

State Ideology at Work: Suppression and Promotion of Linguistic Diversity in Nepal¹

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Abstract

The state's monolingual policies and linguistic diversity are in conflictual relationships, pulling against each other. This paper explores historical practices of monolingualism in Nepal's multilingual land and critically examines current constitutional provisions for the promotion of linguistic diversity. To this end, the study combined qualitative methods of document analysis and semi-structured interviews to examine the status and scale of linguistic diversity in policy documents, including past and present constitutions, and understand key stakeholders' perceptions of Nepal's past and present language policies and programs. Findings show that state ideology shapes language policies with its direct impact on the documentation of linguistic diversity. Deeming linguistic diversity as a threat to national unity, Nepal in the past practiced a one-language, assimilationist policy that privileged the Nepali language, marginalizing other languages. Despite recent constitutional provisions for the promotion of the nation's linguistic diversity, languages other than Nepali are still struggling to have official status, principally due to the continuation of monolingual hangover and the lack of concerted planning and programs in strengthening historically marginalized languages. These findings are expected to contribute to minimizing policy-practice dissonance and framing viable policies for the management of linguistic diversity in multilingual contexts like Nepal.

Keywords: Homogenism, language ideology, linguistic diversity, monolingual injunction, multilingualism

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Introduction

Linguistic diversity is a defining feature of Nepal. According to the National Population and Housing Census-2021, there are 124 languages spoken as mother tongues in this geographically small nation with a population of nearly three million (National Statistics Office [NSO] 2025). The languages spoken in Nepal belong to four major language families: Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian, along with one language isolate, Kusunda (NSO, 2025). The national population report-2021 records 72 Sino-Tibetan mother tongues, yet they are only spoken by 16.6% of the overall population. The majority, accounting for over 83%, speak Indo-European languages as their mother tongues. The majority of the population speaks Indo-European languages, viz. Nepali, Maithali, Awadhi, and Tharu and Nepali, with its official status, is the most dominant of all.

Historically, Nepal has remained multilingual in everyday communication practices at both individual and societal levels (Adhikari, 2019). Despite this diversity, state policies have portrayed the nation as monolingual for centuries. The discrepancy between policy and practice has emerged from the state's monolingual orientation and the multilingual reality of Nepali society. State-promoted monolingualism persisted throughout the history of the multilingual land of Nepal, from the Licchavi period (450–750), the Malla period (1144–1779), the period of Unification (1801–1840), and the Rana regime (1846–1951) to the Panchayat period (1961–1990). The one-language state policy continued until the promulgation of the Constitution of Nepal in 1990 and the subsequent restoration of the multiparty democratic system. The issue of linguistic diversity has prominently appeared in the subsequent constitutions of 2007 and 2015, thereby recognizing the nation's multilingual makeup. These democratic constitutions represent a significant shift away from the state-imposed monolingualism that undervalued the multilingual reality of Nepali society for centuries. Despite being hailed as a crucial step in preserving and promoting the nation's linguistic diversity, the constitutional provisions following the restoration of democracy have drawn criticism for perpetuating a monolingual hangover by favoring the Nepali language, which has historically functioned as the de facto official language. Additionally, doubts and concerns have been raised regarding the state's initiative to implement policy provisions aimed at preserving and promoting minority languages.

Several studies have questioned both the historical dominance of Nepali as the primary language and the state's monolingual ideology, emphasizing their effects on linguistic diversity (Chalise, 2024; Gautam, 2021; Gautam & Poudel, 2022; Gellner, 2016; Regmi, 2024; Regmi, 2022; Yadava, 2007; 2014). For instance, Gautam (2021) and Gautam and Poudel (2022) illustrate how the state's democratic ideology and practices intertwine with diversity and multilingualism. Similarly, Yadava (2007), Regmi (2024), and Chalise (2024) identify multiple issues with enumerating languages in national censuses, which lead to either the reduction or expansion of Nepal's linguistic diversity. Aside from the nation's liberal stance on diversity and inclusion, key factors contributing to the recent growth of Nepal's linguistic diversity include movements for ethnic rights and inclusion, the ambiguous distinction between languages and dialects, and the presence of inadequately trained enumerators (Chalise, 2024; Regmi, 2022; Yadava, 2014). In this context, this paper engages with the ongoing conversation by focusing on how state ideologies influence the extent of linguistic diversity and the viability of minority languages. To this end, the paper closely examines Nepal's rich yet fragile linguistic landscape, exploring how state ideologies have long contributed to the marginalization of minority languages. While recent constitutional changes have formally recognized the country's multilingual reality, in practice, the dominance of Nepali continues to overshadow other languages. This gap between what is written in policy and what actually occurs on the ground lies at the core of Nepal's ongoing struggle with language planning and policy. The study argues that despite the shift in political rhetoric, deeply rooted monolingual mindsets still shape how policies are created and executed. By tracing historical developments and analyzing current practices, the study highlights how these legacy ideologies continue to limit the meaningful inclusion and empowerment of indigenous language communities.

Theoretical Considerations

How the state perceives and treats linguistic diversity is entrenched in and shaped by its language ideology. Following Vogl and Hüning (2010), language ideology can be conceptualized as an action-oriented system of beliefs about language(s). Language ideology amounts to collective beliefs, feelings, and conceptions about language(s) which often index "the political interests of individual speakers, ethnic and other interest groups, and national state" (Kroskrity, 2001, p. 192). The language ideology fostered by the state or a dominant social group often becomes a surrogate for its political agenda.

Hence, language ideology and political ideology are mutually constitutive, one shaping and influencing the other in a continuous cycle. It interacts and interweaves with the ideologies of national identity, homogenism, and monolingualism (Blommaert & Verchueren, 1998; Cooke & Simpson, 2012). Since language ideology is socially situated and entangled with the questions of power in society (Blackledge, 2008), it dynamically changes over time with changed state ideology. Hence, the same state at different times espousing different political ideologies might hold different perspectives toward language(s) and linguistic diversity.

Vogl and Hüning (2010) mention two types of language ideology: uniformity ideology and diversity ideology. Uniformity ideology idealizes a homogenous community/nation equating linguistic territory with national territory. This ideology feeds on homogenism and monolingualism, conflicting with the multilingual reality of the community/nation. Pulled by the centripetal forces of centralization and regimentation of language use, homogenism is hegemonic, oppressive, and state-driven (Blommaert & Verschueren, 1998; Cooke & Simpson, 2012). Diversity ideology, on the other hand, espouses what Bakhtin (1981) calls heteroglossia, which acknowledges and promotes societal multilingualism or linguistic diversity as a normal social condition. In other words, diversity ideology privileges a linguistically heterogeneous community/nation and deems the notion of one language serving one community/nation as a fallacy. This ideology is pulled by the centrifugal forces of multilingual practices.

These two language ideologies are different with respect to their orientations toward language use in multilingual settings. Ruiz (1984) and Willey (2009) explicate the state's three dominant orientations toward linguistic diversity: language as a problem, language as a right, and language as a resource. Hegemonic in nature, uniformity ideology regards linguistic diversity as a problem that needs to be controlled by the state. Linguistic diversity is perceived as a threat to social/national integrity and cohesion. On the contrary, diversity ideology is underpinned by the notion of language as a right and language as a resource. Since language is inextricably intertwined with many aspects of social life (Ruiz, 1984), the state should ensure its citizens' right to use their languages in formal and informal settings. Failure to ensure citizens' language rights leads to confrontation, activism, and advocacy (Spolsky, 1998; Wiley, 2009). Diversity ideology, likewise, promotes language as a resource. According to this orientation, a linguistically

diverse society is more resourceful than a monolingual society, i.e., the more languages the richer the community/nation is.

Methodology

The study followed a qualitative research approach that combined document analysis and semi-structured interviews with purposively selected participants.

Document analysis

The study employed document analysis as a main tool to collect textual data. Document analysis involves the collection and analysis of textual data from documents to examine and explore the phenomenon in question (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023; O'Leary, 2017; Miles et al., 2018). We reviewed and analyzed different national population census reports published periodically, the reports of the Language Commission and Acts and constitutions promulgated in different periods. Table 1 catalogs the principal documents reviewed and analyzed for this study.

Table 1

Documents Reviewed and Analyzed in the Study

Documents	Date
Government of Nepal Act	1948
The Interim Government of Nepal Act	1951
The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal	1959
The Constitution of Nepal	1962
The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal	1990
The Interim Constitution of Nepal	2007
The Constitution of Nepal	2015
National Population Reports	1952 to 2021
Annual Report of Language Commission	2021

The focus of the analysis was on examining and understanding how language issues are perceived and presented in the reviewed documents. We three authors read the documents separately, coded them, collated the codes, and developed the themes out of them. The multiple rounds of close reading of the documents and collating the codes and themes helped us ensure reliability and rigor in the analysis of the data. We extracted the pertinent cases from the reviewed documents as evidence to substantiate our arguments.

Semi-structured interviews

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Document analysis was accompanied by semi-structured interviews with four purposively selected participants. The purpose of semi-structured interviews was to understand stakeholders' views and voices on Nepal's linguistic diversity and state policies in the past and present. The participants were selected in ways that they could represent diverse cohorts of stakeholders involved directly or indirectly in language issues in Nepal. They included a policymaker (a member of the federal parliament), a language activist, a language researcher from a university, and a member of the language commission. The profiles of the participants at the time of data collection are as follows: Participant 1 (P1): P1 is an elected member of the federal parliament. Coming from an ethnic community, she has been in politics for two decades and is an active advocate of the preservation of minority languages.

Participant 2 (P2). A language activist from an ethnic community, P2 has been working in the field of minority languages and cultures for three decades.

P3: A PhD in linguistics, P3 is a researcher. He belongs to a Brahmin community, a dominant non-ethnic community of Nepal. His expertise lies in multilingualism and language policies.

Participant 4 (P4): A PhD in linguistics, P4 is a member of the Language Commission Nepal.

Interviews were conducted on the occasion of International Mother Tongue Day February 21, 2024. The medium of interviews was the Nepali language as preferred by the participants. On average, the interviews lasted for half an hour. Each interviewee was audio recorded and selectively transcribed. The relevant excerpts were later translated into English. We reviewed the translations and tallied them with Nepali sources to ensure the reliability of the content. We approached the data in a productive, contextual, and discursive manner (Pennycook, 2007) to identify themes that effectively addressed the research inquiry (Miles et al., 2018).

The participants were anonymized and coded as P1, P2, P3, and P4, and verbal consent was obtained before audio-recording their views. Any identifiable personal information was removed from the analysis and discussion of the data. Since the documents analyzed in the study are publicly accessible, no consent was required from the concerned authorities to utilize them for the study. Finally, both document and interview data were analyzed thematically following the thematic analysis process as suggested by Braun and Clarke (2006).

Findings and Discussion

Four major themes emerged from the analysis of documents and semi-structured interviews: state policies and fluctuation in linguistic diversity, suppression of linguistic diversity through monolingual injunction, policy-practice dissonance in the promotion of linguistic diversity, and policy without adequate planning. In what follows, we elucidate these themes substantiated by empirical evidence from the data.

State policies and fluctuation in linguistic diversity

Examination of census reports from the beginning until now shows the impact of state ideology on the official enumeration of languages. Nepal has conducted eight population censuses so far, with the first one being in 1952/54. Since then, linguistic demography has figured distinctly in all national censuses. However, the enumeration of languages has varied from census to census, making it difficult to accurately assess the scale of the nation's linguistic diversity. Table 2 presents the fluctuation in the ways languages have been enumerated in different national surveys over the span of seven decades (1954-2021).

Table 2

Languages Recorded in Censuses from 1951/52 to 2021

Population census	Number of languages
1952/54	44
1961	36
1971	17
1981	18
1991	92
2001	110
2011	123
2021	124

Source: National Statistics Office

The 1952/54 census was conducted after the establishment of democracy in Nepal following the fall of the autocratic Rana Regime in 1951. This census report officially recognized Nepal's linguistic diversity for the first time, recording 44 languages spoken as mother tongues. However, the nation's linguistic diversity shrank significantly in three successive censuses, i.e., 1961 (36), 1971 (17), and 1981 (18). This can be attributed to state policy embraced by the autocratic form of government, widely known as the

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Panchayat System, that began with the dissolution of the democratic multiparty government and the establishment of an absolute monarchy in 1961. Intolerant to political, cultural, and linguistic diversity, the Panchayat system adopted an anti-diversity ideology and a policy of one political party, one nation, and one language (Whelpton, 2012; Yadava, 2007). The direct impact of the state's anti-diversity ideology manifested itself in the enumeration of languages, as the number of languages in the official records decreased by nearly one-third in the second census and by one-fourth in the third and fourth censuses.

The absolute monarchy came to an end with the restoration of multiparty democracy in 1990. The number of languages increased drastically to 92 in the census that followed, suggesting a positive impact of the newfound democratic political atmosphere on the government documentation of linguistic diversity. Likewise, the successive national censuses show an ascending trend in the number of languages in Nepal. This trend indicates the democratic state's liberal and inclusive approach to the promotion and preservation of linguistic diversity as an asset, further signaling a cause-and-effect relationship between state ideology and linguistic diversity.

Intolerant and apprehensive of diversity, the autocratic state tends to perceive linguistic diversity as a threat to centralized state mechanisms and suppresses it. On the other hand, open to diversity and plurality, the democratic state perceives linguistic diversity as a national asset, thereby preserving and promoting it. Following the restoration of democracy, Nepal's linguistic minorities have been increasingly aware of their languages, and several ethnic organizations have also taken active initiatives to preserve and promote their cultural and linguistic identities (Yadava 2007). As a result, several minority languages that were grouped into an unknown category earlier have been named and enumerated separately, contributing to linguistic diversity.

Suppression of linguistic diversity through monolingual injunction

The analysis of policy documents, specifically constitutions and acts, reveals that Nepal adopted exclusively one-language policies until the restoration of the democratic multiparty system in 1990. The state strategically camouflaged multilingualism at both individual and societal levels, suppressing linguistic diversity through monolingual injunction (Adhikari & Poudel, 2023). Throughout history, the state has privileged Nepali as the only (till the early 1990s) or the major language (since the early 1990s onwards), marginalizing other languages as invisible or insignificant. Initially, Nepali was a dialect

limited to a principality or a region, which, in the course of time, emerged as the most dominant and dominating language of the nation owing to its privileged association with the rulers (Gellner, 2016). To write with Roy, Nepali was a dialect with an army (1987) adopted and fostered by the state to regulate social norms, practices, and institutions.

For long, the state remained without any policy to address the language issue. The need might have never been felt to do so, as Nepali was perceived as the one and only language of public affairs. For example, *Muluki Ein*, the first civil law of Nepal issued in 1854, was written in the Nepali language, which was supposed to be Nepali as the official language of the nation and reinforced Nepalization, ignoring other ethnic languages (Gautam 2021; Khatiwada et al.2021). The first civil law imagined the multilingual nation as a monolingual one, and this imagination was given continuity in the Government of Nepal Act, the first Act of the nation introduced in 1948. Also termed the nation's first constitution, this Act made a constitutional provision that distinctly declared Nepali as the official language as: "All proceedings of the Legislative Assembly shall be in the Nepali national language." (Government of Nepal Act, 1948, Article 44).

Although this Act did not come into force, it had serious and far-reaching consequences for the state's language policies for several decades to come. The Act made no mention of other languages spoken in the country and their status and roles in public domains, including education and administration. It imagined Nepal as a monolingual state and reinforced Nepali as the official language (falsely), assuming it was a shared language of habitual use for all language communities. The Act took for granted the superiority of the Nepali language.

Promulgated after the establishment of democracy, the Interim Government of Nepal Act 1951 was silent about the language policy of the nation. This silence suggests that the state authority assumed Nepali as the only official language, asserting its centrality beyond question. The nation's first democratic constitution was dissolved in 1961 and a de facto absolute monarchy was established through the Panchayat system that continued till 1990. The constitution promulgated in 1962 officially declared Nepali as the national language. To quote the Constitution, "The national language of Nepal shall be Nepali in the Devanagari script" (Article 70). The 1962 constitution showed its loyalty and commitment to monolingual policy, presenting the multilingual nation as officially monolingual. To consolidate power, the king institutionalized the Nepali language as one of the pillars of national identity, the others being Hinduism and the

monarchy. The Nepali language was promoted aggressively, deeming it the single most powerful and pervasive symbol of Nepalese nationalism (Frederick 1975; Sonntag 1995). The state propagated the slogan- *Ek Raja, Ek Bhesh, Ek Bhasa* (One King, One Dress, One Language), cultivated and reinforced a singular, monolithic image of the nation, ignoring its culturally and linguistically diverse and complex realities (Kharel and KC 2018). To achieve its goal of national unity by suppressing diversity, the state-sanctioned Nepali as the only medium of education, courts, administration, media, and other public domains. Now, being able to use Nepali would grant the citizens a valid linguistic identity, which in turn was, albeit falsely, equated with their national identity. On this issue, Participant-1 noted, "During the Panchayat system, Nepal strictly followed the one language policy and discouraged the use of other languages in the name of national unity. As a result, only one language flourished at the cost of other languages".

Participant 3, on the other hand, interpreted the state's monolingual policy as a historical imperative. In his view, Nepal as a nation-state was still in the making, and there was a need for a common language to bring people together and facilitate communication. At such a juncture in history, Nepali was promoted as a nation-unifying force, which had already established itself as the first language of the majority of Nepalis and the most dominant lingua franca (Bandhu, 1989). Accordingly, the state invested significant financial and human resources in the Nepali language, making it the only language of education and official transactions. In the observation of Participant 4, "The Nepali language itself was not adequately standardized. Its literature was just developing. The King established Nepal Academy to promote this language and its literature". This follows that Nepali was the only language that had the privilege of developing under the patronage of the state. No other languages figured in any national policies and programs, let alone receiving any institutional support. The one-language policy, as noted by Participant-3, was elitist as it was framed by the King and his men without any involvement of stakeholders of other languages. The policy that monopolized monolingualism was anti-diversity, hegemonic, elitist, and oppressive, which was enacted through different state apparatuses, including education, the court, and the bureaucracy. The state-supported hegemonic monolingualism (Kroskrity, 2010) continued until the end of the autocratic Panchayat system in 1990.

Policy-practice dissonance in the promotion of linguistic diversity

The 1990 People's Movement brought an end to the three-decade-long absolute monarchy and restored multiparty democracy in Nepal. The political transformation of the nation directly impacted the state's language ideologies and policies, giving way to the monolingual, Nepali-exclusive, assimilationist policy with a new multilingual policy (Sonntag1995). The Constitution, promulgated in 1991, adopted a liberal approach to people's rights to religion, language, and culture. This Constitution, for the first time in Nepal's history, defined the status of the languages used within the geo-political territories of the nation in Article 6 and Clauses 1 and 2 as:

6. Language of the Nation:

(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 tongue in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal. (Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal-1991)

The 1991 Constitution marked a seismic shift in the country's language policy. The nation eschewed the language ideology of homogeneity and embraced the language ideology of diversity. This is the first constitution that acknowledged Nepal as a multilingual nation, by recognizing all languages spoken within its territory as national languages (Regmi, 2022; Sonntag, 1995). With this declaration, the state took ownership not only of Nepali, the historically dominant and privileged language, but also of other languages hitherto pushed to political and cultural fringes. What is even more noteworthy about this constitution is the recognition of language as a right, as provisioned in Article 18 and its Clauses:

18. Cultural and educational rights I) 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 mother tongue for imparting education to its children

The Constitution ensured the rights of all language communities to preserve and maintain their languages. It enshrined three types of language rights: inherent rights of languages, communities' rights to use their languages, and communities' rights to teach their languages to their children (Spolsky, 1998). First, the constitutional provision showed concern about the inherent right of all languages, like any other endangered species, to survive and flourish. Second, it focused on the rights of minority language

communities to use their languages. Equally or even more important than the first and second provisions is the third provision that ensured the rights of minority language speakers to teach their languages to their children. Hence, the democratic multiparty government adopted a liberal, democratic, and inclusive move toward the preservation and promotion of linguistic diversity. This type of policy initiative is deemed instrumental for its potential to prevent language loss and even reverse language shift to status or prestige variety/language (Spolsky, 1998).

However, despite this liberal gesture toward linguistic diversity, dichotomization and hierarchization of languages, and othering of minority languages run deep through the Constitution. In a multilingual nation, the selection of a particular language as the language of the nation and the language for government business obviously leads to structural inequality between the designated language and other languages (Willy, 2009). Accordingly, the constitutional designation of Nepali as the official language provided structural benefits by uplifting its already socio-politically privileged status. This hierarchization of languages further fed the gap between Nepali and other minority languages. Moreover, the dichotomization of Nepali as the language of the nation and other languages as national languages is neither clear nor helpful. The former evokes a sense of state ownership, whereas the latter implies only the recognition of the existence of other languages. Moreover, we can also detect the mechanism of othering at work in this constitution, since the designation of Nepali as the official language positioned it at the center of all structures of the state, equipping it with legislative, judicial, and executive power, and other languages with no such forms of state power. Malla (2015, pp. 32-33) argues that the State policy to promote one language in the name of the national language typified "a classic 'Orwellian ideological trap', i.e., all languages are equal, but at least one language will have to be more equal than others to enable the equals to communicate among themselves".

The National Language Policy Recommendation Committee (NLPRC) was formed in 1994 to manage linguistic diversity in Nepal. The Committee recommended that the state could use two or more languages along with Nepali as the official languages, taking account of the national interest (NLPRC, 1994). It stressed the use of local languages for the effective functioning of local administration and to make it more public-oriented. Following this recommendation, three local bodies, namely Kathmandu Metropolitan, Dhanusa District Development Committee, and Rajbiraj Municipality,

decided to use respectively Newari and Maithili, the locally dominant languages, for official business (Regmi,2022; Shiwakoti,2002; Turin,2007). However, this decision was immediately annulled by the Supreme Court citing it against the spirit of the Constitution. Deep down, the Court deemed the decision of the local bodies to use local languages as a threat to national unity and hence against the national interest (Sonntag,1995). This decision ran counter to Nepali citizens' rights enshrined by the Constitution to use, preserve, and promote local languages (Shiwakoti, 2002; Turin,2007). Hence, even the democratic state continued to imagine and implement Nepali as the de facto language of state mechanisms and machinery without an alternative language, creating dissonance between constitutional rhetoric and reality in practice. When asked about this decision, Participants 1 and 2 called it regressive, anti-diversity, and the continuation of linguistic homogeneity:

In retrospect, I think the decision made the issue of linguistic diversity further complicated. It closed off the possibility of local languages to be used in government bodies. (Participant 2)

Participant 4 maintained that the democratic political system provided hope and inspiration for minority language communities by allowing them to educate their children in their mother tongues. He at the same time, criticized the state for its failure to translate the constitutional policy of linguistic diversity into practice. In his view, the successive governments after the restoration of democracy only paid lip service to the promotion of minority languages (Shah,1995). His view is substantiated by the fact that the governments lacked concrete planning and programs for running mother tongue education. Consequently, local communities felt helpless for want of adequate financial and human resources to empower their languages.

Policy without adequate planning

The Interim Constitution of Nepal-2007 was the outcome of the political movement in 2006, popularly known as the 2006 Democratic Movement that reinstated the parliament and transferred all executive power from the king to the prime minister. This constitution replaced the constitution of 1990 and transitioned the nation from a monarchy to a federal democratic republic. The decade that followed until the promulgation of Nepal's first democratic republican constitution in 2015 could be regarded as an interregnum characterized by political chaos, uncertainty, as well as a collective aspiration impacting all sectors of the nation, including its language policy.

Giving continuity to the democratic and liberal spirit of the previous constitution, the Interim Constitution-2007 recognized and further reinforced the multilingual makeup of the nation and made the following provisions for languages:

- (1) All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in Nepal are the national languages of Nepal.
- (2) The Nepali Language in Devnagari script shall be the official language.
- (3) Notwithstanding anything contained in clause (2), it shall not be deemed to have hindered to use the mother language in local bodies and offices. State shall maintain records by translating the languages so used for official purposes. (Part 1, Article 5)

The Interim Constitution took a more progressive, liberal, and democratic stance on linguistic diversity (Gautam, 2022; Regmi, 2022). It eschewed the previously sketched arbitrary dichotomization and hierarchization of Nepali as the language of the nation and other languages as national languages, thereby treating all languages with parity. Moreover, the Constitution opened the door for non-Nepali language users to use their languages in local government units, which not only ensured their language rights but also raised the status of hitherto marginalized languages. Above all, the Constitution envisioned translation as an indispensable mechanism to maintain official transactions in multilingual settings (Adhikari & Shrestha, 2021). This constitutional move is instrumental in maximizing language contact and minimizing language conflict in multilingual nations like Nepal. As in the previous constitution, the Interim Constitution enshrined people's language rights, specifically children's right to receive basic education in their mother tongues and each community's right to preserve and promote their language.

However, the constitutional promises of empowering minority languages and promoting linguistic diversity did not materialize into action for several reasons. First, the government's role in supporting minority language communities to use their languages in educational and official settings was not adequate (Gautam, 2022; Turin, 2007). The government did not adequately invest in human and material resources to develop the repertoires of minority languages. Without concrete plans and programs for corpus planning of minority languages, the political decision to uplift their status was nothing more than a populist political agenda aimed at soothing the dissenting voices of minority language communities (Participant 3). Likewise, the lack of institutionalization of

translation as mandated by the Constitution impeded constitutional aspirations of promoting local languages at local levels (Participant 4).

The present governing constitution of Nepal, promulgated in 2015, gives continuity to most of the language policies provisioned in the Interim Constitution 2007. Accordingly, the Constitution recognizes all languages as the languages of the nation (Section 1, Article 6) and Nepali as the official language (Section 1, Article 7.1), ensures people's right to basic education in their mother tongues and their right to preserve and promote their languages (Article 31.1). More importantly, the Constitution grants power to each province to "determine one or more languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State its official language(s), in addition to the Nepali language" (7.3). This provision renders the present constitution more progressive than the previous one. An even more progressive initiative lies in the provision for forming the Language Commission to resolve all language-related issues within the country. The duties of the Commission, among others, are setting criteria for the recognition of regional languages for official purposes and recommending to the government the measures to be adopted for the protection and promotion of languages so that they can be used in education. The formation of the Language Commission in 2016 is considered a landmark in Nepal's history of language management (Gautam, 2022). The Commission has recommended 11 regional languages as the official languages of their respective provinces, which include Maithili, Limbu, Doteli, Nepal Bhasha, Tamang, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Bajjika, Awadhi, Gurung, and Magar Kham (Language Commission, 2021). Following this recommendation, the Bagmati province recently decided to use Tamang and Nepal Bhasha along with Nepali as the languages of official business in the province, and this historical decision by the provincial cabinet came into effect on May 6, 2021.

Despite their appreciation for the Constitution's progressive policies for promoting linguistic diversity, the participants in this study pointed out its regressive move and doubted its effective implementation. The participants were critical of the removal of the clause concerning the translation of official documents from regional languages into Nepali as provisioned in the Interim Constitution. In the view of Participant 4, "It is a regressive move of this constitution to remove the provision for translation included in the previous constitution". He further noted that the legislators either intentionally removed this provision or failed to understand the actual functioning of the multilingual nation. Likewise, Participants 2 and 3 questioned, "How can civil

service providers and service receivers from different language backgrounds communicate with each other without the aid of interpreters? Also, how are the offices going to maintain documents in different official languages without translation?" The Language Commission is also silent about the provisions for translation between official languages. The participants' concern about translation is valid regarding the functioning of multilingual nations like Nepal. Highlighting the role of translation in multilingual contexts, Grin (2017) conceives it as a vehicle for language policies and a determinant of their success. Grin (2017) further notes that "translation contributes to the maintenance of linguistic diversity and societal multilingualism which are, reciprocally, dependent upon the practice of translation"(p.155). In a follow-up interview, Participant 4 also commented on the Provincial Cabinet's recent decision to use provincial languages for government business as, "This historical decision is praiseworthy. But, the decision has come without adequate planning and preparation". He was skeptical about the efficacy of this decision in the absence of the development of human and material resources in the newly sanctioned regional languages. In the view of Participant P3, the decision came mostly as a result of the pressure from language activists without considering the grassroots reality. His view is legitimate when we look at the internal strengths of the languages recommended for official transactions, as they lack adequate material resources, including comprehensive mono/bi/multi-lingual dictionaries, standardized grammar, and instructional materials, and human resources, i.e., translators and interpreters to facilitate oral and written communication across official languages. The policy promises to promote linguistic diversity are unlikely to materialize unless the state plans, prepares, and mobilizes necessary human and non-human resources to expand and strengthen local languages (Gautam & Poudel, 2022).

Conclusion and Implications

Taking Nepal's linguistic diversity as a case, this paper discusses the way the state's language ideology and concomitant language policies are shaped by its political ideology. The study shows that state ideology impacts the scale of linguistic diversity in official documentation, further suggesting an intricate connection between state ideology and language policies. As Nepal's case demonstrates, the state's autocratic and assimilationist policies lead to the shrinkage of linguistic diversity, whereas linguistic diversity is likely to expand with the state's adoption of a democratic and liberal system. This finding suggests that the nation's linguistic diversity is not only a sociolinguistic

fact that is objectively recorded in official documents. Instead, it is subject to state ideology and is often officially manipulated. The evidence from this study demonstrates that state ideology and language policies are mutually constitutive, and linguistic diversity is entangled with them. To its political goal of imagined national unity and solidarity, the autocratic government adopts the monolingual policy to promote the exclusive use of one language through various state apparatuses, including education. On the other hand, the democratic government treats linguistic diversity as a national resource and ensures citizens' rights to use their languages to achieve its goals of equality, justice, and fairness. Likewise, state-supported monolingualism is anti-diversity, hegemonic, elitist and oppressive, camouflages the nation's multilingual makeup, and silences heteroglossic practices at individual and societal levels. The paper concludes that Nepal's current democratic constitutional provisions support and protect multiple languages. However, sustaining and promoting linguistic inclusion and diversity requires the development of multilingual language policies, informed by data from a separate national language census.

Our conclusion implies that liberal constitutional policies are instrumental in preserving and promoting linguistic diversity. However, such policies hold significance only when they are translated into practice. For example, despite ensuring each community's right to use their languages, Nepal's 1990 Constitution did not largely benefit indigenous communities, as local languages were not allowed to be used for official transactions, thereby continuing the monolingual injunction in multilingual contexts. The conclusion of this paper also implies that the constitutional rhetoric of multilingualism needs to go in tandem with concerted planning and programs. This necessitates the state to invest financial and human resources in historically marginalized languages so that they can be developed as languages for official purposes. Finally, since translation is closely tied to linguistic diversity, its crucial role needs to be defined in the constitution and language policy documents. The findings of the paper might benefit other similar multilingual contexts where monolingual policies are historically entrenched, privileging one language at the cost of other languages. The insights from the study will also help us better understand the lingering effects of past monolingual hegemonic policies on current multilingual policies and practices.

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