

Language contact in Kathmandu: A study on language use and attitude

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Abstract:

This paper explores the patterns of language contact in Kathmandu valley, a multilingual capital city of Nepal. Kathmandu has become the cosmopolitan city due to different migration within the last two decades and developed as a micro linguistic area. This research focuses on language contact situations of three language communities viz. Newar (Original), Sherpa and Maithili (Migrated) in different domains viz. social, cultural, personal, and official as well as media related activities where the informants are asked about the languages they use along with the use of their own mother tongue. The data was collected during June 2016 to September, 2017 among 135 different informants having different age, sex, profession and educational background from four major areas of the three ethnic communities living in Kathmandu valley i.e. Kathmandu, Patan and Bhaktapur. This socio-ethnographic research aims at providing some clues as to how the discovery of a minority language triggers changes in representations and attitudes. The data is analyzed in quantitative as well as qualitative methodology based on some in depth open informal interviews, FGD (Focus Group Discussions) and informal observations as well. The language attitudes towards Nepali and English along with their mother tongues seems to be influenced by positive affective socialization experiences in the new multilingual society and by the growing perception that knowing the languages make them member of the new community. It is emphasized that “distinctive ethnic identities of minority groups, for example, must be constructed from linguistic symbols and/or communicative practices that contrast with resources available for the construction of other ethnic identities or more generally, available national identities” (Kroskrity 2000, p. 112). The new language and the new identity may be actively promoted or persuaded. Different ethnic people living in the capital city have been influenced directly and indirectly by the globalization and international linkage and communication. Moreover, they have been involved in various social, cultural and ceremonial activities with the new mixed society which motivates them to shift into new target languages from the ancestral source language.

Key words: language shift, use and attitude, micro area, ethno-linguistic, socialization

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