

Introduction

Language, Education and the Nepali Nation

*Jigu dei jita: ya:, jigu bhay jita: ya:
Jigu mama bhasba, tasakan jita: ya:
Jipi he thwo dey ya, tisa kha: chha maya
Jimita tiya chha, chaka: sa nhalabyu.
Pahad, Parvat, Himal, Tarai.
Guli na du jaati, bhasa phukka ya:
Jugu dei jita: ya:, jigu bhay jita: ya:
Jigu mama bhasba, tasakan jita: ya*

I love my country, I love my language
My mother tongue, I love it very much
We are the jewels of this country, o' mother
Adorned by us, smile at us once
Hills, Mountains, Plains
We love all ethnic groups and all languages
I love my country, I love my language
My mother tongue, I love it very much

Every morning, students in Jagat Sundar Bwonekuthi (JSB) School gathered in the main hall to sing their school song. Students, lined up neatly in their class rows, sang this song in Nepal Bhasa,¹ one of the 123 minority

¹ Nepal Bhasa is the language spoken by Newars, one of the ethnic groups in Nepal. Although 'Nepal Bhasa' literally means language of Nepal, it is different from

languages in Nepal. The song portrays an image of Nepal with diverse terrain – hills, mountains and Tarai – where different groups speaking different languages are the ‘jewels’ that adorn the country. This discursive move to invoke the love for one’s country, while declaring the love for one’s mother tongue (*matri bhasa*), was one of the important ways in which JSB sought to institutionalise their mother tongue as the language of education. In this context, the school song simultaneously positioned ethnolinguistic identity as national identity, the one that does not hinder but bolsters the notion of Nepali nationhood. A few months later, I continued my fieldwork in another school that used Dangaura Tharu² as the medium of instruction: Jana Kalyan Higher Secondary School (JKHSS) in Kapilvastu. In the very first meeting at JKHSS, the teachers discussed extensively on the new multilingual textbook that they had been using in primary level, that is, Grades I–III. Showing me the textbook with Dangaura Tharu and Nepali language scripts simultaneously printed on every page (more discussion on this in Chapter 4), JKHSS teachers explained, ‘Each language has its role.’ I was often told during our conversations, ‘Mother tongue cannot replace Nepali because Nepali is the contact language. Nepali cannot replace English because it is an international language. Similarly, Nepali and English can never take the place of the mother tongue because it is the language close to our hearts.’ The salience of this discourse was their simultaneous membership to multiple groups, claims over public spaces and in the spaces of national belonging, hitherto associated with Nepali language.

In this book, I examine everyday language practices and discourses around language use inside schools that use mother tongue to understand the

‘Nepali’, which is the official language of Nepal. Nepal Bhasa is also commonly known as Newari. However, many ethnic organisations have strongly opposed the use of the term ‘Newari’. The census of Nepal now uses ‘Nepal Bhasa’ to denote the language spoken by Newars. In this book, I have used Nepal Bhasa to reflect the term chosen self-consciously by Newar ethnic activists and used by the Nepali state as census category.

² Dangaura Tharu is a variant of Tharu language spoken at JKHSS, Kapilvastu. Scholars have noted that Tharu language is a contested category. According to Sonntag (1995: 115), ‘Tharus are an ethnic group in search of a language.’ She notes that although Tharus have succeeded into coalescing pan-Tharu identity, they do not have a singular linguistic identity. Guneratne (1998) identifies at least nine different Tharu languages spoken across Nepal.

complex dynamics between education, national identity and ethnic identity in the changing sociopolitical context of Nepal. It is based on the fieldwork conducted in two schools in Nepal: JSB in Kathmandu and JKHSS in Kapilvastu between August 2013 and March 2014, and follow-up visits in 2016 and 2017. I started with JSB as it was well known for using the Nepal Bhasa as a medium of education and was also one of the oldest of such schools. This also gave me more time to finalise my second research site, JKHSS, which used Dangaura Tharu as a medium of instruction in Grades I–III. In both schools, JSB and JKHSS, I used participant observation and unstructured interviews as my main method of data collection. I participated in the school routine, attended classes, spent time in the school grounds during breaks, chatted with teachers in the teachers' room and also worked as a substitute teacher when needed. I also spent time with parents, when they came to drop their children in the morning and sometimes walked home with them when they came to pick their children up in the afternoon. During this time, I also conducted semi-structured interviews with the education bureaucrats in the Department of Education, the Ministry of Education (MoE), Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) and several non-governmental organizations (NGOs) working on the issue of mother tongue education.

Schools such as JSB and JKHSS belong to a small group of schools in Nepal that use minority languages of Nepal for education.³ The term 'minority', in this book, has been used to refer to social groups that are subordinate to the dominant group in political, financial or social power. In Nepal, the terms such as 'indigenous groups' and 'nationalities' have been used to recognise these groups. Much of the demands of these social groups have revolved around the issues of power relations rather than the numerical size of the groups, with the concerns on ethnolinguistic right coalescing around the question of mother tongue. The official space for mother tongue schools such as JSB and JKHSS opened up after the Constitution of Nepal, 1990, declared Nepal as a multi-ethnic (*bahu jatiya*) and multilingual (*bahu bhasik*) country, and the right to have primary education in mother tongue was declared as a 'fundamental right' (Gellner,

³ There is no reliable data on the exact number of schools that use minority language as their medium of instruction. According to the *2015 Consolidated Report*, 4,623 primary schools used local languages as 'transitional language to make better interpretation of the subject matters for those students who did not have Nepali language as their mother tongue' (MoE, 2016: 96). There are a total of 34,362 primary schools in Nepal. See also Appendix A2 for the list of schools using different minority languages.

2004: 7). The 1990 Constitution also officially recognised all languages spoken as mother tongues in Nepal as ‘languages of the nation’ (*rastrīya bhāsa*) and Nepali language – the lingua franca – as ‘national language’ (*rastra bhāsa*). In 2015, in the constitution, the term ‘languages of the nation’ was removed and all the languages spoken in Nepal, that is, Nepali and mother tongues, were recognised as the national language (Article 6, Constitution of Nepal, 2015). This official adoption of minority languages for education in Nepal is often portrayed as a radical departure from a historical context in which the use of languages other than the national language, Nepali, used to be considered communal and therefore against the law.

It is within such a contentious ethnolinguistic context that schools such as JSB and JKHSS started implementing multilingual education. Multilingual education in Nepal describes a model that involves starting education in the medium of the language that a student already speaks, that is, the mother tongue. Inside a classroom, this means learning school subjects like maths, science and social studies in the student’s first language (usually, the mother tongue – L1), then introducing a second (Nepali – L2) and a third (English – L3) language as ‘subjects’, and gradually transitioning to L2 and L3 as media of instruction, as needed. Multilingual education is based on the principle of ‘first-language-first’ in order to help children make a better start, and continue to perform better, than those for whom school starts with a language they do not understand (UNESCO, 2011). In the context of Nepal, mother tongue as the medium of instruction is introduced to enhance cognitive, communicative and academic proficiencies of students (Yonjan-Tamang, 2009). In addition, multilingual education also operationalises provisions in the Constitution of Nepal that recognise the multi-ethnic and multilingual nature of the country. The idea and practice of mother tongue education were thus played out in the backdrop of changing discourses of social inclusion and multi-ethnicity.

The introduction of a mother tongue in the formal and public spaces such as schools, while no doubt an educational initiative, is also inherently implicated in the contemporary political context. Despite the constitutional provision on mother tongue education, JSB and JKHSS constantly faced the ever-looming suspicion of ethnic particularism putatively promoted by their emphasis on an ethnolinguistic identity. The suspicion manifested in instrumental terms, through the questions raised on the value of mother tongue education in contemporary times, and in symbolic terms, through the questions raised on its implications on building a sense of national community. Given that the issue of language has historically remained an integral part of nation- and

state-building in Nepal, the circumstances that JSB and JKHSS found themselves in were not surprising. As I will discuss in Chapter 2, Nepal had embarked on an exclusive state-building project between 1951 and 1990, popularly known as the ‘Panchayat’ period. This ‘uniquely Nepali’ system placed importance on homogeneous national identity and monolingual ideology where Nepali language was positioned as a potent symbol of Nepali nationalism (Gaige, 1975; Onta, 1996b).⁴ This ‘state-centric’ vision was represented by the slogan ‘Ek raja, ek desh, ek bhasa, ek bhesh’ (one king, one country, one language, one dress). While the state in Nepal celebrated the country’s social diversity, the ethnolinguistic heterogeneity of its population was not officially recognised in official policies until the 1990s. Such official apathy made the issue of ethnolinguistic identities highly contentious (Lawoti, 2007).

I conducted this research when, in academic and political terms, Nepal was undergoing momentous changes in political, social and cultural arenas that brought this ‘state-centric’ and assimilationist notions of Nepali identity under a tight scrutiny (Burghart, 1984; Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton, 1997; Awasthi, 2004; Hutt, 2012; Malagodi, 2013). There was much discussion on the contested idea of Nepal (Gellner, 2016; Jha, 2017; Lal, 2012) as many scholars and ethnic activists proposed ‘people-centric’⁵ visions of more plural, inclusive and diverse notions of Nepaliness (Lawoti and Hangen, 2013). These new ideas challenged the hegemony of Nepali language and its apparent association with Nepali national identity (Gellner, Pfaff-Czarnecka and Whelpton, 1997; Onta, 2006). This vision, articulated mainly in the identity-based social mobilisations, drew our attention to the competing voices in the nation’s imagination and its ambivalent foundations. However, because no single group enjoys an absolute majority and different social groups are interspersed throughout the country, attempts to undermine an overarching Nepali identity have been considered unfeasible by politicians and scholars alike. This book considers the implications of such processes, especially in a ‘country of minorities’ such as Nepal.

⁴ Even when the constitution has been amended to include all the languages spoken in the country as national languages, the state regularly rejects the use of local languages in state institutions.

⁵ Scholars have noted that the post-1990 phase was elite-driven and led by activists (Gellner and Karki, 2010; Gellner, 2019). While the notion ‘people-centric’ may not capture the spectrum of political struggles that characterised the post-1990 period, it nonetheless helps to foreground its focus on the heterogeneity and diversity of Nepali people as the fundamental basis of Nepali politics.

While these approaches do enable a more bottom-up perspective on nationalism and ethnicity, they reiterate the binary framework espoused in long-standing theories of nationalism such as civic versus ethnic nationalism (Kohn, 1944) and state-framed versus counter-state nationalism (Brubaker, 1999). Differences notwithstanding, both state-centric and people-centric visions continue to remain normative in its approach and are often posited in opposition to each other. Despite the recent move towards analysing these notions as ‘category of practice’ (Brubaker, 2004), we often overlook the realities of everyday lives where different identities are entangled with each other. While a neat distinction between ethnicity and nationalism undoubtedly helps to focus on the way the Nepali state has approached the issue of language, it also obfuscates complex negotiations that take in everyday practice. Moving beyond the a priori notion on ethnicity and nationalism, scholars have urged to pay attention to more mundane forms of nationalism and approach categorical identities not as a matter of ethno-cultural facts but forged in public narrative (Somers, 1994); asserted as a political claim (Brubaker, 2004); shaped through imagination (Anderson, 1991); and instituted in national narratives, symbols and traditions (Hobsbawn and Ranger, 1983). Foregrounding a more ethnographic approach, scholars have argued that it is more fruitful to use the categories such as nation and ethnicity as a ‘tool of analysis’ rather than an ‘object of analysis’.

In JSB, the students repeated their school song, again and again, every morning as a part of their normal regular school routine. Though the song was marginal to the official curriculum, it was as integral to JSB’s school experience as the official multilingual textbooks in JKHSS student’s school experience. Through a variety of formal and informal channels, schools presented the students with the discourses on their ethnolinguistic identity and their relations to the Nepali nation. Scholars note that these daily rituals form an integral part of the sensory repertoire that shapes specific modalities of identity-making in schools (Benei, 2008). It is through a variety of everyday activities and in interaction with a variety of actors – parents, teachers, education officials – that the students negotiate the identity-making process, with schools occupying one of the prominent sites of identity negotiation and crystallisation. In this book, I have foregrounded these processes of negotiation: how various actors in the school system make sense of the competing logic of mother tongue schools and national education system, how they position themselves within the existing language hierarchies and how the schools manage to run the programme amidst the troubled history of minority languages in Nepal.

As now-established theories in linguistic anthropology show, while there is still a tendency to approach language as a system of grammatical rules, language is more complex because it has both referential meaning and social meaning. It is this duality of language that makes it a rich resource for semiotic production within human societies (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004; Wortham, 2008). As Bourdieu (1992) reminds us, language is a practice that shapes the social actors' way of being in the world, which through sheer repetition shapes identity formation. Every time we speak, Norton (2010: 2) argues, we are 'negotiating and renegotiating our sense of self in relation to the larger social world, and reorganising that relationship across time and space'. Such negotiation is interwoven with power, politics, ideologies and interlocutors' views of their own and others' identities (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004: 1). These dynamics compel us to question the notion of sociolinguistic naturalism: 'the assumption that a linguistic form exists independent of willful human intervention and that it naturally and directly corresponds to social state of affairs' (Woolard, 2016: 7).

It is in an acknowledgement of the enmeshing of various ideas and identities in the mother tongue education that I have used in a relational approach to examine the issue of language use. If we pay attention to the dynamics of everyday encounters, we may be able to discern that assertion of ethnolinguistic identity does not always represent a linear or unambiguous move 'beyond the nation-state'. As a product of situated social action, ethnolinguistic identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004: 376). As Calhoun (1993: 211) points out, 'ethnic solidarities and identities are claimed most often where groups do not seek national autonomy but rather a recognition internal to ... state boundaries'. The overlapping spaces embedded in mother tongue schools could function as a site for linguistic and cultural encounters, where power relations are negotiated and struggle over symbolic resources occur. Analytically, this approach also enables us not to look for the 'intrinsic properties of individuals or groups' but to 'construct their relational attributes' and conceptualise them as 'interdependent units in terms of broad networks of relations' (Gorski, 2013: 22).

ASSIMILATION–PLURALISM PARADOX

This book emerges out of my curiosity to understand the highly politicised and controversial issue of mother tongue education in Nepal. When I started my research on mother tongue education, I was often met with two opposite and extreme reactions. On the one hand, the supporters of mother tongue

education applauded me for researching an important and timely issue. They often reiterated the need to use mother tongue in education as pupils learn better when they are taught in their first language and, therefore, enable children from minority language groups to have better access to education. They also highlighted that, from a social justice point of view, education in mother tongue helps to build an inclusive society and redefine the notion of Nepali nationhood. On the other hand, the sceptics questioned the need to spend precious research time to study such a marginal topic. They questioned both the need and the practicality of using numerous minority languages of Nepal. After all, the proficiency in minority languages, they argued, did not ensure better life chances and/or addresses the issue of poor socio-economic outcomes that the country is struggling with. Moreover, some others pointed out that schooling in different languages is not helpful in the imagination of a unified national community.

It is precisely these tensions that this book hopes to address. When a mother tongue is considered as the language of education, it unsettles various taken-for-granted assumptions on education by calling upon multiple, and often competing, interests within its framework. On the one hand, mother tongue schools offer education in the minority language with an aim to cultivate and normalise these languages. On the other hand, these schools operate within the institutional spaces of the existing national education system and are expected to promote unified national identity. This situation creates an ideological paradox wherein the schools perform dual functions of promoting apparently particularistic ethnic languages and ensuring membership in a broader national community at the same time – an ‘assimilation-pluralism paradox’ (Hornberger, 2000). Drawing on a variety of case studies on minority language education in different countries, Martin-Jones and Heller (1996: 10) illustrate that the tension between assimilation and pluralism is revealed in classroom teaching/learning situations where the ‘tension between valuing an indigenous language and valuing the language of (former colonial) power’ is quite evident in language practices. Moreover, the minority language schools remain obliged to negotiate the institutional spaces for less-dominant languages from a comparatively powerless position.

As I progressed in my research fieldwork, I realised the mother tongue education provided a fascinating entry point to studying the interconnected issue of education, national identity and minority identity, especially in a highly heterogeneous context of Nepal. These broader political shifts were not just distant changes but also resonated at a personal level in my life. I was born into

an ethnic group, the Newar, with Nepal Bhasa as my 'mother tongue'. However, I did not learn this language in schools. My school, complying with the education policy of the time, used Nepali as the language of instruction and English as the language of examination. My research interest thus emerged amidst this contrasting experience of my schooling in a 'monolingual' nation, where I received my foundational education in the Nepali language, and later growing up in multilingual and multi-ethnic Nepal (post-1990), where school education could be provided in other minority languages but not widely accepted.

The analysis presented in this book is based on the premise that language dynamics in public places, such as schools, reveal a lot about the process of negotiation of symbolic power that is underway in any sociopolitical context. By using a particular language in a particular situation, people assert the legitimate domains of that language and its speakers, (re)shape relations of symbolic power and craft certain forms of identity. Mother tongue instruction was, therefore, not only about the introduction of minority languages in education but also about an 'arena of struggle' where the social positions of ethnolinguistic groups were negotiated. The language speaker's choice to use or not to use a particular language is indicative of the struggle to produce one's own, separate, socially significant discourse. In any linguistic exchange, we, therefore, need to pay attention to the social location of the subject, and this cannot be understood without the relational dimension where subjects interact with different people. As Woolard asks:

What makes a particular language authoritative in community members' eyes and ears? What relationship to language allows a government and its institutions to be perceived as legitimate? And what entitles a speaker to use language freely and to convince others with that use? Monolingual speakers of dominant language rarely have to pause and consider such questions, but members of bilingual and minoritized speech communities routinely confront them, implicitly or explicitly. The answer matter because the foundations of linguistic authority are also foundations of identity, community, nation, polity, and citizenship. (Woolard, 2016: 1)

Throughout this book, I use everyday language practices as an important lens to the intergroup and intragroup dynamics that have shaped much of Nepal's recent politics. Especially in the context where ethnolinguistic identity has been one of the important ways in which various social groups in Nepal have sought to make claims over the state, over the educational institutions and in the market, the close analysis of minority language schools provides a fascinating insight on how these categories are played out in everyday life and in the ways in which

different social groups engage with each other. Drawing on these insights, instead of conducting an evaluation of the benefit of mother tongue education in ethnolinguistic politics, in language preservation or in educational success of minority groups, this study explores the ways in which various social actors use language and linguistic resources to negotiate their position in relation to different identities and the ways in which they are entangled with each other.

LANGUAGE AND THE CONTESTED IDEA OF NEPAL

This contentious nature of language is also a reflection of contested political claims in Nepal. Many researches in Nepal note the institutionalisation of Nepali language, and the subsequent erasure of other languages from public space has remained central to nation-building and state-making (Gaige, 1975; Onta, 1996b). Given the centrality of language in the construction of Nepali state, the contention around the issue of language use thus reflects the contested idea of Nepal (Gellner, 2016; Jha, 2017; Lal, 2012). C. K. Lal (2012: 1) in his very thought-provoking paper asks, 'What should happen and what needs to be done to be a *Nepaliya*, a Nepalese?' In the new notions of Nepalihood, that the country is currently experimenting, the issue of public use of minority language is increasingly occupying centrality and raising an inherent question of power and politics. Jha (2017) notes that language spoken by people in the Madhesh area is an important criterion that distinguishes them from their Pahadi counterparts, one of the important basis for 'non-recognition of the (Madhesi) population as equal citizens'.

During the 1990s, Nepal witnessed persistent ethnolinguistic activism that raised voices against the 'one nation, one language' policy of an earlier era. Gellner (2007) identifies the post-1990 period as a time of 'ethnicity-building' (distinct from the period of nation-building before 1990) where different ethnic groups made demands for mother tongue education and the use of local language in public offices, in addition to various other claims for territorial autonomy and recognition. In such a context, language has served as an important aspect of promoting and challenging varying visions of Nepal. As a response, the Constitution of Nepal, 1990, declared Nepal a multi-ethnic and multilingual country, with all the languages spoken as mother tongues duly recognised as 'national languages'. The constitution also granted the right to primary education in the mother tongue as a fundamental right of citizens, a provision that was carried over to the subsequent constitution of 2015. This official adoption of minority languages for the purpose of education in Nepal is often portrayed

as a radical departure from a historical context, in which the use of languages other than the national language, Nepali, used to be considered communal and, therefore, against the law.

In recent years, the issue of minority language education has emerged as an overtly public and politically charged subject. Many ethnic organisations have put forward demands for mother tongue education and the use of minority languages in official contexts (Gellner, 1986; Bhattachan, 1995; Sonntag, 1995). The 1994 Election manifestos of the three main political parties – Nepali Congress (NC) party, Nepal Communist Party (Unified Marxist–Leninist, UML) and Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) – included a commitment in general terms to the promotion of mother tongue education (Whelpton, 1997: 64), and many parties subsequently continued to keep the topic on the political agenda. Among the 40-point demands put forward by Maoists before the start of the People’s War (1996–2006) was a call for the right to use all Nepali languages and dialects. Also, during the People’s War, Maoists attacked school buildings, not only as symbols of state institutions but also as icons of ethnic subjugation and discrimination (Pherali, 2011). Nepal’s ongoing and contested transformation from a unitary to federal system has created new political spaces in the country’s institutional landscape. At the time of writing, the Government of Nepal (GoN) had already begun this process of ‘unbundling’ with a preparation of a comprehensive report that describes the comprehensive list of exclusive and concurrent powers and functions of the federal, provincial and local governments (FIARCC, 2017). The local government now holds primary responsibility for the management of local services and education with the possibility of introducing mother tongue education in a larger scale.

One of the key features of the language movement in Nepal has been its effort to normalize language in public arenas such as education, media and state institutions. At the time of research in 2014, Radio Nepal, the state-run radio station, broadcast a five-minute news in a number of national languages and a weekly page in *Gorakhpatra*, the state-run newspaper, published at least one, full page with articles in a number of languages other than Nepali. The Nepal Academy has included research on ethnic languages in its programmes since the 1990s. Similarly, Nepal National Plan of Action (MoE, 2003b: 47) has prioritized reorienting the existing policies that focus on the inclusion of ethnic, minority, Dalit and women and girls on the development and use of local languages. This was further taken up by the School Sector Reform Plan 2009–2015, which placed a target of 7,500 schools using mother tongue medium of instruction in Grades I–III (MoE, 2009). In line with this, the GoN piloted

multilingual education in seven primary schools in 2007–9 (mother tongue, Nepali and English as mediums of instruction).⁶ In addition, several ethnic organisations have been teaching ethnic languages to the younger generation in their mother tongue schools across Nepal. While such actions have not been enough to bring about significant changes, it has nonetheless opened up spaces for more minority language education, while at the same time demonstrating the Nepali state's commitment to embrace the linguistic diversity of its population.

Despite the centrality of the discourse on mother tongue education, both in politics and in educational interventions, everyday cultural politics of language use in minority-language schools have received minimal academic attention.⁷ The existing studies often tend to focus on the analysis of education policies and are driven by the normative concerns on the use of minority languages. The works by Yadav (1992), Awasthi (2004), Yonjan-Tamang (2009) and Ghimire (2011) argue for the importance of language in education outcomes of ethno-linguistic groups. Scholars have argued that mother tongue education is a way to redefine educational systems within broader efforts to democratise, pluralise and reconstruct public lives (Tumbahang, 2010; Lawoti and Hangen, 2013); undo the effects of language 'unplanning' (Giri, 2009); and to recognise ethnic identity and influence the existing social hierarchy (Yadava, 2007).

The conversations around mother tongue education are also often framed in the language of unkept promises and demands are made in the language of rights. Accordingly, activists contend that indigenous languages should be introduced at least as 'elective' subjects (Tumbahang, 2010). Similarly, Phyak (2011), Phyak and Ojha (2019), and Giri (2009; 2011) discuss the differential levels of power enjoyed by the three languages (mother tongue, Nepali and

⁶ During 2007–2009, the Government of Nepal piloted multilingual education in seven primary schools: Sharada Primary School (in Sunsari, uses Tharu and Uraw languages), Rastriya Ekta Primary School (in Jhapa, uses Rajbanshi, Santhal, and Nepali languages), Bhimsen School (in Rasuwa, uses Tamang language), Rastriya Lower Secondary School, Saraswati Lower Secondary Schools (in Rasuwa, use Tamang language) and Deurali Lower Secondary School (in Dhankuta, uses Athpariya Rai) (UNESCO, 2011). This research was not conducted in any of these schools.

⁷ Academic interest in mother tongue education schools has increased in recent years. At the time of my fieldwork, there were at least three other PhD students studying mother tongue education in Nepal via the following disciplinary perspectives: educational linguistics (Miranda Weinberg, University of Pennsylvania, USA); linguistics (Laxman Ghimire, Tribhuvan University, Nepal); and education (Tok Nath Bhattarai, Kathmandu University, Nepal). There have also been studies on English as a medium of instruction (Prem Phyak, University of Hawai, USA).

English) and the consequent implication for the sustainability of mother tongue education. Shrestha and Hoek (1995) have discussed the link between ethnic activism and language education, while Gellner (2009; 2014; 1997) highlights the incongruity between the rhetoric of language preservation and actual practice of ethnic activists. Previous studies have also covered the benefits of minority languages in education (Awasthi, 2004; Yadav, 1992), minority language education as a linguistic human right (Shrestha and Hoek, 1995), inequalities between various languages (Phyak, 2011; 2016; Phyak and Ojha, 2019; Giri, 2009; 2011), the gradual shift to dominant languages (Pettigrew, 2000; Turin, 2013), and the incongruity between the discourse and practice of ethnic activists (Gellner, 1997; 2014).

In the current political context, where Nepal is undergoing a significant political transformation from a unitary to a federal system of government, the issue of mother tongue education is likely to be even more significant. The new Constitution of Nepal, promulgated in September 2015, provides a basic division of powers between the federal government, 7 provincial governments and 753 local governments. As Sharma (2017: 43) notes, 'Nepal's journey towards federalism is essentially a search for recognising and managing social diversity in the process of political, social and economic development.' The functions and powers of subnational government have substantially increased under the new federal arrangement, although negotiations are ongoing and structures are far from settled. Elected local governments now enjoy a relatively high degree of autonomy with considerable political, administrative and fiscal decentralization. The local bodies are now mandated to design and deliver sectoral services – such as health and education, and the issue of local language in education and other state institutions is likely to emerge as an important issue.

SIMULTANEOUS MEMBERSHIPS IN MULTIPLE GROUPS

As will be illustrated in different chapters of this book, in JSB and JKHSS, the negotiation of spaces for multiple languages and their speakers within one national collective was often articulated through the simultaneous presence of different languages and associated identities. These also uncover the tensions inherent in transforming the spaces, what has been and continues to be a space for uniformity, into spaces of multiple and often competing interests. There were, therefore, increasing efforts to use Nepal Bhasa and Tharu in everyday practices in the schools. This was, however, done without dislodging the position of the Nepali language as an overarching language that brings speakers of different

languages together. Thus, everyday language practices in the schools, on the one hand, displayed inward-looking characteristics through the everyday use of mother tongue and the construction of unified ethnic identity within minority language education. On the other hand, there were outward-looking dynamics of actively engaging with the national education system.

The construction of a particular ethnolinguistic identity was framed within an affirmation of Nepali national identity. But they were seen as neither incompatible nor binary opposites – students identified with both Tharu/Newari and Nepali identities at the same time and within the same space. The data from Nepal Democracy Survey, conducted in 2004 and 2007, corroborate similar dynamics in Nepal. The findings of the survey show that ‘people are proud of both national and ethnic identities. People can have dual loyalties – to the nation and their communities at the same time’ (Hachhethu, 2014: 180). These dynamics illustrate that ‘social actors may ascribe different meanings to their senses of belonging to a nation’ (Benei, 2008). This reframing of language use, in multilingual context, opens up possibilities in research to explore how the speakers do not necessarily choose between two apparently contrasting elements.

The notion of ‘simultaneity’ provides a helpful framework in explaining the multiple scales on which identities are expressed. The idea of simultaneity is influenced by Mikhail Bakhtin’s conceptual system of heterogeneity and his rejection of binarism. Simultaneity, according to Bakhtin, is when people do not necessarily select between contrasting elements but, rather, can thrive in their tense intersection. This understanding of ‘both/and’, instead of ‘either/or’, allows for multiplicity and heterogeneity in the way we understand languages. Bakhtin (1981: 291) argued that language in use and in action represents ‘specific points of view on the world, forms for conceptualising the world in words, specific world views, each characterised by its own objects, meanings, and values’. Therefore, simultaneity in language refers to the coexistence of different competing points of view. He perceives simultaneity as ‘not a mere wavering between two mutually exclusive possibilities but a real co-presence of contrasting elements in tension’ (281):

This interaction, this dialogic tension between two languages and two belief systems, permits authorial intentions to be realised in such a way that we can acutely sense their presence at every point.... (Bakhtin, 1981: 314)

The notion of ‘simultaneity’ differs from the idea of ‘multiple identities’, where people possess potentially intersecting but different identities due

to their different origins or traditions (Hall, 2003). Simultaneity, according to Bakhtin (1981), is when the same word or identity can possess different meanings, simultaneously, in a given sociopolitical context. Woolard, discussing the theoretical utility of this concept, identifies that simultaneity allows the possibility of real co-presence of apparently divergent positions. She refers to this as bivalency of multilingual contexts where speakers make 'simultaneous claims to more than one social identity'. Woolard notes that simultaneities can occur in various forms such as hybridity (the mixing of two or more forms), polyglossia (the simultaneous presence of two or more languages within a single cultural system) and heteroglossia (where same language exist in its official and unofficial forms).

With this view, it is possible to imagine that various minority languages coexist along with other dominant languages, even when they may or may not share similar symbolic capital and/or exist in a harmonious relationship. The framework of simultaneity thus helps us to appreciate that in multilingual and multi-ethnic contexts. While there might be various tensions present in the coexistence of various identities, within this framework, various levels of 'unresolved co-presences' are possible. Through these mechanisms, in a multilingual and multi-ethnic setting, not only various languages and linguistic forms coexist but also different positions, voices and identities coexist. At still another level, simultaneity is a dialogue between the different meanings the same word has at different stages in the history of a given national language and in various situations within the same historical period (Holoquist, 1990: 67).

The idea of simultaneity, however, does not do away with the 'linguistic hierarchy' that often denies acceptance of 'low-status' language into the 'high-status' language, and the flow of ideas is usually unidirectional. Nonetheless, this helps us to re-conceptualise the boundaries of social life and move away from a reductionist approach to language and identity. By placing the focus on the multilingual speakers, as Woolard (1998: 3) shows, we may be able to appreciate the ambivalent but 'simultaneous messages that are communicated in linguistic contact zones'. Especially in changing political contexts, individuals can engage simultaneously with more than one social identity and languages while making sense of changing circumstances around them. These 'unresolved co-presences' are the main object of inquiry throughout this book.

As illustrated in the opening paragraph, and as will be discussed throughout the book, the students in these language schools did not choose between their ethnic identity and national identity, they discursively positioned 'ethnic

identity' as 'national identity'. The everyday language practices complicate the neat compartmentalisation of identities. Contrary to the ideas of difference espoused in ethnic activism and assimilationist ideas of homogeneity articulated in nationalist discourse, students made simultaneous claims to more than one social identity, which were considered neither incompatible nor binary opposites. This book explores the way in which apparently fragmented ethnic identities interact with a putatively comprehensive national identity in contemporary Nepal. This book suggests that the notions of nationalism and ethnic identity cannot be understood exclusively as a choice between maintaining the integrity of the nation or completely rejecting it. By paying close attention to the everyday context within which identities are practised, this book argues for an analytical necessity to approach 'ethnic identity' and 'national identity' in relation to each other.

RELATIONAL SPACE OF LANGUAGE HIERARCHY

Language discourses in public space, such as schools, reveal a lot about the process of negotiation of symbolic power that is underway in any sociopolitical context. However, we also need to acknowledge that different languages operate within the context of existing power relations and that language hierarchy shapes the ways in which they are socially valued (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Phyak and Ojha, 2019). In JSB and JKHSS, despite the professed objective of mother tongue schools to cultivate and normalise minority languages, the everyday language exchanges reflected a mix of different languages that operated within the deep-seated asymmetries of power relation between languages. The challenge for both schools were to comprehend how to make mother tongue education relevant under the new conditions.

As decidedly mother tongue schools, JSB and JKHSS, sought to normalise the use of minority languages – Nepal Bhasa and Dangaura Tharu – in school education. These languages were, however, introduced in addition to the existing school subjects such as English and Nepali. The approach followed in both the schools was what Cummins (1979) refers as 'additive' rather than 'subtractive'. The minority languages were introduced only as an additional language, when they are used in schools, and the dominant languages such as Nepali and English are generally taught as compulsory subjects. Thus, multilingualism, that is, the knowledge and use of more than one language, was used as a prime strategy for mother tongue education. In JSB and JKHSS, languages such as Nepal Bhasa and Tharu competed for institutional and social recognition along with dominant languages such as Nepali and English. While some existing studies

of language education in Nepal address this issue of differential levels of power enjoyed by different languages – minority languages, Nepali, and English (Phyak, 2011; Giri, 2009; 2011), we are yet to see detailed studies on its implication on mother tongue education.

In this book, I propose minority language education as a ‘zone of contact’ where the dominant and less-dominant groups are in relation with each other. Pratt (1991: 34) describes these zones of contact as ‘social spaces where cultures meet, clash and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power... as they lived out in many parts of the world today’. Given that different groups in the contact zones enjoy different power relations, Bourdieu’s work on language and power is also instructive here. Bourdieu (1977) notes that language symbolises relation of power and, therefore, no one acquires a language without acquiring a relation to the language. Multilingual schools not only bring ethnolinguistic groups together but also provide a context to examine how various actors negotiate a ‘complex network of historical power relations between the speakers as well as between the respective groups to which they belong’ (Bourdieu, 1992: 118).

Mother tongue education, thus, serves to elucidate the tensions between the disparate roles of education, especially with regard to language. On the one hand, education is seen a social good that provides ethnolinguistic groups with access to cultural capital, such as the dominant language, which can, in turn, promote successful functioning in society (Goody, 1975; Dreze and Sen, 1995). Minority languages are either considered to be unnecessary or to hold instrumental value only in the early years of schooling, where they can enable a smooth transition towards operating within the dominant language and identity. According to this view, education facilitates assimilation and acts as a ‘great leveller’ of social differences. On the other hand, education is also seen to legitimise and reproduce the dominant cultural capital, to propagate a hidden curriculum (Bowles and Gintis, 1976), and to exacerbate social inequalities (Bourdieu and Passeron, 1979), thereby further marginalising minority populations. Minority language education is here viewed as being in opposition to and a rejection of the dominant language and identity.

These contradictory ideas are also indicative of the complex issue of perception about language use and practices in Nepal. Examining these tensions as an important aspect of my research process, I have tried to pay attention to what goes on inside the schools rather than what is assumed to be going on. This process is not only helpful in exploring the perspectives but there is also

recognition that social dynamics is 'structured by how they interpret the world' and, therefore, the recognition of 'actual or potential conflict' within and between perspectives (Hammersley, 1999: 2). This book, therefore, does not seek to trace how ethnic identities are produced through the inculcation of 'mother tongue' in schools and/or evaluate its success and failure. It, instead, foregrounds the tensions in linguistic practices and seeks to understand the varying ways in which they are entangled with other identities.

Whether it is in the ideals of monolingual nationalism or in distinct practices of ethnic politics, as Silverstein (1998: 402) argues, 'people participate in semiotic process that produce their identities, beliefs and their particular senses of agentive subjectivity'. And in this process, people use language as an 'emblematic of social, political, intellectual or moral character' of the speaker (Woolard, 1998: 18–19). Heller (2006: 17) describes this confrontation of groups with different power relations as a discursive struggle produced by the contradiction of the minority condition. Bourdieu's discussion on language and power is particularly instructive here. 'No one acquires a language', Bourdieu states, 'without acquiring a relation to language' (1977: 646). The power relation of languages is the reflection of power relation between the speakers of those languages. Therefore, Bourdieu argues that language cannot be understood only through the lens of purely linguistic analysis. Every linguistic exchange is a reflection of 'complex network of historical power relations between the speakers as well as between the respective groups to which they belong' (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992: 118). It is this intrinsic power relation that gets manifested in the process of 'identity-making' when any language is used for the purposes of education. This process do not necessarily 'refer to language or uses of language, but to ways of organizing meaning that are often, though not exclusively, realized through language' (Pennycook, 1994: 128).

In this context, people who speak the less dominant languages may experience the link between language and identity, even while there might not be any scientific link between the language and identity (Fishman, 1997). The ethnic identity is called into being when, through the medium of language, a particular ethnolinguistic identity is legitimised or indexed in society (Pavlenko and Blackledge, 2004; Silverstein, 1979). In everyday language exchange, the hierarchical structuring of difference – often termed as 'markedness' – plays out very strongly in ethnicisation and stigmatization of language varieties. Various studies around the world have demonstrated this phenomenon. Urciuoli (1996) in her study of Puerto Ricans in New York shows the imposed racialisation due to the 'markedness' of both Spanish and English spoken by these groups.

Drawing on the link between language and power, educators like Freire (1987) argues that if the students are to find their own voice, then the relation of community language and dialectic to the standard language has to be confronted. However, Freire also urges us to recognise the role of other languages. According to Freire (1987), 'The goal should never be to restrict students to their own vernacular. Educators should understand the value of mastering the standard dominant language of the wider society.'

In order to understand the struggle in education, we need to keep in mind that one of the symbolic struggles in education is on the idea of 'an educated person' and on the very definition of education (Levinson, Foley and Holland, 1996). Luttrell (1996), discussing the self-making process in non-formal education classes, points out that the institutional spaces of education encourage some forms of subjectivities more than the other, in relation to specific historical contexts. In some places, educated person may mean 'devotion and service' inspired by Chinese Confucianism (Shaw, 1996), and in others it could be 'chanting and toolmaking' (Rival, 1996). In case of Nepal, scholars have variedly defined the production of the educated person in terms of inculcation of Nepali nationalism through the history of valour and bravery (Onta, 1996a; 1996b), the idea of urbanised and Westernised self (Pigg, 1992), as a 'good citizen' embodying the national identity (Skinner and Holland, 1996) and as a process of 'modernising' self (Valentin, 2011).

Identity work may, thus, serve to underscore the distinction between group members and those outside the group on the basis of embodied symbolic capital. Ethnic identity, according to scholars such as Barth (1969) and Urciuoli (1996), emerges under the conditions of contact, as a way of reifying differences between people. According to these scholars, ethnic distinction does not appear in absence of social interaction. On the contrary, it is through the social contact that the critical feature of self-ascription and ascription by others become visible. As a product of situated social action, identities may shift and recombine to meet new circumstances (Bucholtz and Hall, 2004: 376). Irvine's (1989) analysis of greetings in Wolof-speaking groups in West Africa demonstrates the creative use of language to impose high status on the addressee in order to accomplish social purposes such as gaining financial support. Many sociolinguistic researches (Gal and Irvine, 1995; Irvine, 1989; Gal, 1989) have now shown the way in which discursive exchanges influence process of boundary-making in languages and linguistic identity. This approach, which has helped us to understand the construction of power and hierarchy in everyday language exchange, presents a minimal possibility for crossing language boundaries.

Following similar analysis, many scholars have investigated the construction of power and hierarchy in everyday language exchange and locate linguistic practices as a part of large system of inequality, encompassing states as well as local communities (Gal and Irvine, 1995, 2000; Irvine, 1989). Drawing on this theoretical underpinning, these researches focus on everyday language practice to illustrate that people often use language to discern their 'locatedness' in a group and negotiate for the dynamics of identity formation. Irvine (1989) finds that Wolof villagers construe linguistic differentiation as related to social differentiation, where people use inter- and intra-linguistic variation to discern the social groups of the speakers. Linguistic behaviour is thus seen as deriving from speakers' social, political, intellectual or moral character (Gal and Irvine, 1995; Irvine, 1989). Studying the Basque youth in public spaces, Urla (2001) demonstrates the creative utilisation of their minority language in alternate forms such as street graffiti, zines, mini FM radio, rock music and so on. Through these language activities, Basque youth engage in very different ways to establish their distinct identity from the dominant languages.

Many scholars now argue that linguistic nationalism involves much more than whether people can speak one or more languages (Heller, 2006: 10; Ahearn, 2017). It includes the process in which various languages come to represent certain meanings in a given context. Increasingly, the concept of 'language ideology' (Silverstein, 1979; Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994) has been used to make inquiry into the mediating link between overarching social structures and forms of everyday language exchange. Language ideologies, Silverstein (1979: 193) argues, are 'sets of beliefs about language articulated by users as a rationalization of justification of perceived language structure and use'. These scholars investigate the 'shared bodies of commonsense notions' (Rumsey, 1990: 346) about language in a given context and argue that the meanings that every language represent are often shaped by the relationships from which it is generated. They argue that ideologies of language are significant for social as well as linguistic analysis because they are not only about language but also about the social relations that the language mediates. This body of literature reminds us the understanding of language is usually 'partial, contested and value-laden' (Woolard and Schieffelin, 1994: 58).

Other scholars (Giroux, 1981) have similarly advocated for a more complex understanding of 'popular and dominant forces' that together come to constitute the school environment. Giroux (1981) criticises the reproductive perspective on schooling, such as those of Althusser (1971), Bowles and Gintis (1976), and Bourdieu and Passeron (1979), for deterministically conceiving the school as

servicing to inculcate only the culture, ideologies and social relations necessary to build and sustain the status quo. Giroux reminds us that schools can function as a 'terrain of contestation' and serve as spaces for new forms of learning and social relations. The classroom, textbooks and everyday interactions can provide spaces where individuals and groups in concrete relationships negotiate, resist, accept or generate various ideas.

The new developments in the sociolinguistic literature have increasingly highlighted the importance of paying attention to the actual language exchanges and discourses around languages to unpack its social meaning. Drawing our attention to the multilingual contexts in Europe, scholars such as Garcia (2009) points towards varied discursive practices in multilingual contexts where speakers draw on several languages simultaneously. The focus here is not on languages but on the people who might draw on different languages in their multilingual discursive practices. Many other researches show that the indigenous and ethnic movements around the world (Aikman, 1999; Heller, 2006; Bilanuik, 2005; Gustafson, 2009) often utilise language as an important way to make claims on the state, articulate ideas about ethnicity and nationalism, and express community memberships in a variety of ways. In these contexts, scholars have drawn our attention to diverse linguistic practices such as the production of 'correct' local languages, utilising languages to assert memberships and integration of these local languages into a broader linguistic market. This analysis has made it possible to capture the perspective on multilingualism that is more complex and grounded in everyday language use.

ON COMPARISON

This book is based on the fieldwork conducted in two schools: JSB and JKHSS. My decision to look at different schools did not stem from an interest in evaluating which one is doing best or what parameters are required to make minority language education work. This perspective would have required me to pose different questions and identify categories, characteristics and practices that could be legitimately compared, leading to theoretical and methodological problems in doing such comparisons. At the same time, since these two schools are embedded in very different contexts, there is a fundamental comparative dimension to this study. As Marit Melhuus has written:

We are not comparing objects, names of things or essences, but meanings, ways of constructing relationships between objects, persons, situations, events. Because similarities or differences are not given in the things

themselves but in the ways they are contextualised, i.e. in the relations of which they form a part, we must compare frameworks, processes of meaning construction, structures of discourses. (Melhuus, 2002: 82)

JSB was initiated as a flagship programme of Newar ethnolinguistic activism. The multilingual education (MLE) programme in JKHSS was introduced as a project funded by United Mission to Nepal (UMN) and in collaboration with the Government of Nepal. JSB and JKHSS not only have very different histories as introduced above but also function in very different ways. JSB is a private school located in an urban setting of Kathmandu. JKHSS, on the other hand, is a government school located in a rural village of Kapilvastu. JSB followed what has been called the language maintenance model where the schools actively encouraged students to use their mother tongue inside and outside the school (Ghimire, 2015). By contrast, JKHSS's language practice conforms to what has been identified as a language transitional model, which encourage language-minority students to use the mother tongue to gain command over school subjects and slowly to learn the national language (Ghimire, 2015). This empirical context had implications for the way language was used in everyday life. Most of the students in JSB were fluent bilingual students. They spoke Nepali and Nepal Bhasa with almost equal ease. In most cases, the younger generation was more fluent in Nepali than they were in Nepal Bhasa. Many gained more competence in Nepal Bhasa only after a few months in JSB. In JKHSS, all the students spoke mainly Tharu. The younger students in the lower grades did not understand Nepali. I observed, and the teachers agreed with me, that the students start speaking fluent Nepali only after a few years in the school.

These two very different contexts and the broader sociopolitical context that it is embedded in is incorporated throughout the book as an inherent part of the interpretation and analysis. These two schools are different in their origin and purpose, with each school with explicitly declared objective and visions. The comparative perspective is presented not as a list of similarities and differences in these two schools but as an analysis of various dynamics as emerging out of the contexts in which these schools are situated. As Melhuus (2002) argues, a proper conceptualisation and theorising of 'context' is a meaningful way to make comparison across place and time. Here, the comparison is utilised as a tool to uncover the processes and to make sense of plurality in those contexts. The processes described here were embedded both in projects and in the broader

context. The processual approach redefines the object of study, addresses the passage of time and often makes comparison problematic:

The use of comparison in contemporary anthropology is more akin to the unselfconscious, commonsensical comparison of everyday judgment than to the formal cross-cultural comparison of analytically defined variables. (Holy, 1987: 16)

I am also conscious of the fact that my research started after mother tongue education was initiated in these schools. This research captures the dynamics in a particular point in the ongoing life of the schools; the processes that was underway much before the research started and will continue after the research is over. As Moore (2005) points out, there is a challenge inherent in treating 'ongoing activities in an observable social field as an object of fieldwork'. The study of this nature is best placed to appreciate the process of its implementation and follow the process as it moved along. This temporal characteristic also opens up the possibility to appreciate the unplanned activities that get added on as the process develops over time. This research appreciates these apparently ancillary activities not as an anomaly in the otherwise planned activities but as a central element of each school's story as it unfolds over time. The attention to the overall context of these schools become even more important as these developments reveal the situational dimensions of the processes (Moore, 2005).

ON STUDYING SCHOOLS

Researching school is doing research in one of the most familiar places. It is one of the most universal of experiences, as nearly all of us have been to school. The fieldwork activities – such as attending classes, observing the ongoing interactions in the classroom and following the routine of the school – are potentially a challenging site to study because of their familiarity. Though the individual activities of the school might differ from place to place; most schools follow a similar routine of morning assembly, attendance register, timetabled subject teaching and didactic teaching method. It took me at least a few weeks of feeling lost in the most predictable activities of the classroom before I started noticing the ways in which students switched from one language to another while speaking to each other (Chapter 3), the ways in which teachers 'corrected' the language of the students (Chapter 4), the ways in which different subjects were associated with perception of student's educational competence (Chapter 6) and the ways in which different people saw the use of language in the employment market (Chapter 7).

During my fieldwork, I also ‘studied’ Nepal Bhasa for the first time. While sitting in the classroom, I was able to appreciate the difference between the spoken language and the written language. My absolute incompetence in using my ‘mother tongue’ for written work, teaching the subject and reading the newspapers uncovered many ways in which various kinds of language competence – speaking, reading and writing – are seen, quite erroneously, as synonymous to each other. Most of my competence in Nepali, I realised, came from years of ‘correction’, repetition, training and examination in the schools I attended and/or language socialisation outside the school. Though these were fairly universal strategies, this process seemed more prominent in the classes that taught minority languages and in the contexts that were less mainstream. This experience has informed much of Chapter 5.

In the Kapilvastu school, I learned other lessons. I had minimal competence in Tharu. Though Tharu is close to Nepali and Hindi (languages I am conversant in), it followed very different sentence patterns and has a different grammatical structure. Especially in the initial days of my fieldwork, I usually sat with one of the teachers or students who would translate the conversations for me. This arrangement helped me quite a bit to understand ongoing activities in the school; it also made me experience how language could form a barrier not only in school education but also in social interaction. Since most of the teachers and students spoke in Nepali, I was able to have regular interaction with them. However, my interactions with village elders and women were very limited. I usually waited for one of the teachers, Rita B. K., who had kindly agreed to be my interpreter during her free time. In classrooms, I noted when and where they used the language that I could not understand in order to discern a pattern of language use. This experience was an essential lesson in the difficulties of minority-language speakers in a context where another language is used for mainstream communication.

Ethnographic studies of education by scholars such as Willis (1977), Stambach (2000), Anderson-Levitt (2003), Simpson (2003), Valentin (2005), Froerer (2007) and Benei (2008) have highlighted the diverse ways in which children make sense of the education process and show that this does not necessarily follow the structures of the school alone. ‘Social agents’, wrote Willis (1977: 175), ‘are not passive bearers of ideology, but active appropriators who reproduce existing structures only through struggle, contestation and partial penetration of those structures.’ His work highlights that schools did not unilaterally socialise the ‘lads’; they were very much part of the dynamic process. Based on the ethnographic studies of education, these studies move beyond the

more deterministic formulation of education and highlight how social agents construct their subjectivities by negotiating various resources available to them, that is, to view education as a 'site of intense cultural politics'.

I have been careful not to take it for granted that schools are sites for uniform ideas and values. Discussing the different perspectives of different social actors inside JSB, Gellner (2014) has reminded us that all the members of the organisation need not subscribe equally to the values of the organisation. Analysing the diverse motivations of parents, teachers, students and founders in JSB, he (2014) contends 'It is possible for the aims of the different participants to be wholly distinct and incommensurate, and yet the whole can function and flourish.' Different members could come together for different reasons. Nonetheless, even while there is 'disjunction between the aims of different parties' (Gellner, 2014), the organisations can function perfectly well. Drawing on this insight, in this research, I have been mindful of the 'plurality of voices' in both the schools.

While the existing literature is critical in emphasizing the salience of ethnic identity as an organizing principle, we are yet to understand what happens inside minority-language schools, especially at a time when the social hierarchies are undergoing a fundamental reconfiguration. There may well be different processes going on in schools quite beyond the national-level institutional changes. These dynamics are very important to understand complexities of multilingual education. Building on insights from these studies, this study draws attention to the everyday cultural politics of language use inside minority-language schools. Following the leads indicated by Shrestha and Hoek (1995) and Gellner (2009), I will specifically focus on dynamic aspects of language-in-education to understand the complex relationship between the ethnicisation of Nepali politics and educational policy agenda.

In addition, while there is a growing acknowledgement of ethnicity-based inequality, there is a tendency to pay more attention to the high politics of state and analysing ethnolinguistic mobilization as competition in formal politics, for example, constitutional change and federal restructuring (Lawoti, 2007; Ghai, 2007), electoral arrangements (Vollan, 2012) and party politics (Hachhethu, Kumar and Jiwan, 2008). However, in a multi-ethnic society like Nepal, the real context of multi-ethnic settings is characterised by intergroup exchanges. There is, therefore, a need to extend the analysis on ethnicity beyond a single ethnic group and situate it in intergroup relations. This research seeks to investigate the issue of mother tongue education and the ways in which people position themselves within these polarizing debates on ethnicity. Through this, I aim

to understand the ways in which ideas and practices of language-in-education might reveal the complex relationship between the ethnicisation of politics and the educational policy agenda in Nepal.

There have been several anthropological studies of education in Nepal. While these studies provide rich ethnographic material to foreground the social role of education, they do not focus on the issue of language and ethnicity within educational institutions. Most notable of them are Ragsdale (1989) and Ahearn (2003). Ragsdale's (1989) analysis reveals the disconnections between the country's centrally planned education system's focus on national integration and rural community of Gurungs. Similarly, Ahearn (2003: 155), in her analysis of love letters, literacy and agency in a Magar community, also notes that in school textbooks 'development and nationalism' go hand in hand and demonstrate the government's desire to demonstrate a strong national identity. However, she also highlights that literacy gives a sense of agency in other realms of lives and connect them with 'development discourse', various notions of 'success' and a new sense of personhood.

Skinner and Holland's (1996) ethnography of school in Naudada presents an account of how national identity and nation-building efforts were tied to development. The lessons exhorted the students to do 'good work' to develop Nepal and themselves as good citizens. They also note that in actuality, schools in Naudada did not provide a harmonious march towards nation-building and they often offered a heterogeneous site of identity formation and demonstrated different voices for their understanding of themselves and the world. This process thus had 'implications, not only for their continued educational participation and future goals but also for potential changes in dominant ideology and self-understanding that resisted older forms of privilege' (Skinner and Holland, 1996: 291).

Similarly, Higbe's (1988) memoir of her time spent as a Peace Corps volunteer also outlines the hopes and aspirations that education brings in Banepa, a traditional Newar village. Through various portraits of individuals in the village, she highlights that villagers' 'security of the past' is still theirs to claim but they are also trying to enter the changing world through education (Higbe, 1988: 164). On a similar line, Rothchild (2006) provides a narrative and the struggles of Nepalese girls in pursuing education. These ethnographies of schools in Nepal bring the focus on the agency of ordinary people in making sense of education that is imparted by the educational institutions. All these works look at education as a 'process' for social change and indicate the potential to transform not just themselves but also society. These themes were taken

forward in the special issue of *Globalization, Societies, and Education* (vol. no. 9, issue no. 1) in 2011. This collection of eight articles draws attention to the tensions and contradictions resulted by the education policy in Nepal. They explored 'the cultural implication of developmental modernity within the realm of schooling' (Carney and Rappleye, 2011: 7). Most studies presented in this collection trace the legacy of Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) and the ensuing challenges that the country faces in its unfulfilled promise of development.

Building on previous works on the anthropology of education in Nepal and drawing on the analytical framework used by Skinner and Holland (1996), in this book, I examine education as a space of multiple meaning-making within a given sociopolitical context. Many scholars (Whelpton, 1997: 39; Gellner, 2009) have repeatedly reminded us that the official vision and everyday life of the population might not overlap. In this book, I explore the way these diverse and often contradictory goals of ethnicity-based education play out in complex language practices in schools and the implications of this for rapidly changing national politics. Such an analysis is likely to offer a better account not only of the meaning and significance attached to education but also of the place of education within the broader reconstruction of Nepali public life. In relation to minority language education, this conceptualisation enables us to examine the language-in-education as a process of multiple meaning-making within a given sociopolitical context, providing contradictory resources to those who interact with them. This relational approach to the construction of identity opens up spaces to imagine education as a symbolic site where 'new relations, new representations, and new knowledge can be formed, sometimes against, sometimes tangential to, sometimes coincident with the interests of those holding power' (Levinson, Foley and Holland, 1996: 22).

OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK

This book has three goals. First, it aims to provide a detailed account of everyday language practices and discourses around language use in two mother tongue schools in Nepal. Second, it situates these language practices in the historical processes, drawing attention to the linguistic hierarchy within which these ethnolinguistic identities are embedded in Nepal. Third, drawing on these ethnographic insights, the book aims to offer a new approach to conceptualise national and ethnic identities simultaneously, especially in highly heterogeneous contexts such as Nepal. As an overall theoretical framework, this book elaborates

on the state- and people-centric visions of Nepali nationalism and discuss the complex entanglements between these two approaches.

Throughout the book, I will draw on the everyday language use in the two mother tongue schools to illustrate the constant tension arising from the confrontation between the existing language hierarchies, assertion of autonomy as a member of a distinct ethnolinguistic community and making claims on the state. The book locates its analysis on the investigation of the relational space of language hierarchy.

In Chapter 1, I will lay out a historical overview that explains the salience of this issue in the contemporary context of Nepal. By tracing the development of language-in-education policy in Nepal, I will specifically highlight controversies over the use of various languages in official contexts and the ways in which schools have been made use of in promoting and legitimising a range of political visions.

Chapter 2 will present the ethnographic context and methodological details of the research, and I will also discuss my research position and my engagement with the topic, the participants and the process of research. In this chapter, I will also contextualise the two schools, JSB and JKHSS, that use two minority languages – Nepal Bhasa and Tharu respectively – and describe their histories and contemporary situations. I will then discuss the differences and similarities in minority language education in these two schools and lay out my research approach. Through an analysis of mother tongue education, I will present educational institutions as both symbolic and functional spaces, where people negotiate differing ideas and visions for self and society.

Chapter 3 will discuss the ways in which the schools seek to normalise minority languages on school premises and in public spaces. Both the schools use minority languages for teaching purposes and in official communication, and students also participate in ethnic festivals. While the students speak in Nepal Bhasa and Tharu on school premises and in public spaces, without dislodging the Nepali language from its overarching position as the one bringing speakers of different languages together. In this chapter, I will also show that students participate in ethnic festivals by dressing up in traditional clothing, displaying their ‘talent’ in ethnic music and building various informal groups. However, while they mark their ‘ethnic’ presence in public spaces through the participation in these activities, they also affirm symbols of Nepali nationalism such as the Nepali flag and the Nepali language. Moreover, the school administrators did not seek to validate mother tongue education by pursuing radically exclusive

schooling system but by negotiating a position for minority language education within the nation-state framework. I will illustrate that, by simultaneously claiming more than one social identity, these schools and students challenge the apparent binary opposition between notions of ethnicity and nationalism in Nepal.

Chapters 4 and 5 will discuss the ways in which Nepal Bhasa and Tharu textbooks are being used to construct minority languages as 'legitimate languages' in education. I will pay particular attention to local stories, names, contexts, pictures and to how these have been used to establish mother tongue education as legitimate pedagogy producing legitimate knowledge for school education. While these textbooks served as spaces for language standardisation and localisation of education, they also made closer interaction with the state possible by using the provisions guaranteed by the constitution as a common ground for extending dialogue in otherwise very conflictual positions. Both of the schools worked very closely with the GoN's CDC and followed its guidelines when both publishing the textbooks and shaping these textbooks by including local contents. I will demonstrate how the language standardisation and textbook writing was done by following the national curriculum, by using the Devanagari script and by adhering to the rules of the national education system.

Chapter 6 will highlight the way in which the notion of 'quality education' is used to challenge the 'language ideology' that minority language education is a low-quality type of instruction. In order to unlink this inherent association, the schools and the students actively espouse external measures of quality such as excellent School Leaving Certificate (SLC) results, mother tongue proficiency, high English language levels and good achievements in higher education. The idea of 'quality education' provided a space where parents and students are able to navigate their way through a range of interests and expectations by demonstrating that mother tongue use does not obstruct higher education achievement. By doing so, students and schools negotiated the legitimate role for mother tongue education in the production of 'educated' people.

In Chapter 7, I will explore the link between minority language education and employment. Using the idea of the 'linguistic market place', I will demonstrate that the emergence or creation of such new markets as FM radio stations, television channels, folk music and dance, and textbook writing are seen as small but significant ways in which minority languages can be used as labour to gain employment. Although these new opportunities seem to have shaped the aspirations of some students, many others also want to be chartered accountants,

nurses and laboratory technicians. This chapter will discuss the ways in which ethnic identification resonates with student aspirations and is articulated within emerging labour markets and, most significantly, will identify the shift towards a new vision of local language that sees it as a valuable form of linguistic capital and as a marker of emerging groups.

In the concluding chapter, I will bring together various themes discussed throughout the book to highlight the varying ways in which different identities are entangled with each other. Drawing on the idea of 'simultaneity', I will elaborate on the evolving nature of relations between ethnolinguistic groups and the Nepali state as well as the issue of sociopolitical transformation in Nepal. This book is an account of the dynamic interaction between the ongoing processes of state-(trans)formation and its embeddedness in the existing power relations.