

## Linguistic Diversities in Nepal: A Glimpse of Past and Present

RISHIRAM ADHIKARI

\*Author affiliations can be found in the back matter of this article

### CORRESPONDING AUTHOR

**Rishiram Adhikari**

Nepal Sanskrit University

[adhikaririshiram45@gmail.com](mailto:adhikaririshiram45@gmail.com)

### KEYWORDS

Diversity

Politics

Challenges

Statistics

Minority

### ABSTRACT

Nepal is known m as a multilingual nation; however, language policies and statistics of languages spoken in Nepal showed the challenges to maintain linguistic diversities in Nepal. In this context, aim of this study is to outline the language policies of Nepal. Constitutional provisions and arguments of the participants were analyzed with geographical and historical contexts. The study also presents the current population census and highlights the statistics of languages on the basis of mother tongue, second language and ancestor language. Government reports, law and rules related language policies, published between 1950 to 2013 were analyzed with the opinions and perceptions of the participants. Throughout history, the language politics in Nepal has undergone significant shifts and changes due to various political transformations. Current statistics of languages show that it is difficult to preserve minority languages because he numbers of speakers is very low. Except that lack of sufficient resource mobilization on the preservation of minority languages, confusing government policies, socio economic and cultural shift of the respected language community creates problems to sustain minorities language in Nepal. Finding of this study can be apply to formulate the policies and programs related to the preservation and promotion of endangered language because the study analyzes the present linguistic polices and statistics of the language spoken in Nepal.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic diversity is one of the main features of Nepal because National population census 2021 showed 124 mother tongue languages, 124 ancestral languages and 117 second languages. The languages spoken in Nepal are from different language family that Poudel & Baral (2021) note, "Despite its small size, Nepal is a country of linguistic diversity with

four major language families, namely, Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Dravidian (Munda), and Austro-Asiatic, and one language isolate, Kusunda"(104). National population repots 2021 recorded 72 Sino-Tibetan mother tongues, yet they are only spoken by 16.6% of the overall population. The majority, accounting for over 83%, speak Indo-European languages as their mother

tongues. In 2021 twelve new indigenous languages have been acknowledged as mother tongues, and the nomenclature of certain languages has been revised. Languages of Indo-Aryan family are the most influential languages in Nepal because Nepali, Maithali, Awadi and Tharu languages are the member of the Indo Aryan language family. Nepal has been practicing multilingualism since longtime, however, officially one language is used to perform the government act. The first recorded written document is found in Sanskrit language that was written during Likshvi period. Since the time Nepal has practiced one language in official purposed. However, Malla king named Pratap Malla can speak fifteen languages (Adhikari, 2023). It shows that Nepal has practiced multilingualism since long time. After the end of Malla dynasty Shaha king, Prithivi Narayan Shaha forcefully implemented the Nepali Bhasa by given the name of 'Gorkhabhasa'. In the Name of Gorkha language government promoted 'Nepali language' and compulsorily used in government office. During period of Rana regime other languages are treated as savage conversation (language of man eater). At that time Newari language was one of the influential languages of Nepal specially, in Kathmandu valley, however, Rana rulers banded the language to speak in public place. In this regards Adhikari (2021) noted that Rana rulers destroyed the hundreds of manuscript of Newari language

and banded the language in Nepal. There has not found any record, how many languages were spoken in Nepal during Rana regime and before that. After established the democracy in Nepal in 1951, many linguistics and anthropologists have studied about issue of linguistic and cultural diversities. Since the nation population census 1952-54 languages have been regularly reported. In 1952 there mentioned 44 languages, in 1961 there only mentioned 36 languages, in 1971 only 17 languages are recorded. In this regard Gurung (2002) wrote:

Since the 1952/54 census languages have consistently been reported. However, their number shows variation in these censuses. Except 'other', 'unknown' and 'not stated' languages, there were recorded 44 (1952/54), 36 (1961), 17 (1971), 18 (1981), and 32 (1991) languages in the last five censuses" (37).

During the period of Panchayat regime Nepal had adopted single or one language policy so that the national population report only mentioned few languages. During democratic period in 1952 population census recorded 44 languages; however, in 1961 it only mentioned 17 languages. The differences indicated that language policy of the state plays important role to increase or decrease the number of languages in a nation.

**Table 1: Total Number of Languages Recorded in Different Censuses**

S. N.	Population census	Number of Languages Recorded in National Censuses
1	1952	44
2	1961	36
3	1971	17
4	1981	18
5	1991	32
6	2001	110
7	2011	123
8	2021	124

Source: National Statistics Office (1952- 2021)

Above table shows the role political system to promote and preserve the linguistic diversities in Nepal. Panchayat system of government neglected the issue

of linguistic diversities and minimized the existence of languages in Nepal. After reestablished the democratic system of government in 1990, Nepal again continued

the policy of maintain linguistic diversities. Structure of state and political agenda of the government play a vital role for linguistic diversities that Pelinka (2018) highlights, "Every political movement is the outcome of different conflicting ideas between language users and linguistic differences running through any society" (619). In same vain Joseph (2006) mentioned that choice of state plays an important role whether it follows linguistic diversities or not He further notes, "The politics of language choice becomes particularly difficult when in situational choices have to be made in what language(s) the government will conduct its business and communicate its citizens, and, above all, what the language(s) of education will be" (10). In the context of Nepal language policy and politics has also directly linked with democratic movement because linguistic diversities are only possible in democracy. Regmi (2021 a &b), Yadava (2003), Yadava (2007), Epele et al. (2012) and Bradley (1997; 2002) are the main researchers who discussed on various aspects of languages and linguistic diversities in term of language policy and practice have also touched the issue about challenges of implementation of linguistic diversities in Nepal. The study fulfills the gaps of this study and establishes a new set on the issues of linguistic diversities in Nepal in the changing socio-economic political panorama.

## 2. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The study followed the qualitative paradigm of the research. In qualitative research design document analysis and in-depth interview techniques were followed and analyzed the documents like population census published by center department of statistics, constitution of Nepal. With document analysis, in-depth interview also used as supplementary tool to collect information from the field. Interview has taken with linguists, activists and policy makers and gathered the information about situation of linguistic diversities and its practices in Nepal. Semi-structured questions were used to collect

information. Questions were asked to three people including one policy maker (members of federal parliament, one activist and one researcher. Interviewed has conducted during the occasion of mother tongue day 2024 (Feb, 21). Each of the individual 1-hour interviews has taken and recorded, transcribed, translated into English, and also checked for accuracy and reliability. The documents used as secondary sources for this study were published between 1949 to 2023.

### 2.1 SOCIO ECONOMIC BACKGROUND OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Only three individuals were participants in this study. They were from different socio-economic backgrounds. They have given code name participant 1 (p1), participant 2 (p2) and participant 3 (p3). Short introduction of the participants is as follows:

P1: P1 was a fifty years old woman, elected in federal parliament. She has raised an issue of language preservation practice. She belonged to ethnic community. She has passed mater degree in humanities and social science and had been involved in politics for 20 years.

P2: P2 is sixty a years old man. He belonged to an ethnic community, working in the field of language and culture and advocating for preserving minority language in Nepal. He acquired a master degree in law and social science. He had been working in the field of advocating for language preservation for thirty years.

P3: P3 was researcher. He was a fifty-five years old man. He obtained PhD degree in linguistics before ten years. He belonged to a Brahmin community. He had been studying language polices for 20 years.

### 2.2 LEGAL AND CONSTITUTION PROVISION OF LINGUISTIC DIVERSITIES

Nepal is a multilingual nation since the prehistoric period because this is the home land of various tribal people who had migrated from north and south. People

migrated from south practiced Indo Aryan language and the people came from north followed Tibet Barman language. However, Nepal had followed ruler's language as an official language of the nation. The first written law country code (Muluki Ain) prepared by Janga Bahadur Rana in 1910 mentioned about Nepali and Sanskrit language as a language of the nation, however, the law did not make clear provision of language. At that time Sanskrit was a major teaching learning language although Nepali and English languages were also used in Nepal. Only one School of Nepal Darwar School followed English as teaching learning language and Nepali languages was used in some schools of Kathmandu as a means of teaching learning language. The first educational act of Nepal 'Istihar' introduced in 1995 BS also did not mention about language of teaching learning, however, Nepali, English and Sanskrit were the main mediums of teaching learning in Kathmandu and, in Terai Hindi was also introduced for teaching. The first constitution of Nepal 1988 made constitutional provision to follow Nepali language and notes, "All proceedings of the Legislative Assembly shall be in Nepali national language. (Article, 44). The constitution could not implant and new constitution was promulgated in 1951 but the constitution was silent on language provision. The constitution of Nepal 1959 clearly mentioned and language provision and noted, "National Language the National f.-8 language of Nepal shall be Nepali in the Devanagari script. (Article, 70). In the same line constitution of Nepal 1962 also continued the provision of previous constitution and mentioned, "The national language of Nepal is the Nepali language in the Devanagari script"(Article). After reestablished democracy in 1990 and new constitution had promulgated with broad constitutional provision in language as:

Language of the Nation:' (1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script is the language of the nation of Nepal The Nepali language shall be the official language (2) All the

languages spoken as the mother tongue in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal. (Article, 6)

In the same line article 18" cultural and education rights' sub article 1 mentioned "Each community residing in the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right promote its language, script and culture" (Constitution of Nepal 1990, article, 18, 1). Democratic constitution is cooperatively liberal on language policy; however, in practice only Nepali language was used as official language. In 2006 the second people movement had happened and republic form of government had established. Interim constitution of Nepal 2006 made the following provision on language as:

Language of the Nation: (1) all the languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of nation. (2) The Nepali Language in Devanagari script shall be the official language. (3) Notwithstanding anything contained in Clause (2), nothing shall be deemed to prevent the using of any language spoken as the mother tongue in a local body and office. The State shall maintain records by translating the languages so used in the official language. (Interim Constitution of Nepal Article, 5.) And Right relating to education and culture: (1) every community shall have the right to get basic education in its own mother tongue, as provided in law. (2) Every citizen shall have the right to get free education up to the secondary level from the State, as provided in law. (3) Every community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization and Language. (Interim Constitution of Nepal Article 17)

Interim constitution brings a new provision about language policy, however, government neither allocates budget nor

constructs mechanism for the implementation of the provision. On the guidelines of a new interim constitution new constitution has promulgated in Nepal in 2015 (Constitution of Nepal). The constitution adopts a federal system of government and allocates certain linguistic rights to the local government. For the first time the constitution made the provision of language commission. The constitution makes following provision for maintaining linguistic diversities in Nepal as:

Languages of the nation: All languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation (Constitution of Nepal, Article, 6). Official language: (1) The Nepali language in the Devnagari script shall be the official language of Nepal. (2) A State may, by a State law, determine one or more than one languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State as its official language(s), in addition to the Nepali language. (3) Other matters relating to language shall be as decided by the Government of Nepal, on recommendation of the Language Commission (Constitution of Nepal (2072), Article, 7).

Constitution of Nepal makes provision of language commission in federal and the commission shall be the independent body to suggest government for the implementation of language policy. Language Commission: (1) The Government of Nepal shall, no later than one year of the commencement of this Constitution, constitute a Language Commission comprising representation of States. (2) The Language Commission shall consist of one Chairperson and a required number of members. (6) The functions, duties and powers of the Language Commission shall be as follows:

(a) to determine the criteria to be fulfilled for the recognition of the official language and make recommendations on languages to the Government of Nepal, (b) to

make recommendations to the Government of Nepal, on the measures to be adopted for the protection, promotion and development of languages, (c) to measure the levels of development of mother tongues and make suggestions to the Government of Nepal, on the potentiality of their use in education, (d) to study, research and monitor languages. (7) The Language Commission shall complete its task under sub-clause (a) of clause (6) no later than five years after the date of its constitution. (8) The Government of Nepal may, in coordination with a State Government, establish a branch of the Language Commission in that State. (9) The other functions, duties, powers and rules of procedures of the Language Commission shall be as provided for in the Federal law. Constitution of Nepal, Article, 282)

The constitution also repeats the provision of previous constitution as:

Right to language and culture: (1) every person and community shall have the right to use their languages. (2) Every person and community shall have the right to participate in the cultural life of their communities. (3) Every Nepalese community residing in Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, culture, cultural civilization and heritage. (Article, 31, Right Relating to Education)

The Constitution of Nepal (2015) redefines multilingual identity of Nepal. Phyak, (2011) and Weinberg (2013) discussed the constitutional provision multilingualism, as, "The language of the nation' and other local languages as 'national languages"(p.). After 1990 each of the constitution repeats same rhetoric of multilingualism, however, none of the government allocates budget and makes

policy for the implementation of multilingualism. After restructure of the government certain linguistic rights have allocated to the local government. Some of the local bodies have prepared local curriculum with including mother tongue education. Local government has not enough budgets for the implementation of local language. There is no mechanism for implementing a local language at a local level as an official language. Constitution clearly noted that majority language can be used as an official language. In province level, except Nepali other languages are not in majority, however, at local level, some languages are in majority. Constitution of Nepal has given right to the local body to preserve the local language so that a positive sign has seen in the direction of preserving and promoting linguistic diversities in Nepal.

Since long time Tribhuvan university has run degree in Newari, Maithali, Hindi, Nepali, and Sanskrit language as optional subject and Nepali and English languages are used as compulsory from preschool to the secondary level. Constitution has given rights to use mother tongue as medium of instruction, in primary, however, the provision cannot be implemented in Nepal and mother tongue education only remains an issue of discussion and debate. Lack of resources, implementation mechanism, law and regulation create hinder on promoting linguistic diversities in Nepal. In this context p1 notes, "Since 1990 the issue of linguistic diversities has constitutionally addressed but the situation is not so far from Panchayat system because only Nepali is used as official language. Government does not allocate budget on language translation. Languages are only adding in census record but not implemented in reality. Only few researchers and activists talk about linguistic diversities rest of the population do not take keen interest on local language. Course books and curriculum of mother tongue have prepared but there is problem in implementation. Lack of teachers, interest of respected community people and government policy create hinder for the implementation

linguistic diversities in Nepal. (*Personal Interview, 2024*)

P1 just shows the hindrances of multilingual education in Nepal. He notes on the current situation and the efforts implementation. In the same line, p2 highlights, "Monolingual legacy create problems to the implementation multilingualism in Nepal because administration and main stream political parties do not follow the spirit of multilingualism in Nepal as a result it is just remained as an issue regarding linguistic diversities" (*Personal Interview, 2024*). He focuses on the lack of commitment of the political party and negligence of the respected community. He further adds, "Respected community people love to use English and they see their future in the fluency of the English language" (*Personal Interview, 2024*). In Nepal, people like to learn English so that indigenous languages hardly used in teaching learning. Rich and educated parents hesitated to send their children to mother tongue education institutions and only the poor family children involved in mother tongue education which is neither effective nor productive to preserve the linguistic diversities in Nepal. In India government provides job to the expert of indigenous language but in Nepal the situation is different so that people do not like to invest time and resources in mother tongue education. In this regards p3 highlights, "I have conducted research on the community interest on mother tongue education and found that rich and educated family children are hardly involved in mother tongue class. They choose English as an additional subject and only few children from poor families are involved in mother tongue class. The students who are involved in mother tongue class do have not any further desire to study the language. They also want to learn English like other" (*Personal Interview, 2024*). Globalization, modernization and in fluencies of mass media motivated people to learn English because most of the children want to go abroad after they finish the school level. Their parents know that

without English it is almost impossible to go abroad for a job or education. The psychology creates a problem to preserve linguistic diversities in Nepal. Only 13

languages are spoken by more than 1% population. The following table shows the lists of languages that have more than 1% speakers.

Table 2: Languages have more than 1% speakers

S.N	Languages	Number	%
1	Nepali	13084457	44.86
2	Maithili	3222389	11.05
3	Bhojpuri	1820795	6.24
4	Tharu	1714091	5.88
5	Tamang	1423075	4.88
6	Bajjika	1133764	3.89
7	Avadhi	864276	2.96
8	Nepal bhasha (Newari)	863380	2.96
9	Magar Dhut	810315	2.78
10	Doteli	494864	1.7
11	Urdu	413785	1.42
12	Yakthung/Limbu	350436	1.2
13	Gurung	328074	1.12

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 2 indicates the languages having more than 1% speaker. Nepali is most affluent languages of Nepal that is used official as well as medium languages of conversation among different mother tongue speakers, however, speakers of the language also not more than fifty percent. Constitution of Nepal 2015 clearly mentions the majority speakers' language as, "One languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State as its official language(s)" (Constitution of Nepal, 2015 Article 7, (2)). It shows that none of the languages are majority language in

Nepal; however, Nepali language is assured as a majority language and used as an official language in Nepal. 82 languages have less than 1% speakers and more than 0% speakers. These languages were only spoken certain geographical region. Like that 29 languages have 0% mother tongue speakers and these languages are spoken by few people. These languages are known as disappearing languages and it is difficult preserve these languages. The following table shows the list of engendered languages of Nepal having less than 0.1% speakers.

Table 3: List of languages having less than 0.1% mother tongue speakers

S.N.	Language	Number	Percentage
1	Sadri	1347	0
2	English	1323	0
3	Magar Kaike	1225	0
4	Sonaha	1182	0
5	Hayu/Vayu	1133	0
6	Kisan	1004	0
7	Punjabi	871	0
8	Dhuleli	786	0
9	Khamchi (Raute)	741	0
10	Lungkhim	702	0
11	Lowa	624	0
12	Kagate	611	0
13	Waling/Walung	545	0



14	Nar-Phu	428	0
15	Lhomi	413	0
16	Tichhurong Poike	410	0
17	Kurmali	397	0
18	Koche	332	0
19	Sindhi	291	0
20	Phangduwali	247	0
21	Belhare	177	0
22	Surel	174	0
23	Malpande	161	0
24	Khariya	132	0
25	Sadhani	122	0
26	Hariyanwi	114	0
27	Sam	106	0
28	Bankariya	86	0
29	Kusunda	23	0

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 3 notes the list of language having less than 0.1% mother tongue speakers. Foreign languages e.g. English also recorded as mother tongue which was unreliable for preserving linguistic diversities in Nepal. In this regards p3 highlights, "National population census has mentioned and categorized languages without any scientific logics. Without proper study it is impossible to preserve endangered language. Government authority knowingly or unknowingly categorized English as an endangered language. It shows that how government is negligent in preserving linguistic diversities in Nepal. There is still

confusion on that about the mother tongue language and second language. In the national population report 2021, there mentions 48.08% population had no second language and only 46.23% population used Nepali as a second language. Nepali is an official language so that 56% people should have used Nepali as the second language because only 44.86% people spoke Nepali as a second language. Except Nepali less than 1% population used other languages as a second language. The following table shows the situation as:

Table 4: Population by Second Language

S.N.	Second Language	Total	Percentage
1	Total	29164578	100
2	No Second Language	14023086	48.08
3	Nepali	13482904	46.23

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Above table notes the position of Nepali language in Nepal as a second language. Nepali language is constitutionally defined as the official

language; however, constitution also makes provision to be the official language. The position of other languages as the second language presents in the following table.

Table 5: Languages have used 1% Population as the Second Language

S.N	Languages	Number	%
1.	Maithili	267621	0.92
2.	Hindi	223106	0.76
3.	Bhojpuri	138572	0.48
4.	English	102561	0.35
5.	Tharu	89606	0.31



6.	Bajjika	86062	0.30
7.	Avadhi	75651	0.26
8.	Urdu	72128	0.25
9.	Tamang	71569	0.25
10.	Magar Dhut	54143	0.19
11.	Bhote	45292	0.16
12.	Bantawa	43536	0.15
13.	Nepalbhasha (Newari)	32604	0.11
14.	Chamling	29253	0.10
15.	Magahi	29191	0.10
16.	Gurung	23698	0.08
17.	Yakthung/Limbu	19705	0.07
18.	Thulung	17187	0.06
19.	Magar Kham	16814	0.06
20.	Bahing/Bayung	15104	0.05
21.	Rai	14398	0.05
22.	Doteli	14344	0.05
23.	Sampang	14261	0.05
24.	Khaling	10370	0.04
25.	Baitadeli	9521	0.03
26.	Sherpa	9435	0.03
27.	Sanskrit	6615	0.02
28.	Achhami	6522	0.02
29.	Angika	6127	0.02
30.	Musalman	6084	0.02
31.	Kulung	6039	0.02
32.	Dumi	5870	0.02
33.	Dadeldhuri	5535	0.02
34.	Bangla	5447	0.02
35.	Wambule	5227	0.02
36.	Darchuleli	4272	0.01
37.	Puma	4271	0.01
38.	Rajbanshi	4103	0.01
39.	Bote	3891	0.01
40.	Mewahang	3669	0.01
41.	Marwadi	3449	0.01
42.	Nachiring	3176	0.01
43.	Tibetan	3134	0.01
44.	Bajhangi	2641	0.01
45.	Khash	2607	0.01
46.	Chhintang	2135	0.01
47.	Tilung	1762	0.01
48.	Sunuwar	1597	0.01
49.	Belhare	1491	0.01

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 5 indicates the position of other languages as the second languages. 49 languages were only used 1 to 0.1% populations as the second languages. One of the interesting facts was

that 49 languages were mentioned as the second languages spoken less than 0.01% which was categorized as the language less than 0% population spoke as the second language. The following table shows the list

of languages that had less than 0.001% speak as the second language.

*Table 6: The Languages Used as the Second Language Less than 0.01% Population*

S.N	Languages	Number	Percentage
1.	Punjabi	1274	0.00
2.	Dungmali	1271	0.00
3.	Jero/Jerung	1245	0.00
4.	Jumli	1125	0.00
5.	Bajureli	1076	0.00
6.	Dhimal	999	0.00
7.	Majhi	971	0.00
8.	Ghale	963	0.00
9.	Koyee	928	0.00
10.	Ranatharu	871	0.00
11.	Thami	859	0.00
12.	Danuwar	845	0.00
13.	Chepang	833	0.00
14.	Sign Language	828	0.00
15.	Bhujel	740	0.00
16.	Thakali	733	0.00
17.	Yakkha	704	0.00
18.	Santhali	703	0.00
19.	Chhiling	685	0.00
20.	Ganagai	644	0.00
21.	Lohorong	622	0.00
22.	Kumal	615	0.00
23.	Kagate	615	0.00
24.	Darai	591	0.00
25.	Khamchi(Raute)	526	0.00
26.	Magar Kaike	515	0.00
27.	H Yolmo/Yholmo	508	0.00
28.	Yamphu/Yamphe	494	0.00
29.	Dailekhi	434	0.00
30.	Chhantyal	394	0.00
31.	Hayu/Vayu	349	0.00
32.	Koche	335	0.00
33.	Jirel	332	0.00
34.	Athpahariya	320	0.00
35.	Balkura/Baram	307	0.00
36.	Waling/Walung	304	0.00
37.	Manange	304	0.00
38.	Dura	278	0.00
39.	Uranw/Urau	245	0.00
40.	Lapcha	242	0.00
41.	Sindhi	217	0.00
42.	Tajpuriya	209	0.00
43.	Dhuleli	187	0.00
44.	Pahari	142	0.00
45.	Lhopa	129	0.00
46.	Dolpali	127	0.00

47.	Sadhani	125	0.00
48.	Sadri	106	0.00
49.	Baragunwa	89	0.00
50.	Phangduwali	85	0.00
51.	Hariyanwi	84	0.00
52.	Sam	79	0.00
53.	Malpande	78	0.00
54.	Raji	76	0.00
55.	Meche	75	0.00
56.	Tichhurong Poike	72	0.00
57.	Surel	64	0.00
58.	Kurmali	60	0.00
59.	Bankariya	42	0.00
60.	Kewarat	38	0.00
61.	Sonaha	35	0.00
62.	Karmarong	34	0.00
63.	Kisan	33	0.00
64.	Byansi	32	0.00
65.	Kusunda	32	0.00
50.	Lungkhim	28	0.00
51.	Mugali	23	0.00
52.	Others	159	0.00

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 6 notes that 68 languages were used less than 0.01% as the second languages. Data show that only 23 persons spoke Mugali as the second language, 33 persons spoke Kisan language as the second language. 159 people spoke other languages as the second language; however, there was no mention other languages. Such types of data created confusion on the position of second language. Like that in the context of ancestor language. There was confusion in the percentage of ancestral language and mother tongue. In this regards p3 notes:

National population report mentioned ancestors' language without any discussion. Government

expert claimed the ancestors' language is the language used by father and fore father but now the languages do not speak like mother tongue. Through current data it is unreliable to identify ancestors' language. (*Personal Interview, 2024*).

P1 disagreed with the provision of ancestors' languages because national population report presented the controversial data on ancestors' language. The following table shows the list of ancestors' languages spoken more than 1%.

Table 7: Ancestor' languages spoken more than 1% population in Nepal

S.N.	Languages	Number	Percentage
1.	Nepali	10137006	34.76
2.	Maithili	2959876	10.15
3.	Bhojpuri	1768618	6.06
4.	Tharu	1764709	6.05
5.	Tamang	1602875	5.50
6.	Magar Dhut	1248003	4.28
7.	Nepalbhasha (Newari)	1179946	4.05

8.	Bajjika	1145924	3.93
9.	Avadhi	911800	3.13
10.	Urdu	569626	1.95
11.	Doteli	526910	1.81
12.	Gurung	467697	1.60
13.	Magahi	423568	1.45
14.	Baitadeli	410602	1.41
15.	Yakthung/Limbu	408577	1.40
16.	Achhami	396503	1.36
17.	Khash	326512	1.12

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 7 indicates lists of ancestor's languages spoken in Nepal. Data show that 34.76% people used Nepali language as ancestors' language whereas 1.12 % notes Khas was their ancestors' language. It is believed that Khash language was an ancestor language of Nepali language. Except Nepali language, percentage of ancestor's languages and mother tongue were not so different. Like that Maithali

mother tongue speakers and Maithali ancestor language percentage was almost same, however, Nepali mother tongue speakers were 44.86 % but only 34.76% used it as an ancestor language. Except abovementioned 17 languages other languages also mentioned as the ancestor's language. The following table shows the list of languages that spoken by the less than 0.01 people as an ancestor's language.

Table 8: List of Ancestor's Languages Spoken Less than 0.01 %

S.N.	Languages	No. of speakers	Percentage
1.	Sonaha	1223	0.00
2.	English	1208	0.00
3.	Koche	1180	0.00
4.	Kisan	1161	0.00
5.	Punjabi	1152	0.00
6.	Sadri	1114	0.00
7.	Khamchi(Raute)	827	0.00
8.	Waling/Walung	753	0.00
9.	Dhuleli	745	0.00
10.	Lungkhim	738	0.00
11.	Lowa	648	0.00
12.	Sign Language	647	0.00
13.	Kagate	543	0.00
14.	Kurmali	526	0.00
15.	Nar-Phu	463	0.00
16.	Lhomi	435	0.00
17.	Tichhurong Poike	411	0.00
18.	Sindhi	398	0.00
19.	Phangduwali	241	0.00
20.	Khariya	220	0.00
21.	Malpande	207	0.00
22.	Surel	201	0.00
23.	Belhare	173	0.00
24.	Hariyanwi	171	0.00
25.	Sam	164	0.00
26.	Sadhani	130	0.00

27.	Kusunda	87	0.00
28.	Bankariya	82	0.00

Source: National Statistics Office (2023)

Table 8 notes that list of languages that were spoken less than 0.01% people as the ancestors' language. Data shows that only 82 persons spoke Bankariya language as ancestor's language 1208 persons spoke English as ancestor languages. English was used as a foreign language that it can't be ancestor's language but in national population report 2021 English also categorized as ancestor's language. In this regard p3 notes that "National population report categorized the new language as ancestor language. Bankariya and Narphu language are just categorized as language some years ago but these languages also categorized as ancestor language." (Personal Interview, 2021)

In the context of Nepal, multilingualism is taken as the linguistic diversities and; however, the implementation of multilingualism is weak and nominal. After the establishment of inclusive democracy, the numbers of languages are increasing which is positive for enhancing linguistic diversities, in Nepal, however, socio- cultural environment of the Nepalese society is not favorable for linguistic diversities.

### 3. CONCLUSION

Constitutionally and legally Nepal is known as the multilingual nation because people speak 124 languages in different parts of the nation by different castes and community people. Since long time only Nepali language has been used as an official language however, constitution makes the provision of using other language as official language. Lack of proper law to implement other languages as official languages, lack of resources and government mechanism, socio culture pressure of global society, and lack of interest of respected language speakers create problem to implement multilingualism in Nepal. During the time of reconstructing the state the issue of language could not be the parameter of federalism so that issue related to language

and culture have still remained as unfinished political agenda rather than the matter of the pride. Influences of English language are very high in Nepal, but National population report does not reflect the fact. The Issue of language has only become political agenda and the matter of discussion in academic in Nepal. More than that some local bodies prepared text books to teach mother tongue languages like text book of Tharu language, Tamang language, Rai language, Magar language. Similarly, at the national level, there are some text books for teaching mother tongue languages, in Nepal however, only few students are studying in the class of mother tongue language. To maintain linguistic diversities in resources and implementation units should be managed at the local, provincial and national levels. Respected linguistic community should be conscious to preserve the languages; however, influences of English language and western culture create pressure to indigenous people to follow English language. Trend of international migration, Christianization and globalization have created new challenges in maintain linguistic diversities in Nepal.

### AUTHOR AFFILIATIONS

**Rishiram Adhikari, PhD**

Lecturer of English, Nepal Sanskrit University

### REFERENCES

1. Bradley, David. (1997). 'Tibeto-Burman languages and Classification.' In: Bradley, David (Ed.), Pacific Linguistics Series, (1-71). Canberra: Pacific Linguistics.
2. Bradley, David. (2002). 'The Sub-grouping of Tibeto-Burman.' In: Beckwith, Christopher (Ed.), Medieval Tibeto-Burman Languages, (73-112). Leiden: Brill.
3. Eppele, M. John, Paul Lewis, Dan Raj Regmi and Yogendra P. Yadava (eds.). (2012). Ethnologue: Languages of Nepal. Kathmandu: Central Department of Linguistics and SIL International.
4. Government of Nepal (1948) Government of Nepal Act, 1948. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission

5. **Government of Nepal** (1951) The interim government of Nepal act, 1951. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission
6. **Government of Nepal** (1959) The constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal, 1959. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission,
7. **Government of Nepal** (1962) constitution of Nepal 1962. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission
8. **Government of Nepal** (1990) Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1990). Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission,
9. **Government of Nepal** (2007) The interim constitution of Nepal 2007. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission,
10. **Government of Nepal** (2015) Constitution of Nepal (2015), Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission,
11. **Government of Nepal** (2019) Report of language commission. Kathmandu: Nepal Law Commission
12. **Government of Nepal** (2021) National population reports (since 1952 to 2021). Kathmandu: Department of Statistics
13. **Gurung, H. (2002)**. Janagananaa-2001 Anusaar Jaatiya Tathyaank: Prarambhik Lekhaajokhaa, Dhramodaya Sabha, Kathmandu.
14. **Lewis, M. P. & G. F. Simons.** (2010). 'Assessing Endangerment: Expanding Fishman's GIDS.' *Revue Romaine de Linguistique*, 3 (1), 103-120
15. **Lewis, M. Paul & Gary F. Simons.** (2017). *Sustaining Language Use: Perspectives on Community-Based Language Development*. Dallas: Pike Center for Integrative Scholarship, SIL.
16. **Joseph, John E.** (2006). *Language and politics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press
17. **National Statistics Office.** (2023). National report on caste/ethnicity, language & religion (Individual table): Table-2: Population by mother tongue. Kathmandu: Department of Statistics
18. **National Statistics Office.** (2023). National report on caste/ethnicity, language & religion (Individual table): Table-3: Population by second language. Kathmandu: Department of Statistics
19. **National Statistics Office.** (2023). National report on caste/ethnicity, language & religion (Individual table): Table-4: Population by ancestor's language. Kathmandu: Department of Statistics
20. **Pelinka, A.** (2018). Identity politics, populism and the far right. In Wodak Ruth & Bernhard Forchtner (Eds.), *The Rutledge handbook of language and politics*, (618-629). London: Routledge.
21. **Phyak, P.** (2011). Beyond the façade of language planning for Nepalese primary education: Monolingual hangover, elitism and displacement of local languages? *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 12(2), 265-287
22. **Poudel, P. P. & Madan P. B.** (2021). Examining foreign language teaching and learning in Nepal: An ecological perspective. *Journal of World Languages*. 7(1). 104-123.
23. **Regmi, D. R.** (2020). 'Nepalka bhasaharuko samaj bhasabaigyanik isthiti: samikchhyatmak vislesana (Sociolinguistic Situation of the Languages of Nepal: An Appraisal).' In B.K. Joshi, Madav P. Pokharel and Maheshwar P. Joshi (Eds.), *Language Endangerment and Language Revitalization in Himalaya (Proceedings of the International Seminar on Endangered Languages of Himalaya, Almora, 2018)*, (131-149). Dehradun: Doon Library and Research Center
24. **Regmi, D. R.** (2021 a). A Sociolinguistic Survey of the Languages of Nepal: A Synopsis, Volume I: Tibeto-Burman Languages (Including a sociolinguistic typology of the Tibeto-Burman languages spoken in Nepal). München: LINCOM EUROPA.
25. **Weinberg, M.** (2013). Revisiting history in language policy: The case of medium of instruction in Nepal. *Working Papers in Educational Linguistics*, 28(1), 61-80.
26. **Yadava, Y. P.** (2007). Linguistic diversity in Nepal: Perspectives on language policy (A paper presented at international seminar on constitutionalism and diversity in Nepal). Kathmandu, Nepal.
27. **Yadava, Y. P.** (2003). 'Language'. *Population Monograph in Nepal*. 1:137-7 Kathmandu: Central Bureau Statistics

---

#### TO CITE THIS ARTICLE

Adhikari, R. (2024). Linguistic diversities in Nepal: A glimpse of past and present. *International Research Journal of MMC*, 5(4), 41–55. <https://doi.org/10.3126/irjmmc.v5i4.70643>

**Submitted:** 5 June 2024

**Accepted:** 15 August 2024

**Published:** 30 September 2024

#### COPYRIGHT

©2024 The Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (CC-BY-NC 4.0), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original author and source are credited. See <https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

*International Research Journal of MMC (IRJMMC)* is a peer-reviewed open access journal published by Research Management Cell, Makawanpur Multiple Campus, Hetauda

