

Prem Prasad Poudel* and Madan Prasad Baral

Examining foreign language teaching and learning in Nepal: An ecological perspective

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Abstract: In recent years, in Nepal, while some languages of the nation are on the verge of extinction, some foreign languages (such as Japanese, Korean, Chinese) are emerging as new attractions among the youths and adults and are widely taught in the marketplaces through the private sector initiative. Against this backdrop, in this article, we have examined the current foreign language teaching and learning situation drawing on qualitative empirical data obtained from the institutes involved in foreign language instruction in a city in Gandaki Province of Nepal. The data were collected from a survey in forty institutes, ten individual interviews and five focus group discussions. Drawing on the data, an ecological model was adopted, which focused on dynamic interaction, co-existence, and competition among languages, and findings were discussed in line with these aspects of ecological understanding. Findings revealed that learning foreign languages has been established as a conduit towards economic gains and opportunities for employment and education, which has largely been contributory towards reshaping the ecological relationship among the foreign languages in Nepal.


Keywords: ecological relationship; foreign language hierarchies; Nepal; social images


1 Introduction

Nepal, a country that is resided by approximately 30 million people (UNFPA Nepal 2017) belonging to a total of “125 ethnic groups/communities” (Dahal 2014: 3) and speaking “more than 123 languages” (Yadava 2014: 52), lies on the lap of the Himalayas between the People’s Republic of China on the North,

***Corresponding author: Prem Prasad Poudel**, Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal; and Department of Education Policy and Leadership, The Education University of Hong Kong, Hong Kong, China, E-mail: prempoudel95@gmail.com

Madan Prasad Baral, Department of English Education, Tribhuvan University, Pokhara, Nepal, E-mail: rohit37baral@gmail.com

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and the Republic of India on the South, West, and East. Changes of various kinds in the neighborhood influence the situated diversity of this country. Influences have been noticed in the cultural, religious, educational, and linguistic dimensions of the Nepalese society at large. Being a country with low socio-economic status and still principally conceptualized as the Least Developed Country (United Nations 2019), it has been struggling hard to promote and protect its own cultural values and identities. The sociolinguistic scenario can be taken as an example, where the teaching and learning of new foreign languages have been widespread both in formal and informal language teaching contexts affecting the sociolinguistic constitution of the communities. In this article, we have attempted to explore the changing situation of the ecology of foreign languages in the recent years, drawing on some empirical data from one of the metropolitan cities in the Gandaki Province of Nepal.

2 Literature review

2.1 The sociolinguistic scenario of Nepal

The languages spoken in Nepali territory have genetic affiliation to four language families, viz. Indo-European (82.10%), Sino-Tibetan (17.30%), Astro-Asiatic (0.19%), and Dravidian (0.13%) (except the language “Kusunda” which is supposed to be a language isolate). Moreover, 19 of the total 123 languages are spoken by 96% of the population whereas the remaining 104 languages are spoken by 4% of Nepal’s population (Yadava 2014). Additionally, the report published by Central Bureau of Statistics (2012) mentioned that a total of 0.09% (25,717 people) were the speakers of the foreign and sign languages. English was isolated from the foreign and sign language category and it was found that a total of 0.01% (2,032 people) were enumerated as English native speakers (Yadava 2014). However, in recent years, speakers of foreign languages might have increased significantly due to the increasing mobility of people across national borders and opening up of new cross-border employment opportunities, which further complicates the case of linguistic diversity.

This linguistic diversity (as identified by Central Bureau of Statistics 2012) is one of the salient features of Nepalese society and has been celebrated as a resource. However, globally, concerns have been raised regarding potential loss of as many as 50–90% of humankind’s approximately 7,000 known spoken languages by the end of the twenty-first century (Grenoble 2011 as cited in McCarty 2018). This global scenario equally applies to the linguistic diversity of many countries where more and more indigenous languages have been endangered, and

favors have increased on learning foreign languages (Nettle and Romaine 2000). Among the three perceptions of such diversity: language-as-problem, language-as-resource, and language-as-right (Ruíz 1984), the first symbolizes the hegemonic monolingual ideological stance and whereas the latter two relate to the respect, equality, empowerment, and revitalization of the linguistic diversities across the communities. All these types of understandings have been visualized in Nepal's linguistic discourses, and importantly, they have been instrumental for the conceptualizations of language policy making as well as democratic and human rights movements in relation to language ecology in the multilingual contexts.

Protection of this historical linguistic diversity has been challenged due to the diminishing number of speakers of local/indigenous languages and increasing use of some foreign languages (such as Hindi, Chinese, English). For instance, Sharma (2018) argued that Chinese language has gained power, prestige, and commodity value in Nepal whereas many of the native languages of various ethnic and indigenous communities have not been functional in the social, educational, administrative, and media spaces. During our observation in the research sites, people from the Gurung and Magar communities reported that they do not quite often use their native language even while communicating their home affairs. This might be one of the reasons for the native-speaking population's decreasing interest to use their native/local/ethnic languages (Hill 2002). Such trend is significantly increasing due to the demographic changes, social class mobility, and employment opportunities, especially in the urban and semi-urban areas of the country. Similar trends are reported internationally, which reveals that many languages are endangered, and those endangered languages are spoken by relatively small number of people (McCarty 2018). In Nepal, currently, promotion and protection of the native languages of the 4% population is a huge challenge for the government and the relevant communities (Yadava 2013).

Attempts have been made to promote and protect that linguistic diversity through various measures at the national and local level in the names of mother-tongue education and multilingual education supported by the international and national organizations. However, efficient and positive impacts of these measures have been minimal. As the Article 32 of the Constitution of Nepal provisioned, multilingualism, as the fundamental right (Government of Nepal 2015), inherently urges the government agencies and private sectors to develop the program and plans in multiple languages to promote the linguistic diversity, which might establish multilingualism or multilingual practices as the norms in the official domains. Similarly, this constitution gives exclusive power to the provincial legislature and local governments to make laws on language provisions (Jha 2017). As a result, more local level policy making in language policy and planning are likely to take place in the local governments. In a long

run, we can anticipate that trilingual policies and practices (Adamson and Feng 2009; Li 2006) might emerge in the official spaces (that consist of Nepali, English and any other provincial/local language), where one of the three languages would probably be the foreign language (most probably English at the current state of foreign language use in Nepal and globally).

Although there are widespread discussions on the rights of local/indigenous languages and revitalization efforts of such languages, researchers have not yet captured the ecological status of the foreign languages and their teaching and learning situations in Nepal. We have realized the need for understanding the trend of Foreign Language Teaching and Learning (FLTL) through the utilization of the ecological framework. This article reports this concern.

2.2 Trends of foreign language teaching and learning in Nepal

Although English language teaching formally began with the establishment of Durbar High School in 1853 AD (Sharma 2005), there is no recorded cut-off point that indicates the beginning of any other foreign language(s) (besides the English language) teaching in Nepal. The FLTL enterprise might have been taking place for long, especially in the monasteries, mosques, and temples. For instance, Tibetan has been taught in the monasteries, Chinese in the Confucius institutes, Urdu, and Arabic in the mosques, and so on. The traditions of teaching and learning of those languages are unaffected by the fluid national boundaries of Nepal with India and China that permit people-to-people relations at various levels. Also, such linguistic practices are shaped by shared religious and politico-cultural philosophies. An anthropological and historical study would have addressed this concern.

Aside from the religious and cultural motives, trade and tourism are other driving forces for the expansion and adoption of foreign languages such as Chinese and Hindi in Nepal. These languages have been taught at universities as well. For instance, the Campus for International Languages (Vishwo Bhasa Campus) of Tribhuvan University in Kathmandu has been offering courses in Chinese, Russian, Korean, Japanese, German, French, Spanish, etc. Similarly, the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences at Tribhuvan University has the Central Department of Hindi. Some schools, usually the private ones, have begun to offer courses in foreign languages such as Chinese, French, German, and some others as additional languages. This indicates that there is a growing trend of teaching and learning of foreign languages in Nepal from school education to higher education. As early as 1970s, the National Education System Plan (NESP 1971–1976) had prescribed foreign languages to be taught as part of the curriculum under the

category of United Nations languages which included French, Chinese, German, Spanish, etc. (Sharma 2005). This reveals the fact that teaching and learning of foreign languages was and still is promoted through government machinery. The Government of Nepal (GoN) has set up an Employment Permit System (EPS) section under the Ministry of Labour and Employment, Department of Foreign Employment since 2007 AD (2064 BS), and this section is closely working with the Embassy of Republic of Korea to manage the Korean Language Tests, and employment provisions in Republic of Korea. Every year, thousands of youths in Nepal apply for Korean language tests seeking opportunities to be employed in Republic of Korea. For example, over 82,000 youths applied for Korean language test in 2017 (Subedi 2018). The employment prospects in Republic of Korea was promoted by bilateral agreement for employment between the two countries (i.e. Nepal and Republic of Korea). This agreement has rapidly expanded Korean language teaching marketplaces in Nepal. A similar scenario can be found in learning Japanese as well. Both attempts have contributed to the formation of new sociolinguistic spaces for foreign languages such as Korean and Japanese in Nepal.

Against this backdrop, here, we have focused on the FLTL situation in the marketplaces outside of formal educational institutions provided by private ones, an under-researched domain at least in the case of Nepal. Such institutions have offered the language packages to complement the growing requirements of proficiency in foreign languages for those who would aspire to pursue higher education and employment outside of Nepal. As the young generation has been aspiring for learning foreign languages due to the pressures from the globalization of the economy, trade, education, and employment, such motivation is likely to have a long-term effect on the multilingual constitution of Nepalese communities, especially in the urban contexts. Some critical scholars (e.g. Pennycook 2006; Phillipson 1992, 1996) acknowledge the imperial power of the global lingua franca English and think that the global growth of English and other foreign languages (such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese) may threaten the ethnolinguistic diversity in many places by upsetting an ecology of those languages. In this situation, keeping up the historical linguistic ecologies in multilingual contexts such as that of Nepal has always been a challenge because of the growing orientations towards foreign languages. Based on the analysis of Nepal's education plans, Giri (2015: 6) concludes that "English has been the principal factor as well as a contributing source of linguistic hegemony in Nepal". In the similar reference, Sharma (2018) reports the increasing motivation to learn Chinese is its emergence as a symbol of globalized capital of Chinese economy. Such findings have led us to explore the ecological relationships of the foreign languages and implications for future multilingual diversity in Nepal.

3 Theoretical foundation: The ecological perspective

Initially, Bronfenbrenner (1979) used the “ecological system theory” to describe the layers of factors that collectively form an environment for the psychological development of a child. Later, this perspective has been increasingly used in the areas of language policy planning, and multilingualism with contextual modifications. The general understanding of the evolution of ecological concept in various disciplinary arenas such as psychology (Bronfenbrenner 1979), curriculum-based ecosystems (Barab and Roth 2006), educational policy studies (Weaver-Hightower 2008), shows that it can equally be relevant in understanding the changing relationships among foreign languages in the marketplaces for language education. Voegelin et al. (1967) used the term “ecology of language” in their study of the complex interrelationships among indigenous languages in the Southwest region of the United States. Similarly, Haugen (1972: 325) used the ecology metaphor and argued that language ecology studies “the interactions between any given language and its environment”. He argued that the ecology consists of psychological and sociological aspects of the bilingual and/or multilingual speakers simultaneously as “the ecology of language is determined primarily by the people who learn it, use it, and transmit it to others” (Haugen 1972: 325). Hence, language ecology studies the dynamics of interaction, influence, and co-existence of languages in social contexts, which this paper focuses on. Edwards (2001: 232) claimed that the breadth of understanding of ecology of language perspective has moved from the traditional focus on the “conditions of the struggle for existence” (in Darwinian sense) to co-existence and cooperation in the contemporary world. He argues that the new thrust is driven by “the desire to preserve linguistic diversity in the world where more and more languages are seen to be at risk” (Edwards 2001: 232). Similarly, Kramsch and Whiteside (2008) conceptualized the ecological perspective on foreign language education, especially based on the complexity theory. Understanding the contexts of language use, language learning and teaching lead us to the complex ecologies of various types, such as ecologies of learner varieties, changing orientations towards languages, and the ecologies of the purposes of learning the foreign languages. As ecologies are largely contextualized, understanding of them also points to the changing dynamics of the ecologies among the languages in place along the historical, cultural, and political dimensions. Against this backdrop, here we have attempted to figure out how foreign languages co-exist in the FLTL contexts of Nepal. We agree with Byrne (1997) that

ecological relations among languages are inherently evolutionary and historical and point to the notion that foreign languages such as English, Chinese, Japanese, German, and Korean (those we have focused here) have different histories of existence and have formed explicitly separate but interrelated sociolinguistic spaces.

Based on the above discussion, our claims of ecological relationships closely adhere to the ideas forwarded by Haugen (1972) who articulates the notion of dynamic interaction, influence, and co-existence among languages. Mainly two concerns we think would fall under our understanding of the ecology: the interaction between the foreign languages and the teaching and learning environment, and dynamic relationship among the languages themselves. Utilization of the ecological perspective has provided us with the understanding of substantial transformations in foreign language education provided by private sector initiatives to meet the increasing demands for learning them for the global educational opportunities, trade (global and local), and cross-broader employment.

4 Methods

The data we discuss here were collected from one of the densely populated metropolitan cities of Gandaki Province of Nepal. It is home to people with varied ethnic/caste backgrounds (Magars, Gurungs, Newars, Brahmins, Kshetris, Dalits, and other indigenous communities), languages, and cultures. The city is resided by a significant number of migrants from the neighboring villages, largely from the hilly regions. Learning foreign languages (such as English, Japanese, Korean, Chinese) was the traditional practice as the place was popular for tourism. Such practice was guided by the motivation to join the British Army, foreign employment, and the involvement in tourism and trade. However, in the recent years, due to increasing foreign employment opportunities in countries such as Republic of Korea, Japan, China, and some countries in the Middle East, a huge number of youths are learning the languages such as English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese (Mandarin), Arabic, German, and many more. These foreign languages have been the selling points for educational service providers. Our study is, therefore, situated within this context and we have attempted to dig out the case of changing FLTL dimensions, their changing hierarchies in the learning spaces, nature of the learning population, and the patterns of the purposes for learning.

As a part of the data, we have documented the changing landscapes of the foreign languages in the foreign language learning hubs of the city through the collection of still pictures, and audio-videos as well. The major data were obtained

from a total of forty institutes that provide foreign language courses. Initially, we collected some figures through our survey from those institutes that revealed enrolment trend in learning foreign languages and the language courses offered by them. Following the survey, as a part of qualitative data, semi-structured individual interviews were conducted with 5 foreign language instructors, 5 service providers (owners of the institutes), and 5 group interviews with 30 students (6 participants in each of the 5 groups learning different foreign languages in different institutions). In total, there were 10 interviews and 5 Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). Consents were taken before conducting surveys and interviews. Each interview lasted for 30 min to an hour. The student population consisted of 5 language learning groups (English, Korean, Japanese, Chinese, and others-included German, Hebrew, Russian, and French). Each FGD with the learners' group lasted roughly for an hour. The interviews and FGDs took place at their offices and classrooms, respectively. Each interview and FGDs were audio-recorded, transcribed, and selected excerpts were translated into English. Thematic coding (Charmaz 2006) was made after each translation and categories of the thematic information were generated. In this paper, we have only utilized some portion of the data to fit our purpose of reporting the ecological relationships among the foreign languages. The rich data from these many interviews and FGDs have been condensed and utilized thematically for this purpose. Many issues generated by the qualitative data needs further work of writing on the related underlying issues. At this point, and for our current purpose, we (both authors) read the data thoroughly and maintained consistency in our understanding the data while developing codes. For establishing higher level consistency across codes, both authors initially read the data independently and developed codes. Following this, the authors arranged a meeting for discussing on the codes from both sides and came to the "consensus agreement" on the codes which are reported as findings discussed in this paper. Although we did not calculate statistical measures for inter-rater reliability check, we are confident that the codes discussed below are the ones evolved from the common and shared interpretation between authors, which makes the findings reliable. In addition to coding the data, while presenting the findings, the names of the participants and the participating institutes are anonymized (by using pseudonyms) for the protection of their privacy and data confidentiality.

5 Results and discussion

Analysis of the data revealed a fluctuating scenario of foreign language learning and teaching in the selected research site. Although the selected research context may not provide a compelling representation of the case of Nepal, it certainly

provides the general picture of the changing trend of foreign language learning, purpose and driving factors for the contemporary youths in Nepal to learn the foreign languages. The findings that we come up with are discussed in the thematic categories hereafter.

5.1 Purposes for foreign language learning

Learning certain foreign languages is guided by various orientations. When societies become increasingly mobile, the languages that are more dominant (both at the national and international level) attract the attention of the most. Perceptions are that learning such languages contributes to better life-chances for individuals. Because of that motivation, the self-concept of ethnolinguistic minority students towards their home language and culture can be affected negatively (Choi 2016). In other words, the changing motivations towards languages that are linked to the economic gains and life-chances might have significant implications to the diminishing linguistic diversity in societies such as that of Nepal (Poudel and Choi 2021). Additionally, the transnational forces (such as missionaries and some donor agencies) that promote language learning programs might eventually contribute to the marginalization of the local and even the national languages in many polities. In this study, we found that there are diverse motivations or purposes of the youths for learning foreign languages, which are presented in Table 1 below.

The data on Table 1 is the summary of the purposes of learning foreign languages reported by the respondents (reported by service providing institutions and responded by the learners). It reveals that there are six main factors that motivate foreign language learning among Nepali youths. They are foreign employment, study abroad, domestic employment in the tourism sector, migration, business, and hobby. It showed that English and Japanese were chosen for most of the purposes (5 and 4 of the 6 purposes mentioned). All the people consulted responded that learning these languages can open doors for all the purposes. Japanese, French, and German (we have included them in “other” category on the table) were learned largely as a matter of hobby. English, Japanese, and Korean were applicable to both foreign and domestic employment. Domestic employment here refers to home country employments (employment in multinational companies, missionaries, language teaching institutes, and tourism industry). Chinese was learned largely for domestic employment and tourism and business. However, during the interviews, majority of the respondents agreed with the emergence of Chinese as another power language after English, which might upset the existing craze towards other foreign languages such as Japanese, Korean, German, French. It

Table 1: Purposes of learning foreign languages.

Purposes	Language									
	English		Japanese		Korean		Chinese		Others	
	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No	Yes	No
Foreign employment	57.5%	42.5%	92.5%	7.5%	100%	0%	0%	100%	95%	5%
Study abroad	77.5%	22.5%	82.5%	17.5%	42.5%	57.5%	5%	95%	0%	100%
Domestic employment and tourism	62.5%	37.5%	85%	15%	92.5%	7.5%	87.5%	12.5%	0%	100%
Migration	77.5%	22.5%	0%	100%	0%	100%	0%	100%	60%	40%
Business	82.5%	17.5%	0%	100%	0%	100%	40	0%	0%	100%
Hobby	0%	100%	72.5%	22.5%	0%	100%	0%	40	92.5%	7.5%

means that Chinese might rapidly expand as one of the important languages given the geopolitical relation of Nepal and China and the increasing networks among public institutions. In response to the question asked in relation to the reason for their choice of the Chinese language, one of the informants said:

I did not go to a private school, and could not learn English well. I feel like English is the language of the educated and rich people. However, Chinese will be a common language, anyone can learn it. We don't need to be educated. After I learn Chinese, I can run a business by importing things from China or collaborate with Chinese investors. They are increasing in every business areas. You can see a lot of Chinese restaurants in the tourist places, and Chinese products everywhere. (Seetal March 26, 2020)

This learner attributes economic capital and social capital (Bourdieu 1986; Silver 2005) to Chinese and English respectively. While the economic capital is “that which creates and/or helps to maintain material wealth including money, property, and human resources of economic value” (Silver 2005: 3), the social capital is “the aggregate of an individual’s group memberships and social connections” (Silver 2005: 5). Throughout the analysis, we have been confronted with the historicity, social values, and economic rationales imagined and attested to certain languages. For instance, the above excerpt explains the reasons for increasing trend of Chinese language teaching in the schools and the market-places as a result of continuing growth of Chinese economy (Sharma 2018). Sharma has highlighted the power, prestige and commodity value of the Chinese language in Nepal. Hence, this language is technically perceived as a potential form of alternative lingua franca alongside the English language. This is the societal evolution of English (Graddol 1997) and of course Chinese and other foreign languages. Seetal felt that the lack of proficiency in English has marginalized her and learning Chinese can compensate it. It is important to notice here that language choice also indicates who the person is (detail about the social class and language choice will be discussed later). This implies that she distances herself from English and embraces Chinese which she thinks fits her purpose, capacity, and social background. Like her, all the participants believed that only English and Chinese could be the languages of business, and this signals us to see how languages have formed hierarchies in the social spaces, which the following discussion captures.

Hence, Table 1 above not only displays the purposes of learning but also indicates (though indirectly) how the foreign languages are co-existing for similar (also diverse) purposes. Our understanding of ecology justifies this concern as languages are interacting in social spaces where people choose one or the other for

various purposes, and at the same time, co-exist within the larger sociolinguistic landscapes.

5.2 Hierarchies of foreign language teaching and learning landscapes

Scholars (e.g. Phillipson and Skutnabb-Kangas 1996) have reported that there are changing linguistic hierarchies due to various reasons and have also indicated the need for closer scrutiny on the ecological aspects of languages. Interactions between languages and the environments they circulate form hierarchies. In line with their claims, we attempted to explore how the foreign languages are changing their positions, and what new hierarchies have been formed due to changing political, economic, and educational rationales attributed to them. This draws on the ecological perspectives on languages by identifying the embedded ecologies in foreign language learning spaces. The relationships among languages are dynamic and emergent (Lier 2010), and complex encounters among languages and their speakers in the emerging societies across the world (Kramsch and Whiteside 2008) are taking place.

In this study, we found several concerns about the shifting hierarchies in FLTL, images formed about the languages. Our claims are consistent with the claims made by Blommaert (2010: 181) that there is a shift from “a language as a static system to language as a mobile resource, and a shift away from the traditional notion of a speech community, to a perspective where language exists in and for mobility across space and time”. Due to the demographic changes and the global connectivity, the hierarchies of the preferences to languages have changed. For instance, the informants’ responses informed us to conclude that there are purposive preferences to languages, as Chinese was linked with economic capital; Japanese was associated with study and employment. During the interview, our curiosity about “Teaching of which language benefits more for the institutions that are providing the services”, we obtained similar responses from them as “We have been benefited from teaching English and Korean at the moment, however, we think we get more from Chinese as many youths throughout the year visit us to inquire about the classes, fees, and the duration” (Suraj March 26, 2020). Another owner of the institution who runs classes in Chinese language added, “We may earn less from Chinese classes, but there will be many groups so that the average benefit will be balanced”. Figure 1 below shows how the foreign languages were prioritized or rated as being more important.

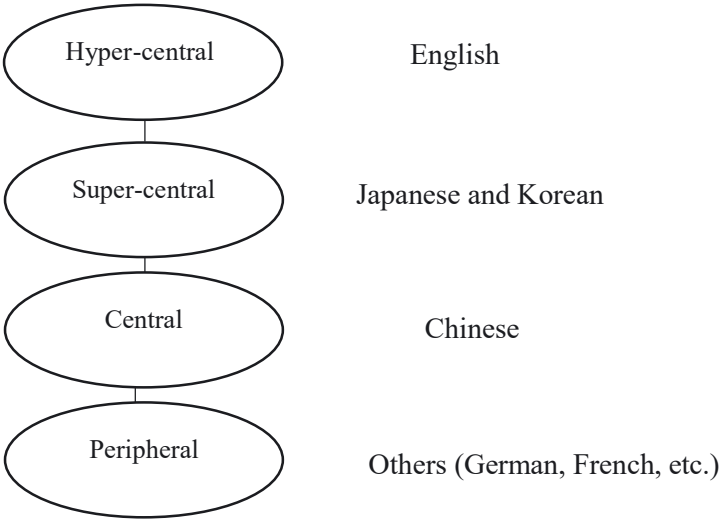


Figure 1: Positioning of foreign languages in Nepal.

5.3 Foreign language learning and social images

The choice of learning a language is not about language per se but is intimately tied with the power asymmetries and speakers' struggle for self-determination, social justice, and opportunities. Individuals attempt to enable themselves and their families, and upgrade their social status through various social actions, including learning the languages that have high social prestige, power, and functional values. In the course of data collection, one of the respondents linked her social status with her aspiration for learning a foreign language. She said, "Rich people learn English, and lower-middle-class people learn either Japanese or Korean because they want to earn money through foreign employment and the final goal is to move to the category of the rich people" (excerpt from the focus group discussion). Here, her association of social imagery and foreign languages attests that even foreign languages in multilingual societies are reproducing social capital. Such imageries relate to the social hierarchies, political divisions, and professional spaces as well. The images formed in relation to certain language(s) shape the foci for symbolic interaction, for example, the increasing symbolic power of Chinese as an international lingua franca (Sharma 2018). Formation of such images and/or power takes place with the intersections of personal histories, biographies, historical positioning of the languages and their pragmatic relevance. The emergence of such symbolic capital (Silver 2005), an accumulated prestige or

honor, in relation to some foreign languages (such as English, Chinese, Korean, Japanese) has been attributed to the expansion of broader forces such as globalization and neoliberal economy.

Due to the varied social images associated with the foreign languages in Nepalese society, the learners experienced a strong sense of exclusion and decreased self-esteem in learning certain languages. Seetal's argument above indicates that she thinks she is excluded from the English language learning spaces as she is not educated and belongs to the non-elite class in her society. In other words, the youths learning foreign languages in the research sites experienced a sign of belonging to some languages (i.e. included within the language learning groups) and distanced from some others (excluded from the learning community) languages. It applies to what Derrida (2005 [1986]) mentioned as language as a site of power which moves alongside inclusionary and exclusionary practices. He stated, "inclusion always carries with it the potential for exclusion and its potential for justice is simultaneously a potential for injustice" (as cited in Frost and McNamara 2018: 281). We understand that the youths related foreign languages with the power asymmetries that are evolving in contemporary society due to more powerful global forces.

5.4 Globalization and foreign language ecologies

Although it is difficult to clearly trace the independent effects of globalization to a particular linguistic situation, it can be agreed that there are connections between globalization and spread of foreign languages. Globalization is synonymously understood with "free market, westernization, and internet revolution" (Ricento 2018: 222). Most learners expressed the free market, globalization, and acceleration of information and communication technology were much influential for them to learn foreign languages such as English, Chinese, Korean. The "global" importance and implication remained the buzz word across the data sets obtained from the owners of the institutions, instructors, and the learners. They also attribute those factors for current social and symbolic capitalization of foreign languages in Nepal. The learners were found to have been influenced by the "TINA (there is no alternative) doctrine" (Ricento 2018: 222) in learning some foreign languages. For instance, one of the participants expressed "I have no alternatives, I think I cannot do well in English, so I want to learn Japanese and go to Japan to work" (excerpt from a focus group discussion). In her expression, we can see the economic effects of globalization through languages. Ricento (2015) rightly mentioned that the policies of the governments greatly influence, even determine, the role and

status that English and other global languages will have in society. This understanding rightly applies to the case of Nepal where languages such as Korean and Japanese have rapidly surfaced in the marketplaces following the government-level bilateral agreements for employment, education, and trade. Hence, we see there are political, educational, and economic rationales behind these languages getting popularity among the youths.

We presented the foreign language ecology, our conceptualization of ecological relationship among languages based on the users/learners' perception of values. We have presented our understanding of ecological relationships among languages (Haugen 1972) where we see an interaction between the foreign languages and the learning environments (i.e. the context of foreign language learning in the research site). Their relationship has been presented as situated in "hyper-central, super-central, central, and peripheral" (de Swaan 2013) positions in the societies. We see that such positioning reflects how the foreign languages have established their positions in the foreign language learning environments. This is about ecology for Haugen, that is, the dynamic interaction among languages. We have put the foreign languages learned by youths in Nepal in the positions as shown in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows that English tops the list with the hyper-central position in the foreign language choice for the participants. This figure demonstrates the current co-existence of these selected foreign languages in the FLTL spaces in Nepal. However, we contend that some dynamic changes in the preference of the languages in the future are likely depending on the socio-economic, cultural, and political changes. In addition to that, the geopolitical situatedness of Nepal between India and China is likely to be influencing how the language dynamics change. For instance, the rampant use of Hindi in the southern part and the use of Chinese in the Hilly regions (including the capital, and many other territories on the northern part of Nepal) might affect the existing language ecologies, resulting in expansion of some foreign languages (such as Chinese, Hindi) in education and business across different territories in Nepal. In addition to that, the historical linkage of Nepal with China and India, including their people-to-people connection, trade and cultural relations, is the other influencing factor that is likely to affect the foreign language ecologies.

Moreover, we have mentioned earlier that Chinese is increasingly preferred for business whereas Korean is for employment and study. The institutes we surveyed were mostly attended by the youths and adults, and majority of them were aspiring for employment and study. Hence, it is the reason for Japanese and Korean positioned at the super-central level. This scenario explicitly presents us with the idea that mainly three languages (i.e. Korean, Japanese, and Chinese) are forming social spaces to compete with English. However, we can anticipate that due to

English language's established history and globalized recognition, the linguistic hierarchies between English and other foreign languages are not likely to change, at least for some decades until when Chinese or any other foreign languages come widely into education and marketplaces (which is largely unlikely to happen though). Our observation of the current trend of increasing influence of China in Nepal, our comprehensive reading of literature, and sensitizing the opinions of the learners reveals that Chinese is emerging as one of the influential languages in Nepal's trade, tourism, and employment. This tells us a different scenario of foreign language ecology in the professional language learning spaces, as learners' preferences to different languages are gradually shifting from one to the other. Aside from the effect of globalization contributing to establish foreign languages at different levels of hierarchies, there are other domestic factors (policies and practices) that have largely contributed to shaping symbolic capital of foreign languages. Among many, the provisions and practices of language tests (conducted for various purposes such as education and employment) have formed another type of influence on formation of symbolic capital of some foreign languages such as German, English, Japanese, and Korean.

6 Conclusion and implications

In this paper, we have figured out the ecological status of teaching and learning practice of foreign languages in Nepal. We have concluded that several factors have contributed to such accelerating expansion of such languages and their relationships in the FLLT environments. This expansion is shaped and influenced by local as well as international political, economic, and social dynamics. In other words, wider circulating globalization discourses, increasing tendency towards foreign employment, immigration opportunities for the youths and adults, and knowledge economy in developed nations have fueled the increasing trend of FLTL situation in Nepal. We understand that tendencies towards certain languages are temporal and dynamic, and we also anticipate that expansion of the languages (such as Chinese, Korean, Japanese) in Nepal's educational spaces and marketplaces will certainly upset the existing ecological relationship among local and foreign languages, ultimately challenging Nepal's historical legacy of maintaining domestic multilingualism. Forces that have economic, political, and academic rationales have driven the way foreign languages are taught, and the way attitudes towards them are formed. People's preferences to certain foreign languages are largely grounded in their personalized contexts and socio-cultural background. It

can be also concluded that economic rationales precede all other rationales such as identity, nationality, and ethnicity. This can be explicit from the choice of Korean over English by the youths who think that they are less likely to benefit from learning English (a matter of economic and social capital discussed above). The youths' aspirations for foreign language learning also relate to their social status as well, since they think that learning English or other languages would benefit them economically and contribute to their upper social mobility. Seetal's expression "I will earn more after learning these languages as I can get access to more employment opportunities, and my family may move to the middle class from the poor social class level now" rightly informs us of this reality and social capitalization of foreign language learning. We have also noticed (during informal discussions with learners) that preference to foreign languages has gradually diminished their attachment with their own home languages. They feel that learning their native languages, usually other than Nepali language, have very little advantage for their life-chances or potential future opportunities. This notion implies (and we also foresee) that Nepal's minoritized languages will be further marginalized due to the individual and collective attempts to promote the learning and teaching of foreign languages. These attempts and practices that follow have long been contributing towards formation of new hierarchies of languages in many societies and likely to have long-term impact negatively on the linguistic diversity of plural societies such as that of Nepal.

Our exploration leads us to conclude that there is no guarantee that a particular language (either local or foreign) will survive (Patten and Kymlicka 2003) and is likely to be largely shaped by people's motivation to learn, live, and love the language(s). The ecological relationships among foreign languages are non-static and are shaped by national contexts, people-to-people relationships, and the political, economic, and socio-cultural advantages to be obtained through learning the foreign languages. In this connection, we strongly urge the government organizations (such as Ministry of Education, Language Commission, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation) in Nepal to work on the path of enabling the local and national languages to meet the economic and educational goals of the people, or else teaching and learning of English, Chinese, and other opportunity-languages will largely expand throughout the formal schooling system and also outside marketplaces. Ultimately, this concern is not only a linguistic one, rather it relates to Nepal's national identity, economy, multilingualism, and socio-cultural practice. Further understanding of how the presence of foreign languages in educational and social spaces has impacted Nepal's linguistic diversity, either promoting or squeezing will be an interesting area that this study points to for future research.

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