Minority Language Politics in Nepal and the Himalayas

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Abstract

While Nepal is constitutionally recognised as a 'multilingual' nation, scholars, citizens and the government still disagree about the number of languages spoken within its borders. Some argue that this lack of accord is an indication of a profound institutional ignorance concerning the ethnolinguistic tapestry of the country, and go on to criticise the government for the perceived dearth of linguistic planning. This is only part of the picture, however, and I suggest that dissenting positions regarding the status of languages are natural and even positive signs in multilingual nation states such as Nepal. In fact, the fragmented nature of scholarship on Nepal's linguistic communities provides a fertile ground for scholars, ethnic activists and the national government to meet, discuss and formulate a progressive course of action for the coming years. In short, languages are always in flux and linguistic identities are anything but rigid. Linguistic policy, therefore, should remain equally flexible.

While many of Nepal's minority languages are endangered, with diminishing fluency and compromised linguistic ability among younger speakers, the speech forms are still dynamic organisms. The Thangmi language, for example, spoken by an ethnic group of the same name, has recently evolved words for 'aeroplane', 'video camera' and 'Maoist', while at the same time losing indigenous names for plants and places. Language death remains a complicated issue, and many of its causes, which include increased literacy, education and the dominance of the national language, are actually developments which have positive sides when viewed from the perspective of an emergent modern nation-state.

Linguistic rights are emotive and political issues in all multilingual nations, and Nepal is by no means an exception. For example, the Maoist demand for an end to Sanskrit teaching in government schools relates much more to the negative symbolism that Sanskrit embodies and invokes than it does to any attributes of the language itself. In sum, Nepali linguistic policy must move beyond the banning or promotion of individual languages according to political pressure groups to an informed approach which both takes account of, and incorporates, local needs and indigenous ethnolinguistic perspectives.

1. Constitutional Provisions for Linguistic Diversity in Nepal

During the previous Panchayat rule, which ended in 1990, the ideological doctrine was one of 'one nation, one culture, one language'. Nepal has come a long way since then in recognising the multi-ethnic and multi-lingual nature of the kingdom. *The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal* (V.S. 2047 = 1990 AD) contains important guarantees which are referred to by both indigenous people and policy makers in Nepal. While Article 4 of Part 1 of the Constitution states that Nepal is a 'multi-ethnic, multilingual' kingdom, Article 6 of the same section explicitly relates to the 'Language of the Nation'. This Article warrants citing in full on account of its importance to indigenous peoples and the activists who represent them at the national level in Nepal:

(1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script is the language of the nation. The Nepali language shall be the official language.

(2) All the languages spoken as the mother language in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal.

A point to note here is the slight ambiguity of the Constitution: while Nepali is the 'language of the nation' and the 'official language', mother tongues spoken by indigenous peoples are 'the national languages of Nepal'. While some commentators see the distinction as highly nuanced, others are critical of what they perceive to be semantic rhetoric. Continuing on in the Constitution, Article 18 of Part 3 (in the section on Fundamental Rights) states that:

(1) Each community residing within the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script and culture.

(2) Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.

The combination of Articles 6 and 18 thus provides a solid constitutional bedrock for indigenous peoples to have access to mother tongue language instruction, even though it remains unclear from the second Article whether the 'right to operate schools' is one which will be underwritten by government financial aid.

In accordance with the multiethnic and multilingual provisions enshrined within the constitution, His Majesty's Government of Nepal (HMG/N) formed the *National Committee for Formulating Cultural Policy and Programmes* in 1992 (2049 V.S.) to realise concrete plans to help preserve and promote Nepalese culture. In a further report of 1993, the Department of Education's *National Language Policy Recommendation Commission* suggested designing mother tongue curriculum and textbooks with the aim of introducing the mother tongue as the medium of monolingual and transitional bilingual primary education and literacy programmes. Subsequently, the *National Education Commission* of 1999 envisaged a policy of providing education in the mother tongue while the *9th Five Year Plan* (1999-2002) formulated explicit policies and programmes to target indigenous peoples.

At an international level, issues relating to the medium of instruction in primary education have been variously addressed, most notably at a *UNESCO Meeting of Specialists* in 1951 which, after completing a global survey of languages used in education, recommended that 'every effort should be made to provide education in the mother tongue'. This same sentiment was echoed in Article 24, Section II of the *Universal Declaration of Linguistic Rights* or 1996, which states that:

All language communities have the right to decide to what extent their language is to be present, as a vehicular language and as an object of study, at all levels of education in their territory, pre-school, primary,

secondary, technical, and vocational, university, and adult education.

It is prudent to note that the constitutional guarantee of Article 18 was not entirely new for Nepal, even though its precise formulation into the post-democracy constitution of 1990 was a significant departure. Article 7 of the 1971 Education Act of Nepal already stated that:

(1) The medium of instruction in schools shall be the Nepali language.

(2) Provided that education up to the primary level may be imparted in the mother tongue.

The *7th Amendment to the Education Act* of 1971 made further provisions for the medium of instruction in primary education in Nepal (up to Grade Five) to be the mother tongue.

1991 marked the establishment of the *Nepal Federation of Nationalities (NEFEN)* as an umbrella organisation and advocacy forum for Nepal's indigenous peoples. NEFEN has gradually expanded its membership base and had 48 registered organisations under its remit by 2003. A government Act in 2002 recognised NEFEN as the representative organisation of indigenous communities. As a direct result of ongoing political pressure from indigenous peoples since the restoration of democracy in 1990, the government established the *National Committee for the Development of Nationalities* in 1996. One of the Committee's first tasks was to compile a comprehensive list the ethnic peoples of the nation, and 61 *'Indigenous Nationalities of Nepal'* were duly recognised. Deciding factors in determining which groups were to be included in the list were the degree of cultural uniqueness, a sense of a cohesive group identity, and also the presence of a distinct living language.

An amendment to the *Local Self-Governance Act* in 1999 helped to divest significant power and authority to local government bodies such as the District Development Committees (DDCs), Municipalities and Village Development Committees (VDCs), particularly regarding the protection, preservation and promotion of the languages, religions and cultures of indigenous peoples.

In order to implement the provision of the 10th Plan, the Nepali Parliament issued an Act in 2002 to establish the *National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities (NFDIN)* which had a broad mandate to ensure indigenous peoples social, economic and cultural development and upliftment, as well as their equal participation in the mainstream of national development. The NFDIN is currently in the process of defining the rules and regulations that are to guide its further functioning, and is the second autonomous body which has a specific mandate to directly negotiate with donors. The foundation subsequently recognised 59 of the 61 ethnic communities proposed by the former *National Committee for the Development of Nationalities* and defined indigenous peoples as follows:

'Indigenous nationalities' means a tribe or community as mentioned in the schedule having its own mother tongue and traditional rites and customs, distinct cultural identity, distinct social structure and written or unwritten history.

It is interesting to note the importance given to mother tongue in the above definition, which is slightly variant to the *International Labour Organisation's Convention 169* (an amended version of Convention 107) which rather defines 'tribal peoples' as those:

…whose social, cultural and economic conditions distinguish them from other sections of the national community and whose status is regulated wholly or partially by their own customs or traditions or by special laws or regulations.

Finally, the *10th Plan of the National Planning Commission* (2003-2008) explicitly includes programmes and strategies aimed

at supporting and encouraging indigenous peoples.

In sum then, there are clearly no shortage of national and international provisions for what we may term 'linguistic and indigenous rights', and many indigenous peoples groups and activist organisations in Kathmandu are only too aware of their rights as enshrined in the Constitution, the Education Act and its Amendments, and the recommendations of the various governmental reports which address these issues. The real concern relates to the ability of such groups - and particularly the indigenous people of rural Nepal whom they claim to represent - to gain access to, and then effectively use, the legal system to defend these basic rights. To date, language activists have rarely relied on legal provisions to access their rights; and debates about language, ethnicity and culture are not acted out in courts. The whole field of ethnolinguistic rights is highly politicised in Nepal, and disagreement between indigenous peoples movements on the correct path to achieve equality are common: some advocate working with the system to change it from within, while other more militant organisations have allied themselves with the Maoist movement believing that radical leftist politics, and explicitly not parliamentary debate, will deliver practical results at a grassroots level.

There is a widespread belief among ethnic activists and rural villagers from indigenous communities that despite the countless legal provisions respecting their fundamental rights, an institutional inertia exists regarding complex and emotive issues such as mother tongue education and the access of minority communities to government and power which is inhibiting their realisation and implementation. Indigenous people, particularly in rural areas poorly serviced by infrastructure, have very limited access to legal provisions to defend their rights and are intimidated by the very institutions which are meant to represent them. While the issues are complex, three well-attested reasons have been documented for indigenous people not resorting to legal means to defend their rights. First, the machinery of government is still primarily controlled by 'high caste' groups who have held power for the last 250 years and have little incentive to change with the time and relinquish control. Second, educated indigenous peoples in both urban and rural Nepal are reluctant to use official channels - legal or administrative - to redress inequalities since they believe the system to be weighted against their interests and their chances of success limited. This is a realistic fear, particularly since fluency in spoken Nepali and a high degree of literacy are prerequisites for legal exchange, skills which many indigenous people still do not have. Third, many indigenous peoples and ethnic minorities in rural areas are simply not aware of their rights, or if they are aware, they have little sense of how and where to assert them.

2. The Linguistic Mosaic of Nepal

Nepal is home to four language families (Indo-Aryan, Tibeto-Burman, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian), although the latter two families are spoken by numerically insignificant populations. It is a popular and widespread misconception that a one-to-one parity between ethnicity and language exists. At a conservative estimate there are around 65 ethnic groups but at least 85 languages (and perhaps even well over 100 distinct speech varieties). Reliable nation-wide linguistic data does not exist, but published surveys focussing on specific regions (particularly on the Rai languages of eastern Nepal) give scholars reason to trust the higher estimates. The *Population Census of 2001* reports 92 known languages, and a handful unidentified ones, while the *Ethnologue* published by the *Summer Institute of Linguistics* in Dallas, Texas, offers a total figure of 120 extant languages in the Kingdom of Nepal (2003).

Aside from Nepali, the 'language of the nation' and the only 'official language', which is reportedly spoken as a mother tongue by 48.61% of the total population (CBS 2001), and Maithili (another Indo-Aryan language) spoken as a mother tongue by 12.3% of

Nepal's citizens, Nepal's 'national languages' all have speakers numbering under 10% of the total population. The most numerous mother tongue languages spoken by indigenous peoples are Tamang (5.19%), Newar (3.63%) and Magar (3.39%), as reported in the 2001 census.

Many of Nepal's indigenous mother tongues, particularly those belonging to the Tibeto-Burman language family, are both poorly documented and in danger of disappearing. Descriptive linguists categorise languages according to levels such as safe, at risk, endangered and extinct, and most of Nepal's indigenous mother tongues are believed to be endangered. The key measure of a language's viability is considered not so much the number of people who speak it as the extent to which children are learning it as their native tongue. Linguistic and cultural identity are closely tied, and many of Nepal's indigenous peoples define themselves in large part according to the language they speak. Language is thus often used as a symbolic badge of membership in a particular group or community, the singular emblem of pride on one's social or ethnic identity and distinctiveness (Osahito Miyaoka, 2001). It should be stressed that multilingualism and not monolingualism is the norm in Nepal as it is in most other South Asian countries. There are few people who speak only one language, and those that do are usually poorly educated caste Hindu's who are monolingual Nepali speakers or functionally illiterate older indigenous peoples who speak only their ethnic mother tongue, such as Sherpa or Newar. The vast majority of Nepal's population speak at least two, and often three or four, languages which include, in decreasing probability: Nepali, an ethnic mother tongue, a second regionally-dominant ethnic language (such as Tamang, Gurung or Magar), some Hindi and even basic English.

In connection to multilingualism, it is important to note that the relationship between indigenous peoples and the languages which they speak are highly varied and naturally diverse. These relationships can be divided into three categories:

(1) Situations in which a one-to-one correspondence exists between an indigenous community and their language, as among the Magar, Tamang, Gurung, Limbu, Sherpa, Rajbhanshi, Sunuwar, Kumal, Majhi, Danuwar, Chepang, Thami, Thakali, Bhote, Dhimal, Lepcha, Byansi, Raute and Raji.

(2) Situations in which a single indigenous people speak several languages, for example the Rai-Kiranti are considered to constitute a single ethnic group, but they speak a range of at least 15 mutually unintelligible languages such as Bantawa, Puma, Chamling, Chulung, Thulung, Kulung, Sampang, Dumi and Athphare.

(3) Situations in which several indigenous peoples speak what is seen to be a single language, such as Newar.

The one-to-one correlation facilitates the development and preparation of textbooks which include information and examples relevant to the indigenous ethnic culture. Situations (2) and (3), as described above however, are more complex when conceiving of culturally-appropriate pedagogical materials.

All but eight of the many languages spoken in Nepal as mother tongues by indigenous peoples have no literate tradition. The lexicalisation of a language and the development or resurrection of a suitable script or set of orthographical conventions are prerequisites for introducing a language into education as the medium of instruction. From this perspective, the minority languages spoken in Nepal as mother tongues by indigenous peoples can be grouped under the following three headings:

Languages with literate traditions:

Newar
Maithili
Limbu
Bhojpuri
Awadhi
Hindi
Urdu
Bhote (Sherpa)

Languages in the process of standardising literate traditions:

Tharu
Tamang
Magar
Gurung
Thulung
Bantawa
Chamling
Khaling
Kulung
Thakali
Sherpa
Rajbhanshi
Bahing
Thami

Languages without literate traditions:

All the remaining minority languages as listed in Appendix 1.

Of the languages possessing literate traditions, only Maithili, Newar and Tibetan (the latter largely for refugees resident in Nepal) have been in vogue as a subject of study at various educational levels. These three languages also have rich literary traditions, poetry and written folk tales. However, in compliance with the constitutional and legal provisions which have been in place since the restoration of democracy (as outlined above), separate curricula and textbooks have been designed and prepared to teach eleven minority languages at the primary level of education. These eleven languages are: Maithili, Newar, Limbu, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Bantawa, Tamang, Tharu, Magar, Sherpa and Urdu. Most of these languages already possess literate traditions, but others are presently in the process of developing writing and orthographical systems. The remaining languages will have to wait for the development of a linguistically representative and culturally sensitive writing system before textbooks can be prepared and mother tongue or bilingual education implemented. The report by the *Thematic Group on Indigenous Peoples and Linguistic Minorities* noted that:

'In preparing the existing textbooks, an attempt has been made to incorporate the respective cultural values. It has, however, been observed that they still need to be revised to represent their culture adequately' (2002)

In this regard, a few general issues relating to language documentation and lexicalisation are worth noting. First, the process of standardisation required for a pedagogical grammar, textbook or dictionary necessarily results in a degree of language simplification. Just as divergent spellings of words and regional variations of speech were constrained by the standardisation of English grammar and spelling by Samuel Johnson, so too the development of writing systems for Nepal's indigenous languages will result in a kind of centralisation and standardisation of the spoken language combined with the elevation of one speech variety or dialect to a normative position. There are at least three dialects of Thakali, for example, and in the process of developing a suitable writing system and a corpus of pedagogical materials in the language, one variety (or a synthetic mixture of all three) will be promoted as standard and representative. Given the highly diverse and heterogeneous ethnolinguistic tapestry of Nepal, this process can be expected to be complicated since it is well documented that minority groups the world over will sooner learn a national language than they will adjust their own speech forms to accommodate or resemble that of their immediate neighbours (see *Endangered Languages of the Pacific Rim*, 2001).

Second, there is the issue of which script to choose or whether to invent an entirely new

one. Various scripts exist within Nepal, the two dominant ones being the Nepali or Devanagari script, and the Tibetan script, used to write languages such as Sherpa. Other languages with attested pre-existing scripts include Newar, Limbu and Lepcha (or Lapche). Indigenous peoples speaking languages which have not yet developed a literate tradition have three realistic options for scripts: Nepali, Tibetan or devising their own new one.

The advantage of Nepali is that, largely on account of the growth of the education sector and the boom in print media post-1990, the script is widely recognised and understood by citizens with different ethnic backgrounds. The disadvantage is that the phonetic basis of the Nepali Devanagari script impose orthographical constraints on what sounds it is able to represent and furthermore, most indigenous peoples of Nepal speaking Tibeto-Burman languages are loath to use the dominant script, itself seen to be derived from the Indo-Aryan Sanskrit language to which their language is genetically unrelated, to represent their own speech form. In short, the Nepalification of indigenous Tibeto-Burman languages is strongly resisted by many parts of the ethnic nationalities movement in Nepal.

The advantage of Tibetan, on the other hand, is that the script at least derives from a language in the same language family (Tibeto-Burman) as many of Nepal's indigenous and unwritten languages, but the disadvantages are overwhelming. Aside from Sherpa and other conservative variants of central Tibetan, most of Nepal's Tibeto-Burman languages are as far removed from standard Tibetan as French and Russian are from each other. In other words, membership in the same language family in no way guarantees linguistic similarity or the applicability of one script for all languages in that category. Moreover, the Tibetan script has developed an extremely complex set of rules to explain modern Tibetan pronunciation.

Finally, many indigenous peoples of Nepal are eager to develop new scripts for their own mother tongues. While their attempt is laudable, it is also profoundly unrealistic given the poor level of educational attainment of many of those involved in the process and the practical challenges in disseminating them (publishing outlets, computer fonts, special schools). To my knowledge, there are few if any professionally-trained lexicographers or linguists among Nepal's indigenous peoples working on the development of scripts or compiling language corpora for these endangered languages. The desire for a script is an understandable aspiration given the psychological link that is made between script = literate tradition = classical language = recorded history = cultural authenticity and power. Many indigenous people interviewed in rural Nepal saw the development of a script for their language as important more for the status this might accord their community on the national stage than for any resulting mother tongue or bilingual education programmes that might develop.

The problems caused by scripts can best be illustrated through the example of Tamang, one of Nepal's dominant ethnic languages and spoken by 1,179,145 people or 5.19% of the total population of Nepal. The *Nepal Tamang Ghedung*, an ethnic organisation representing Tamang concerns at a national level, writes its name in three scripts: Nepali (Devanagari) for most ethnic Tamangs who can read, a modified Tibetan on account of its place in the Tibeto-Burman language family and because some Tamang Buddhists can read the script, and English for its international audience. Such a tri-scriptural approach would naturally be unworkable for pedagogical materials and textbook development.

Regarding the preparation of textbooks for indigenous peoples speaking Nepal's ethnic languages, the report by *the Thematic Group on Indigenous Peoples and Linguistic Minorities concluded that*:

'…it is sad to note that even with the languages in which textbooks have already been available, very little progress has been made in this field. The textbooks alone are

not sufficient. The active participation of the government as well as the speech communities is essential. This is a very crucial issue in the implementation of minority languages in education, calling for closer scrutiny.' (2002)

3. Language death and decline, or 60 languages in search of their scripts

Articles in the popular and academic press inform us that the world's endangered languages are dying out. There are whole books devoted to language death which attempt to find a mathematical basis for predicting what is seen to be the inevitable decline of indigenous and unwritten languages in the face of the juggernaut of national [even international], pan-ethnic, written and official languages.

While I would not for a moment challenge the veracity of this portrayal, it is all very bleak and nostalgic, emblematic of a backwards-looking fatalism which dictates that progress necessarily challenges traditional socio-linguistic life. It's revealing, I think, that the *Central Department of Linguistics* at Tribhuvan University has a new journal entitled Gipan, which means 'language' in *Kusunda*. The choice of name is mean to reflect a concern for the endangered and disappearing languages of Nepal, but it also strikes me as quite depressing: a single word from an already extinct language from a poorly understood language family. The death of Kusunda, then, and the subsequent immortalisation of the 'glossonym' as the name of Nepal's only linguistic journal strike me as strangely paradoxical. The extinction of the language and its poor state of documentation reflect badly on the national and international community of linguists working on and within Nepal who neglected to document the language before it was too late. Perhaps *Gipan* will serve as a sober reminder of the importance of timely linguistic documentation.

For a moment, I would like to reflect on signs of hope which may bring a smile to the faces of linguists who are otherwise faced with the genocide, suicide and extinction of languages. The Thangmi language, for example, while undoubtedly threatened, is still spoken as a mother tongue by thousands of Thangmi adults and children across Dolakha and Sindhupalcok. In three villages in particular, the language is still vibrant and growing at the same time as it is being challenged and eroded by the widespread use of Nepali. There are numerous signs of linguistic vigour and life: new songs in the Thangmi language, Thangmi first names replacing the *Krishnas* and *Shantis* which were so prevalent among the last generation, new Thangmi words (neologisms) coupled with an indigenous desire for the preservation of the oral traditions encoded in the Thangmi language.

Walking to and from school, Thangmi kids compose songs and rhymes about their lives, families and friends; parents given their children names of culturally important plants and animals, or of well known Thangmi *jhânkrî* (shaman) from times past; young men and women create new Thangmi words on the fly (such as *bân pâli* (friend-pl) for 'Maoists', *wâkhe bâdi* (voice-box) for 'radio' and *mesek bân* (eye-friend) for 'spectacles'. These new words catch on and become adopted in a matter of days. On the language documentation side, there are at least three Thangmi individuals pursuing dictionary projects. Their focus has been exclusively on word collection (lexicon hunting) and they compete with one another, and with me, about how many words they have collected. Some are more rigorous than others, and wound counts can be artificially bolstered by incorporating loan words from Nepali (*bhetnu* is *bhetaisa* in Thangmi, *milnu* is *milaisa*, etc). The real search, however, is for a script, a *lipi*, which will somehow validate their claims to antiquity and autochthony. While most Thangmi are completely reconciled to using Devanagari to write their language, and sensibly believe that they never had their own unique writing system, some of the more militant members of the community are desperately trying to unearth any indication of a uniquely Thangmi script. Following their logic, there must have been

one as all languages were once written as well as spoken.

The desire for a script is understandable from many perspectives, particularly when one bears in mind the verdict that the *National Language Policy Recommendations Commission* established at the end of May, 1993, chaired by Bairagi Kainla, reached in its report to the government on April 14, 1994. The *Commission* offered a four-fold stratification of language spoken in Nepal, ranked on the basis of having a written tradition. At the top, ranked in first position, were those languages with elaborate and well-attested written traditions, such as Nepali, Newari, Maithili, Limbu, Bhojpuri and Awadhi. In second position came languages "in the process of developing a written tradition" such as Tamang, Gurung and numerous others (Sonntag 2001: 169), in third position, those languages without a written tradition and finally, and very much last, dying languages (such as Raute). In this caste-system of languages, in which script and literacy are placed as the highest units of value, it is of no surprise to learn that 'language development activities' by ethnoactivists and language promoters include the following components: 'graphisation' or the establishment of an orthography and spelling conventions; 'standardisation' - the process of making one speech variety a 'super-dialectal' norm and 'modernisation' - extension of the lexicon to cope with the experiences of the modern socio-lingual world (following Webster 1999: 556).

At any rate, Nepal has come a long way in its dealings with minority languages. Pause for a moment to reflect on the 1954 *National Education Planning Commission*, published in 1956. The Commission's findings were explicitly biased towards Nepali and desire for the elimination of other languages was overt:

"No other language should be taught, even optionally in the primary school because : few children will have need for them, they would hinder the teaching of Nepali…" (Pandey et al. 1956: 104).

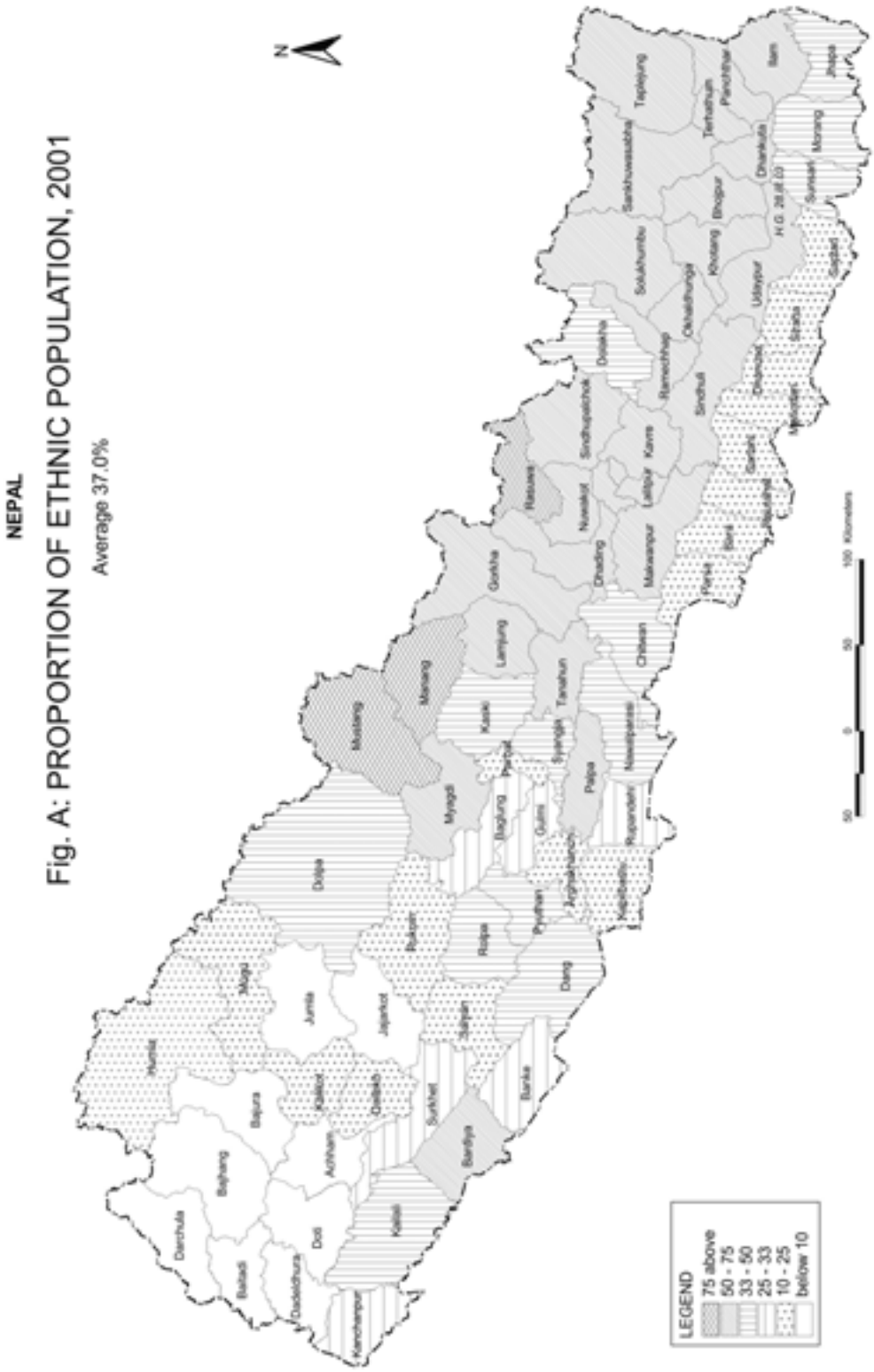
The Commission simply felt that "if the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language, then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result" (Pandey et al. 1956: 97, as cited in Sonntag 1980: 82). Clearly, the natural and preferable state for Nepal was seen to be a monolingual one in which minority languages were consciously disregarded or even overpowered. The Commission may well have been fuelled by a desire which was succinctly articulated by Ray Taras. In advocating the creation of a 'national' language where only 'minority' ones exist, Taras points out that the process 'may prove as arduous and valuable a project as safeguarding languages at risk' (1998: 81). The loss of minority languages, in this view, is an acceptable (perhaps even desirable) by-product of the cause of nationalism and unity. Taras suggests that when national identity is viewed as 'multi-dimensional', the 'erosion of the status of a language in a given society is no cause for alarm since a group can compensate by embracing other markers of identity - intermarriage, food and folk customs' (1998: 81). But this is entirely inapplicable to Nepal, where intermarriage is pretty much out of the question, everyone eats pretty much the same, and folk customs have everything to do with language. Contrary to Taras' interpretation, in fact, Sonntag rightly identifies that 'language is an important if not determining characteristic of groups in Nepal' (2001: 170).

Appendix 1 : Population by mother tongue and sex, from Census 2001

S.No.	Mother Tongue	Number	%	Cumulative	Male	Female
	Kingdom of Nepal	*22736934*	*100.00*	*100.00*	*11359378*	*11377556*
1	Nepali	11053255	48.61	48.61	5422233	5631022
2	Maithili	2797582	12.30	60.92	1458556	1339026
3	Bhojpuri	1712536	7.53	68.45	893813	818723
4	Tharu (Dagaura/Rana)	1331546	5.86	74.31	671252	660294
5	Tamang	1179145	5.19	79.49	588409	590736
6	Newar	825458	3.63	83.12	410481	414977
7	Magar	770116	3.39	86.51	372568	397548
8	Awadhi	560744	2.47	88.98	293201	267543
9	Bantawa	371056	1.63	90.61	182162	188894
10	Gurung	338925	1.49	92.10	159369	179556
11	Limbu	333633	1.47	93.57	161634	171999
12	Bajjika	237947	1.05	94.61	124088	113859
13	Urdu	174840	0.77	95.38	90223	84617
14	Rajbansi	129829	0.57	95.95	65053	64776
15	Sherpa	129771	0.57	96.52	64102	65669
16	Hindi	105765	0.47	96.99	61624	44141
17	Chamling	44093	0.19	97.18	21106	22987
18	Santhali	40260	0.18	97.36	20278	19982
19	Chepang	36807	0.16	97.52	18652	18155
20	Danuwar	31849	0.14	97.66	15745	16104
21	Jhangar/ Dhangar	28615	0.13	97.79	14158	14457
22	Sunuwar	26611	0.12	97.90	12967	13644
23	Bangla	23602	0.10	98.01	12881	10721
24	Marwari (Rajsthani)	22637	0.10	98.11	12019	10618
25	Manjhi	21841	0.10	98.20	10827	11014
26	Thami	18991	0.08	98.29	9383	9608
27	Kulung	18686	0.08	98.37	9325	9361
28	Dhimal	17308	0.08	98.45	8509	8799
29	Angika	15892	0.07	98.52	8127	7765
30	Yakkha	14648	0.06	98.58	7009	7639
31	Thulung	14034	0.06	98.64	6918	7116
32	Sangpang	10810	0.05	98.69	5199	5611
33	Bhujel/ Khawas	10733	0.05	98.74	5301	5432
34	Darai	10210	0.04	98.78	4920	5290
35	Khaling	9288	0.04	98.82	4648	4640
36	Kumal	6533	0.03	98.85	3147	3386
37	Thakali	6441	0.03	98.88	3063	3378
38	Chhantyal/ Chhantel	5912	0.03	98.90	2733	3179
39	Nepali Sign Language	5743	0.03	98.93	2946	2797
40	Tibetan	5277	0.02	98.95	2813	2464
41	Dumi	5271	0.02	98.98	2589	2682
42	Jirel	4919	0.02	99.00	2409	2510
43	Wambule/ Umbule	4471	0.02	99.02	2233	2238
44	Puma	4310	0.02	99.04	2115	2195
45	Yholmo	3986	0.02	99.05	1980	2006
46	Nachhiring	3553	0.02	99.07	1758	1795
47	Dura	3397	0.01	99.08	1542	1855
48	Meche	3301	0.01	99.10	1574	1727
49	Pahari	2995	0.01	99.11	1554	1441
50	Lepcha/ Lapche	2826	0.01	99.13	1497	1329

51	Bote	2823	0.01	99.14	1440	1383
52	Bahing	2765	0.01	99.15	1327	1438
53	Koi/ Koyu	2641	0.01	99.16	1349	1292
54	Raji	2413	0.01	99.17	1189	1224
55	Hayu	1743	0.01	99.18	847	896
56	Byangshi	1734	0.01	99.19	874	860
57	Yamphu/ Yamphe	1722	0.01	99.19	836	886
58	Ghale	1649	0.01	99.20	801	848
59	Khariya	1575	0.01	99.21	788	787
60	Chhiling	1314	0.01	99.21	657	657
61	Lohorung	1207	0.01	99.22	570	637
62	Punjabi	1165	0.01	99.23	649	516
63	Chinese	1101	0.00	99.23	556	545
64	English	1037	0.00	99.23	588	449
65	Mewahang	904	0.00	99.24	435	469
66	Sanskrit	823	0.00	99.24	471	352
67	Kaike	794	0.00	99.25	383	411
68	Raute	518	0.00	99.25	275	243
69	Kisan	489	0.00	99.25	239	250
70	Churauti	408	0.00	99.25	211	197
71	Baram/ Maramu	342	0.00	99.25	149	193
72	Tilung	310	0.00	99.25	147	163
73	Jero/ Jerung	271	0.00	99.26	125	146
74	Dungmali	221	0.00	99.26	100	121
75	Oriya	159	0.00	99.26	93	66
76	Lingkhim	97	0.00	99.26	53	44
77	Kusunda	87	0.00	99.26	37	50
78	Sindhi	72	0.00	99.26	38	34
79	Koche	54	0.00	99.26	23	31
80	Hariyanwi	33	0.00	99.26	11	22
81	Magahi	30	0.00	99.26	16	14
82	Sam	23	0.00	99.26	10	13
83	Kurmali	13	0.00	99.26	6	7
84	Kagate	10	0.00	99.26	6	4
85	Dzonkha	9	0.00	99.26	4	5
86	Kuki	9	0.00	99.26	4	5
87	Chhintang	8	0.00	99.26	3	5
88	Mizo	8	0.00	99.26	6	2
89	Nagamese	6	0.00	99.26	3	3
90	Lhomi	4	0.00	99.26	3	1
91	Assamise	3	0.00	99.26	2	1
92	Sadhani	2	0.00	99.26	1	1
93	Unknown Language	168340	0.74	100.00	83360	84980

Appendix 2 : Map showing population density of Nepal's indigenous peoples



from the *Trident and Thunderbolt*, by Harka Gurung 2003.

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