

# Trends in Nepal's Linguistic Demography: Insights from the 2021 Census

Tilak Prasad Sharma <sup>1</sup>

Dawa Sherpa, PhD <sup>2</sup>

Anju Dhakal <sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup>Asst. Professor TU, Geography and  
Population Education Department

<sup>2</sup>Associate Professor TU, Nepali Education  
Department, Mahendra Ratna Campus,  
Tahachal, Kathmandu

<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-1014-699X>  
sherpada2023@gmail.com

<sup>3</sup>Asst. Professor  
Janajyoti Multiple Campus,  
Lalbandi, Sarlahi  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0008-6675-4530>  
anjudhakal101@gmail.com

Corresponding author: [tilak20013@gmail.com](mailto:tilak20013@gmail.com)  
<https://orcid.org/0009-0002-7388-9659>

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## Abstract

*The linguistic landscape of Nepal is of mixed variety that has been developed due to various ethnic and cultural backgrounds. The research takes a look at the population pattern of the major language families and five major languages (Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, and Tamang) of Nepal between 1961 to 2021 and the province-wise linguistic diversity to develop the language policy and cultural preservation approaches. The data used in analyzing the trends is from National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) of Nepal during 1961 to 2021 that covers information about the population sizes, the proportional representation of language families and the leading mother tongues. Indo-European family (with majority Nepali) grew up to 83.1 (24.2 million) in 2021, compared to 79.1 (7.4 million) in 1961, whereas Sino-Tibetan family experienced negative growth all the way down to 16.6 (down to 5 million in 2021) percent. The share of Nepali as the mother-tongue has decreased, as in 1981, 58.3 percent of Nepali spoke it, compared to 44.9 percent in 2021; Tharu*

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*increased with 5.9 percent, and Maithili and Bhojpuri did not change significantly. There are 21 languages out of 124 that cover 95 percent of the population with the small ones facing the threat of extinction. The most prompted linguistic diversity (107 languages in each province) is found in Koshi and Bagmati, whereas Nepali is the common language owing in most of the regions with the sole exception (Madhesh). The linguistic environment of Nepal is showing signs of increasing variations as well as Indo-European paramountcy, which requires regional policies with a view to containing the unifying powers of the Nepali language without the need to eliminate the minor languages.*

**Keywords:** Cultural preservation, Language policy, Linguistic diversity, Nepali dominance, Minority languages.

## Introduction

Nepal's linguistic and cultural diversity is reflected in the wide distribution of mother tongues across its ecological regions the mountains, hills, and plains as documented in the 2021 Census. This is multilingualism which not only bears witness to a rich ethnolinguistic heritage of the country, but in addition it is an essential aspect of the sociocultural identity. National censuses of Nepal which have been carried out decennially since the period 1952 / 54 have been the main source in recording linguistic demography in the country. Since the later decades, the coverage, precision, and sociolinguistic scope of Nepal's censuses have progressively improved, culminating in the 2021 National Population and Housing Census, which reported 123 spoken mother tongues (National Statistics Office [NSO], 2023).

This latest counting is used at a crucial moment in Nepal governance and international commitments. The 2021 census is the initial census to be prepared amid the federal structure that is established by the Constitution of Nepal 2015, which recognizes local, provincial, and federal governments. At the same time, there has been an empowerment of the indigenous and endangered languages by the international community. The International Decade of Indigenous Languages proclaimed by the United Nations General Assembly and the scope of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) in general and Goal 16 in particular, which emphasize the fostering of inclusive societies in particular have added a new urgency to the question of language conservation and equal participation (UNESCO, 2022; United Nations, 2022).

It is against this background that the census 2021 creates an unforeseen possibility of examining the linguistic landscape in Nepal, quantitatively. It contains detail data in rough form populations by their mother tongues, use of their languages as the second own, the distributions in language family to which they belong, and their ecological as well as geographic distribution. Notably, it also chronicles languages reported by even numerically small and marginalized linguistic communities, including Kusunda and Bankariya with some of them having less than 100 speakers (NSO, 2023).

The interest in the issue of linguistic diversity in Nepal is not new. Most of its multilingual structures including its phylogenetic diversity have been discussed in pioneering works by Yadava (2013), Pun (2020) and Opgenort (2004) that demonstrated the existence of four broad language groups, namely, Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austroasiatic, and Dravidian. They also note the structural heterogeneity (e.g., the existence of implosives in some languages of the Rai group or complicated systems of agreement in languages of the Eastern Indo-Aryan group, e.g. Maithili). However, much data on the existing literature is derived prior to federal restructuring and to the official inclusion of sign language and other language isolates in census reporting. Also, the studies, as linguistic works are abundant in descriptive and comparative matters, usually do not offer quantitative analysis, which is conducted on the basis of current population-wide census data.

This gap has thrown light on a big gap in research. Little research applies a quantitative synthesis of the census 2021 population data on language distribution into the cohort of population size, spatial interface, and clans of languages across areas and administrative hierarchies of ecological zones (Gautam, 2021). As an example, we understand that Nepali is the most frequently spoken mother tongue (used by 44.9 percent of the persistent population), but we do not know how this prevailing position is combined with regional linguistic minorities, settlement density, urbanization, and ecological distribution (NSO, 2023). The patterns of mother tongue maintenance and second language usage with reference to the five previous census periods were also not really quantified.

This article tries to fill this gap by providing a detailed report of the linguistic demography of Nepal with the aid of the national census of 2021. In particular, we look at patterns of mother tongue distribution over time, and also population size categories of languages as well as spatial distribution of language families across

ecological zones and provinces. What is more, we examine policy implications of these trends, linguistic rights and cultural preservation.

In a linguistic point of view, recording and counting language use patterns would be a way to shape up the attempts of language preservation and revitalization. Policy wise, the knowledge of language distribution is vital in establishing a broad-based education, media accessibility, elections system and social service provision especially in multilingual federal republic.

Moreover, the addition of hitherto undercounted or newly discovered languages to the 2021 census like Sign Language and several dying mother languages gives a better and more comprehensive linguistic map of Nepal. This not only means that the 2021 census is not only a statistical process but also a milestone in sociolinguistic reporting. The statistics indicate not only the use of spoken language but also sociocultural self-identity, heritage and affiliation to a community. Self-perceived mother tongue, second language, and ancestral language are also captured by the census and these data offer a multi-dimensional conclusion on the transmission and maintenance of language (NSO, 2023).

The proposed article will give a relevant, empirical analysis of linguistic demography in Nepal on the basis of the latest and most thorough national census. Ensuring a proper analysis of the sociolinguistic theory and policy by incorporating census data helps us to gain a better knowledge of how languages are being used, coexisted, and developed in the country in terms of its demography as well as its administration. Finally, we are standing here in favor of a better-constituted linguistic policy which will not only consider the multilingual nature of Nepal but will also ensure the security of the long-threatened languages without neglecting their linguistically oppressed minority groups.

## **Research Methods and Materials**

The present paper is based on descriptive quantitative research design, which aims to examine the linguistic demography in Nepal by examining the mother tongue-wise distribution, language varieties, and age group of the population. The descriptive method will make it possible to systematize and present demographic information on the language in various provinces, ecological areas, as well as in municipal categories. The use of secondary data in the study is based on the latest nationally representative source, which is the Nepal Population and Housing Census (NPHC) 2021, covering the whole population of Nepal, and hence reliable.

The official source of data in the present study is the Nepal Population and Housing Census 2021 carried out by the National Statistics Office (NSO) of Nepal. One in every decade the census contains much linguistic data along with mother tongue, second languages, and second languages spoken by ancestors that covers 124 languages that include sign language. This was the methodology of the census which includes door to door enumeration of all the provinces, ecological zones (Mountain, Hill, Tarai), urban-rural municipalities and therefore it has met the linguistic diversity of Nepal at various administrative levels. The statistics on the linguistic diversity indices, the size of the groups by the mother tongue, and the distribution of the language families were retrieved using official census reports and thematic publications (NSO, 2023; CBS, 2021).

The descriptive statistical methods were applied to analyze the data and formulate a summary and explanations of the speech distribution and diversity patterns in geographical and administrative areas. Important statistics like frequency distributions, percentage and cumulative percentage were calculated to determine the size of cohorts of the population by mother tongue. Also, language heterogeneity across the provinces and ecological zones was estimated using the Linguistic Diversity Index (LDI) allowing comparison of results with those obtained in 2021 and in 2011.

The relationship with language families (Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, others) to ecological/ provincial regions was tested by use of cross-tabulations and trend analysis. Trends on language distribution were visualized in terms of graphical representations such as the use of tables and charts. It was also during the data analysis exercise, that comparison of census data and previous linguistic studies was made to determine alteration in the use of language, emergence of smaller groups of language and its policy implication with regard to language preservation and cultural identity (Yadava, 2007).

## **Results**

### ***Trends in Population Distribution of Major Language Families in Nepal (1961–2021)***

The linguistic background of Nepal is a colorful ‘carved floor pattern’ attributed to multiethnic and cultural makeup. This paper considers population dynamics of the four major language families in Nepal between 1961 and 2021, how

the Indo-European family- mainly Nepali- has dominated and how the Sino-Tibetan and other small language groupings have shifted in relation.

**Table 1**

*Population of Language Families (1961–2021)*

<b>Mother Tongues</b>	<b>1961</b>	<b>1971</b>	<b>1981</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>2011</b>	<b>2021</b>
Indo-European	7,449,604	9,062,435	12,417,886	14,701,283	17,982,769	21,753,009	24,227,411
%	79.1	78.4	82.7	79.5	79.1	82.1	83.1
Sino-Tibetan	1,813,083	1,982,635	1,811,944	3,098,698	4,183,995	4,584,523	4,837,808
%	19.3	17.2	12.1	16.8	18.4	17.3	16.6
Austro-Asiatic	29,485	23,853	28,208	33,332	40,260	49,858	55,916
%	0.3	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2	0.2
Dravidian	-	-	-	15,175	28,615	33,651	38,873
%	-	-	-	0.1	0.1	0.1	0
Others	114,392	487,060	764,802	648,627	28,615	25,745	3,799
%	1.2	4.2	5.1	3.5	0.1	0.1	0
Not Stated	6,432	-	-	9,157	503,295	47,718	4,201
%	0.1	-	-	0.1	2.2	0.2	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>9,412,996</b>	<b>11,555,983</b>	<b>15,022,839</b>	<b>18,491,097</b>	<b>22,7</b>		

*Source: Yadava (2014), NSO (2023).*

The population tendency of the major language groups of Nepal in six decades is given in Table 1 indicating that the Indo-European language group was and still is the dominant group of language speakers and it has seen an increase of about 7.4 million language speakers (79.1 percent) in 1961 to 24.2 million language speakers (83.1 percent) in 2021. Although the absolute numbers in the family (about 1.8 million to 4.8 million) increased, the Sino-Tibetan experienced a proportional decline in the percentage within the population (19.3% to 16.6%). The small language families, e.g. Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian, are not declining, although their representation is extremely small (approximately 0.2 per cent and nearly 0.1 per cent respectively). The Others and Not Stated have been seen to fluctuate, and have been spiking in certain census years possibly due to change in census methodology or reporting.

***Trends in the Five Major Languages of Nepal Across Five Decades (1981–2021)***

The languages of Nepal have experienced significant changes in the last 50 years especially in the five major languages spoken. This paper describes the dynamics of the prevalence rate of Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, and Tamang between 1981 and 2021, reflecting how the number of speakers has changed and what is their ratio.

**Table 2***Major Five Languages in the Last Five Censuses, NPHC 2021*

Major Languages	1981 (%)	1991 (%)	2001 (%)	2011 (%)	2021 (%)
Nepali	58.3	50.3	48.6	44.6	44.9
Maithili	11.1	11.8	12.3	11.6	11
Bhojpuri	7.6	7.4	7.5	5.9	6.2
Tharu	3.6	5.3	5.8	5.7	5.9
Tamang	3.4	4.8	5.1	5.1	4.9
Total Population	15,022,839	18,491,097	22,736,934	26,494,504	29,164,578

*Source: National Population and Housing Census (NPHC), 2021.*

The above table 2 shows the change in the distribution of share of the five major languages in terms of percentage in Nepal in the past five consecutive national censuses. The most used mother tongue is Nepali; however, its percentage declined steadily from 58.3 percent in 1981 or 2021 respectively an indication of the gradual diversification of linguistic identity in the nation. The second position is Maithili, whose proportion is rather steady and slightly varies around 11 per cent. The share of Bhojpuri is slightly changing, and it is declining: during the same time, it dropped by 7.6 to 6.2 percent. The Tharu language shows a small growth of 3.6 percent to 5.9 percent either due to population growth or better reporting. The share of the Tamang language speakers has been around 5 percent but in 2021 it has declined slightly. These changes show a demographic increase to a current population of more than 29 million as compared to 15 million in 1981 and portrays differences in language maintenance and shift in Nepal, where it is natural to have more than one language.

***Distribution and Prevalence of Major Languages in Nepal with Over 100,000 Speakers (NPHC 2021)***

Nepal has a great linguistic diversity shown by the distribution and the prevalence of the major languages with more than 100,000 people speaking each of them. The 2021 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) indicates that 21 languages have a population of over this limit, with these many languages accounting to 95 percent of the entire population.

**Table 3**

*Nepal's Large Languages (Minimum 100,000 Speakers), NPHC 2021*

S.N.	Mother Tongues	Population	Percentage (%)	Cumulative Percentage (%)
1	Nepali	13,084,457	44.9	44.9
2	Maithili	3,222,389	11	55.9
3	Bhojpuri	1,820,795	6.2	62.2
4	Tharu	1,714,091	5.9	68.1
5	Tamang	1,423,075	4.9	72.9
6	Bajjika	1,133,764	3.9	76.8
7	Avadhi	864,276	3	79.8
8	Nepalbhasha (Newari)	863,380	3	82.8
9	Magar Dhut	810,315	2.8	85.5
10	Doteli	494,864	1.7	87.2
11	Urdu	413,785	1.4	88.7
12	Yakthung / Limbu	350,436	1.2	89.9
13	Gurung	328,074	1.1	91
14	Magahi	230,117	0.8	91.8
15	Baitadeli	152,666	0.5	92.3
16	Rai	144,512	0.5	92.8
17	Achhami	141,444	0.5	93.3
18	Bantawa	138,003	0.5	93.7
19	Rajbanshi	130,163	0.4	94.2
20	Sherpa	117,896	0.4	94.6
21	Khash	117,511	0.4	95

*Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), 2023.*



Table 3 shows linguistic diversity, particularly the number of population and proportional representation of the largest mother tongues in Nepal according to the 2021 census. Nepali is spoken by 44.9 percent (more than 13 million speakers) of the country in general, considering it as the national language and *lingua franca*. The second and third most spoken languages are Maithili (11%) and Bhojpuri (6.2%), accounting to almost 18 per cent of the population. Other prominent languages are Tharu (5.9%), Tamang (4.9%) and Bajjika (3.9%), which means a rich multilingual tapestry. The table also reveals that those other small but still significant language communities, such as Avadhi, Nepal bhasha (Newari), Magar, Doteli and Urdu, include 1.4 to 3 percent of the native speakers each. A total of 95% is achieved by taking into consideration the top 21 languages thus showing these are the top most languages used by the large majority of the population. Khash, Achhami and Baitadeli are the dialects of Nepali but counted separately.

***Population Distribution of Mother Tongues by Size Cohorts in Nepal (NPHC 2021)***

The hierarchical structure of the linguistic landscape can be demonstrated by utilizing the population distribution of the mother tongues in Nepal.

**Table 4**

*Population by Mother Tongue and Size Cohort, NPHC 2021*

Population Size Category	No. of Mother Tongues	Population	%	Cumulative %
Over 100,000	21	27,696,013	95	95
100,000 < 9,999	36	1,286,583	4.4	99.4
10,000 < 999	45	168,942	0	100
999 below	22	8,493	0	100
Others and Not Stated	–	4,547	0	100
<b>Total</b>	<b>124</b>	<b>29,164,578</b>	–	–

*Source: National Population and Housing Census (NPHC), 2021.*

Table 4 indicates that classifies the mother tongues of Nepal according to the number of speakers and we can find that there is broad linguistic concentration with some large languages. Among the languages captured in the 124 total mother tongues, 21 of them have more than 100,000 speakers making the total group a close proportion of the total population (about 27.7 million persons). This shows

that Nepali speakers form a relatively small group of languages and the number of speakers in those languages is very huge. The second level comprises 36 languages with their populations representing 4.4 percent in population. Those languages that have less than 10,000 speakers are many but they still constitute less than 1 percent of the total population. This distribution indicates a large level of imbalance such that there is great linguistic diversity in small speaking communities and great threat that is posed to language preservation and the policies that can support the endangered languages regarding the multilingual situation in Nepal.

***Languages Spoken Across Nepal's Provinces: Diversity and Dominance Patterns (NPHC 2021)***

Nepal is a linguistically diverse country with a rich tapestry of languages spoken across its seven provinces. The 2021 National Population and Housing Census (NPHC) highlights significant variations in the number of languages spoken, as well as the dominance of certain major languages in different provinces.

**Table 5**

*Languages Spoken in Provinces, NPHC 2021*

Province	No. of Languages Spoken	Total Population	Largest Language of the Province (%)	No. of Second Languages	No. of Languages of Ancestor
Koshi	107	4,961,412	Nepali (45.3)	105	110
Madhesh	60	6,114,600	Maithili (41.7)	67	70
Bagmati	107	6,116,866	Nepali (56.0)	98	112
Gandaki	72	2,466,427	Nepali (73.4)	71	90
Lumbini	66	5,122,078	Nepali (50.9)	63	82
Karnali	48	1,688,412	Nepali (88.9)	37	55
Sudurpashchim	72	2,694,783	Nepali (42.4)	49	72

*Source: National Statistics Office (NSO), 2023.*

The variation in the linguistic diversity between the provinces of Nepal indicates that not only are there many different numbers of languages that are spoken but also that the big languages are dominant. Linguistically, Koshi and Bagmati provinces have the greatest diversity with the 107 languages each, in contrast, Karnali also had the lowest number amounting to 48. The maximum language that is spoken

in most of the provinces is Nepali but is dominant in the Karnali (88.9%), Gandaki (73.4%), and the least dominant is in the Madhesh with Maithili (41.7). Significant multilingualism is also provided by the number of second languages and ancestral languages especially in Koshi and Bagmati which signify complicated linguistic heritage and contacts.

## Discussion

As seen in the given data, the linguistic landscape of Nepal is characterized by the intricate interaction between linguistic domination, cultural diversity, and a slow change over the period of more than 60 years (1961-2021). By underlining the prevalence of the Indo-European language family, notably Nepali, with the continuous existence of considerable linguistic diversity in the forms of Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian languages and the existence of minor languages communities, the findings of the provincial linguistic distribution aspect has to do more with the existence that has a central occupation of the Indic local languages by one linguistic group instead of the differentiating between the Indic and the non-Indic local languages.

The ascending power of the Indo-European language group whose representatives constitute 79.1 percent of the Nepali population in 1961 and 83.1 percent in 2021 with Nepali as its umbrella language. This tendency correlates with the historical development of Nepali as national language as well as *lingua franca* which is a policy that was established in the nation-building process of the Panchayat system (1960 -1990) in the sense of one nation and one language (Yadava, 2007, Gautam, 2021). The significant reduction in the share of the Sino-Tibetan family (19.3 to 16.6) though absolute growth in numbers of the speakers is an indication of the relatively low growth rates in the population or the potential shift to Nepali, especially the urbanizing regions. The sociolinguistic change can be an indication of social and economic pressures since learners of the minor languages tend to embrace Nepali because it presents them with educational and economic prospects (Turin, 2007).

The marginal but stable representation of smaller language families such as Austro-Asiatic and Dravidian at 0.2 percent and 0.1 percent respectively, focus the attention towards their stable survival there. Such minorities are commonly related to such marginalized and indigenous groups as they experience major struggles to preserve language vitality because of minor institutional support and fewer speakers

(Phyak, 2021). The irregularity between the number of people under the “Others” and the number under the “Not Stated” may reflect either some variance in census practices or growing identification with the minority language, as has been found in surveys of the reliability of census numbers in multilingual communities (Silverstein, 2000).

An outstanding decrease in percentage of Nepali speakers, 58.3 per cent in 1981 and 44.9 per cent in 2021, although it tends to remain the most common language. This comparative setback indicates growing linguistic diversification, that could be occasioned by a greater awareness of minority languages in post 1990 democratic Nepal, where there is a tendency towards multicultural policies stimulating the ethnic and linguistic assertion of identity (Hangen, 2009). Maithili and Bhojpuri that are used mostly in Terai have been holding up relatively consistent percentages (around 11 percent and 6.2 percent, respectively), due to their solid regional roots in Madhesh province where linguistic Maithili is dominant with 41.7 percent. The increment of Tharu speakers (3.6 percent to 5.9 percent) may be due to a growth of population in Tharu groups or better writing in the census since Tharu as a group has acquired publicity through ethnic advocacy (Guneratne, 2002). The stable percentage (approximately 5 per cent) that Tamang holds shows that the Sino-Tibetan languages are resilient and this has been aided by the cultural revitalization that took place in Bagmati and Koshi provinces where the Tamang are mainly found.

Such patterns correspond with other trends in language shift across the globe where there are languages that are more dominant and on the other hand; there are those that are less dominant with appropriate shifts being experienced in the relative shares of the languages due to the increased prominence of the lesser spoken languages in the pluralistic communities (Fishman, 1991). Nevertheless, its persistence in being a *lingua franca* is given by the idea that it plays an important role in unifying the diverse population in Nepal, as it can be seen in other multilingual countries such as India (Mohanty, 2019).

Within linguistic Nepal, there are 2 languages with other 21 languages (of the 124) spoken by the majority of the languages (total population of 95 percent) representing more than 100,000 people. Such concentration highlights the predominance of such large languages as Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, and Tamang whereas smaller ones (67 languages speaking below 10,000 people) make up less than 1 percent of the population. This is similar in the international

outlook in which only a few languages have become dominant with many smaller languages becoming threatened (Krauss, 1992). The 22 languages having fewer than 1,000 persons speaking the languages have also been found to be quite vulnerable simply because small numbers of persons speaking a language are associated with low intergenerational transmission rates which is a core aspect in the loss of the languages (UNESCO, 2003).

The centralization of language diversity within the small language groups would lead to speculation of language endangering especially in the native languages such as those of the Austro-Asiatic and Sino-Tibetan families. Research indicates that unless there is a specific revitalization program bigoted to the mother-tongue education and community-based language program, these languages will be extinct in several decades (Regmi, 2017, Gautam, 2025). The Constitution of Nepal, passed in 2015, acknowledges the multiplicity of languages and fosters multilingual education though implementation is yet to be uniform across the board, in regards to small-scale language groups (Phyak et al., 2022).

The data of the individual provinces shows a large amount of variety concerning linguistic diversity with Koshi and Bagmati provinces having the greatest number of languages (107 and 107 respectively) with Karnali having the least number of languages (48). The relative homogenous nature of their linguistic background is represented by the dominance of Nepali in Karnali (88.9%) and Gandaki (73.4) though, the emergence of the Maithili by the Maithili people in Madhesh (41.7%) highlights the level of linguistic identity in different regions. This difference requires language practices at the regional level rather than national varieties since national policies could not suit the local demands of languages (Bhusal & Breen, 2023). An example would be a high diversity of Koshi and Bagmati, which indicates the necessity of strong multilingual educational streams, and the linguistic homogeneity of Karnali should be addressed through special treatment of the minorities languages to deter acculturation.

The fact that the second and ancestral languages are persistent, especially in Koshi and Bagmati, shows an affluent multilingually. This concurs with research findings in which multilingualism has been found to increase cognitive and cultural resilience (Skutnabb-Kangas, 2013). Nonetheless, majority of the provinces may impose assimilative force over other languages due to the dominance held by Nepali thereby creating fear among the studies on linguistic hegemony (Phillipson, 1992).

The findings underscore the importance of inclusive language policies that promote Nepali as a shared language while preserving linguistic diversity in many multilingual contexts (Gautam & Giri, 2024). The decrease in Nepali's relative proportion and the rise of languages like Tharu reflect a growing recognition of ethnic and linguistic identities that should influence policy frameworks. The reality that 95% of people communicate in only 21 languages highlights the necessity of directing resources towards these essential languages while also protecting the lesser-known ones. UNESCO's (2003) framework for language vitality emphasizes the importance of institutional support, community engagement, and educational efforts in safeguarding endangered languages, crucial for the 67 languages in Nepal with fewer than 10,000 speakers.

Education policies should expand mother-tongue education, particularly in areas like Koshi and Bagmati provinces where multiple languages are spoken by multiple ethnic communities. Research shows that teaching in a person's first language improves academic outcomes and strengthens cultural identity (Cummins, 2000). Additionally, digital tools and platforms in minority languages can enhance their visibility and vibrancy, as shown by successful revitalization efforts in different contexts (Crystal, 2000).

## **Conclusion**

This research analyzed the linguistic patterns of Nepal between 1961 to 2021, demonstrating that although the Indo-European language family, particularly Nepali, has increased in prevalence (from 79.1% to 83.1%), the proportion of Sino-Tibetan languages decreased even with their numerical rise. The percentage of Nepali speakers as a first language decreased (from 58.3% in 1981 to 44.9% in 2021), reflecting increased linguistic variety. In 2021, 21 out of 124 native languages accounted for 95% of the populace, emphasizing the dominance of certain languages and the threat to numerous lesser-used tongues. Regions such as Koshi and Bagmati exhibited the greatest diversity. The existing political system and the language policy made in the constitutions (1961;1991;2007 & 2015) shows the various transformations in census data as well as the representation of languages. However, the results highlight the dual challenge of advancing Nepali as a national *lingua franca* while safeguarding minority languages. Inclusive, region-sensitive strategies, education in native languages, and digital media initiatives are essential for maintaining language. This research enhances understanding by combining sixty years of census data to

inform the future studies and policies related to endangered languages, multilingual education, and the impacts of migration and digital technologies on language usage.

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