Minority language education in Nepal

The view from a Himalayan village

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This article, a case study in one group of communities of Nepal, considers minority language education in the face of increasing encroachment of the dominant and national language Nepali. Our over-arching research question asks, in the context of local education, what we can observe about the perceived value, use of, and competition between two local languages (Gurung, Gyalsumdo) and also between these languages and Nepali (the national language of Nepal) in the Manang District. We find persistent divisions amongst residents and educators about the current and future role of local languages.

Keywords: language attitudes, language practices, language shift, language maintenance, minority language education, Nepal, Tibeto-Burman

Although there are 6,000 languages catalogued worldwide (Lewis & Simons, 2010), the distribution and function of these languages is not even. In many multilingual countries (Chad, Botswana, Mauritius, Brazil, and Germany), a single or small set of languages are recognized for official, public use, with other languages serving private or unofficial functions. Other countries, such as India, have attempted a more holistic recognition of multilingualism at official levels. Despite a turbulent history, we believe that as a country, Nepal may be moving in this direction. Our study focuses on the geographic region of Manang, Nepal, where complex issues related to language shift and language maintenance intersect. Our findings of how language is used among community members reinforces observations from other studies, and can serve as a model for minority language education in other areas of Nepal.

Minority language education in Nepal is a complex and controversial topic, due to the country's extreme but fragile linguistic diversity and history of linguistic oppression. Recent political shifts have resulted in a rise of ethno-linguistic consciousness in Nepal and language rights policies, and they have also resulted

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in competing frameworks for language preservation that vary according to cultural and geo-political differences across the country. Layered on all of this is ambivalence from local residents and educators about how indigenous minority languages can be valued and incorporated into primary and secondary (K-12) schooling and the local employment marketplace in the face of dominant national and global languages.

These factors have consequences for the viability of smaller language communities. Of the approximately 100 languages in Nepal, roughly 50% are classified within the range of "endangered" to "critically endangered" (http://www.unesco.org/languages-atlas/). Of particular relevance to Nepal is a combination one-two punch of the rise of boarding schools (often remotely located from children's families and mother tongue environments), where instruction is in Nepali (the dominant and official language of Nepal) or in mixtures of Nepali and English (a global language), and also an out-migration trend of young adults to seek employment opportunities in Kathmandu or abroad (Ministry of Labour and Employment, 2014; Gajurel, 2015). In Nepal and elsewhere, this lack of language valuation in local schools, combined with a perceived low value of languages in the local and national marketplace, potentially undermines preservation attempts and hastens language shift and death (Fishman, 2006; Dunbar & Skutnabb-Kangas, 2008; Angdembe, 2013; Hildebrandt et al., 2015).

The focus for this study, the Manang District, is located in Nepal's Western Development Region. Four Tibeto-Burman languages are indigenous to Manang, and the district is divided into two distinct linguistic and cultural spheres: Upper Manang (Nyeshang Valley) and Lower Manang (Snellgrove, 1961/1981; Thomas, 2005). The practices observed in Manang are also compared to innovations taking place elsewhere, including Nepal's capital, Kathmandu.

In this article, we consider the history and current reality of language education with an eye specifically to the complex situation in one village setting, Chame, where two indigenous languages (Gurung and Gyalsumdo) co-exist and compete with dominant languages including Nepali, Hindi (a regional language of economic significance), and even English (a prestige language due to tourism and mass media influences). Our larger research question asks, in the context of local education, what we can observe about the perceived value, use of, and competition between two local languages and also between these languages and Nepali, the national language of Nepal, in the Manang District. Our single case study approach is relevant in this case for these reasons: (1) by embedding examinations of people and various settings (Patton 2015), we gain access to the complementary data that are otherwise not easily revealed. The combination of linguistic and educational interviews and individual observations provide a nested, or layered interpretation of how and why one specific region would want to (or not) utilize

local languages in the educational setting; (2) our approach and findings allow for parallels to be drawn between the unique histories of the local languages, as well as the needs of the local residents; (3) our findings and recommendations allow for comparisons of individual researcher experiences in this specific educational setting with the goals set by current national mandates.

While most accounts of multilingual and minority language education focus on large-scale studies in national or multi-community contexts (Hough et al., 2009; Taylor, 2010; Phyak, 2013; Davis & Phyak, 2015), our account takes a close-zoom examination of these variables in one village setting, investigating language education histories, current practices, and opinions about local language instruction.[1] As such, it reinforces findings in these larger scale studies with details from a specific setting.

Language education in Nepal: History and context

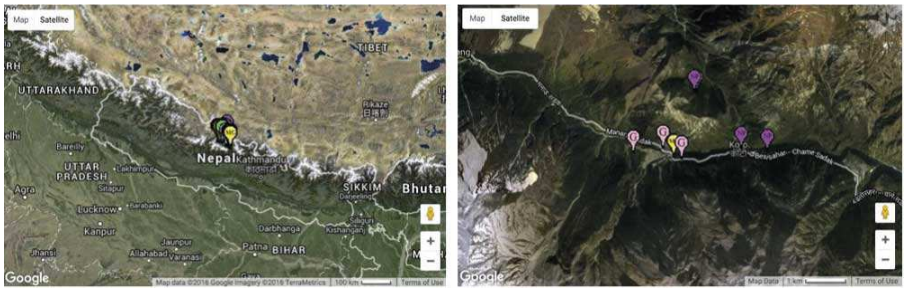
The history of language policies and indigenous minority language discrimination in Nepal is discussed in Awasthi (2004). Until recently, hundreds of years of official policies of what Hough and others quote as "one king, one country, one language, one culture" (2009, p. 160) resulted in a banning of indigenous linguistic and cultural practices and a virtual snuffing out of these practices anywhere but in private domains. This began to change in the 1990's with a popular democratic movement in Nepal, resulting in calls for recognition and protection of cultural and linguistic human rights. Nepal began a slow journey towards linguistic pluralism (Sonntag, 1980; Eagle, 1999).

Progress in language rights again stalled during a decade-long Maoist militia uprising, followed immediately by controversies from the (now defunct) monarchy, and then from a long stalemate of the adoption/ratification of a national constitution. However, improvements have included a process of official registration of minority languages, recognition of indigenous languages, and establishment of federations to promote indigenous-inclusive language rights (including the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities/NFDIN), all of which have played a role in envisioning and constructing multilingual education programs. Consistent with Article 287 of the Nepalese Constitution, a Language Commission was formed in Fall 2016, with the intention of protecting, promoting and developing languages, measuring the development

1. Rai et al. (2011) represent other close-zoom studies, in Rasua, Palpa and Kanchanpur Districts of Nepal, with considerations of Rajbansi, Santhal, Tharu, Uraw, Maithili, Yakkha, and Athphariya.

of mother tongue languages and making suggestions for their use in education (Kamat, 2016).

However, the imprint of oppression has remained, particularly in the form of low valuation of local languages outside of the home, socio-politically constructed identities at odds with lineage (for example, surnames that do not align with ethnolinguistic histories), self-viewing and self-appreciation through western models and standards, and school dropout and outward migration trends for betterment (Kukuczka, 2011; Weinberg, 2013). Adding to this are current initiatives coming from the national government are largely top-down and decentralized. Primary school teachers are hired externally, having little or no access to local languages, traditions and practices, and there is little oversight on teacher performance. Additionally, there is little attempt to overlap content with local application or values (Hough et al., 2009; Weinberg, 2013). Our study is situated within this complex context in which political, economic, and social goals often compete.



Map 1. Nepal (left) and the Chame/Koto/Temang/Thancowk Village Cluster (right)

In lower Manang, where Chame is located, two indigenous languages have co-existed for several generations: Gurung (the larger of the two languages at approximately 2,000 speakers distributed across approximately 10 VDC's, and with approximately 200,000 speakers across the country)[2] and Gyalsumdo (a smaller Tibetan dialect with approximately 250 speakers distributed across four VDC's). This difference – 250 versus 2,000 – can be misleading. Although the raw numbers are different, in Manang, both languages occupy the same precarious position when it comes to vitality. Indeed, a number of recent publications on lan-

2. A VDC "village development committee" is an administrative branch of Nepal's Ministry of Federal Affairs and Local Development; VDC's have a local governing infrastructure, and are subdivided into wards. VDC's also have schools. The school board in any given VDC is comprised of teachers and community members. Their influence over curriculum varies and is often subject to political shifts and tensions in the VDC.

guage endangerment have stressed that it is not so much raw speaker populations that are a reliable indicator of language vitality, but rather variables such as average age of speakers, population stability, domains of daily language access, presence of an orthography, and most importantly to this study, presence in school curricula (Fishman, 2001; Lewis & Simons, 2010; UNESCO, 2003). When these factors are considered, both Gurung and Gyalsumdo emerge as vulnerable. Both languages are threatened by increasing outward population migration. Gurung does have a written orthography, but it is not regularly used by most speakers, and like many indigenous languages of Nepal, Gyalsumdo does not have a written orthography. Both languages have an aging speaker population. And, neither language is substantially incorporated into local education settings. Therefore, both Gurung and Gyalsumdo are on roughly the same level as they vie for a foothold amongst national and international languages.

When Nepal was divided into governmental zones and districts, Chame VDC was established as the District headquarters. This has resulted in both benefits and challenges for Chame, including establishment of more stable infrastructures, but also in an influx of Nepali-speaking government employees. Additionally, because Chame is an important political and economic village along the larger Annapurna trekking route (having a bank, a post office, a health clinic, lodges and restaurants), it has become a major stopover point for foreign backpacker tourists, resulting in the rise of contact languages like Hindi and English. Not surprisingly, Nepali, Hindi and English are viewed as languages of economic and social advancement (prestige languages), while Gurung and Gyalsumdo are viewed as traditional languages with limited practical value beyond the home environment and cultural celebrations. The recent construction of a motor road through Manang furthers these resources, but has increased linguistic competition (Hildebrandt & Hu, 2017), and Figure 1 illustrates the co-existence of these encroaching languages in the local marketplace.

Figure 1. Bilingual Nepali and English Signage in Chame Village (author photos)

Not all VDC's in Manang (and elsewhere in Nepal) are as developed as Chame. In several communities, the schools are under-staffed and under-resourced, and have only a handful students. However, the schools of Chame have benefitted from its headquarters status. This resulting uneasy linguistic co-existence amidst the recent attempts at the multilingual education movements described above makes Chame a good location for this close-zoom study.

Chame has three schools: a lower primary school serving kindergarten through fifth grade, a lower secondary school, to tenth grade, and a higher secondary "plus-two" school, providing specialized training in education and commerce/business.

Figure 2. Chame Higher Secondary School in 2012 (author photo)

There are no statistics available for Chame village specifically, but the literacy rate of children aged 5 and over in Manang District is 74.8%, 12 percentage points lower than Kathmandu (86.3%), but still higher than most other districts in the country (UNESCO, 2013). This suggests that schooling is an important part of social development and organization. What role do (or can) local languages have in this environment?

Given the above context, our overarching goal informing our methods is this: How can we examine tensions in linguistic practices, attitudes and language instruction that have been created in the Chame environment, particularly

between educators and local residents, and how can our observations be converted into recommendations that simultaneously respect the educational goals of the school system and also the desires of residents? We observe from the investigation of this larger question via interviews and discussions with local residents and with educators, two overlapping themes that form the structure for this paper:

1. Conflicts in what Chame community members and educators *feel* about current language practices in private (domestic) versus public (educational) settings
2. Conflicts in what Chame community members and educators *want* for local and languages in the future

In the following sections, we describe the methods used to investigate our research question and the findings that underlie our two sets of general observations in 1 and 2 above.

Methods and findings

A. Methods

This study is a joint effort by the co-authors: a documentary linguist with 20 years fieldwork experience in Manang, with concerns about issues of language preservation, and a primary/secondary education scholar with an interest in how these challenges are manifested in teaching/learning design and delivery in Chame. Our methods are a combination of in-person sociolinguistic interviews (designed to ask specific questions about language background, current practices, attitudes, and future prospects), as well as an adapted participant observation. Our methods are simultaneously distinct yet overlapping; they merge those designs that most closely correspond with our separate training histories in order to lend a broader view of the context and triangulation of the findings.

The sociolinguistic interview data for this study come from repeat-design sociolinguistic interviews, designed to provide an assessment of language promotion or vulnerability in private and public contexts in the Manang District as a whole. A total of 87 interviews were conducted across the four languages of Manang, including Gurung and Gyalsumdo and also Manange and Nar-Phu (Hildebrandt and others, 2015). The sampling approach was a combination of "snowball" (interviewees direct us to additional people) and "sample of convenience," which allowed us to interview residents from a range of backgrounds.

The survey questionnaire, modeled on similar surveys (Kansakar et al., 2011), contains five sections: General and personal information; Family background and

language practices; Current family situation and language practices; Work and education language practices; Subjective contemporary (opinions on mutual intelligibility and opinions on future language prospects).[3] All interviews were conducted in person, in Nepali, and all interviews were audio-recorded.[4] In this report, we reflect on those questions that touch directly on issues of the roles of local languages in local schools.

A sub-set of seventeen of the interviews are used for this study, particularly interviews from Chame village as well as from villages where children are served by Chame for education. This results in eleven Gurung and six Gyalsumdo interviews consulted for this study. Participant-observations of classrooms took place over seven days in Chame, and four days in Kathmandu in 2014. Eight teachers and administrators were met with in both locations, and five of these teachers and administrators responded to the questionnaires, all of whom were located in Chame village. Informal conversations were utilized to supplement our data.

The daily plan included meeting with teachers in the main office, teaching morning classes, and then meeting with an administrator. In addition, detailed accounts of researcher observations were recorded in a journal. Traditionally, ethnographies require prolonged periods of time spent in the field, collecting data on the shared patterns of behaviors, language, and actions of an intact cultural group in a natural setting (Creswell, 2014). In this study, carrying out field methods in an abbreviated fashion were validated by the triangulation of findings across co-authors.

The results are organized according to how the questions connect our first two research questions: how residents feel about language practices and prospects, and what they want to see in the future in their community. We first summarize responses to the survey questions, and then we turn to participant-observer responses. Given that two parallel data collection techniques were used in the same community, one expected method for data analysis would be via cross-tabulation. Cross-tabulation has advantages, including the ability to examine relationships within larger datasets that are not always immediately apparent in an analysis of the total survey population. However, in our case, the two field researchers were not always in the same community at the same time, and therefore not interacting with the same individuals. Therefore, the respondent population is a mixed

3. The questionnaire received IRB/Ethics approval by SIUE (the home institution) and the interviewees gave oral consent for their interview responses to be recorded. The Informed Consent approval can be found at: https://mananglanguages.isg.siue.edu/wp-content/uploads/pdf/oral_consent_v2.pdf. The full questionnaire may be found at https://manang languages.isg.siue.edu/index.php/sociolinguistic-interviews/.

4. Some local educators spoke Gurung, and none that we were aware of spoke Gyalsumdo.

one, where one resident who was interviewed by one researcher was not necessarily interviewed by the other. We also were restricted to interviewing residents over the age of 18 years, which eliminated students from our data collection design. Furthermore, the design of our survey instrument (the nature of the questions themselves) were geared towards distinct (but complementary) goals of language attitudes and pedagogical approaches. Therefore, as the nature of the questions differed across the researchers, the types of possible responses were also different enough such that quantitative cross-tabulation was not practical.

B. Findings

We first present the results of six sociolinguistic interview questions that tap into residents' histories, daily language practices and experiences vis-à-vis the local school system, and their own predictions about the future based on these practices. We pose these questions in turn, and comment on recurrent response types.

Interview Question 1: "Did you receive formal education as a child, and if so, in what language?" This question contextualizes residents' attitudes about language-education connections in their own education history. Until recently, primary education in Nepal was not compulsory, and so it may be that those without formal education experience may not have a strong sense about the role of schools in language promotion or hindrance, while those with formal education may have a more fixed range of opinions.

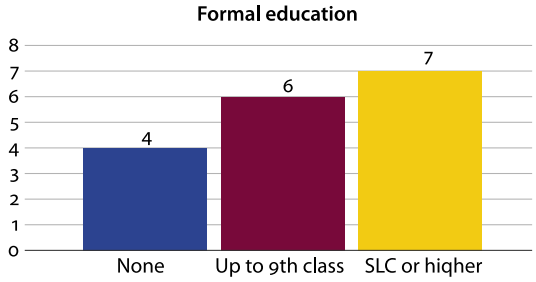


Figure 3. Degree of formal education

Figure 3 shows that the degree of formal education for those interviewed in general is low; most interviewees reported between somewhere "none" and "up to 9th class," but there were some teachers (primarily Gurung), who had completed their School Leaving Certificate education in a more specialized subject such as education or commerce. Those who had some formal education studied primarily in Nepali, or a combination of Nepali and English languages. A smaller percent-

age of respondents had access only to the mother tongue, and this was typically in the first years of education, as a scaffold towards acquisition of Nepali.

Interview Question 2: "What language do you yourself use in your daily life?" This question is designed to reveal everyday language practices in and around the Chame area.

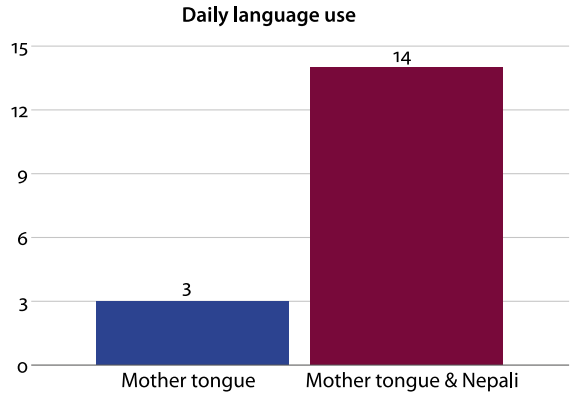


Figure 4. Daily language practices

The responses in Figure 4 show that even though the mother tongue functions as an everyday code of communication, already, Nepali has emerged as on equal footing with the local mother tongue. Hildebrandt and others (2015) show this to be the case throughout Manang, particularly in areas where VDC's are located close to the developing motor road.

Interview Question 3: "What language do you use with your children?" This question was designed as a companion to Interview Question 2. While residents may find Nepali to have a higher function in everyday life, are mother tongue traditions continuing in domestic environments?

Figure 5 shows that mother tongue-only language practices are more common, but not exclusively so. Those respondents who indicated mixed mother tongue and Nepali use either had some children in boarding schools (children communicated with their parents, when they saw them, in Nepali), or else they spoke the mother tongue with older children and Nepali with younger children. In some cases, respondents indicate that parents speak the mother tongue with children, but children respond to the parents in Nepali.[5]

5. This pattern can be contrasted with language use with spouses (if married), where the dominant trend is mother tongue use only (Hildebrandt et al., 2015, p. 113). It can also be contrasted to language use with respondents' own parents, which is almost entirely in the mother tongue.

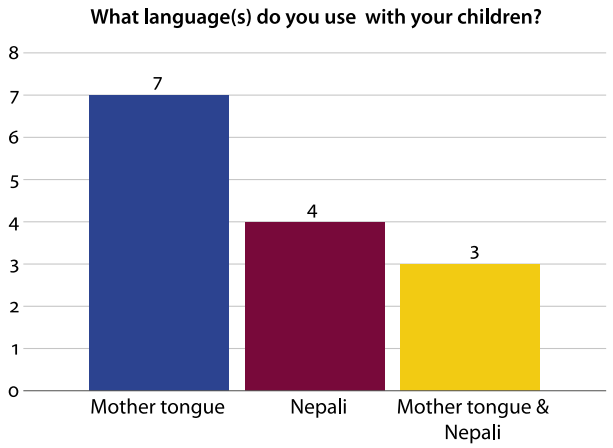


Figure 5. Language use with children

Interview Question 4: "What language do you use at work?" Like question 3, this question was designed as a companion to the question regarding general, everyday language use.

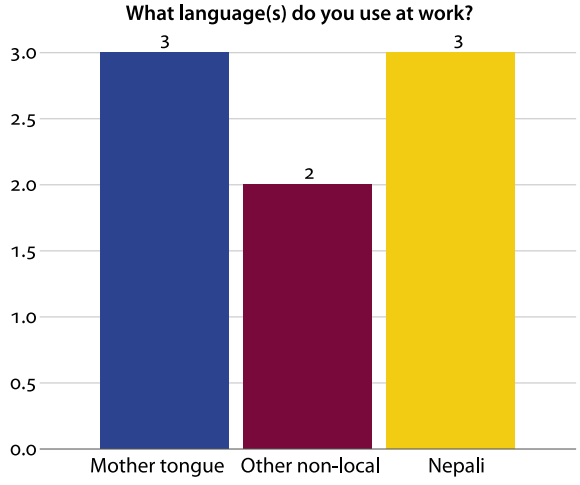


Figure 6. Language use at work

The response patterns in Figure 6 reflect those in Figure 1; the mother tongue maintains a place in work settings (for those who are employed, eight respondents), but Nepali or other non-local languages (English, Hindi) have also found a foothold.

This suggests a longitudinal shift, whereby the mother tongue is less favored with younger generations.

From these questions, the emerging pattern is mixed; local languages play a role in everyday, employment, and domestic scenarios for many residents, but they are increasingly in competition with other non-local languages. There is also a possible generational shift, whereby younger speakers witness a rising influence of non-local languages in domestic and public settings. These reported practices, however, stand in contrast to how residents feel about and value their mother tongues for cultural practices. This is shown in interview question 5.

Interview Question 5: "How important is your mother tongue to your practice of your culture and religion?" It is often assumed that language endangerment in Nepal is due to a lack of ethnic pride or identity, and historically this rejection of ethnicity was engineered into Nepal nation-building (Angdembe, 2013). In Chame, what is the relationship between local language practices and local cultural practices?

Figure 7. Language value and cultural practices

All respondents see an important language-culture connection, and this attitude is echoed across the Manang District, with an almost 100% positive response (Hildebrandt et al., 2015, p. 119). This suggests a disconnect between how local languages are viewed as a marker of cultural identity and the realities of daily communicative practices. There is value, but it is mediated by national education and marketplace concerns. Given this asymmetry, it is useful to survey what residents think the future of their mother tongues might be.

Interview Question 6: "In your opinion, will your mother tongue still have children learners (after one or two generations)?" This question functions as a barometer for language vitality. Local residents have split opinions about how they value and practice their mother tongues in public and private settings. What do they think about the future of their languages?

As shown in Figure 8, the picture is mixed. One Gurung man feels that his mother tongue is safe for at least the next ten years. After that, the future is uncertain. Two Gyalsumdo males feel that there is a trend of Nepali language

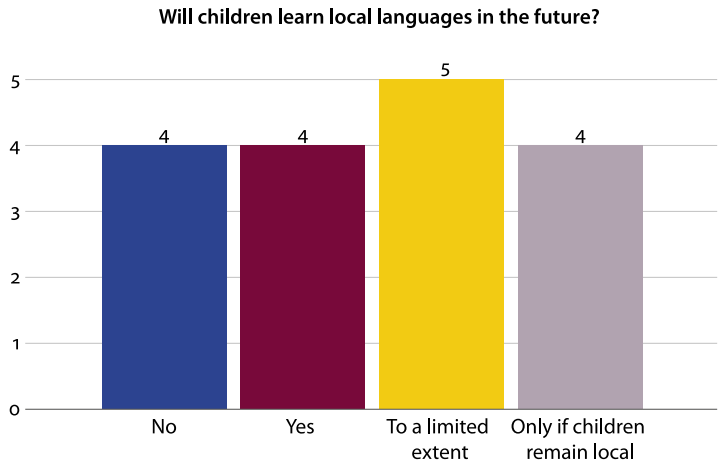


Figure 8. The future of local languages

replacement, and that nothing can be done to preserve the local languages. One Gyalsumdo female feels that if children leave home, that will ultimately result in local language loss. Another Gyalsumdo female feels that children in future generations will retain partial access to local languages, but not full.

Local residents who are not educators themselves have less experience with formal education, and so their impressions of the value of local languages are less certain. Current language practices are more mixed, whereby parents have transitioned to Nepali with children who live in remotely located boarding schools, or with younger children. This is different from reported practices with spouses, older children, and children who have remained local. These mixed practices, however, stand in contrast to the high value of local languages in cultural practices.

The emergent pattern is that local residents are aware of a growing threat to local languages. They see the emergence of Nepali at home and at school as a natural indicator of progress, but they see a trade-off. Adding to this pressure, some (but not all) educators see the local languages as carrying some practical value. Layered onto this complexity, there is the suggestion that local residents are in no position to challenge educator opinions when they themselves report mixed use and attitudes.

We also wished to learn about residents' concerns for the future place of local languages in Manang schools. The following three interview questions and discussions again reveal some conflict between residents and teachers.

Interview Question 7: "Currently in almost all Manang schools, the teaching language is Nepali. Would the use of your mother tongue in your local school be helpful or harmful (problematic, complicating to their education progress) to children?" This question raises the prospect to respondents of bringing local lan-

guages into school, which currently is not standard practice. The responses can be revealing because of the gap between language practices and attitudes outside of school versus those inside.

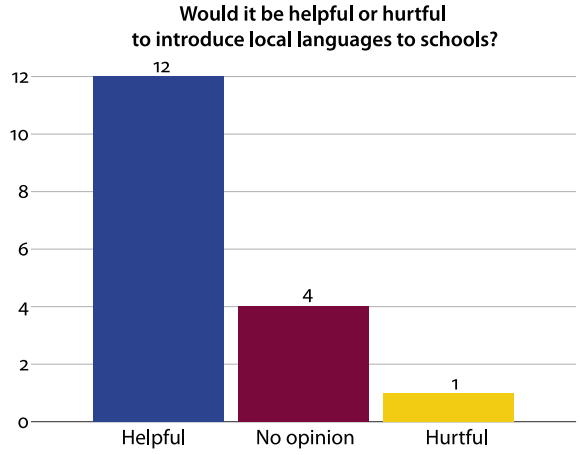


Figure 9. Local languages in local schools?

Figure 9 shows that while respondents are open to their mother tongues being introduced into schools, most comments suggest that the mother tongues should be taught *alongside* (and not instead of) Nepali. One Gyalsumdo woman stated, "A dedicated course in our mother tongue would be useful." A Gyalsumdo male said that, "Our language should be taught alongside Nepali." A Gurung male said that, "Perhaps our language would not be practical in Chame village, but it would be in other VDC's." A Gyalsumdo male felt that Gyalsumdo language would be nice in local schools, but perhaps not practical, as (standard) Tibetan was already the language of instruction in a nearby Tibetan school (located in Humde VDC).[6]

Interview Question 8: "What can or should people do to keep your mother tongue spoken into the future?" This question is a follow-up for those who are uncertain about the future of the language, or who are not familiar with the local education system.

Figure 10 illustrates that local language use in both private and public (education) settings is important for language survival. Two respondents feel that

6. Four respondents gave "no opinion" for this question. Upon further consultation of our interview notes and the recordings, we learned that one Gyalsumdo speaker felt that the presence of a Tibetan boarding school in upper Manang was sufficient to preserve Gyalsumdo (a variety of Tibetan). The other respondents, all female mother-tongue speakers of Gurung, felt that Nepali was easier for students, or else had no personal schooling experience and felt that they should not comment.

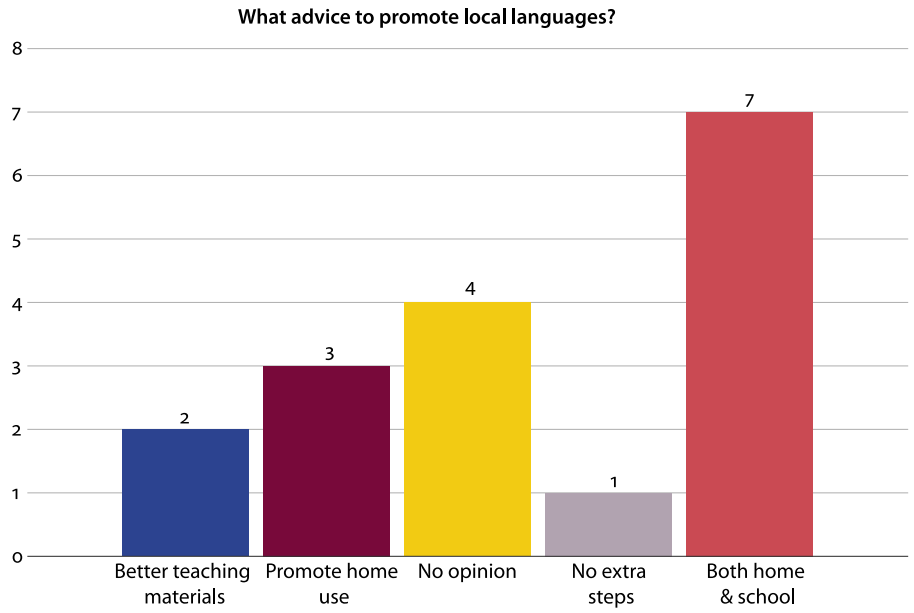


Figure 10. Advice to promote local languages

language socialization and practice at home is the most important factor. Five respondents feel that the local language must be formally incorporated into the local school curriculum in addition to the home setting. These responses can be correlated with the final sociolinguistic interview question, namely, whether children should be deciders of their own linguistic practices.[7]

Interview Question 9: "Should children in your community be allowed to make their own choices about language practices?" This question allows local residents to evaluate how important local languages are or to give opinions about their views on the autonomy of children to make individual language practice decisions.

Those with a strong opinion feel that local children *should* be required to learn and practice their mother tongues in childhood. One Gyalsumdo male suggests that children be required to learn the mother tongue in the context of local use, local meanings, and local relevance. One Gurung male says that children will hopefully naturally absorb the local languages by hearing them used around them every day.

7. Four respondents gave "no opinion" for this question. All are mother-tongue speakers of Gurung. Upon further consultation of our interview notes and recordings, we learned that three of these respondents felt that Gurung is safe enough such that active steps are not necessary. One respondent simply had no opinion on the question.

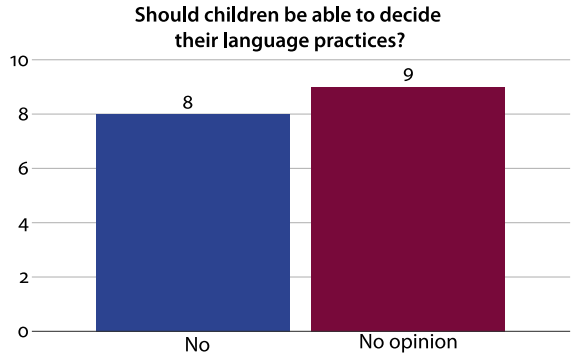


Figure 11. Children's choices in language practice decisions

As with the first research question, desires regarding local languages are entrenched in the realities and practicalities of life in Chame. Residents feel that local languages should serve a daily function alongside Nepali, and that language socialization must happen at home and school. This variation in what people want is reflected, and magnified, in observations, and in two specific incidents: a teacher training workshop, and a local religious celebration.

We now turn to how observation and interaction with educators and community members further reveal conflicting opinions. We find three main challenges to community members and educators: (1) increasing encroachment of the dominant and national language Nepali and the decreased persistence of use of the mother tongue language in schools themselves; (2) incorporation of western pedagogy into this specific educational setting; and (3) the challenge of coexistence between spirituality and academia.

Language encroachment and mother tongue language

In an observation of the Koto school, and in speaking to teachers and the administrator, we observed that some students were able to keep up because they understood Nepali, and others were not able to keep up because instruction was not provided in their mother tongue. We did not observe a remediating intervention to address the student linguistic and content needs or a system to scaffold Nepali acquisition, but rather a repeated encouragement that the students should mimic the language until they could use it effectively. One teacher shared that she knew the local language of some of the students, and could speak with them; however, the use of the mother tongue did not seem to be held in high regard by other educators. Our impression from this was that the children's inability to speak Nepali was seen as a disadvantage or a challenge to be overcome. At the Secondary School

in Chame, we observed that students were better able to follow along with Nepali. We also observed that the administration highly valued instruction in the English language, as one of the authors was asked to teach several classes ranging across different subjects in her mother tongue (English).

We see a micro-model of the sociolinguistic interviews: In the primary school, students bring with them the prior knowledge of the mother tongue at home. By the time they transition into secondary school, they have adjusted to using Nepali at school. The students begin to realize and practice this division in private, domestic contexts. However, these educational contexts are not static – they are strongly influenced by growth and development in education research and practice.

Incorporation of context-based current pedagogy

In his study of Lamnasa Village in 1974, Ragsdale (1990) notes that the curriculum of the time, the "New Education Plan," was modified by teachers so that more day-to-day traditions and skills could be emphasized. He expands upon the discrepancy that existed between the official curriculum, and the reality of schooling in rural communities. Our observations of the secondary school in Chame reveal a conflict between the encroaching western culture, and the realities of teaching in a rural area in an underfunded government school.

At the administrative building in Chame, we found twenty-five teachers from surrounding areas who had come to participate in a professional development event. Some teachers traveled for over a day by foot to attend this training, coming from villages of lower and upper Manang. The teachers were using an Action Research approach (Mills, 2010; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011), an established method of teacher research (Patton, 2015) to reflect upon their teaching practice. Teachers examined how they could improve student attendance and motivation in their classrooms, and subsequently, their schools.

The high attendance at the teacher training, combined with pedagogical and research methods utilized, indicated that teachers and administrators in the region were committed to meaningful instruction using western methods initiatives. It also showed that dominant languages like Nepali and English are the primary vehicles for professional advancement.

Our findings indicate that teachers at Chame district are learning pedagogical methods aligned with current literature; such as action research, hands-on practices, and student-centered pedagogy. However, these methods come from a western perspective, where standardized testing is the norm. Teachers are exposed to new methods, see them working in other settings (urban and suburban schools

that are well-funded) and are frustrated when they are not able to implement these techniques to fruition (no resources) to cause the same results (within a different context).

> *Mostly I apply student centered teaching activities. Teaching language needs more and more practice and communication. Therefore, I let (allow) them to be fully participated in the classroom.*
>
> *[I use] group work, pair work, individual work.*
>
> *[I use] all four [English] skills, grammar teaching, creating peaceful learning atmosphere.*
>
> *[There are] many more challenges, first teaching aids are not sufficient. Second, classroom management is not in the proper manner. Third, [it is] difficult to make them aware about the value of education, awareness campaigns [are] needed.*
>
> *[There are] no means of [providing] audio, we need it.*

In addition to observations and information gleaned from conversations, educators' feelings about language in their classroom can be observed from a questionnaire that examined different teaching activities. The responses indicate that teachers have a strong sense of current pedagogical initiatives and constructivist theory, as well as pedagogical content knowledge, and they structure their instruction around that need. However, we also observed that when the teachers were asked about how they teach language, they automatically assumed that the language was either Nepali or English.

Spirituality and academia

Some days, after the teacher training, we visited the secondary school again, and found few teachers from the Chame area in attendance. We were told that there was a multi-day religious holiday, and teachers and other community members were celebrating, including holding a picnic. Picnics within the Buddhist communities are recognized as traditionaly important, and culturally significant components of holiday celebrations (Shrestha, 2002).

On one of these days, the school day was shortened, allowing students to attend the picnic, and we were invited by the Assistant Principal to accompany him and the school Head to this event. We observed a gathering of small groups, with people playing cards, listening to music, socializing, and cooking food. We were encouraged several times by the Head of the school to observe the game-playing and other activities. Through time, his message became apparent: People

were playing card games and gambling, and this is why they were not in school. The dichotomy was obvious: local residents (local teachers included) were enjoying their cultural event, while conversely, from the non-local teachers and administrators, there was general disapproval of this type of behavior. The administrators and some teachers at the school felt that this type of an event detracted from the academic nature of the school day, and that it was not beneficial.

> *Local festivals disturb the teaching and learning activities. [Also,] learning activities are passive due to [children's] household work [requirements].*

Ragsdale (1990) argues that rural schools have a dual role, and in some areas, schools have been facilitators of cultural change while at the same time remaining integrated with Gurung social structure. This need for this dual role is demonstrated in this instance, as it was clear that for some, the religious holiday was the priority, and for others (the administration in particular), school was the priority. This disconnect between locals and school administrative traditions and calendars has also been observed by Hangen (2009).

In a related incident, we learned that one educator had plans to build a temple next to the school. By having a temple in close proximity, he felt that attendance could improve, as students would not have to choose between spiritual commitments and school attendance. While this effort emphasizes the idea that academics and spirituality can coexist, this teacher's religion is Hindu (while the Gurung and Gyalsumdo of Chame are Buddhist), and this potentially introduces additional tensions.

What do these responses and observations tell us about what people of Chame *want*, particularly in the context of local practices as they align or conflict with education practices? From local residents, there is a desire to incorporate local languages into public settings. While Nepali is viewed as critical for educational success, local languages still do have value. Locals would like to see their mother tongues practiced in schools. But there is also a conflict. A non-local model of education perseveres. Educators look at local practices of culture as something "other" (in other words, "less than"), something that takes place separately from education. On the other hand, educators who are from Manang see a value in finding connections between cultural practices and educational ones.

Discussion

In comparing the responses from the sociolinguistic interviews, as well as the observations, we identify basic *conflicts* or *tensions* that exist between what community members see and want in relation to what is happening in local schools.

Tension 1: We observe a clash of attitudes. Local residents and educators see the practical value of local language practices, while outside-originating educators view local languages as a hindrance to academic proficiency. There is a significant learning curve for non-local teachers posted in Chame, whether novice or experienced, in learning about community viewpoints and perspectives.

Tension 2: Local teachers face some career challenges. The rural location of the schools, and lack of resources present a challenge for any teacher, but in particular for novice teachers attempting to establish themselves in a new profession.

Tension 3: Nepali language proficiency is more important than mother-tongue language proficiency, for educators and some local residents. Although we acknowledge that a major goal of primary and secondary education is proficiency in Nepali such that students can pass the School Leaving Exam, a total disregard of mother-tongue language and the culture it represents has been shown to result in psychological damage (Hough and others, 2009), and in the case of our study, a possible attrition of students. This practice is best described by the Adrienne Rich;

> When those who have the power to name and socially construct reality, choose not to see you or hear you, whether you are dark skinned, old, disabled, female, or speak with a different accent or dialect than theirs, when someone with the authority of a teacher, describes the world and you are not in it, there is a moment of psychic disequilibrium, as if you looked in the mirror and saw nothing. (1994, p. 199)

Tension 4: There is a disconnect between academic goals prescribed by educators and local desires to preserve cultural traditions. Educators view these activities as a compromise in investment in national educational standards. This can be seen by examining the school system's construct. Even though it has been given local authority, the district still seems to model the dominant culture by not incorporating local languages within the curriculum and devaluing local customs as distracting. In any country, the dominant culture has the luxury of creating the lens through which non-dominant beliefs, values, and interests are viewed. When educators enforce outside languages to the exclusion of local ones, and when this enforcement is tied to academic success, it interferes with that success and sends a message to students that they are an "other".

> This is observed by primary and secondary school educators' complaints of locally situated activities as a distraction from state-mandated learning objectives.

In contrast, bottom-up approaches, which empower local communities to take control of their learning needs (Hough et al., 2009), promote the educational value of indigenous languages. There are many benefits to including these languages within the curriculum: increased attendance rates and engagement, and ability to learn basic literacy skills. In addition, a student-centered approach to learning requires that students question, discuss, collaborate, and present information. Our data evidences that these practices are being utilized by educators in Chame. However, for these practices to be successful, children need to be able to understand the teacher's language.

University and teacher training faculty, as well as teachers at the primary and secondary schools play a major role in the practice of Critical Indigenous Pedagogy. University teacher education courses need to provide opportunities for candidates to learn and practice the skills needed to incorporate local culture into their teaching. Current work by Ball Chandra Luitel at Kathmandu University in the practice of auto-ethnography, in which teachers assess strengths and areas for improvement (Belbase et al., 2008). Support from school administration and parents play a significant role in the classroom teachers' pedagogical choices, and teaching and learning is a collaboration among the students and the teacher. To achieve a "pedagogical metamorphosis" (Belbase et al., 2008), it is critical to provide "professional development that enables teachers to develop personally the transformative learning skills they are now being called upon to develop in their own students" (Taylor et al., 2012). Teachers can begin addressing this need by incorporating aspects of Hough's model: speaking about or inviting community speakers to discuss knowledge about medicines and healing practices; local history, numerical systems, weights and measures; belief systems; and life rituals, festivals, songs and poems.

We have focused on local issues so far. We also note that the Nepalese government is not entirely insensitive to these issues. In 2015, The Ministry of Education published the *Education For All National Review Report,* documenting the current status of the education system. Of the seven major goals for developing education in the country, Goal 7 highlights the educational needs of indigenous people and linguistic minorities, with the intention of "ensuring the right of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to basic and primary education through mother tongue" (p. 68). Goal 7 identifies targets and challenges, such as acknowledging that most minority languages are still undocumented and confined to pre-literate traditions, making note of the languages that have begun to develop written litera-

ture in the form of newspapers, magazines, textbooks, and folk literature for both adult literacy and primary education. Although there is great linguistic diversity in Nepal, the current education system persists as monolingual.

Goal 7 acknowledges that linguistic diversity is a societal resource, given the language is fundamentally inherent to communication and interpersonal interactions, and that "it has been widely accepted that all children should have the opportunity to receive basic and primary education through mother tongue as their right" (p. 54), and that this is a pathway to achieve quality education and assist in learners' cognitive development. Our study has demonstrated that Gurung and Gyalsumdo serve important private/domestic and public/community functions, and as such, deserve a place in basic primary education.[8] However, implementation of these plans has been spotty and restricted to specific regions or language communities (see Tumbahang, 2016, for commentary; Dewan, 2016, for Tharu case studies, CRED, 2005, for Limbu case studies, Shrestha & Van den Hoek, 1995 for Newari).

Models of proposed multilingual education integrate western practices and outcomes with a valuation of local knowledge and traditions. There are a number of instances of current programs around the world that promote co-existence and integration of dominant, alongside indigenous/local ones. As one example, in the United States, Native Language Immersion Programs are voluntary, additive, and supplemented by summer or after school programs. In this model, students' first language (English) is used as a foundation for learning their second, native language. Over 30 years of data indicate that this type of instruction to Native Americans benefits students in the areas of language acquisition, test performance, retention and graduation rates, college readiness, and parental involvement and cultural pride (McCarty, 2014).

As a second example, in many Australian universities, teacher training programs in the area of indigenous languages have been established. These programs include, what Purdie and others describe as, "strong community support, links with a linguist expert in the language, proficient speakers as teachers, involvement of qualified languages education teachers, provision of training and ongoing PD for teachers, positive student outcomes (language success, participation, involve-

8. Goal 7 lists several activities that have been initiated: At the administrative level, assistance has been provided by United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), Save the Children Norway, and the Finnish Technical Assistance Support. Six schools have been selected to pilot specific programs. Several studies have documented the effectiveness of the introduction of indigenous languages and the learning environment at the primary level. Textbooks and supplementary reading materials have been developed and distributed. Conferences, workshops, and special training on how to use these materials in the educational setting have also been held.

ment, and positive school attitudes), longevity of the programme, principal, and staff support for programme" (2008, p. 130).

Returning to the Nepal context, Kathmandu University, has implemented teacher training methods that demonstrate a co-existence of western and eastern beliefs and practices. Scholars of mathematics education research have proposed making mathematics an inclusive learning experience, including critically reflective practice and culturally contextualized mathematics education (Luitel & Taylor, 2007; Taylor et al., 2012).

Hough's "Critical Indigenous Pedagogy" emphasizes inclusion of a variety of topics from an indigenous perspective. Following this model, and considering the constraints and limitations in the Chame environment, we see two common benefits emerging from these "bottom up" approaches:

1. Teaching indigenous languages promotes positive outcomes in the areas of language acquisition, test performance, participation, involvement, retention, graduation rates, and positive school attitudes, parental involvement, and cultural pride.
2. Support at the community and national level arises from an understanding of the beneficial aspects of practicing indigenous languages in education.
3. Teachers must be continuously and meaningfully guided and supported to adopt practices inclusive of indigenous cultures and languages.

Mother tongue integration into local schools: Towards the future

Given the tensions and the potential benefits, how might incorporation of local languages be successfully realized in Chame? We have three ideas that we feel are realistic and impactful, and hopefully expandable elsewhere in Nepal. First, it would be instructive to have Chame district administrators invite local residents to assist in the classroom as tutor-translators or presenters of culturally or environmentally significant information or practices. This would reinforce the practical utility of local languages, and it would also assist in scaffolding learning experiences alongside Nepali proficiency. Evidence of this practice is being developed in the Lhomi community of Nepal, where teachers and community members are preparing for a multilingual preschool (SIL, 2016).

We also hope for continued action towards including mother tongue languages in the classroom. One example of this in Chame comes from a practical dictionary of Gyalsumdo, co-produced by co-authors and Gyalsumdo community leaders (Dhakal et al., 2016). The dictionary is written in a locally adapted version of Devanagari, which children are most familiar with. It contains entries for

locally found and used items and images from daily life in Gyalsumdo-speaking communities, as illustrated in Figure 12. Texts such as these bridge the gap between local languages and Nepali.

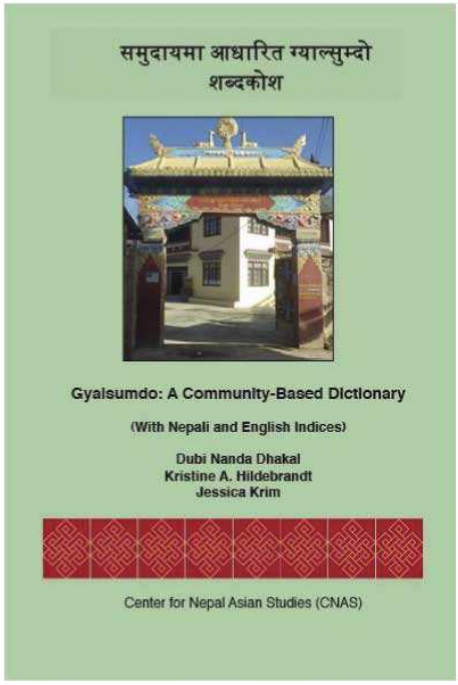


Figure 12. Cover and Entry Page, Gyalsumdo Community Dictionary

This is a good start at promotion of the legitimacy and usefulness of a local language, but what is needed from this point is a way for children to use this (and other) resources, in structured classrooms or in informal learning settings.

Lastly, in the spirit of Luitel (2007), the functionality of local languages would benefit from connections between local schools and teacher educators. This is a good way to provide needed support to new teachers as they transition into the teacher role, as well as facilitate interest in transforming current pedagogical practices into context-specific learning experiences with achievable outcomes. One way we see this happening would be a teacher exchange where a teacher-educator from a major university or a local teacher-training center would visit the Chame school, and two or three teachers from the Chame school would visit the university of the teacher educator. Teacher educators would be able to observe the ethnolinguistic dynamics and the tensions that teachers face daily. In turn, the teacher educators would be able to observe and have access to expanded resources.

Conclusion

This article has reported on the current tensions in language practices and attitudes in the multilingual Chame VDC, Nepal. Through the use of sociolinguistic interviews and adapted participant-observer methods, we have shown that schools in villages like Chame face the monumental challenge of incorporating international and national mandates to recognize and preserve indigenous language rights and practices, both in terms of educator attitudes and pedagogical methods, and in terms of resource access. We have also shown that local residents value their mother tongues and want to see them taught, but they recognize a compromise in the face of other pressures.

We hope to have shown that even small shifts in perspective, practices, and materials at local levels can reverse the slow death that many indigenous, minority languages in Nepal face. The valuation of local educator experiences vis-à-vis pedagogy training in Kathmandu, the incorporation of basic print resources into community and school domains, and stronger educator-community member connections and cross-cultural recognition in classroom practices and materials can help build a scaffold by which local languages may retain a foothold. The progressive policies adopted at higher levels of Nepalese government must continue to find culturally relevant implementations for these languages to survive amongst changes taking place in Nepal.

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नेपालको] मात्रे भाषा पडाङः गुरुङ र ग्यल्सुम्दो चमे गाउँ मा

तेरिजि

यो लेख नेपालको एक सामुदायिकि गाउँको मामला अध्ययन हो । यस लेखमा शिक्षा क्षेत्रमा नेपालको राष्टिय« भाषा नेपालीको अरु अल्पसंख्यक भाषाहरुसंग तुलनात्मक तथ्याङ्क प्रस्तुत गरिएको छ । हाम्रो प्राथमिक अनुसन्धानको लक्ष्य मनाङ्ग जिल्लामा यथावत कथित मल्ूय, प्रयोग र दुई स्थानिय भाषाहरु (गुरुङ्ग र ग्यालसुम्दो को बीच प्रतिस्पर्धा साथै यी दुई भाषाहरु र नेपाली भाषा बीच प्रतिस्पर्धा को निरिक्षण गर्ने रहेको थियो । हामीले स्थानिय बासिन्दा र शिक्षकहरु मध्ये अहिलेको समय र भविष्यमा स्थानिय भाषाका भुमिकाको बारेमा मतविभाजन फेला पारेका छौं ।

Edukado en minoritataj lingvoj en Nepalo vidata el himalaja vilaĝo

Resumo

La nuna artikolo estas kazostudo de unu grupo de komunumoj de Nepalo. Ĝi konsideras edukadon en minoritataj lingvoj fronte al la kreskanta entrudiĝo de la domina kaj nacia lingvo la nepala. La tegmenta esplora demando en tiu ĉi studo rilatas al tio kion oni povas observi koncerne la perceptatan valoron, utiligeblon kaj konkurencon de du lokaj lingvoj (Gurung, Gyalsumdo) kaj ankaŭ la rilaton inter tiuj du lingvoj kaj la nepala – en la Distrikto Manang. Ni trovas daŭrajn opinidividojn inter enloĝantoj kaj edukistoj pri la aktuala rolo de lokaj lingvoj, kaj pri ties preferataj estontaj roloj.

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