tharu residents throughout the Tharu-speaking region of Nepal. In addition, standardization can be a time-consuming and resource-intensive procedure that may not be accessible to all community members, especially those from marginalized groups.

The diverse linguistic and cultural requirements of the Tharu community should be considered when standardizing the Tharu language. A balanced approach that considers the advantages and disadvantages of standardization is required to guarantee the preservation and development of the language while preserving its distinctive dialectical and cultural expressions. Additionally, it is essential to involve members of the Tharu community, particularly those from marginalized groups, in the language planning and policy formulation processes. This can

help ensure that the requirements and perspectives of all community members are taken into account during the language planning process (Pandey and Regmi, 301).

Discussion

The standardization of the Tharu language, that is why is not only limited to systematizing it linguistically by publishing and authenticating grammar but also to improving their social ranking as well. This process in a wider sense is connected to sociolinguistics and socio-cultural phenomenon as a whole. Moreover, the standardization of the Tharu language is also intertwined with the study of the effect of all aspects of society, including cultural norms, expectations, and context, on the way language is used, and society's effect on the language. It has also been observed that some sorts of constraints can also shape the languages, and the occurrences of historical changes as well as the meanings distinguished at different times also can give a new shape to any language. The standardization and the development of the Tharu language must keep into consideration such vital linguistic features.

The standardization of the Tharu language has to be done with a wider thought keeping in mind that the language has to exist significantly for which it has to adopt some of the words from other languages as well. Authentic grammar has to be issued from the concerned authority. The language needs to widen its coverage in the way possible. The inclusion of the new words is not going to interfere with its originality for there is a simple argument that Deumert mentions in her book *Language Standardization and Language Change the Dynamics of Cape Dutch*:

The majority of standard languages are thus composite varieties characterized by multiple selections; that is, the complex recombination of features from various dialects and varieties. In other words, standard languages have 'multiple ancestors' and their history is shaped by various types of language contact. Language standardization understood as a process of variant reduction does not only include deliberate intervention by regulating authorities but also processes of cumulative micro-accommodation, leveling, and dialect convergence, which is the outcome of the everyday linguistic activities of individuals. (2)

The academies working on language and literature, various linguistic societies, and academicians are naturally responsible for the standardization of the Tharu language by publishing dictionaries, grammar books, journals, etc. to initiate the imposition of uniformity in the language.

Wardhaugh explains language standardization as a process in which a language is codified in some way that involves the developments of grammar, spelling, dictionaries, and possibly the literature too (101). That is why the act of standardization is primarily focused on written forms. The oral form of standardization comes only after the written form because the written forms are the basis for the verbal form, even though they are closely connected. In some cases, oral forms of standard language also play an important role in showing the condition of the language. Analyzing Wardhaugh's idea here what can be concluded is that a language should first be written maintaining standard and it has to be practiced orally in the same standard style for which the all-accepted grammar books have to be published, and it has to be approved by the concerned authorities in no time. The Tharu language process of standardization has yet to go through this stage.

The sociolinguistic context must be considered during the language standardization process. It must be tailored to the specific linguistic and cultural requirements of each community (Ramanathan and Kaplan, 15). In addition, language standardization should not be regarded as the sole means of language preservation and development. A more holistic approach that

incorporates language maintenance and revitalization efforts, as well as the promotion of multilingualism and linguistic diversity, may be more suitable for the Tharu community (Leki and Cumming, 4).

Conclusion

Tharu language and its dialects have their features, styles, tones, and also accents of speaking. It has always remained influenced by the languages spoken by the majority of the people around the habitation of the Tharu people. The effect of Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Hindi, and Avadhi can significantly be noticed at present in Nepal. Tharu communities in different parts of Nepal and India do not share the same language. In western Nepal and adjacent parts of India, the Tharu language seems to have been influenced by Hindi, Urdu, and Awadhi languages as far as the accents and use of words are concerned (Dhakal). In and near central Nepal itself, the Tharu people speak a variant of Bhojpuri. In eastern Nepal, the Maithili language seems to have influenced the Tharu language to a greater extent. Interestingly, more standard versions of these Tharu dialects are spoken in a remarkable number by non-Tharu neighbours in the same areas so that there are no linguistic barriers between Tharus and their neighbours. That is why the advancement of the Tharu language and its standardization is also essential. This will keep on proving its high position and existence in the days to come basically for its assimilation from the generation to come. The younger generation of Tharu people might be tied linguistically only if they find their native language to be practical, standard, and convenient enough to reflect the matter of socio-cultural and sociolinguistic phenomenon. The standardization of the Tharu language will undoubtedly enrich the Tharu language and literature by making it more acceptable, convenient, updated as well as long-lived. Publication of authentic grammar, dictionaries, and the massive use of the language accordingly in practical lives as well as the provision of academic courses in schools and colleges could be a giant step in the overall standardization of the Tharu language.

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