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Provincial Languages of Nepal and Their Endangerment

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Abstract

Language is essential for the ability of communities to express their cultural knowledge, and the preservation of the one is paramount to the preservation and further development of the others. There are more than 7000 languages spoken worldwide, half of which are likely to disappear within this century. In the world, 500 languages are spoken by less than 100 people, and 96% of the languages of the world are spoken by only 4% of the world's population. Currently, out of the world's 7,168 living languages, 3,078 (43%) languages, including 114 out of 780 in India, 133 out of 320 in China, and 62 out of 124 in Nepal, are endangered (Jones, 2024). Other data say that 37 out of 131 languages in Nepal (Language Commission, BS 2078) and 23 out of 124 languages (National Statistics Office, BS 2078) are endangered. Almost all minority languages of Nepal and the world are in an endangered and critical state and have not become effective transmitters of culture. This paper explores the state of endangered languages and the process of their endangerment in the context of Nepal and at the provincial level. It uses primary and secondary data to describe the linguistic landscape of the country.

Keywords: Language, endangerment process, language preservation, Culture and cultural transmission

1. Introduction

Language is the means of communication that transmits ideas, culture, behaviors, and psychological aspects of human beings. It is a methodical means of communicating concepts or

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emotions using accepted signs, noises, gestures, or symbols with comprehensible meanings (Zadeh, 1975; Tseng, 2018). Globally, there are 7,168 living languages. Carmen Ang (2021) mentions in *Visual Capitalist* that India has 456 languages, China has 309, the USA has 328, Papua New Guinea has 840, Indonesia has 711, and Nepal has 124 (NSO, 2021). While examining the extinct languages in each of the mentioned countries, there are at least three languages from Nepal that are no longer spoken: Dura, Kusunda, and Waling. India has lost 13 languages, while China has lost one, and the United States has seen the extinction of 73 languages (Gyanwali, 2022). According to NSO (2021), the number of languages reported in Nepal's censuses rose from 31 in 1991 to 92 in 2001, then to 123 in 2011, and reached 124 in the 2021 Census. The 2021 census grouped 12 foreign languages as foreign languages and added 13 new languages. The added languages were Bhote, Lowa, Chum/Nubri, Baragung, NarPhu, Ranatharu, Karmarong, Mugali, Tichhurong Poike, Sadri, Done, Munda/Mudiyari, and Kewarat (NSO, 2021). In the 2021 census, the largest percentage of the population reported Nepali as their first language (44.9%), with Maithili coming next (11.0%), followed by Bhojpuri (6.2%) and Tharu (5.9%). Among these most common languages, the proportion of Awadhi speakers increased by 1.1% compared to 2011, while the proportion of Maithili speakers dropped by 0.7%, and the proportion of Tamang, Nepalbhasha (Newari), Magar Dhut, and Doteli speakers also dropped (NSO, 2021).

The main objective of this article is to explore the languages and their endangerment of language in the context of Nepal at the provincial level. The specific objective is to analyze the National and Provincial languages, the number of languages based on the NSO (2021) census, and the process of language endangerment at the provincial level of Nepal.

2. Methodology

This article analyzes the linguistic landscape of the seven provinces of Nepal, which is the study area of this article. Analytical and descriptive methods are applied by using the secondary data for this article. The data used in the study are quantitative and were collected from secondary sources like the Central Bureau of Statistics of Nepal, Ethnologue, Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University, UNESCO, and other organizations/individual research documents.

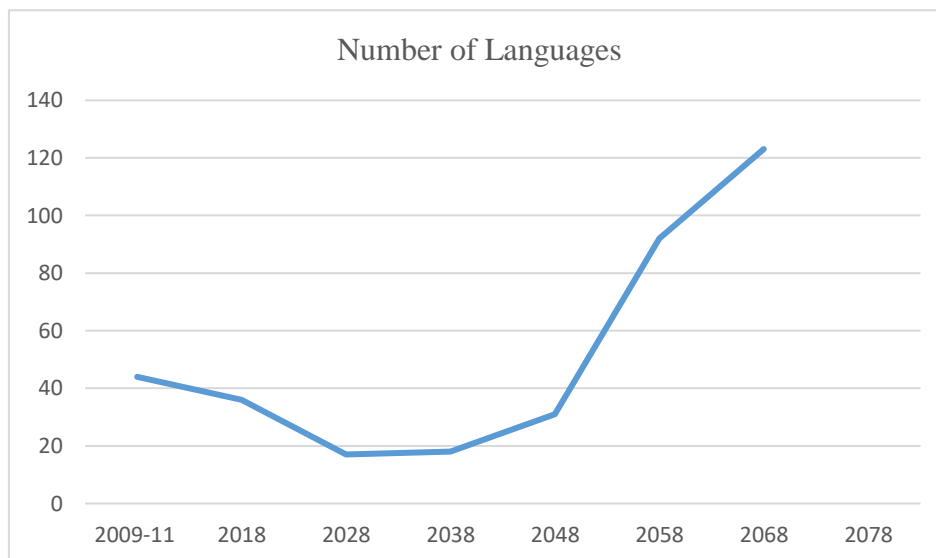
3. Results and Discussion

3.1 Languages of Nepal

According to the NSO (2021), there are 124 languages in the country. However, eight additional languages have been discovered in Nepal by the Language Commission. Rana Tharu, Nar Phu, Chum (Syar), Poike, Serake (Seke), Marek-Yakkha, and Nawa Sherpa are the seven additional languages that the Commission included (Nepali Meaning, 2021). Only seven out of the 131 languages are spoken by 70% of the population. The trends of speaking different languages in Nepal are given in the following chart.

Figure 1

Number of Languages



Nepali is the official language and is spoken as a mother tongue by 44.86 percent of the total population, followed by Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newari, Magar, Awadhi, Bantawa, Gurung, Limbu, and Bajjika. These languages comprise almost 90% of the population, with Nepali accounting for nearly 50% of the population. More than 80% of people in Nepal speak Nepali, which is also the mother tongue of nearly 45% of the country's population. It also serves as a lingua franca for the various linguistic groups of Nepal. It is interesting to note that over 90% of people in Nepal speak fewer than 10% of the country's total languages, and less than 10% population speaks more

than 90% of its languages (Language commission, 2021). The overall distribution of Nepali languages is given in the following table:

Table 1
Distribution of Nepali Languages

Mother Tongue	CBS (2001)	CBS (2011)	NSO (2021)
Nepali	48.61	44.6	44.86
Maithali	12.3	11.7	11.05
Bhojpuri	7.53	5.98	6.24
Tharu	5.86	5.77	5.88
Tamang	5.19	5.11	4.88
Newar	3.63	3.2	2.96
Magar	3.39	2.98	2.78
Awadhi	2.47	1.89	2.96
Bantawa	1.63	0.50	0.47
Gurung	1.49	1.22	1.12
Limbu	1.47	1.29	1.20
Bajjika	1.05	2.99	3.89

Source: CBS, 2001; 2011 & NSO, 2021

Nepali serves as the official language and is commonly understood across the country, particularly in the Terai/Madhesh region, where it is the predominant mother tongue. It can be debated academically that using a neutral language such as English does not align with the demands of the demonstrators and is impractical. The State cannot realistically implement a multilingual policy for all the various languages spoken in the nation. Nonetheless, the Constitution provides ample opportunity for multilingual states, and this is feasible in the Madhesh Province under the current constitutional framework (Karki, 2017).

3.2 Comparative Study of Seven Provinces

The vast array of languages spoken in Nepal is a testament to its rich cultural diversity. According to the Constitution of Nepal (2015), Nepal is a federal democratic republican state, as stated in Article 4 Sub-article 1. Nepal's new constitution (2015) divided the country into seven federal provinces. These provinces were created by combining Nepal's existing districts. Two districts, however, were split between two provinces (Gyawali, 2018). The federal model of Nepal is based on different federalist models practiced in the world. Major of them is: (i) geographically divided federations (like Switzerland, Canada, and Russia), (ii) corporate federation (like Nigeria), (iii) unequal/mixed federation (like Quebec in Canada, Kashmir in India), (iv) confluence federation (like Belgium) and (v) union federation (like USA, EU). Nepal's model of federalism has to respond

to the specificities and needs of the country and should not be influenced by foreign ideologies, however, because of the similarity of culture and experience, Nepal might find the example of India useful (UNDP, 2007, p. 11), and Nepal followed the same principle as previously mentioned. According to the Constitution (2015), Nepal is a multiethnic, multilingual, multireligious, and multicultural country with shared goals among its citizens from various geographic areas who are devoted to and bound together by a shared commitment to the country's independence, territorial integrity, national interest, and prosperity. Now, Nepal is divided into seven provinces, with a short description given below:

3.2.1 Koshi Province

It is linguistically and socio-culturally varied. The main castes and ethnic groups of this province include Muslims, Madhesis, Dalits, ethnic communities, and Khas Aryas. According to the NSO (2021), Kshetri and Brahmin make up 27 percent of its population, and ethnic communities, including Terai ethnic communities, make up the largest group in Koshi Province, comprising 50% of the total population (CBS, 2012). Of the various ethnic groups, the Rai and Limbu communities are predominant, with 10.20% and 7.81% of the population, respectively. Buddhism, Kirat, and Hinduism influence the province's predominant cultural customs. Major religious groups in the province include Hinduism, Kirat, and Buddhism (CBS, 2012). Among them, Kirat is largely practiced by hill indigenous groups such as Rai, Limbu, Sunuwar, and Yakkha (Dahal, 2003). The Kirat religion and culture include elements of animism, shamanism, and worship of nature and ancestors. They also practice a customary governance system, which is headed, for example, by hereditary Subba among Limbu, Rai among Rais, and Deonia among Dhimals (Nepali, Ghale & Hachhethu, 2018).

3.2.2 Madhesh Province

Madhesh Province is diverse in both caste and ethnicity. Ethnic groups of Madhesh constitute the largest ethnic group with 67.2% of the total population including Madhesi Dalits (15.4%). However, the Madhesi identity is not a homogenous category as it can be further differentiated along caste lines and religious practices (Dastider, 2013). Yadav caste has the highest population, i.e. 15.15%, and Muslim has 12.96% of all Madhesis in the province. Madhesi Dalits whose identity is distinct from other “high” caste Madhesi groups and therefore need to be addressed separately (Jha, 2017). Muslims, constituting a major religious minority group in Province Two, make up 11.6% of the total

population and their identification with the Madhesi category is somewhat ambivalent (Dastider, 2013). The dominant cultural practices in Madhesh Province are shaped by Hinduism and Islam. The practices of Hinduism in the Tarai are slightly different from the ways the religion is practiced in the hill regions (Bista, 1967; Nepali, Ghale & Hachhethu, 2018).

3.2.3 Bagmati Province

Bagmati Province belongs to the capital city and has been rapidly transforming due to migration from rural and urban areas from all over the country. Its socio-cultural and linguistic diversity is deepening because of its multiethnic characters. According to NSO (2021) Brahmins and Chhetri's constitute a majority with 35.25% of the total population in the province. Among the hilly ethnic communities, Tamang's have the largest share in the population with 19.88% followed by Newars with 15.57% of the population. The Sherpa, Chepong, Thami, Jirel, Hyolmo, Pahari, and other ethnic communities have become minorities in terms of the linguistic landscape in the province. Due to the cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity of Tamangs, Newars, and other ethnic communities, it is necessary to break down into sub-categories. The province's primary languages are Tamang, Newari, and Nepali. Tamang and Newari speakers are less than the number of Nepali speakers, and Nepali speakers are far larger than that of the other hill castes and ethnic groups. This shows that the province has a higher influence on the Nepali language (Nepali, Ghale & Hachhethu, 2018).

3.2.4 Gandaki Province

Brahmins, Chhetri, Magars, Gurungs, Dalits, and Newars are the main social groups that make up Gandaki Province. According to Nepali, Ghale & Hachhethu (2018), Brahmins and Chhetri are the majority cultural groups comprising 33.10% of the population. After that, Magars and Gurungs are 18.82% and 11.03% of the population, respectively. Other major ethnic communities include Tamang, Tharu, Thakali, Kumal, Gharti/Bhujel, Muslim, Sanyasi, Ghale, etc. Hill Dalits, like Bishwakarma, Mijar, and Pariyar, are one-fifth (20%) of the total population. As per the Census of 2021, the major languages spoken as the mother tongue in the province are Nepali, Magar, Gurung, and Bhojpur (CBS, 2021). Religions like Hinduism, Buddhism, Islam, and Christianity influenced the cultural customs of the province. Despite not being Hindu by birth, the province's two largest hill ethnic communities, Gurung and Magar, practice either Buddhism or Hinduism or occasionally both of the religions. Over half of the ethnic communities are either syncretic, Hindu, or they practice shamanic religions.

3.2.5 Lumbini Province

It is a socio-culturally diverse province comprising Brahmins, Chhetri, Magars, Tharus, Dalits, Madhesis, and Muslims. The largest population in the province is Magar, which has 14.56% of the total population. Tharu is the second largest ethnic group, with 14.29% of the total population in the province. Hilly ethnic communities, Terai ethnic communities, Hilly Dalits, and Madhesi Dalits are other groups that reside in the province. Muslims make a 7.12% of the total population. The province is also linguistically diverse, and Nepali, Magar, Tharu, etc., are the major languages spoken in the province. Cultural practices of the province are mostly formed by Hinduism and Islam. Hindus are about 90% of the total population in the province and are a common religion of people from both the hilly and Terai districts.

3.2.6 Karnali Province

It is relatively more homogeneous, with less social and ethnic diversity. As per the NSO (2021), Chhetris constitute 42.16% of the total population, making them the largest social group in the province. Among Hilly Dalits, Bishwakarma has the largest share, with 16.22% of the population. After that, Thakuris and Magars are the major cultural groups, which comprise 10.49% and 10.42% of the population of the province, respectively. Other ethnic groups like Bhote, Dolpo, Byasi/Sauka, Kumal, and Mugal/Mugum, etc., are also the inhabitants in the province. Nepali is the dominant language because the Sinja Valley of Jumla, located in the province, is recognized as the place of origin of the Nepali language (Sharma, 1983). Buddhism and Hinduism are the two main religions that have influenced the cultural traditions of the province. Hindus have 95% of the share in the total population of the province, and they worship Masto, an animistic religion (Mishra, 2011), which is a unique cultural and religious feature in Hinduism.

3.2.7 Sudurpashchim Province

It is socio-culturally diverse and the most distant province from Kathmandu, the capital city of Nepal. Chhetris are the largest ethnic group in the province, with 41.74% population, followed by Tharus with 14.76% of the population (NSO, 2021). Hilly Dalits and other ethnic communities and Terai ethnic groups are other minority groups in the province. Major languages spoken as mother tongues in the province include Nepali, Doteli, Tharu, Baitadeli, Achhami, and Bajhangli. However,

Doteli, Baitadeli, Achhami, and Bajhanghi are recognized as dialects of the Nepali language. Hindu, Buddhist, and Muslim are the major religious groups in the province.

3.3 Provincial Languages of Nepal

Articles 6 and 7 of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, list the language-related provisions. While Article 7 (1) designates Nepali as the country's official language, Article 6 states that "all languages spoken as the mother tongues in Nepal are the languages of the nation." However, by declaring that "A State may, by a state law, determine one or more than one languages of the nation spoken by a majority of people within the State as its official language(s), in addition to Nepali language," Article 7(2) allows for a multilingual policy. Article 32 of the Constitution states that (1) all individuals and communities have the right to use their native tongues; (2) all individuals and communities have the right to engage in their communities' cultural activities; and (3) all Nepalese communities living in Nepal have the right to protect and promote their language, script, culture, cultural civilization, and legacy (Constitution of Nepal, 2015). Article 7 (3) allows for other issues related to language to be decided by the Government of Nepal on the recommendation of the Language Commission, which shall, as per Article 287, be constituted with a representation of the states within one year of the commencement of the Constitution (Karki 2017).

Based on the recommendations made by the Language Commission of Nepal in 2021 regarding the official language, under the provisions of Article 7 (3) of the Constitution of Nepal, 2015 and Section 3 (b) of the Language Commission Act, 2017, and Point 11.4.5 of the Recommendations on Language of Official Work, 2021, the government decided the official languages of the provinces. These languages are also based on the review of the data of the National Census 2021 and the recommendations made in the past. A minimum of 2 languages in addition to Nepali language or languages spoken by 6 percent or more were recommended as the official languages (Nepal Language Commission, 2080 BS). Based on the constitutional provisions, the Language Commission recommended the following languages as the official languages of the provinces:

Table 2*Official Languages of the Provinces of Nepal*

Provinces	Nepali language (In Percentage)	Official Language (In Percentage)
Koshi	43.07	Maithili - 11.19 and Limbu - 7.31
Madhes	6.67	Maithili- 45.30, Bhojpuri - 18.58, and Bajjika – 14.65
Bagmati	57.42	Tamang- 18.32 and Newar - 12.30
Gandaki	67.88	Magar - 9.03, Gurung - 7.85, and Bhojpuri - 7.07
Lumbini	54.70	Tharu - 13.15 and Awadhi - 11.52
Sudurpashchim	30.18	Dotyali - 30.45 and Tharu - 17.01
Karnali	95.14	Khas (Nepali) and Magar - 2.26

Source: NSO, 2021; Yadav, 2022.

3.4 Endangered Languages

When fewer and fewer people recognize a language as their mother tongue and consequently stop using it or passing it on to their offsprings, "... when its speakers cease to use it, use it in an increasingly reduced number of communicative domains, and cease to pass it on from one generation to the next," according to the definition provided by UNESCO's Ad Hoc Expert Group on Endangered Languages (2003), it may be considered endangered. In other words, neither adults nor children are new speakers. According to their level of endangerment, UNESCO has classified languages as vulnerable, definitely endangered, severely endangered, and critically endangered. The number of users who identify with a given language and the quantity and type of applications or functions for which the language is used are the two aspects that characterize the endangerment of a language (Eberhard, Gary, and Charles (eds.), 2024). They further mention that 3,045 languages out of 7164 are endangered as of 2022 in the world. It is 42.5% of all living languages. In the context of Nepal, 37 languages have less than 1,000 native speakers and hence are on the brink of extinction, and out of those 37 languages, 23 are on the verge of extinction (Language Commission, 2022). Similarly, according to Prof. Yadav (2019), 96 percent of the total population of Nepal speaks 19 major languages, while just 4 percent of the population speaks 104 languages, and most of the languages spoken in Nepal are endangered. In Nepal, 62 languages are in endangered states.

Table 3*Language Distribution of the Provinces*

Provinces	Linguistic Populations					
	100000+	10000 100000	– 1000 10000	– Less 1000	than	Total
Nepal	21	36	44	23		124
Koshi	9	26	26	46		107
Madhes Pradesh	8	3	8	41		60
Bagmati	4	14	28	61		107
Gandaki	3	4	23	42		72
Lumbini	5	5	7	49		66
Sudurpashchim	5	6	13	48		72
Karnali	2	2	11	33		48

Source: NSO, 2021.

The languages with more than 1% percent of speakers at the Provincial level are given in the following table:

Table 4*More than 1 percent Languages of the Provinces*

Koshi	Madhes Pradesh	Bagmati	Gandaki	Lumbini	Karnali	Sudur Pachhim
45.27 (Nepali)	5.76 (Nepali)	56.04 (Nepali)	73.39 (Nepali)	50.85 (Nepali)	88.85 (Nepali)	42.44 (Nepali)
11.68 (Maithali),	41.73 (Maithali)	1.25 (Maithali)	9.60 (Magar)	16.70 (Awadhi)	6.34 (Khas)	18.07 (Doteli)
6.70 (Limbu),	18.81 (Bhojpuri)	1.44 (Bhojpuri)	8.44 (Santhali)	10.97 (Bhojpuri)		5.62 (Baitedeli)
1.67 (Chamling),	18.44 (Bajjika)	1.10 (Gurung)				5.14 (Achhami)
2.70 (Bantawa)	4.17 (Tharu)	1.56 (Tharu)	1.74 (Tharu)	13.59 (Tharu)		17.68 (Tharu)
1.32 (Sherpa),	1.65 (Tamang)	17.99 (Tamang)	1.36 (Tamang)			3.69 (Bajhang)
2.32 (Urdu)	3.52 (Magali)	11.82 (Newari)	1.53 (Newari)			2.09 (Bajureli)
4.40 (Tharu)	4.08 (Urdu)	2.40 (Magar)		4.96 (Magar)	1.60 (Magar)	1.69 (Darchuleli)
3.54 (Tamang)						
1.26 (Newari),						
2.58 (Rajwamshi)						
2.88 (Magar) 1.08						
(Santhali),						
1.85 (Rai)						

Source: NSO, 2021.

Mainly, there are three criteria of language endangerment: (1) How many speakers are still alive today? (2) The average age of fluent or native speakers. (3) The proportion of the younger generation becoming fluent in the language. Less than one thousand linguistic populations belong to the most Patan Gyansagar, 7(1), 1-15

endangered languages. The following table presents the provincial languages of less than one thousand population.

Table 5

Provincial Languages Less than One Percent

Provinces	Languages less than one percent (minority language)	Less than 1000
Koshi Province	Kulung, Angika, Oraon/Kudukh, Gurung, Ganagai, Thulung, Bhojpuri, Sampang, Tajpuriya Dhimal, Bangla, Hindi, Khaling, Magahi ,Yakkha ,Sunuwar, Bahing/Bayung Wambule Majhi Yamphu/Yamphe, Marwadi , Nachhiring, Danuwar, Musalman , Dumi, Mewahang, Bhujel, Puma, Athpahariya, Dungmali, Bhote, Sanskrit, Meche ,Koyee, Lohorung, Kewarat, Jero/Jerung , Chhintang, Lapcha, Munda/Mudiyari, Tilung, Chhiling, Ghale, Sadri, Thami, Done, Kumal, Kisan, Avadhi, Hyolmo/Yholmo, Lungkhim, Khash, Sign Language, Mugali, Bajjika, Kurmali, Baitadeli ,Bote, Waling/Walung, Phangduwali, Koche, Doteli, Sindhi, Tibetan, Magar Kham, Manange, Malpande, English, Belhare, Lhomi, Khariya, Sam, Sadhani, Hariyanwi, Hayu/Vayu, Magar Kaike, Dura, Darai, Darchuleli, Punjabi, Raji, Jumli, Byansi, Chhantyal , Kagate , Achhami , Jirel, Surel, Chepang, Bajhang, Lhopa, Thakali, Dhuleli.	38
Madhes Province	Magar Dhut, Hindi, Nepalbhasha (Newari), Danuwar, Oraon/Kudukh, Majhi, Rai, Musalman, Marwadi, Gurung, Avadhi, Bangla, Sunuwar, Bhujel, Sanskrit, Khash, Chamling, Dumi, Thami, Magar, Kham, Ghale, Wambule, Yakthung/Limbu, Chepang, Bote, Pahari, Doteli, Hayu/Vayu, Punjabi, Rajbanshi, Bantawa, Sign Language, Jirel, Thulung, Kumal, Bahing/Bayung, English, Jero/Jerung, Santhali, Tilung, Sindhi, Sherpa, Bajhang, Dhimal, Dailekhi, Sampang, Koche, Tibetan, Darai, Angika, Achhami, Khaling	44
Bagmati Province	Chepang, Sherpa, Rai, Danuwar, Hindi, Thami, Sunuwar, Yakthung/Limbu, Majhi, Ghale, Hyolmo/Yholmo, Darai, Doteli, Marwadi, Chamling, Pahari, Kumal, Jirel, Bajjika, Bangla, Urdu, Bantawa, Tibetan, Sanskrit, Bote, Bhujel, Avadhi, Done, Thulung, Wambule, Khash, Bhote, Thakali, Magar Kham, Kulung, Khaling, Bahing/Bayung, Rajbanshi, Manange, Sampang, Hayu/Vayu, English, Musalman, Dumi, Nachhiring, Yakkha, Chhantyal, Dura, Dhimal, Kagate, Baitadeli, Sign Language, Magahi, Punjabi, Lhomi, Mugali, Yamphu/Yamphe, Balkura/Baram, Chum/Nubri, Achhami, Jero/Jerung, Bajhang, Lohorung, Waling/Walung, Mewahang, Chhiling, Tilung, Puma, Tajpuriya, Oraon/Kudukh, Surel, Santhali, Karmarong, Koyee, Athpahariya, Dungmali, Lapcha, Byansi, Dolpali, Bankariya, Lhopa, Magar Kaike, Ganagai, Sindhi, Koche, Raji, Ranatharu, Bajureli, Meche, Angika, Darchuleli, Chhintang, Nar-Phu, Jumli, Hariyanwi, Sonaha, Kurmali, Dhuleli, and Kewarat	71
Gandaki Province	Bhojpuri, Magar Kham, Ghale, Kumal, Hindi, Darai, Chum/Nubri, Maithili, Chepang, Chhantyal, Sanskrit, Rai, Bhujel, Bote, Khash, Thakali, Lhopa, Musalman, Baragunwa, Dura, Balkura/Baram , Majhi, Urdu,	42

	Tibetan Manange, Avadhi, Bajjika, Bangla, Yakthung/Limbu, Lowa, Hyolmo/Yholmo, Sherpa, Nar-Phu, Sign Language, Rajbanshi, Doteli, Sunuwar, Bhote, Bantawa, English, Chamling, Baitadeli, Marwadi, Dolpali, Wambule, Kulung, Thulung, Jirel, Dumi, Thami, Bahing/Bayung, Punjabi, Pahari, Lohorung, Sampang, Magahi, Puma, Danuwar, Hayu/Vayu, Chhiling, Yakkha, Dhimal, Chhintang, Khaling, Lapcha, and Koyee	
Lumbini Province	Urdu, Hindi, Nepalbhasha (Newari) , Gurung, Kumal , Maithili , Tamang , Khash , Sanskrit , Achhami , Musalman , Sonaha , Bangla , Marwadi , Raji , Bote , Dailekhi , Chhantyal , Majhi , Rajbanshi , Doteli , Rai , Thakali , Jumli , Sign Language , Punjabi , Kagate , Yakthung/Limbu , Bajjika , Sherpa , Darai , Baitadeli , Mugali , Hayu/Vayu , English , Bhujel , Chepang , Ghale , Sampang , Sunuwar , Bantawa , Santhali , Chamling , Sadhani , Bajhang , Magar Kaike , Bajureli , Dumi , Thami , Tibetan , Dhimal , Wambule , Hariyanwi , Pahari , Sindhi , Dhuleli , Kusunda ,Thulung ,Bankariya , and Magahi.	49
Sudurpashchim Province	Dadeldhuri ,Magar Dhut ,Magar Kham ,Tamang ,Hindi ,Maithili Dailekhi , Avadhi ,Jumli , Khash , Raji , Nepalbhasha (Newari) , Gurung , Bhojpur , Byansi , Bhote , Dhuleli , Sanskrit , Rai , Musalman , Khamchi(Raute), Urdu , Kumal , Pahari , Sonaha , Sign Language, Punjabi, MagarKaike , Bangla , Yakthung/Limbu ,Tibetan , Majhi , Rajbanshi , Mugali , Oraon/Kudukh , Chhiling , Bote, Marwadi, English, Sherpa, Lhopa, Sunuwar, Waling/Walung, Bajjika, Dura, Koche, Bhujel, Chamling, Thakali, Mewahang, Belhare, Thami, Bantawa, Dumi, Ghale, Ganagai, Lohorung, Sampang, Dungmali, Nachhiring, Magahi, Meche, and Danuwar	48
Karnali Province	Tharu, Bhote, Jumli, Dolpali, Karmarong, Mugali, Gurung, Tamang, Hindi, Achhami, Bote, Raji, Magar Kaike, Doteli, Maithili, Nepalbhasha (Newari), Bhojpur, Avadhi, Sherpa, Tichhurong, Poike, Byansi, Dailekhi, Khamchi (Raute), Urdu, Baitadeli, Sanskrit, Rai, Ghale, Chhiling, Chhantyal, Yakthung/Limbu, Sign Language, Tibetan, Musalman, Majhi, Thakali, Bajureli, Bajjika, English, Kumal, Marwadi, Rajbanshi, Bajhang, and Sunuwar.	33

Source: NSO, 2021.

According to the National Statistics Office (2021), among the 124 languages of Nepal, there are 21 languages with more than 100,000 speakers, 36 with more than 10,000 speakers, 44 with more than 1,000 speakers, and 23 with less than 1,000 speakers. Some have classified languages with less than 1,000 speakers as extinct languages. Based on this, 23 languages fall into this category in the context of Nepal. They are Mewahang, Kaike, Raute, Kisan, Baramu, Tilung, Jerung, Dungmali, Linkhim, Kushunda, Koche, Sam, Kagate, Chhintang, Lhomi, Banakariya, Surel, Kushwadiya, Sigar,

Thudam, and Dura. However, according to the Language Commission (2008), 23 languages that are spoken in Nepal by less than 1,000 native speakers are in danger of becoming extinct.

4. Conclusion

Nepal is a multi-cultural and multi-lingual state having 142 ethnic groups and 124 languages (NSO, 2021). Although Nepali is the official language, it is also a contested issue in the context of ethnic groups and their spoken languages in Nepal. Out of these 124 languages, Nepali, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Tharu, Tamang, Newari, Magar, Awadhi, Bantawa, Gurung, and Limbu are the major languages. There is more diversity in ethnic groups and languages at the national and provincial levels. According to some thinkers, people who do not speak Nepali as their first language continue to be at a significant comparative disadvantage in a variety of facets of national life (Shakya, 2017). But, the constitution of Nepal (2015) has guaranteed the right to speak the mother tongue as a fundamental right of the people. Due to the unjust policies of the government and the domination of major languages, most of the ethnic languages are in an endangered state at the provincial level. At the provincial level, 23 languages in Koshi, 41 in Madhes, 61 in Bagmati, 42 in Gandaki, 49 in Lumbini, 48 in Sudurpaschhim, and 33 in Karnali province are endangered. According to NSO (2021), there are only 23 languages that have fewer than 1000 speakers and are the endangered. However, this number does not represent the actual number of endangered languages of Nepal. However, the Constitution of Nepal, 2015, has proposed a multi-language policy at least at the provincial level, and the Languages Commission has already decided on two or three languages at the provincial level for official purposes. Hence, the Government, the Language Commission, Academicians, and civil society should function as watchdogs to implement the constitutional rights and policies/programs of the Language Commission as well as the federal and provincial governments.

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