

Recontextualization Practices of Nepalese Language in Educational Policy Discourses

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Abstract

Language in education policy discourses keep on changing periodically in the history of formal education of a nation-state due to the ideological influence oriented by national and international level of sociopolitical change. To discuss such issues, this paper theoretically analyzes Nepalese language in education policy provisions since 1956 to present, which are mentioned in different constitutional and educational policy discourses, to explore how those policy discourses are recontextualized under the influence of hegemonic political power, neoliberalism, globalization and linguistic human right-based ideologies in the formation process. The finding shows that there is strong influence of hegemonic political power before 1990, but the subsequent policy discourses indicate that there is greater influence of linguistic human right-based ideology along with globalization and neoliberalism in democratic period. Therefore, the study is beneficial for policy makers, implementors and researchers to enlighten how ideological visions influence language in education policy formation process of a country. Finally, this study provides some insightful thoughts to conduct further research studies in this domain to develop broader comprehensive overviews.

Keywords: *Recontextualization, language in education policy, linguistic human rights, monolingualism, multilingualism*

Introduction

“Anyone who thinks we are close to final answers, or that we know how to find them, must surely be mistaken” (Chafe, 1994, p. x).

The above-mentioned statement by Wallace Chafe illuminates that language policy discourses of a nation are not stable. Such discourses diachronically go under the process of transformation, what Bernstein (2003) calls recontextualization, to improve the existing weaknesses of the policy discourses. In this context, this study employs Bernstein's (2003)

notion of recontextualization as the key theoretical input to explore how production and reproduction of language policy discourses take place. Bernstein argues that when a discourse is introduced and positioned as primary context, it is called contextualization. Then academic practitioners critically reproduce the secondary text within same discipline of knowledge. This process of transforming the discourse from primary context to secondary one is called recontextualization (relocation) of discourse. And some scholars transfer such discourse intertextually to use it in interdisciplinary context which is called decontextualization. These three theoretical notions, mainly recontextualization, are employed in this study to argue how language policy discourses are diachronically produced and reproduced in a nation-state to deliver relevant education. On the other hand, Ricento (2000) argues that macro sociopolitical factors like state formation, migration and globalization of capital and communication; epistemological factors such as structuralism, modernism, postmodernism and neoliberalism; and strategic factors like explicit or implicit reasons of implementing certain language policy based on socio-economic, political, cost or benefit factors, are three major influencing factors of developing language in education policy.

However, some people counterclaim that globalization is the most influential ideological factor of language policy contextualization and recontextualization process. For example, Savski (2020) argues that some governments have been following a worldwide trend of forming their new language policy in education to revise the existing one. For example, "Malaysian and Thai governments announced that they would begin the common European Framework of Reference for Language (CEFR) in the development and implementation of future language policies" (Savski, 2020, p. 2) as the framework has become increasingly popular worldwide. In addition to such globally popular frameworks of education, global popularity of a language also forces the nation to recontextualize its language policy in order to globalize its education and human resource (Mufwene, 2010). However, I would like to counter argue that globalization is not only a single ideological factor of influencing the formation of language policy of a nation. Therefore, this study discusses Gramsci's (1992) hegemonic influence of political power as discussed by Upadhyaya (2011), globalization as global inclusive access of economic market discussed by Ricento (2010) and Fairclough (2006), neoliberalism as free individual market policy discussed by Barnawi (2018) and Bernstein et al. (2015), and linguistic human rights discussed by Skutnabb-Kangas (2006) to analyze how ideological constructs influence the recontextualization process of language in education policy discourses.

In Nepalese context, language policy propounded by traditionally dominating groups sounds liberal but the hegemonic socio-political influence discriminates linguistically marginalized people. For example, Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) 1956 claims that "if the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language, then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result" (p. 97). This means, policy making authorities apparently prescribe Nepali monolingual education policy to promote national integration, but their hidden interest seems to dominate/sideline minority languages. Subsequently, National Education System Plan (NESP) 1971 also continues

'one nation – one language' education policy that has been previously introduced by NNEPC 1956. After the reestablishment of democracy in 1990, the government has started mother tongue-based multilingual education policy which has further been recontextualized in trilingual (mother tongue, Nepali and English) policy by National Curriculum Framework 2007. Therefore, it is necessary to study how and why such recontextualizations occur in Nepalese language policy discourses to deliver formal education. Considering the above-mentioned references, this study theoretically analyzes how hegemonic political power, linguistic human rights, neoliberalism and globalization-based ideologies influence to recontextualize Nepalese language in education policy discourses in order to address contemporary educational issues of the nation.

Although the policy propounded by traditionally dominating groups sounds liberal, hegemonic socio-political influence discriminates linguistically marginalized people in Nepalese language in education policy making process. This influence, both conventionally and neoliberally, still surfaces in the current recontextualized language policy discourses. On the other hand, apparently, language policies sound relevant for all people at the time of formation but, in reality, there exists hidden agendas that cater to the interest of the policy makers.

Literature Review

Theoretical Framework

To develop the theoretical insights for this study, I have reviewed the following theoretical constructs:

Recontextualization

This study employs Bernstein's (2003) notion of recontextualization as the key theoretical lens to analyze the transformational trend of Nepalese language policy discourses. He employs three terminologies such as contextualization, recontextualization and decontextualization to conceptualize the production and reproduction of discourses. First, when a discourse is introduced and positioned as primary context, it is called contextualization. Then academic practitioners critically reproduce the secondary text within same discipline which is called recontextualization of discourse. According to Bernstein (2003), "recontextualization involves creating, maintaining, changing, and legitimizing discourse, transformation, and organizational practices which regulate the internal ordering of pedagogic discourse" (p. 167). It involves what and how type of activities of transforming the primary text into secondary one. Third, some scholars transfer such discourse intertextually to use it in interdisciplinary context which is called decontextualization.

Hegemonic Political Power

Upadhyaya (2011) vividly deals with Gramsci's (1992) theoretical notion of hegemony and its relation with political power. According to Upadhyaya, Gramsci argues that powerful elites try to explore consent of minority people to impose their hegemony rather than employing Marxian hegemony of coercive power to maintain social space. Similarly, Schmidt (2006)

argues that political power affects language policy to address two issues such as identity politics and social equality. To address the issue of identity and social equality, the political authorities decide to implement either monolingual or multilingual policy interpreting people's emotional sensitivity and stake of political conflict over language policy.

Globalization

Scheuerman's (2008) presents globalization as one of the most fashionable buzzwords of contemporary political and academic debate. Particularly, globalization refers to the pursuit of free market policies in the world economy, growing dominance of western (American) forms of political, economic and cultural life, the proliferation of new information technologies and formation of unified community to foster global integration (as cited in Ricento, 2010). On the other hand, Fairclough (2006) discusses Held et al.'s (1999) three approaches of globalization such as hyper-globalization; emergence of a single global market, skeptical globalization; regionalization in 20th century economy which is less integrated globally, and transformational globalization; complex, multidimensional and unpredictable notion of globalization. This means globalization refers to worldwide, inclusive and comprehensive practice of human ideologies to improve the living standard of global citizens with the enhancement of global access of economic free market and information and technology.

Neoliberalism

Neoliberalism, according to Barnawi (2018), "refers to the philosophy of economic and social transformation taking place according to the logic of free market doctrines that dictate the way economies and societies function" (p. 1). This means neoliberalism is an ideology that emphasizes privatization, commodification and free market policy of human affairs. Similarly, Harvey (2005) defines neoliberalism as "a theory of political and economic practices that proposes that human well-being can best be advanced by liberating individual entrepreneurial freedoms and skills within an institutional framework characterized by strong private property rights, free markets and free trade" (as cited in Bernstein et al. 2015, p. 4). Therefore, neoliberalism is 20th century ideological thought concerning the freedom of free market economy in which every individual can develop excess to sell their ideologies or material things in wider territories. On the other hand, neoliberalism differs from liberalism where liberalism is a political ideology emerged in the age of enlightenment which promotes overall individual freedom and property ownership.

Linguistic Human Rights

According to Skutnabb-Kangas (2006), "the states should take appropriate measures so that, wherever possible, persons belonging to minorities have adequate opportunities to learn their mother tongue or to have instruction in their mother tongue" (p. 276). This means the nation needs to ensure fundamental educational rights of minority people following United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992) to promote their languages regardless how few users those languages have. In addition, linguistic human rights should be ensured to prevent linguistic genocide, to promote national integration, to promote positive and liberal state policies, to promote social cooperation and to prevent social conflicts.

Empirical Framework

Several research studies have been conducted in the field of Nepalese language policy and planning, out of which two relevant studies are reviewed here in order to develop empirical insights for the research. First, Giri (2011) argues that the ruling elites historically play invisible politics over minority indigenous languages imposing "one nation – one language policy." He finds that the socio-political and linguistic context of the current language policy implicitly gives the ruling elites a space to adopt monolingual education policy regardless multilingual policy provision in Nepal. This practice does more harm than good as the policy leads the extinction of a number of minority languages. So, this study helps the present study to analyze how political ideology influence language policy. The second research study conducted by Weinberg (2013) deals with the detail history of Nepalese language in education policy, particularly language policy for medium of instruction. The researcher discusses that before the establishment of democracy in 1950 there was not specific language policy for the medium instruction. After the establishment of democracy in 1950, Nepal National Educational Planning Commission 1956 and National Education System Plan 1971 explicitly promote linguistic homogenization raising the slogan "*ek bhasa, ek bhash, ek dharma, ek desh*" (one language, one way of dress, one religion, one nation) (Weinberg, 2013, p. 64) to promote national integration. Finally, after the reestablishment of democracy in 1990 onward, Nepalese language in education policy has shifted from monolingual to mother tongue based multilingual education giving recognition of marginalized minority languages of various ethnic groups. Although this study is not directly related to the present study, it provides a lot of empirical data to analyze the recontextualization process of language policy discourses.

The above-mentioned theoretical and empirical insights are relevant in this study to analyze Nepalese language in education policy recontextualization process. However, most of the the empirical studies regarding language policy discourses explore empirical data of language policy change periodically due to certain socio-political changes in the country. Those studies could not explicitly deal with the determining or influencing factors of reforming the language policies. Therefore, in what follows, I analyze the policy discourses to show how hegemonic political power, globalization, neoliberalism and linguistic human right-based ideologies influence recontextualization of the language in education policy discourses in Nepalese context.

Textual Analysis/Discussion of Language in Education Policy Discourses

Textual analysis section of this study involves interpretation of constitutional and educational language policy discourses since the establishment of democracy in Nepal, 1950 onwards, to explore how language in education policies have been recontextualized due to the influence of hegemonic political power, globalization, neoliberalism and linguistic human rights.

First, Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) 1956, widely known as Wood Commission, develops first formal education policy of Nepalese education entitled 'Education in Nepal'. The report prescribes Nepali monolingual education policy with explicit ignorance of other minority languages apparently aiming to promote national unity. For example, "if the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language, then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result" (NNEPC, 1956, p. 97). This imposition of monolingual education policy in multilingual Nepal is the influence of western (American) hegemonic political power because the commission was advised by Dr. Hugh B. Wood, an American Fulbright scholar. Awasthi (2011) and Giri (2011) claim that "it appears that the NNEPC followed Wood's personal views. This has led to a characterization of the report as parroting American or Western views of acceptable language use" (as cited in Weinberg, 2013). This means Nepali monolingual policy recommended by Dr. Wood is apparently implemented as the generalized form of English monolingual policy to promote national integration but the hidden interest looks like the imposition of western hegemony in Nepal through education.

Second, the next major educational policy of Nepalese education next to NNEPC is National Education System Plan 1971-76 which is introduced by contemporary *Panchayat* autocratic government. The report continues "one nation -one language" education policy proposed by NNEPC. NESP (1971) recommends that "Nepali will be the medium of instruction up to the secondary school and will in general be replaced by English in higher education" (p. 9). The monolingual policy of NNEPC has been continued by NESP in recontextualized form because the earlier monolingual policy is influenced by American hegemonic ideology, however, the latter one is influenced by Panchayat political hegemony to promote national integration. Therefore, the same monolingual policy is recontextualized by two different ideological thoughts.

After the reestablishment of democracy in 1990, the democratic Nepalese government declares recontextualized constitution of Nepal in 1990 giving recognition to all the languages spoken in Nepal as nation languages. The constitution proclaims that "all the languages spoken as the mother tongue in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal" (Article, 6.2). For the first time, the constitution secures linguistic and cultural rights of minority people as their fundamental rights of language and culture in article 18. For example,

1. Each community residing in the Kingdom of Nepal shall have the right to preserve and promote its language, script, and culture.
2. Each community shall have the right to operate schools up to the primary level in its own mother tongue for imparting education to its children.

This recontextualization of education policy from monolingual to mother tongue education is result of democratic political ideology to address the linguistic human rights of linguistically marginalized people.

The subsequent language policy discourses, which are mentioned in constitutional and educational documents, are influenced with globalization, neoliberalism and linguistic human right based ideologies along with influence of political power. For example, Interim Constitution of Nepal 2007 continues the fundamental rights of education and culture in article 17, sub-articles 1, 2 and 3. Following this constitutional provision, National Curriculum Framework 2007 mentions the following language policy of school education.

Mother tongue will be the medium of elementary education. The medium of school level education can be in Nepali or English language or both of them. However, in the first stage of elementary education (Grades 1-3), the medium of education will generally be in mother tongue. In the case of non-Nepali citizen, there will be a special provision of choosing any other language as a subject instead of Nepali. The medium of teaching of any language subject will be in the same language. (p. 34)

This language policy recontextualizes the earlier one proposing Nepali or English or both languages as the medium of instruction at school level. Similarly, the latest constitution of Nepal 2015 recommends mother tongue as medium of instruction up to secondary level. For example, "every Nepali community living in Nepal shall have the right to acquire education in its mother tongue up to the secondary level, and the right to open and run schools and educational institutions as provided by law (Constitution of Nepal, 2015, Article, 31.5). Finally, National Education Policy 2019 proposes the following multidimensional language policy to address federal political system of the nation and neoliberal effect of globalization:

1. Nepali language and learners' mother tongue will be the medium of instruction at basic level. Alternatively, English language can be used to teach mathematics and science subjects (Policy no. 10.8.1).
2. Local levels can teach local languages to preserve and promote those languages, their scripts, culture and literature (Policy no. 10.8.3).
3. English or Nepali or both languages will be used as the medium of instruction at secondary level (Policy no. 10.9.4).

The above-mentioned academic examples of Nepalese language in education policy show that the monolingual educational policy practiced before 1990 has been recontextualized as mother tongue based multilingual education policy due to the influence of Skutnabb-Kangas's (2006) theoretical notion of linguistic human rights because all constitutional and educational policy discourses, after 1990, prescribe mother tongue as the medium of instruction at elementary level of education to preserve and promote the marginalized languages. In addition, there is also greater influence of neoliberalism and globalization in the latest recontextualized language policy discourses. For example, National Curriculum Framework for School Education in Nepal 2007 aims to "prepare productive and skilled citizens competent to undertake local, national level jobs and also capable to international job market if it requires to" (p. 31). Moreover, most of the Nepalese parents intend to send their children in English medium schools thinking that "people who know English are more exposed, more knowledgeable and

therefore, more successful in life than those who don't. Without English, there is no academic or occupational future" (Giri, 2011, p. 113). Knowing such a strong craze of learning English, various governmental and private schools launch English medium education aiming to produce capable citizens for competitive free global market. Considering this fact, the latest educational policies emphasize English medium instruction recontextualizing Nepali monolingual and mother tongue based multilingual education policy into EMI alternative one. On the other hand, the continuation of mother tongue education after 1990 is guided with political power to address linguistic human rights of marginalized people.

Conclusion

In conclusion, the provision of language in education policy has been recontextualized as per the socio-political change in the long history of Nepalese formal education. Every new government established after specific political shift revises the medium of instruction policy to address the contemporary needs and aspirations of people and to make the education relevant. Various ideological notions play determining role to recontextualize the language policy. As mentioned above, hegemonic political power is a major factor of recontextualizing language policy since the beginning stage of formal education. Linguistic human right based ideology is another factor of transforming policy discourse which is more prevalent in democratic system. Currently, neoliberalism and globalization play more determining role in language policy development due to the influence of national and international free market economic policy. Finally, the government has several challenges to address people's needs and aspirations by means of education. Either it is better to follow the notion of linguistic human rights to promote minority people or to follow neoliberalism and globalization to produce capable citizens for competitive free global market. Therefore, to solve this issue, it is necessary to conduct an extensive empirical research study to suggest the government for the formation of an appropriate language policy to deliver contextual education.

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