

Language Death ~ Case of Newari Language

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A group of people who speak their own language (1st language), contact with another group, because of education, business, service, work, marriage, media (TV, movie, music) etc., they learn another language (2nd language). At that time they become bilingual. In this situation people compare these two languages, which language is better or have economical benefit. In the most of the case they chose 2nd language. It is world trend that if there is no any economical profit, they leave it; they don't teach/ encourage their children to learn their own 1st language. As a result children can not speak and understand the language. When aged people die, not only they, they also take their language. David crystal maintains that "a language dies when nobody speaks it any more". Language death describes the disappearance of a language. When a language is no longer used for communication, the last speakers become merely living archives. If a language has just a few speakers left, and nobody is trying to pass the language on to the children, then that language may be expected to die soon. Of the 6,000 languages in the world at the moment, and half are going to die out within 100years. The problem is serious: 3,000 languages in 1200 months. That means that a language dies out somewhere in the world about once every two weeks. These lines made me to think about my mother tongue- Newari.

What is happening in my Mother tongue-Newari?

Banepa is a small town in Nepal. More than 80 % of its population is Newar, which has its own typical culture and language- Newari (a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by 3.44% of population in Nepal). I am also form Newar ethnic

group and can speak Newari well. If we look at a family chart of my grandparents, our family members are 102 in total. Among them, 24 members (nearly 25%) and 20 out of 22 members under the age of 20 have some kind of knowledge about Newari but cannot speak it. This means they do not use Newari for communication in daily life. They use Nepali and English at school and official use, and watch movies and listen to songs in Hindi, English or Nepali. The main cause for the disappearance of a language is that speakers abandon it. Devid Crystal argues that “languages which are no longer being learned as a mother tongue by children are said to be moribund. This captures the notion of a language well beyond the stage of ‘mere’ endangerment, because it lacks intergenerational transmission; the analogy is with a species unable to reproduce itself” (p.20). Most of Our family members who are fluent in Newari are in their 30s. The average life expectancy of Nepalese is 60. If the present trend towards abandoning Newari continues, 30 years from now nobody will speak this language. Young people’s declining motivation towards using to use Newari indicates that it is in endangered. There are mainly 4 reasons why my relatives are not using this language.

Reasons for not using Newari

The first reason concerns inter-cast marriage; one of my cousin married with a woman form a different ethnic group called Thakali. He cannot speak Thakali language (one branch of Tibeto-Burman language occupying 0.03% population) and his wife cannot speak Newari. So, they gave up their mother tongue and used Nepali language as a lingua franca. Obviously, their children grew up using Nepali.

A second reason concerns intonation, Newari is usually used at home and business with same group in spoken form only. When a child goes to school, he/she

has to learn in Nepali and English as the language of education. If a child is fluent in his or her mother tongue, the main problem with the regard to acquisition of the 2nd language is intonation. Since, in educational institutes, a majority of students and teachers speak Nepali, they sometimes ill treat or tease someone who speaks with a different intonation. Moreover, such a person's chances of getting a job in media like radio, TV or acting is very low. Consequently, parents and children do not teach and learn their mother language anymore.

A third involves language policy. From the emergence of Nepal as a modern nation-state in 1769, through the Panchayat rule from 1962-1989, the ruling powers promoted a policy of '*euta besh, euta jati, eutai rastra Nepal,*' which means 'one nation, one culture, one language' for national unity. Nepali language is given top priority in every aspect of society. For example, in national trade, the political system, the legal courts, the military, the police, and the national education system Nepali dominates the minority languages. The National language Nepali became the language of the educated and the elite, and by contrast, minority languages were marginalized as the languages of the poor and uneducated.

The fourth and final reason relates to the domination of English language in the economic and political field. English is the language that occupies the second largest number of significant domains throughout the country. In 1960s, Nepal entered into a new business sector –tourism industry, which demanded English-speaking manpower. A person with a good command in English began to earn a better salary, finding jobs in tourism, international business, international affairs, aid projects, the media, private education, and science and technology. In this era of globalization and information technology, the popularity of English has also come to be one of the main causes of declining interest in Newari as well as

Nepali too.

Reasons to save a language

Why we have to worry about language death? In the world what different or effects will occur if one minority language disappear? Is it not good if all the people use one language? Is it not good if they are able to speak another language which is largely spoken, as for example English..? Answer is NO! Every language is equally important for sustainable ecosystem. As biodiversity is important for balanced ecosystem, language diversity is equally important for balanced society. Further more linguistic diversity and biodiversity/ eco-diversity are inter- related and connected with each other (Ecosystem= biodiversity + linguistic/ culture diversity). Ecosystem is stable only if both of they are alive. As altitude, weather, place is different, physical things such as soil, air, water also different. Physical environment directly affect biological creatures, plant, animal as well as human beings. In the specific place these elements use, help, preserve directly or indirectly each other and make a stable ecosystem. Human beings are one member of that ecosystem as well as guardian also. So it is human duty to preserve the nature for live and let live.

For properly use and preserve the nature, what we need: experience, knowledge, skills and appropriate communication/ language to teach or transfer that knowledge to others. The appropriate language means; suppose there is a plant (may be it is only available in that place), people of that place know much about; what season is good for it? How much water is needed? What kind of soil, temperature is suitable? What are the elements which damage it? etc. and how, which part of it is useful to man (food, make shelter, cloth, medicine etc) or its other important to nature or ecosystem? Is it possible to get all this knowledge, information with in 1

or 2 years? No, impossible. But, people who have been living there for long time, they know much. They have their own vocabulary, language to explain all these information. If that language disappear or die, both knowledge of using and preserving a plant/ animal also disappear. May be scientist can research or find them, however it takes time. It is also possible that that species disappear before they know it. So, it is not hard to say that language death is connected with extinction of animal or plant. Therefore linguistic diversity play key role in the ecosystem, and Linguistic diversity is as equally important as biodiversity. World linguists stress the importance of diversity of languages versus mono-language alternative. Cultural diversity is as necessary for humankind as biodiversity is for nature. (UNESCO 2002, Article1).

According to Humphrey, “the rich variety of linguistic idioms carries with it an equally rich variety of culture form and ways of thought, and maintains for humankind a diversity of devices for coping with the uncertain challenges of human existence. And who knows what cultural and intellectual tools we will need in tomorrow’s world? In this sense, linguistic diversity resembles biodiversity.”(p.6) Crystal suggests the following six reasons: because we need diversity, because languages express identity, because languages are repositories of history, languages contribute to sum of human knowledge, and because languages are interesting in themselves. (pp.27-67)

According to Crystal, Evolution has been aided by diversity:

The strongest and most stable ecosystems are those which are the most diverse. Diversity contains the potential for adaptation whereas uniformity can endanger a species by providing inflexibility and inadaptability. Our success on this planet has been due to an ability to adapt to different kinds of environment over thousands of years as well as cultur-

al. Such ability is born out of diversity. Thus language and cultural diversity maximizes chances of human success and adaptability. Just as in biology, diversity is the norm, so it is with language: multilingualism is the norm.

The two types of diversities seem to mutually enforce and support each other. With death of languages, also the traditional ecological knowledge about relationships between plants and animals is being lost. Indigenous and minority communities are reservoirs of considerable knowledge about rare, threatened, and endemic species. This knowledge which is encoded in the many indigenous and minority languages, can be used both to promote sustainable use of land and natural resources and to help guide the identification, management, protection, or recovery of habitats for threatened species.

Languages are recognized as forming an integral part of a people's cultural and historical identity. Language is often used as a symbolic badge of membership in a particular community. The destruction of a language is the destruction of a rooted identity for both groups and individuals. Along with the accompanying loss of culture, language loss can destroy a sense of self-worth, limiting human potential and complicating efforts to solve other problems, such as poverty, family breakdown, school failure, and substance abuse.

When language dies, we do suffer a profound loss in terms of human culture and knowledge. When we lose a language we also lose potential detail in the picture of human history, for language preserves a record of

where we have been and whom we have met. Advocates for language preservation emphasize the store of knowledge contained in vocabulary and folklore. Enshrined in a language is the whole of a community's history, and a large part of its cultural identity. The world is a mosaic of visions. To lose even one piece of this mosaic is a loss for all of us.

What we can do for save our mother tongue?

Every language is important for sustainable future. It means we have to preserve each language and culture of the earth. First step is the community itself must want to save its language. The culture of which it's a part must need to have a respect for minority language. Crystal argues that one response to the threat of language is to promote bilingualism: a native language for identity and a prestige language for communication with the world at large. Organizations, groups working on preserving Newari language are encouraging people to use Newari by press and media. Kathmandu metropolitan city (Capital of Nepal) adapted Newari as official language, and some schools as medium of education. However, progress and effect is unsatisfactory to target. So, every person of each group has to use their 1st language as possible as they can.

Conclusion

Due to social, political, economic environment developed in last few century, Minority people like Newar set their mind that Newari language is obstacle for national unity, society, and learning and teaching their mother tongue has no any advantage to find job and other economic fields. Older people encourage their children to learn Nepali or English rather than their ethnic language. Our family and relatives also could not escape from this trend. As a result family members under 20 can speak Nepali and English but not Newari. Being bilingual or having

knowledge and capable to communicate in more languages board personal thinking, idea, skills, however, problem raise here is that they leave Newari. If this trends continue to lead in our society, after 30-40 years later nobody speaks this language. Flock lories and tales which we listened, games which we enjoyed will disappear. Story and History of our civilization, method of agriculture, cure of disease by local material and herbs, their experiences and knowledge about environment also gone. If we loose our language, we loose our identity. So, we need to preserve it for future. First and best way to start is communities itself go in front and use it at least at home. Educated person, state and national language policy, education system have to clearly explain about importance to preserve their language, and encourage and motivate them to use it.

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