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Revisiting History in Language Policy: The Case of Medium of Instruction in Nepal

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Abstract

This paper examines the history of language-in-education policy in Nepal. I begin with a brief overview of a standard history of Nepali language planning and policy. This version of history describes an early period with almost no schools, followed by the Nepali-only Panchayat period, and, after the 1990 restoration of democracy, an openness toward multilingual schooling in policy. I augment this history to point toward a view of history that is not split into static periods, does not impose current categories of ethnicity and language on a past when such categories functioned differently, and that recognizes the importance of influences from outside of Nepal's national borders. Finally, I discuss the ways these differences inform an understanding of the past and opportunities for considering the future of language policy.

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Introduction

Language policy and planning is a pressing contemporary concern in multilingual, multiethnic Nepal. The country is in the process of rebuilding after a ten-year civil war (1996-2006) and writing a new constitution, which will devolve power to local levels in a federal system (von Einsiedel, Malone & Pradhan, 2012). This could have significant effects on language planning, especially if Maoist party demands for ethnically-based states are met (Rimal, 2009).

At the time of this paper's publication, constitution drafting was at a standstill. Prime Minister Baburam Bhattarai dissolved the Constituent Assembly, the 601-member body elected to draft the new constitution, in May 2012, claiming that it had failed to accomplish its task (Kantipur News, 5/28/2012). Despite this stasis at the national policy level, language policy continues to be a matter of public debate, especially in the realm of education (e.g., Rai, 11/6/2012). During the summer of 2012, language policy debate briefly flared into violence, with student unions vandalizing property of private, for-profit colleges that had foreign, especially English-language, names (Himalayan News Service, 7/24/2012).

The recent past of Nepal's language policy and planning (LPP) has been chaotic and, at times, challenging to follow. The aim of this paper is to examine the history of LPP in Nepal. In particular, I look at the representation of this history in scholarly work about LPP, and ways that this representation can be augmented. Following a brief conceptual orientation, I retell the traditional history, which presents the history of Nepal's LPP in three phases: before 1950, 1950-1990, and after 1990. Next, I discuss possible amendments to this history that arise from taking a less staged approach to writing history, recognizing change in ethnic and linguistic

categories, and going beyond Nepal's national borders. In order to supplement the history found in LPP studies, I turn to sources such as policy documents and other primary sources. I conclude with a discussion of implications of this historical exercise for LPP in Nepal, and for LPP methodology more broadly.

Conceptual Framework

This section lays out the conceptual basis for this paper. In recent years, LPP scholars have increasingly recognized the need to understand history in order to study language policy. May (2003) warns against “presentist” views of language policy that omit the historical forces that lead to current language policies. In order to understand the current state of language policy, especially the power relations inherent in and created by such policies, we must look to the past, May argues. As Wiley (2006) notes, though, discussions of language politics and policy sometimes appeal to “the *authority* of history to bolster their claims about how the past informs us about contemporary issues. Such appeals to history are based on the assumption that there is a correct, empirically based, ‘true’ story of what happened in the past” (p. 136). Wiley also warns of the tendency in LPP histories to apply teleological, eurocentric narratives to histories that may not follow such patterns. This may be a tendency in studies of education beyond LPP as well; as Morrow and Torres (1999) note, “histories of education typically present the celebratory history of policy making as a progressive process based on ‘reforms’ culminating in the present” (p. 92).

Studying history in order to understand the present may not be as simple as drawing a straight line from past policies and power dynamics to the present, though. Scholars in the fields of history and historical anthropology have questioned the ways history is told; I argue that attention to these matters could strengthen our understanding of history in the field of LPP. Trouillot (1995) points to the historically located nature of writing history. History, according to Trouillot, is both “the facts of the matter” and “a narrative of those facts,” simultaneously “what happened” and “what is said to have happened” (p. 2). He is particularly concerned with what gets left out of history, claiming that “any historical narrative is a bundle of silences” (p. 27). Trouillot argues that part of the historian’s job is to examine what histories are conventionally told and to counter dominant histories.

Historians and historical anthropologists therefore attempt to capture a different kind of history, beyond a single, supposedly empirically true version. These histories, rather than drawing a straight line from the past to the present, acknowledge messiness in the past and use historical information to determine not just how the current moment came from the past, but also where voices have been silenced and where there were possibilities for other turns to have been taken (e.g., Mitchell, 2002; Stoler, 2010). In this paper, I attempt to introduce these often omitted elements into the retelling of the history of language policy in Nepal, and argue for the importance of such historical efforts for the future of this particular language policy as well as the utility of such an approach in language policy studies in general.

Language Policy in Nepal: A Brief History

Language policy studies in Nepal inevitably begin by enumerating language diversity in the country, a practice that sets the stage for an understanding of

languages as distinct, fixed, and linked to particular geographic areas (Moore, Pietikäinen & Blommaert, 2010). While sources give numbers of languages ranging from 92 to 143 (Yonjan-Tamang, 2005), it is clear that there are many languages spoken in Nepal. The 2011 Census of Nepal reported Nepali, the largest and the official national language, as the mother tongue of 44.6% of the population.¹ Only 12 of the 92 languages counted in the census were spoken by more than one percent of the population (Central Bureau of Statistics Nepal, 2012).

This section of the paper outlines the history of Nepal's language policy as compiled from a review of recent works on language planning and policy. The language policy texts from which this account draws represent this as the single, true history of LPP in Nepal, going through three stages to reach the present. This view is presented both by Nepali scholars (Awasthi, 2004, 2011; Giri, 2010, 2011; Phyak, 2011; Rai, Rai, Phyak & Rai, 2011) and non-Nepali scholars of language policy (Eagle, 1999; Sonntag, 1995). The following sections present this history as it takes us through the periods before 1950, from 1950-1990, and after 1990.

Schooling before 1950: As Rare As Snakes in Ireland

A country with borders close to those of present-day Nepal first emerged in 1769 after a series of military successes by Prithvi Narayan Shah, the first king of the Shah dynasty that held the throne until the abolition of the monarchy in 2007 (Whelpton, 2005). While the Shahs remained kings throughout that time, the Kot massacre of royal family members and advisers in 1846 led to the establishment of the Rana autocracy. The Rana family established themselves as hereditary Prime Ministers and distributed army and government positions to favored family members. Throughout their rule, the Rana family used their position to amass wealth while keeping the rest of the country impoverished and isolated from the outside world. The kings during this period were figureheads with no real power to rule (Whelpton, 2005).

The Rana rulers were not interested in developing the feelings of nationalism that often inspire the imposition of national language policies (Burghart, 1984). In addition, they were opposed to widespread education and therefore had no need to set language-in-education policies. The first statement of language policy in Nepal, made in 1905, supposedly established Nepali as the official language of law and government with the declaration that only documents written in Nepali were legal for use in courts (Eagle, 1999). However, Hutt (1988) notes that no documentation of this declaration has been published.

At the same time that they declared Nepali the only permissible court language, the Rana rulers wanted English-language education for their children. The first Rana ruler, Jung Bahadur Rana, traveled to England and elsewhere in Europe in 1850, and was greatly impressed by the educational systems he observed

¹ This figure represents a decline from the 2001 census, which counted 49% of the population as mother tongue speakers of Nepali. This change may seem surprising at a time when many language communities are shifting to speaking Nepali (Toba, Toba & Rai, 2005). The decline in Nepali speakers could be due to a number of factors, such as speakers of varieties of Nepali formerly labeled as dialects identifying as speaking a separate language (one of these, Dotyeli, which was not previously counted as a separate language, was reported to be the mother tongue of 3% of the population, making it the ninth largest language group); political movements that make it more popular to identify as speaking a language other than Nepali as a mother tongue; and changes in census enumeration methods, including that the 2001 census took place during the height of a civil war, making it impossible for enumerators to reach remote areas. Gurung (1997) comments on similar issues in past censuses.

and the power of the English language worldwide (Whelpton, 2005). Upon his return, Jung Bahadur established the *Durbar* (Palace) School on palace grounds. The school was only open to members of the Rana family, though it later moved off palace grounds and admitted some students from non-Rana, though still elite, families (Eagle, 1999). Thus the first government-run schooling in Nepal was in the medium of English.

Beyond the Rana family, schooling was extremely limited; the Ranas saw an educated populace as a threat to their control (Caddell, 2007; Eagle, 1999; Sharma, 1990). A British resident surgeon wrote in 1877 that “the subject of schools in Nepal may be dismissed as briefly as that of snakes in Ireland. There are none,” a quote often used to illustrate the lack of schooling in Nepal in this period (Wright, 1958/1877, as cited in Caddell, 2007, p. 281). The exception to this was religious schooling in Hindu *pathshalas* and Buddhist *gompas*, using the mediums of Sanskrit and Tibetan respectively (Eagle, 1999; Phyak, 2011). The first post-secondary educational institution in Nepal, Trichandra College, opened in 1918 to shelter graduates of the Durbar School from radical ideas circulating in Indian universities, where they otherwise would have traveled for further studies (Eagle, 1999). The medium of instruction at Trichandra College was English. Educational policy under the Ranas served to limit education to elites, mostly their Rana family members. For this small population, the language of education was English.

Schooling During the Panchayat Era (1950-1990): One Language, One Nation

Rana rule ended in 1950 with the reestablishment of the power of the king, supported by the Nepali Congress political party. King Tribhuvan, whose power was restored, accepted the constraints of a constitution and worked with parliament and cabinet members to establish a democratic government focused on goals of development. Democratic government did not go smoothly; after King Tribhuvan’s death, political instability led to the establishment of five different cabinets in five years (Whelpton, 2005). Elections in 1959 brought the Nepali Congress party to power, allowing them to advance an ambitious reform program. King Mahendra, unhappy with this level of instability, declared a state of emergency, dissolved parliament, arrested the Prime Minister and members of the cabinet, and banned political parties and ethnically based groups (Eagle, 1999). The King claimed that the parliamentary system was unsuitable for Nepal’s needs, and that his newly created Panchayat system of so-called partyless democracy, which concentrated all real power under the king, would provide the stability that Nepal needed for national development (Burghart, 1984).

The period after 1950 was the first time that Nepal’s government became interested in cultural unification. The slogan of *ek bhasha, ek bhash, ek dharma, ek desh* (one language, one way of dress, one religion, one nation) summarized the goals of the Panchayat government, which attempted to spread Nepali, Hinduism, and other symbols of nation throughout the country to create a unified national identity (Rai et al., 2011; Whelpton, 2005). The goal was assimilation of people with varied cultural and linguistic practices into a Nepali identity based on the cultural practices of elite, high-caste hill Hindus (Onta, 1996a).

Education was an important tool for reaching this end. Establishing widespread schooling was an immediate priority of the new government in 1950, and new

structures of educational administration were set up shortly after the establishment of democracy. The Nepal National Educational Planning Commission (NNEPC), a group of Nepali civil servants advised by University of Oregon Professor of Education Hugh B. Wood developed an overarching educational plan (NNEPC, 1956). The NNEPC report devoted several pages to the question of language of instruction. The report “set the tone of the education sector” for years to come (Awasthi, 2004, p. 3). The authors of the report strongly supported Nepali as the medium of instruction for schooling, largely for purposes of national integration, stating:

The study of a non-Nepali *local* tongue would mitigate against the effective development of Nepali, for the student would make greater use of it than Nepali – at home and in the community – and thus Nepali would remain a “foreign” language. If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language, then other languages will gradually disappear, and greater national strength and unity will result. (NNEPC, 1956, p. 97)

The report discussed not only what language should be used in classrooms but also on playgrounds and in all spheres of life. The goal was not just to teach academic competence in Nepali, but to develop monolingual Nepali speakers:

It should be emphasized that if Nepali is to become the true national language, then we must insist that its use be enforced in the primary school... Otherwise, Nepali, though learned, may remain a “foreign” language rather than the child’s basic, thinking language. Local dialects and tongues, other than standard Nepali, should be vanished from the school and playground as early as possible in the life of the child. (NNEPC, 1956, p. 96)

The language of school was therefore meant to become the language of all spheres of life by silencing students’ first languages.

Discussions of this report blame Hugh Wood, the American advisor to the commission, for this monolingual emphasis (e.g., Awasthi, 2004, 2011). Wood publicly declared his support for monolingual schooling on the grounds that English-only instruction had succeeded in American schools. The government newspaper reported on March 26, 1954:

U. S. Education Expert, Dr. Wood expressed his views on the problem of the medium of instruction in primary education. He said that two hundred years before, the very problem had stared them in the face in the United States of America, which, at that time had a multiplicity of spoken languages; but that after the War of Independence, English was given due prominence as the medium of instruction, and that today there was no problem of language there. (*Gorkhapatra*, 3/26/1954, as cited in Wood, 1987, p. 26).

From this excerpt, it appears that the NNEPC followed Wood’s personal views. This has led to a characterization of the report as parroting American or Western views of acceptable language use (Awasthi, 2011; Giri, 2011).

The next major education policy was the National Education System Plan (NESP), established in 1971 and implemented in the five years following its inception. The NESP was again explicit about the aims of assimilation and homogenization, stating the goals of education as:

to strengthen devotion to crown, country, national unity and the *panchayat* system, to develop uniform traditions in education by bringing together various patterns under a single national policy, to limit the tradition of regional languages, to encourage financial and social mobility, and to fulfill manpower requirements essential for national development. (Ministry of Education, 1971, p. 1, as cited in Caddell, 2007, p. 266)

Under this policy, and throughout the Panchayat era, the goals of education were to promote development through unification of the nation under one language and culture. Education, which took place through the medium of Nepali language, changed from a privilege for elites to something accessible to much of the population, with the goal of bringing the whole population into a unified national identity.

Schooling After 1990: The Right to Education in the Mother Tongue

The Panchayat system ended amid widespread protests for democracy in 1990. The king agreed to a new constitution which recognized Nepal as a multicultural and multilingual country. The Constitution of 1990 contained a major shift in language policy at the constitutional level, stating:

- (1) The Nepali language in the Devanagari script is the language of the nation of Nepal. The Nepali language shall be the official language.
- (2) All the languages spoken as the mother tongue in the various parts of Nepal are the national languages of Nepal. (His Majesty's Government Nepal, 1990)

This was the first time that languages other than Nepali received constitutional recognition as legitimate elements of the nation. At the same time, this formulation maintains the dominance of Nepali over other languages spoken in the country by keeping Nepali as the only national language (Phyak, 2011).

The 1990 Constitution was also the first time that educational and cultural rights were explicitly extended to Nepal's minorities in the constitution, though again these provisions were not entirely straightforward. The relevant articles state:

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

26. State Policies
 - (2) The State shall, while maintaining the cultural diversity of the country, pursue a policy of strengthening the national unity by promoting healthy and cordial social relations amongst the various religions, castes, tribes, communities and linguistic groups, and by helping in the promotion of their languages, literatures, scripts, arts, and cultures. (His Majesty's Government Nepal, 1990)

These are major concessions to the demands of linguistic minorities to be recognized and supported by the government. This is also the first time that

a language-in-education policy was stated in the Constitution, including the provision for operation of schools in each community's mother tongue. Nevertheless, these passages remain somewhat ambiguous. For example, it seems that communities will be the ones to operate schools in their mother tongues, absolving the government of responsibility for operation of schools in languages other than Nepali. By restricting this measure to primary education, it leaves mother tongue-medium instruction at higher levels of education unprotected and fails to set a policy for early childhood education. Despite the lack of clarity of certain provisions, though, the Constitution of 1990 was a major step forward for the inclusion of languages other than Nepali in education.

The Constitution of 1990 remained in effect for seventeen years before being replaced by the Interim Constitution of 2007. Between these two documents, Nepal experienced another difficult transition to democracy, as it had previously in the 1950 brush with democracy. A violent Maoist insurgency beginning in Western Nepal in 1996 started a civil war that lasted until the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006 (International Crisis Group, 2011). Among the results of the peace agreement and incorporation of the Maoists into the political structure was the abolition of the monarchy, and subsequent promulgation of the 2007 Interim Constitution. While there were many changes between these two constitutions, the sections that immediately address language policy and education remained unchanged from those in the Constitution of 1990 (Government of Nepal, 2007).

As many LPP scholars have observed, language policy is often created through educational plans and implementation rather than at the constitutional level (Canagarajah, 2004; Hornberger, 2002; Menken, 2008). The School Sector Reform Plan, Nepal's major education policy document for 2009-2015, provided some clarification of the language policy, supporting use of mother tongues in grades one through three (Ministry of Education, 2009). In addition, the government has approved a set of guidelines for implementing multilingual education, and commissioned a report on teaching Nepali as a second language to speakers of other languages in Nepal (Yonjan-Tamang, 2012).

Language policy observers still lament the lack of support for languages other than Nepali, especially in the realm of education, calling the situation "cultural anarchism" (Giri, 2010, p. 88) or a "façade of language planning" behind which the author reveals "monolingual hangover, elitism, and displacement of local languages" (Phyak, 2011, p. 265). Another set of authors extol the virtues of the one major mother tongue-based multilingual education project that has been implemented; these papers are written by the members of the team that implemented a three-year project to introduce mother tongue-based multilingual education in seven pilot schools around the country (e.g., Hough, Thapa Magar, & Yonjan-Tamang, 2009; Nurmela, 2009; Taylor, 2010; Yonjan-Tamang, Hough, & Nurmela, 2009). These authors emphasize that the program reversed years of centralized decision-making, valuing local indigenous knowledge (Nurmela, 2009) and providing a program designed to suit Nepal's indigenous minorities' educational needs (Hough, Thapa Magar, & Yonjan-Tamang, 2009). Only one member of the project team has published a paper outlining some of the "glitches" in the Multilingual Education project (Taylor, 2010); a more critical view of the project is provided by external evaluations (Phyak, 2012; Rai et al., 2011).

Language planning and policy writing in Nepal since 1990 represents Nepal's language policy history as a journey of three stages: before 1950, when there were no schools, and a few elites received English instruction; between 1950 and 1990, when schools were Nepali-only; and after 1990, when other languages were allowed in schools but remained extremely marginalized. These policies are often described as a programmatic attempt by elites to subjugate other caste and ethnic groups; for example Giri's (2011) statement that "the ideology of linguistic dominance was masterminded through a systematic design created by the ruling elites" (p. 201). Language planning and policy in education is traditionally presented as a history from the days of subjugation due to lack of access to education, followed by the era of exclusion through Nepali-only education, characterized as "from the language policy perspective...perhaps the darkest age" (Phyak, 2011, p. 268), and finally to an age of "fundamental change" (Sonntag, 1995, p. 118) after the 1990 Constitution.

Complicating the Language Policy History

The history presented above used three distinct periods, demarcated by major changes in government and policy, and described little or no change within each period or continuity across periods. In fact, the version presented here showed more details of change over time than some other representations of the same history. Some authors lump together the Rana and Panchayat period as the period of Nepali-only policies, claiming for example, "many of the indigenous languages were suppressed under the Rana regime and the Panchayat era which actively pursued 'one nation-one language' policy" (Toba, Toba & Rai, 2005, as cited in Giri, 2010, p. 94); even though, as discussed above, the Rana regime did not pursue the same nationalist policies as the Panchayat (Burghart, 1984). Within the three periods I presented above, though, some eras have been more open or opposed to the use of languages other than Nepali in education.

The aim of the following sections is to point to change within eras, continuity between periods, and times when different decisions could have been made regarding language policy. I begin by looking at increased access to schooling during the Rana era that contradicts the standard depiction of the whole period as a static one with no schools. Next, an examination of the NNEPC report shows that there was consideration of alternate mediums of instruction for the Nepali school system. The following two sections look at change within the Panchayat era and the post-1990 era. Together these cases show that the division of this history into three distinct and static sections misses details of a complicated history.

Pre-1950: Increasing Access to Schooling

A first piece of evidence for the messiness of periods in the history of medium of instruction is the existence of Nepali-medium schooling before the end of Rana rule. While schooling was extremely limited during the Rana period, the number of schools did increase throughout Rana rule. A Department of Education was established in 1858, even though the only secondary school at the time was the Durbar School which opened to students outside of the Rana family in 1885 (Sharma, 1990). In 1901, reform-minded Prime Minister Dev Shamsher opened a large number of schools, cited as 50 (Sharma, 1990) or 200 (Caddell, 2007), during

his three months in power before his brother staged a coup to put an end to such dangerous reforms. These so-called language schools were the first official Nepali-medium schools in the country (Sharma, 1990). Whelpton (2005) notes that the use of Nepali as a medium of instruction could be interpreted as a populist move or an exclusionary means to limit access to English. While most histories imply that the language schools were shut down as soon as Dev Shamsher lost power (e.g., Whelpton, 2005), the more detailed description provided by Sharma (1990) notes that several language schools remained open in district headquarters away from Kathmandu, perhaps because education in rural areas was seen as less of a threat to the rulers than schooling in Kathmandu.

Even after Dev Shamsher, Rana governments moved toward increased access to education. In 1905, the prime minister who had ousted Dev Shamsher started a Nepali-medium school to train civil servants (Sharma, 1990). In 1934, Nepali was declared the official language of educational institutions and the language of exams for the School Leaving Certificate, the equivalent of a high school diploma (Caddell, 2007). In 1935, a group of young men set up a public school in Kathmandu, presumably using Nepali medium as per the 1934 language law. The opening of additional schools prompted the Rana government to establish a centralized system for controlling these new schools (Sharma, 1990). Another reform-minded prime minister, Padma Shamsher, proposed the establishment of “vernacular”² schools along the lines of Gandhi’s vocation-oriented Basic Schools in India in the late 1940s. Like Dev Shamsher’s language schools, these could be seen as a liberal move to spread educational access or an attempt to “keep people in their place” by providing limited education to non-elites (Whelpton, 2005, p. 83).

Whatever the Ranas’ motivation, there was slowly expanding access to education in both English and Nepali throughout the Rana period, culminating in a 1948 declaration of the right of Nepalis to universal education and the establishment of a university commission, a Sanskrit college, and adult education centers (Sharma, 1990). The establishment of widespread schooling after the introduction of democracy could be interpreted not as a clean break from the earlier period but rather as the continuation of a trajectory toward public education that had begun fifty years earlier. In terms of language policy, the Ranas appear to have been interested in maintaining their monopoly on English proficiency, a trend common to elites worldwide (May, 2012). Nepali language education was good enough for the masses, while other languages were generally not discussed as potential languages of education.

The 1950s: Multivocal Policy

There were dramatic changes for language-in-education policy during the 1950s, even if, as noted in the previous section, some education was available during the Rana era. A closer examination of the report of the NNEPC provides some insight into how Nepali became the official language of instruction. A major change that came with the NNEPC is that policy went from being the univocal declaration of an autocratic prime minister to a discussion among many people; not only was the report written by the 47 Nepali members of the planning commission

² I assume that the use of vernacular by historians implies Nepali language, though I have only seen references to “vernacular” and not specifically to Nepali (e.g., Whelpton, 2005, p. 83).

with American adviser Hugh Wood, but the planning commission also performed a countrywide survey of educational desires and aspirations. One chapter of the NNEPC report is devoted to analyzing the 1,647 written responses they received, with a significant discussion of demands about language. The report describes these results, going into some detail about regional preferences:

There is a *mania for English education* in some parts of the country and the reason given in upholding this system is the preference shown to English educated people in government service...Border lands on the North and the East are linguistically and culturally akin to Tibet. Hence our representative who was sent to Menang [sic; a northern district] reports that one member in each family has received training in Lamaism at some monastery and the rest do not want education of any type...Except for some parts of the Terai [southern plains bordering India], many desire that early primary education be given in the regional *language*, middle and secondary education in the national language, and higher education either in English or in the national language. In some quarters, exclusive preference is given to Hindi in all stages, but the major areas all over the country insist that Nepali, the national language, be made the medium of instruction of the upper primary and secondary stages. (NNEPC, 1956, pp. 53-55)

This passage demonstrates the Commission's recognition of multiple viewpoints with regard to language. This is also evident in Table 1, which reproduces the report's presentation of survey results. In both presentations of the data, the NNEPC report noted regional differences in language demands, which related to existing patterns of language use such as the preference for English speakers in government jobs, or the use of Tibetan in the north and east of the country. Table 1 shows even more details, such as the recognition of Hindi as the "local" language preferred in the Terai area, set in scare quotes in the original text probably to denote skepticism that Hindi, seen as a language of India, could be a local language in Nepal (Gaige, 1975). Influence from India is also noted in the demand for English in Eastern Nepal, the area that borders on Darjeeling and therefore had the most contact with the many English-medium mission schools in the Darjeeling area. While the eventual decision of the commission was in favor of the Nepali language, we see that the advantages of local languages, Nepali, and English were weighed in reaching the final recommendation.

The recommendations of the NNEPC are also worth examining in detail. As discussed earlier, the report supported the use of Nepali in school for purposes of national integration and, explicitly, the elimination of other languages spoken in Nepal. However, at times there appears to be some room in the NNEPC recommendations for the use of additional languages in the classroom. At the same time that the national language is heavily stressed, the report recommends the use of "mother tongue, leading to Nepali" in primary education (NNEPC, 1956, p. 93). The report details the way students should be weaned from the use of their first language at the beginning of school:

In non-Nepali speaking areas, the first grade teacher must communicate with his pupils in the beginning in their mother tongue, but he can begin to build the Nepali vocabulary immediately. For example, the reading readiness pictures that are placed around the walls of the classroom can have their descriptive words printed in Nepali; orally the teacher can

Table 1: Medium of Instruction Desired

	Kathmandu Valley	West Nepal	East Nepal	Terai	Average
Primary School					
Local	71%	48%	75%	79%*	68%
National	38%	44%	13%	16%	28%
English	12%	17%	75%**	4%	27%
Middle School					
Local	18%	22%	25%	51%*	29%
National	81%	69%	50%	50%	63%
English	26%	25%	12%	16%	20%
High School					
Local	20%	22%	5%	54%*	25%
National	68%	67%	75%	45%	64%
English	52%	35%	73%**	26%	46%

*“Local” language for the Terai area means Hindi in most sections.

** This reflects the influence of the missionary English schools in the Darjeeling area (NNEPC, 1956, p. 53)³

introduce the Nepali word along with its local-tongue counterpart...If this informal approach is used to build vocabulary, it is believed that many pupils will cease to be dependent upon their mother tongue by the end of the first grade; certainly from the end of the second grade the medium of instruction should be entirely Nepali. (NNEPC, 1956, p. 96)

This excerpt shows a limited willingness to use students’ first languages in the classroom for the first two years of instruction. While the NNEPC report is clearly opposed to the maintenance of students’ first languages, it is worth noting that even the present-day School Sector Reform Plan (SSRP) and multilingual education implementation guidelines, considered significant steps toward acceptance of multiple languages in school, only allow for education in the medium of students’ mother tongues through third grade (Government of Nepal, 2010; Ministry of Education, 2009). My intention in this discussion is not to attempt to reinterpret the NNEPC report as supporting bilingual education, something it explicitly does not do. What I do want to show is that a close read of the report shows more ambivalence than is described in later discussions of the document. While the goal was elimination of minority languages through Nepali medium schooling, teachers were to be allowed to minimally use other languages in the classroom; before settling on this recommendation, local languages were considered as a possible medium of education.

This Nepali-only educational recommendation was made into law in 1956-7 but was not accepted readily (Chalmers, 2007). In the Kathmandu area, where a Newar-language school had already been established in 1954, the imposition of Nepali in primary schools was met with protests from Newar language activists, demanding Newar language in local schools. Speakers of the Limbu

³ That most of these categories add up to more than 100% points to desire for education through multiple mediums of education, support for multilingual education long before such a term was used in educational discourse.

language in Eastern Nepal, a group with a long literary tradition and history of opposition to unitary state policies (Caplan, 1970), petitioned the government to set up a Limbu-language school (Chalmers, 2007). In the southern plains, "Save Hindi" campaigns advocated official status for Hindi, including in schools, with widespread support; this campaign was countered by the establishment of a Nepali Promotion Congress, and the groups clashed in violent confrontations (Gauge, 1975). The government acquiesced to the protests of speakers of languages other than Nepali, and in January 1958 retracted the requirement for immediate use of Nepali in all primary schools (Chalmers, 2007). These popular protests against the Nepali-only policy forced the government to reverse its position on language. The democratic 1950s, a period represented in language policy histories as part of the Nepali-only era in schooling (e.g., Giri, 2010; Toba, et al., 2005), was a brief window of opportunity for the use of other languages in schooling.

1960-1990: Change within the Panchayat Era

This brief window closed after King Mahendra's royal coup of 1960, which began the Panchayat era. While the NNEPC demonstrated nation-building goals through insistence on the importance of schooling for building the nation, as discussed above, it was during the Panchayat era that the one language-one nation approach to nation-building was most prominent (Caddell, 2007). Panchayat-era laws included restrictive language policies both outside of schools and in the classroom. The 1962 constitution maintained Nepali's status as the national language, and made knowledge of Nepali a requirement for citizenship applications (Chalmers, 2007). In 1964, a law recommending that Nepali businesses keep records in Nepali was changed to require all commercial records to be kept in either Nepali or English (Hutt, 1988). Starting in 1965, all signboards were required to be displayed in Nepali, and state-owned Radio Nepal, the only radio station in the country, ended its ten-minute news broadcasts in Newar and Hindi, leaving broadcasts only in Nepali (Chalmers, 2007). In the realm of education, a new National Education Commission recommended Nepali as the medium of instruction for all grades; the measure was enforced by the 1962 Education Act. The beginning of Panchayat rule ushered in a new emphasis on Nepali-only policies, as is described in LPP histories.

Despite this strictness, there was some change in educational policy during this time, most noticeably with relation to additional languages beyond Nepali; the omission of international languages in language policy histories in traditional approaches to LPP thus paints an incomplete view of language policy. The 1956 NNEPC report recommended introduction of languages other than Nepali only in secondary school, when the commission suggested "Tibetan, Hindi, Bengali, and/or English be required" of students in preprofessional tracks (NNEPC, 1956, p. 114). In 1971, the NESP maintained the Nepali-only approach to the primary level (class 1-3). Students at the lower secondary level (class 4-6) were supposed to spend 55% of school hours studying Nepali, 5% on Elementary Sanskrit, the language of Hindu texts, and 10% studying "one of the UN languages" (Ministry of Education, 1971, p. 24-5). This modification shows an emphasis on the nation-building and Hinduising goals of the Panchayat government with Nepali and Sanskrit respectively, and on development and international cooperation ("one of the UN languages," Ministry of Education, 1971, p. 25).

In addition, the secondary school level policy included some of the languages of Nepal. The NESP provided guidelines for three kinds of high school (class 6-10): general, vocational, and Sanskrit. In general high schools, Nepali was allocated 12% of school hours, “one of the UN languages” received 12% as well, and an optional subject was given 10% of school hours. Optional subjects included Sanskrit and the UN languages that already had a spot in the curriculum, four other international languages (German, Japanese, Portuguese, Chinese), and six languages spoken in Nepal (Hindi, Tibetan, Urdu, Maithili, Bhojpuri and Newari), as well as additional subjects in mathematics and sciences. The optional subjects for vocational school included no additional languages, while both Nepali and a UN language were required subjects. Sanskrit high schools required Nepali and Sanskrit, but had the same optional languages as general high schools with the addition of Rai, Limbu, Gurung, Magar, and Tamang, languages of Nepal spoken by predominantly Buddhist groups unlikely to attend Sanskrit schools.

In practice, English remained the additional language in nearly all schools despite changes in wording in policy documents (Malla, 1977). Even though changes in policy toward additional languages had little effect on the position of English as the dominant international language in Nepal, I have discussed these moves in order to question the narrative of educational policy in Nepal as a contest between Nepali-only forces and minority languages. For example, Hutt’s (1988) study of Nepali as a national language predicted that “some quite substantial revisions may be expected in education policy with regard to the medium of instruction” (p. 47) in the near future—in the direction of increased emphasis on English. Other languages, especially English, have not been peripheral players in the linguistic ecology but central elements in Nepal’s language policy.

After 1990: Continued Change

Even after 1990, language policy has not been static. Sonntag (1995) notes that despite changes in the constitution, no active moves were made to change implementation until controversy erupted over the establishment of Sanskrit as a mandatory subject in 1992. Protests by non-Hindu minorities led to the creation of a National Language Policy Recommendations Commission, which recommended use of children’s first languages as the medium of instruction (Sonntag, 1995). In 1997, the conflict intensified when three local governments began to use local languages in administration, retaining Nepali as the primary official language. The government immediately warned that, under the 1990 Constitution, use of languages other than Nepali in local government was unlawful; this was supported by a 1999 Supreme Court ruling (Chalmers, 2007). Language policy continues to develop today through government and civil society actions.

Language policy, throughout the history of Nepal, has moved in fits and starts, faced by opposition that at times has influenced national-level policies. While major political changes may mark shifts in language policy, looking at only those junctures misses other times when language policy has been flexible, opening or closing spaces for use of languages other than Nepali in education (Hornberger, 2002). In addition, closer examination of policy documents shows that the discussion surrounding language use in Nepal’s schools has not just been about languages spoken within Nepal but also about the proper place for languages like Sanskrit and English.

Changing Categories and Permeable Borders: Two Additional Dimensions

There are many aspects of history that could be expanded on to provide a richer history of LPP. Above I discussed historical elements that fall outside of the staged presentation of history, either by showing continuity between eras or change inside a single era. In this section I point briefly to two additional topics that I believe are important in the continued conversation about language policy. These are the changing nature of categories of language and ethnicity, and influences on LPP in Nepal from beyond Nepal's borders.

Changing Categories

It is easy, but misleading, when telling historical narratives to rely on present-day categories as if they are static and primordial (Mitchell, 2009). One example of the changing nature of language and ethnicity comes from the history of the Nepali language. Burghart (1984) documents change in the name attached to the language now called Nepali, from names attached to particular groups of people (*Khas kura*, language of the Khas people; *Parbatiya*, language of the hill people; and *Gorkhali*, or language of the Gorkha region). Hutt (1988) reports that in the 1980s, "many Nepalese, especially those for whom it is not a mother tongue, still use terms such as *gorkhali*, *parbatiya* and even *khas kura* for the Nepali language" (p. 34). This terminological negotiation begins to show that Nepali has not been a monolithic entity throughout history.

Nepali was a language under development at the same time that the Nepali nation-state was being built (Hutt, 1988). Nepali language printing and publishing began in India at the end of the 19th century, largely printing translations of Sanskrit classics, contemporary literature from North India, and, later, European authors. While development and promotion of Nepali language began in Nepal under Dev Shamsher's brief rule in 1901, with the establishment of a newspaper and language society during the same three months when he set up the language schools, later prime ministers discouraged printing in Nepal (Hutt, 1988). While Nepali has been consistently elevated by those in power, it has also faced similar challenges to those faced by other languages of Nepal. In 1918, a proponent of the development of Nepali, Parasmani Pradhan, lamented claims by others that Nepali was a "jungly" or barbaric language (Onta, 1996b, p. 166). Similar insults have continued to be leveled against the other languages of Nepal, with first-language speakers of Nepali calling other languages of Nepal the "dialects of the jungle" (Malla, 1979, as cited in Phyak, 2011, p. 198). The position of Nepali language development a century ago was not so different from the position of other languages of Nepal more recently.

Permeable Borders

The discussion so far has noted several elements of influence from outside of Nepal, especially in the development of Nepali as a written language. This contrasts with many histories of Nepal, including history presented in discussions of LPP, which describe a Nepal largely free from outside influences. However, Nepal's history is linked to the rest of the world. An illustration of this is that changes in

Nepali government structures seemingly caused by internal Nepali politics match world events (Kunreuther, 2002). The 1950 end of the Rana era lines up with the post-World War II decline in colonization, with Indian independence as most relevant for Nepal, and was led by men educated in India and influenced by the independence movement there (Whelpton, 2005). The 1990 People's Movement took place in the global context of the end of the Soviet Union and worldwide democracy movements. Liechty (1997) has argued that even during the isolationist Rana era, exclusion was selective; despite popular perceptions that the borders were completely closed from 1846 to 1950, the Rana rulers allowed certain kinds of trade and foreign visitors to enter the country.

LPP in Nepal has been impacted by international influence in several ways. In particular, India should play a large role in our understanding of language policy in Nepal. The earliest teaching and publishing in Nepali took place in Darjeeling and Banaras, with Nepali-medium primary schooling in Darjeeling beginning in the 1920s; most early publishing in Nepali took place outside of Nepal's borders (Hutt, 1988; Onta, 1996b). Calcutta University began allowing what they called Nepali, Pahadiya, or Khaskura as a language of exams in 1918. In 1932, reflecting the terminological shift discussed earlier, a Nepali language promotion society in Darjeeling successfully petitioned to change this name to Nepali (Onta, 1996b). Authors in the Nepali-language literary magazines of Banaras and Darjeeling credited the "atmosphere" of India in which "one could but not be inspired to think about progress based on one's own mother-tongue" for inspiring their promotion of Nepali (Onta, 1996b, p. 168).

These educated Nepali speakers and publications eventually reached Nepal. Teachers in many early schools, including the Durbar School and Trichandra College, were brought in from India, and taught using materials produced in India as there were no presses in Nepal where materials could be printed (NNEPC, 1956; Whelpton, 2005). Other Nepalis learned to speak Nepali and English during their service as Gurkha soldiers in the British Army; British officers remarked with surprise that some of their recruits, many of whom were monolingual speakers of languages other than Nepali, had joined the army for the opportunity to learn Nepali and English (Des Chene, 1991). Upon their return, some former Gurkha soldiers tutored local children, creating pockets with high levels of literacy and Nepali proficiency in areas otherwise unreachable by schooling (Ragsdale, 1981). Much of the early development of Nepali language and schooling in Nepali was influenced by events outside of the borders of Nepal.

International discourses of nationalism and rights are also reflected in these changing policies. The vision of a monolingual nation promoted between 1950 and 1990 aligns with international discourses of nationalism, for example Haugen's (1966) assertion that "every self-respecting nation has to have a language. Not just a 'vernacular' or a 'dialect', but a fully developed language. Anything else marks it as underdeveloped" (p. 927). Hutt (1988) notes, "one of the conditions for the development of nationalism in Nepali literature was a certain familiarity with foreign literatures among its writers. Indeed, the forms of 20th-century Nepali nationalism were modeled, perhaps consciously, on those of earlier nationalisms elsewhere" (p. 39). A philosophy of one-language, one-nation did not spring from the minds of Nepal's leaders but rather was at least partly a result of the influence of global ideals of nationalism.

Similarly, the post-1990 move toward a pluralistic national language policy is not an isolated phenomenon. Phyak (2011) notes that a number of international agreements underlie the Ministry of Education's move toward multilingual education.⁴ Hangen (2007) links the demands for indigenous rights in those terms, including mother-tongue education, to the use of the discourse of indigeneity by the UN and other international organizations, and to such organizations' willingness to fund indigenous groups for projects including language advocacy. Even a sovereign nation that has never been colonized is influenced by people and ideas from outside its borders. This does not reduce the authenticity of such ideas or movements, but is part of a fuller view of historical and present trends in language policy and politics.

Discussion: Why This Critique?

No history can include every detail relevant to the topic at hand. This paper has not included every dimension of language policy in Nepal; omission of topics including actual language practices in school, the influence of foreign consultants and linguists after Hugh Wood, and the impact of the People's War were necessary to keep this paper to a reasonable length. My amendments to the standard histories of language policy build on rather than contradict the work of scholars of language policy in Nepal. By examining some elements regularly omitted from histories of language policy, I hope to point to the value of including these topics in such a study.

I have discussed three main areas where a revision of the standard history may be illuminating: noting where there are continuities between major eras in language policy, and also where there have been changes within those periods; examining the ways categories such as language and ethnic group have changed over time, rather than viewing such categories as static throughout history; and paying attention to dynamics of language policy that have roots in places outside the geographical bounds of the country under study. These cautions apply to the study of language policy in areas beyond Nepal, for example when talking about English-only policies in the United States that depict English as the only option for schooling (Wiley & Lukes, 1996).

Specific to the current state of language policy of Nepal, I believe this approach may have pragmatic value. Histories that depict Nepali-medium education as a fixed, single option since the beginning of schooling in Nepal make the proposed shift to multilingual schooling seem like a radical break from the past. It is indeed a dramatic shift; however, we have seen that demands for such an approach to schooling were taken seriously by the democratic government of the 1950s. We have also seen that when Nepali was adopted as a medium of education, it was labeled an underdeveloped language with few written materials and insufficient academic vocabulary for its use in schooling (NNEPC, 1956). Through its use in schools, Nepali was developed to be suitable for schooling; since this process has been successful for Nepali, advocates of multilingual education could argue that undertaking a similar process for other languages is not only possible but can be parallel to the story of

⁴ These international agreements are: The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948); the Joint World Conference on Education for All (1990); the Dakar Framework of Action (2000); the Millennium Development Goals (2000) and the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (ILO 169, ratified by Nepal in 2007) (Phyak, 2011, p. 284-285).

the national language of Nepal. History is a part of the conversation surrounding decisions about language policy in education; careful consideration of the ways the history is told may influence the outcome of such conversations.

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