Schooling Languages: Indigeneity, Language Policy And Language Shift In Nepal

Miranda Weinberg
University of Pennsylvania, miranda.weinberg@gmail.com

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Schooling Languages: Indigeneity, Language Policy And Language Shift In Nepal

Abstract
What happens when a language is allowed into school for the first time? How do policies and characterizations of languages travel through time and space? How do official metasemiotic regimes relate to linguistic behaviors and their interpretation, and what do we learn from this about phenomena such as indigeneity and states? In this dissertation, I examine these questions through the case of Dhimal, an indigenous Tibeto-Burman language spoken by around 20,000 people in the eastern plains of Nepal. Recent political changes in Nepal, a country with substantial cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity but longstanding one-nation one-language policies, guaranteed all communities the right to education in their mother tongues. Implementation of this bold provision has been a site of political struggle, shaped by relations of power and inequality between languages and their speakers. At the same time, speakers of minoritized languages increasingly demand schooling in English, and many have shifted to using Nepali in daily life.

Working in the traditions of ethnography of language policy and semiotic anthropology, I investigate citizenship, indigeneity and language policy at multiple scales of time and space. Following a brief history of language in education policy in Nepal, I discuss three government schools that have or have not introduced a Dhimal language subject, demonstrating how agents and their affiliations to political parties, not just linguistic or ethnic groups, determined school-level language policy. Through analysis of a textbook lesson as it was written and revised, I show how the voicing structure of a single text illustrated conflicting goals among the participants in a single language revitalization project. At the classroom level, teaching methods influenced by the metasemiotic projects described in the prior chapters shaped teaching methods that focused on demonstrating equivalence and separation between named languages. Outside of school, language shift was taking place due to discourse patterns in which young people were never expected to produce Dhimal language, while close examination of these and other interactions demonstrated that no matter what speech forms children produced, they were never heard by adults as speaking Dhimal.

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SCHOOLING LANGUAGES:

INDIGENEITY, LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE SHIFT IN NEPAL

Miranda Weinberg

A DISSERTATION

in

Education and Anthropology

Presented to the Faculties of the University of Pennsylvania

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Supervisor of Dissertation
Dr. Nancy H. Hornberger
Professor, Graduate School of Education

Co-Supervisor of Dissertation
Dr. Asif Agha
Professor, Anthropology

Graduate Group Chairperson
Dr. Matthew Hartley
Professor, Graduate School of Education

Graduate Group Chairperson, Anthropology
Dr. Theodore Schurr
Professor, Anthropology

Dissertation Committee
Dr. Robert Moore
Senior Lecturer, Graduate School of Education

Dr. Laura Ahearn
SCHOOLING LANGUAGES:
INDIGENEITY, LANGUAGE POLICY AND LANGUAGE SHIFT IN NEPAL
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What happens when a language is allowed into school for the first time? How do policies and characterizations of languages travel through time and space? How do official metasemiotic regimes relate to linguistic behaviors and their interpretation, and what do we learn from this about phenomena such as indigeneity and states? In this dissertation, I examine these questions through the case of Dhimal, an indigenous Tibeto-Burman language spoken by around 20,000 people in the eastern plains of Nepal. Recent political changes in Nepal, a country with substantial cultural, religious, and linguistic diversity but longstanding one-nation one-language policies, guaranteed all communities the right to education in their mother tongues. Implementation of this bold provision has been a site of political struggle, shaped by relations of power and inequality between languages and their speakers. At the same time, speakers of minoritized languages increasingly demand schooling in English, and many have shifted to using Nepali in daily life.

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Transcription Conventions

Languages

I have used the following conventions to represent the three languages that I quote from recorded interaction and in field notes. As I discuss in the dissertation, this is imperfect, as many lexemes are bi- or multivalent (Woolard, 1990).

**Dhimal utterance**

*Nepali utterance*

*English utterance*

‘gloss of Dhimal utterance’

‘gloss of Nepali utterance’

‘gloss of English utterance’

Names

MW: Miranda Weinberg

S1: Student 1

Ss: Multiple students

Transcription of Nepali

I use the International Alphabet of Sanskrit Transliteration (IAST) for spoken and written Nepali, with the following modifications, most of which are common among Nepal scholars (Green, 2014):

**Vowels**

I do not differentiate between long and short i, e, or u.
I write $\tilde{x}$ for nasalized vowels, where $x$ is any vowel.

*Consonants*

I do not differentiate between IAST $\textit{s}$ and IAST $\textit{ṣ}$; for both I write $sh$.

I write $ng$ for $ṅ$.

I write $w$ for $v$.

An American English-based guide to pronouncing transcribed/transliterated Nepali is as follows:

*Vowels*

- $a$ as in *holy*, sometimes as in *about*
- $\ddot{a}$ between *mat* and *father*
- $e$ as in *melt*
- $i$ as in *see*, sometimes as in *sit*
- $o$ as in *cone*
- $u$ as in *mood*
- $ai$ as in *bile*
- $au$ between *endow* and *below*
- $\ddot{a}i$ as in *my*

*Consonants*

Pronounced (roughly) as in American English, though note the following:

- $j$ is pronounced quite like the final sound in *garage*
- $d$, $t$, $dh$, and $th$ are dental (the tip of the tongue touches the back of the teeth)
- $d$, $t$, $dh$, and $th$ are retroflex (the tip of the tongue touches the top of the mouth)
- $th$ is pronounced with aspiration (and does not sound like *then* or *thin*)
sh and ph are pronounced (or sound to Americans) sometimes like aspirated s and p and sometimes as in shale and pharmacy

ch is pronounced like cheese but without aspiration

All other combinations of xh, where x is any consonant, are pronounced with audible aspiration.

Transcriptions of Dhimal

Dhimal transcription largely following King (2009). In most cases, Dhimal transliteration matches the Nepali described above. The major exception is that Dhimal a is pronounced rather more like Nepali ā than it is like Nepali a. However, transcribing each Dhimal a with the macron seemed annoying.

Additional transcription conventions

- Single brackets with transcribed text indicate overlapping speech
- Three dots indicate that I omitted a segment of the transcript for purposes of clarity
- Brackets indicate an editorial insertion
Chapter 1: Introduction

Nepal’s national anthem, adopted in 2007 following the conclusion of the decade-long conflict between Maoist and state forces, celebrates the physical and cultural diversity represented within Nepal’s borders. Comparing Nepal’s citizens to a garland woven out of hundreds of flowers, the lyrics claim that Nepal is both made up of great diversity and yet unified and indivisible.

Sayaũ thūgā phulkā hāmi, euṭai mālā nepāli
Sārvabhaum bhai phailiekā, Meci-Mahākāli
Prakritikā koṭi-koti sampaḍāko ācala,
Virharukā ragatale, svaṭantra ra aṭala
Jānabhumi, shāntibhumi tarāi, pahāḍ, himāla
Akhānda yo pyāro hāmro māṭribhūmi Nepāla
Bahul jāti, bhāshā, dharma, sāskriti chan vishāla
Agragāmi rāṣṭra hāmro, jaya jaya Nepāla!¹

We are hundreds of flowers, [but] one Nepali garland
Sovereign and spread out, [from] Meki [to] Mahakali²
A zone of nature’s myriad resources
Independent and unalterable, by the blood of heroes
Land of knowledge, land of peace, Tarai, Pahad, Himal³
Undivided this our dear motherland Nepal
The multiple ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures are vast
Ours is a progressive nation, Jaya Jaya Nepal⁴

(translation by Hutt, 2012)

At every school in Nepal, every day begins with a similar ritual: a set of exercises, the singing of the national anthem, and a prayer. At some schools this was more elaborate: a student might share a prepared speech or teachers might ask quiz questions, but at every school students participate in the basic outline of this set of activities. As Benei (2008)

¹ See transcription conventions on page ix.
² Rivers at the eastern and western borders of Nepal
³ Plains, hills, mountains
⁴ Glory to Nepal
has noted for the similar morning rituals of Indian schoolchildren, the morning line-up links schooling, adoration of the nation, and physical discipline. During my research, I heard the national anthem at the beginning of every school day. At some schools, a recording played from speakers and students sang along; at others, the song was just performed by the assembled students and teachers. Listening to the national anthem sung every morning, I began to notice that the lyrics I heard children singing did not match the official text. I was not the only person to notice this, either; instead, I overheard teachers commenting on this mistake on multiple occasions, with a mixture of amusement and exasperation. When I asked about it, teachers acknowledged that students had learned the words wrong, but I never observed or heard of teachers attempting to change students’ misconceptions.

The penultimate line of the anthem is one of several lines that celebrate diversity:

\[
\text{bahul jāti bhāshā dharma sāskriti chan vishāla}
\]

multiple caste language religion culture is-3 vast

‘The multiple ethnicities, languages, religions and cultures are vast’

Young students had, probably unwittingly, replaced the first word of this line, \( \text{bahul} \) (multiple), with \( \text{bāhun} \), the Nepali-language word for Brahmans from the hills, the top of Nepal’s caste and geographical hierarchy. While I hesitate to claim that students were parsing the lyrics of the national anthem as meaningful phrases, this adaptation was only a minor phonemic change but essentially turned the meaning of the line on its head:

\[
\text{bāhun jāti bhāshā dharma sāskriti chan bishāla}
\]

Brahman caste language religion culture is-3 vast

‘The Brahman caste, languages, religions and cultures are vast’
Instead of lauding the beauty of diversity, the students’ accidental rewording of the national anthem did the opposite: celebrating the continued supremacy of the traditional privileged Bahun caste.

This vignette is an appropriate opening to this dissertation for several reasons. Like the new national anthem, the introduction of multiple languages of Nepal into schools was part of post-conflict efforts to reorder the traditional hegemony of high-caste Hindus in the Nepali social order. Throughout this dissertation, I trace elements of this changed language policy in the case of the Dhimal language, a Tibeto-Burman language spoken by around 20,000 people primarily in the southeastern plains of Nepal (King, 2009). I examine what forces shaped the possibility of having a Dhimal language class, and what it would look like. As we will see, while the creation of a Dhimal classes had required significant re-ordering of the linguistic policy-scape, classroom interactions did little to teach students Dhimal language or to challenge caste hierarchies and stereotypes that structured everyday interactions.

The guiding question of this study is, put simply: What happens when a language is allowed into school for the first time? Behind this deceptively simple question lies several linked questions: What are the necessary preliminary steps that allow this change to occur, such as alignments of political will in national politics and at individual schools? What are the linguistic consequences of creating textbooks for a language that has previously been unwritten, what lessons are taught in classrooms, and what tensions arise throughout these processes? Debates and actions about language are never just about language but also ineluctably linked to social formations like ethnicity, citizenship,
and nationalism; therefore, the scope of the inquiry begins with observable behaviors around language and builds to contribute to an understanding of our social world.

Language policies in schools manage where and when ways of speaking are allowed or prohibited. They are tied to imaginaries of nation, whether a one-language, one-nation formula or a more multilingual option, and ideas of what it means to be educated. One of the key insights of linguistic anthropology is to identify how speech forms are linked to kinds of people, or models of personhood (Agha, 2007a). For example, a command of English, or a particular variety of English, may be a mark of education or wealth. Speaking the national language with a noticeable accent may be a sign of elite multilingualism or of rural remoteness. Language policies are fundamentally concerned with the kinds of people or subjectivities produced in schooling (Mortimer, 2012), the ways that diversity is ordered and managed (De Korne, 2016), nations and their relation to their citizens (Ramanathan, 2013). Changes in language policies, therefore, can invite realignments of these associations, opening space to alter conventionalized associations between forms of speaking and kinds of people. In this dissertation, I aim to understand how language policies travel within and across national boundaries and the ideologies of language, education, citizenship and progress that shape, and may in turn be informed by, such policies.

In this introduction, I briefly describe the research problem that I aim to answer and how I came to be interested in these questions. I situate the study in Nepal and the history of the Dhimal community, and conclude by outlining the rest of the dissertation.
1.1 The Story of the Problem

The questions I ask in this dissertation emerged from research and applied work I conducted in Nepal in 2009-2011. Through contact with many different programs and projects related to bringing more languages into formal and non-formal educational initiatives, I grew to have significant concerns about the ways that these programs were justified and understood. Among the questions that caused me discomfort were issues of the ways so-called multilingual education programs maintained rigid barriers between languages in school, an approach that did not reflect the ways languages are used outside of the classroom. The so-called mother tongue focus was a concern as well; when so many young Nepalis were growing up with Nepali as their dominant language, why were educational programs so insistent that their mother tongues remained the language that was their parents’ first language, not their own? Were there actually separate goals, involved, one related to educational achievement and another tied to cultural heritage preservation (Ghimire 2014), if so, did they require different pedagogical approaches? What were the goals, and where they being achieved? Could this be an example of the danger Jaffe (1999) describes in which forms of language activism that reproduce a dominant language ideology, in this case one of language separateness and monoglot standard (Silverstein, 1987/1996), also reproduce the structures of domination?

These questions motivated my decision to go to graduate school, and guided this dissertation research. When I began field research, the way I formulated my research question was around a potential new or reshaped subject position, that of the educated indigenous citizen. I posited that the introduction of indigenous language classes into
schools would lead to the creation of a new way of being Nepali, of being educated, and being indigenous, all of which would mutually influence each other. I expected to see students learning lessons about the possibility of filling this subject position, the discursive and non-discursive semiotic markers of these configurations, the negotiation around the possibility of such a combination in both school and non-school spaces.

I found, instead, that these were not categories often invoked in concert. Each had its own contours and moments. For example, just as states only matter at certain times to certain people, the subject position of citizen is only relevant at times. This should not come as a surprise when we acknowledge that any characteristic may be important at particular moments; as Agha (2007b) points out, people who are identified as a particular role (e.g., linguist) only do things that are identified as relevant to that role for particular stretches of time. The rest of the time, they may be taking up other roles (e.g., mother, daughter, soccer coach, commuter) while they perform other tasks. Similarly, citizen becomes a relevant role identifier at moments when a state frame is invoked, generally when participating in rituals like singing the national anthem or moments of making claims of the state, as in making an argument about the responsibility of the state to provide relief after an earthquake. Indigeneity, similarly, matters at some moments and not others. Multiple relevant terms, from matwāli to ādivāsi janajāti and the English indigenous invoked different histories and emotional valences for the category (Bakhtin, 1986; Gellner, 2007). Educated (padheko) invoked either knowledge of English or a sort of proper, measured behavior; the category of education was crucial for commenting on others’ behavior and evaluating the eligibility of marriage partners, for instance. These
categories were important, but my assumption that they would relate to one another was not borne out, at least not in ways that I found analytically compelling.

In working to tease these categories apart, though, additional dynamics became more interesting to me. Throughout data analysis, coding and beginning to write, I toyed with multiple stories that I could tell through the data I had collected, an excellent reminder of the possibilities of one set of data to be cut in various ways and the power of the ethnographer to represent others (Erickson, 2004; Fabian, 1983). The current form of the project reflects a number of concerns: staying true to the issues that had brought me to graduate school, this research site and design; avoiding the temptation to criticize or rebuke my interlocutors for the ways that they take up or do not take up particular orientations or actions regarding schooling and languages; and presenting findings that have relevance in multiple fields and contexts.

1.2 The Story of the Site

One of my major concerns with existing literature about so-called mother tongue-based multilingual education was that it was conducted in seemingly neat linguistic situations: all the children apparently spoke one language at home and were forced to speak another language at school. Schools changed the medium of instruction to match, and voila! A language problem had been solved. Few of the locations I had visited in Nepal had such clear-cut linguistic divisions and solutions.

While it was not hard to find a messier linguistic situation in Nepal I wanted to work in a particularly multilingual community. To that end, during preliminary fieldwork in the summer of 2013, I asked scholars, activists, and friends in Kathmandu for advice.
It is appropriate that Dr. Lava Deo Awasthi, whose dissertation jump-started the conversation about multilingual education in Nepal (Awasthi, 2004) gave me a clear and definitive answer, which I followed: if you are looking for multilingual communities, he told me, go to Jhapa District, in the southeast corner of the country. Through Dr. Lal Rapacha, then an officer at the National Federation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, I met several language activists, linguists and authors from Jhapa and neighboring Morang districts who were based in Kathmandu. With their advice, I set up a plan to go to the east and visit various communities until I found a location that made sense for my project. In the end, with the help of one of these activists, Som Bahadur Dhimal, I contacted Ram Bahadur Dhimal, a community leader, and spent the remainder of my field research time based at his house.

During this preliminary fieldwork period, I was struck not only by the linguistic and cultural diversity of the residents of the area, but also their daily engagement with the politics of difference. For example, one day at the tea shop owned by one of Ram Bahadur’s brothers, a neighbor asked his daily tea-drinking companions whether he counted as an “ādivāsi janajāti” (‘indigenous nationality’) when he had never lived in his caste’s original homeland. Rather than a simple yes or no, this prompted a lengthy discussion of the semantics of the terms ādivāsi and janajāti, used separately and together as a phrase, and the referents of these terms. At school, too, I found a complicated linguistic situation, where students identified with various ethnic groups spoke Nepali as their dominant language, but teachers nevertheless described these Nepali-dominant students who barely, if it all, spoke a heritage language as deficient in Nepali language due to supposed mother tongue interference. At the same time, a Dhimal language course
was being offered at a school where many students were from other caste/ethnic backgrounds and ethnically Dhimal students were in the minority.

Neighboring schools offered language classes in the Limbu language, another Tibeto-Burman language but one spoken by people who until recently had lived in the hills. At the time of my research, there was a significant Limbu population in Jhapa and some political parties claimed Jhapa as part of a Limbu ethnic state. When members of the Limbu ethnic organization learned that I was interested in indigenous-language education in the region, they invited me to a meeting at their office. While some Dhimal leaders denounced the Limbu community for claiming Dhimal territory as originally Limbu land, the same Dhimal leaders attended the meeting with me to maintain their ties to the wealthier and more powerful Limbu ethnic organization. The Dhimal leaders were simultaneously involved in helping neighbors who lived on a tea plantation as they attempted to gain legal citizenship (cf. S. Mulmi & Shneiderman, 2017). The tea plantation workers, who identified themselves as speaking Santhal or a mixed version of Santhal, had been brought in from India decades ago to work on the plantation; many of them had legal citizenship in neither India nor Nepal. On one road in Jhapa, then, there were speakers of Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, and Austro-Asiatic languages; there were followers of several of the world’s major religions, as well as a number of syncretic traditions; and I knew I had just scratched the surface. If I was looking for a complicated, messy, diverse situation, I had found it.

The history of the Dhimal community added to the relevance of the study to other contexts. Until the mid-1950s, the plains area where they lived, and where I ended up conducting research, was so heavily malarial that the Dhimals were the only people
willing to live in what was then thick jungle; however, following a USAID-funded malaria eradication project in the 1950s, there has been a huge influx of settlers from the hills of Nepal in traditional Dhimal territory. While today’s middle-aged Dhimals remember a time when their only neighbors were Dhimal, now Dhimals are a tiny minority in their historical homeland (Rai, 2013, 2014). One result of this demographic change (and of the introduction of mass schooling, another USAID intervention) is bilingualism, and now, increasingly, dominance in the Nepali language. An Indo-Aryan language, and therefore entirely unrelated to Dhimal, Nepali was the language of the first kings of Nepal and the western hills region where their family originated. Nepali spread over centuries as a trade language in the hills and language of wider communication in situations where the many different ethnic and linguistic groups in the territory of Nepal came into contact, for example, among the many migrants from Nepal to the Darjeeling hills in India or the kingdom of Bhutan, or recruits into the Gurkha regiments of the British army, who (to the surprise of their British commanders) often shared no common language until they learned Nepali during their army service (Hutt, 1988; Ragsdale, 1981). Merchants, migrants and army recruits, though, represent a tiny population compared to the number of people who learned Nepali at school. This history is discussed further throughout the dissertation, and serves as an important backdrop to understanding the context of the study.

1.3 Chapter Outline

This project investigates the ways that national language policies and actions around these policies shape the connections between linguistic forms and broader social
forms. Each data chapter focuses on a different scale, from decades of national history to fleeting face-to-face interactions. In Chapter 2, I discuss the conceptual underpinnings of the study, followed by an outline of my methods and a discussion of my researcher positionality (Chapter 3). Chapter 4 provides a historical view of language policy at the national level, examining how the state came to authorize Dhimal and other languages as eligible modes of communication in government classrooms beginning in the Constitution of 1990 and ensuing policies. This chapter draws from primary and secondary printed materials and oral histories collected in interviews with policymakers, scholars, and activists.

The remaining data chapters draw from ethnographic research. Chapter 5 focuses on three schools: the first two schools to introduce a Dhimal language subject and a third that was in many ways an ideal site for such a course but where it had not been implemented. This chapter demonstrates the power of particular actors to decide whether and how to interpret legal mandates, and the importance of those actors’ shared political party affiliation. Chapter 6 delves into the linguistic implications of the production of textbooks in a previously unwritten language, tracing several drafts of a textbook lesson and debates surrounding its revisions. Discussion of the changes to this textbook lesson demonstrates differing opinions about the purpose of teaching a language, and about encoding official versions of language and culture. Chapter 7 turns to classroom discourse in language classes. The chapter investigates the ways that the Dhimal class provided metapragmatic commentary about languages and their relative positions in the world. The final data chapter expands beyond schooling to look at education in a broader sense, investigating interactional patterns that allowed children to grow up without
learning Dhimal, despite hearing the language spoken every day. At each level of analysis, from national policies to individual interactions, I draw from specific linguistic evidence to understand social processes. In the conclusion (Chapter 9), I discuss the themes that unite the investigations of specific levels of scale in the individual chapters, and draw conclusions for theory and educational practice.
Chapter Two: Conceptual Framework

This is a linguistic anthropological study of multilingual education grounded in the research tradition of educational linguistics. As I described in the introduction, this is a problem-oriented study, with questions arising from practice (Hornberger, 2001; Spolsky, 1978). It is also rooted in the tradition of educational linguistics by drawing from a diverse range of disciplinary inspirations, or, following Bucholtz and Hall (2008), taking an “all of the above” approach to situating linguistic behavior in social context. In the chapters to come, I draw from anthropology, sociolinguistics, and educational research. Concepts that inform my analysis are introduced along the way.

In this chapter, I discuss core concepts that underlie and motivate the whole study, and situate the study in existing scholarship. I begin by discussing approaches to multilingual education (MLE), a specific approach to the distribution of languages and the most familiar approach to many of the other actors in my dissertation. In discussing MLE, I examine some of the core tenets and relate this to additional research in bi/multilingual education. The bulk of the conceptual framework provides the space to critique the underlying assumptions of these common MLE approaches.

2.1 Multilingual Education

The approach to language education that has inspired significant language activism in Nepal is often referred to as Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education, or MTBMLE. This approach fundamentally takes an essentialist view of languages as separate objects, attached to ethnicities, groups of people, and territories in a seemingly
unproblematic manner. The underlying tenets of MTBMLE are clearly articulated in a 1953 UNESCO report that “it is axiomatic that the best medium for teaching a child is his mother tongue” (UNESCO, 1953, p. 47).

This report displays a problem orientation to language diversity (Ruiz 1984), discussing ways to solve “language problems,” with a particular focus on “problems of multilingualism. Drawing from research and projects conducted in various locations around the world, many led by people affiliated with the Summer Institute of Linguistics, and a meeting of these experts, the report’s main points include:

1. The mother tongue is a person's natural means of self-expression, and one of his first needs is to develop his power of self-expression to the full.
2. Every pupil should begin his formal education in his mother tongue.
3. There is nothing in the structure of any language which precludes it from becoming a vehicle of modern civilization.
4. No language is inadequate to meet the needs of the child's first months in school…
8. If each class in a school contains children from several language groups, and it is impossible to regroup the children, the teacher's first task must be to teach all pupils enough of one language to make it possible to use that language as the medium of instruction.
9. A lingua franca is not an adequate substitute for the mother tongue unless the children are familiar with it before coming to school…
13. If a child's mother tongue is not the official language of his country, or is not a world language, he needs to learn a second language.
14. It is possible to acquire a good knowledge of a second language without using it as the medium of instruction for general subjects.
15. During the child's first or second year at school, the second language may be introduced orally as a subject of instruction.
16. The amount of the second language should be increased gradually, and if it has to become the medium of instruction, it should not do so until the pupils are sufficiently familiar with it. (UNESCO, 1953, pp. 68-69)

The 1953 UNESCO report continues to be quoted in contemporary research and policy prescriptions alike. The idea that students should be taught in the mother tongue is an axiom of language activists and those educational policymakers and practitioners who
accept this view. It has been a continuous plank in UNESCO’s work (Ball, 2010; UNESCO, 2005) and more recently in advocacy and programs conducted by other international organizations such as the World Bank (World Bank, 2005), USAID (Kim, Boyle, Zuilkowski, & Nakamura, 2016), Save the Children (Pinnock, 2009, 2011; Pinnock, Mackenzie, Pearce, & Young, 2011) and RTI (Bulat, et al., 2017).

The tenets of MLE include that children should begin school in their first language, an approach that will improve overall academic achievement, learning of additional languages, and cultural continuity by preventing, or at least slowing, community language shift. These promises are sometimes presented as axiomatic, and at other times backed up by research evidence from particular cases. These cases show that there are many advantages to teaching in students’ mother tongues, particularly when it comes to school retention and attendance, participation in more child-friendly classrooms that have an environment more like the children’s homes, and faster attainment of literacy. In addition, there are goals of cultural preservation and continuity that are meant to be achieved by beginning school in community languages rather than national languages that may not be spoken in students’ homes.

While so far I have discussed the varieties of multilingual education promoted by UNESCO, SIL, and colleagues, these are not the only options. Another strand of research focuses more explicitly on culturally relevant and empowering teaching for minoritized and Indigenous students. For example, Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) characterizes teaching entirely through unfamiliar languages as “linguistic genocide.” She has argued that instruction entirely in a language not spoken in the home violates international human rights conventions, representing
the deliberate elimination of a language, without killing its speakers; forcing
speakers to give up a mother tongue through ‘forcibly transferring children of the
group to another group’; ‘causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of
the group’ (United Nations International Convention on the Prevention and
Punishment of the Crime of Genocide 1948, E 793, Articles 2e and 2b); or
‘prohibiting the use of the [mother tongue] in daily intercourse, or in schools, or
the printing and circulation of publications in the language of the group’ (from
the 1948 Final Draft of the above, not part of the Convention)’ (Skutnabb-Kangas
& McCarty, 2005).

In characterizing mother tongue education as a linguistic human right, Skutnabb-Kangas
and colleagues place mother tongue education within the international framework of
human rights. Skutnabb-Kangas and colleagues emphasize the role of traditional
Indigenous knowledge alongside locally acceptable pedagogies and a switch to using
students’ mother tongues as much as possible. While this strand of research and advocacy
differs in tone and emphasis from those discussed above, it maintains similar essentialist
beliefs about language, culture, and people.

The understandings of language, literacy, and schooling described in this
literature are essentialist ones. Mother tongue is largely seen as a natural category, while
named languages are treated as equivalent codes that may be placed in slots previously
reserved for one or another, but are certainly not intended to be mixed. They are also seen
as autonomous codes, parallel to the ways that literacy is often seen as an autonomous
technology (Goody & Watt, 1963; Ong, 1982) rather than a practice in development
literature (Bartlett, 2010, Robinson-Pant, 2000; 2010). These are not the only options for
bi/multilingual education, though.

These works maintain a powerful and widespread ideology about multilingualism
and education, which includes elements such as:

- People have a clear mother tongue
- They should be taught in that mother tongue at the start of school
Language, culture, and people exist in a 1:1:1 relationship

This ideological core leads to approaches to multilingual education that encourage the development of “separate bilingualism” (Creese & Blackledge, 2010) or “two solitudes” (Cummins, 2005, 2008). Scholars writing about North American contexts have warned that approaches to bilingual education that aim to keep languages separate maintain an ideal of monolingual native speakers (Flores & Baetens Beardsmore, 2015; Heller, 1999). In a South Asian context where monolingualism is extremely rare and makes little sense as a concept (as does mere bilingualism), I argue that the ideal of parallel monolingualism is at play through the transfer of policy from other parts of the world (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2012). In a sociolinguistic context characterized by translanguaging (O. García, 2009) and the use of multiple codes in every day of an individual’s life, the imposition of classroom structures that draw from these monolingual norms is particularly striking.

The following sections of this conceptual framework aim to work beyond these notions, which I will argue present an over-simplified and empirically unsatisfying view of languages, education, and larger social formations. In the next section I turn to approaches to bi/multilingual education that take a more flexible view of the connections between this language, polity and culture.

2.2 Moving Away from Essentialist Views of Language in Education

Not all approaches to bi/multilingual education build from an essentialist view of the connections between language, people, culture, and place, or view languages as separable and interchangeable objects. Many of these approaches begin from an
empirically grounded perspective, which allows us to recognize variation and diversity as ever-present characteristics of languages and language use. This extends not just to diversity in linguistic forms but also in discourse patterns (e.g., Au, 1980; Michaels, 1981; Philips, 1983) the social meanings attached to speech forms (Agha, 2007a), the organization of multilingualism in a social group (Blom & Gumperz, 1962; Gumperz, 1964, among many others) the kinds of attachment speakers have toward their languages (Meek, 2010; L. Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1997) and more.

These approaches view diversity and variation as essential parts of social life. While scholars may view variation as natural and constant, they also must recognize that difference is rarely treated as value-neutral in the social world. Instead, as Hornberger (2013a) writes, drawing on the work of Dell Hymes, “despite the potential equality of all languages, differences in language and language use too often become a basis for social discrimination and actual inequality” (p. 15). As Haugen (1973) notes, “Language is not a problem unless it is used as a basis for discrimination, but it has in fact been so used as far back as we have records” (1973, p. 54). Language practices may serve as a transparent marker of cultural capital (Bourdieu, 1991). This is especially relevant for educational contexts, which not only exist within a context of unequal power relations but also reproduce norms, behaviors, and forms of social inequality (Bourdieu, 1991; Hymes, 1992; Macleod, 1987/2008; Ogbu, 1974; Weis, 1990; Willis, 1981). Schools are therefore useful sites for viewing the transmission, recontextualization, and potentially contestation or development of new social norms and ideologies (Collins, 2009; Wortham, 2005). Within educational institutions, teachers and students may reproduce these disparities
In the field of bi/multilingual education, these more constructivist approaches have allowed scholars and practitioners to move beyond switching one language for another. Hornberger’s heuristic of the *continua of biliteracy* is one such tool, which encourages analysis of bilingual educational contexts on the basis of continua of contexts, development, content, and media (Hornberger, 2002, 2003; Hornberger & Skilton-Sylvester, 2000). Rather than treating language or literacy as a pre-defined phenomenon, the continua of biliteracy identifies several dimensions that are important for analysis, including traditional power relations that have privileged certain forms of language and literacy. While intended as a heuristic rather than prescriptive model, Hornberger has suggested that learners have the best chance of attaining full biliterate development if the contexts where they learn allow them to draw on many points of the continua, an argument that requires addressing implicit power imbalances.

One example of drawing on multiple points on the continua is recognition of the ways that speakers employ multiple named linguistic codes in communication. Practices of code-switching, mixing, meshing have long been described by linguists and anthropologists. Ofelia García (2009) argues for describing the practices of bi/multilingual speakers as *translanguaging*, or “the multiple discursive practices in which bilinguals engage in order to make sense of their bilingual worlds” (O. García, 2009, p. 45). García’s description of translanguaging, rather than continuing the image of bilingualism as the use of two separate languages, also employs the metaphor of a continuum. Translanguaging focuses on semiotic behaviors of bilingual people, rather
than comparing their speech to reified standard languages. Thus, “translanguaging makes obvious that there are no clear-cut boundaries between the language of bilinguals. What we have is a languaging continuum that is accessed.” (p. 47). A translanguaging framework may provide a conceptual tool for scholars and practitioners of bi/multilingual education to move beyond the separate or two solitudes approach to the treatment of named languages.

2.3 Language Revitalization

Language revitalization initiatives are themselves a particular form of bi/multilingual education, and provide additional insight into the tensions inherent in multilingual education. Like other educational projects and actions around language, language revitalization initiatives exist in contexts filled with power imbalances and differential access to resources. In addition, the somewhat related matter of who counts as indigenous and what kinds of claims are made on the basis of indigeneity further highlights the importance of moving beyond common sense definitions in our analysis of language education.

The recently growing anthropological literature on language revitalization points to the ways that multiple, contingent factors are tied to sometimes very rapid language shift (Wyman, 2012), such as the case of a northern Athabaskan community where an ideology of valuing elders’ speech proved discouraging to younger speakers (Meek, 2010). The importance of investigating indigenous language practices and ideologies (Kroskrity & Field, 2009) as part of understanding indigenous experiences and the outcomes of revitalization projects has been explored in the United States (Au, 1980;
Language revitalization projects are not just a matter of teaching but also require revalorizing, codifying, standardizing and counting language practices (Hill, 2002; Moore, Pietikäinen & Blommaert, 2010; Muehlmann, 2009, 2012). Several studies have traced the emergence of new social actions around a language, especially language loyalty movements. In South Asia, for example, Sumathy Ramaswamy (1997) and Lisa Mitchell (2009) examine the cases of Tamil and Telugu languages respectively to detail the historical development of a sense of these languages as unique, intimately tied to their speakers’ identities, and in the case of Telugu, worth dying for. Ayres (2009), on the other hand, traces the failure of Pakistan’s official attempts to develop similar widespread feelings toward Urdu in the multilingual population of Pakistan. This work demonstrates that feelings of loyalty, love, or devotion toward a “mother tongue” are not a natural phenomenon, but rather one created by political actions. As Silverstein (2003) argues, “ethnolinguistic identity is not a mechanical institutional fact; it is a fact of a psychosocial sort that has emerged where people ascribe a certain primordiality to language and a certain consequentiality to language difference” (p. 532).

Linguistic anthropological research has shown how recent institutional “(re)scheduling” of “emblematic identity displays” (Silverstein, 2003, p. 538) such as language, promote ways of speaking as representing particular social groups (see also Davis, 2012; Duchène & Heller, 2007; Hornberger & King, 1998; Jaffe, 1999; Kroskrity & Field, 2009). Such newly developed language loyalties or feelings that language is part of self-representation, self-expression, or even language rights (May, 2012; Skutnabb-
Kangas & Phillipson, 1994) may result in efforts to revitalize such languages. Especially when revitalization takes place through government institutions like public schools, these efforts may require making claims of the state on the basis of indigenous identity, or a sense that particular rights and privileges are deserved by the first inhabitants of an area. These claims may be ambiguous, or contested, though. In the next section, I discuss some relevant research on the notion of indigeneity as it relates to making claims of states.

### 2.4 Indigeneity and the State

A significant amount of academic anxiety has surrounded the ambiguous definitions of who is indigenous and what implications that label holds for its referents (Li, 2000; Malkki, 1992). However, as Karlsson (2008) argues in a review of the travels of indigenous rights discourse to India, “from the simple fact that more and more peoples are claiming the indigenous slot, we can assume that indigeneity resonates well with the experiences and aspirations of many marginalized peoples in the present-day nation-state system” (p. 404) Pointing to one of the reasons for the flexibility of the meaning of indigeneity, de la Cadena & Starn note that indigeneity always emerges “within larger social fields of difference and sameness” and therefore can only be understood in relation to other social forms (de la Cadena & Starn, 2007, p. 4). Others have argued that the definitional flexibility of the term indigenous is part of its strength, allowing it to be claimed by varied groups for multiple purposes (Tsing, 2007). Particularly in Latin America, indigenous movements have forced redefinitions of the notion of citizenship at constitutional and cultural levels to include indigenous people as citizens, sometimes with different, often collective, rights than non-indigenous citizens (Becker, 2008; L. Field,

De la Cadena & Starn (2007) suggest that debates over indigenous language and culture often mask deeper and more threatening indigenous political challenges to the state (see also Aikman 1999; Faudree, 2013; M. García 2005). This is a particularly apt point in the Nepali context where claims of indigenous rights were involved in debates over redrawing the country’s internal map and changing the distribution of rights, but have also sometimes been represented as merely claims limited to culture or language.

A set of scholarly debates about indigenous identity has revolved around the constructed nature of nations (Anderson, 1983) and traditions (Hobsbawm & Ranger, 1983), and the failure of deconstructionist accounts to explain the relevance of admittedly constructed categories in lived experience. These debates present challenges for scholars, particularly anthropologists who research and write about indigenous peoples, especially as their own writing becomes part of the argument for or against claims made on the basis of being indigenous (Briggs, 1996; Clifford, 2001; L. Field, 1999; Karlsson, 2003; Middleton, 2011, 2015; Shneiderman, 2013; Silverstein, 2003; Turin, 2011). Briggs (1996) argues that “invention of tradition” narratives may undermine indigenous academics, especially in their attempts to use scholarship to redress historical and ongoing oppression. Others counter that it is the outside scholar’s job to identify troubling tendencies in indigenous discourses that link language, people, and land (Beteille, 1998; S. Guha, 1999; Kuper, 2003; Malkki, 1992), especially in locations like India where the discourse of indigeneity has arrived relatively recently and does not fit unproblematically into existing forms of social organization (Shah, 2007).
Others resolve this challenge by focusing empirically on what the discourse of indigeneity accomplishes. Alpa Shah (2007, 2010) provides a grim picture of the ways that indigenous activism in Jharkhand, India, leaves existing class hierarchies intact and negatively impacts the well-being of the most vulnerable indigenous peoples. Ghosh (2006), also working in Jharkhand state, makes similar arguments, particularly around the ways that transnational indigenous rights talk, an uneasy fit in the Indian context, undermine older means of making claims as indigenous people. Hodgson (2011) demonstrates that in the case of the Maasai of Tanzania, the language of indigenous rights helped them gain international recognition, but was less effective on the national stage. At the national scale, Maasai activists were only able to achieve their goals by reframing their claims in the language of pastoralism and development. Jackson (2012) demonstrates that the language of indigeneity can further marginalize indigenous groups. She shows that Guyanan Creoles have successfully claimed indigenous status, despite the existence of groups descended from prior inhabitants, allowing for the further dispossession of indigenous peoples. On the other hand, Hooker (2005) demonstrates that indigenous groups in Latin America have been able to use the language of indigenous rights to achieve collective rights that have not been achieved by other oppressed groups, particularly Afro-Latinos. Taken together, these studies of indigeneity show that employing the discourse of indigeneity is not an unproblematic route to political action, but at the same time that it is one used around the world for groups attempting to improve their lives.

Others have shown how successful deployment of the “indigenous slot” requires successfully performing a sufficiently harmless and disadvantaged position (Povinelli,
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2002), while gaining too much economic or political power makes the deployment of the indigenous category appear suspect (Cattelino, 2010; D. Hodgson, 2011; S. Jackson, 2012). Cattelino (2008) demonstrates that the Seminole tribe’s improved economic status, due to successful casinos and other business ventures, have made them vulnerable to suspicion of not “really” being Indians. As Povinelli (2002) demonstrates in the case of Australia, when indigenous peoples exercise political rights and gain power, they face accusations that they are not sufficiently culturally different to claim the indigenous title. Paja Faudree (2013) identifies a similar tension for individual indigenous leaders: “many of the very qualities that allow indigenous individuals to lead revival projects—that they are highly literate, bilingual, and relatively cosmopolitan—make them further subject to claims of inauthenticity by the very people for whom they purport to speak” (Faudree 2013, p. 12). The successful performance of indigeneity is, thus, a careful balancing act of adequately performing difference and isolation while negotiating bureaucracies that require a certain level of cosmopolitan cultural capital to be able to navigate.

Education plays a large role in defining indigeneity. Becker (2008) argues that schools enabled the development of the indigenous movement in Ecuador by giving indigenous leaders analytical tools to critique their socioeconomic position. De la Cadena (2000) found, contrary to her expectations, that even when her indigenous interlocutors became sufficiently integrated into Cuzqueño mainstream culture that others viewed them as mestizo, they continued to claim their indigenous identity as well. Educational hierarchies played a large role in determining who was considered indigenous or mestizo, with more educated people, even in a single interaction, being accepted as more mestizo, and the less educated as more Indian. García (2005) similarly found that there were new
subject positions emerging in the present field of indigenous movements and educational projects, such as ex-indgena, indigenous intellectual, or indigenous professional, a dynamic that Warren (1998) identified in the creation of subject positions such as “indigenous intellectual” in the Maya movement.

Another dialectic holds between those who argue that the current form of ethnic and indigenous identity claims is driven by neoliberal market logics (Comaroff & Comaroff, 2009; C. Hale, 2005; Jung, 2008) as opposed to a product of state control (Scott, 2009). Shneiderman (2014) argues that we should recognize an additional dimension beyond market and state operating in the production of indigeneity: the “ritual process through which identity itself is produced as a sacred object that binds together diverse members of the collectivity” (2014, p. 279; see also de la Cadena, 2010). Faudree (2013) similarly argues that it is necessary to look at concerns beyond the immediately political to understand recent appeals to ethnic identities.

So far in this discussion, I have shown that various binaries and tensions have troubled scholars investigating claims of indigeneity. While strict binaries often do not provide space for understanding these phenomena, theoretical approaches that have allowed productive work in this realm have often drawn from Hall’s (1996) concept of articulation, which he considers to be “both a way of understanding how ideological elements come, under certain conditions, to cohere together within a discourse, and a way of asking how they do or do not become articulated, at specific conjunctures, to certain political subjects” (p. 142). A theory of articulation, with its double meaning of speaking and joining together, can capture the contingent nature of taking up indigeneity as a subject position and using that position as a basis for making claims of the state (Clifford,
2000, 2001; de la Cadena, 2000; de la Cadena & Starn, 2007; Gustafson, 2009; Li, 2000, 2007; Schwittay, 2003; Shah, 2007, 2010; Tsing, 2004). Clifford (2000), for example, points out that anti-identity politics positions serve to protect hegemonic whiteness; on the other hand, following Hall in understanding identity as permanently in process and open-ended makes identity politics appear worth studying and taking seriously.

Within Nepal, while the category of janajāti is an old one, the term adibāsi janajāti, tied to international discourses of indigeneity, is more recent (Gellner, 2011; Hangen, 2007; Shneiderman, 2014). Gellner (2011) notes that indigenous rights discourse has reversed older hierarchies of geography and belonging:

Dominant groups, in the past, always had a myth of origin outside their present territory, usually connecting them to a high-status kingdom to the south and/or west. Prestige was to be measured by links to the outside, to more powerful and glorious places elsewhere. Tribal groups were allowed to have been there first, though in very many cases they too have myths of outside origin. The very fact of earlier arrival marked them as inferior, though it also gave them certain religious rights and a role in some central religious rituals…The indigenous rights discourse which entered Nepal formally in 1993 with the UN’s Year of Indigenous People and earlier in the form of more general cultural nationalism, reversed these traditional perceptions. (Gellner, 2011, p. 49)

International funding for indigenous groups has certainly played a role in making indigeneity an available discourse (Hangen, 2007; Shneiderman, 2014). However, as the example in the introduction about the man wondering about his status as adibāsi janajāti demonstrates, talk about being indigenous has escaped from the academy or NGO and made it into everyday conversations.

One problem with some discussions of indigeneity is the implicit theory of a unitary and constant within it. While nation-states remain the frame for much political action, scholarship in political anthropology has pointed to the importance of recognizing the state as a more fragmented and partial phenomenon than the count noun *the state*.
seems to imply (see Silverstein, 2000; Whorf, 1956). An early call to disaggregate the state into empirically approachable sections came from Abrams (1977), who argued for the necessity of studying both the ideas that underly states and the actual instantiation of state practices. Too often, he argued, scholars imagine a unitary state rather than demystifying the partials that create the effect of states. This approach is strengthened by looking at the state through the lens of governmentality, a term coined by Foucault (1991) that comprises the many ways that human conduct is governed, including by institutions such as schools. The disaggregation of the state not only opposes a monolithic view of the state, but makes the state more readily available as an object of study for anthropologists, as interactions, configurations of power and knowledge, and various state apparatuses serve as observable aspects of the multifaceted state apparatus (Anjaria, 2011; Appadurai, 2002; Chatterji & Mehta, 2007; Ferguson & Gupta, 2002; Fernandes, 2004, 2006; R. Guha, 1989; Gupta, 2012; T. Mitchell, 1991; Sharma & Gupta, 2006). Like Foucault, Bourdieu (1994) emphasizes that states do not just constrain and restrict but also “produce and impose (especially through the school system) categories of thought that we spontaneously apply to all things of the social world as production—including the state itself” (p. 1). Trouillot (2001) argues that “the state” as a single object is not an empirically valid concept, but that one can identify state effects such as isolation, identification, legibility and spatialization.

Empirical studies, including many in South Asia, trace varied forms of governmentality and experiences of the state. Cohn’s classic studies of the forms of government in colonial India demonstrate the multiple techniques that allowed the British colonizers to control populations and forms of knowledge, with a particular emphasis on
the importance of the census (Cohn, 1987, 1996; see also Dirks, 2001; Saumarez Smith, 1985). Anjaria’s (2011) study of the interaction between hawkers and low-level civil servants in Mumbai demonstrates the ways that hawkers experience the state as a set of contingent operations rather than as a formal institutional structure. Chatterji & Mehta (2007) show how multiple forms of governmentality, including rationing, mapping, and enumerating, become vitally important in moments of violence. In an account of the maps of informal settlements surrounding Cairo, Elyachar (2003) argues that an advantage of adopting a governmentality approach is that it emphasizes that the state is not omniscient (contra, e.g., Scott’s all-seeing state [Scott, 1998]). Several studies have shown that the production of texts and writing is not just a byproduct of state activities but actually a way to see the state at work (Gupta, 2012; Hull, 2012; Riles, 2006). Viewing states as partial, contradictory, momentary, and changing allows for ethnographic purchase on important social processes.

2.5 Diversity and Development

The discussion so far has skirted the issue of how, precisely, we understand difference and diversity. Schools have historically been a way to cultivate national citizens removed from ethnic identification (in Nepal: Caddell, 2005; Onta, 1996; Ragsdale, 1989; Skinner & Holland, 1986; elsewhere, Benei, 2008; Bryant, 2004; Coe, 2005; K. Hall, 2002; Hein & Selden, 2000; Keaton, 2005; Levinson, 2001). This process, like most educational processes, occurs largely through language, whether though socialization to speak a national standard version of Thai (Howard, 2009), through classroom interactional routines (García Sánchez, 2014), or policing of the food in
students’ lunches (Karrebæk, 2012). Approaches to multicultural education that involve bringing minority cultures into classrooms have attempted to counter the homogenizing tendency of schools, through multicultural, intercultural, culturally responsive pedagogy (Banks & Banks, 2004) or, more recently, culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). While these approaches may be credited with countering schools’ emphasis on dominant cultures and histories and promoting learning for minority students (Sleeter, 2011), they have been critiqued for using stereotyped information about groups, reifying difference and maintaining the same harmful power dynamics that existed under standard educational approaches (May, 1999; Roman, 2003; Troyna & Williams, 1986). Indigenous people are especially often excluded from the educational national mainstream, an exclusion that is at times reinforced rather than countered by intercultural or multilingual educational policies (Aikman, 1999; M. García, 2005; Gustafson, 2009; Hansen, 1999; Luykx, 1999; Rappaport, 2005).

Debate about diversity and the ways it may be changing due to new migration patterns and communication technology has spurred discussion of a new “diversity of diversities” or “superdiversity” (Blommaert, 2013; Blommaert & Rampton, 2011; Vertovec, 2007). While I join scholars skeptical of the analytical utility or accuracy of the new term (Flores & Lewis, 2016; Pavlenko, in press; Silverstein, 2015), discussion of the contours of diversity have prompted methodological and theoretical discussions of what, precisely, educators, scholars and others mean when they talk about diversity, and how to study it (e.g., Faudree & Schulthies, 2016; Urzio, 2015). The case I present in my dissertation is particularly compelling for considering multicultural education and
diversity talk because changing definitions and implications of those definitions made issues of diversity and difference particularly salient during my research.

Diversity is closely related to the powerful notion of development. Pigg (1992) described development in Nepal as not meaning the technical process of transformation promoted by technocrats and policy makers but also as having “a profoundly social meaning, a meaning that weaves bikas into the fabric of local life and patterns Nepalese national society” (p. 496). While Pigg wrote this decades ago, her description of the Nepali notion of bikās, ‘development,’ remains relevant to this day. Anthropologists have argued that development projects work by identifying seemingly solvable, technical, and apolitical problems in the world (Des Chene, 1996a; Escobar, 1995; J. Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007; T. Mitchell, 2002). In this vein, approaches to mother tongue education often treat languages as natural, unproblematic categories, ignoring emotional attachments to language and the connection between ways of speaking and kinds of people. By investigating the categories of language that are relevant to their speakers, and how they understand and evaluate the various repertoires available to them in relation to schooling and aspirations, my dissertation research will contribute to understanding this paradox.

2.6 Scale

A recurring theme in this review of ethnography of language policy is attention to the multiple intersecting layers involved in language policy processes. Conceptualizing
the relationship between part and whole is crucial to theorizing ethnographic research. In this section, I review linguistic anthropological understandings of scales of time and space in order to build a conceptual and methodological framework for understanding the concurrent multiscalar processes involved in LPP and normativity in communicative and educational practices.

It seems clear that there are always multiple scales involved in interactions, especially around language policy. This is represented, for example, language policy onion’s layers of legislation and political processes, states and supranational agencies, institutions, and classroom practitioners (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996), or in Johnson’s (2009) framework of agents, goals, processes, discourses, and social-historical contexts. In both of these, there is recognition of varying spatial scales, from the supranational agency to the individual classroom. Both also address a range of timescales, with social and historical contexts drawing from a longer timescale than the interactions of individual agents. The simultaneous importance of time and space should perhaps not surprise us, since as Bakhtin points out, time and space are always inextricably linked in discursive behavior, creating semiotic representations of social spacetime he calls chronotopes (Bakhtin, 1981). Bakhtin draws attention to the way space and time, as well as social kinds, are intimately linked in discursive behavior (Agha, 2007a, 2007c); therefore, we should expect to see all three as important in behavior surrounding language policy and practices.

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5 A Nepali saying on this topic states “ek sita bhātle bhandako bhāt pākeko cha ki chaina bhanne dekhāuncha (a grain of rice shows whether the rice in the cooker is done or not), or, you can understand the whole picture from any one segment) (cf. Hult, 2010, p. 20)
At times, these scales have been dichotomized as micro- and macro-scales, with individuals exerting agency in emergent interactions at macro-levels but constrained by macro-level structures. However, this simplistic view has been discarded in favor of frameworks that go beyond a micro/macro divide (Blommaert, Collins & Slembrouck, 2005; Collins, 2012; Lemke, 2000; Wortham 2006, 2012). These emphasize that there are potentially infinite scales of time and space invoked in any situation, though only some are relevant at a given time (Lemke, 2000). Collins summarizes three major lessons of attention to scale and scaling: first, the interaction order is never only local; second, “the interactional plane is not exclusively the realm of individual choice or agency, nor social structure solely the realm of constraint;” and finally, centers and hierarchies remain relevant (Collins, 2012, p. 198). Following these tenets, the challenge is to figure out which of these potentially infinite scales are relevant in any given moment (Wortham, 2012).

Various attempts have been made at developing frameworks to determine what timescales and co-text are relevant in interaction. Rymes (2013) advocates attention to *metacommentary*, or comments on communication to understand what is relevant to participants in an interaction. Latour’s (2005) actor-network theory promotes tracing interconnections among human and non-human actors across disparate scales. Agha’s (2007a) notion of *social domain* identifies the set of people who are able to recognize the indexical connection between semiotic behavior and social types of people as such these connections become enregistered. Nexus analysis (Scollon & Scollon, 2004) locates social action at the nexus of discourses in place, the interaction order, and the historical
body. Each of these approaches provides certain insights into tackling the problem of overlapping scales.

The proliferation of attempts to understand the interaction of multiple scales and identify what is relevant to understanding particular situations indicates that this is a live question in social theory. It is also a question relevant to my analytical needs in understanding language policy processes that take place across multiple scales of time and space, from long-term historical processes of ethnicization and racialization, to ontogenetic processes of migration and socialization, and individual interactions. Taken together, these concepts provide a framework for the remaining investigation.
Chapter Three: Methods

This is a linguistic anthropological study of educational language policy and practices. I set out to understand the process and effects of a change in language policy that allowed a marginalized language into school. After decades of schooling designed to exclude most of the languages in Nepal, I wanted to know what it would take to introduce minoritized languages into classrooms, and what it would look like linguistically, pedagogically and politically when this did happen. In order to answer these questions, I needed to look at multiple levels of scale, from historical language policy documents to classroom discourse and everyday conversation outside of school.

These questions required research methods that would provide access to the linguistic and educational practices of my research participants, and to the ways they made sense of their worlds. To this end, I conducted an ethnography of language policy, an approach that “can illuminate official and unofficial, de jure and de facto, macro and micro, corpus/status/acquisition planning, national and local language policy, and, importantly, the links (or lack thereof) between policy and practice” (Hornberger & Johnson, 2011, p. 278). My methods largely comprised the classic trinity of ethnographic research: participant-observation, interviews, and document collection. In the following sections, I discuss the ethnography of language policy, each of my research methods in turn, and how the data they yielded has been a part of my analysis. This discussion is followed by reflections on my positionality as a researcher.
3.1 Ethnography of Language Policy

In early scholarly approaches to language policy and planning (LPP), there was an emphasis on studying nation-level language policies that would maximize efficiency and national unity, particularly in newly independent countries, and developing typologies and theories of LPP (e.g., Fishman, 1979; Haugen, 1983; Kloss, 1969). Johnson and Ricento (2013) identify the 1970s and 1980s as a time of transition in the field, characterized by growing attention to the actors involved in language planning (e.g., Cooper’s [1989] question, *who plans what for whom and how?*), the potential for language policy to be involved with social inequality and change (e.g., *Language Planning and Social Change*, the title of Cooper’s [1989] book), and ideologies or orientations to language (Ruiz, 1984). In addition, Hornberger (1988), in an ethnography of speaking approach to studying a bilingual education policy in Peru, demonstrated the applicability of ethnography to studying language policy and the importance of integrating attention to interaction patterns with the study of policy texts.

Critical language policy studies emerged in full force with Tollefson’s (1991) explicit attention to power and inequality in LPP. Grouping most of the earlier LPP studies as following a “neo-classical approach” that claimed to neutrally describe the world, Tollefson advocated a “historical-structural approach” that would recognize the inherent political and ideological nature of LPP. Critical approaches to LPP opened the field to engagement with current social theory and to questions of inequality and ideology inherent in policy-making and implementation. However, it had weaknesses as well; Ricento and Hornberger (1996), for example, argued that critical language policy failed
to acknowledge the role of multiple interconnected layers of policy processes, which they visualized as a multilayered language policy “onion.”

Hornberger and Johnson (2007) articulated the ethnography of language policy as a method to investigate the agents, contexts, and processes involved in the multiple layers of the LPP onion. While ethnographies of language policy had been conducted prior to Hornberger and Johnson’s call, there has been significant growth in the field since then. There are now several volumes of research that collect ethnographic research on language policy (e.g., Canagarajah, 2005; García, Skutnabb-Kangas & Torres-Guzmán, 2006; Hornberger, 2008; Johnson, 2013; McCarty, 2011; Menken & García, 2010; for reviews of recent research in ethnography and LPP, see Hornberger, Anzures Tapia, Hanks, Kvietok Dueñas, & Lee, forthcoming; Hornberger & Johnson, 2011; Johnson & Ricento, 2013). The findings from ethnographic studies of language policy contribute to the understanding of policy processes around the world, including attention to multiple scales of processes and the situated, contingent nature of LPP decisions and effects. Ethnographers of LPP share a common concern with social justice, especially related to the rights of speakers of minority and Indigenous languages (Johnson & Ricento, 2013).

Attention to language policy processes and actors allows for a more comfortable integration of other branches of linguistic anthropology and the ethnography of language policy. For example, Mortimer’s (2013) tracing of communicative event chains in Paraguayan language policy draws from attempts to use linguistic anthropology to understand larger timescales than the speech event (Agha, 2007a; Agha & Wortham, 2005; Wortham 2005, 2006; Wortham & Reyes, 2015). This allows for attention to the multiple scales of time and space that may be relevant to individual interactions (Lemke,
2000). Tracing the interlinked speech events that carry national-level policies to individual classrooms introduces one solution to the perennial problem of macro-micro dichotomies in the ethnography of language policy (e.g., Ricento’s [2000] suggestion that LPP scholarship had not yet successfully accounted for the relationship between microlevel interaction and macrolevel social organization). In addition, Mortimer (2013) brings social indexicality to the fore in understanding the ways that culturally recognizable language forms are linked to social types of people (Agha, 2007a). The insight that policy relies on “circulating cultural images of kinds of people for interpretability” (Mortimer, 2013, p. 77) provides a step to understanding the ways policy bridges from macro-scales to interactional encounters.

3.2 Methods

In the tradition of the ethnography of language planning and policy, my research emphasized long-term engagement, multiple methods, and an attempt to understand emic categories. The major elements of my research methods were participant-observation, interviews and surveys, and document collection. The following sections detail each of these in turn.

3.2.1 Participant-observation

Participant-observation, a core method of ethnography, can cover an enormous range of actual activities, varying along an axis of more participatory or more observation-oriented (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011). Mary Des Chene, in a discussion of ethnography in the ethnically charged environment of modern Nepal, provides the
Nepali term *gaph*, or chatting, as a gloss of this research method (1996b, p. 107). Much of my participant-observation indeed took the form of *gaph*, chatting or gossiping with the people whose lived experiences inform this study.

During my fieldwork in Jhapa and Morang, a primary source of observations was my primary location in a household, where I was quickly drawn into family relationships, tensions and responsibilities. Som Bahadur Dhimal, a language activist, author and scholar in Kathmandu, connected me with his relatives in the village of Buttabari. This was an ideal site for my research because of the personal connection to Som, whom I had known for several years before conducting dissertation research, its proximity to the first school to begin teaching in the Dhimal language, and the connections that Som’s relatives had to additional educational institutions. During my research, I became intimately part of that family’s life. I shared a room (and sometimes makeup or clothes) with the woman I called my *bahini*, or little sister, ate alongside the family prepared, and watched TV at the end of the day with the whole family. Their extended family provided my entry point into the community; Man Bahadur Dhimal, whose family I was staying with, was the youngest of four brothers and one sister, all of whom lived nearby. Some thirty-one members of this extended family lived on adjacent plots of land and interacted with each other frequently, providing me with immediate connections to people ranging from grandparents to infants, and conversations from the weather’s effects on crops to planning weddings.

The house was located on a densely-populated stretch of road, which meant that I also overheard neighbors’ conversations, observed their comings and goings, and even smelled the food they cooked. There was no way, while I was in Buttabari, to avoid
participation in community life; even if I tried to escape into my (shared) room, someone was likely to come bring me a plate of food, bring a baby for me to watch (since typing at my laptop was not always understood as work), or just want to talk. While the family unit was important, the neighborhood was also part of everyday life, and in a warm climate with plenty of time spent outdoors, I often interacted with and observed many other members of the community.

One of my primary participation-observation modalities was watching the road. The house had a porch that looked east onto a dirt road. South along the same road was the rest of the Dhimal village of Buttabari and, farther south, the larger Dhimal village of Arnakhari. Five minutes to the north was Krishna Mandir chowk, the intersection where this road and several other small north-south roads met the East-West Highway, one of Nepal’s major roadways. The chowk was where you would catch a bus to go to the larger bazar towns to the east or west, do small scale shopping, get your bicycle or motorcycle repaired, or pick up remittances from family members abroad. It was also where men would go for a cup of chiyā (tea; or, perhaps chiso chiyā, literally cold tea but a euphemism for alcohol). The house’s location near the chowk meant that anyone who lived to the south or wanted to visit someone farther south would pass by, making the porch a prime spot for observing the daily goings-on of the neighbors. Watching the road gave me the opportunity to watch and listen to the whole neighborhood, to call out and ask where they were going, and to invite them to sit with me for a moment. I was also rarely alone while I did this, but rather sat with members of the household, their extended family or neighbors who would explain who was walking by: their family ties, their history with employment abroad, their political party affiliation, and an evaluation of
their character or appearance. In some ways the inverse of a “walk-along” as research tool (Kusenbach, 2003), my “sit-beside” approach of watching the road was central to my participant-observation data collection, while also making me a visible presence in the community (See Figure 1). Sitting on the porch or in the shade was also a common pursuit of members of the community, which allowed me to participate in the same form of observation of their neighbors that others also performed regularly.

Beyond this relatively passive form of participant-observation, I visited many houses and attended events throughout my fieldwork. The aggressive hospitality of the neighbors, heightened by their curiosity about my presence, meant that I rarely reached a destination without being invited to stop and chat at houses along the way. These interactions, which I agreed to as often as I could, also frequently led to invitations to additional events, whether sharing a meal or attending a wedding. Weddings were regular highlights of the social calendar and my involvement in various weddings ranged from eating a quick meal to spending days preparing, eating, chatting, and dancing. These intergenerational events were particularly rich sites for observing age-based patterns of language use, and gave me a reason to visit Dhimal communities across the districts of Jhapa and Morang. I attended nine weddings in Jhapa and Morang districts, in four different towns and including several different communities (e.g., weddings where both parties were Dhimal, or Brahman, and also intercaste couples).
Figure 1: Scenes from watching the road: My frequent participant-observation modality

Another festive set of events were the Dhimal melas, fairs held in each Dhimal village over the period of two months to celebrate the pre-monsoon festival called Jatri.
These occasions, which gathered together not only the whole village but also people connected to it such as daughters who had married into other villages or settled in Kathmandu, were greatly anticipated by the whole community. My participation in them gave an opportunity to see and be seen, and to visit different communities and compare other Dhimal villages to the ones I was more familiar with. I attended eight Jatri melas, six of them the standard village-based observance along with two Dhimal community-wide events that started and ended the festive season (see Rai, 2013, on reforming the practice of the Jatri mela). The list of holidays and religious ceremonies that I attended extends well beyond these, including engagements, funerals, fairs, and religious observances at various houses and temples.

As I watched life unfold around me, I was always being observed. My habits were discussed not only by people who saw them firsthand but also by their friends, who learned about my tendency to eat little rice but lots of vegetables, or knew how long I had spent on the phone (and how much money I spent on phone minutes) or that I had been in a bad mood the previous day. This meant that I frequently received advice about how to act, which was an informative variety of metacommentary but also created certain challenges. On some issues, I had a clear moral stand: I would accept food and water from people of all castes, for instance, no matter the qualms of acquaintances of various backgrounds who questioned this tendency. At other times, I was less sure of how to interpret the advice I was given. For instance, several people warned me to avoid a particular household, which was headed by a single woman described to me as a witch. She kept trained snakes in the basement of the house, I was told, and made people fall ill. I could easily laugh off the claims of witchcraft and understand accusations of witchcraft
as a means of sanctioning the behavior of women who fail to conform to traditional standards of behavior (Agarwal, 1994; Chaudhuri, 2012; Federici, 2008; Roy, 1998). However, I could not deny that this woman was unpleasant to be around; whenever I saw her, she had a habit of insisting that I go to her house, to the point of physically trying to pull me by the arm down the road. Should I visit her home to show to the neighbors (who, I knew, would be watching) what I thought of accusations of witchcraft, or avoid her house because it seemed unpleasant? In the end, she remained tangential to my research goals, and the closest I got to her house was sitting on her porch for a few minutes. This was one of the more dramatic examples, but I frequently felt that I needed to balance my desires and comfort level with the ways that my behavior would be evaluated by those observing my behavior.

Participant observation at schools was also a major part of my research methods. I negotiated access to schools primarily through contact with head teachers, who were usually welcoming to me as a researcher, and often asked me to spend some time teaching while I was there. While I demurred from permanently taking over any subject, I did frequently cover classes for teachers who were absent or called away for other tasks, or taught individual lessons while teachers watched. At Krishna Lower Secondary School (KLSS) and Jana Chetana Primary School (JCPS), I tried to attend a full day of school at least once a week throughout my research period. I attended a total of 29 days of school at KLSS and 24 at JCPS. I observed classes at three other schools for a shorter period of time: Saraswati Secondary School on three occasions, and two English-medium private schools in the Krishna Mandir neighborhood for nine and two days respectively.
Table 1: School observations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School</th>
<th>School type</th>
<th>Dhimal subject offered?</th>
<th>Number of days observed</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Krishna Lower Secondary School</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>Class 1 and 2</td>
<td>29</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Jana Chetana Primary School</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>24</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pashupati English School*</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saraswati Secondary School*</td>
<td>government</td>
<td>pre-primary and Class 1</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mount Everest Boarding School*</td>
<td>private</td>
<td>no</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* pseudonyms

During a typical day of school observation, I would arrive in time for the morning line-up or slightly before, and would talk to teachers in their staff room or to students playing in the courtyard. After the line-up, in which students sang the national anthem, did a brief set of calisthenics, and heard announcements about upcoming events (see Chapter 1), I would attend classes or sit in the breakroom with teachers. At schools with Dhimal language classes, I would prioritize those classes; at all schools, I prioritized language-oriented subjects (e.g., English, Nepali, grammar) and social studies, which offered the most explicit teaching about topics such as nationalism, the purpose of education, and the organization of society. During break times, I would either talk to children or with teachers, or with parents picking up children.

Schools, like the outside community, had their own special events, which I tried to attend. These included enrolment drives in the catchment areas of KLSS and JCPS, Children’s Day programs at the two schools and an enrolment and final exam score announcement program at KLSS. For some of these programs, I was invited as a special
guest or requested to video record the proceedings, or both. I attended two School Management Committee meetings at KLSS and three at JCPS, and was invited to join the head teacher from KLSS at a meeting of the head teachers from all the government schools in Damak municipality, and once to travel with him to the District Education Office. Attending these events and meetings was a valuable source of information on how schools functioned and where decisions, especially about language policy, were being made.

Another essential site for participant observation was Dhimal community events. In this category, I attended meetings and workshops at the national headquarters of the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra (DJBK), the Dhimal Ethnic Development Center, a sprawling campus in Morang district. Programs such as regular committee meetings, the annual general meeting, and special workshops such as the textbook workshop detailed in Chapter 6, and a march from the town of Urlabari to Damak culminating in a rally in the town of Damak, helped in my understanding of Dhimal political action (see also Rai, 2013, on the DJBK). Some parts of these meetings were inaccessible to me either because they were limited to DJBK members (in which case I was sent to the house of the caretakers next door, who were somehow related to Man Sir’s family and therefore especially friendly to me) or because they were conducted in a mix of Nepali and Dhimal that I did not always understand fully. However, generally DJBK members were extremely open to allowing me to observe their work and attend events. I also attended

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6 Rai (2013) notes the DJBK national headquarters lies in the center of Dhmala territory in Morang, as opposed to most ethnic and caste organizations in Nepal that have their headquarters in Kathmandu, no matter the location of most of their members. Rai argues that this is a sign of DJBK’s functioning as an indigenous organization focused more on grassroots organizing than on urban elites, and of their realignment of spatial orders to reflect the Dhimal community rather than Nepali national spatial orders.
more local meetings, such as a workshop on writing Dhimal, meetings of small savings and loan cooperatives and weaving cooperatives, the village committee and general body meeting of Buttabari, the village where I was based, and an attempt at forming a youth club in Buttabari.

In Kathmandu, I attended several events related to indigenous languages, educational policy, and the Dhimal community. These included the Nepal English Language Teachers Association annual conference, events sponsored by multiple groups on the occasion International Mother Language Day, and the Kathmandu celebration of the Dhimal Jatri mela described above. While these events do not feature prominently in my dissertation, they were all important in understanding the functioning of nation-level policy, and the parts of the Dhimal community that live in Kathmandu.

For all of these sites and events, I kept extensive fieldnotes. I often wrote brief jottings (Emerson, Fretz & Shaw, 2011) either in a field notebook or on my phone throughout the day before expanding them in full typed fieldnotes. Photos taken on my phone also served as a reminder of things I meant to write about. As with other parts of my life in Jhapa, my fieldnotes were not entirely private; my hosts and their friends would habitually flip through my field notebook to see what I had been writing, and I often had observers watching over my shoulder as I typed my notes (a different version of the challenge that John Jackson [2013] describes of knowing that the people he represented in his work might see the finished products; the people I was describing often watched my production of the highly unfinished notes that would inform later outputs). When I took notes while watching classes, students and teachers often looked in my notebook and commented on my handwriting or the accuracy of anything I had attempted
to write in the Devanagari script. One kindergarten student at JCPS even helpfully “graded” my notes by flipping through my notebook and writing check marks or **good** on each page of a field notebook. I wrote fieldnotes generally for some time in the evening but also for several hours every morning; this was the quietest and most private time for me to write as most other people were busy with agricultural or domestic chores, and I sometimes joked that in doing my writing work (**lekhne kām**) I was similarly fulfilling my obligations.

In my research plan, I set out to use social groupings formed by interaction with schools as the unit of analysis for my study. To that end, I followed invitations and opportunities to explore such networks. By the end of my fieldwork, I had visited the houses of over a dozen teachers and met their families, attended weddings of teachers, their family members and friends, and spent time at the houses of many students. Many of the connections I made also involved Man Bahadur Dhimal’s family networks and obligations, leading me to visit around fifteen different Dhimal villages during the course of my research. In general, I was welcomed into households and events throughout the area and the Dhimal community.

### 3.2.2 Interviews, survey and focus groups

After I had developed relationships with key research participants, I began to request interviews. I conducted individual recorded interviews with 20 people, including government education officials, teachers, and language activists. Interviews ranged from 15 minutes to 90 minutes, though many were around half an hour long. I conducted semi-structured interviews in which I had a planned set of questions or topics that I wanted to discuss, but allowed the emergent discussion to guide the order and eventual focus of the
conversation. In addition to these individual conversations, I held group interviews with the School Management Committee and assembled teachers of JCPS and KLSS, and a group discussion at the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra with ten people who responded to an invitation to talk with me about Dhimal language.

**Table 2: Interviews**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Role</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Language activist (Kathmandu-based)</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Dhimal activist (Jhapa/Morang-based)</td>
<td>6 (2 of these are also teachers)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Government school teachers</td>
<td>8 (2 of these are also Dhimal activists)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Private school head teachers/owners</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education bureaucrats</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Another set of interview-like conversations were part of a language and education survey that I conducted near the end of my fieldwork. With the goal of collecting a larger sample of information about language proficiencies, education levels, and professed beliefs about language, I visited nearly all Dhimal households in the villages of Buttabari and Arnakhari. Sangeeta Dhimal, Man Bahadur’s daughter and a teacher education student from Buttabari fluent in Dhimal and Nepali, accompanied me and participated in these conversations. These were more structured conversations than the ones I held in most interviews, though they certainly also strayed from my planned interview protocol on many occasions.

In Buttabari, Man Bahadur, as chair of the Dhimal village committee, had already conducted a population survey of the members of the Dhimal village association, so I revisited the same households to ask additional questions about education and language.
In Arnakhari, there was no such base survey though there was a list of households that belonged to the village Dhimal committee. In order to identify Dhimal households, I relied on Sangeeta’s knowledge and asked survey respondents about their nearest Dhimal neighbors. I recorded conversations when I was given permission. The conversations usually took place at individuals’ houses but sometimes at a neighbor’s house or store as when I found groups visiting with each other or playing cards, and were mostly short, averaging under ten minutes. I discuss the language proficiency portion of the survey, and the difficulty of interpreting responses to it, in Chapter 8. The greater number of recorded conversations in Buttabari, despite the larger number of total Dhimal households in Arnakhari, perhaps reflects my greater familiarity with the residents of Buttabari, where I lived during fieldwork, as opposed to the neighboring village of Arnakhari. In addition, while the length of recorded conversations in Arnakhari was slightly longer than those in Buttabari, the Buttabari survey interactions usually included lengthy conversations that were not always recorded. I attempted to keep notes on these side conversations, though the long days of surveys meant that they were not all recorded in great detail.

**Table 3: Language and Education Survey**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Number of recorded conversations</th>
<th>Minutes of recorded survey interactions</th>
<th>Respondent households</th>
<th>Respondent individuals</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Arnakhari</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>328</td>
<td>81</td>
<td>419</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Buttabari</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>335</td>
<td>65</td>
<td>313</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>85</td>
<td>663</td>
<td>146</td>
<td>732</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

An additional source of one-on-one conversations was the fourteen language lessons I had with Som Bahadur Dhimal in Kathmandu. Held either in the library of the
Fulbright Commission building or in the Nepal Ethnographic Museum in the Nepal Tourism Board building, language lessons with Som not only covered the basics of Dhimal grammar and vocabulary but also gave me the opportunity to speak with him at great length about his views on Dhimal language, culture, and his activism work. Lasting two to three hours each, these lessons were a valuable source of metapragmatic commentary about Dhimal language and Som’s goals for language development.

In general, I did not find interviews, especially one-on-one interviews, to be the most useful source of information, and therefore stopped making formal interviews a research priority. I should be clear that while my interviews were rarely conducted in situations where there were no other overhearers or even participants, that was not what I saw as a problem. Nor was the problem a tendency for my interlocutors to want to provide answers they assumed I wanted to hear, or even the tendency to answer yes to a question as a face-saving mechanism (though that was a dynamic that made me attempt to avoid yes-or-no questions at all costs). Nor was it about the choice of language used in the interviews. Most interviews were conducted in Nepali, with a handful in English when that was the interviewee’s preferred language. In the language survey, some respondents preferred to use Dhimal, in which case Sangeeta conducted the interview, though I could generally understand the conversation. While it is difficult to entertain the counterfactual of how interviews would have unfolded if more of them had taken place in Dhimal than Nepali, as I will discuss in Chapter 8 it was expected that someone of my age from the Dhimal community would often speak in Nepali rather than Dhimal, and most of my interlocutors spoke Nepali for much of every day including in the home.
As Briggs (1986) points out, the assumption by many researchers that interviews are transparent and understandable speech events is not only incorrect but also impedes successful analysis of interview events. This insight is especially important in a Nepali context where an ideology of direct speech and truth-telling is a recent innovation (Kunreuther, 2014), and one that I would argue remains largely limited to certain class positions and especially the capital of Kathmandu. While informal conversations often reflected complex meaning-making processes and analyses of the world, asking direct questions was an odd interactional style that yielded brief, seemingly stock answers. My interlocutors also seemed anxious about conducting interviews, or at least anxious to avoid them, and aside from a handful of key research participants I felt uncomfortable about doggedly pursuing these unenthusiastic interviewees. I learned far more from informal conversation and participant observation than from interviews, and so, especially by the end of the research period, I was much more focused on observation and informal conversation than pushing for formal interviews.

3.2.3 Documents

I collected various sorts of documents and photos as part of my research. Many of these were given to me by people who knew about my research interests. I collected others during the research period, including during visits to the Ministry of Education, the Centre for Educational Research, Innovation and Development at Tribhuvan University, and the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, all in or near Kathmandu. The materials I collected include:

- Textbooks, which I either photographed or obtained copies of
- Flyers, e.g., for schools, campaigns, and political parties
• Exam question sheets  
• Photos of classrooms and schools  
• Publications of the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra  
• Publications by language activists in various languages, usually dictionaries, textbooks, books of poetry, and advocacy materials  
• Wedding invitations  
• Wedding DVDs  
• Facebook and Twitter posts (with identifying information removed)  
• Ministry of Education publications  
• NGO reports  
• Newspaper articles

In addition to documents I collected in Nepal, I accessed many policy documents, such as educational plans and five-year development plans that include sections on education, and early reports on Nepal’s educational system on the internet and through the University of Pennsylvania library and affiliated libraries.

3.3 Analysis

Data analysis began concurrently with my research. My fieldnotes represent the first level of analysis, as I chose what was worth recording and how to describe it. I wrote occasional memos for myself describing themes or challenges that I was facing. I also conducted some preliminary analysis and received feedback when I presented at a social sciences research conference in Kathmandu midway through my research period. Reflection and memoing allowed me to adjust the questions I asked in interviews and the themes I focused on in my observation.

Along with field notes, I kept a daily summary of what I did each day, with brief notes on the major activities of the day. When I made audio or video recordings, I kept a log of the participants, location and main events of the recording. I have used these logs
to determine which portions of recordings needed to be transcribed in full. I have conducted all transcription and translation myself. While I did not initially keep similar logs for photographs and documents, I later created a parallel log for those forms of data collection.

After the conclusion of my fieldwork, I uploaded my fieldnotes and transcribed interviews and recordings into data analysis software Dedoose. I also developed logs of recordings, transcripts, and artifacts that contained information about the various types of data I had collected. I conducted a first pass of coding by reading through all these documents and assigning themes that emerged. The initial code list included a variety of types of codes, some thematic and others tied to particular events or event types. From this first round of coding, I also identified key incidents or levels of analysis that seemed worth investigating. As I identified these slices of the data to focus on, I would essentially compile smaller data sets to code and consider. I often developed ideas by writing analytical memos about what I saw in the data, then returning to the data once again. As I mentioned in the discussion of my research questions in Chapter 1, the overabundance of data I collected meant that analysis was largely a process of choosing which stories to tell. There are many other angles of analysis that would be plausible and potentially fruitful, and so determining what to write often felt like a task of excluding information in order to produce a coherent document.

3.4 Positionality

A core tenet of ethnographic research is that the researcher is the primary instrument of the research methodology. As a researcher, I was embedded in the research
site and in the relationships I formed. The range of things I was able to observe and my interpretations were shaped by my prior experiences and the ways I was seen by the people around me. In this section, I will discuss some of the ways that I see my positionality as influencing the way my research and analysis have unfolded.

As I discussed above, my entry into my research site was facilitated by connections with Som Bahadur Dhimal and his family. These connections shaped my research in positive ways, by creating relationships of fictive kinship, but certainly also created an impression of alignment with those people and with the Dhimal community. Some non-Dhimal community members resented what they assumed to be a sole focus on Dhimals, a focus they thought was undeserved (see García Sánchez, 2014 for a similar reaction from dominant communities upset by scholars’ attention to their marginalized neighbors). Others, both from the Dhimal and non-Dhimal communities, were concerned that instead of focusing on interviewing older people and attending religious ceremonies, I went to school and spoke to children and others positioned as less knowledgeable about Dhimal culture. At schools, I was often seen as being aligned particularly with whoever had been my first contact at the school; at KLSS this was particularly salient because my point of entry was through head teacher Krishna Bahadur Dhimal. I suspect that one reason teachers at that school were reluctant to be interviewed for my study was their assumption that I would report back on the conversation to the head teacher. At JCPS, where my first contact was a teacher at the same level as other teachers, teachers were much more willing to participate in interviews.

Beyond the relationships that gave or closed off access, my interlocutors and neighbors slotted me into roles that made sense to them. My age, nationality, gender,
height, skin color, perceived marital status and choices of jewelry are some of the
dimensions that I noticed shaping my interactions during my research period. For
example, during preliminary research I had stayed with Ram Bahadur Dhimal, a
community leader who spent much of his time debating politics at tea shops, a heavily
male-dominated space. During this preliminary research, and during my occasional visits
to Ram ji’s house, he would bring me along to the tea shop. By contrast, in Buttabari and
Arnakhari I was treated more fully as a woman. This meant that I was never encouraged
to go to the tea shop or other male-dominated spaces and reprimanded on the few
occasions when I did. This meant that on my visits to Ram ji’s house I could participate
in varieties of political conversation that I did not hear during the rest of my field
research. On the other hand, being treated as a woman was instructive, whether it meant
having neighbors ask me to watch their children when I seemed to be doing nothing else,
or having to sit in a back room while drinking alcohol during a festival while men drank,
danced and sang openly in the front. Even the shape of my nose, which in a Nepali
context was frequently described as looking like a high-caste Brahman or Chettri, or even
Aryan, nose, made people from those groups react to me with a certain sense of
solidarity. My willingness to eat pork and snails, and drink alcohol, on the other hand,
opened doors within the Dhimal community who were accustomed to outsiders
disparaging their foodways.

Like many researchers from wealthy countries conducting research, I worried
about the power relations between me and the participants in my research. I believe that
my outsider status enabled me to gain access to some information and an understandable
role of foreign researcher. In particular, comparing the ease with which I was welcomed
into events like Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra meetings to the suspicion and barriers that Janak Rai (2013) faced in negotiating access to similar events as a Nepali researcher clarified that I was treated differently due to my nationality. Nevertheless, like Lauren Leve (1999) in her dissertation research in Nepal, I found that while I may be privileged on a global scale, in interactions I was often positioned as a rather powerless and ignorant young woman. Especially in interviews with middle-aged, accomplished, middle class, well-educated leaders in their community, “the ironic arrogance implicit in the piety with which I and my fellow graduate students had debated the question of how to practice a post-Orientalist scholarship divorced from the conditions of domination and exploitation that had characterized anthropological knowledge and its production in the past, came face to face with the mocking parallel reality that many of my associates did not perceive me as particularly powerful at all!” (Leve, 1999, p. 25). My research methods, which were not always recognized by those around me as research (and certainly not as good research) furthered this situation. Many of my interlocutors, especially those involved in community leadership, had played the role of researcher or research subjects themselves. In most cases, that research had involved rapidly-conducted surveys yielding quantitative data, not the open-ended and lengthy process that I engaged in. In some of my interviews and often in informal conversation, my interlocutors helpfully told me what I should be doing, which was often talking to the oldest members of the community to learn about authentic Dhimal culture or visiting more schools and villages to have a larger sample size.

At the same time, being positioned by interlocutors as naïve could be helpful and a relief. When people assumed that I knew little about what I was seeing, I benefitted
from hearing their own explanations of events and interactions. And I was even more uncomfortable on the occasions when I was positioned as an expert, which happened most frequently in school contexts. This was especially challenging when it came to the question of teaching English, which was often the first request that teachers, students and parents made of me when I met them. This presented a number of challenges for me as a researcher. With a few exceptions, there was more mutual comprehension in my conversations in Jhapa and Morang when they were conducted in Nepali than English. For my goals of successful communication and having my interlocutors express themselves with nuance and precision, Nepali was a better choice for conversations. This was often easy to resolve by using both languages or switching between them depending on the topic of conversation, such as conducting formulaic greetings in English but using Nepali for further conversation. When I was asked to teach English classes, which happened often, I was in a more difficult position; as an ethical stance, when the people providing me with great benefit by participating in my research asked for a favor, I wanted to say yes. However, the English I speak and the English that was being taught in Nepali schools differed significantly in lexicon, grammar and phonology. My English was often incomprehensible to teachers and students alike, even when reading the same text that they were using, and I did not know the desired answers to many of the assigned questions. In fact, on the occasions when I was asked to teach, I found that I had better success in subjects like Nepali grammar or other subjects that were taught in the medium of Nepali than I did in English and especially English grammar classes. Fortunately, this disjuncture between varieties of English often became clear to teachers as well, and was a fruitful way to begin conversations about language variation.
I was also attentive to the ways that my Nepali and Dhimal speech positioned me relative to my research participants. My Nepali language trajectory, beginning with a semester of Nepali language study in Darjeeling taught by instructors from Kathmandu, followed by tutoring by a Kathmandu-based instructor and living largely in Kathmandu, has given my Nepali a particular flavor. Many of the linguistic features of Eastern Nepali feel particularly comfortable to me because of my earlier exposure to Darjeeling Nepali, for example using dāju instead of dāi for brother or raising vowels and ending with a nasal stop rather than a nasal vowel in the hortative verb forms (jāũ in Kathmandu, jũm in eastern Nepal). However, other elements of my Nepali speech clearly stood out, leading interlocutors to frequently comment on my sweet (mitho) language or say that I spoke better Nepali than they did (hāmi bhandā rāmro bolchau/bolnuhuncha). When I asked about this comment, often by laughing and saying that there was no way I could speak better than they did, I was often told that this was a comment on the way that I used person agreement on verb endings, or because I used such formal verb endings (an artifact, in part, of my discomfort with less formal verb endings, from having learned them later in a curriculum that started with formal verb endings in order to prevent students from accidentally insulting anyone). The amount of Dhimal I spoke was also frequently a reason for commentary and praise. This was partly because outsiders were not expected to learn Dhimal, and partly, I suspect, because people of my age did not always speak Dhimal comfortably or frequently. This was particularly notable because my limited Dhimal proficiency was evaluated extremely positively, while Dhimal young people with far greater proficiency were castigated for speaking poorly (see Chapter 8).
As with any research, the moment when I did this work is relevant to what I observed. While Jhapa and Morang were only minimally affected by the earthquake of April 25, 2015 and the aftershocks that followed, some of them significant earthquakes in their own right, the earthquake did impact my research design, which had called for more work in Kathmandu including with government officials than was possible. Following the earthquake of April 25 and a major aftershock on May 12, schools were closed across the country of Nepal for a week each, interrupting the regular schedule of school visits I had attempted to create. The release of a new constitution, which was followed by massive protests, strikes, and a fuel shortage, also impacted the conversations I was able to have and the sites I was able to visit. For example, I had planned to spend more time at Saraswati Secondary School, the second school to offer Dhimal language classes, but between frequent strikes and overcrowding of vehicles during the fuel shortage, it became difficult to go to the school on a regular basis and I decided to focus on the schools that I could reach to more easily. The strikes and fuel shortage also made it harder to go back and forth from between Jhapa and Kathmandu than I had anticipated, leading me to spend more time in the east and focus less on Kathmandu-based bureaucracy and language activism than I had anticipated.

This was also a challenging time to conduct research for many reasons; looking back on my notes, for instance, I was surprised to find that I had scolded myself for taking bad notes at a meeting that had been interrupted by a 7.3 magnitude earthquake on May 12, 2015. There was uncertainty not just about when the next earthquake might strike but also when the borders might open, whether private schools could continue to operate school buses in the absence of fuel at the petrol pump. It was a strange and
unsetting experience to be so close to the devastation caused by the earthquake, and yet distant; on the day of the initial earthquake, I had been at the annual general meeting of the Arnakhari village women’s weaving cooperative. While the meeting was briefly delayed as people checked on their homes and family members after the first round of shaking, in the absence of real trouble where we were or any information about destruction elsewhere, the meeting continued. It was only hours later, when phone service began to resume and electricity returned to enable watching television, that we had any idea of the scale of the earthquake. For my interlocutors, whose entire lives and families were in the affected area, the experience was even more unsettling.

The methods I used and my positionality in conducting research, whether it was my personal beliefs or the ways I was perceived, shaped the process and products. To this end, throughout the dissertation I endeavor to include description of where I was in the research process, whether that was at the front of the class or observing from the back, attending a meeting or serving as a guest speaker, conducting a formal interview, attending a wedding or festival, talking to curious strangers on the bus, or gossiping while watching the road.
Chapter 4: Language in Education Policy in Nepal, 1956-2016

Language policy has been a contentious issue in Nepal at several junctures, often playing a significant role in discussion of what sort of nation Nepal should and would become. These moments have ranged from massive street protests in the 1950s over the government privileging of Nepali over Hindi (Gaige, 1975) to the demand for mother tongue schooling in the 40-point demands issued by Maoists at the start of a decade-long civil war (Bhattarai, 1996). As in every part of the world, decisions and demands about language are made not only by Nepal’s central government, but also by businesses, educators, and even student unions who have policed the linguistic landscape of Kathmandu by painting over and tearing down English-language school signs (Weinberg, 2017). In this chapter, I trace the history of educational language policies that allowed for the creation of the Dhimal language courses at two schools in southeastern Nepal. This national-level discussion sets the stage for the following chapter, in which I focus on the particular language policy histories of the two schools where the course has been adopted, and of one where it has not.

Several other scholars have written histories of language policy in Nepal (Eagle, 1999; Hutt, 1988; Sonntag, 1995), while other scholarly works and government or NGO reports include brief sketches of this history as part of the background for empirical studies or recommendations (e.g., Phyak, 2011; Rai, Rai, Phyak & Rai, 2011; Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015). I draw from primary sources and secondary sources, but my account and approach differs from these others on several counts. Key differences include the starting assumption that linguistic affiliation is not natural but is rather...
created and takes on importance at particular moments (L. Mitchell, 2009; Ramaswamy, 1997; Silverstein, 2003); attention to continuities and change across and between major
time periods; and acknowledgement of the ways that Nepal's language policy trajectory is
influenced by factors outside of its national boundaries.\textsuperscript{7} I revisit these points in the
conclusion of the chapter.

4.1 Schooling in Nepal

In order to understand the conditions that allowed for teaching Dhimal as a small
part of the curriculum, we need to understand several phenomena: the emergence of
widespread schooling in Nepal; the dominance of Nepali language in this territory and
particularly in school; the privileged position of English in school settings; and the steps
that have opened a limited space for the presence of languages other than Nepali and
English in school. This section discusses the emergence of schooling as a widespread
phenomenon in the country of Nepal.

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). This new country incorporated people speaking many languages and following
many religions, a characteristic that was not viewed as problematic by rulers interested in
maintaining territory and the taxes that were provided by those territories, not in creating
a sense of national belonging (Burghart, 1984; Whelpton, 2005). Burghart argues
convincingly that it was only in the mid-nineteenth century that the concept of nation-

\textsuperscript{7} This chapter develops arguments from a published working paper (Weinberg, 2013).
state began to take hold in Nepal, with the territorial holdings of the king of Nepal being politically unified and the types of people living within that territory listed and organized according to the Muluki Ain (Civil Law) of 1854.\(^8\) While the Muluki Ain placed limits on how groups could interact with each other and be treated by the state, there was no mention of an official language in the first law of the land (Burghart, 1984; Höfer 1979/2004). In addition, the Rana family who ruled Nepal from 1850-1950\(^9\) were opposed to widespread education and therefore had no need to set language-in-education policies for the country.

Beyond the Rana family, schooling was extremely limited before 1950. 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 pāṭhśālās and Buddhist gumbās, using the mediums of Sanskrit and Tibetan respectively (Eagle, 1999; NNEPC, 1956; Phyak, 2011). The Ranas likely saw an educated populace as a threat to their control (Caddell, 2007; Eagle, 1999; Sharma, 1990).

In 1950, King Tribhuvan staged a dramatic return to power, instating multi-party democracy under his rule as a constitutional monarch. Coinciding with the emergence of international aid and Cold War concern from world powers about Asian politics, countries including the United States began donating rapidly increasing amounts of

\(^8\) Dhimal was among the groups who were not listed in the Muluki Ain. Shneiderman (2015) argues in the similar case of the Thangmi in the north of Nepal that this demonstrates that they were unimportant or barely known to the central government as of 1854.

\(^9\) Following the Kot massacre of 1850, members of the aristocratic Rana family ruled Nepal as hereditary prime ministers. Members of the Shah dynasty remained as figurehead kings until the restoration the monarchy in 1950.
money and technical expertise to various areas of development, with the United States serving as “the largest and most influential donor in the education sector until 1972, leaving an indelible imprint on the educational system (Skerry, Moran & Calavan, 1992, p. 56; see also Mihaly, 1965/2002). Nepal's seemingly primitive and underdeveloped status was seen not just as a challenge but also as an advantage, providing a “blank slate” (Skerry, Moran & Calavan, 1992, p. 36) or “textbook opportunity” (Wood, 1987, p. 344) for experiments in development, allowing development actors to create new systems without needing to reckon with existing infrastructure (Fujikura, 1996; NNEPC, 1956; Skerry, Moran & Calavan, 1992). Schooling spread rapidly: from a country where only 0.1% of primary school-aged children were enrolled school in 1951 (Wood, 1962), net enrolment for primary school today is 95.7% (Ministry of Education, 2015a). While schooling and literacy were not previously important parts of Nepali childhood, attending school for at least some years is now normal.

While the effectiveness of schooling in imparting skills like reading and writing remains lower than national and international targets (Ministry of Education, 2015b; Sitabkhan & DeStefano 2014), schools have had a significant effect on Nepali society and life during their approximately 60-year history. They have played a role in creating new social hierarchies around the country, with school education becoming highly valued by many Nepalis (Ahearn, 2001; Bista, 1991; Pigg, 1992, 1996; Skinner, 1990; Skinner & Holland, 1996). Schools have been sites where students were socialized into nationalist narratives (Caddell 2005, 2007; Onta, 1996; Ragsdale 1989), and where state narratives and actions were contested by Maoists (Chettri, 2004; Shields & Rappleye, 2008; Shneiderman & Turin, 2004). Schools have also been central in politics during the past
decades, through both teacher and student politics (e.g., Burghart, 1996; Snellinger, 2009). As in India, younger people involved in politics have sometimes chosen to draw out their time as students in order to advance in the student wings of political parties, gaining opportunities that would not be available in mainstream political parties dominated by aging leaders (Snellinger, 2009; on similar dynamics in India, see Jeffrey, 2010). From an experience limited only to the most privileged elite, schooling is now part of the experience of most Nepali children; educational language policy is part of this widespread experience.

4.2 The Dominance of Nepali

The existence of a language named Nepali is, like schooling, a relatively new phenomenon. The language of the Shah kings and the Rana rulers was known at the beginning of the Rana era as *Khas kurā*, the language of the Khas people, a group from the hills of western Nepal to which the Shah rulers belonged. The same code was also sometimes called *Parbatiya*, the language of the hill people, or *Gorkhāli*, the language from the region of Gorkhā, the home area of the Shah kings (Burghart, 1984). Gorkhali was the term favored by the early Rana rulers, who declared Gorkhali the official name of the language in the 1850s. The appellation *Nepali* was first attached to the language outside of Nepal's borders in 1887, when a British missionary in Darjeeling published a grammar and vocabulary of the language; he called the language Nepali after the British name for the country. The Ranas disliked this label, since at the time they and other Nepalis used the term Nepal to refer only to the Kathmandu Valley and not to their total territory. It was not until the 1930s that the government accepted the label Nepal for the
whole country, and Nepali for the language. 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 kurā 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 created (Hutt, 1988). Written literary traditions in Nepali began in the 19th century largely outside of the borders of Nepal, with poets writing in Banaras and Darjeeling, India (Chalmers, 2003). 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 (Hutt, 1988).

There was some development and promotion of Nepali language within Nepal during the 144-day rule of progressive Prime Minister Dev Shamsher Rana in 1901, during which he established a newspaper, language society, and several “language schools” that taught in Nepali. Most of these innovations were undone by later prime ministers, including Dev Shamsher’s brothers who deposed him after his few months of rapid reforms (Whelpton, 2005).

After the end of Rana rule in 1950, the government commission working to establish a school system noted the lack of printed materials in Nepali as a major challenge for the establishment of the school system and called for emphasis to be placed on the rapid development of teaching materials in Nepali (NNEPC, 1956). While Nepali

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10 This was the case as well in my survey of the villages of Buttabari and Arnakhari; many people referred to the language as parbatiya or as rāṣṭra bhāṣā, the national language. On the other hand, some language activists try to maintain the name Khas or Khas Nepali in order to reduce the ease of equating the language and nation (D. Tuladhar, p.c., 7/25/16).
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, 1996, p. 166). Similar insults have continued to be leveled against the other languages of Nepal, with first-language speakers of Nepali calling these other languages 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.

4.3 Nepali in School

The end of Rana rule and restoration of both monarchy and democracy in 1950 ended restrictions on who could access schooling, beginning the trend toward widespread schooling. By the time the government of Nepal established an education planning commission, there were several types of schools in operation around the country, including English schools modeled on Indian, and by proxy British, school systems, Sanskrit schools for training Hindu priests, monastery schools for training Buddhist practitioners, and Basic Schools based on Gandhian principles of providing practical, vocational training to students (NNEPC, 1956). Other forms of schooling included classes run by soldiers returned from service in Gurkha regiments of the British Army (Ragsdale, 1981, 1989) and tutoring by hired traveling instructors (f/n 12/1/2015). Thus, while the report of the Nepal National Education Planning Commission (NNEPC) described the lack of existing widespread schooling as an advantage that would allow educational planners to create an entirely new system, there were a number of models of
schools in operation even before the government was heavily involved in providing schooling.

The NNEPC report was a product of 38 highly educated commission members, all Nepali other than American advisor Hugh Wood, a professor of education from the University of Oregon. While the report covers a wide range of topics related to the establishment of schools around the country, the issue of languages in schools comes up repeatedly, including in discussion of shortcomings of the existing schools, in the results of a national survey about educational needs and desires, and in recommendations for the future. In a description of major problems with the existing educational infrastructure, the overemphasis on language teaching in these schools appears as a key problem:

Most schools devote an *unwarranted amount of time to the teaching of languages* (foreign, as well as national and mother tongue) *and to preparing for final examinations*. Language teaching often occupies 40% to 80% of the curriculum time. Most schools use the last two or three months of each year to prepare for final examinations even in the primary and middle schools. As a result of these factors, there is a noticeable lack of time for social studies, science and health, fine arts and music and similar experiences in most schools (emphasis in original; NNEPC, 1956, p. 40).

Having identified language as an area of concern and debate, the commission included questions about languages of instruction in a survey distributed throughout Nepal (NNEPC, 1956). While acknowledging the unrepresentative nature of such a survey, especially with the obstacles of limited literacy and challenging transportation at the time, the commission received an impressive 1,647 completed questionnaires. Respondents gave a wide range of responses about language in the future schools of Nepal; these are summarized in Table 4 below. Among the interesting aspects of this table is the fact that each category adds up to more than 100%; that is, people answered that
they wanted more than one medium of instruction at each level in each region. While possibly a result of misunderstanding about what this question meant (perhaps this merely reflects that respondents felt multiple languages should be taught as subjects), it seems to reflect a desire to learn in multiple languages. Another interesting result is regional variation; the report’s authors posited that the “influence of the missionary English schools in the Darjeeling area” created high demand for English in East Nepal (p. 53). Another notable dynamic is the variation in what “local language” would mean; if, as noted in the report, “‘local’ language for the Terai area means Hindi in most sections,” then some respondents were requesting schooling in a language with a written and scholarly tradition significantly more developed than that of Nepali, while others were requesting schooling in languages with minimal written traditions.

**Table 4: Medium of Instruction Desired**

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

*"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)*
In the following section of the report, which provides excerpts of written survey responses, there are a variety of attitudes presented about what languages should be used in school and on what grounds. In a response from “the headman of a village who discussed the ideas with his people and then wrote a single reply to which each affixed his thumb print” (p. 55), the villagers apparently supported Nepali:

The medium of instruction should be the national language in primary, middle, and higher educational institutions, because any language which cannot be made lingua franca and which does not serve legal proceedings in court should not find a place. In the same way English, which is merely taught as a foreign language cannot be considered as an important medium of instruction in educational institutions. The use of a national language can bring about equality among all classes of people, can be an anchor-sheet for Nepalese nationality, and can be the main instrument for promoting literature (p. 56).

A college professor’s response, characterized by the report’s authors as “learned but practical and far-seeing” (p. 61) discussed benefits of mother-tongue as opposed to Nepali-only approaches. I reproduce the professor’s comments at length because they summarize many of the arguments made by other survey respondents and by the authors of the report in their summaries:

Opinions differ on principle with regard to the medium of instruction in primary schools. The advantages of local languages are:

1. Children can easily be made literate if they are taught in their mother tongue.
2. Love of mother tongue instead of distaste for the national language, will be the emphasis.
3. The less advanced tribal languages will be developed and this will go a long way in helping to bring about an all round progress in the country by mutual good will of all concerned.
4. The Government will be credited for preserving the right of its people to publish books in their own mother tongue for the medium of instruction.

The advantages of the national language are:

1. If the national language is made the medium of instruction, the Government will tide over the immediate difficulties of preparing
text-books in many languages, and implement their plan at once. Local languages generally lack grammars and dictionaries and it takes a long time to prepare them.

(2) In a small country where languages are spoken, it will not be practicable to give the same status to all the languages simultaneously. Therefore it will be imperative to adopt a general policy to give status to a language which is spoken by the majority of the people. Moreover, taking a census and the collection of statistics will involve much time before it will be possible to take up the problem of many languages.

(3) The national language will be easier to learn than Hindi. No truly Hindi speaking people inhabit any part of the country.

(4) As an official language for a long time, Nepali has been current everywhere and therefore is not difficult for the local people to understand.

(5) Newars, Magars, Lepchas, Gurung, Chepangs, Tharus, Khas, and Rajputs who constitute the different communities of Nepal, easily understand the language and express their thoughts to one another through its medium. It is thought that it will not be so unintelligible to boys and girls of every tribe in primary schools throughout the country.

(6) Nepali bears a closer affinity with Hindi than any other local language and both Nepali and Hindi are unlike Maithili, Newari, and Tibetan, using Deva Nagiri script.

(7) The most important thing that strikes the readers of our earlier history is that the bond of language has been the greatest factor in determining the frontiers of our country. Garhwal and the other conquered parts of Nepal broke away because of different languages prevailing there. To solve the problems of multiplicity of language, stress and importance will have to be laid on one language, if the integrity and sovereignty of Nepal is to be maintained. (NNEPC, 1956, pp. 62-63).

This professor’s objections to the use of local languages in schools revolved around the rejection of the idea that Nepali citizens could be speakers of Hindi, which many were and still are (Gaige, 1975; Yadava, 2014), and the questionable assumption that everyone spoke Nepali comfortably as a second language (cf. Chand, 1975; Chand, Tuladhar & Subba, 1977). The points on both sides that this anonymous professor made in 1956 are remarkably similar to the talking points in discussions taking place now, internationally and within Nepal (e.g., Pinnock, 2009; Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015).
The learned professor was not the only person expressing a variety of concerns about language. Excerpts from additional responses largely emphasized the importance of widespread access to practical, vocation-oriented schools, and the dismaying state of schools at the time of the survey. Debates over language appeared throughout, though, as respondents to the survey described their visions of a future Nepali school system and beliefs about the potential for teaching in different languages:

Sanskrit does not supply bread and butter; it creates blind belief, and class distinction (p. 66).

Sanskrit and English education do not fit village needs; a new system must be established for our people (p. 66).

Nepali should be the medium of instruction from the primary school through the college (p. 67).

The medium of instructions should be Nepali after the first two grades; English and Hindi should not be offered in primary school (p. 68).

The primary school curriculum should include Nepali, Arithmetic, Geography, General Knowledge and Cottage Industries (p. 68).

English should not be compulsory for the medium of instruction; it should be optional in the high school (p. 69).

Sanskrit, English, and Hindi should be optional subjects at the high school level. Nepal history should precede foreign history (p. 69).

Preparation and printing of textbooks in Nepali must receive first priority (p. 70).

The report’s authors summarized the overall opinion received through the survey as “a great thirst for education, a dissatisfaction with present schools, a skepticism of Sanskrit and English and foreign educational patterns, and a desire for something practical” (p. 72). In this vein, the recommendations put forward by the committee, which “set the tone
of the education sector” for years to come (Awasthi, 2004, p. 3) strongly supported Nepali as the medium of instruction for schooling, 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)

Reflecting the report's general orientation toward education as a means of nation-building, the overriding linguistic concern had to do with “greater national strength and unity,” rather than issues such as students' transition to school or the speed of literacy acquisition. Further emphasizing the nation-building goals of schools, 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 [sic] 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, or even variation within varieties of Nepali, focusing instead on “standard Nepali.” The emphasis on Nepali was also justified by the “adequate research evidence to show that most children cannot learn several languages well,” (NNEPC, p. 97), a research consensus that has reversed over the decades.

Despite seemingly draconian Nepali-only statements, though, the report’s recommendations did allow for the use of mother tongue in the first few years of
schooling. The author suggested that the language curriculum of primary schools should be “mother tongue, leading to Nepali” (p. 93), with the goal of phasing out mother tongue support by the end of second grade. While this is far less time spent in mother tongue instruction than recommended by advocates of giving as much instruction as possible in students’ first languages (e.g., August & Shanahan, 2006; Ball, 2010; Benson, 2004), but not actually much less than the present government’s guidelines, which allow for mother tongue-medium instruction only through third grade (Ministry of Education, 2009).

In Nepali scholarship, discussions of this report often blame Hugh Wood, the American advisor to the commission, for the glorification of monolingual schooling in the final report (e.g., Awasthi, 2004, 2008, 2011; Giri, 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. For example, Awasthi narrates the formation and influences of the NNEPC as a tale of the dominance of “western values” over existing Nepali pluralism:

Reduction of multilingualism was not an indigenous construct of Nepal. The linguistic restrictionism was an alien concept for the people and polity, and was an importation from the west. The concept of reductionism grew during the British Raj in India, and flourished after the NNEPC report. Dr. Wood played a major
part to give shape to reduction of multilingualism in this country. (Awasthi, 2008, p. 23).

Awasthi argues throughout his work (2004, 2008, 2011) that the “Wood Commission” adopted a monolingual mindset due to influence from Wood and, less directly, the Macaulay Minute, an 1835 report on language in education in India in which Lord Macaulay famously recommended instruction in English in order to create an educated elite more sympathetic to the colonial government than to other Indians (Macaulay, 1835). While Macaulay and the Nepal National Educational Planning Commission ultimately reached different conclusions, with the Macaulay Minute supporting English schooling and the NNEPC report supporting Nepali despite some popular demand for English instruction, Awasthi argues that they share a monolingual ideology that was, up to that time, foreign to Nepal.

Without a more detailed picture of the history of the activities of the NNEPC, it is difficult to accept that this was an imposition brought in exclusively through Wood's influence; as Awasthi (2008) notes, many of the Nepali members of the commission had been educated in India, where they could have encountered ideologies that equated monolingualism and nation-building. The vision of a monolingual nation promoted between 1950 and 1990 certainly aligned 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). Thus,
it is unclear that Hugh Wood was the singlehanded vector of monolingualism, a proposition that seems particularly unlikely especially in light of his insistence that the work of the commission was done by Nepali colleagues with only his advice (see his introductory note in NNEPC, 1956; Wood, 1965). Whatever the source, though, the NNEPC recommendations demonstrate a strong belief on the part of the government-sponsored commission that teaching a single language, and enforcing its use in as many domains as possible, would strengthen national unity.

The NNEPC's Nepali-only recommendation was made into law in 1956-7 but was not accepted readily. 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 (Chalmers, 2007). Speakers of the Limbu 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. 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 (Gaige, 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 of the Nepali-only policy forced the government to reverse its position on language, demonstrating that a decree from the central government was not sufficient to have an effect on behavior, at least at that
moment. It was only under the 1962 Education Act that the Nepali-only law was restored, and eventually more effectively enforced in government schools.

4.4 The Allure of English

Second only to the privileged position of Nepali in the school system, English has had a special place in Nepali schools, beginning with the first government-supported school. The Darbār (Palace) School was founded by the first Rana ruler, Jung Bahadur Rana. Jung Bahadur visited England and other parts of Europe in 1850, and was apparently greatly impressed by the educational systems he observed and the power of the English language worldwide. Upon his return from Europe, Jung Bahadur established an English-medium school for his own children on palace grounds. The school was only open to members of the ruling Rana family, though it later moved off palace grounds and admitted some students from non-Rana, though still elite, families (Eagle, 1999). The first post-secondary educational institution in Nepal, Trichandra College, opened in 1918 to shelter graduates of the Darbār School from radical ideas circulating in Indian universities, where they otherwise would have traveled for further studies. 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 (Sharma, 1990). For this small population, the language of schooling was English.

Beyond the early elite English-language schooling, English has been a part of mass schooling in Nepali since its inception. Before there was significant government involvement in schooling, many of the schools privately established around Nepal were based on an English model, and taught using English textbooks (NNEPC 1956; Wood,
1965). The same Nepal National Education Planning Commission report that named Nepali the medium for all schooling discussed popular demand for English. In the analysis of the national survey, the NNEPC report described “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” (NNEPC, 1956, p. 53). One such region was the east of Nepal, where contact with English-medium mission schools in Darjeeling, India, fueled a desire for English-language schooling. However, as discussed above, Nepali and not English was chosen as the medium of instruction for all government schools.

English remained an important element in language policy, educational and otherwise, in the following years. While never becoming an official language as it has been in neighboring India, English enjoyed a privileged position even in national policy. For example, in 1964, a law requiring that Nepali businesses keep records in Nepali was changed to allow commercial records to be kept in either Nepali or English (Hutt, 1988). English-medium schools remained an option, albeit limited to a few privately run and mission schools; Wood (1965) notes that the same elites who preached Nepali for national unity tended to enroll their children in English-medium schools.\textsuperscript{11} Schools also began to introduce English at lower levels than previously. The NNEPC report recommended that additional language instruction begin only in secondary school, and then that “Tibetan, Hindi, Bengali and/or English” be required only for students in pre-professional tracks (NNEPC, 1956, p. 114). The next major educational plan advanced additional languages to begin in grade four, in which 55% of classroom hours were

\textsuperscript{11} This is reminiscent of present-day complaints that indigenous elites send their children to English-medium schools while advocating for mother tongue schooling only for less wealthy speakers of their language (e.g., Gautam, 2015; Koirala 2010).
supposed to be spent on Nepali, 5% on Sanskrit, and 10% on “one of the UN languages” (Ministry of Education, 1971, pp. 24-25). In practice, “one of the UN languages” always meant English (Malla, 1977; fn, 12/29/15). Today, English instruction officially begins in first grade at all government schools (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005), if not earlier.

The optimal time to begin the teaching of English and amount of class time to devote to the subject have been the topic of repeated and prolonged discussion since then. In one example, Dr. Jai Raj Awasthi, an applied linguist, long-time professor and civil servant, and participant in many educational and language policy commissions, reported during a panel discussion at the Nepal English Language Teachers' Association (NELTA) annual conference in 2016 that input on the role of English in school tended to draw significantly from the personal experiences of members of government and the royal family:

When we did NELTA ELT survey in 1983-84 led by Alan Davies, interviewed people, several educationists including KP Malla. KP Malla said, “I studied English from Grade 8.” Education Secretary Dr. Narsing Rana Sinha said we should start English from Grade 8. Then we asked this question: why Grade 8? He said, “I learned from Grade 8 and I learned proficiently, I am not less competent than anybody who started English from nursery classes.” That was one part. Another part was that the Minister of Education said, “No, we should start English from Grade 1.” We asked the reason, why should we start English from Grade 1? He didn't have any reason for it. So I had to interview personally three times myself with the minister then. On the third meeting he spelled out what is hidden inside. He said, “Crown Prince Dipendra goes to Ishwari, Ishwari school in Tripureshwor, right, and then [his first cousin] Paras went to Darjeeling, so when he comes back, boom, he speaks English and crown prince cannot speak English, so let's start English from grade one,” that is what the minister said, and therefore we have to start English from grade 1. Look at the policy maker's answer! (Jai Raj Awasthi at NELTA Conference, 2/17/15).
In this anecdote, Awasthi described high-level discussions about the proper distribution of English in schooling, especially the best age to begin English language instruction. This discussion relied on the personal experiences of various people in decision-making positions, whether observing their own English-language proficiency or observing the language learning of members of the royal family. Notably, these highly placed politicians and experts did not refer to available research, or consider whether, why, or to what level English language should be pursued by Nepali students. English proficiency, instead, was viewed as an unquestionably desirable goal.

The pressure for increased access to English medium schooling has continued seemingly unabated, and perhaps only accelerated. In a 1986 report on language policy in Nepal, Dahal and Subba expressed alarm at the rapid rise in interest in and prestige of English in Nepal:

> English seems to be gaining deepening influence and prestige in various key development spheres, such as technology, advanced science and research, big business and tourism. This influence is being promoted by a growing segment of the emerging internationally oriented modernizing elite. Comprising former feudal landlord families, neocapitalist business families, the neobureaucratic class of high government officials, and the Western-educated intelligentsia at Tribhuvan University, this emerging elite holds the real power today in Nepal and is the principal decision-making class. Nonutilitarian snob values associated with an English-speaking, metropolitan-oriented elite—English for “social climbing”—are on the rise. These developments in a South Asian nation where English only recently has become an important factor deserve scrutiny, lest the linguistic gap—mediated by English--between the broad masses and the small elite, a gap so familiar elsewhere on the subcontinent, take root in Nepal. (Dahal & Subba, 1986, pp. 240-241)

Observing similar dynamics in his study of Nepali as a national language, Hutt (1988) noted that, while educational policies had aimed to provide all levels of schooling in Nepali, “the authorities are beginning to come to terms with the fact that students who have received their middle and lower grades of education in an exclusively Nepali
medium cannot be expected to manage with advanced textbooks in English” (p. 46). Quoting an interview with then-King Birendra in a magazine, in which Birendra emphasized the importance of “the international language,” Hutt 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.

In some ways, this prediction was prescient; with the return to multi-party democracy in 1990, new policies allowing for private schools enabled the massive proliferation of English-medium private schools. Facing competition from these private schools, government schools have also converted to at least nominally using English as medium of instruction beginning at earlier and earlier grade levels (Joshi, 2013; Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015). Beginning in 2012, government schools have been legally allowed to begin instruction from grade 1 in the medium of English; this policy has been accompanied by no additional education or professional development for teachers to improve their own English language proficiency or pedagogy (Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015).

In Nepal, as in many parts of the world, English holds a highly privileged position, and English proficiency confers prestige on its speakers. In addition, English language is used prominently in various contexts in Nepal, to the point where Giri (2016) has argued that English is not a foreign language in Nepal. In addition, written English is a major part of the linguistic landscape of Nepal, including in relatively rural areas and on government buildings. Notably, English writing alongside Nepali is considered entirely normal while the inclusion of other forms of writing remains an area of conflict; this was
exemplified by a one-day strike on September 5, 2015 when the Limbuwan party in eastern Nepal shut down transportation, schools and government offices in order to demand that the Limbu language, written in its own script, be included on signboards alongside Nepali and English in the areas of eastern Nepal which they claimed as a Limbu state (f/n, 9/5/2015).

While the value of English is most often tied to its perceived economic advantages, the use of English has additional effects. Several researchers have documented the ways that English allows for modes of communication previously unavailable in Nepali speech. Ahearn (2001) notes that the concept of labh (a direct borrowing of English love) employed by love letter writers had novel characteristics compared to the previously available categories of prem and maya. Pigg (1992) found that English was held by villagers and urbanites alike to be the language of bikās, or development. In a related trend, HIV/AIDS educators' used the “expressive capabilities” of English to talk with “the transparency and frankness that is required” to discuss sensitive topics like sex and drugs (Pigg, 2009, p. 484). Kunreuther (2014) describes intermixing of English and Nepali as part of new formations of voice in Kathmandu in the 1990s and beyond. This includes both an intimate voice associated with authentic, personal feeling, as in the expressions of love that Ahearn discusses, and a political voice associated with civic empowerment and democratic participation. Aside from the associations of English with prestige and economic advancement, use of the language, including through mixing English and Nepali, may open opportunities for expression seemingly unavailable through the sole medium of Nepali.
4.5 The Many Languages of Nepal in School

Schooling in additional languages of Nepal has been a consistent demand from certain sectors of the population from the 1950s on. As discussed above, the Nepali-only recommendation of the 1956 NNEPC report was immediately opposed by people who were already involved in schooling in Newar, Limbu and Hindi languages (Caplan, 1970; Chalmers, 2007; Gaige, 1975). Although the use of other languages of Nepal in public spaces was severely curtailed under the Panchayat government (1950-1990), activists continued to attempt to write in other languages, sometimes being punished or even imprisoned for their efforts (Hangen, 2007; Ragsdale, 1989; Yonjan Tamang, 2010).

During the Panchayat era, discussion of or publication in languages other than Nepali was highly discouraged as it was considered divisive and threatening to the monolingual state (Hangen, 2007), and few pre-1990 publications advocated schooling in the indigenous languages of Nepal, or discussed language in the context of educational challenges. One exception to this is the prescient report published in the proceedings of a language policy workshop conducted in India. Dahal and Subba, cited above, warned of the encroachment of Nepali and English, noting that “some lesser languages are faced with the danger of extinction over the next decades” (1986, p. 248) and that English had increasing appeal, with the potential of creating a linguistic gap between elites and others. They concluded by arguing for a language policy that would respect linguistic diversity while still maintaining national unity:

It is time that we in Nepal formulate a well-defined policy for development that promotes national integration and modernization while recognizing the basic linguistic heritage. The role and functions of Nepali, English, and other indigenous languages must be more clearly delineated. Is the promotion of the more than fifty lesser languages of the country—
languages spoken as a mother tongue by nearly half of the population—compatible with a program to promote national integration and modern development? Can some modus be found to integrate our diverse ethnic groups and bring them into the mainstream while encouraging their ethnic identity and self-image, rather than ignoring them as does the present policy?

Nepal remains one of the least developed and most ethnically diverse countries in Asia. A formula should be found that will promote national unity while respecting linguistic and ethnic diversity. This is the only sound path to national integration and development. One first major step might be strong governmental commitment to bilingual education in the primary schools. Unfortunately, even in intellectual circles, there is little serious discussion about the necessity and feasibility of such a new major step in language policy. The widening gap between the masses and the elite and between the urbanized advanced ethnic groups and the backward majority must be bridged as we move down the difficult road to a more egalitarian society in Nepal. The problem in Nepal is that some modicum of recognition may be given to the linguistic and cultural identities of a few conscious ethnic groups, while the great majority remain in a state of ‘benign neglect.’ Selective token recognition is not the answer. (Dahal & Subba, 1986, pp. 249-250)

These authors, both of whom had completed PhDs in India, were able to publish such a recommendation only outside of Nepal, though over the course of Panchayat rule there were moments of relative openness during which some ethnic advocacy organizations were founded that worked for the promotion of their own languages (Hangen, 2007).

This repressive situation changed after the Panchayat system ended in 1990, amid widespread protests for democracy. 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)

The Constitution of 1990 was the first time that languages other than Nepali received recognition as legitimate elements of the nation. At the same time, this
formulation maintained the dominance of Nepali over other languages spoken in the
country by keeping Nepali as the only national language (Malagodi, 2013; 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 articles represent major concessions to the demands of linguistic minorities
that their languages be recognized and supported by the government, though Nepali
retained its position as the national language. In archival research and interviews with
members of the Constitution Recommendation Commission that drafted the 1990
Constitution, Malagodi (2013) found that there was little discussion about the
preservation of Nepali as the national language, which the constitution’s writers saw as a
natural reflection of the Nepali language’s status as a lingua franca and as the glue
holding together the nation. As Surya Nath Upadhyay, Member-Secretary of the 1990
Constitution Recommendation told Malagodi in an interview:

Take out Nepali from us and compare the highlanders with the plains people of
the Terai. How would they come together?...The food is different, the gods are
different, the scriptures are different, the rituals are different, the religious rites
are different, and every damn thing is different! And in a country like this where there are more than a hundred ethnic groups, we need to find out the cementing factors.

Surya Nath Upadhyay, Member-Secretary of the 1990 Constitution Recommendation Commission, 22 March 2006. (Malagodi, 2013, p. 157)

Upadhyay’s comments demonstrate that the drafters of the 1990 constitution continued to view the Nepali language as a crucial factor in creating and maintaining national unity. There was some discussion of the role of other languages, which were eventually recognized at a lower, largely symbolic level as “languages of the nation” (rāshtriya bhāshā) to reflect the demands of the minority groups during the democratic transition.

The Constitution of 1990 was also the first time that a language-in-education policy was stated in the constitution of Nepal, with the inclusion of the right to operation of schools in each community's mother tongue. Nevertheless, these passages remained somewhat ambiguous. For example, it seems that under article 18(2) above, communities would 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, the constitutional provisions left mother tongue-medium instruction at higher levels of education unprotected and failed 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. In the intervening period, Nepal experienced another difficult transition to democracy, as it had previously in the 1950 experiment with democracy. A Maoist insurgency beginning in Western Nepal in 1996
started a civil war that concluded with the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Accord in 2006. One of the 40 demands that the Maoists published shortly before beginning the insurgency was that “All languages should be given equal status. Up until middle-high school level (ucca-mādyāmik) arrangements should be made for education to be given in the children's mother tongue” (Bhattarai, 1996; ICG, 2005). After the ten years of civil war, the results of the peace agreement and incorporation of the Maoists into the political structure included 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 addressed language policy and education remained unchanged from those in the Constitution of 1990 (Government of Nepal, 2007).

The prolonged transitional period and peace process included the writing of yet another new constitution, which was finally promulgated in 2015. This latest document has slight, but potentially significant, changes in the wording related to languages:

6. Language of the nation: All the mother tongues spoken in Nepal shall be the national language.
7. Language of official transaction:
   (1) The Nepali language written in Devnagiri script shall be the language of official business in Nepal.
   (2) In addition to Nepali language, a province shall select one or more national language that is spoken by majority of people in that province as the language of official business, as provided for by the provincial law.
   (3) Other matters concerning language shall be as decided by the Government of Nepal on the recommendation of the Language Commission. (Government of Nepal, 2015)

With the more specific labeling of Nepali as the “language of official transaction” rather than the “national language,” this constitution may have responded to the demands of language activists who had objected to the hierarchy created in previous constitutions. On the other hand, the article effectively prevented any language becoming a co-official
state language alongside Nepali by stating that a co-official language must be “spoken by majority of people in that province.” In conjunction with a new map of federal states that maintained Nepali speakers as the majority in each province, this provision dashed the hopes of proponents of the use of other languages in government, who had expected that the federal system promised in the new constitution would allow for additional languages to become official languages of federal states.

As many LPP scholars have observed, language policy is often created through educational plans and implementation rather than at the constitutional level (e.g., Hornberger, 2002; Menken, 2008; Ricento & Hornberger, 1996). The School Sector Reform Plan, Nepal's major education policy document for 2009-2015, provided some clarification of 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).

Changes in language policy implementation has often moved in fits and starts, with policy changes or implementation only occurring in response to widespread protests. Sonntag (1995) notes that despite changes in the 1990 Constitution, no active moves were made to change implementation until controversy erupted over the establishment of Sanskrit as a mandatory school 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; Yadava & Grove, 2008). 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). It was not until 2006 that the government, with technical and financial support from the government of Finland, began a major project to experiment with mother tongue-based multilingual education (see Hough, Thapa Magar & Yonjan-Tamang, 2009; Nurmela, 2009; Taylor, 2010; Yonjan-Tamang, Hough & Nurmela, 2009). After the conclusion of this project in 2009, there has been no major government project, though a few NGOs are involved in mother tongue-medium schooling in pockets around the country (Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015).

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. 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). 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 and follow-up visits (Phyak, 2013; U. Pradhan, 2016; Rai, Rai, Phyak & Rai, 2011; Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015).

4.6 Orientations to Multilingual Schooling

Discussions surrounding multilingual education in Nepal has centered on using languages of Nepal other than Nepali or English as the medium of education in early grades, as supported by the various policies discussed above. The School Sector Reform Plan, in effect from 2009-2016, set a target of 7,500 schools implementing multilingual education by 2015 (MLE; Ministry of Education, 2009). This target was not met: only 138 schools requested support as MLE schools in 2015 (Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015). Interestingly, this model has been supported by people with fairly different ideological attachments to linguistic diversity and mixed images of what mother tongue-based pedagogy should look like.

One set of models may be grouped as an indigenous and language rights approach, championed by Nepali activists like Amrit Yonjan-Tamang and advisors from elsewhere like David Hough and Tove Skutnabb-Kangas in their role as advisors to the Finnish-funded Multilingual Education Program for all non-Nepali Speaking Students of Primary Schools of Nepal project. They saw the introduction of indigenous languages as a way to bring local, traditional indigenous knowledge into classrooms that usually discount such knowledge, allowing for “critical indigenous pedagogy...which is grounded in indigenous epistemologies, metaphysics and values” (Hough, Thapa Magar & Yonjan-Tamang, 2009, p.166). This strand of thinking also emphasized that the use of such
languages is the right of all Nepalis. Such an approach meant that mother tongue-based multilingual education should be available to speakers of all languages of Nepal, no matter how small the speaker population may be; in fact, the Finnish-funded MTBMLE project chose in many cases to work with small, endangered languages as part of this rights-based approach. In addition to changing the language of instruction, this model proposed a significant change in the pedagogical philosophy of Nepali schools. Rather than the top-down model of knowledge transfer, or what Freire (1970) calls a banking model, this group argued that parents, community members and even students held knowledge that should be taught in the classroom. While these ideas emerged in the context of discussions of medium of instruction, they broadly drew on ideas from critical and indigenous pedagogy in addition to research about bilingual education and multilingualism in literacy and education.

Other models of mother tongue education were more limited in their intended intervention. Publications from SIL and UNESCO, which due to significantly overlapping authorship are sometimes difficult to distinguish, focused on a more limited set of changes that were supposed to accompany the introduction of indigenous languages into classrooms (see Khadka, Chaudhary, Magar, Chaudhary & Pokhrel, 2006; Koirala, 2010; UNESCO, 2007, 2008. Handman [2009] details language ideological differences between SIL and UNESCO; however, in the case of Nepal the two work together closely and put out a nearly unified message). Arguments for mother tongue-based schooling from SIL and UNESCO focus on changes in classroom interactions that will arise as a result of a different language of instruction; for example, that the use of a familiar language allows students to participate more actively in classroom discussions (e.g.,
Malone, 2004; SIL, 2015; UNESCO, 2007). There is no major change in the curriculum philosophy but rather a prediction, supported by findings from experience and existing research, that student participation will increase when they are allowed to speak the same language at home as at school.

Nepal government documents related to medium of education seem to have followed the problem-solving approach supported by UNESCO. One of the most detailed government documents on the topic of language is the National Curriculum Framework (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005), which points out the contradiction of government inaction on medium of education compared to the many supportive government policies, recommendations, and documents. In order to demonstrate the government’s commitment to addressing language issues in education, Nepal even added a target to the international Education for All goals related to medium of education. In addition to the six goals agreed on by the 164 countries that participated in Education For All between 2000 and 2015, Nepal’s seventh goal was “Ensuring the rights of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to quality basic and primary education through their mother tongue” (Ministry of Education, 2015b). In a review of progress toward the EFA goals, the purpose of this goal was explained as “to address linguistic diversity in the country with a view to ensuring the right of indigenous people and linguistic minorities to basic and primary education through mother tongue. It was envisaged that by 2015 almost all youths and adults should get literate in their mother tongue, including transition to the official language i.e. Nepali and the international language English” (Ministry of Education, 2015b, p. 9). Without specific indicators to demonstrate progress toward this goal, though, the report was able to state that Nepal had made “great
achievements in the sphere of MLE legal provisions and regulations” (p. 54), and that progress was “helpful in laying foundation towards achieving the goal of basic education in mother tongue” (p. 56).

While repeatedly noting obstacles to providing schooling in the mother tongue, the National Curriculum Framework (NCF), like other documents, remained somewhat evasive as to the actions to be taken around language in schooling. Values of multiculturalism, inclusion, and local control of curriculum are emphasized throughout the document. The recommendation related to mother tongue education follows many other educational documents in emphasizing local languages in early years and transition to Nepali or English following that early foundation:

Curriculum will give opportunity to learn in mother language in early grades in line with the child-development approach to learning, the language of instruction will be the mother tongue in early grades i.e. Pre-primary to grade 5. There will be provision for language transition from the mother tongue to Nepali and/or English from grade 4.

The curriculum of English will include elements of teaching English as a second language. The curriculum of Nepali will also have these elements so that children whose mother language is not Nepali will be taught utilizing techniques of teaching a second language. (Ministry of Education and Sports, 2005, p. 21)

Taking the NCF as a representative text, we see that it included multiple languages of Nepal in the written framework; however, inclusion of indigenous knowledge, epistemology or pedagogy was not part of the agenda.

In practice, much of the presence of the languages of Nepal in schools has been in the form of teaching languages as subjects, rather than using them as the medium for teaching other subjects. The Curriculum Development Centre, a section of the Ministry of Education, has developed textbooks in 23 languages of Nepal (Seel, Yadava & Kadel,
2015); however, these are mostly texts for teaching these languages as subjects, for example a Dhimal language textbook rather than a science or math textbook written in Dhimal. According to Ministry of Education statistics, as of 2011 there were 19,999 primary level classes representing 33 languages “which used a local language in the teaching and learning process at the primary level as a transitional language to make better interpretation of the subject matters for those students who did not have Nepali language as their mother tongue” (Ministry of Education, 2011, p. 58). What this support consisted of is unclear, though. For example, I observed the head teacher of one of my focal schools check the box on the reporting form to say that his school provided transitional language support in first and second grades, because his school offered Dhimal language classes four times a week for first graders, and twice a week for second graders. As discussed in later chapters, the students in these classes mostly did not have Dhimal heritage, and none of them spoke Dhimal more proficiently than Nepali (see Chapters 5, 7 and 8). This school is presumably counted among those providing transitional language support, even though nearly all of its students arrived at school speaking Nepali as their dominant language, and the level of Dhimal language support the school provided was minimal.

4.7 Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter has been to describe the national-level policy environment that opened an ideological and implementational space (Hornberger, 2002), albeit a constrained one, to bring languages other than Nepali (and English and Sanskrit) into Nepali government school classrooms. I have attempted to emphasize the dominance
of Nepali in the language policies of the Nepali government since the 1950s. At the same time, though, there has been a significant emphasis on English in schooling, not only in recent years but also throughout the entire history of mass schooling in Nepal. In addition, requests by speakers of other languages to be allowed to use their languages in classroom, while largely silenced during the most repressive years of Panchayat government (1950-1990), have been present since the beginning of mass schooling, and continue today. What future changes in medium of instruction might look like though, is not entirely clear, as some advocates for mother tongue-based multilingual schooling argue that this will represent a major epistemological, curricular and pedagogical shift. Others, including the authors of government policy, seem to see medium of instruction as a matter of a shift in the linguistic code employed in the classroom, which will automatically bring about desired changes in pedagogical interactions but not significantly reshape schooling.

Some scholars of Nepal have identified a tendency within scholarship about the country to view Nepal as entirely autonomous and unaffected by global trends or events. This view is influenced by nationalist discourses within Nepal that emphasize Nepal's exceptional status as never having been colonized (despite the fact that there was significant British control over Nepal's government over time; see Des Chene, 1991; Liechty, 1997; A. Mulmi, 2017) and acceptance of a Shangri La-tinged view of Nepal as a land out of time (for critiques, see Des Chene, 1995; Kunreuther, 2002; Lal, 2002). Despite these powerful influences on how Nepal is portrayed especially in popular press but also in scholarly work, major changes in Nepal's political structure have often mirrored global trends, as in the move to democracy in 1950 and again in 1990. In
addition, since the opening of the country to international aid in the 1950s, portions of Nepal's budget have been provided by international donors with the ability to set conditions and priorities for the money’s use (Fujikura, 2013; Mihaly, 1965/2002). In the realm of education, there has been significant cross-border interaction with India as well, as many of the earliest teachers, textbooks, and curricula in Nepal came from India (NNEPC, 1956; Wood, 1987). Without downplaying Nepal's idiosyncrasies and unique experiences, it is useful to note that national language policies mirror global trends of moving from one-language, one-nation stances in the mid-twentieth century to more pluralistic approaches (Hornberger, 2002), influenced in part by international conventions and standards and reports from international organizations (e.g., Malone, 2004 for UNESCO; Pfelepsone, 2015, for RTI/USAID; Pinnock 2009, 2011 for Save the Children).

Many histories of Nepal's language policy divide the story of language policy into three distinct chunks: the period of no school before 1950; the Nepali-only period from 1950-1990; and the multilingual period from 1990 through the present. Through this history, I have shown that, while these periods, which align with major changes in Nepal's political system, have had implications for language policy, their impact is not as clear-cut as it may appear at first glance. There has been change within each of these broad periods. For example, when the national government attempted in the 1950s to implement Nepali-only schooling, widespread protests forced the decision to be revoked and only fully instated years later after the end of a decade of democracy.

The goal of this discussion is not solely to argue for attention to nuance and detail in the study of language policy in Nepal (and elsewhere), though that is a worthy goal. In this history, I have demonstrated the long roots of the demand for schooling in the many
languages spoken in Nepal, and in English. While demands for schooling in indigenous languages and in English have had different valences and possibilities for being expressed and addressed at different times, both have long been present in policy conversations, and are not merely manifestations of recent external influences as they are sometimes represented. The dominance of Nepali in schooling, on the other hand, was by no means an inevitable development, as Nepali was a severely "underdeveloped" language at the time that it was adopted as the national medium of instruction (NNEPC, 1956). In addition, attention to the ways that language policy is not merely an automatic reflection of written central level documents offers hope for the possibility of action at scales other than the central government; this point is further developed in the following chapter's examination of language policy decisions made at three specific schools. A careful examination of history demonstrates the present linguistic order of things is neither wholly new nor unchangeable.
Chapter 5: Authorizing Dhimal Language at School: Three Cases

On a sunny afternoon in December, near the end of my fieldwork, I asked a group of second grade students about their favorite subject:

1. MW: *ani timharuko sabbhandā manparne bishaya kun ho?* And what is all of your favorite subject?
2. S1: *malāi manparne bishaya, malāi cahi manparne bishaya, uh, kun ho* My favorite subject, uh, the subject I like, um, which is it
3. S2: *malāi thahā cha* I know
4. MW: *la bhanna ta?* Ok, say it then
5. S3: *eh bhanna lāunu na* Yeah, make her say it
6. MW: *la bhanna* Ok, say it
7. S2: *Dhimal* Dhimal
8. MW: *Dhimal ho?* It’s Dhimal?
9. Teacher: *Dhimal bhāshā, Dhimal bhāshā* Dhimal language, Dhimal language
11. S2: *bhan* Say
12. Teacher: *ke bhannu timile* What do you say?
13. S1: *malāi favorite bishaya Dhimal bhāshā ho* My favorite subject is Dhimal language
14. S4: *malāi pani Dhimal bhāshā* Mine is Dhimal too

(Group interview, 12/2/15)

On being asked what their favorite subject was, one by one, all but one of the students in the class reported that their favorite subject was Dhimal. The one exception reported that she favored GK, or General Knowledge. This exchange should certainly not be taken as a transparent reflection of students’ feelings: the teacher of the Dhimal and GK subjects was hovering over the conversation and prompting students to answer, the students knew that I frequently attended their Dhimal class, and the less confident students tended to echo the answers of the first few students to speak up. However, it is notable that these
students, none of whom are Dhimal by ethnicity, all identified Dhimal language as their favorite class. This was remarkable not just in their selection of the subject as their favorite, but also due to the existence of a Dhimal class, taught at a government school and authorized by the Nepali state and by local authorities.

On four days of the six-day school week, students in first grade at Krishna Lower Secondary School (KLSS) followed English class with a subject that was called labeled Dhimal or sthāniya bāṣhā (local language). Second graders at the school had this subject twice a week, as did pre-primary and first grade students at Saraswati Secondary School (SSS) located in neighboring Morang District. In this chapter I trace how the Dhimal class came to be offered at two schools in Jhapa and Morang districts, while it was not offered at a third school that better fit the profile of a school that could offer the language course. Throughout the discussion, I emphasize how affiliations based on party politics and ethnicity interacted with the implementation of the national policies discussed in the previous chapter. This discussion illuminates certain elements of the self-contradictory function of the Nepali state.

Research in the ethnography of language policy and planning points to the unexpected, unpredictable ways that policies travel (e.g., Hornberger, 2008; McCarty, 2011; Menken & García, 2010). School systems tend to have significant latitude for actors at various levels to act in ways that may differ from written policy. Drawing from organizational theory, educational systems have been described as “loosely coupled systems,” in which different units (whether districts, schools or individual classrooms)

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12 Saraswati Secondary School is a pseudonym; while there were no objections when I asked my interlocutors about using their school’s name, I did not have the opportunity to explain my research as fully and receive equally informed consent as I did at the other two schools discussed in this chapter.
may function nearly independently (Fusarelli, 2002; Goldspink, 2007; Weick, 1976, 1982). The methodology of conducting “vertical case studies” (Vavrus & Bartlett, 2006) similarly recognizes that various levels of educational bureaucracies may not act in concert, and those multiple levels require attention in order to provide a complete account of educational policy and practice. Regarding language policy specifically, the metaphor of the multilayered language policy onion (Ricento & Hornberger, 1996) provides similar insights, as do applications of nexus analysis to the topic of language policy (Hult, 2005, 2010). This set of insights is tied as well to the notion of scale in anthropological theory; there are myriad levels of scale at play in any interaction or event, with the challenge for the anthropologist to understand what is relevant in a particular interaction or issue (Lemke, 2000; Wortham, 2012). Scales, though, are never predetermined but created by people who participate together in scaling projects (Carr & Lempert, 2016). In conducting ethnography, then, the researcher must identify what levels of scale are relevant to the problem at hand.

The question of where Dhimal language classes came to be taught, or not, involves multiple scales of time and space. One relevant scale, national educational and language policy, was discussed in the previous chapter. The individual school is another crucial scale, due to the high levels of autonomy available to head teachers and school management committees (SMCs). Multiple time scales are also relevant, from the

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13 SMCs are themselves a product of a World Bank intervention aimed at increasing local control of schools and thereby improving school quality (Bhatta, 2005; Carney, Bista & Agergaard, 2007). In a study of the function of SMCs the international scale could be relevant, but for the present purposes, this note serves as a reminder of the sometimes opaque role of international institutions, such as the World Bank, in shaping the most seemingly local scale.
settlement history of the entire region, to decisions made for a school year, to the class period when teachers decide what to do in their classroom.

5.1 Getting a Dhimal Textbook: The Government Attitude toward Mother Tongue Provisions

In Nepal, as in many parts of the world, teachers frequently conflate the notion of textbook and curriculum. It is doubtful that the Dhimal language class would have been offered at any school without the publication of a Dhimal language textbook. The process of writing a textbook is discussed in more detail in Chapter 6; here I briefly describe the events that led to the publication of a first grade Dhimal subject textbook as both a precursor to the following discussion of Dhimal language classes, and as a way to introduce some themes of this chapter. Textbooks in various languages of Nepal began to be produced after the 1990 constitution bestowed every community with the right to operate basic education in their own languages (Phyak, 2011; Seel, Yadava & Kadel, 2015). However, with over one hundred languages spoken in the country and limited resources to devote to the mother tongue textbooks, it took some time for a Dhimal textbook to become a reality. Som Bahadur Dhimal, the primary force behind creating the first Dhimal textbook, narrated the process in an interview at his house:

Som: *pahila inclusive mother tongueko textbook banāune program CDCmā cha bhanne maile thāhā pāē pahila. ani tyatikerā ma Dhimal hāmrō organization cha ni, organization…ma tyatikerā vice chairperson thiē. vice chairperson bhaeko belāmā ma cahi Kaṭhmanduko in-charge, ani programharu herthē ma. tyatikerā, CDĆmā gaē, kitāb* I first learned that there was an *program* to produce *inclusive mother tongue textbooks* at the *CDC* [Curriculum Development Center]. And at that time I was, we have a Dhimal organization … At that time I was the vice chairperson. At the same time that I was vice chairperson, I was the *in-charge* for Kathmandu, and I oversaw programs. At that time, I
There is a system for writing books, but there is priority for [groups with] over one lakh [100,000] population. And our population is not above one lakh. These days how many are you?

The census shows us at just twenty-six thousand two hundred ninety eight. … And what happened, after that I said, “No, these endangered languages, languages without literature, should be given priority, to them too.” They said to me, “That’s not how it is.” The government officers didn’t seem that positive. And I, myself, and at that time we had two constitutional assembly members, CA members…And at that time, I said to them, “please bring a request.” Our Nagendra Bahadur Dhimal, he had won through direct election and he wrote it for me and I brought it there. And I dealt with the officer there. “I am my organization’s vice chairperson, our community also needs a textbook. You need to arrange it for us.” And what they said, the first time, they ignored me. The second time, they didn’t ignore, they didn’t say yes, they didn’t say no. What they said was, “ok, submit an application, application, I’ll forward the file at a meeting.” And ok, and I went to the meeting. That
we didn't get opportunity, tyo, tyo barsha pāyaūmna, ani tyo barsha, dui barsha pachi, ani dhimal bhāshāko textbook lekhna bolāyo. year we didn’t get opportunity, we didn’t get it that year, and that year. Two years later, they invited us to write a Dhimal language textbook.

(Interview 2/6/15)

In this interview excerpt, Som pointed to a number of themes that will appear in discussions of specific schools. One is the necessity of action on the part of advocates in order to fulfill rights that were guaranteed in written laws and policies. While there was implementational space for languages of Nepal to be introduced in the classroom, and a rights-based orientation in official documents, the government did little to promote these legal provisions (see Hornberger, 2002; Ruiz, 1984). Som’s narrative about the textbook demonstrates this; while there was a program at the Curriculum Development Centre for the production of language textbooks, development of the textbook was only made available to his language community after several years and repeated requests.

Som’s narrative also displays that he had significant knowledge about how to interact with a government office. While he did not specify how he learned about the textbook program, this in itself was an achievement. Several of my interlocutors complained that even if there were government or NGO programs that they could benefit from, they never learned about them (f/n 3/28/15, 11/8/15). This was especially true due to social networks: because there were no Dhimals in civil service positions, such as the CDC officers who needed to be dealt with to get a textbook, the Dhimal community as a whole had limited access not only to resources but also to information about government programs (f/n 3/25/15; 5/18/15, 9/3/15). Som’s access to government offices was also facilitated by his location in Kathmandu. The process of convincing
government officers to take him seriously required several in-person trips to the Curriculum Development Centre offices just outside Kathmandu, which was possible for Som but would not have been for community members based in the Dhimal territory in the east of Nepal.

Som also demonstrated facility dealing with government officials through his invocation of his high position in an organization; he represented his request as coming not from an individual but from him as a representative of a broader group. When that attempt to demonstrate his importance was insufficient, he turned to political influence, asking for backup from Dhimal members of the constitutional assembly. Implicit in this narrative is Nagendra Bahadur Dhimal’s political affiliation: as a Maoist member of the first Constitutional Assembly, he was a member of the largest political party in the first CA, and part of an organization that had only recently ceased an armed insurgency and begun to participate in parliamentary politics. Some analysts of Nepali politics at the time have argued that Maoist actions before the full dissolution of their People’s Liberation Army were backed with the implicit threat of violence, or at least street protests (Adhikari, 2014; Gautam, 2015; Jha, 2014). Som’s inclusion of a Maoist CA member in his dealings with the education officers was a smart and apparently effective move.

An additional way that Som showed his ability to work with the government was his deployment of English in recounting this story. Som’s Nepali throughout this interview and our interactions was always peppered with English, reflecting his many years studying the English language and using English in his education and writing. In the narrative quoted above, Som directly voiced the government officials several times:

1. kitāb lekhne system cha, tara above one lakh populationko lāgi

   ‘They said, “There is a system for writing books, but there is priority...”'
In two of three examples of reported speech, marked by the verb *bhanyo* (said-3p), Som used English to voice government officials’ speech. In the first of these, the noun phrase *above one lakh population* is entirely in English, as opposed to other uses of English that are single lexemes; in the final item of reported speech, while the phrase retains Nepali syntax and includes Nepali morphemes on both *meetingmā* and *filelāi*, with so many English lexical items it would be impossible to make sense of the voiced government official without knowledge of English.

Som also voiced his own past self several times in telling this story:

4. *maile cahi tyahā kuro rākhē, hoina, yo endangered language haru, literature na bhaeko tyelāi priority dinu parcha, tyelai pani*  
   ‘I said, “No, these endangered languages, languages without literature, should be given priority to them too”’

5. *maile cahi uhāharulāi euṭā sīfāris lyādīnus bhanerā*  
   ‘I said to them, “please bring a request”’

6. ‘*ma mero sansthāko vice chairperson ho, hāmro samudāyalāi pani textbook cahincha, tapāile byabasthā gardinu parcha*’  
   “I am my organization’s vice chairperson, our community needs a textbook. You need to arrange it for us.”’

In the first and last examples of his own reported speech, Som addressed government officials, using English loanwords; in the second, he addressed the Dhimal CA members
using completely Nepali vocabulary. In these three snippets of his own speech, as well as his use of English throughout, and his ability to voice the English-speaking government officials, Som demonstrates that he had the facility in English to (in his own word) “deal” with officials at the Ministry of Education.

The example of the textbook, a necessary precursor to the introduction of the course, demonstrates the government’s overall approach to multilingual legal provisions. That is, while government officials did not overtly flout the laws guaranteeing access to first-language schooling, they were more than happy to stall, delay, and avoid implementing these provisions. It required concerted effort by community advocates to change the language policy status quo. In the following discussion, I turn to the cases of three government schools (See Figure 2 for a map of the three schools’ locations). Two were the first schools to adopt a Dhimal language subject, and to date the only schools to do so. The other is a school where an outside observer might have expected a Dhimal subject to be adopted; not only at first glance but even after some observation it seemed to be an appropriate site for a Dhimal language subject. While focused in this case on school language policies, this discussion also sheds light on the disjointed, sometimes self-contradictory means by which the Nepali state functions.

5.2 Krishna Lower Secondary School

Located almost directly on the East-West Highway, Krishna Lower Secondary School (KLSS) drew many of its students from the children of laborers on the nearby tea plantation and from a sukumbāsi or squatters’ settlement on the banks of a nearby river. The school had historically had several Dhimal teachers and Dhimal leadership, an
exception in an educational bureaucracy where head teachers tend to be disproportionately high-caste (World Bank, 2001, 2009). Since the early days of the school, it had been led by head teacher Krishna Bahadur Dhimal, who along with long-time KLSS teacher Nambar Lal Dhimal was a founder of the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra, the national Dhimal organization.

**Figure 2:** Map of the location of three schools

The student body that I observed, though, had changed from recollections of earlier days. Teachers, graduates of the school, and neighbors of the school remembered the student body as being heavily Dhimal, far more so than it is today. The declining proportion of Dhimal students was in part due to demographic changes; before the malaria eradication project of the 1950s, there had been few non-Dhimal residents of the area, while massive in-migration has left them a minority in the region (see Chapter 1,
Rai, 2013, 2014; on similar dynamics elsewhere in the Tarai, Guneratne, 2002). More recently, private schools were drawing students away from KLSS; throughout fieldwork, I was told often that no Dhimal students attended public schools anymore; they went to private schools (interviews 3/20/15; 4/8/15, 4/24/15; f/n 3/29/15). These days, the teachers and SMC members told me, only the poorest families sent their children to government schools; as one long-time teacher told me, “dāurā boknele pani boarding pathāuncha (‘even those who carry firewood [i.e., do manual labor] send their children to private school’)” (interview, 4/24/15). The influx of settlers, which converted a lightly settled homogeneous region into a densely populated, diverse area, and the draw of private schools meant that Dhimal students were now only a small part of the student body at a school that used to largely serve Dhimal students.

5.2.1 Enabling factors for the Dhimal class

Despite the decreased proportion of Dhimal students, KLSS was the first school to introduce a Dhimal language subject. This move was enabled by the presence of several teachers who could speak Dhimal, including a Brahman teacher who had learned Dhimal from friends who taught the first grade Dhimal language class. In addition to having several Dhimal and Dhimal-speaking teachers, the chair of the School Management Committee, a younger man who had recently replaced his uncle in this role, was also Dhimal. While the rest of the SMC membership was not Dhimal, the SMC chair has more power and responsibility for the school’s management than other members of the committee (Bhatta, 2005; Edwards, 2011). This may have been what allowed KLSS to be the first school to introduce a Dhimal language subject; as head teacher Krishna
Bahadur Dhimal put it: “headmaster pani ma āphai Dhimal, adhyaksha pani Dhimale cha. tyele gardākheri pani alikati sahayog bhayo” (‘the headmaster, I myself am Dhimal, the [SMC] chairman is also Dhimal. Because of that there was a little cooperation’) (interview 4/8/15).

In addition to being Dhimal, both the head teacher and the SMC chair supported the same political party: Nepali Congress. The SMC chair was a member of the district-level party committee while the head teacher was a member of the Congress-aligned Nepal Teachers’ Association. Nepali schools have long been criticized for being hotbeds of political activism, especially among teachers, who are frequently demonized in the press, scholarship, and everyday conversation as playing politics rather than actually teaching children (Caddell, 2005; Edwards, 2011; Joshi, 2013). In my fieldwork, government school teachers also made comments along these lines, complaining about politics in education (interviews 3/26/15, 4/8/15, 4/24/15; fn 4/14/15), while the lack of party politics at private schools was held up by teachers and parents as an advantage of private schools (interview 11/9/15; fn 8/21/15). At the same time, every government school teacher I met, including those who complained about politics at school, was a member of a political party-affiliated teachers’ union; several were highly involved in these organizations, or in thematic organizations like the women’s wing of their party, or struggles to increase pay for early childhood development teachers or achieve permanent status for long-time temporary teachers.

The effects of political alignments were not so clear to me in school observations. In some cases, teachers attended political rallies or union functions rather than teaching, but teacher absenteeism just as often resulted from additional assigned duties, such as
attending trainings or conducting voter registration drives, or personal matters, such as weddings, visiting sick family members, or, especially in the case of Dhimal teachers, attending festivals which were not given as school holidays. The government school head teachers I interviewed complained that political party jockeying reduced their ability to hire and fire teachers as they thought was appropriate (interviews 3/31/15, 4/8/15). When I asked a teacher at the neighboring Jana Chetana Primary School about the effects of political affiliation at school, he described it as affecting the emotional tone of all interactions: “sangai milera kām garna sakepani, alikati cintā lāgcha’ (‘Even if you can work well together, it causes a little discomfort’) (f/n 3/29/15).

At KLSS, political conversations in the staffroom took place daily, with teachers often joking or teasing each other about political affiliation. For example, the one time I saw teachers remain at school after their normal dismissal time was on October 11, 2015, when the formation of a new government led to an unusual alliance between the monarchist Rastriya Prajatantra Party (RPP), center-left United Marxist-Leninist (UML) and farther left United Communist Party (Maoist), leaving the centrist Nepali Congress the only major opposition party. As they sat around the common table in the staff room, KLSS teachers followed live voting results on their phones, joking that the one RPP supporter among the teachers had become part of the family for the first time, that the most prominent UML supporter among the teachers should buy a round of tea (also a slang term for alcohol) to celebrate his victory, and that the election left the head teacher (one of few Congress supporters at the school) out in the cold. Krishna Sir, uncharacteristically, remained behind his desk on the other side of the staff room throughout this conversation rather than joining the rest of the teachers at their shared
table, while another Congress-aligned teacher simply left school while the other teachers joked (f/n 10/12/15). Political affiliation was certainly something that teachers discussed, but at least in this case mostly served as a basis for friendly joking, not interpersonal problems.

At times, a balanced set of political affiliations was important for the school’s functioning: following the earthquakes of April 25 and May 12, which opened small cracks in the walls of several classroom buildings at KLSS, the teachers and SMC agreed to send a delegation to the municipality offices to request funds for repairs. The discussion of who would go to the government office explicitly focused on the need to balance teachers and SMC members, the importance of including at least one woman in the group, and various excuses that participants gave to try to get out of this responsibility: they had no gas in their motorbike, they needed to watch a child, they had work to do in the fields. At the end of the discussion, however, the group that was formed had a perfect balance of members from Nepali Congress and UML. Party affiliation among teachers and others in the school community was visible and widely known, but sometimes not stated explicitly even when party affiliation was relevant to an interaction or outcome. While they explicitly talked about their shared ethnic affiliation, the shared party affiliation of the head teacher and SMC chair at KLSS may have cleared the path for the introduction of the Dhimal course.

In addition, both Krishna Sir and his school’s SMC chair were heavily involved in the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra, the main ethnic organization of the Dhimal community (see Rai, 2013, on the DJBK). During the time of the study, KLSS’s head teacher, SMC chair, and a senior teacher at KLSS were all central committee members, which meant
that they devoted significant amounts of time and effort to attending meetings and organizing events. While several of DJBK’s core members were also teachers, no other single school community had so many members involved in DJBK’s central committee. These three men shared some ideas about what ethnic organizing should look like; in addition, their contact with DJBK meant that they stayed abreast of political and policy developments that would allow them to offer the language at school.

5.2.2 The introduction of the Dhimal class

The government of Nepal offered the opportunity and even right to schooling in multiple languages beginning in 1990 (see Chapter 4); however, it took many years after the passage of those laws and policies for the Dhimal language class to be introduced in even one school. Interviews and conversations with some of the key players provided some information about their motivation and the process of introducing the language in this schools. In an interview held in the school courtyard during one of his free periods, Nambar Lal Dhimal, a senior teacher at KLSS, co-editor of the first grade Dhimal language textbook, and teacher of the Class 2 Dhimal class during the time of study, narrated the establishment of the class as follows:

MW: tapāĩle kahile suñnubhaeko thiyo, yo sthāniya bhāṣā pani padhāuna sakincha bhanera, kahile dekhi yo schoolmā shuru bhayō, yasko itihāś alīkati suñnadīnus

When did you hear that, that it is also possible to teach the local language? When did it start at this school? Please tell me a little about its history.

Nambar Sir: yo malāĩ lāgthyo, malāĩ pahile dekhi nai aba ma jātī sansthāmā prabesh gareko maile dui hajār santāunna sāl dekhi maile kendriya samitimā gaē, hoīna, kendriya samitiko cahi ahile pani

It used to seem to me, I was part of the ethnic association from its very establishment, I went on the central committee beginning in 2057 [following the Nepali calendar; 2000-2001 AD]. I am
मा कहिले सदस्याका काहिले महासाचीब, काहिले काही बिबहाग्याको काहिले यो समूदायक प्रमुख ब्याएरा काम गर्दै गर्दौ।

तयातिकराहरुमा लाग्नेबाट ब्याएरा हाम्रो धिमाल ब्याएरा यालाह। हाम्रो धिमाल समूदायका बाटा अगै ठुप्रो बिद्याधरी राखेहां। ब्याएरुले ग्वर्मा बोलिङ्गी हाम्रो धिमाल र याली याको प्रमुख भएरा काम गर्दै यो समूदाय, काम से काम, यो ब्याएरा मात्रिब्याभाष्को रुपमा स्थानीय धिमाल धिमाल समूदायका लाउँनु पदाक्षरी काम यो समूदायका बाटा एको त्यो रेबस्कन बच्चलौ धिमाल सिक्वाना राम्ने हन्त्यो ब्याएरा...

अबा अहिले द्वितीयो नैन्चेहरुका ठापीको एता सरकारी रेखा भण्डाका पानि ठापीको एता बोर्डिङ निजी बिद्याधरी राखेहां। नेपाली भाषा भएको र त्यो नेपाली भाषा भएको र हाम्रो धिमाल भएको एता बोर्डिङ का अप्रेडहरूले तल्लो नीतीको ठाप्नेले र अप्रेडहरूले त्यो मात्रिब्याभाष्को पहाडमा उल्लालनु भयेका जस्ता समूदायका लाभता यतीने मनोहार गर्दौ।

अबा हाम्रा अबा धिमाल लोभ हुने भयो, धिमाल धिमाल, अबा मेंसा ब्याएरो के हो, किया ब्याएरो के हो, प्याला ब्याएरो के हो, होइना, यी कुराहरु नैन्चेहरुले अबा बिरसने भयो, अनि तयातिकराए पूर्वको काम त्याको बाटा अहिले हामिले अलकतीको वेवा ह्याम्रो धिमालको भोली सम्रक्षण हुदाइना। भोली धिमाल लोभ भाईराहलौ धिमालको भोली सम्रक्षण गर्नु पर्चा, धिमालाई अबा हामिले जती हामी

स्तुति भेष्यै अवधारणा भेष्य र अवधारणाको अवधारणा, जस्तै हाम्रो काहिले बिबहाग्याको काहिले यो समूदायक प्रमुख ब्याएरा काम गर्दौ।

तयातिकराहरुमा लाग्नेबाट ब्याएरा हाम्रो धिमाल ब्याएरा यालाह। हाम्रो धिमाल समूदायका बाटा अगै ठुप्रो बिद्याधरी राखेहां। ब्याएरुले ग्वर्मा बोलिङ्गी हाम्रो धिमाल र याली याको प्रमुख भएरा काम गर्दै यो समूदाय, काम से काम, यो ब्याएरा मात्रिब्याभाष्को रुपमा स्थानीय धिमाल धिमाल समूदायका लाउँनु पदाक्षरी काम यो समूदायका बाटा एको त्यो रेबस्कन बच्चलौ धिमाल सिक्वाना राम्ने हन्त्यो ब्याएरा...

अबा अहिले द्वितीयो नैन्चेहरुका ठापीको एता सरकारी रेखा भण्डाका पानि ठापीको एता बोर्डिङ निजी बिद्याधरी राखेहां। नेपाली भाषा भएको र त्यो नेपाली भाषा भएको र हाम्रो धिमाल भएको एता बोर्डिङ का अप्रेडहरूले तल्लो नीतीको ठाप्नेले र अप्रेडहरूले त्यो मात्रिब्याभाष्को पहाडमा उल्लालनु भयेका जस्ता समूदायका लाभता यतीने मनोहार गर्दौ।

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स्तुति भेष्यै अवधारणा भेष्य र अवधारणाको अवधारणा, जस्तै हाम्रो काहिले बिबहाग्याको काहिले यो समूदायक प्रमुख ब्याएरा काम गर्दौ।

At that time it seemed to me, well, there are many students from our Dhimal community here. Now at home they speak that language, and then as soon as they arrive here it is hard to understand that Nepali language. And at that time it seemed to me, at least as a mother tongue, as a local language we need to introduce the mother tongue, I said at least it would be good to teach it to the children who come from that community…

So now…a lot of people, instead of this government school, they are sending their children to this boarding, private school side and they started teaching English.

Now our language started to be lost, Dhimal language. Now what goat means, what chicken means, what pig means, right, they started to forget these things. And at that time, at least if we don’t give these children a little concept now, tomorrow our speech will not be protected. Tomorrow our language will continue being lost…We need to protect the language, as much as we speak, and if we protect the language for tomorrow’s coming generation and they speak it and
Nambar Sir noted that his participation and leadership roles in the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra made him think about the need to preserve the language. In addition, he observed that Dhimal students who arrived at school had a hard time learning Nepali, so it would be helpful to offer instruction in Dhimal language. Later in this interview and in other conversations, however, Nambar Sir acknowledged that this situation had changed so Dhimal students now arrived at school speaking Nepali and not Dhimal. This change provided support for Nambar Sir’s next argument for the importance of introducing a Dhimal language class: the possibility that the language would be forgotten by the present generation, interrupting intergenerational transmission of the language. In addition, Nambar Sir mentioned the growing popularity of English-medium private “boarding” schools (as in India, a private school does not need to have boarders to be called a boarding school; see LaDousa 2014), as a reason for the decline in children learning Dhimal language (see Chapter 8).

Head teacher Krishna Bahadur Dhimal’s narration of the creation of the Dhimal language class focused on other elements of the process, perhaps reflecting his role as the mediator between the school and other levels of education bureaucracy:
MW:  
ani tapāiko cahi sthāniya bhāshā pani rākhunbhaeko cha, hoina?  
You have introduced your local language, right?

Krishna Sir:  
sthāniya bhāshā rākheko cha.  
Local language has been introduced.

MW:  
tyō cahi nirnaya kasari garnubhayo?  
How did you make that decision?

Krishna Sir:  
aba sthāniya bhāshā cahi yo local yahā cahi ke cha bhane hāmro dhimalharuko basti cha. dhimalharuko āphnai bhāshā cha, hoina? mother tongue cha. ani nepal sarkārle yo yesko pāṭhyakram, pāṭhyapustak banādieko cha. banādieko, timharu lāgu gara bhāncha, ule cahi, sarkārle. kahā lāgu garne, kahā bhanne, ani jillā shikshya kāryālaya bhanyo, ule ke bhāncha bhane, ninety percent bidhyārthi timiharu rakha, ani tyo padhāu, bhancha. kahā khojne, tyasto ta kahī hūdaina. tyasto ta, ani mixed huncha. ani āphai tyahi cahi, aba headmaster pani ma āphai Dhimal, adhyaksha pani Dhimale cha, tyele gardakheri pani alikati sahayog bhayo.  
Well, the local language, what we have here that is local is our Dhimal settlements. Dhimals have their own language, right? There’s a mother tongue. And the government of Nepal created a curriculum, a textbook for it. They made it for it. You apply this, they say, the government says. Where to apply it, where, and the District Education office, what they said is, where there are ninety percent students [who speak a language], put it there, and teach it there they say. Where to look for that, you won’t find it anywhere. That’s how, it’s mixed. And so, I myself, well, I’m the headmaster and I myself am Dhimal, the [SMC] chairman is also Dhimal. Because of that there was a little cooperation.  
(Interview 4/8/15)

Krishna Sir’s answer emphasized multiple scales involved in policy making: the national government of Nepal (nepal sarkār), the District Education Office (jillā sikshyā kāryālaya; DEO), and the management of the school, including both the headmaster and chair of the School Management Committee. He noted the contradiction in these different layers; while the government of Nepal created a curriculum and textbook, the District
Education Office guidelines would have made every school ineligible for offering a Dhimal subject. There were no schools with at least a 90% Dhimal student population (let alone a 90% Dhimal-speaking student population), a result of the demographic situation of the Dhimal population discussed previously. Whether this was the DEO’s honest interpretation of the law, or an excuse to justify the officers’ reluctance to implement a law that they saw as counterproductive (interviews at Jhapa DEO, 12/6/15), Krishna Sir realized that he would need to take action to introduce the course:

| Krishna Sir | rākhum na ta yo bishaya, meetingmā rakhyyum, rākhne. jebhain pani eutā local bishaya padhāune parcha. ani rākheko ahile one, twomā cha. gardākhari abapadhāuninda padhāiyo tara sabai baṭa abarāmrọ khālko u āena, tyahā hoina. tyelā ali ke garne kurā soc garm parcha. tyo plus eutā bishaya thapnu parla ke cahi lägeko cha, hoina. jammā hundred marks ko huncha yo, local bishaya. local subject pani rākhna pāiyō ra local mother tongue rākhne pāiyō. languagemā, hoina. yasto rākhum pāechha. |
| MW: | ani tyo garna sakincha, tyo jillā shikshyā kāryālaya bāṭa āyo ki? kasari thāhā pūnumbhayō? |
| Krishna Sir | pra vi levelmā mātribhāshāmā padhāunā pāune bhanera cahi hāmrọ usmāi cha, ke bhanche, antarim sambidhānṃāi cha. hoina? maile yo schoolmā, yahāko local bāshā hunu parcha bhanera yahāko communityle bhanyo bhane rākhnu parcha ule. ra sarkārle ke pani bhanche, baccālāi, usko |

Let’s put in this subject, we put it in a meeting. Let’s put it. No matter what, we have to teach a local subject. So we’ve put it in [class] one and two. We have been teaching it but there has not been a good type of thing from everyone, it’s not there. We have to think a bit about what to do. Maybe that plus add another subject it seems, right? It’s a total of a hundred marks, the local subject. You can put in either a local subject or a local mother tongue. Language, right? That’s what you can put in.

And that you can do that, did that come from the District Education Office? How did you find out?

At the primary school level, it says in the, the interim constitution, that we can teach in the mother tongue, right? I have to, at this school, if the community here said that there needs to be a local language, then I have to do it. The government also says, about children, their multilingual,

MLE, multi-language. That is necessary. Whatever their own mother tongue is, whatever it is, the requirement to teach them in their mother tongue is a matter of their rights now. But not every school has those facilities. They can’t do it. It’s because of that. They need to do it. If the government did it at every school, according to wherever whatever caste is, whatever language, they put in local local language, that would work. If they did that it would be good. The government needs to implement this, implement. Instead of being about your own interest, if the government did that it would be a simple policy...but even if the government says it, here they, the officers haven’t done it. They haven’t needed to. They haven’t felt like they need to do it.

MW: niyammā cha

Krishna Sir: unh, niyammā cha, nitimā cha, tara uniharule tyelāi ekdam abashyaktā mahasus gareko chaina. kitābā matra cha.

Yes, it’s in the law, it’s in the policy, but they haven’t felt it to be really mandatory. It’s just in a book.

(Interview, 4/8/15)

Krishna Sir’s summary described the government position of having provided a right without taking actions toward fulfilling those rights. He also, like many scholars of South Asia, analyzed the government (sarkār) as an aggregate of component parts that did not act in concert. That is, while the interim constitution in effect at the time and the central

government said one thing, district-level officers did not feel that they needed to follow
the laws (“yo garnu parcha bhanne lāgeka chaina”; ‘they don’t feel like they need to do
it’), and so the laws remained at the level of books without being acted on. Throughout
the implementation of the mother tongue programs, this remained a theme; the
government had given a right, but left it to communities to demand the fulfillment of the
right and implement the programs that would accomplish that goal.

Unlike some other parts of this bureaucracy, Krishna Sir received fairly
immediate feedback on his decisions from the people affected by his decisions. This is
reflected in his comment quoted above, “gardakheri aba paḍhāunda paḍhāyo tara sabai
baṭa aba rāmro khalko u āena” (‘we have been teaching it but there has not been a good
type of thing from everyone’).\(^\text{15}\) In fact, when I arrived in Jhapa in early 2015, he was
considering canceling the Dhimal language class.\(^\text{16}\) By the time of this interview, and by
the beginning of the next school year, he had decided on the approach he discussed in the
following interview excerpt, splitting the time available for a local subject between the
local Dhimal subject and General Knowledge (GK), a subject that used an English-
language textbook and focused on the memorization of random facts. While offering GK
in the local subject slot was a popular choice at the schools I observed, it was not a
strictly legal option, which Krishna Sir recognized:

\[\text{MW: } aba \text{ cahi, tyo sthāniya bishayako }\]
\[\text{thāūmā ke rākhnuhuncha aba?} \]
\[\text{Now what will you put in the place of the local subject?}\]

\[\text{Krishna Sir: sthāniya bishaya ko rupmā, plus }\]
\[\text{garne cahi hola, tyelāi purai }\]
\[\text{For the local subject, maybe just add, not completely remove it.}\]

\(^\text{15}\) \(u\) in this sentence is a placeholder, which allows him to complete the sentence without
specifying a referent. I am glossing \(u\) as ‘type of thing’ in this context.

\(^\text{16}\) This was an upsetting thing to hear early in fieldwork.
In this discussion, Krishna Sir pointed out the limits of what was allowed under the rubric of the local subject: not English, and not GK. Following the introduction of the local subject in 1992, schools taught additional English in the local subject timeslot. After this
was disallowed, first by the central Department of Education and then the Resource Center (an office that oversees a cluster of around a dozen schools), schools introduced Nepali grammar or General Knowledge courses. None of these followed guidelines that allowed for the teaching of either a local language or locally-oriented topics such as vegetable farming, technical subjects, environment or the locality. Later in the discussion, Krishna sir emphasized again that GK was not allowable under the rules governing the local subject: “kasaile rules anusār kām gareko chaina. tyo GK-CK lāgera rules anusārai hūdai hūdaina” (‘No one has worked according to the rules. Offering that GK-CK is absolutely not following the rules’). Following this discussion, I was surprised when I arrived at KLSS for the 2073 school year and learned that GK was being offered in all grade levels except first grade for at least part of the local subject timeslot. Figure 3 shows a page from the Class 2 General Knowledge textbook used at KLSS, demonstrating that the content covered in the course was far from locally focused.

Hoping for a broader perspective of how the Dhimal course had come to be taught at KLSS, I asked the School Management Committee at a meeting for their perspectives on the Dhimal class. To my surprise, many of the SMC members were unaware that a Dhimal class existed. Krishna Sir took the opportunity to explain to me and the gathered committee his reasoning for offering the course. The SMC members who spoke at the meeting provided largely positive reactions, on the basis that the school was following government policies and that this showed that the Dhimal leaders at the school were taking initiative to support the use of their own language (group interview, 4/30/15).

17 This form of partial reduplication, common across South Asian languages, serves to emphasize GK. Several other grammatical constructions make this a particularly emphatic statement: the final syllable appended to anusār-ai provides emphasis, as does the repetition of the negative copula hundai hundaina.
one said anything against offering the course but praised the teachers for taking the
initiative. Like all speech events, this was an interaction rather than a transparent
exchange of ideas. The SMC members were all strongly affiliated with political parties,
and needed to act in ways that supported their political positions and ambitions; most
were long-time residents of the area, several of whom had grown up together, and some
wanted to curry favor with their visiting researcher. They knew from prior interactions,
village gossip, and my introduction that day, that my research had to do with languages,
policy, and schooling. Various social pressures meant that they would be unlikely to
explicitly speak against my perceived interests, or those of the head teacher.
Nevertheless, this interaction served to demonstrate that decision-making power on the
SMC, at least as it related to offering a local language subject, lay with the SMC chair
and the head teacher, while the rest of the SMC members were simply unaware of what
was being taught in the local subject slot.

Figure 3: A page from a General Knowledge Textbook
5.2.3 Dhimal for Non-Dhimal students

One of the striking characteristics of the Dhimal language classes at KLSS was that there were almost no Dhimal students enrolled in the classes. In the cohorts I observed during the bulk of my fieldwork, there was one Dhimal student among around twelve students in Class 1, no students who identified as Dhimal in Class 2 (though one boy had a Dhimal grandmother); Class 3, one of the first cohorts to have received two years of Dhimal language instruction included one Dhimal student. This put the supporters of the Dhimal language class in a somewhat uncomfortable position: the arguments for teaching Dhimal at school largely focused on teaching the language to children of Dhimal ethnicity, whether it was to provide linguistic support to students who spoke Dhimal at home, or to encourage children to learn a language they were not learning at home. In his description of teaching the Dhimal language class, Nambar Sir
explained that he saw value in teaching the Dhimal language to students from other communities:

MW:  
ani tapāiko anubhav kasto bhaeko cha?

Nambar Sir:  
anubhav ahile rāmro cha.

And how has your experience [teaching Dhimal language] been?

The experience is good now. If I go to class, now all the other boys and girls clap and say “It’s Dhimal Language Sir!” Because I teach them from pictures… they really enjoy it, right? Now they understand what these are, children from other castes, children from other communities also really enjoy it. They really enjoy it. They enjoy participating in what I teach so much, they’ll say “I’ll go first, I’m here, I’ll do this, I’ll do that” all at the same time.

Children who come from other communities also really enjoy participating. I also, when I get to teach them, I really want to do it, I find that I taught them well, that’s how I feel. Because if we learn all languages, if we get the opportunity to teach them all, tomorrow somewhere else, nowhere will be uncomfortable, it will be comfortable for them to do that, that’s how it feels to me.

(Interview, 12/2/15)
Nambar Sir’s claim that the students enjoyed his class was certainly confirmed by the
Class 2 students’ claims, quoted at the beginning of this chapter, that Dhimal language
was their favorite subject at school. This group of students was also adamant about
inviting me to join their Dhimal class, especially on days when Nambar Sir promised that
they would play a game, usually matching vocabulary cards in Dhimal, Nepali and
English with photos (See Chapter 7). In addition to emphasizing how much the students
enjoyed his class, Nambar Sir pointed to the utility of learning to speak other languages,
to prevent difficult or uncomfortable situations. This phrasing is somewhat surprising;
Nambar Sir expresses the importance of learning languages to avoid uncomfortable
situations elsewhere (“bhōli kahā aru tira kunai ṭhāũm pani abthyaro pardaina,”
‘tomorrow somewhere else, nowhere will be uncomfortable.’). However, in the case of
Dhimal language, the place where students might encounter speakers of this language is
their own hometown. Students confirmed that they knew Dhimal speakers who lived
nearby:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MW: aní Dhimal bhāšā kīna siknu parcha hola</th>
<th>Why do you think you need to learn Dhimal language?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>S1: dhimal bhāšā bolnalāi</td>
<td>to speak Dhimal language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S2: bolnalāi</td>
<td>to speak</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S3: aru sanga bolna sajilo huncha</td>
<td>it will be easy to speak with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1: aru sita Dhimal bhāšā bāta bolnalāi</td>
<td>to speak in Dhimal language with others</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MW: aní timro Dhimal bhāšā bolne sāthiharu cha? cha timro Dhimal bolne sāthiharu?</td>
<td>and do you have friends who speak Dhimal? Do you have Dhimal-speaking friends?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>S1: gāũmā cha</td>
<td>they’re in the village</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The Class 2 students (none of them Dhimal by ethnicity) claimed that they had lots of Dhimal-speaking friends at home “gāũmā” (‘in the village’), and that after taking the Dhimal class, they could understand at least a few things that these neighbors said, which some of them had not understand prior to taking the course. This more closely aligns with the reasons that Krishna Sir gave for teaching Dhimal to non-Dhimal students:
Krishna Sir: *hāmro cāhanā ke cha bhane, tyo bhāshā cahi Dhimal mārai sikne hoīna ki. tyo aru jātiko baccāle pani sikda huncha. kina local cahi usmā bhāshā bolcha. tyo arule pani sikda huncha. uniharule ramāunchan, arko bhāshā sikda na rāmro hūdaina, rāmrāi huncha... arko thap bhāshā jānincha. tyasto. hāmro chahanā cahi. aba katlie cahi “aruko bhāshā kina paḍhne” bhāncha, arule cahi. tara sabai bhāshā sikda huncha. āphulai rāmrāi ho.* 

Our hope is not just that Dhimals learn the language. Those children from other castes will also learn it. Because locally the language is spoken. Others will also learn it. They’ll enjoy it. It’s not bad to learn another language, it’s good…another additional language is spoken. That is our hope. Now how many people say, “Why learn someone else’s language?” But learning every language can be done. It’s good for oneself.

(Interview 4/8/15)

Krishna Sir’s reasons for why children from other ethnic groups should learn this language overlapped with the reasons that Nambar Sir gave: that it is enjoyable to learn another language, and generally that it is good to learn languages. Krishna Sir’s additional reason, though, was that since Dhimal was the local language, others who lived there should also learn to speak it. Throughout conversations with Krishna Sir, including this interview and the discussion of the language class with the School Management Committee, he interchangeably referred to Dhimal language, our language, mother tongue, and local language. As a middle-aged Dhimal, he recalled a childhood when Dhimal was the only language spoken in his immediate area: “*Janme dekhi aru jātī thiena. sabai dhimale dhimal thiyo. yahā aru jātiharu pachi āeko*” (‘When I was born, there were no other castes. Everyone was just Dhimals. Other people came here later’) (Interview, 4/8/15). This experience may have been one influence on Krishna Sir’s description of Dhimal as the local language that should be learned by any other residents of the area.
Another potential influence for talking about the need to learn local languages was political discourse that focused on drawing ethnically defined states based on the location of ethnic and linguistic groups. Krishna Sir was a supporter of the proposed model of ethnic federalism (counter to his party’s position, which supported federalism without ethnically based states), arguing that a federal system would empower previously subjugated groups. In addition, he supported the DJBK’s advocacy for a Dhimal autonomous region within whatever federal unit their area landed in. The association of language and place, common worldwide (see Moore, Pietikäinen & Blommaert, 2010), had significant political implications during the establishment of the Dhimal language classes and during my research period.

The implementation of KLSS’s Dhimal course was largely a result of the actions of two key players: the head teacher and chair of the School Management Committee. That they were able to collaborate successfully was in part a result of their shared ethnic background, a rare situation when there were few Dhimal headteachers and few Dhimal SMC chairs. Their common party allegiance likely also enabled their action. At the same time, there was little demand from parents and guardians to teach the Dhimal course and no significant positive reaction, to the point where even Nambar Sir and Krishna sir, enthusiastic proponents of teaching the language, considered canceling the course after offering it for a few years.

5.3 Saraswati Secondary School

Saraswati Secondary School (SSS) was located farther from the East-West highway than the other focal schools in a more rural location. Still, it was on a
sufficiently busy road that there were approximately hourly buses that left from the bazar town of Urlabari going south past the school, and electric rickshaws were available to take small groups on the same road. The school was on the edge of the Dhimal village of Athiyabari, one of the largest Dhimal villages and one that was often described to me as an example of a purā (pure) or typical Dhimal village. SSS was located at the edge of a densely packed Dhimal settlement, meaning that the student body drew not just from the Dhimal village but also adjacent settlements, creating an ethnically mixed student body.

The leadership of this school was not Dhimal, a fact that surprised me when I learned that it had become the second school to offer a Dhimal subject. Indeed, the school’s teaching staff was largely Brahman or Chetri (high-caste Hindus); according to the staff roster painted on the office wall, the teachers included seven Brahmans and four Chetris, with two Newars, two Dhimals, and one Dalit teacher. Among these sixteen teachers, only five were permanent teachers with full salaries and benefits provided by the government; these, the highest status teachers among the group, were three Brahmans, a Newar and a Chetri. The School Management Committee was chaired by a Dhimal community member; three of seven past and present SMC chairs were Dhimals, while the rest came from other backgrounds, and three of seven parent members of the SMC were Dhimal at the time of my research.

The surrounding community included two major figures from the Dhimal community: the head teacher of a large government school in Urlabari Bazar and co-

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18 I intended to make this school an additional focal school, but ultimately decided not to for two reasons: first, unlike many other schools where I visited, the school leadership was fairly unfriendly and suspicious during my visits. Second, shortly after I learned about the Dhimal class a combination of strikes, and petrol shortages made it difficult for me to reach the school.
author of the first grade Dhimal textbook, who passed away during my research period; and Partaman Dhimal, the sole Dhimal member of the second constituent assembly (elected in 2013 and still in office at the time of writing), who was also a mid-level member of the UML party, past SMC chair and present SMC member at SSS. Neither of these men played an active role in establishing the Dhimal language class at SSS; the head teacher was ill and passed away shortly before the class was established, while the member of parliament did not participate in the meetings, instead splitting his time between Athiyabari and Kathmandu, where the CA was rapidly approaching the release of the 2015 constitution. However, according to teachers at the school, the presence of these two Dhimal leaders in the area provided an implicit backing for a Dhimal class (f/n 8/28/2015).

Kedar Dhimal, secretary general of the DJBK, informally told me that they forced this school to implement the language class (jabarjastile lāgyo f/n 11/18/2015); in an interview conducted in English a few days later at his sister’s house, he narrated the process in more detail.

MW: One of your successes is that you introduced the Dhimal subject at the school in Athiyabari, right? At Saraswati Ma Vi? Could you tell me about how you made that happen? Like, what is the process that you used?

Kedar Dhimal: Yes. One meeting passed under the leadership of me, need to implement in various schools where our children’s numbers were there. And with me, Krishna Sir and Bangai ji, and Ratna Sir, you know him I know, and Buddhi Lal sir, we have I think five people with me. And first we talked about, we talked about this subject to the Resource Person, I forgot his name, he lives in Urlabari. We went there and we requested and also handed a letter, “Please execute our books in that school where there are so many Dhimal people, like that school.” Then he became very
positive, then he also suggested to us, “You need to talk with management committee of the school.”

Then we also went there, the chairman of management committee, we talked to him, and he also belong to Dhimal, and we convinced him, “Yes, you belong to Dhimal, then this Dhimal curriculum, that is already made, it should be implemented here.” At the beginning, he was very unknown, he is very, you know, straight person, straight person, he doesn't know what to do next. And we advised him, and he also became positive. And a meeting was called in the school over there of the management committee, then we were also called over there. And we put our subject, then they became very, and we also emphasized, we also focused, please, if you do not implement in this school, then anything can happen. Then they became very ready, and the principal, he is also very positive. I think he knew, and then we agreed, and they implemented. But so many times we visited, so many persons. It's very unimaginable. (Interview, 11/22/15)

As with Som’s experience with getting the Dhimal language textbook produced, implementing the Dhimal language course at a new school required several steps and the ability to navigate several levels of bureaucracy, from the Resource Person to the head teacher and School Management committee chairman. In addition, the process required numerous visits to these various gatekeepers, so many that “it’s very unimaginable,” according to Kedar. He described several arguments that he used to convince the key players that they should implement the course. The first relied on the legal provisions of the interim constitution:

MW: When you talk to the Resource Person or the School Management chair, what kinds of things do you say to convince them that they should offer the Dhimal curriculum?

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19 I think this was a direct translation of the Nepali word *siddha*, which can describe both a straight path and a straightforward, honest person. See discussion below.
Kedar Dhimal: Ok, I told them, “Mr. Chairman, Mr. Principal Sir,” at that moment the constitution was not promulgated, at that moment the interim constitution was over there, and article three or four, there was written that the mother tongue can be implemented in primary schools. In article three, it was written, on the basis of that one, I told them “Ok, Principal Sir, we have been given the right, interim constitution in article three, this article three says this, so on the basis of this one, you need to implement.”

(Interview, 11/22/15)

The first argument that Kedar described for convincing the principal relied on the provisions of the interim constitution. Citing specific articles demonstrated his knowledge, and the existence of a right that the DJBK was working to claim. After this tactic of emphasizing the legal basis for teaching Dhimal, Kedar moved on to the importance of the Dhimal language to the community:

Kedar Dhimal: “To implement this Dhimal language means to preserve Dhimal language. To implement this Dhimal language means respect the Dhimal language. And to preserve again the diversities of language. So I think this is not the crime, if you implement. Please do this,” we requested. And I think he [the headteacher] was positive too.

(Interview, 11/22/15)

This is the second of Kedar’s rhetorical strategies to convince gatekeepers to allow the Dhimal course into the school. He not only drew on the provisions of the interim constitution to demonstrate the legality offering the course, but also on broader notions of “respect” for Dhimal language and “the diversities of language.”

With the Dhimal chairman of the school’s management committee, Kedar took a somewhat different approach:

Kedar Dhimal: And the chairman, he was straight, he was also, I think somehow, he may be eager to implement because he belonged to Dhimal and he did not reject. “Ok,” he told me, “you are the general secretary of the Jāti Bikäs Kendra, so
With the SMC chairman, Kedar appealed to their shared background and his own authority as the general secretary of their ethnic organization. Kedar’s description of the SMC chair as “straight” and just needing to be told what to do draws on an old trope that describes Dhimals as simple and just needing to be told by others what to do (Bista, 1980; B. Hodgson, 1847; Regmi, 1991).

As in the case of KLSS, demand for the Dhimal language class did not come from local parents or students, as the policy implies it should. Instead, in this case representatives from the DJBK conducted meetings with the resource person, head teacher and SMC chair to convince them that they should offer a Dhimal language course. Their arguments were successful because of their persistence in meeting with multiple people repeatedly, and also because of an ultimately receptive head teacher and SMC chair. In addition, the school had recently hired a Dhimal teacher who was able to teach the language, though she claimed in conversation that she was not an entirely fluent speaker of Dhimal and that she had learned the language she was teaching in part at the training for teaching Dhimal (f/n 8/28/15).

The case of SSS demonstrates the importance of the Dhimal organization in promoting the Dhimal language class, as it was only through the actions of members of the DBJK that the class was implemented at this school. Kedar’s narrative of implementing the Dhimal course echoed Som’s interactions with Kathmandu-based policy makers. It was only after held multiple meetings with initially unhelpful

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20 A friend who did her student teaching at this school had similar comments. I wrote in field notes: “S said the other day that Dhimals aren’t good at being SMC chair, someone tells them to do something they’ll say yes, ok, without understanding what’s happening.” (f/n 8/20/15).
bureaucrats, appealed to their authority as officers of their ethnic organization, and invoked elected members of their community (and potentially made veiled threats) that they were able to make progress toward implementing the language classes. In addition, this example demonstrates that when schools and even mid-level education bureaucrats such as Resource Persons (who oversaw clusters of around a dozen schools) did not implement a local language subject, their reasons may have had more to do with ignorance, lack of information, or disinterest in the relevant policy than with ideological opposition. Due to the central government’s position towards local language instruction, a position of permission without action, implementing a course that was promised in the constitution and multiple educational policies required concerted action by Dhimal language advocates.

5.4 Jana Chetana Primary School

Jana Chetana Primary School was a small primary school located about a twenty-minute walk south of KLSS. To the north and west of the school was the large Dhimal village of Arnakhari; toward the east was the Himalaya Tea Estate; and to the south lay fields owned by the residents of Arnakhari. The school was located on land donated by a handful of the wealthiest residents of Arnakhari, including Krishna Sir, head teacher of KLSS. Until recently, one of those land donors also chaired the SMC; however, in the most recent SMC election a Brahman local resident and member of the Maoist party won the seat of SMC chair. The school was founded by Man Bahadur Dhimal and a friend of his in 1995 AD (2052 following the Nepali calendar); their idealism for the potential of schooling for the betterment of their community is reflected in the name, which translates
as People’s Awareness. Shortly before I began fieldwork, the founding head teacher migrated with his immediate family to Japan. The new head teacher lived halfway between JCPS and the center of Damak Bazar; unlike his fellow teachers, who lived very close to the school and had ties to the area, this head teacher was a newcomer to Damak.

The seven-person teaching staff at JCPS included two Dhimal teachers, both of whom grew up near the school and had taught there for many years. Man Bahadur Dhimal, the co-founder of the school along with its original head teacher, grew up a fifteen-minute walk up the road from JCPS, in the same government administrative unit (Damak Municipality Ward #16) but a different Dhimal village than the area immediately around JCPS. Reshma Dhimal, on the other hand, grew up in Arnakhari close to the school; the daughter of KLSS head teacher Krishna Sir, she married a man from another village, but continued to spend the weekdays at her parents’ house in order to stay close to work. In fact, all three married female teachers at the school countered traditional marriage norms by living with their own families, near their workplace, rather than moving in with their husband’s families.

Of the schools I observed, Jana Chetana was the school where I heard the most spoken Dhimal language. This was partly because Reshma Miss and Man Sir frequently spoke with each other in Dhimal, especially when they wanted to exclude other teachers from their conversation. In addition, when parents came to enroll students, discuss their children’s performance, pay for textbooks, or attend meetings, they spoke with the two

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21 The Dhimal villages are only partly congruent with government administrative units. Each Dhimal village has not only its own name but also its own local deities, propitiated at sites on the edges of the villages; its own traditional leadership including a headman; and a village leadership committee organized under the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra (see Rai, 2013).
Dhimal teachers and amongst themselves in Dhimal (this occasionally happened at KLSS too, but more often at JCPS).

In contrast to other schools, I also heard students at JCPS use Dhimal at school, if not in full sentences then at least occasional words. One morning, a nursery school student arrived at school sobbing; once she caught her breath, she explained that her maili boi (mother’s second-oldest sister) had promised to buy her candy but failed to do so. With some amusement, one of the Brahman teachers responded that even if the child’s maili boi had gone back home, the child could still have some candy, and produced a few pieces of candy from her purse (f/n 5/6/2015). The non-Dhimal teacher understood and responded using the Dhimal kinship term boi without giving any indication that this was an abnormal word to use at school. On the same day, I was asked to fill in for an absent teacher in the fifth grade science class; at the beginning of class, I showed the students a picture from their textbook that showed a variety of animals and asked them to identify the animals. Among other answers that the students provided in a mix of English and Nepali, one of the Dhimal students called out “cudur” (‘snail’). I knew the word, which was used frequently when my hosts served snails at meals. Since non-Dhimals in the area were much less likely to eat snails than Dhimals, it was a word that even children who were not fluent speakers of Dhimal might know in Dhimal but not in Nepali or English. I accepted this student’s answer as correct and offered an English translation (f/n 5/6/2015).

On another occasion, I observed second grade students, Dhimal and non-Dhimal, testing each other on Dhimal vocabulary, and showing off the various words and phrases
that they knew in Dhimal. In the following excerpt, Suyesha was the only Dhimal student, while Ashish and Sarita were both from other backgrounds:

Ashish asks Suyesha what *manthu* (‘is not’) means; she says *chaina* (‘is not’). She gives a couple of words - *puriŋ* (‘head’), some others. Then she says, “*Dhimal bhāšhā āinchā*” (‘I know Dhimal’) in a kind of goofy show-off voice. Sarita pipes up with several phrases “*m cali bhaneko bhāt khānu, manthu bhaneko chaina*” (‘eat rice means eat rice, is not means is not’).

(f/n 5/6/2015)

Suyesha’s claim that she understood Dhimal was confirmed for me on other occasions, though I never saw her speak Dhimal in an everyday situation, including when she played with Dhimal friends in Arnakhari (f/n 4/16/16, 11/22/15). Whatever her actual proficiency in the language, though, this exchange demonstrated that students of various backgrounds were aware of and interested in exchanging words in Dhimal. Knowledge of Dhimal vocabulary was something that the children could show off to their peers, not something to be ashamed of or hide, regardless of ethnic background.

With this level of knowledge and interest in Dhimal language among the students, the presence of two teachers who spoke fluent Dhimal, students from Dhimal backgrounds, and a location near a major Dhimal settlement, JCPS seemed to fit the profile of a school that could offer a Dhimal language subject. In the past, it could even have been a good fit for Dhimal medium, as teachers and community parents reported that Dhimal students from Arnakhari used to arrive at school speaking fluent Dhimal but limited Nepali. Teachers and parents from Arnakhari agreed that these days children arrived at school with knowledge of Nepali and not Dhimal. Despite this seemingly promising environment for a Dhimal language class, though, there was no real discussion of its introduction while I was there. The two Dhimal teachers occasionally mentioned
that it could be a good idea, usually in interactions off school grounds, but I never saw
the idea of a Dhimal language class discussed seriously at the school.

Indeed, the head teacher of this school seemed unenthusiastic about the prospect
of teaching a local language. While he told me in an interview that he had learned bits of
other languages in order to communicate with students at previous postings at schools in
other parts of eastern Nepal, those languages were never used in a formal context, and he
had not yet learned any Dhimal. Indeed, in a discussion of national language policy,
Govinda Sir only mentioned languages other than Nepali and English to emphasize the
ways that knowing only a mother tongue would limit communication:

MW: Ani bhāshā, jasto English, Nepali
sambandhi niti-niyam ke cha hola?

Govinda Sir: English aba international
language bhaeko hunale aba
angreji āṭāwa abhibhāvakko
chāhanā, “English jānos”
bhanne cha. Aba āphnai deshko
mātrībhāshā, āṭāwa āphno
deshko bhāshāko mādyam cahi
nepali cha. yo nepali bhāshā
pani alikati agādi baḍhāunu
parne huncha, hoina. aba tyahi
angreji matrai jānera pani
bhaena. aba nepalbari, euṭā
sājhā bhāshā chahyo ni anta. ma
eta mechiko mahākāli gaera
bolnu paryo bhane, aba Nepali
jāneko cha bhane ta Nepali
bolera āphno manko bhāvanā
prastāb garna sakchu. utako
mānche pani etā āera garna
sakcha. tara aba āphno
mātrībhāshā bāta mātrai tyo
sambodhan huna sakdaina.

And what are the policies and
laws related to language, like
English, Nepali?

Because English has become the
international language, English is
the desire of guardians. They’re
saying, “know English.” Then
our own country’s mother
tongue, or our country’s
common language is Nepali.
This Nepali language also needs
to be brought forward a little,
right? Just knowing that English
isn’t enough. In all of Nepal’s
territory, you need a common
language after all. When I go
from here in Mechi [eastern
Nepal] to Mahākāli [western
Nepal] and I need to speak, if I
speak Nepali I can speak Nepali
to make my own heart/mind’s feelings clear. People from there
can do the same when they come here. But just from one’s own
mother tongue, that conversation
cannot happen.

So coming and going at the international level, they say you need to know English. If you know English, everywhere you need to know the international language, and there can be exchange of information. The language is understood. Because of that, English and Nepali are mandatory to learn, it seems to me. In my opinion.

(Interview 3/31/15)

This answer emphasized the need to speak Nepali in order to communicate with people anywhere in the territory of Nepal, and English in order to talk to people around the world. Later in the conversation, Govinda Sir also emphasized the importance of English for the large number of Nepalis who work overseas. Even though the extract above followed several minutes of discussion of government policies and procedures, in his answer Govinda Sir said nothing about government policies but rather talked about reasons why a person might need to learn languages for use in various places. He noted that knowing only a mother tongue would restrict one’s ability to have conversations in far-flung parts of the world, whether internationally or in other regions of Nepal.

As we have seen in the other two school cases, the two gatekeepers at this school were the head teacher and SMC chair. Like the head teacher at JCPS, the SMC chair emphasized that schools must teach English, calling English the main subject (mul bishaya) that students needed to learn. Later in a conversation with SMC and Parent-Teacher Association members, when I asked whether mother tongue-based education would fit at their school (milcha ki mildaina tyo khalko kurā), he provided a rambling, evasive answer:
Well, would it work, why wouldn’t it work here too, well if there are teachers for one’s own language, it would be possible to run it, learning, teaching, mother tongue, that’s not something that couldn’t happen. That thing about teaching in one’s, own languages, keeps coming up everywhere, right? The problem is just that up to now it hasn’t been applied like that at every school yet. (Group interview, 3/26/15)

While speaking for some time, the SMC chair avoided providing a clear opinion; the subject could be taught, it’s not impossible, but there is a problem (this is a good example of not speaking straight, as compared to the ways that Dhimal people stereotypically communicated their thoughts in a straightforward manner). He showed no inclination to support teaching a Dhimal subject, but also provided no clear argument against a local language subject. Following this answer, the chair of the Parent-Teacher Association, a near neighbor of the SMC chair and member of the same high-caste background, added a comment more directly arguing against the need to teacher mother tongues in school. His point was echoed by a Dhimal mother who was a member of the SMC, followed by a final evaluation by the SMC chair.

Before, they were weak in Nepali language, they only knew their own language, right? Now really every community, everyone has learned Nepali language. Before, you needed to teach people in their mother tongue, [kids] go to school, there isn’t their ethnic language at school. Some castes’
language is given, now there’s language, like there’s Newar language, but it hasn’t reached everyone’s language. Because of that they study our national language. Well, we need to talk about Dhimal language, right? If we’re talking about Dhimal, mostly they don’t speak in the home.

SMC member (Dhimal mother) boldaina, nepāli bhāshā calcha They don’t speak, Nepali language is used

SMC chair: nepāli bhāshā, rāshtriya bhāshā sabaile ahile kendrincha. Nepali language, national language, is central for everyone now.  
(Group interview, 3/26/15)

In this discussion, the PTA and SMC chairs offered several reasons why they should not offer a mother tongue subject, all without explicitly saying that they opposed such a move. First, the SMC chair reiterated that mother tongue instruction had not been happening everywhere. Next, the PTA chair argued that while in the past students arrived at school speaking their ethnic language but not Nepali, this situation had reversed, a point supported by a Dhimal SMC member immediately following, and throughout my research (See Chapter 8). Because everyone spoke Nepali, they argued, Dhimal language instruction was unnecessary.

Despite the focus on the national language in the extract above, the language that was mentioned most often during this conversation with members of the SMC and PTA was English. Several times, discussion of my broad questions about quality education and improvements at the school led to parents and community members emphasizing the importance of learning English, efforts to improve English instruction at the school, and
the appeal of boarding schools due to their superior level of English instruction. The SMC chair and other members of the school community, while unwilling in this forum to say that they opposed offering a Dhimal language subject, demonstrated that they saw English as the more central issue, while they provided arguments against offering a Dhimal subject.

A few days after the discussion quoted above, Man Sir and Reshma Miss, the two Dhimal teachers at the school, expressed mixed feelings about whether offering the Dhimal class was a good idea. They mentioned the lack of interest from local parents, whose main concern was that their children learn English: as Reshma Miss put it, “abhibhāvakko ḍhulo chāhanā English bhāṣā jānos, āpno bhāṣā jānos ki na jānos kehi matlab chaina” (‘guardians’ main hope is that children know English; it doesn’t mean anything if they know their own language or not’) (Interview 4/1/15; note the similarity to head teacher Govinda Sir’s voicing of guardians’ focus on English in the interview segment above). Man Sir repeatedly brought up the importance of speaking Dhimal language in the home in order to promote intergenerational language transmission, and suggested that a community-based instruction program outside of school might be more effective than classes during school hours. Despite their mixed opinions, both expressed interest in offering a Dhimal language course. Reshma Miss’s evaluation was that even if they could teach a little bit of Dhimal language it would be worth it: “jati bhāṣā sikyo uti rāmro” (‘as much Dhimal language as they learn, it’s that good’). These two teachers placed the blame for not being able to offer the Dhimal language class at their school on the chair of the SMC. Man Sir had attended the SMC meeting discussed above, while Reshma Miss had not.
Reshma Miss: 

Maybe we should offer it too starting this year

Man Sir: 

The other day the chairman refused that thing [i.e., offering the Dhimal subject]

Reshma Miss: 

There was a discussion?

Man Sir: 

Yes, this thing was discussed, in the committee. They said things like “during English’s time, why do that? It needs to be done but here there isn’t really a possibility.”…He said “It could be offered, it remains to be brought.”

Reshma Miss: 

Who, the chairman?

Man Sir: 

The chairman, the other day. (Interview, 4/1/15)

Despite their enthusiasm for offering the course, or at least doing something for the language, the teachers felt they could do nothing without SMC approval. Man Sir confirmed that SMC approval was necessary in order to make changes at the school, emphasizing that this was a government policy:

MW: 

and in order to offer it, what needs to be done? Do you need to ask the committee or can it be done yourself?

Man Sir: 

A decision has to be taken with the committee. Without taking a decision, without doing that, it’s hard. You have to run it according to these government policies. Otherwise, according to one’s own pleasure, it could
In this case, the government policy of requiring school decisions to be made in collaboration with the school management committee, a policy passed in support of local control of schooling (Bhatta, 2005) acted to prevent the implementation of a policy that was nominally meant to support languages of Nepal being taught in schools. This demonstrates, among other challenges to the language policy, the importance of interrogating what “local” means, as in this case people who lived in close proximity to one another held different views of what languages should be taught in school.

Throughout my fieldwork, several people mentioned JCPS as an optimal site for implementing the language class, including two men instrumental in introducing the course at other schools: Krishna Sir and Kedar Sir (interviews 4/8/15; 11/22/15). Both men had connections to Arnakhari and the school. In fact, my interviews with both leaders were conducted within view of JCPS. With a skeptical SMC chair and head teacher at JCPS, though, this seemingly optimal school for offering a Dhimal subject did not offer the course. It is possible that the school leadership could have been convinced by action from leaders of the DJBK. To date, though, this has not occurred, and this school is a prime demonstration of the ways that the government policy of tolerance coupled with inaction led to maintenance of the language policy status quo, despite the written provision of the right to instruction in additional languages.
5.5 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the status of the Dhimal language class at three schools. At KLSS, the Dhimal language was adopted relatively quickly due to the enthusiasm and leadership of politically and ethnically aligned key players: the head teacher and SMC chair. In the case of SSS, the SMC chair and head teacher were convinced to offer the course following the concerted efforts of ethnic activists from the DJBK. In contrast, the Dhimal class was not introduced at JCPS despite the interest of some teachers and the relatively high proportion of Dhimal students that would make the school a seemingly promising site for the inclusion of a Dhimal language subject. This was a result of an SMC chair and head teacher uninterested in offering the subject, and a lack of action on the part of the DJBK.

This discussion points to the ways that a policy environment that allowed for but did not actively promote the inclusion of minoritized languages in schools left the adoption of the policy to rely on the decisive actions of individuals (see Johnson, 2013b, on language policy arbiters). Without champions of the language class, the language policy status quo reigned, with English, Nepali or General Knowledge subjects offered in a timeslot that was, according to the letter of the law, meant for a locally relevant subject such as Dhimal language.

At a broader level, the example of this policy adoption demonstrates the fragmentary and momentary nature of the state. Several of my interlocutors described details of the ways that the state acted in self-contradictory ways, at one moment guaranteeing a right but in the next instant not providing any actions toward fulfilling that right. Various levels of bureaucracy did not act in concert, allowing school leadership to
make decisions to follow, subvert, or ignore a policy that had a legal basis in the
fundamental legal document in effect at the time, the Interim Constitution of 2007. These
factors combined to provide the grounds for the seemingly puzzling and patchy
implementation of a legal provision.
Chapter 6: Making Textbook Dhimal: Textbooks and Language Standardization

This chapter addresses a different aspect of the question: What happens when a language is allowed into school for the first time? Beyond the national and school-level policies, introducing Dhimal language classes required language advocates to make many decisions around the form of the language that would be taught in classrooms. In this chapter, I focus on the creation of a Dhimal language textbook as a crucial step in the standardization of what would become the version of Dhimal language taught in classrooms. Textbooks provide a metapragmatic script for use in multiple future uptake formulations. That is, the textbook is intended to provide a template for multiple classroom conversations, potentially widely distributed over time and space.

In particular, I focus on the polyphonous nature of a single text (Bakhtin, 1981). Through the study of the text and discussion of the context in which it was created, we can see how conflicting aspirations for the future led to the attempt to enregister a specific form of textbook language, ending with the creation of a published text with a range of influences. While this discussion shares some characteristics with discussions of language revitalization that distinguish between purist and more flexible views toward language (Amery, 2000; Dorian, 1994; Hornberger & King, 1998; Kroskrity & Field, 2009, among many others), I argue that an understanding of social indexicality allows for a more complete view of how these decisions are made.
6.1 The Story of the Textbook: Som Bahadur Dhimal

The textbook I focus on here is part of the efforts of the Ministry of Education of Nepal to include languages other than Nepali in the school system (See also Chapter 4 and Section 5.1). Recognizing its staff’s lack of expertise in the many languages spoken in Nepal, the Ministry of Education’s Curriculum Development Centre (CDC) hired speakers of various languages on a consultant basis to develop language textbooks in various languages of Nepal. These language consultants wrote textbooks following a set of guidelines and using what they learn in a brief training. The books were intended to be used in teaching a local language in the four periods per week allotted to a local subject for government school students. The government guidelines dictated the number of lessons and kinds (e.g., poems, biographies, essays) that should appear in the book but had little to say about topics like linguistic forms or difficulty. As the Curriculum Development Centre had few or no employees qualified to evaluate the languages in which they will publish these books, the responsibility for deciding appropriate contents, in terms of topic and the difficulty or variety of language used, remained largely with the contracted language experts themselves.

In early 2015, a Dhimal textbook for fifth grade was among the books the CDC decided to publish, and CDC officials invited a three-person team of college-educated Dhimals, all based in Kathmandu, to write the book. Of the three, Som Bahadur Dhimal, a language activist, journalist, and most recently linguistics PhD student, emerged as de facto leader. Som was born in a village in Morang district but moved to Kathmandu as a child, where he worked in carpet factories and managed to fit in school around his labor (interview, 2/6/15). Living in Kathmandu, he developed a significantly different
linguistic repertoire than he would have if he had stayed closer to home. As he recalled in
an interview at his house,


When I was small, I was born and raised in the village. My mom fully speaking Dhimal, daddy speaking pure Dhimal, everyone in our community speaking Dhimal. Rather, not understanding Nepali. Calling in Dhimal, saying ‘sit!’ in Dhimal, saying ‘speak!’ in Dhimal, speaking entirely Dhimal, we learned concepts in Dhimal. When I was junior. After coming to Kathmandu, my link broke. Then I learned Nepali, then I learned Nepali. Later after going to school I learned a little English. English isn’t complete, Nepali isn’t complete either, Dhimal isn’t complete either. They’re mixed now.

(Interview, 2/6/2015)

Som’s narration of his linguistic trajectory demonstrates his comfort in Nepali and

English both in content and in his frequent use of English nouns while speaking Nepali.
Throughout his education and professional life, Som has done research about the Dhimal community, including in a master’s thesis about the educational achievement of members of the Dhimal community (Dhimal, 2010), in contract work for international organizations like UNESCO and sections of the Nepali government, and through his own research projects, some of which have been funded by the National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, a government agency. His language activism includes not only advocating for Dhimal education in schools but also acting as the coordinator (and, in practice, author) of a twice-monthly Dhimal language page in the government newspaper, Gorkhapatra. In addition, he has published books of Dhimal

Shortly before I began fieldwork, Som and one other Dhimal speaker had represented the language at an orthography development workshop sponsored by SIL and Mother Tongue Center Nepal, at which they developed a standardized orthography for the Dhimal language. The proposed framework, represented in a pamphlet, was meant to be discussed by Dhimal speakers (and potential writers) to eventually be adopted officially by the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra. In an interview, Som described the workshop as follows:

MW: ani yo tālim gardakheri, kasari, kasari development garnubhayo?

Som: yo tālim cahi, aba yo hāmi sanga pahila uniharuko cahi ke bhanda, schedule thiyo. schedule anusār pahila pahila uhāharule aru aru bhashāharu gareko schedule thiyo, tyahi processmā hāmile kām garyāum. aba alphabet kun kun Dhimalmā huna sakcha, tapāiko bolera, word practice garnubhos, ani certain wordharu boldai jāmus, ani boldai jāndakheri cha chaina testing garera, ani alphabet nikānē bhāyo. ani yo shabda pahila tyo bhāshāle lekheko John T. Kingle lekheko, tyo anusār, ṭhik cha ki change hunu parcha, tyo discussion. tyo discussion bhaepachi, ke cahi thapnu parcha bhanera kurā āyo ani tyahi anusār bandāyaum. aba pheri yo cahi field testing bhaneko, alikati bhāshā jānelāi yo bhāshā ṭhik cha chaina, yahā lekheko aru ajai bādi use huncha ki tyatinai ṭhik cha, tyelai suggestion liera, refine garera, And doing this training, how, how did you develop it?

At the training, there was a, what do you call it, they had a schedule for us. There was a schedule based on how they worked with other languages before. We worked following that process. Now in Dhimal, what alphabet could there be, speaking it, do word practice, try out certain words and through speaking, test if there is or isn’t, and the alphabet emerged. Looking at what has already been written, what John T. King wrote, is that ok or does it need to be changed, that discussion. After that discussion, what needs to be added, and according to that we made it. Now this field testing means, those who know the language a little well, ask them is this language ok or not, are there other things that are used more or is it alright like this, taking those

23 In his 2009 grammar of Dhimal (King, 2009).
Som described the technical process of developing an orthography, using a technique that SIL has developed through working with other languages (see Malone, 2004). The process, based on a goal of representing the language efficiently, drew not only from the expertise of the speakers in the room and their institutional sponsors but also from a published descriptive grammar and exemplary Dhimal speakers. Like the textbooks, the orthography was developed in Kathmandu and intended to be distributed later to the intended users in eastern Nepal.

6.2 The Story of the Textbook: Man Bahadur Dhimal

On March 19, 2015, Som arrived in the house of his aunt in a village in southeastern Nepal, which was also the house where I was living. His visit served multiple purposes: he had a research assignment from a government office related to documenting “intangible heritage,” for which he needed to speak to various Dhimal experts; his wife, recently returned from working as domestic help in the Middle East, was visiting relatives and distributing gifts she had brought back; and as always on these visits, he was spreading news of his language development work. In this case, he was happy to report that the team in Kathmandu was nearing completion of the fifth grade Dhimal textbook. As he had on previous textbook projects, Som asked Dhimal teachers, including his aunt’s husband, Man Bahadur Dhimal, to contribute their own writing to be included in the language textbook.
Man Bahadur Dhimal, unlike Som, lived in the same area for his entire life, though his long-time employment as a government primary school teacher had given him reason to visit Kathmandu and other parts of Nepal on educational tours. Also unlike Som, Man Bahadur spoke Dhimal every day, especially with his large extended family who all lived nearby, as well as other nearby Dhimal families. With people of other backgrounds, and some Dhimals, Man Sir spoke Nepali. The school where he taught had nominally switched to using English as the medium of instruction, so he also used English at school frequently, though my observations and conversations with the teachers confirmed that they used Nepali frequently in the classroom. Man Sir demonstrated his interest in and commitment to the Dhimal community and language frequently, though less publicly than other community members, most notably Som. For example, he had years ago written a couple of riddles, in Dhimal, on a paper fan in his house that his family used in hot weather. He devoted significant amounts of time to writing a genealogy the members of his thar, or sub-clan. During 2015, he spent hours at a printer’s office, preparing the manuscript of this genealogy as a book; the book also included descriptions of Dhimal religious rituals and a Dhimal-Nepali glossary. He told me that he would be interested in doing more active documentation and advocacy in these directions but was discouraged because it seemed that others around him were uninterested in supporting or participating in these efforts.

Around a month after Som’s visit, Man Bahadur Dhimal, known locally as Man Sir in recognition of his position as an elementary school teacher, told his family and me that he had written a poem for inclusion in the textbook. In the evening, he muted the TV and read out his poem, receiving feedback (and laughter) from his wife and children. The
following day, at Man Bahadur’s request, I took a photograph of the poem and emailed it to Som, who had returned to Kathmandu weeks ago (Figure 4). Som responded quickly saying that the message of the poem was good, but he needed to edit it a little. Just over an hour later, Som sent an edited version of the poem and asked me to request that Man Sir call him to provide a response. That evening, Man Sir enlisted his daughter to read the two versions of the poem aloud line-by-line, in order to compare the two, and called Som in Kathmandu to discuss the changes that had been made. In addition, Man Sir was among the attendees of an editing workshop held at the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra at which the poem was discussed. The textbook was finally published in 2015; the first copy that made it to the broader Dhimal community was a copy that Som brought to the annual congress of the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra.
Figure 4: Man Bahadur Dhimal’s original poem
6.3 Voicing in the Textbook

In the following sections of this chapter, I discuss the poem that Man Sir wrote in greater detail, particularly the voicing structure of the poem, as a text and in its context as part of a textbook. First, I present Man Sir’s poem as he first wrote it:

In Class

1 Inside the classroom, children
2 Like flowers in a garden.
3 Students in class
4 All sitting to study.

5 The teacher arriving in class
6 We say “seupakha, good morning.”
7 He says, “seupakha, sit down”
8 We students all sit down.

9 He says “open your books,”
10 Then he starts teaching.
11 For reading and writing
12 We have pens in our hands.

13 The teacher
14 Asks us questions.
15 We students, understanding,
16 Give the correct answers.

17 Laughing and feeling happy,
18 We say the answers.
19 “Bravo” he gives to us
20 “You’re studying well.”

21 “Tomorrow, having done your homework
22 Come to school,” he says.
23 Saying “alright,”
24 We say “ok, bye.”

Already in Man Sir’s single-authored text, we can distinguish a number of voices.

Following Bakhtin (1981), all language is made up of multiple voices, speaking from different positions. Bakhtin notes that voices are recognizable by particular traits, and that
a particular word or grammatical construction holds the flavor of histories, speakers, and kinds of people. Agha (2005) argues that Bakhtin’s analysis relies on perceivable voicing contrasts, which make different voices identifiable. Situations that involved voicing contrasts involve individuals establishing “forms of footing and alignment with voices indexed by speech and thus with social types of persons, real or imagined, whose voices they take them to be” (p. 38). Thus, by teasing out the voicing structure of the poem textbook lesson, I aim to understand the ways that actors involved in the production of a textbook took stances toward the voices involved in this text and toward broader social formations indexically linked to characteristics of these voices.

Within the text above, the most obvious voices are those of the students narrating the events of their school day and the narrated teacher, who tells them what to do and praises them for doing well in school. However, aside from the narrated students and teacher, there are implied future students and teachers who will be the animators (Goffman, 1974, 1979) of this text when it is used in the classroom. This is inherent in the format of the textbook, which is intended to be used eventually in teaching, and so will be read aloud by teachers and students. Employing Peirce’s (1955) terminology of signs is useful here; the textbook is meant to act as a legisign or underlying rule while the future textbook-based interactions will be observable sinsign replicas, or individual instantiations of that underlying rule. The textbook itself, or more specifically the language within it, will remain constant, having been crystallized in printed form. However, like religious events that use the same liturgy, each lesson that occurs using the textbook as its format will be a unique event, and even more so as teachers and students interact with the book as a pedagogical text. For example, in existing classes using the
Class 1 and 2 textbooks, class sessions I observed focused on the lessons from the textbook but diverged in the actual activities conducted, student participation, and framing talk from the teachers (see Chapter 7). Even events from other classrooms, weather events like heavy rain, or the head teacher calling teachers for a meeting (not to mention the presence of the visiting researcher) could affect a day’s sinsign replica of the “same” textbook lesson. The relationship between a textbook and lessons is therefore not a mere replication, and in fact may diverge from the written text quite significantly as the text is recontextualized in repeated classroom events (Bauman & Briggs, 1990). However, the linguistic prescriptions of the textbook have a significant impact on the classroom speech events.

As people who shared a common notion of what the classroom looks like, Man Sir and Som both knew that many lessons would involve students and teacher reading the text of the lesson aloud. When this occurs, much of the poem’s voicing structure places the voicer of the poem in the role of the student: “seupakha gudmarni donahi re” (‘We say “seupakha” good morning’) (Line 6) or “khurta kalam chumnahi re” (‘We have pens in our hands’) (Line 12), so future students in Dhimal classes would voice these words of being good students. One characteristic of this student voice is that they use English on several occasions, greeting their teacher (as they would in a real classroom) by saying “good morning” (Line 6). They take leave by saying “ok, bye,” (Line 24) which is plausible though not part of a standard formula as is greeting teachers with “good morning, sir/miss.” The teacher is not averse to borrowings from English either, as he reminds the students to do their homework using the English word, which is commonly used in Nepali school contexts.

24 A Dhimal language greeting.
Man Sir noted that he had included English because it would draw the attention and interest of students, and be fun for students. He saw no conflict in flavoring the lesson with a bit of English; after all, the actual future students using this textbook would almost certainly have begun their Dhimal class by chorusing “good morning sir (or miss)” and end by being assigned “homework.” I argue that the use of English also orients students to a particular student framing. In this community, English was (as it is in many places) commonly viewed as a language of future opportunity; if students learned English well, they would supposedly have better opportunities for future employment, especially future employment abroad, than the ones that their parents have had (in Nepal, Awasthi, 2004; Giri, 2011; Phyak, 2011, 2013; on similar dynamics in India, Ladousa, 2005, 2014; Proctor, 2014). The students, as Man Sir wrote their voice, are perhaps in part participating in an image of the future as including them speaking English. In any case, they are taking a stance of allowing a few formulaic English terms into their Dhimal classroom.

Another notable element of Man Bahadur’s poem is the invocation of a commonly deployed metaphor that likens the diverse groups that make up Nepal’s population to flowers in a garden. This metaphor is often attributed to the first king and uniter (or conqueror) of most of the territory that comprises modern-day Nepal, Prithvi Narayan Shah. In what is frequently cited as the original formulation of this phrase, Prithvi Narayan Shah described his territory as a “flower garden of four varnas and thirty-six castes,” referring to the four Vedic castes and the various other groups that had been incorporated into his territorial holdings. Whether or not this is an accurate reading of his memoirs (see Bennike, 2015; K. Pradhan, 1991), it has taken on an active life in Nepali
representations of diversity, especially when invoked in educational or official settings. As Bennike (2015) notes, the flower garden metaphor, along with promoting an image of unity and strength in diversity, has associations of orderliness, with each group put it in its place. As opposed to the melting pot metaphor popular in the United States, the flower metaphor describes a situation in which each group represented within the nation remains distinct from the others, while also contributing to an attractive whole.

The flower metaphor was promoted as part of national discourse during the Panchayat era (1960-1990) as a way of subsuming caste and ethnic differences in the image of a single Nepali nation (Bennike, 2015; Leve, 1999; Stirr, 2009). During the Panchayat era, the flower garden metaphor appeared in multiple textbooks, which at times linked the metaphor to other elements of the powerful discourse of development (within Nepal: Ahearn 2001; Des Chene, 1996; Fujikura 2013; Pigg 1992), for example advocating that the hydropower industry must be developed in order to provide electricity to nourish the flower garden of Nepal (Shrestha, 1987 as cited in Bennike, 2015). Radio Nepal, the national and only radio station during the Panchayat era employed a shorthand reference of the flower metaphor in the title of the show Fulbāri, the only program on the air for most of the era that used languages other than Nepali. In this radio program, musicians from various linguistic backgrounds were invited to the radio studios in Kathmandu to record songs representative of their languages and cultures. Nambar Lal Dhimal, the first teacher of a Dhimal language class at KLSS, had performed Dhimal songs on the Fulbāri program in two different years (interview 3/12/15).

Even after the restoration of multi-party democracy in 1990 allowed for freer expression of ethnic diversity (Des Chene, 1996b; Hangen, 2007), the flower metaphor
has remained a popular element of discourse about the Nepali nation and diversity within it. The metaphor also remains a part of officially promoted images of the nation. For example, the national anthem, adopted in 2007 and now sung at every school in the morning and at many other events that are held within a national frame, opens with an invocation of this metaphor: “We are hundreds of flowers but one Nepali garland” (Hutt 2012); notice the similarities to the first lines of Man Sir’s poem:

1 Inside the classroom, children
2 Like flowers in a garden.
3 Students in class
4 All sitting to study.

In addition to brief references as in the national anthem and Man Bahadur’s poem for the Dhimal language textbook, the flower metaphor is elaborated in textbooks used in both government and private schools. For example, an eighth-grade social studies textbook published in 2009 stated:

Nepal is our motherland. It is called a common garden of four castes and thirty-six sub-castes. We, the people of the country, are like different flowers grown in a garden. We are different in face and colour. Apparently, there is a difference in our forms and kinds. This variation is called thirty-six sub-castes. (CDC, 2009 as cited in Bennike, 2015).

In this discussion of the flower metaphor, the social studies text describes the various groups living within Nepal as differing in “face and colour,” and in “forms and kinds.”

The flower garden metaphor, far from remaining confined in official or state-sponsored discourses, is brought into various other spaces to talk about diversity within Nepal. One evening, flipping through the channels at Man Bahadur’s house, the family happened on a beauty pageant titled Miss Tourism Nepal. The first question the contestants were required to answer was: “Hāmi sabai Nepali ho. Ke tapāīlāi Nepāl desh
“Matrai ho ki pahicān pani ho?” (‘We are all Nepali. Is Nepal just a country to you, or is it an identity?’). Each contestant answered this rather leading question by responding that being Nepali is a key part of their identity, with more than one using the first line of the national anthem: Sayaī thūgā phulkā hāmi, euṭai mālā nepāli
(We are hundreds of flowers, [but] one Nepali garland). No other source besides the national anthem, and in particular, this line, was quoted by more than one of the contestants.

Moving more specifically to the issue of linguistic diversity, the flower metaphor was invoked multiple times at celebrations of International Mother Language Day on February 21, 2015. The Minister of Tourism and Civil Aviation, who was invited to open a day-long seminar at Nepal Academy, noted that there were more than 130 languages counted in Nepal in the most recent census, and that he hoped that none of these flowers would be allowed to die in the future.

A similar point is made in the introduction to a Dhimal-Nepali-English glossary published by the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra, in which the District Education Officer opened his note of introduction with a reference to the flower trope:

नेपाल चार वर्ष छतिस जातको साज्ञा फुलबारी भिन्नको सबै जात र प्रकारका फुलहरूले समान वातावरण आफ्नै दंगले इर्दगर्ने, फुल्ने, फल्ने र झाँग्ने अवसर पेमा मात्र बगैचा सुन्दर र समुद्रहुन सक्छ। यस्तै उचित संरक्षण र सम्बंधनको चाहना सहित फुलेको फुल हो - धिमाल जाति।

In Nepal’s shared garden of four castes and thirty-six ethnicities, only if every species and type of flower can grow, flower, ripen and thrive in a common environment can the garden be beautiful and peaceful. With hopes of appropriate protection and respect this includes one such blooming flower: the Dhimal caste.

(Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra, 2006)
The note goes on to emphasize the importance of supporting various languages for the purposes of improving educational achievement and strengthening democracy. In this case, the flower metaphor emphasizes not only strength in diversity but also the potential fragility of flowers, and of threatened or endangered cultures and languages. Man Bahadur was also fond of the metaphor; in the book he was writing about his family background, the introduction opened with a reference to Nepal as a flower garden, with Dhimal as one of the flowers within it.

The use of the flower garden metaphor, therefore, implicitly references many prior invocations of this metaphor to talk about diversity within Nepal. As Spitulnik (1997) describes in the case of radio listening in Zambia, particular phrases may become “recycled and reanimated in everyday usage” (p. 162), in new and varied contexts. The use of the flower garden metaphor has become one such detachable element of discourse, taken from government products and discourse such as textbooks and radio shows and recontextualized in text and talk. Like the national anthem, Man Bahadur’s poem mentions the flower metaphor only in the opening lines.

By beginning this poem with a metaphor comparing children to flowers in a garden, Man Bahadur added another entry to a speech chain, or set of linked speech events in which individuals are receivers and then senders of some message, likening Nepal’s diverse populace to flowers in a garden. Having repeatedly been a receiver of the message that Nepal is like a diverse flower garden, Man Bahadur became the producer of that message with an audience of future Dhimal language students. In addition, without explicitly referring to the country of Nepal, Man Bahadur placed the Dhimal class (both the narrated class represented in the poem and the actual future Dhimal language classes
that will use this textbook) in a Nepali national context. This was in no way accidental; in talking about the poem both privately and at the editing workshop, Man Bahadur explained that he wanted to evoke the beauty of diversity in the classrooms where this language would be taught. Also, as we have seen, the flower metaphor appears frequently in textbooks; by participating in the use of this metaphor in a lesson for the textbook, Man Bahadur makes his lesson fit more neatly into the genre of Nepali textbooks, even if his lesson was written in a language that had only recently been allowed in school.

The use of this metaphor was not just about participating in a national discourse, but also meant to signal the author’s stance on diversity. Man Bahadur explained individually to me, to Som on the phone, and to the other teachers at the editing workshop that these lines were intended to honor the fact that Dhimals now live in mixed communities. Rather than the exclusively Dhimal villages of the past, their communities now included people of many different backgrounds. This was especially true in classrooms because schools, frequently located on the edge of traditional Dhimal settlements, drew students from multiple ethnic communities. At the first two schools to introduce Dhimal language classes, there were very few ethnically Dhimal students in the classroom, and even fewer children who spoke Dhimal proficiently. The students voiced in the poem perform generic student roles in part because, as Man Sir has written the textbook, they could be students of any background as he imagined a classroom of students of varied backgrounds using the textbook in the future.

6.4 Som's revisions

So far we have looked at Man Bahadur’s original poem. Som’s revised version of
the poem had changes in almost every line:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man Bahadur’s original:</th>
<th>Som Bahadur’s revisions:</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>In Class</td>
<td>Flowers of the Class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1 Inside the classroom, children</td>
<td>Like flowers in a beautiful garden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 Like flowers in a garden.</td>
<td>students in the classroom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Students in class</td>
<td>all sitting to study</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 All sitting to study.</td>
<td>the master arriving in class.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5 The teacher arriving in class</td>
<td>“Seupakha” they say in one voice</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 We say “seupakha, good morning.”</td>
<td>welcoming him to class</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 He says, “seupakha, sit down”</td>
<td>the students all sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8 We students all sit down.</td>
<td>after the teacher says to sit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9 He says “open your books,”</td>
<td>He says “open your books,”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Then he starts teaching.</td>
<td>then he starts teaching.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11 For reading and writing</td>
<td>For reading and writing</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12 We have pens in our hands.</td>
<td>we have pens in our hands.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13 The teacher</td>
<td>The teacher to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14 Asks us questions.</td>
<td>asks questions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15 We students, understanding,</td>
<td>We students, understanding,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16 Give the correct answers.</td>
<td>do the right answers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17 Laughing and feeling happy,</td>
<td>“to preserve your language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18 We say the answers.</td>
<td>speak in your language” he says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19 “Bravo” he gives to us</td>
<td>“if you preserve your language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 “You’re studying well.”</td>
<td>“you preserve your culture and history” he says</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 “Tomorrow, having done your homework”</td>
<td>“bravo!” he gives to us</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22 Come to school,” he says.</td>
<td>“study well” he says</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
23 Saying “alright,”
24 We say “ok, bye.”
25 “tomorrow having done your homework come to school daily” he says
26 saying “alright” we all take an oath we’ll see you tomorrow to learn we say

While the translation above only demonstrates the places where there were differences in referential meaning or in the named language used, there were other changes as well that do not appear in this gloss. Many of these had to do with changing the spelling of words to follow the orthographic conventions that described below.

In this discussion, I focus on Som’s edits that caused changes in the voicing structure of the poem. The first thing that stood out to me, and to Man Bahadur’s family, upon reading Som’s revisions, was that English was gone. Not only was this immediately obvious, but Man Bahadur’s wife (who is Som’s aunt) agreed with Som’s choice, saying that a Dhimal textbook was no place for English words. Table 5 shows the removal of English from the original poem.

As shown in Table 5, Som replaced the tokens he recognized as English in Man Bahadur’s original poem. In the image of the future Dhimal class depicted in Som’s revision, there is no English being used, neither by the narrated characters nor by the future narrating students—the actual things of flesh and bone who will articulate these words in future Dhimal classrooms. If the appearance of English in the earlier version had signaled participation in a discourse of English as future-oriented, then Som’s revision seems to demonstrate a rejection of such an idea, or at least a different vision of the future, in which Dhimal would remain intact and free from English incursions. This could also reflect Som’s beliefs about language pedagogy, as he was trained as an English teacher in a communicative approach where speaking only in the target language
was highly valued.

Table 5: Removal of English in Som Bahadur Dhimal’s revisions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Man Sir’s original</th>
<th>Som’s revisions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5 <em>masṭar lita dultey say</em> ‘The teacher arriving in class’</td>
<td>5 <em>seupakha e? galata dohi re</em> ‘“Seupakha” they say in one voice’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 <em>seupakha gudmarning donahi.</em> ‘we say “seupakha, good morning.”’</td>
<td>6 <em>swagat pali kilastay</em> ‘welcoming him to class’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21 <em>jumni homwark patey</em> ‘Tomorrow, having done your homework’</td>
<td>23 <em>jumni saʔko kam patey</em> ‘Tomorrow, having done your homework’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23 <em>te doteŋ kelai</em> ‘Saying “alright”’</td>
<td>25 <em>te doteŋ kera jharay chatey</em> ‘saying “alright” we all take an oath’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24 <em>oke bai donare.</em> ‘We say “ok, bye”’</td>
<td>26 <em>jumni bheṭetey katha dhiraŋ donhahi</em> “see you tomorrow to learn” we say’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The attempts at linguistic purity did not end with the removal of English. Rather than just replacing the casual “ok bye” from Man Bahadur’s original with an equally casual leave-taking, Som replaced it with an archaic phrase in lines 25-26 in which the narrated students swear (literally, eat) a formal oath against truancy. In a similar vein, where Man Bahadur had used the common Nepali borrowing of *kalam* (pen; itself travelled to Nepali via Arabic and Urdu), Som replaced the word with *phulṭiŋ* (*pen*), a word which Man Bahadur did not recognize. Man Bahadur’s wife remembered *phulṭiŋ* as something that she had heard as a child meaning a quill pen. Rather than using the word commonly in use, Som changed the wording to use a more purely Dhimal lexicon, and an archaic one.25

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25 In my language lessons, Som taught me to translate *pen* as *phulṭiŋ*, but also used *dirt pen* in example Dhimal sentences (Language lessons 1/28/15, 2/3/15, 2/22/15)
Another move toward purity of Dhimal came in the orthographic standards of the poem. The spelling changes that Som made were largely for the sake of consistency with the orthographic standard developed in the workshop discussed earlier in this chapter. These changes, though, move the written language in the direction of being less visually similar to Nepali. In the most frequently occurring case, Man Sir’s original used the verb ‘to read or study,’ \textit{paḍhili} ( पढीली ) and words derived from it (\textit{paḍhipali, paḍhepaka}) four times. Derived from the Nepali verb \textit{paḍhnu} ( पढ़नु ), the spelling that Man Sir used maintains both the same phonological form of the verb root (/\textit{paḍhi}/) and spelling (पढ़) as the Nepali word. Som’s revision changed each of these from \textit{paḍhili} ( पढीली ) to \textit{porheli} (पोहेर्ली), which is both visually different and reflects a borrowing adapted to follow Dhimal phonology. Man Sir’s spelling uses a retroflex stop (ढ), which appears in Dhimal only in words borrowed from Nepali; the spelling that Som uses replaces the retroflex stop with a breathy flap (हँ).

\textbf{Table 6:} Spellings of ‘to read’

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Nepali</th>
<th>Man Sir’s version</th>
<th>Som’s version</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>पढ़नु</td>
<td>पढीली</td>
<td>पोहेर्ली</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>/\textit{paḍhnu/}</td>
<td>/\textit{paḍhili/}</td>
<td>/\textit{porheli/}</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Som’s version represents a pronunciation that has resisted the use of phonological features of Nepali that did not previously appear in Dhimal speech, but also visually
looks very distinctive, as the typographic ligature ḍ̄, which represents the breathy flap [rh] would conflict with Nepali phonology and never appear in written Nepali or Hindi.

Som’s orthographic changes therefore had three effects: first, they brought the text in line with the orthographic standard that Som and colleagues were working to promote; second, they made Dhimal look visually more dissimilar to Nepali than other possible orthographic conventions; and finally, they maintained a more conservative phonemic inventory than Man Sir’s original draft had represented.²⁶

An additional major change in the voicing structure appears in a stanza that Som added completely new in his revision:

*tai bhasa banchepali*
To preserve your language

*bhasata nuidhiuli dohi re*
speak in your language” he says.

*tai bhasa banchepanu*
“if you speak your language

*tai sanskriti, itihas banchekhe dohi re*
“you preserve your culture and history.”

This didactic stanza, which resembles nothing in Man Sir’s original poem, draws on themes of the interconnected nature of language and culture that will be familiar to anyone who has encountered, for example, UNESCO’s discussions of language as “intangible heritage,” discourses of linguists concerned with endangered languages, or approaches to mother-tongue literacy spearheaded by diverse actors from academics like

²⁶ This was not a fully consistent change, though; in Som’s substitution of *phulṭiṅ* where Man Bahadur had originally written *kalam*, Som introduced a word with a retroflex stop. I don’t fully understand why there would be a retroflex stop in this older word unless it was itself borrowed from an Indo-Aryan language. There are also retroflex stops in both versions of the poem; in *mastar*, itself derived from English *master*, and reflecting the rule of Nepali adaptation of English alveolar stops as retroflex stops, and the Nepali-derived *ṭhik* (‘correct’).
Tove Skutnabb-Kangas and mission-oriented translators from SIL. Som has, in fact, interacted with all of these people, taking trainings, attending meetings, working as a researcher, and writing his own opinions about these topics.

The inclusion of this stanza radically changes the voicing structure of the future classroom speech event that I discussed above. Far from the generic, caste-neutral student and teacher of the original text, this version seems clearly meant to be read by Dhimal students and teachers. The voice of the authoritative teacher, hectoring students to speak in Dhimal not only for the sake of their language but also for the preservation of their culture and history, becomes specifically a Dhimal teacher. In the future narrating event as well, the students who are meant to read this aloud seem likely to be Dhimal students, not the mixed group of Man Sir’s imagined future classroom. This addition makes denotationally explicit the effect of Som’s other edits; the linkage between language, culture, and history is the goal here.

Having discussed various elements of Som’s contributions, I revisit them to examine the cumulative effect of these seemingly minor changes: the purification of lexical items borrowed from English and (in some cases) Nepali; the use of archaic Dhimal lexical items; the avoidance of phonological features borrowed from Nepali; the visual orthographic distinction from Nepali; and the addition of a stanza explicitly instructing students to speak in their language for the simultaneous preservation of language, culture and history. Combined, these illustrate the voice of a particular kind of ethnic/indigenous activist. As opposed to Man Sir’s vision of peaceful coexistence, in which Dhimal and non-Dhimal students would learn this language together, Som’s version of the poem and of the future Dhimal classroom portrayed an ethnically
homogeneous classroom of teachers and students working to preserve their culture and language. This is demonstrated through linguistic purification in terms of lexicon, phonology, and orthography, and reflects Som’s political stance and understanding of the goals of language planning efforts such as the textbook, as well. For example, in a discussion of orthographic conventions, Som discussed the tension between those who thought it would be best to spell borrowed words as they are written in Nepali or following the conventions that he and others (under the guidance of linguists from SIL) had developed. They made the decision to follow the Dhimal orthography even for borrowed words because if they used the Nepali spellings:

Dhimal language cahi shadowmā huncha, kinaki aruko word dherai ãuncha, Dhimalko word thorai huncha. aní tyo cahi chapmā parcha, tyo cahi, imperialism.

Dhimal language will be in shadow, because there are lots of others’ words, few Dhimal words. So it will be in a shadow; that’s imperialism.

(Interview 2/6/15)

As demonstrated both by his comments in interviews and his choices in the editing process, Som’s concerns included linking the language to the history of the Dhimal community, exhorting students to speak in the Dhimal language and value Dhimal culture, and maintaining the unique nature of Dhimal language in orthography and vocabulary.

6.5 The Published Version

Between Som’s edited version and the final, printed version there were a few further changes, especially in making the orthography consistent with spellings used in other lessons (see Figure 5 for the published version of the poem). However, the major
change in the voicing structure when the lesson became part of the finished textbook was that the Dhimal texts became a section within a government-approved frame. In particular, while the text of the single lesson I have so far examined does not explicitly mention a national context, the textbook is clearly an element in a nation-state infrastructure. We gather this partly from the signs of government approval, such as the symbol of the Ministry of Education as publisher in the front matter and cover. In addition, subject matter of the rest of the book parallels that of other textbooks, follows government standards for mother-tongue textbooks, and references elements of the state structure, as in a lesson on how to write a letter to the chairman of one’s local government body. The introductory note is a letter written in Nepali about the Ministry of Education’s goals in publishing textbooks in mother tongues. In addition, the orthographic imperialism that Som worried about is on display beginning on the cover page and front matter. The inside cover gives the publisher as the Nepal government, Ministry of Education, Curriculum Development Center; this information was included as well in the draft of the textbook that was circulated for an editing workshop in April, 2015. Table 7 compares the two versions: the draft textbook version was written following a Dhimal orthography, while the final printed textbook followed Nepali conventions.
**Figure 5:** The published poem

**Table 7:** Textbook front matter spelling changes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Textbook draft (Dhimal orthography)</th>
<th>Published textbook (Nepali orthography)</th>
<th>Gloss</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>प्रकासक \ <em>Prakasak</em></td>
<td>प्रकाशक \ <em>Prakashak</em></td>
<td>‘Publisher’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>नेपाल सरकार \ <em>Nepāl Sarkār</em></td>
<td>नेपाल सरकार \ <em>Nepāl Sarkār</em></td>
<td>‘Nepal Government’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(no changes)</td>
<td></td>
<td>(no changes)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>सिक्षणाया मन्त्रालय \ <em>Sikhāyā Mantrālaya</em></td>
<td>शिक्षा मन्त्रालय \ <em>Shikhyā Mantrālaya</em></td>
<td>‘Ministry of Education’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>पाठ्यक्रम विकास केंद्र \ <em>Pathyakram Vikās Kendra</em></td>
<td>पाठ्यक्रम विकास केंद्र \ <em>Pathyakram Vikās Kendra</em></td>
<td>‘Curriculum Development Centre’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
In these lines from the front matter of the textbook, the lexemes themselves remained constant, with the phonological realizations differing only slightly if at all. The difference is only in the orthographic representation of the same words and nearly the same sounds, and especially in the use of special half letter combinations, used in Nepali orthography to represent common consonant clusters. While these changes may seem minuscule, they comprise the difference between a Dhimal frame and a Nepali frame for the book. The authors, in proposing such a title page, attempted to have the state write in Dhimal, using only the graphemes that the Dhimal orthography devisers had determined to be needed for writing Dhimal and adapting unfamiliar consonant clusters to be phonologically acceptable in Dhimal (e.g., kšhya → kchaya). This would have been a radical change, to have the state ‘speak,’ or at least write, in Dhimal; instead, following Nepali government policies to date, the textbook demonstrated that the state spoke, and spelled, in Nepali, while beneficently allowing Dhimal speakers a portion of flexibility within this Nepali-speaking frame. The published front matter (Figure 6) followed the Nepali spelling:

**Figure 6:** Published textbook front matter
Further evidence that these were noticeable changes came from the teachers’ workshop, at which gathered teachers and Dhimal activists immediately and vociferously denounced the use of Dhimal spellings for Nepali borrowings, and suggested changing the spelling back to the standard Nepali spellings. As teachers met to discuss the proposed draft of the textbook, they wrote up their recommendations for what should be done with the text. Figure 7 shows the list of suggestions they made for the table of contents, which, like the front matter, included many lexical items borrowed from Nepali. The left column lists the existing version (“bhaeko”; ‘as it is’), while the teachers’ consensus spelling is listed in the right column (“bhaeko bhae rāmro”; ‘would be better’). Most suggested changes replaced a loanword from Nepali spelled in the Dhimal orthography with a version following standard Nepali orthography. During the discussion at the workshop, teachers agreed that they appreciated the Dhimal orthographic standards but felt that if they used Dhimal orthographic standards for Nepali loanwords, they would confuse students who were simultaneously learning to write Nepali, and that it would make the book’s authors look like they didn’t know how to write Nepali properly. The published table of contents (Figure 8) reflected some, though not all, of the teachers’ corrections.
**Figure 7:** Teachers’ suggestions for revisions to the textbook table of contents.
Figure 8: Published table of contents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>पाठ</th>
<th>पाठको मिड</th>
<th>विधा</th>
<th>पेज</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>१.</td>
<td>ल्दैसिंध गोयाड धेमालाई</td>
<td>ले</td>
<td>१</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>२.</td>
<td>चुरुझान खान्तेड विवेक बार्का</td>
<td>काथा</td>
<td>६</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>३.</td>
<td>जोंता</td>
<td>सम्बाद</td>
<td>१२</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>४.</td>
<td>चुरुझान माइन्हा</td>
<td>कविता</td>
<td>१९</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>५.</td>
<td>कण विलाहुर योगदान</td>
<td>जिविन</td>
<td>२४</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>६.</td>
<td>नगरा नागारि</td>
<td>काथा</td>
<td>३०</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>७.</td>
<td>पाहिच्छान</td>
<td>कविता</td>
<td>४७</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>८.</td>
<td>मासार्दनु दुःख जेड़के</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>६२</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>९.</td>
<td>जारेहाँ रोणाना</td>
<td>ले</td>
<td>७१</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१०.</td>
<td>प्रतिभा</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>५३</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>११.</td>
<td>पाहिच्छान</td>
<td>चिठ्ठि</td>
<td>५९</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१२.</td>
<td>धिमाल विक्रान्त केन्ट्र</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>६३</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१३.</td>
<td>माउंसाको भाग्या</td>
<td>काथा</td>
<td>७१</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१४.</td>
<td>जातिरि</td>
<td>सम्बाद</td>
<td>७९</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१५.</td>
<td>सुचिना प्रविधि</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>८४</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१६.</td>
<td>दादाहेड़ चिठ्ठि</td>
<td>चिठ्ठि</td>
<td>९१</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१७.</td>
<td>जोनोम भामोड़ोड़ प्यारो</td>
<td>काथा</td>
<td>९४</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१८.</td>
<td>किलासको ले</td>
<td>कविता</td>
<td>१०२</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>१९.</td>
<td>साफासुग्घर</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>१०७</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>२०.</td>
<td>भुडाङ्गाल</td>
<td>निबन्ध</td>
<td>११२</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
6.6 The Textbook’s Future

In addition to the voicing structure within the text and book, the lesson itself will be further recontextualized in future conversations. The textbook can also be seen as a step in a communicative event chain, or a set of communicative events in which the receivers of some message become the sender in a later speech event. Mortimer (2013) has offered an account of language policy in general as a communicative event chain; in this chapter I have described a single strand of such a strain, demonstrating the fractal nature of policy studies that can be studied at various levels, with similar characteristics replicated at each level of scale (Hult, 2010). That is, a similar study could be made of a communicative event chain in which official policies were created, or of the distribution of official decisions to various levels of bureaucracy, or even of decisions made within a school. At any of these levels of granularity, we would be able to trace the speech events in which certain actors went from being receivers of a message to senders in the next step of the communicative event chain. This level is noteworthy first for the potential that it has to shape the nature of the language code used in future interactions well in the future; to draw from language policy terminology, this particular chain is not just an example of status planning but also of corpus planning, making decisions about the form of a language (C. Ferguson, 1968). As Swinehart (2012, p. 33) points out, much discussion of corpus planning focuses on written rather than spoken language, as do the radio announcers in Swinehart’s study. The example of a textbook, though, demonstrates that many literacies are always interlinked with spoken or oral communication, a concept illustrated by Hornberger’s continua of biliteracy (2003), which represents spoken and oral communication as ends on a single continuum. In the case of the textbook, the
immediate planning was focused on a written text, but its intended use was to provide guidelines for future speech events (indeed, one could object to Swinehart’s claim on the basis that much corpus planning focuses on pedagogical texts that are intended to be read aloud and therefore to influence speech, albeit indirectly).

The particular nature of this speech chain is also notable in the form of mass mediation offered by a textbook. That is, while many of the steps of the chain of events that led to the creation of this textbook took place among small numbers of people (e.g., communication between Som and Man Bahadur; Man Bahadur reading aloud to his family; a group of teachers reading the text together), the textbook has the potential to reach many more as it mediates future classroom interactions. The product of these many small-scale interactions could play a role in future interactions that will reach many additional participants in future speech events.

The divergence in opinions about the way that languages should be crystallized in the form of a book demonstrates, in addition to the divergence in images of the future that I have described, different notions of what this book would be. For Som, the book was an opportunity to display emblems of indigeneity. The attempt to gain political rights through such displays has been demonstrated with various communities in Nepal, as in the Tharu community’s successful development of a recognizable ethnic identity despite the absence of a shared language, material culture or set of religious beliefs (Guneratne 2002). In the more recent political climate, Shneiderman (2015) has demonstrated that the Thangmi community in Nepal strategically developed emblematic identity displays in order to receive and maintain recognition and support; Turin (2011) notes the ways that the same community has employed linguistic markers of difference, such as a large
dictionary that entextualizes borrowings into Thangmi as Thangmi words. Middleton
(2015) has demonstrated similar work by ethnic activists in nearby Darjeeling who
navigated displaying ethnic identity and backwardness in ways that would be legible to
anthropologists and government officials.

Som’s insistence on the importance of the book and the maintenance of a Dhimal
written standard that differed noticeably from Nepali is one form of emblematic identity
display. It is a conversational turn addressed to the future question “who are the
Dhimals?”; in answer, there will be an object emblematic of Dhimal difference that can
be pointed to. For this interaction to be successful, the Dhimal textbook must demonstrate
difference from other groups, which is accomplished in this book through images of
Dhimal material culture and lessons about the history and practices of Dhimals, but also
through the linguistic difference between Dhimal and other languages. That is, this
interaction will be more successful if a Nepali reader picks up the book and sees
something incomprehensible, or at least distinctively different from languages they might
already know. For the Dhimal reader, as well, one pedagogical purpose of the text is to
teach that Dhimal is a language and culture different from any other.

For the government publishers of the book, the textbook is similarly addressed to a
future (or perhaps present) question: “What kind of state is the Nepali state?” When the
government official points to textbooks published in 18 languages (Phyak, 2011), she is
able to answer: an inclusive, multilingual state. For this conversational turn to be
effective, the content of the book itself is less important than its existence among a set of
equally existent books in multiple languages. There must be some signs of ethnic
difference, such as illustrations of people wearing distinctive clothes, but the internal
content is less important to the government’s goal. The government’s lack of attention to these books’ pedagogical effectiveness, use in the classroom, or even distribution beyond the Curriculum Development Center warehouse was further evidence that these issues are irrelevant to the goals of the program. Language activists I talked to in both formal interviews and informal conversations, many of whom have worked with the Curriculum Development Center on the production of these books, hypothesized that the government’s goal in producing the books was only for show, and in particular for a display of inclusiveness that could be shown to the international community. The piles of books in various languages sitting in a warehouse on the premises of the Curriculum Development Centre provides further credence to this argument.

6.7 Conclusion

In this chapter, I have demonstrated the polyphonic nature of a lesson in a textbook. The voices I have identified took a range of stances related to the future of the Dhimal community within the Nepali state: a vision of modernity that included a diverse group of ethnically unmarked (but Dhimal-speaking) students studying together; a pure, ethnically homogeneous version of the future drawing heavily on a fossilized past; and the government that allowed for these discourses, so long as the use of another language remained safely within a Nepali frame. These partials have been uncovered not only by examining the text itself but also through ethnographic engagement with the authors, editors and government bureaucrats involved in its production. The different voices involved in this lesson and textbook matter because social indexicality means that in a disagreement over, say, orthographical conventions, the stakes are not just the set of
graphemes used to represent consonant clusters, but also the indexical associations signaled by those orthographic choices. That is, the various people involved in writing and critiquing the textbooks were not merely involved in creating the kind of Dhimal language they wanted to see in future Dhimal textbooks, but they were also imagining the kinds of people who would employ such language and the world they will inhabit.

In the end, the textbook was published in a version of Dhimal that was barely recognizable to its future readers. This concern was also noted by CDC officers and teachers in other language communities, who found “that the ‘official’ version of languages employed in some books is inconsistent with locally spoken forms of that language, rendering them inaccessible to teachers and students” (Seel, Yadava & Kadel, p. 38). I had heard similar complaints in various communities during work in Nepal before starting graduate studies. Hornberger and Limerick (in press) document that multiple projects producing pedagogical texts for Quechua have similarly ended up with texts that teachers and learners found difficult to read. How is it that the process of writing in a language for the first time ended with a product in a language variety unrecognizable to speakers or learners of the Dhimal language? I have demonstrated that the process of creating a single text involved at least three sets of participants with differing views of the goals of a Dhimal language textbook, which were reflected in divergent approaches to writing in Dhimal. While linguistic anthropologists discuss the ways that linguistic and other semiotic emblems become linked to particular recognizable kinds of people (Agha, 2007a), this case demonstrates the ways that language planning is also a process of attempting to create particular kinds of people who will speak in a particular way. This example, I hope, serves as a caution to those who seem to argue that
putting a child’s language into school automatically makes schooling more accessible (e.g., Ball, 2010; Malone, 2004). One of the most elementary insights of linguistic anthropology and sociolinguistics is that there is no such thing as a single, unitary language. Following the creation of textbook language demonstrates that variation in understanding of the goals of a language project, transmogrified into particular choices about linguistic forms and orthographic choices, not only leads to the creation of textbook language incomprehensible to learners and writers alike but to the drawing of unanticipated fault lines in the language community related to these linguistic choices.
Chapter 7: Language teaching as metapragmatic commentary in the Dhimal classroom

The vignette that opened this dissertation demonstrated that an explicit attempt to honor diversity in the national anthem in Nepal had, when it encountered actual children, been reinterpreted to reinforce the existing caste hierarchy. Where the words of the national anthem celebrate the multiethnic (bahul jāti) Nepali state, young children had interpreted the same line as lauding the highest caste in the Hindu hierarchy (bāhun jāti). Like the new national anthem, the introduction of Dhimal language classes was part of post-conflict efforts to reorder the traditional hegemony of high-caste Hindus in the Nepali social order. In previous chapters, I have traced elements of this changed language policy that created the possibility of having a Dhimal language class and its core texts. In this chapter, I turn to an examination of the Dhimal classes themselves, to ask: what happened in this recently created ideological and implementational space (Hornberger, 2005). As we will see, while the creation of this space of the class had required significant re-ordering of the linguistic policy-scape, classroom interactions did little to either teach students Dhimal language or to challenge caste hierarchies and stereotypes that structure everyday interactions.

I observed many classrooms during this research, primarily at two government schools and one private school located in close proximity to each other. I attended a wide range of subject classes, and while I largely focused on the early elementary years I sometimes wound up in higher grades in order to placate students who felt neglected, provide my perspective on lessons about, say, government in the United States, or to cover for an absent teacher. While all these observations inform my analysis, this chapter
focuses on Dhimal language classes at two schools. As detailed in Chapter 5, at the beginning of my fieldwork, only one school offered a Dhimal language class. This school, Krishna Lower Secondary School (KLSS; which offered classes from pre-primary to Class 6), was one of my focal schools, and I observed Dhimal language classes at the level of Class 1 and 2. During my fieldwork, a second school, Saraswati Secondary School (SSS; which offered classes from pre-primary to Class 10) decided to begin offering a Dhimal language subject, and I observed two Dhimal language classes there, taught to a mixed group of pre-primary and Class 1 students.

One of the guiding questions of this study is, put simply: what happens when a language is allowed into a school where it has previously been banned? In some ways, this is the chapter that takes on this question most directly by asking: what does a Dhimal language class look like? What kinds of interactions happen in this class, and what might children learn from attending it? The chapter is split into three sections, the first describing Dhimal language classes at Krishna Lower Secondary School and Saraswati Secondary School, their language and literacy pedagogies and the metapragmatic discourses underlying them. The second section takes up the insistence on named languages and the ways children understood (or did not understand) these, and the final section investigates ways that language/caste/ethnicity and the figure of the schooled Nepali citizen functioned in language classes.

7.1 Dhimal Language Classes

The second-grade class at Krishna Lower Secondary School in the Nepali academic year of 2071 (2014-2015 AD) was a particularly rambunctious group. Even
when students from other grades were too shy to say more than a few words of greeting to me, the second graders, perhaps encouraged by my frequent presence in their class, would run out from their classroom to grab me by the hand and pull me into their classroom. Screaming, “Miss, miss, hāmro classmā āunu na!” (‘Miss, miss, come to our class’), they would attempt to drag me into their room. If I acquiesced, the same process repeated as each child enticed me to sit in their row, and then students shifted to crowd onto my bench, whichever seat I chose. This was a pattern that lasted for months, but intensified one day when they told me that they were going to play a game in Dhimal language.

For the game that the student were so excited about, Nambar Sir brought in a stack of cards, each with a single word written on it. He had written the name of an animal in Dhimal, English, or Nepali on each card. The game was to pick one of these cards at random, then to find the two additional words that matched the first one. The following transcript of Nambar Sir introducing the matching game demonstrates several of the themes that I discuss in this chapter. First, while students were nominally engaging with an object named Dhimal, they were never asked to use this thing as a communicative code, nor were they generally encouraged to or taught how to produce utterances of more than a single word. They were most focused on producing sets, most often triads, of equivalent lexemes in Dhimal, Nepali, and English.

The transcript also demonstrates the strict adherence to the classic classroom discourse pattern of initiation, response, and evaluation, known as IRE (Mehan, 1979; Rymes, 2009), found around the world. In this mode of classroom discourse, the teacher initiates (I) a sequence, often through asking a question. Students respond (R), and the
teacher evaluates (E) whether their response has been successful. In the following transcript, I mark each turn with its slot in the IRE sequence in order to allow for easier tracking of this discourse pattern.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Speaker</th>
<th>Argument</th>
<th>Action/Comment</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>yasari. yasari ek numbermā ek number ke garcha, thaka rākhne. yo goru āyo. dosromā, ke āyo, yasko? ke ho bhanu ta, goru ke bhāncha</td>
<td>like this. like this, number one, number one what you do, put it right here. This ox came up. Second, what came up, for this? What is it, say it, what is ox called?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>S1:</td>
<td>paya</td>
<td>pig R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>paya</td>
<td>pig R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>hoina yasmā</td>
<td>no, this one E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>S2:</td>
<td>piya</td>
<td>ox R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>piya</td>
<td>ox R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>piya, gorulāi ke bhāncha?</td>
<td>ox. What is ox called? E, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>ox</td>
<td>ox R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>yahā ox. aba hāmro dhimalmā ke bhāncha?</td>
<td>Here is ox. Now what is it called in our Dhimal? E, I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>piya</td>
<td>ox R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>piya</td>
<td>ox E</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Ss:</td>
<td>piya rākhne</td>
<td>Put ox R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Nambar Sir:</td>
<td>piya, yasari yasari garne. piya, goru, ox</td>
<td>ox. Like this, do it like this. ox, ox, ox</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

(Class, 9/6/2015)

In this excerpt from a second grade Dhimal language class, Nambar Sir walked through the process of playing a matching game. Randomly drawing the card with the Nepali goru (‘ox’) written on it, he asked students for another word for the same referent. After negatively evaluating their incorrect response (‘paya’, ‘pig’ lines 2-3), one student
provided the correct response in Line 5, with other students echoing this correct answer. In Line 7, Nambar Sir evaluated the response as correct, then asked again for a word for *goru*, implicitly asking for the English ‘*ox*’, which students chorused in Line 8. In the following lines, Nambar Sir returned to the Dhimal lexeme, demonstrating the way that students were supposed to line up three cards with matching words written on them. The sequence closed with Nambar Sir repeating the target triad in Line 13: “*piya, goru, ox*” (‘*ox, ox, ox*’). This illustrates the goal of the lesson: to demonstrate that these three phonological strings all refer to the same animal.

While the students were excited about this lesson because Nambar Sir called it a game, and because they coaxed him into promising to award chocolates to the winner, it was in most ways a standard Dhimal language class. As in the extract above, the entire course was conducted in a matrix of Nepali with Dhimal words inserted as the answers to questions but never used for communicative purposes. As in other Dhimal language classes (and other classes in general), students were praised for their ability to memorize and repeat. While this class meeting was exceptional in the high level of engagement among the children, and their excitement over the activities they took part in, it was an unexceptional Dhimal language in its focus on teaching the equivalence of individual lexical items in three languages.

In Class 1 at KLSS, the Dhimal subject, or Local Language, as it appeared on the timetable, was a regular part of the schedule, taught by the Class 1 teacher, a Brahman man who taught Class 1 all day. He had learned Dhimal from living in the area for most of his life, and I certainly never noticed a lack of proficiency as a problem in his teaching. His Dhimal class came in the mid-morning, after Nepali language and before math.
Students in his class sat on the carpeted floor with backpacks next to them. Ramesh Sir’s Dhimal language classes most frequently involved drilling lexical equivalencies, as in the excerpt above. At other times, his students copied text from the book into their notebooks, usually focused on either single syllables or individual words.

When these students advanced to Class 2, they moved to a classroom with long wooden benches, and instead of having the same teacher all day began to be taught by different teachers for each subject. Nambar Lal Dhimal, one of the senior teachers at KLSS and a leader in Dhimal community organizations, taught the afternoon period that was supposed to be Dhimal language class two days a week and General Knowledge two days a week. While there was nominally a schedule for which day was which, I frequently arrived in class on a day that was scheduled to be Dhimal language only to find Nambar Sir teaching GK. Nevertheless, he was recognized by many as an expert in Dhimal language and as a long-time teacher. His Dhimal class sessions most often took the form of drilling lexical equivalencies, as in the game example above. On one occasion, though, I observed him lead the class in studying a poem in the book, translating into Nepali and drawing parallels between the texts and students’ experiences. As we will see, this was an example of the most connected Dhimal text and speech that students encountered, but at the same time the only Dhimal language produced in this lesson took the form of repetition of the text in the book.

At Saraswati Secondary School, Dhimal language was introduced at the start of the 2072 school year (beginning in April 2015). The teacher was a young Dhimal woman who had only recently begun teaching at the school, though she had participated in a two-week Dhimal language teacher training in 2013. Her classroom was filled with child-
friendly furnishings donated by NGOs: low tables, a thick carpet, and more plentiful toys than I had seen at other schools, including the expensive private schools. Her class had far more students than the smaller groups at KLSS, in part because her classroom grouped together the kindergarten and Class 1 levels. Unlike the Dhimal classes at KLSS, these classes did not include any effort to teach Dhimal literacy but instead focused just on oral language. The classes I observed focused on lexical equivalencies, especially between Nepali and Dhimal with on English than I saw in the KLSS classrooms. While the students did not engage with the Dhimal textbook, they did use posters on the walls to point out pictures of the animals they were describing. Students also frequently took the teacher’s prompt words, like monkey or snake, to describe their own experiences with these animals. While the teacher did often have to chastise them for being too loud, they participated eagerly in repeating words after her.

In each of these classrooms, Dhimal students were a small minority. In the 2071 school year, there was one Dhimal girl in Class 2 at KLSS; Class 1 had one Dhimal girl and boy who had a Dhimal grandmother but did not identify as Dhimal and had to be prodded by a neighbor to acknowledge this connection to the Dhimal community. In the 2072 school year, Class 1 at KLSS had no Dhimal students, while Class 2 had the one Dhimal girl who had been in Class 1 the previous year. At Saraswati Secondary School, there were a handful of Dhimal students, but they were a minority in the classroom, a distribution that I both observed from looking at the class register and that the teacher pointed out to me (see Chapter 8 for more on school enrolment).
7.1.1 What was taught in the Dhimal language class?

What was being taught in the Dhimal language class? People in Jhapa and Morang described the process of learning a language in several ways, but the most common formulation I heard was that learning a language means learning “yo bhaneko yo, gāi bhaneko cow” (‘this means this, cow means cow’). Statements like this are a form of metapragmatic commentary about not just the activity of language learning but also about the nature of languages; describing the process of learning a language as an issue of translating individual words expresses a belief that each language is essentially a relexified version of every other one. This is not necessarily as a surprise; as Silverstein (1981) points out, much of language lies below the threshold of awareness for most of its users.

The Dhimal language classes are a valuable source of metapragmatic discourse regarding the nature of languages and their relations with people and the country. Wortham (2008) argues that the concerns of linguistic anthropology and educational anthropology are mutually illuminating. This is aided by the fact that much of the talk that happens in classrooms is metapragmatic in nature, especially teacher talk, which often comments on the behavior of students (Cazden, John & Hymes, 1972, Rymes 2013). Some of this is explicit metacommentary, such as when a teacher tells a student to speak louder or softer. Even more frequently, talk that may not be explicitly metapragmatic functions as metapragmatic commentary, for example when teachers recast a student comment in more “proper” forms or in another language altogether. In this chapter, I focus particularly on the metapragmatic nature of language pedagogy. That is, I ask: What did the form of language pedagogy teach students about the nature of
language(s)? What messages were conveyed through the teaching methods employed in the classroom? How were different ways of speaking, whether named languages or varieties within those, positioned by classroom interactions?

In a related study, Mortimer (2012) has demonstrated that language policy is a form of metapragmatic discourse, which she defines as “discourse about recognizable types of people, languages, and activities” (p. 6). Her analysis of educational policies in Paraguay demonstrates that policies and teaching practices consistently indexed characterological types of Guaraní and Spanish speakers. While the case I examine now is not as focused on types of people as Mortimer’s study, I examine the classroom as a site of language policy-making, following scholars in the ethnography of language policy who point to the importance of teachers as shapers of policy in their own classrooms and not merely transmitters of pre-fabricated policy from governments to students (e.g., Menken & García, 2010). In this chapter, I focus on metapragmatic commentary about languages. As Agha (2007a) argues, stances taken regarding semiotic behavior are inevitably indexically linked to the kinds of people who are presumed to produce such forms. While the teaching of Dhimal in school is such a new phenomenon that it has not yet coalesced into a stable characterological type of the sort that Mortimer describes, discussion of semiotic behavior is always related to the people who perform such behaviors.

In this chapter, I focus on three recurring elements of metapragmatic discourse found in the Dhimal language classroom. The first is the implication that languages are equivalent and differ mainly in lexicon; the second, the insistence on separate named languages; and, finally, the elevation of the figure of schooled Nepali citizen over ethnic
identity. There were eight varieties of pedagogical practice that I saw from the three teachers, as described in the following chart. Each of these was distinguishable based on the participation framework and the content being discussed in the course.

Table 8: Formats of Dhimal language classes

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pedagogical practice</th>
<th>Classes observed</th>
<th>Participation framework</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Lexical equivalency</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1; KLSS Class 2; SSS</td>
<td>Teacher elicited translations of individual lexical items from students; repeated to confirm.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Repetition (no translation)</td>
<td></td>
<td>Teacher pronounced target Dhimal words, students repeated. After repetition, individual students led the sequence.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual words</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Words and sentences</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Copying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Consonant/vowel</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td>Teacher assigned lesson to copy. Students copied text from book. Teacher checked their writing, usually commenting on their handwriting.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Individual words</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sentences/Connected text</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Orally spelling words</td>
<td>KLSS Class 1</td>
<td>Teacher spelled words aloud; students repeated.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Text discussion</td>
<td>KLSS Class 2</td>
<td>Teacher read parts of a text, translated from Dhimal to Nepali; discussed illustrations with students; asked students to connect the actions in the text to their own lives</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 8 demonstrates several fundamental features of the Dhimal language courses. First, there was only one class among the ones I observed that approached using Dhimal language as a communicative code; even in that class, as we will see, the only
tokens of Dhimal language that were produced were the text itself and individual lexical
items isolated from the text. In general, component parts of what we might call language
were the focus of the language classes, such as individual consonant-vowel pairs or
isolated lexical items. Student production of Dhimal nearly always took the form of
copying, orally or in writing, after a model provided by the teacher or the textbook.

7.1.2 Relexification drills

The major pedagogical technique of the Dhimal language class was to drill
individual lexical items in three languages: Dhimal, Nepali, and English. The three
teachers had been taught to use this technique in the two-week Dhimal language subject
training that they had attended. In an interview, Nambar Lal Dhimal, who was both a
Dhimal language teacher and teacher trainer at the Dhimal language teacher trainings,
confirmed that this was the way he was trained to teach Dhimal, and the way that he
aimed to teach. The prompt for this reflection was that I asked him about whether
students from different communities tended to speak differently from each other or the
same. Nambar Sir began his answer by commenting that there are differences between
the more backwards (pichadieko) and more educated or intellectual groups, which he
identified as the Aryan community (āryan samāj). He moved quickly from this
distinction to commenting on the difficulties of the different languages that students
speak, and the importance of providing translations of individual words so that they could
quickly understand concepts. He explained that the problem for such students is that they
do not understand the words being spoken around them:
Nambar Sir described the problems of students who do not understand the word for water in Nepali or English, the languages they would encounter at school. From describing this problem, where apparently children would not understand the word for water in a language other than their first language by the time they started school, he began to explain the solution:
Nambar Sir continued to describe the importance of giving students in three languages: mother tongue, Nepali, and English. Otherwise, he said, students might not understand what teachers said in Nepali. However, by providing the same word in three languages, Nambar Sir claimed they would be able to understand concepts quickly. He explained that this process had been facilitated by research conducted by linguistic indigenous communities to describe their own languages, enabling him to provide translations of the same words in the three languages.

It used to be really hard for them to understand, but every community’s people has been doing their own study, what community are they from… asking people from that community, have them say what do they say for this in their language, and what do they say for this, they say this. Like for goat, ok, what do you say in your language, now in Dhimal language, goat…They know, and goat, goat in English means, what they say is, goat…if you do this for people from all communities, speakers of various

So for those coming from every community, for me while teaching, I can teach multilingually, that’s what I have been doing for them. In Rai, what do they call that thing, what do they say in Limbu, what do they say in Dhimal, and what do they say in other languages. In Nepali and mother tongue and English. Putting it in three languages for them while teaching, “this means this thing means this.” They can really remember, they understand “oh, for this thing I see they say this.”

(Interview, 12/2/2017)
bāṭa āeko mānchelāi yeso gariyo
bhaṇe yo sāno baccālāi cahi concept
dinnalāi padhāunalāi, concept dinalāi
jyatai sajilo huncha.

languages, then, giving small children
concepts in teaching, it’s extremely
easy to give concepts.

(Interview, 12/2/2017)

Nambar Sir described his teaching as a process of providing translations for individual
nouns from one language to another. Later in the interview, he described this as the way
that he trained teachers in the Dhimal language subject training. Krishna Sir provided a
similar description of the ways that teachers were trained to teach Dhimal language. In
practice, as well, this was the most common form of Dhimal language classes that I
observed for all three teachers.

This description exemplifies a metapragmatic understanding of languages as
essentially relexifications of others, a message taught in the classroom through drills and
games. A representative sequence of this sort of teaching comes from the first grade class
at Krishna Lower Secondary School. Ramesh Sir was teaching a lesson on animals, using
the Class 1 textbook. In this sequence, the second animal that the class reviewed, the
class was already settled into an interactional pattern. As we will see, this is an extended
version of the classroom classic initiation-response-evaluation sequence. The classroom
also features frequent echoing by the students, a classroom discourse pattern common
worldwide but especially in developing countries (Chimbutane, 2011; Hornberger &
Chick, 2001; Martin, 2005; L. Moore, 2006; Needham, 2003). In lines 1-3, Ramesh Sir
initiated a new topic, and students responded by providing the Dhimal word *miŋkao* (as
with the earlier transcript, Initiation, Response and Evaluation are marked in the right
column):
Ramesh sir evaluated the students’ response by pronouncing the word again, broken down by syllables, with students echoing the syllables and finally the entire word.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th>‘cat’</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>arko</td>
<td>‘another’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>miŋkao</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>miŋkao</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

After establishing that they were talking about the lexeme miŋkao, Ramesh Sir moved on to eliciting translations, beginning a new set of IRE sequences.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th>‘cat means? cat means?’</th>
<th>I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>birālo</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>birālo bhanne?</td>
<td>‘cat means?’</td>
<td>I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>cat</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td>R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>cat ok</td>
<td>‘cat ok’</td>
<td>E</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In Line 8, Ramesh Sir initiated a new sequence by asking for a translation of miŋkao twice, first using the English means and in the next sentence the Nepali bhanne. Several students volunteered the Nepali birālo, which Ramesh Sir did not comment on. Instead, he incorporated ‘birālo’ into his next utterance, which took the same form as the questions in Line 8. In Line 10, Ramesh Sir asked a sentence with the same propositional content as both questions in Line 8, but in Line 10 used the Nepali noun birālo rather
than the Dhimal *miyka*o that he asked about in Line 8. Students provided the third translation, with several of them calling out the English *cat*. Ramesh repeated *cat* back and confirmed that this was correct. Ramesh Sir ended the sequence by returning to the new content of the lesson, asking students to repeat the Dhimal *miyka*o twice before turning to a new word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th>Miss:</th>
<th>S1:</th>
<th>Ss:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td><em>cat ok. miyka</em>o.</td>
<td>cilko nām ke ho ta? siddha</td>
<td>cil!</td>
<td><em>baja, baja</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>‘cat ok. cat.’</td>
<td>‘now what is eagle’s name? sit straight. what is eagle’s name?’</td>
<td>‘eagle!’</td>
<td>‘eagle, eagle’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14</td>
<td>Ramesh Sir:</td>
<td>la sable bhanna ta. <em>miyka</em>o.</td>
<td>‘ok everyone say it now. cat.’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>miyka</em>o.</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td>‘cat’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>arko</td>
<td>‘another’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This kind of sequence was common in the teaching of all three Dhimal language teachers, though with some variation. In the following extract from the mixed pre-primary and first grade classroom at Saraswati Secondary School, the teacher attempted to conduct a similar lesson to the one discussed above, also using animal names. The sequence began similarly to those shown above, with the teacher initiating by asking for a translation for the Nepali word for eagle, and students collectively answering correctly:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Miss:</th>
<th>S1:</th>
<th>Ss:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>cilko nām ke ho ta? siddha</td>
<td>cil!</td>
<td><em>baja, baja</em></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>‘now what is eagle’s name? sit straight. what is eagle’s name?’</td>
<td>‘eagle!’</td>
<td>‘eagle, eagle’</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The teacher did not verbally acknowledge their correct answer but implicitly accepted it by moving on to initiate another sequence with the next animal:
Again, students provided the correct Dhimal translation for an animal name. Next, the teacher reconfirmed a few times to be sure that they were all answering together, addressed a student returning from the bathroom using the set phrases in English that students were taught from the beginning of their time in school:

The next animal name, though, was where things broke down, demonstrating that students had not yet mastered the links between Nepali and Dhimal lexical items, and the teacher began scolding the students for not paying attention.
After the two successful sequences in lines 1-11, the teacher introduced a third bird to discuss, asking ‘and what do they say for crow?’ This time, though, students did not provide the desired response, with one of them echoing “kāglāi” (‘for crow’), and another making a bid to open another topic of conversation by addressing the teacher (Lines 13-14). This led to the teacher scolding them in line 15, and asking again, “ke bhancha?” (‘what do they say?’). By this point, though, the question from Line 12 was forgotten, and a student checked to confirm what they were supposed to be translating, asking “cillāi?” (‘for eagle?’) in Line 16. The teacher accepted this, but then received answers for both crow and eagle, leading her to playfully blame their supposed forgetfulness on my presence in the classroom. This extract from Saraswati Secondary School demonstrates several similarities to the earlier extract from Krishna Lower Secondary School. Sticking quite closely to the classic IRE sequence, the two teachers introduced Nepali words, asking for translations. When students provided the correct answer, they were told it was correct, repeated the same set of words, or the teachers moved on to the next word.

There were certainly differences in teaching style between the three teachers I observed. The teacher at Saraswati Secondary School, who was the one woman among the group, decades younger than the other teachers, and the one with the youngest
students, was by far the most playful. Her speech with the students displayed elements of caregiver talk, such as higher pitch, exaggerated pitch contours, and a slower pace than the speaking voice she used with me or with her colleagues. She was also the most likely to engage with students’ contributions, allowing them to share stories about a snake they saw on school grounds or a fish they saw when they visited their maternal uncle’s house, before connecting the students’ commentary to the vocabulary lesson she aimed to teach. Nambar Sir was the only teacher I observed turning Dhimal lessons into a game, in which students randomly drew an animal’s name in Dhimal, Nepali or English and then had to match that word to the corresponding cards in the other two languages. Students adored this version of the same lesson, clamoring for their turn and for this lesson to be repeated.

Despite minor differences in how these lessons were taught, the metapragmatic commentary provided by the exercise remained the same: first, languages are made of individual words; second, these words are equivalent to each other; and, third, learning a language is fundamentally a matter of learning how to translate one set of words to the other.

7.1.3 Language as a collection of words

Even when the lessons took a form other than the relexification exercises described above, they demonstrated teachers’ belief that Dhimal was a collection of words, and that learning Dhimal was a matter of learning to translate from one set of phonological strings to a string with an equivalent set of referents. In an illuminating excerpt from the KLSS Class 1 Dhimal subject, Ramesh Sir began with a sequence of repetitions, first of a letter and word, then a full sentence using that word:
The full example sentence, given in Line 3 and chorused by students in Line 4 used the Dhimal verb ‘to plow,’ *coili* with an imperfective suffix:

\[
\text{miliy-ta} \quad \text{hale} \quad \text{coi-khe}
\]

field-LOC plow plow-IMPF

‘S/he/they is/are plowing in the field’

As opposed to Nepali, which obligatorily distinguishes between singular or plural actors in the verb, and optionally distinguishes for gender in some varieties, the Dhimal imperfective is ambiguous as to number and gender of the actor. That is, the sentence could be glossed as ‘he is plowing in the field,’ ‘she is plowing in the field,’ or ‘they are plowing in the field.’ These options all make the student’s interjection in Line 6,
jotchu (‘I plow’) an inaccurate gloss of the Dhimal sentence. In Line 7, Ramesh Sir used the plural ‘they plow’ to correct the student’s inaccurate attempt. After students dutifully echoed this, though, he changed his gloss to the passive jotincha (‘it is plowed’) in Line 9. Dhimal has more than one way to create passive forms (King, 2009), none of which are in evidence in the sentence miliŋta hale coikhe. This may have been Ramesh Sir’s attempt to replicate the ambiguity of the agent in the Dhimal sentence; that is, using a passive verb allowed for a Nepali translation that, like the Dhimal source text, did not specify the number or gender of the actors. It is also possible that the difference between Dhimal hale (‘plow’, derived from Indo-European languages [King, 2009, p. 555]) and Nepali halo (‘plow’) led to Ramesh Sir’s reanalysis of the sentence in Line 12:

\[
\begin{align*}
\text{khet-mā} & \quad \text{halo-le} & \quad \text{jot-in-cha} \\
\text{field-LOC} & \quad \text{plow-ERG} & \quad \text{plow-PASS-3SG}
\end{align*}
\]

‘In the field it is plowed by the plow’

The example above uses the Nepali ergative marker on the noun halo (plow), marking the plow as the agent in the sentence, even though the passive verb does not require an explicit agent. Note, however, that the locative postposition on the first word of the sentence, khet-mā (field-LOC), makes this sentence particularly odd. Without the locative “khet halole jotincha” could have been reasonably glossed as ‘The field is plowed by the plow,’ but with the locative, the awkwardness of the English gloss ‘In the field it is plowed by the plow’ is an accurate reflection of the similar awkwardness of the Nepali version. Whatever reasoning led to the production of this sentence, it is a clear illustration of the difficulties of translating between two languages with significantly different structures.
This example also demonstrates that instruction, even when it did not take the form of relexification exercises as in the previous section, was focused on language at the level of words. Rather than teaching patterns or grammatical forms, lessons took the form of word-by-word translation exercises. This analysis is not meant to be disparaging toward these teachers, who were asked to teach a language they had not previously taught, with minimal support or training, using a textbook that had not been field tested. Instead, I argue that the textbook, as a template for classroom interaction, and the classroom were sites where the language ideology of language as a collection of words was enacted through pedagogical practice.

### 7.1.4 Literacy practices

Many of the Class 1 Dhimal language classes involved drilling literacy, always through students copying over information from their textbook into their notebooks. I never saw a teacher, activist or SMC member question the importance of Dhimal literacy as part of teaching the language in school (though some survey respondents without close ties to schools thought that learning to read and write Dhimal was either impossible or a waste of time). In addition to teaching literacy in Dhimal, the Dhimal language teachers and others involved in Dhimal language education considered Dhimal language class a means to reinforce literacy in the Devanagari alphabet, which is also used for writing Nepali. Teachers often paired this reflection with a comment that Devanagari was a stopgap measure due to the Dhimal language’s lack of its own orthography; while the classical Herderian view may have seen a one-to-one relationship between language and nation, many of my interlocutors extended this ratio to include one writing system per language and nation (see Choksi, 2015 on orthography ideologies elsewhere in South
The Dhimal language teachers mentioned the use of Devanagari for writing Dhimal as both a shortcoming of the language but also as an advantage for teaching, because it meant that they could teach the same letters in both Nepali and Dhimal language classes.

Dhimal alphabet lessons unfolded in ways that were similar to literacy teaching in Nepali and English. In particular, there was a heavy emphasis on memorizing the forms of the letters, and in the two languages that used Devanagari, on the ways that consonant graphemes combine with vowels. Consonant symbols in Devanagari (e.g., ख, /kʌ/) are followed by an implied mid vowel. The vowel can be changed using diacritics to form other syllables:

\[
\begin{array}{cccccccc}
\text{क} & \text{का} & \text{कि} & \text{की} & \text{कु} & \text{कू} & \text{के} & \text{कै} & \text{को} & \text{कौ} \\
/kʌ & ka & ki & kiː & ku & kuː & ke & kai & ko & kau/
\end{array}
\]

These consonant-vowel combinations were the topic of the first-grade class I examine below. Figure 9 shows the textbook pages for this lesson. Ramesh Sir introduced the Dhimal class by telling students to copy consonant-vowel combinations for about half of the consonants in Devanagari:

1 Ramesh sir: \textit{ka dekhī yo ca cā cī cī samma lekhne} ‘write from ka to ca cā cī’

Ramesh Sir’s instruction in Line 1, to write from \textit{ka} (the first letter of the alphabet) to \textit{ca} with the vowel diacritics attached, was followed by comments by the students as they

\[27\] Further evidence comes from a story that I heard from a couple people that Nepal wasn’t admitted to the United Nations on its first application because it used the same writing system as Hindi, which India had used when it became a member. In the story, it was only after Nepal reapplied using the Newari script that they were admitted to the UN. Nepal’s first attempt to join the UN was rebuffed, not because of orthography, but because Nepal’s sovereignty vis-a-vis Britain’s informal control of the country was questioned by other member nations (A. Mulmi, 2017)
figured out what page they were supposed to work on and Ramesh Sir attempted to
arrange the students in rows and check that everyone had brought their notebook:

2  S2:  yo yo yo  ‘this this this’
3  S1:  oy Simran, yo  ‘hey Simran, this’
4  Ramesh sir:  pachāḍī, pachāḍī, ek janā, ey, yahā [rearranging
                      students]. bethyo sable,
                      copy?  behind, behind, one person,
                      hey. here. [rearranging
                      students]. Did everyone find
                      their notebook?

Figure 9: Dhimal textbook lesson on consonant-vowel combinations

Following this set-up, there was a period of silence, followed by students speaking the
decontextualized syllables aloud as they wrote. As the students wrote, Ramesh Sir joined
me on the bench on the side of the classroom where I was sitting and told me a story
about his morning, during which he had gotten hurt while playing soccer. Around five
minutes into the class period, he left the room while children continued writing, talking to
each other occasionally, and commenting on each other’s handwriting, mostly with negative evaluations of their peers whose handwriting was too small or messy. Around twelve minutes into the class period, Ramesh Sir returned along with a female teacher he had been talking with. They continued their conversation, again while students continued copying syllables. Ramesh Sir checked one student’s writing, telling her:

5 Ramesh sir: la, pheri lekhne, yahā kati bigrieko
‘ok, write again, so many of these here are messy’

Once again, he returned to talking with the female teacher and me, complaining that the recent combination of earthquakes and strikes had gotten children out of the habit of attending school on a daily basis. Aside from one moment when I gently chided the boys of the class, who were getting noisy, and Ramesh Sir followed up by singling out specific troublemakers, no teacher addressed the students again for the rest of the class period. Even after the bell rang marking the end of the period, Ramesh Sir continued telling me about his soccer injury and daily early-morning soccer games. Around three minutes into the next period, Ramesh Sir returned to the chalkboard, changed the subject heading from sthāniya bhāshā (‘local language’) to Math, and addressed the class:

6 Ramesh sir: math now. write this, one to hundred. only numbers. no need to write the numbers name, only write the numbers, one two three four five six seven eight nine ten and eleven twelve thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen, like this, up to hundred. tyo ka kā ki kī tyo dhimal bhāshā pani bholi gharma dekhi liera, that is your homework. ‘Math now. Write this. One to hundred. Only numbers, no need to write the number’s name, only write the numbers one two three four five six seven eight nine ten and eleven twelve thirteen fourteen fifteen sixteen, like this, up to hundred. That ka kā kī kī, bring that Dhimal language from home tomorrow. That is your homework.’
Turning from the Dhimal language class, Ramesh Sir began taking a similar approach to the teaching of math, by having students repeatedly write decontextualized segments of the graphemes that make up literacy or numeracy.

This literacy lesson characterized languages in several ways. Like most of the content taught in these classrooms, school knowledge was represented as something entirely decontextualized from the rest of the world. In this case, literacy was stripped not only of the context of things that might happen outside of the school walls, but syllables were even stripped of the context of any meaning whatsoever. The teacher provided no tokens of spoken Dhimal language during the lesson, and in fact produced remarkably few utterances directed toward the children for the entire time that they were in his classroom. The teaching method reflected what happens when theorists who see literacy as an autonomous technology with inherent benefits (e.g., Goody & Watt, 1963; Ong, 1982) plan lessons, rather than those who see literacy as a socially embedded practice (e.g., Heath, 1983; Hornberger, 2003; New London Group, 1996; Street, 1984, 1993, 2003; cases from Nepal that view literacy as a socially embedded practice include Ahearn, 2001; Leve, 2001, 2007; Robinson-Pant, 2000).

More to the point of the rest of this chapter, this teaching method echoed lesson types that I observed in other classes, positioning the Dhimal language as equivalent to other school subjects. The Dhimal subject, despite talk about local languages making schooling more child-friendly or relevant for students, was not placed in any more local context than was Nepali or math. The opening of the math class that followed this Dhimal language lesson demonstrates that Dhimal and math were taught in nearly the same way.
on this day in Class 1, with students copying characters devoid of their connection to any sort of meaning in both subjects.

In addition, this lesson did not address the issues that might have made Dhimal challenging for students who spent most of their Devanagari reading time in Nepali. The individual syllable practice was always conducted with simple syllables of a consonant and vowel, but not (at least during classes I observed) with the more challenging consonant clusters. While Dhimal and Nepali use the same alphabet, there are differences between the phonemic inventories of Dhimal and Nepali (See Figure 10). These differences posed challenges to young readers who were never provided explicit instruction in the consonant clusters that exist in Dhimal but not in Nepali. The consonants of the Devanagari alphabet are represented by a base form followed by an implied schwa. Consonant clusters are represented by joint letters, known as *samyuktāṣara*. The Dhimal orthography also used these joint letters to represent breathy voiced consonants that are not already represented by Devanagari graphemes, leading to the presence of combinations of consonants in Dhimal writing that were unfamiliar to students used to using Devanagari to write Nepali. While these joint letters were not part of the lessons focused on copying over individual consonants such as the one described above, they did appear in lessons that involved whole Dhimal words.

The presence of joint characters in the Dhimal lessons that were not a part of written Nepali stymied students in lessons during which they were focused on memorizing individual nouns. Based on my classroom observations, these ligatures presented significant difficulty for students, a difficulty that was not always recognized by teachers who focused on memorization of the consonants of the alphabet and the ways
they combine with vowels. Teachers less frequently devoted explicit attention to the ways that consonants combine with each other, in either Nepali or Dhimal language classes, or the differences between sounds in the two languages. Rather than teaching the differences between the languages explicitly or spending more time on the features of Dhimal that presented particular challenges to students, the orthographies were treated as if they were straightforward and entirely the same.

**Figure 10:** Phonemic inventories of Dhimal and Nepali

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Bilabial</th>
<th>Labiodental</th>
<th>Dental</th>
<th>Alveolar</th>
<th>Post-alveolar</th>
<th>Retr al</th>
<th>Palatal</th>
<th>Velar</th>
<th>Glottal</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Plosive</strong></td>
<td>p</td>
<td>b</td>
<td>t</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>d</td>
<td>dʱ</td>
<td>k</td>
<td>g</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>pʰ</td>
<td>bʰ</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>dʰ</td>
<td>tʰ</td>
<td>dʰ</td>
<td></td>
<td>kʰ</td>
<td>gʱ</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Nasal</strong></td>
<td>m</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n</td>
<td>n⁵</td>
<td>nʱ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>η</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Tap or flap</strong></td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>r</td>
<td>rʱ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Affricate</strong></td>
<td>tf</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>dz</td>
<td>dz⁵</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>tfʰ</td>
<td>dz⁴</td>
<td>dz⁵</td>
<td>dz⁶</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Fricative</strong></td>
<td>s</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>h</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Approximant</strong></td>
<td>w</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>j</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>wʱ</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>jʱ</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Lateral approximant</strong></td>
<td>l</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Key: phonemes that appear in Dhimal, Nepali, or both languages.
Diphthongs: iu eu ai au oi ui

*appears in Dhimal only in loanwords from Indo-European languages, such as Nepali.
Sources: Dhimal inventory from King (2009); Nepali from Srivastava (2011)

For example, students spent more than one lesson drilling writing consonants with vowels attached. These drills followed the conventions of Nepali orthography. This meant that they included orthographic distinctions that are irrelevant to both spoken Nepali and Dhimal, for example between ि (ki; /ki/) and ी (ki:, /ki/), and also distinctions that are relevant to Nepali but not to Dhimal such क (ka) vs क (ka). Exercises meant to teach Dhimal writing thus fundamentally misrepresented the phonology of the language.

However, the effect of drilling the same set of graphemes as in Nepali class contributed to the effect discussed in earlier sections of Dhimal being positioned as a language on an equal footing to any other language.

7.2 Named Languages

Perhaps a logical necessity of the implicit metacommentary about the equivalence of languages inherent in the relexification exercises was teachers’ assignment of particular speech forms to named languages. This was not just a feature of Dhimal language classes, as I will demonstrate in examples drawing from other subjects. In this section, I argue that students’ understandings of language varieties would be better
described as reflecting a sense of center and periphery (cf. Blommaert, 2010; LaDousa, 2014) than separate named objects. Teachers, on the other hand, attempted to reinforce the categorization of speech forms, especially individual words, into their respective languages, a task that took on a certain level of absurdity in languages that share many lexical items.

One morning, I was watching the kindergarten students while their teacher was called to the staff room for a meeting. In the classroom, I found a poster of various kinds of fruits, and used this to prompt a conversation with students, in which they named the fruits in Nepali and English and talked about whether they had eaten them, what kinds of plants they grew on, and if they taste good. When I pointed at the image of bananas, they named them “kola,” a lexeme commonly in use in Eastern Nepal (and also in Bengali). When I asked “angrezi bāṭa ke bhancha?” (‘what do they say in English?’), they responded with the standard Nepali “kerā” (‘banana’, f/n 8/27/15). This interaction demonstrated to me that children had a sense of speech varieties linked to centers or periphery, but not necessarily of the named language that they belong to.

A second observation that contributed to this interpretation was outside of the school context. Smarika, a girl who lived in Buttabari, was playing with her neighbor’s relatives who were visiting from their home in Kathmandu. When one came over to play, Smarika confirmed, “timi Kathmandumā baschau, hoina?” (‘You live in Kathmandu, right?’). After the neighbor girl nodded affirmation, Smarika gestured toward me and said, “la, English bola” (‘ok, speak English’). One of Smarika's regular playmates asked Smarika, “ani Kathmandumā English bolcha ra” (‘And they speak English in Kathmandu then?’). Smarika, seemingly offended, retorted, “ani Kathmandumā ke bolcha ra?”
(‘Then what else do they speak in English?’). Smarika’s assumption that English would be the language spoken in Kathmandu was based on Kathmandu’s position as central compared to her home in the eastern plains, and the analogous position of English as a language of the center, as compared to the Dhimal or Nepali spoken at home (fn 11/7/15).

Students’ confusion about the distribution of lexemes and named languages was on clear display in classrooms, especially during the relexification exercises described above, in which students frequently offered lexemes with the correct referent but that belonged to the wrong named language. This was not restricted to any one of the classrooms. For example, Saraswati Secondary School, students offered *fish* as the Dhimal translation of the Nepali:

1 Miss:  *māchālāi ke bhancha?*  ‘what do they call fish?’  I
2 Ss:  *fish*  ‘fish’  R
3 Miss:  *ani dvīmal bhāshāmā māchālāi ke bhanchan kolāi thāhā cha?*  ‘and who knows what they call fish in Dhimal language?’  I
4 Ss:  *fish*  ‘fish’  R

In this passage, the teacher attempted twice to elicit the Dhimal translation of *māchā* (fish), first by asking without specifying the target language in Line 1, and again in Line 3 after specifying that she was talking about Dhimal language. In both cases, students replied with the English *fish*. In this interaction, it was only after several more minutes of trying to quiet students who were enthusiastically retelling tales of their experiences with fish that the teacher was finally able to entice students to repeat the Dhimal word. Similarly, in Class 1 at Krishna Lower Secondary School, students repeatedly gave
English translations of words when Ramesh Sir appeared to be looking for Nepali ones; though he did not explicitly comment on their content, he repeated the Nepali form immediately following English translations, but did not do the same when students offered the Nepali word:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ss:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ss:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ramesh Sir:</th>
<th></th>
<th>Ss:</th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td><em>puhā</em></td>
<td>‘lion’</td>
<td></td>
<td><em>lion</em></td>
<td>‘lion’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>singha</em></td>
<td>‘lion’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>singha</em></td>
<td>‘lion’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>jharayo</em></td>
<td>‘deer’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>nihā</em></td>
<td>‘deer’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>jihā</em></td>
<td>‘parrot’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>parrot</em></td>
<td>‘parrot’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td><em>uh. suga</em></td>
<td>‘yes. parrot’</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this chain of utterances, each consisting of a single word, Ramesh Sir provided the names of animals, which students either repeated or translated. In the case of deer (Lines 5-6), students provided the Nepali translation and Ramesh Sir immediately moved on to the next. For both lion (Lines 1-4) and parrot (Lines 7-9), students answered with the English translations, which Ramesh Sir implicitly rejected by giving Nepali translations, which students also repeated before they moved on to the next item.

The attempts by teachers to sort lexemes into their proper language boxes reached a level of absurdity when it came to words that are shared between Dhimal and Nepali, most notably *gai* (cow), as in the following excerpt:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Miss:</th>
<th><em>gāilāi hāmile dhimal</em></th>
<th>‘what do we say for cow in I</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Line</th>
<th>Student Response</th>
<th>Teacher Response</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td><em>gai</em></td>
<td>‘cow’ R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td><em>gai</em> bhanchaūm. ke bhanchūm?</td>
<td>‘we say cow. What do we say?’ I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td><em>gai</em></td>
<td>‘cow’ R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td><em>gai</em>. ani englishmā dog bhanchūm ani nepalimā kukur ani dhimal bhāshāmā ke bhanchūm kukurlāi?</td>
<td>‘cow. And in English we say dog, and in Nepali dog and what do we say for dog in Dhimal language?’ I</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>dog</td>
<td>‘dog’ R</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>englishmā ho dog. ani dhimal bhāshāmā ke bhanchūm?</td>
<td>‘dog is in English. And what do we say in Dhimal language?’ E, I (8/19/15)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

In this example, the teacher at Saraswati Secondary School began by asking students for the Dhimal translation of *gāi*, which is, as a student correctly answered *gai*. Her positive evaluation of the student’s response in Line 3 and again in Line 5 after the whole class successfully repeated *gai*, makes no acknowledgment that the Dhimal and Nepali are identical phonological forms. This may be part of why a student offered *dog* as the Dhimal translation of dog in Line 6, even after the teacher explained that *dog* was the English word for the Nepali *kukur* (‘dog’. Alternatively, perhaps young students were just confused by the exercise and repeating the key word from the teacher’s previous utterance as a strategy to divine the correct answer).

The Dhimal lessons included a metapragmatic message about the existence of separate named languages. When students were confused about which phonological string fit into which language-labeled set, they were swiftly, if not always explicitly, corrected. The existence of separate named languages was not necessarily the way that
students interpreted the linguistic forms they encountered around them. In addition, social
and historical facts of language variation provided evidence to muddy the waters of these
supposedly clear divisions. The case of *kola* and *kera*, the regional and national Nepali
words for ‘banana,’ demonstrates that young children attempted to fit intralinguistic
variation into the rubric of separate languages. At the same time, a past of language
contact means that there is significant lexical overlap between Dhimal and Nepali, and
even English. Children’s interpretations of linguistic boundaries were influenced by the
evidence they heard around them, which did not always point to the same interpretation
of named languages that their teachers attempted to enforce in the classroom.

7.3 Dominant Language and Culture in the Dhimal Classroom

As in some other contexts of language revitalization, the Dhimal language courses
maintained the dominant language, in this case Nepali, as the matrix language of the time
set aside for teaching Dhimal (Meek, 2010). This had the effect of marking the use of
Dhimal in the classroom as an oddity, rather than changing the alignment of languages
and their appropriateness in schooling contexts. In addition, the use of Nepali in the
classroom throughout the Dhimal subject classes meant that students received instruction
in how to use Nepali as a communicative medium more often than they learned how to
use Dhimal for communicative purposes. At the same time, the pervasive presence of an
ethnically bleached national culture meant that the Dhimal courses that I observed
included minimal Dhimal culture-specific instruction or content.
7.3.1 Nepali as matrix language

One immediate effect of this pattern of language use was that students heard far more Nepali language in Dhimal class than they did Dhimal. A representative excerpt from the Dhimal class at Saraswati Secondary School demonstrates that most of the talk in Dhimal class occurred in Nepali:

In this excerpt, the teacher introduced the Dhimal subject and attempted to have students recall what they had studied the last time they worked on Dhimal subject. In this...
stretch of talk, only one target lexical item, **buksukgelai** (animals) was produced in Dhimal. The rest of the discussion, including repetition of the subject, **Dhimal book** (which is bivalent in Woolard’s [1999] sense, as it could plausibly be considered Nepali or English), and repetition of the Nepali **janāwarharu** (animals) was in Nepali. Of the teacher’s five turns in the excerpt, three included the same single token of Dhimal language; of the students’ five turns in the excerpt, one was the single targeted Dhimal lexeme. This was typical of the balance of languages in Dhimal language classes, which included significantly more Nepali than Dhimal.

The distribution of languages in the Dhimal class was imbalanced not only in amounts but in function, or, more specifically, the absence of Dhimal employed for communicative purposes. Dhimal was positioned as an object to be memorized, not as a language to be used for functional purposes. For example, classroom management talk nearly always took place in Nepali or English, as in this case from KLSS Class 1, in which the class ended with the repetition of a poem from the Dhimal textbook:

1 Ramesh Sir: **jharay militey ela**  
2 Ss: **jharay militey ela**  
3 Ramesh Sir: **parheli hanay ne**  
4 Ss: **parheli hanay ne**  
5 Ramesh Sir: **unh. aba yo bholi timro lekhe. gharma, yo lekhera ek page yo dekhera lekhera liera lyane. padhera pani lekhera pani**

`ok. Now tomorrow, your writing, at home. Write this, this one page. Looking, writing, bring this. Having read, and having written too. (10/26/2015)`

While the instructional content was purely in Dhimal with no translation, when Ramesh Sir moved to explaining what students were supposed to do for homework (Line
5), he simultaneously switched out of the frame of the Dhimal content and into Nepali. As Gumperz (1972, 1972/1970; also Goffman, 1979) points out, code switching often implies a shift in conversational context, an observation that is apt for understanding this stretch of classroom discourse. In the footing of Lines 1-4 in the excerpt above, as well as the several minutes preceding this excerpt, Ramesh Sir and the students were co-animators of the text included in the textbook. The text, though, is best understood as a set of unmoored phonological forms; at least in this class session, the text was never linked to any semantic content. Students participated successfully in this participation framework, producing sufficiently accurate repetitions in Lines 2 and 4, and several before this excerpt, that Ramesh Sir accepted their replies and moved on to subsequent lines of the textbook lesson. In the shift in Line 5, though, Ramesh Sir moved to communicating information to the students about what they were expected to do for homework. For the provision of information about what students were actually supposed to do, he shifted to using exclusively Nepali.

The relegation of Dhimal to an object to be studied but not a language used for communicative purposes is also shown in the moments when teachers did interpret the text; in these cases, the work of meaning-making took place in Nepali while the only tokens of Dhimal produced were isolated segments, generally those presented in the textbook. In contrast, the tokens of Nepali language produced were elaborated and related to students’ understanding. The following excerpt is from a lesson in which Nambar Sir led the KLSS Class 2 students in reading a poem in their textbook.

1 Nambar Sir: \( bhale \ kukhur\bar{a} \ \text{dhimal} \\
\phantom{b} \ \text{bh}\acute{a}\text{sh}\ddot{a}\text{ma} \ \text{ke}\ \text{bancha} \) \begin{tabular}{l} What is rooster called in Dhimal language? \end{tabular} \\
2 S1: \begin{tabular}{l} \text{kiya} \end{tabular} \begin{tabular}{l} chicken \end{tabular}
In this excerpt, Nambar Sir began by introducing a vocabulary term, *dañgai kiya*, ‘rooster’. In Line 5, after a student translated rooster as the generic *kiya*, ‘chicken’, Nambar Sir’s response included Dhimal tokens only in the context of providing the target forms, surrounded by verbs entirely in Nepali. Similarly, when providing the English translation in Line 9 (another example of the relexification exercises described in an
earlier section), Nambar Sir surrounded the English target form with Nepali function words. In Line 11, Nambar Sir began describing the situation described in the poem. Again, the only tokens of Dhimal language produced were forms from the textbook.

A similar pattern was displayed in a discussion of roosters in the SSS Dhimal class, in which *kiya* (chicken) was the only token of Dhimal produced in a long sequence discussing the way roosters call:

1. Miss: *kukhūralai ke bhancha paḍheka hāmile? ke bhancha bhaneka thiyum?* la. What did we learn they say for chicken? What did we say they say? Ok.
2. S1: *kiya* chicken
3. Miss: *ke bhaneka thiyum?* What had we said? I
4. Ss: *kiya* chicken
5. Miss: *kiya, ani kiya kasari karauncha bhaneka thiyum?* kiya. and how did we say chicken cries?
6. Ss: *kukurika* [and other cacophony] cock-a-doodle-doo [etc.] R
7. Miss: *kasari karauncha re?* How do they cry? I
8. Ss: *kukurika* [and other cacophony] cock-a-doodle-doo [etc.] R
10. Ss: *kukurika* [and other cacophony] cock-a-doodle-doo [etc.] R
11. Miss: *ani bascha basdaina kiyale?* And does a chicken crow or not?
12. Ss: *bascha* it crows R
13. Miss: *kasari bascha?* how does it crow? I
14. Ss: *kukurika bascha, kukurika* It crows kukurika, kukurika R
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Turn</th>
<th>Dialogue</th>
<th>Translation</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>Miss: <em>kati baje uthera bascha? kati baje uthera basdo rahecha? kati baje?</em> [student shows five fingers] <em>tyati bhaneko kati ho?</em></td>
<td>what time does it wake up and crow? What time do you hear it wake up and crow? What time? [student shows five fingers] how many is that?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16</td>
<td>Ss: <em>pāc, pāc</em></td>
<td>five, five</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17</td>
<td>Miss: <em>ani hāmro gharko bhalele kati baje bascha bhaneko thiyo</em></td>
<td>and what time had we said that our house’s rooster cries?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18</td>
<td>Ss: <em>pāc, pāc baje</em></td>
<td>five, five’o’clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Miss: <em>pāc baje ta hoina</em></td>
<td>it’s not five’o’clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>S1: <em>tin baje</em></td>
<td>three o’clock</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>Miss: <em>tin baje rāti uthera bhaneka thiena? kati baje uthera bascha?</em></td>
<td>hadn’t we said that they wake up at three’o’clock? What time do they wake up and crow?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>Ss: <em>tin baje</em></td>
<td>three o'clock</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

This stretch of classroom discourse was exclusively in Nepali, except for the onomatopoetic depiction of a rooster’s crow that could be used in either language (Lines 10 and 14) and the single lexeme *kiya*. Of the 22 turns shown above, students produced the lexeme *kiya* twice, while the teacher used it in three turns, leaving the vast majority of turns in this excerpt in Nepali. In Lines 9 and 11, the teacher not only used the single Dhimal lexeme *kiya* in an otherwise Nepali sentence but also employed Nepali morphology:

\[
\text{kasari karaun-cha re kiya-le} \\
\text{how cry-3s ASS chicken-ERG} \\
\text{‘How did you say a chicken cries?’}
\]

\[
\text{ani bas-cha bas-daina kiya-le}
\]
and cry-3s  cry-3s.NEG  chicken-ERG

‘And does a chicken crow or not?’

In the two examples above, the teacher in the SSS Dhimal language class used the target form that she had been discussing with students, kiya (chicken), in a grammatically Nepali sentence and with the Nepali ergative suffix -le. Dhimal, a nominative-accusative language, has no equivalent to the Nepali -le, which in this context serves to give the connotation of a habitual behavior. This furthers the point made in previous sections of this chapter that Dhimal was treated in Dhimal classes as a collection of individual words, without communicative function or even morphosyntax; in this case, the use of Nepali morphology with one Dhimal lexeme in the sentence is a clear example of the treatment of Dhimal as a set of lexemes without other elements of a linguistic system.

The excerpt above demonstrates also that much of the instruction that students received in Dhimal language classes was actually about Nepali language. In Line 15 above, the teacher asked what time roosters crow. One of the students answered by holding up her hand with all five fingers outstretched. Responding to this, the teacher asked how many that was, encouraging her student to produce the word ṁāc (‘five’). While five was not the answer the teacher hoped to receive (since she insisted that roosters crow at three), she used this opportunity to work with students on producing Nepali numbers.

Another frequent issue in students’ Nepali speech was the use of appropriate levels of formality or honorificity, and this was also addressed in the Dhimal language class. Nepali verbs obligatorily carry suffixes marking the formality of a statement, or,
more specifically, indexing the speaker’s relationship to the subject being talked about (Ahearn, 2001; Agha, 2007a). Children frequently used what their teachers (and sometimes their peers) considered to be overly informal verb conjugations. Dhimal does not mark verbs for formality, a characteristic of the language that some Dhimal speakers thought made their language easier to learn (interview, 3/20/15). In Dhimal language classes, this structural difference between the languages meant that the teacher’s choice of verb forms was itself a metapragmatic commentary on the appropriate verb form for children to use when talking about an older person:

1 Ramesh Sir: \textit{waray bhanne?} \quad \textit{man means?} \quad I \\
2 Ss: \quad \textit{budho mānche} \quad \text{old man} \quad R \\
3 Ramesh Sir: \quad \textit{huh. waray bahar khaṅkhe} \quad \text{yeah. The man looks outside.} \quad E, I \\
4 Ss: \quad \textit{hercha} \quad \text{he looks(mid formal)} \quad R \\
5 Ramesh Sir: \quad \textit{hernuhuncha} \quad \text{he looks(high formal)} \quad E \\
6 S1: \quad \textit{hernuhuncha} \quad \text{he looks(high formal)} \quad R \\

In this excerpt, Ramesh Sir provided a sample Dhimal sentence in Line 3, and students accurately produced the correct Nepali verb in the following line. In Line 5, though, Ramesh Sir corrected them to use the more elevated form of the verb, a distinction that does not exist in Dhimal. The Dhimal language classes not only took place largely in Nepali language, with Nepali fulfilling all communicative purposes and Dhimal only slotted in as source material, but students received metapragmatic evaluation and instruction about their use of Nepali. The correction of \textit{hercha} to \textit{hernuhuncha} is necessarily not a comment on the students’ understanding of Dhimal, because either is a plausible translation of the Dhimal \textit{khaṅkhe}. Ramesh Sir’s correction to \textit{hernuhuncha}
was instead a comment on the ways students should learn to speak Nepali, in this case, by using the self-lowering form of a verb to refer to an old man, even when he is not part of the speech situation but being referred to.

In my notes and recordings from Dhimal language classes, I found only a few exceptions to the pattern of classroom management taking place in Nepali. Ramesh Sir tried occasionally to tell students what their assignment was in Dhimal instead of in Nepali. When he did this, he frequently repeated his instructions immediately afterward in Nepali. When he gave instructions in Dhimal and did not repeat himself, students either asked in Nepali about what they were supposed to be doing, or repeated the words he had said, assuming that the unfamiliar words were part of the lesson they were supposed to be memorizing. Despite these few exceptions, there was a robust pattern of Nepali serving as the matrix language for the class.

7.3.2 Cultural content in the Dhimal class

In addition to the linguistic aspects of mother tongue subjects, advocates emphasized the importance of cultural information familiar to children, whose home cultures may otherwise be erased in mainstream schooling contexts. This goal was articulated by policymakers and documents in Kathmandu, and by Dhimal community members I spoke to. For example, when I asked Krishna Bahadur Dhimal, the head teacher at KLSS and one of the trainers in the Dhimal language subject teacher trainings, what they taught at training for Dhimal language teachers, his answer emphasized cultural content alongside the linguistic information they covered:

\textit{eh, bhāshā sambandhit talimmā ke ke sikaincha bhane, aba hāmro languagemā kun kun aksharharu, tyasko}  
\text{Well, what’s taught at the language training is, well which letters are in our language, their sounds, how}
they are. And which letters to use, about that. And what our various holidays are. And the clothes we wear, outfits, how they are, our jewelry and all. About these topics, provide them, give them information.

(Interview 4/8/2015)

In Krishna Sir’s recounting of the Dhimal language teacher trainings, he mentioned the importance of teaching teachers about not just linguistic matters but also cultural information like holidays, clothing and jewelry.

Despite this framing of the language class, the Dhimal classes that I observed included almost no cultural information specific to the Dhimal community. As discussed above, much of the course content consisted of decontextualized letters, syllables, and words, few of them specific to Dhimal cultural identity. When there were examples of connected text, the content of the classes I observed were about everyday matters stripped of any ethnic valence, such as the process of waking up and getting ready for school, or the importance of studying well in school. Even a lesson written based on a Dhimal nursery rhyme had been edited to include stanzas about the importance of going to school.

While there were illustrations meant to represent the Dhimal community in the textbooks, in class sessions I did not observe these being commented on or used in instruction. In fact, one of the photos that was discussed extensively was of a rooster crowing, which accompanied a poem about waking up in the morning to prepare for school, and loving one’s country (see the excerpt above from this same lesson). During the lesson about this poem, Nambar Sir directed students to look at the drawing in the
book. Rather than focusing on the rooster crowing, which was the relevant connection to
the written text, a student noted that the rooster was crowing in front of an image of hills,
an unfamiliar scene for students who lived in the plains:

1 Nambar Sir: *lho abau, sona lho, bhanna āundaina? hoina, dhangai kiya ohoi, bhaneko, la, babu, uṭha uṭha uṭha, bhale kukhurā bajna thālyo, bajdaicha, hoina. jenka pohor jeg hoi, ujyālo bhayo aba, ujyālo bhayo hai. uṭha babu bhaneko.*

   You can’t say *wake up now, wake up child?* Ok, the rooster has *crowed,* means, ok, child, wake up wake up wake up, the rooster has started to crow, it’s crowing. Right? *It’s become morning light,* it’s become light now, it’s become light ok. It means, wake up child.

2 Student: *yahā niri*

3 Teacher: *hoina, ela bela lholi*

   around here

4 Student: *yahā pahaḍ, sir, pahaḍ tira*

   There’s a hill, sir, hillside

5 Teacher: *ho, yahā ghām dubinecha hai. ghām dubine citra cha.*

   Yes, here we see the sun is rising. It’s a picture of the sun rising.

6 Student: *ghām pahaḍma cha*

   The sun is in the hills

7 Teacher: *yelai pāḍhna āune rahecha. arule pāḍhna na āune rahecha. la pheri, pheri*

   I see he knows how to read. I see others can’t read. Ok, again, again.

While Nambar Sir reclaimed control of the lesson after only a few turns, the conversation
returned to the topic of hills later in the lesson, also prompted by the anomalous
illustration. Hills loom large in the Nepali national imaginary, in which the plains have
been seen as barely part of the nation (Bennike, 2015; Gaige, 1975). The Dhimal
textbook, written and illustrated to represent the cultural practices of people who live
almost exclusively in plains, in the end perpetuated the image of hills as the unmarked
terrain.
In another classroom conversation, the inclusion of a Dhimal food practice was interpreted by a Bahun Class 1 student as evidence of the dirtiness of Dhimal practices, an interpretation that the Bahun teacher did not counter.

While Ramesh Sir attempted to teach an example sentence about a common Dhimal practice of eating reheated, fried leftover rice for breakfast, one student’s commentary reflected the orthodox Bahun dietary rule that leftover rice must not be eaten (Stone, 1978). Ramesh Sir continued with the lesson without addressing the student’s comments, which he may not have heard. Nevertheless, this is a useful demonstration of how bringing information considered to be a cultural practice into the classroom is not
automatically an empowering experience, but may run the risk of stigmatizing or reinscribing the backwardness of particular groups. At least for this young student, who was learning strict Hindu rules about eating at home, the course seemed to teach that Dhimal foodways were disgusting and wrong. On the other hand, I knew from talking to her peers that many of them, from various caste and ethnic backgrounds, ate reheated leftover rice as their morning meal, so it was not actually an exclusively Dhimal practice. In this case, then, the example of eating fried rice might have been familiar to students of various backgrounds, but might also have taught the more orthodox Hindu students that Dhimals ate things that were considered dirty in their own households.

7.4 Conclusion

If language learning involves gaining communicative competence in a phonological-lexical-syntactic system, then language learning did not occur in the Dhimal language classroom. There was perhaps some memorization of individual lexical items or even of songs and poems, but no student was gaining the ability to produce a novel sentence in Dhimal. Similarly, within the literacy practices of the course, students learned little beyond writing individual letters with no referents. Teaching practices did reinforce the separation of named languages, a concept that students did not always demonstrate a complete grasp of, and additionally reinforced lessons about Nepali language that students learned in other parts of their school day.

The three teachers who I observed teaching tried to teach a novel subject, with limited professional development or other forms of support in this endeavor. Each one took this task seriously, for example with Nambar Sir devoting free periods to writing up
matching game cards, or Ramesh Sir studying a Dhimal-Nepali-English glossary to strengthen his grasp of Dhimal language. The production of the textbooks had also been a monumental effort by the compilers and editors; in fact, as the previous chapters of this dissertation have demonstrated, the existence of a Dhimal class was the result of hard work by many actors. The intention of this chapter is not to condemn the teachers’ practices but rather to better understand the teaching practices employed in the Dhimal language class and the ways they were informed by ideologies of language, education, and culture.

Significant parts of the literature and policy discourse around teaching minoritized languages in schools focuses on a presumed linkage between language and culture. For example, in a report for Save the Children, Pinnock (2009) reported:

An approach termed ‘mother tongue based multilingual education’ (MTBMLE) is seen as one of the most practical approaches to dealing with the need for multiple languages in education. MTBMLE makes the child’s language, culture and context the foundation of learning. It starts by using the child’s language throughout school, and gradually introduces a second or even a third language as the child progresses through education. The child’s first language remains the key language of education throughout.

While the Dhimal course was one language subject rather than a wholesale change in medium of instruction, bringing minoritized languages into the classroom is meant to provide an antidote to school practices divorced from students’ out-of-school practices and knowledge. In addition, teaching in previously excluded languages is supposed to provide a space for transmission of traditional knowledge that might otherwise be lost when students spend the majority of their day in classrooms and completing homework.

Observation of Dhimal language classes, though, demonstrated that classroom practices did not achieve these goals. Instead, teaching practices focused on drawing
equivalency between Dhimal, English, and Nepali. Rather than emphasizing concepts or knowledge unique to Dhimal cultural practices, students memorized texts created for the Dhimal language classroom that mimicked the same content that they encountered in other subjects. The lessons I observed contained little unique to Dhimal cultural practices, other than the lexicon, and occasionally grammar, of the items being taught.

These lessons seemed to imply an equivalency between the three languages that students might encounter at school, an equal footing that misrepresents their relative positions in the world. Even within the classroom, Dhimal was confined to a single period four times per week, and within that period Nepali was used as the matrix language of the classroom, with Dhimal and English both positioned as objects to be learned. Classroom management talk was always in Nepali or English, further marginalizing Dhimal within the space where it was meant to be privileged.

Finally, close observation of students’ understandings of the relationships between languages sets the stage for the following chapter, which investigates language acquisition, and non-acquisition, in out-of-school contexts. As teachers’ attempts to separate words into their respective named language categories, and students’ own understandings of the relative centrality and power of various speech forms demonstrated, the distinction between named languages was not always clear. While the idea of named languages and the separation of speech forms into those named languages is influenced by centuries of political effort, there was evidence that in practice these divisions were not as clear, at least to children, as their teachers aimed to make them. As we turn to consideration of language shift, it will remain important to maintain skepticism
about the clarity of the boundaries between different languages, not just among children but also among adults.
Chapter 8: Language shift and the listening subject

We’re sitting on the porch of the house where I lived during fieldwork; mostly women and children enjoying a few minutes respite between household and farming tasks, and Man Sir who has just returned from school and is resting before changing his clothes and going to the fields. Someone starts addressing Angela’s eight-month-old little sister in Dhimal; Angela’s mother mock-instructs the baby in what to say to respond appropriately, but then says, “velāi Dhimal bolna āundaina” (‘this one [the baby] doesn’t speak Dhimal’). The baby is eight months old and doesn’t speak at all yet. Man Sir says, “boldinu parcha” (‘you need to speak it [Dhimal] to her’). Angela’s mom says, “Angelalāi pani āundaina, khali Nepali, ma Nepali bolchu, gāli garne mātra Dhimal bāṭa garchu” (‘Angela doesn’t know it either, just Nepali. I speak Nepali. I use Dhimal only to scold’).

The Dhimal community was undergoing language shift. Where daily communication had once taken place in Dhimal, Nepali was increasingly employed as the code for daily interactions. I could see this every day in interactions within and across Dhimal families, where there were distinct age-related patterns of language use. The age dividing line of young people who seemed to speak Dhimal or not varied depending on factors such as the relative rural or urban setting of a village, the particular family, gender, and birth order. Despite some small variation, it was clear that younger people were dominant in Nepali language and rarely if ever spoke Dhimal, while older people preferred speaking in Dhimal with other middle-aged or older Dhimals.

In this chapter, I discuss the factors that have caused this phenomenon in the Dhimal community, with a focus on the practices and perspectives of children, such as Angela and her little sister described in the fieldnote excerpt above. This chapter draws from a number of data sources, especially daily fieldnotes in which I developed and refined my understanding of the standard patterns of interaction in Buttabari and
Arnakhari, the Dhimal villages I knew best, and noted interactions that broke those patterns. Another important data source for this discussion is a survey that I conducted in the villages of Buttabari and Arnakhari. In my survey, conducted with the assistance of a 23-year-old Dhimal woman, I conducted interviews, many of them recorded, that combined filling in a survey questionnaire with as many open-ended questions as my interlocutor seemed willing to answer. I reached 146 households, with 136 audio-recorded interviews totaling 11 hours of recording; in addition to my own questions, these conversations often covered a discussion of my broader purpose in being in the village, their evaluation of the ongoing rice harvest, and discussion of local and national events (See discussion in Section 3.3).

The study of language shift, like most sociolinguistic topics, requires attention to multiple levels of scale. Susan Gal put this clearly in the introduction to her early ethnographic study of language shift: “In studying language shift, I was studying the impact of large-scale historical processes on the minute details of intimate verbal interaction and of individuals’ linguistic expression of their own identities. The macroscopic and the microscopic levels of analysis dovetailed” (1979, p. xi). While this is, of course, true of all kinds of interactions, language shift is a clear example of the principle that, as Fishman wrote, “just as there is no societally unencumbered verbal interaction so are there no large-scale relationships between language and society that do not depend on individual interaction for their realization” (1972, p. 31). Language shift is the outcome of large-scale social processes like migration, mediatized phenomena like schooling, and also the result of face-to-face interactions. At the same time, language shift, or “the gradual displacement of one language by another in the lives of the
community members” (Dorian, 1982, p. 44) only exists as a change in interactions, or in patterns of interactions, over time. That is to say, while schooling, migration or other factors may be useful for understanding the reasons why there are changes in the linguistic codes used for particular interactions, the shift that takes place occurs in individual interactions.

In addition, linguistic practices are always imbued with metacommentary, whether explicit comments on the linguistic choices that people make or the ways that people speak. For example, in the vignette that opened this chapter, Angela’s mother made explicit comments about how to talk to children, saying that her baby did not speak Dhimal, but also made a statement about the interaction by using of Nepali to make that comment. This was not a matter of proficiency; Angela’s mother often spoke in Dhimal in conversations with the same set of neighbors who were on the porch that day. As an isolated conversation, understanding her switch to Nepali for this comment would be impossible; however, viewed in concert with the interactions that I observed and participated in, this becomes one token of a broader pattern of adults addressing and talking about children in Nepali rather than Dhimal.

In this chapter, I devote attention to multiple levels of scale in order to provide an adequate treatment of the phenomenon of language shift in this community. As Gal has argued, “what is of interest to know is not whether industrialization, for instance, is correlated with language shift, but rather: By what intervening processes does industrialization, or any other social change, effect changes in the uses to which speakers put their languages in everyday interactions?” (1979, p. 3). To this end, I lay out some of the large-scale processes that were relevant to language shift in this context, analogous to
the process of industrialization that was a central factor in Gal’s study of Hungarian and German. Following discussion of these societal processes, I move to the interactional patterns that created language shift in practice. Having described the common standard interactional patterns that limited opportunities for children to produce Dhimal speech, I discuss exceptions to this pattern, of times when children were addressed in Dhimal and when they produced Dhimal. I devote particular attention to interactions in which children’s Dhimal language proficiency was tested and evaluated by older interlocutors. The chapter concludes with reflections on methodological and other implications of these findings for the study of language shift.

8.1 Societal Processes Influencing Language Shift

One morning, I had a long conversation with retired teacher Buddhi Lal Dhimal on the back porch of his house. While we spoke, his wife and daughter washed dishes and cooked nearby, and two of his grandsons intermittently ran past, sometimes stopping by to examine my recorder or ask for intervention in conflicts that arose during their games. Hoping to move beyond the political talking points that he offered at the beginning of the interview, I shifted the conversation to be about his language background:

MW: \textit{ani tapāĩ sāno hunda cahi\newline\textit{nepali bhāshā bolnuhunthyo\newline\textit{gharmā ki?}}

‘And when you were little, did you speak Nepali at home?’

Buddhi Lal: \textit{hoina, nepali bhāshā, ali\newline\textit{sānomā ta bolindainathyo, aba\newline\textit{tyatikerā hāmro pāλomā\newline\textit{kinabhanē yastari nepāλiharu\newline\textit{thiena hāmro gharma, aba\newline\textit{mātrai dhimalharu mātrai\newline\textit{thiyo. tyatikerā praya. sānomā}}}

‘No, at that time, in our turn, when I was small, well, Nepali wasn’t spoken because there weren’t Nepalis like this, in our house, well, just it was just Dhimals. At that time, mostly. When I was little I didn’t know
In this interview excerpt, Buddhi Lal identified two drivers of language shift in his community: the impact of in-migration, which has disrupted formerly homogeneous Dhimal communities, and the spread of schooling. In this section, I discuss these two societal processes tied to language shift, along with international migration, a third factor that Buddhi Lal did not mention but that was also relevant to Buddhi Lal’s family as his son had worked for several years in Saudi Arabia and was, at the time of this interview, planning to go abroad again. Each of these factors was mentioned to me frequently, especially but not exclusively in conversations about changes in language practices. At the same time, I observed the impact of these processes in many more interactions beyond the explicit conversations related to them. They are, as large social, political, and economic processes, also linked to one another and to broader issues such as state formation and international trade.

8.1.1 Demographic changes and language shift

As Buddhi Lal’s quote above demonstrates, the influx of speakers of Nepali was frequently cited as a major reason for language shift, and for good reason. Prior to malaria eradication in the 1950s (see Chapter 1; Rai, 2013), most Dhimals had little reason to learn Nepali; lexical borrowing from neighboring languages provides evidence
of multilingualism with neighboring languages of the plains but not extensive bilingualism with Nepali until relatively recently (King, 2009, p. 3). Even after the introduction of schooling, which provided access to Nepali, Dhimal was spoken in the home and community, until the arrival of thousands of Nepali-speaking neighbors. While Dhimal had in the past been a language used in all spheres of life, at the time of my research, it was largely restricted to the sphere of the home or solely Dhimal interactions.

As 60-year-old Manu Lal Dhimal, a farmer in Buttabari, described his village in a survey interview:

MW: *ani tapāiharu prayajaso gharma Dhimalmā bolnuhuncha ki Nepali?* ‘And in your house, do you speak in Dhimal or Nepali?’

Manu Lal: *hāmi bolchūm. Dhimal bolchūm. aba Dhimal gaān tyati sāhro chaina, hāmi pātalo chūm hāmi, ani sabai parbate bhāshā bolchan chetri bāhunko bhāshā* ‘We speak. We speak Dhimal. There isn’t that much of a Dhimal village, we’re spread thin, and everyone speaks the hill language, Bahun-Chettris’ language’

(Interview, 10/25/15)

In this description of the area of Buttabari where he lived, Manu Lal pointed out that the Dhimals were spread thin. Most of their neighbors were first-language speakers of Nepali, or, as he and many of the other respondents to my survey described it, the language of the hills and the Bahun-Chettris\(^{28}\) language. As I discussed in the Chapter 1, this demographic shift was largely a result of malaria eradication, which opened fertile farmland to settlement by people of other ethnic groups (see Rai, 2013).

\(^{28}\) Bahun and Chettri are the Nepali names for the two highest castes of Hindus; Bahun specifically refers to a Brahman of hills origin.
As opposed to Dhimals who had learned Nepali in order to communicate with the newcomers (especially representatives of the state; Rai, 2013), many Nepali speakers felt no need to learn to speak their neighbors’ language. I frequently heard neighbors who were first-language speakers of Nepali joke about their lack of Dhimal language knowledge. In one such interaction, I arrived to visit a Dhimal family and found that they had two Bahun neighbors already drinking tea on the porch. One of the Bahun woman, who heard me use a Dhimal phrase, commented that she had lived in the area for 40 years and not learned any Dhimal. Their hostess, a Dhimal woman, pointed out that the Bahun woman who had just spoken actually knew a handful of Dhimal words, a point to which she agreed. Her companion, the second Bahun woman on the porch, laughed and said, but I really don’t know anything, because “wāstāi gardina” (‘I don’t care at all’) (f/n 4/6/2015). In situations where one person did not speak Dhimal but everyone else did, speakers of Dhimal would generally use Nepali to accommodate that person’s understanding. Beyond the proximity and numerical dominance of Nepali speakers, an issue that I heard cited frequently was that children’s friends were Nepali speakers, and so they played in Nepali. In any case, it seemed clear to my Dhimal interlocutors that this major demographic shift had changed the language they used in daily life, not only when interacting with those new neighbors but also within their own households.

8.1.2 Schooling and language shift

The introduction of schooling, which occurred around the same time as malaria eradication, also provided the opportunity for many children to learn Nepali. As discussed in Chapter 4, this was part of the goal of the school system when it was first established: both to spread Nepali and to discourage children from learning the various other
languages that they might speak. Buddhi Lal’s quote above was representative of many others of his age (60 years old): “\textit{jaba school padhna thālyo, jaba mātrai hāmi āphno bhā- nepali bhāshā jānyo. na bhae āphno bhāshā}” (‘It was only once I started going to school that I learned Nepali. Otherwise, own language.’) (interview 4/24/15). While in the past, school attendance was far from universal (especially among girls), there is now near-universal enrollment in school at the primary level in the area.\footnote{This was even true at the pre-primary level, beginning at extremely young ages; teachers complained of children being enrolled in nursery classes as soon as they were mostly toilet trained, in order to allow parents to return to full-time work.} Indeed, in my survey of Buttabari and Arnakhari, I found that everyone between the ages of three and 16 was enrolled in school, with the exception of one 14-year-old dropout in Buttabari.

Attending school not only introduced children to Nepali, but caused them to spend many hours of the day using Nepali language. This was the case even in nominally English-medium schools, where significant portions of instruction and all student peer interaction occurred in Nepali. In addition, schools provided children with social networks that included many more first-language Nepali speakers than they might have had from just playing with their neighbors, creating multiethnic social networks that interacted using Nepali language. As one Dhimal grandmother described this phenomenon:

\begin{quote}
\textit{tin barsha pugepachi schoolmā paṭhāuncha, schoolmā Nepali sikhalcha. sāno nāti ahile iso lho bhanera} [gesturing come here], āuncha. schoolmā tin barsha pugepachi paṭhāuncha, schoolmā \textit{iso lho ko bhāncha?} ‘after they reach three years, they send them to school. At school they immediately learn Nepali. Now, if you say to my little grandson, \textit{come here}, [gesturing come here] he comes. They send him to school after he reaches three years; at school, who will say \textit{come here}?’ (5/25/15).
\end{quote}
In this description, the old woman (who nearly always addressed her grandchildren in Nepali rather than Dhimal) pointed to the impact of school in teaching Nepali and reducing opportunities for children to hear spoken Dhimal.

An additional element of the importance of schooling is the allure of English (see Giri, 2016; Liechty, 2003; Phyak, 2013; on similar dynamics in India, Bhattacharya, 2013, 2016; LaDousa, 2014; Proctor, 2014). While today’s adults were forced to speak Nepali in school, many now send their children to schools with “English Only” signs plastered on the walls. The schools I observed that claimed to be English medium, which included both private and government schools, still had plenty of Nepali spoken in both formal and informal spaces; nevertheless, learning English was seen by many as the desired outcome of schooling. This point was illustrated by an old Dhimal man I chatted with during a workshop, who asked me whether we have to go to school in my country. Taken aback, I responded that we do. His turn to be surprised, he responded: “sabailāi angrezi āïhalcha, paḍhnu pardaina hola bhaneko” (‘everyone automatically knows English, I thought maybe you don’t have to go to school’; f/n 11/21/2015). In interviews and conversations, teachers said that parents only cared about whether their children learned English and nothing else (f/n 4/12/2015, 5/12/2015, 8/27/2015, 11/29/2015; interview 3/31/2015, 4/1/2015, 4/8/2015). In my surveys, most respondents gave English as an important language for children to learn, with many of their explanations tied to the international migration phenomenon described below. In addition, knowing English and being educated (padheko) were frequently used as near synonyms, with a person’s level of English competence serving as an index of educational attainment.
Of course, learning English at school does not necessarily impede Dhimal competence acquired at home. However, the privileged place of English in the local language ecology did limit opportunities for using Dhimal. This was due in part to the strong emphasis placed on studying and using English, which meant that children were praised for using recognizable tokens of English while playing or speaking with their parents. By contrast, as I describe below, children’s use of Dhimal was generally not met with praise. Some parents with knowledge of English even went so far as to sprinkle their own Nepali and Dhimal speech with English, not only as a means of marking their own distinction and level of education, but also to instruct the next generation. The privileged place of English, therefore, extended beyond its use in school and into home and community conversations that may have previously involved Dhimal language. In addition, English-medium private schools have increasingly introduced before- and after-school tutoring sessions, expanding the time that children spent away from their Dhimal-speaking family members while also increasing school profits and, possibly, test scores (Joshi, 2013). Many government school students also attended tutoring beyond school hours, where they used Nepali and English to complete their school work.

8.1.3 International migration and language shift

A third social process influencing changes in the organization of linguistic codes in this community was international migration. In my survey, over half of the Dhimal households in Arnakhari and Buttabari had at least one member working abroad in Qatar, Dubai, Saudi Arabia, or Malaysia, or had someone who had worked abroad and returned; more than 10% of Dhimal households in both villages had more than one family member
working abroad (see Figure 11). Many of these were young men who worked abroad for a period of several years before being able to return to Nepal. They would often come home for a few months after a years-long contract, staying at home long enough to get married, begin construction on a house, or just long enough to get bored with life at home, and then repeat the process, maybe aiming the next time for a more desirable country or better-paying job. The effects of this migration on Nepal at levels from the whole nation to communities, families, and individuals, are manifold and important (Shneiderman, Wagner, Rinck, Johnson & Lord, 2016; Sijapati & Limbu, 2012). In a context with limited opportunities for economic advancement, international migration and remittances were crucial for keeping families from having to sell land or take on significant debts, especially when it came time for expensive rituals like weddings and funerals, and, as we will see, to help cover the cost of private education. As Man Sir’s wife commented, Dhimal weddings are so expensive that Dhimals used to sell their land to pay for them, but now they could fund weddings by earning money abroad. It was a good thing going abroad was an option, she told me, because “na bhae Dhimal jāti khattam hunthyo” (‘otherwise the Dhimal caste would be finished.’) (f/n 4/6/2015).

**Figure 11:** Families with members abroad, Buttabari and Arnakhari villages

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>family member abroad?</th>
<th>never</th>
<th>someone abroad...</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>46</td>
<td>9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>previously now (1)</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>12%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>now (1+)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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</tbody>
</table>

International migration is not only an economic process, but also an experiential one in which migrants and their families develop new ideas and accumulate new
experiences. Migrants brought back new ideas upon their return to Nepal and communicated them to their families who had remained behind. Living in the Gulf countries or Malaysia had exposed many young parents, especially but not exclusively young fathers, to the global power of English. They saw firsthand the importance of speaking English to reach higher positions, which not only included better compensation but also safer working conditions; during and beyond the time of my research many Nepalis died working in unsafe labor jobs (Black, 2015; Booth & Pattison, 2014a, 2014b; Burrow, 2017; Chaudhary, 2015, 2017; Gibson, 2014a, 2014b; Gibson & Pattison, 2014; Pattison, 2014a, 2014b; Sijapati & Limbu, 2012). Everyone I spoke to in Jhapa and Morang knew and frequently shared horror stories of workers being mistreated, maimed, or worse while working abroad. Speaking good English was a ticket for a safer and better-paying job, ideally in an air-conditioned office rather than outdoors in construction or labor.

In addition, international migration is part of the expected trajectory for many children, a reality reflected not only in the number of men who were working abroad but also in the number of boys who left formal education earlier than girls, on the assumption that what mattered to them was getting a passport and a promise of a job abroad (presentation at the Ministry of Education, 12/17/2015). For the purposes of international employment, I heard over and over from people of all ages, everyone needs English; this point was driven home for people who observed firsthand that people with stronger English were able to work in more comfortable and higher-paying jobs, as drivers or in offices, instead of the difficult, dirty and dangerous construction and labor jobs available to those without strong English. Beyond the difference in kinds of potential employment,
many interlocutors emphasized that if a person speaks English, they can navigate international contexts without being cheated. Learning English is not necessarily incompatible with also speaking Dhimal, Nepali and additional languages, but the extreme emphasis on learning English reached into even everyday conversations in homes.

Financial remittances played a role in the realignment of languages as well. As described above, many people in this community saw English language acquisition as the central goal of schooling. One of the main reasons for traveling abroad was to be able to afford at private schools perceived as the only way for children to learn good English. The boom in English language private schools, which not only mandated English language use on their grounds but also often offered (or, at times, required) extended tutoring sessions that kept children away from their families and communities for long hours, was therefore largely funded by international remittances. Remittances were in this way a crucial part of the realignment of language use in the Dhimal community: capital from work in Malaysia, Saudi Arabia, Qatar or Dubai paid private school fees at English-medium schools in Nepal. This was both a commonly reported pattern in interviews and conversation, and reflected in survey data. For example, there were 49 Dhimal households in the village of Arnakhari with school-age children. Of these, they were split nearly evenly by whether they sent children to private schools (28 households) or government schools (21 households). Within these two groups, though, there was a major difference: most of those who sent children to private schools had a source of money from abroad (22 had a family member either currently or previously working abroad; six did not), while only a minority of those who sent their children to government schools
had a family member working abroad (five had a family member either currently or previously working abroad; 16 did not; see Figure 12).\(^{30}\) Foreign employment did not just increase the perceived need for English language education but also funded it in the form of remittances that were used to pay for English-medium private schools.

**Figure 12:** International remittances and school type in Arnakhari village

![Figure 12](image)

8.2 Interactional Dimensions of Language Shift

I spent a long afternoon sitting on the porch with three generations of Dhimal women: a woman I called *Boi* (aunt, but also a respectful term for someone older than myself); her daughter-in-law (who I called *Bhauju*, or older-sister-in-law), and Bhauju’s two-week-old baby. Despite my limited Dhimal comprehension, Boi and Bhauju spoke Dhimal with each other while I sat with them, commenting on the state of the rice in the fields, what to cook for dinner, and how long the baby had been sleeping. If I intervened, asking for clarification, they were willing to switch to Nepali for a couple turns, but swiftly returned to Dhimal. When the baby woke up from her nap, though, her mother and grandmother unfailingly addressed her in Nepali, asking if she was done sleeping, if she was warm enough, telling her to calm down and stop crying (f/n 10/19/2015).

\(^{30}\) I have less complete data on school attendance in Buttabari, and what I do have shows a less robust pattern than in Arnakhari. Most private school students from Buttabari had a family member abroad (nine did while three did not), but there was an even split among government school students.
Language shift is not only something that happens because of large-scale phenomena like migration and schooling, but also something that takes place through and as a result of individual interactions. I observed a robust pattern in which adult conversation was conducted in Dhimal; when the same adults who had been conversing in Dhimal addressed children, they switched immediately to Nepali. Children spoke almost exclusively in Nepali. This pattern was maintained for young people from infants through adolescents, and in some cases with young people through their early 20s. Young adults, from late teens to people in their 20s and sometimes 30s, were somewhere in between these two extremes, sometimes using Dhimal and sometimes Nepali, or speaking Dhimal with a more heavily Nepali-influenced lexicon than their older relatives. This pattern was repeated in each of the Dhimal villages I visited, regardless of how urban or rural the location, mixed or homogeneous the community, the gender of the child, and all other factors I could think of.

In the following sections, I provide additional detail on the contours of the interactional patterns that both created and reflected ongoing language shift. After a description of these common patterns, I present the few exceptions I observed, which, due to their exceptional nature as breaches of standard behavior, elicited metacommentary that provides additional insight into the patterns themselves (Goffman, 1974, 1981)

8.2.1 Patterns of language use

The fieldnote excerpt above described an interaction in which all child-directed speech was in Nepali despite the surrounding adult speech occurring in Dhimal language. This was the standard pattern for interactions; my fieldnotes early in fieldwork noted
“seems like kids are most often addressed in Nepali” (f/n 3/9/2015). A few days later, I spent an afternoon in neighboring Arnakhari and noted that, “the dynamic of not speaking to kids in Dhimal, at least in places that I can see, seemed especially pronounced down at the store by Krishna Sir’s house” because almost all adult conversation took place in Dhimal, making it even more noticeable when children were addressed using a different code (f/n 3/12/2015). A month later, I wrote “I still haven’t heard anyone speak Dhimal to a child” (f/n 4/9/2015). Later in fieldwork, I merely noted that this pattern was maintained, or commented when it was violated in some way.

Many of my interlocutors explained this phenomenon by telling me that the villages where I spent the most time were too close to the highway and too mixed with other castes to have children speaking Dhimal. They assured me that I would find places where children regularly spoke Dhimal if I went to more homogeneous, bigger Dhimal villages farther from the main highway, yet I heard this interactional pattern in those locations as well. For example, Athiyabari was often given as the paradigmatic example of a Dhimal village; while King (2009) does not make this explicit in his grammar of Dhimal, I assume that he chose to document the language in Athiyabari due to its status as a heavily Dhimal speaking area. Despite this, after an afternoon spent at a store on the main road in Athiyabari, I noted:

Continued evidence of children not speaking or being spoken to in Dhimal, with complaints (in Dhimal) that kids these days don’t speak the language. There are two children there - one the maybe-2-year-old nephew of Dipak, who doesn’t say anything but is addressed exclusively in Nepali, and the young daughter from a mixed marriage (Dhimal father/Newar mother) who is also addressed solely in Nepali (f/n 8/20/2015).

Similarly, one of my early notes on the pattern of child-directed Nepali speech occurring in the middle of an otherwise Dhimal-language interaction occurred during a visit to
Karikoshi village, a large, homogeneous Dhimal village relatively far from the highway that multiple interlocutors described as a ‘pure Dhimal village’ (purā Dhimal gāũ). Even in a place where I had been promised I would find “typical” Dhimals and intact Dhimal culture, adult conversations took place in Dhimal but switched to Nepali when addressing children and babies. The pattern of child-directed speech occurring in Nepali in the midst of Dhimal-language adult conversation was robust across Dhimal communities.

### 8.2.2 Exceptions to the pattern of language use

Deviations from the distribution of languages described in the previous section were infrequent. They stood out, though, not only because the normal pattern was so robust that other arrangements of language use were noteworthy but also because of the metacommentary that followed these breaches of standard conduct. Unusual events included both interactions in which children were addressed in Dhimal, countering the common pattern of child-directed speech taking place in Nepali, and moments when children spoke in Dhimal.

The most common exception to the pattern of using Nepali to address children was scolding in Dhimal. Angela’s mother demonstrated metalinguistic awareness of this when she noted “ma Nepali bolchu, galli garne matra Dhimal baṭa garchu” (‘I speak Nepali. I use Dhimal only to scold’) (f/n 4/23/2015). I saw confirmation of her description of language use patterns in their daily family interactions, and from hearing her scold her daughter, loudly enough that I heard her from across the street: “Angela, yom! yom!” (‘Angela, sit! Sit!’) (f/n 10/5/2015). On another occasion, I noted a grandmother who scolded her children first in Dhimal, then repeated herself in Nepali (f/n 4/26/2015). In a different family, Smarika, a seven-year-old repeatedly identified by
her family as not knowing Dhimal, was playing too close to a pile of recently cut logs in a neighbor’s yard; Smarika’s grandmother yelled from the porch across the street to get away, using a completely Dhimal utterance. Smarika rapidly returned to the safety of her own yard (f/n 5/10/2015). In these cases, it is notable that while scolding in Dhimal was a genre of child-directed Dhimal-language speech, the participation structure of scolding meant that children were not expected to speak back in these interactions. That is, on the occasions when a child was scolded in Dhimal, being told to be quiet, sit still (f/n 10/5/2015), stop playing near the road (f/n 5/10/2015) or get away from the tall grass where there could be snakes (f/n 9/1/2015), they were expected to respond through actions but not through words. Scolding thus sometimes occurred in Dhimal, but did not provide an opportunity for children to respond with Dhimal language utterances. While at first these events seemed like a language learning opportunity for children, the nature of the scolding interaction meant that children still were not provided opportunities to produce Dhimal language.

A second type of interaction in which children were addressed in Dhimal, beyond scolding, was in quiz-like interactions that demonstrated children’s apparent lack of proficiency in Dhimal. As a Dhimal man in his 20s in Nepal between stints working as a driver in the Gulf summarized: “shuru dekhi Nepali sikāuncha, tyaspachi, Dhimal bolches sodhchan” (‘From the start, people teach Nepali, after that, they ask, ‘don’t you speak Dhimal?’) (f/n 10/5/2016).31 His observation captured a routine I witnessed frequently, in which children were tested on their Dhimal knowledge by an adult asking

31 This is similar to the phenomenon noted in Kulick’s (1992) study of language shift in Papua New Guinea, in which adults did not address children in Tapiap but then blamed children for failing to learn it.
basic questions, usually their own name and whether they spoke Dhimal. The adult questioner would inevitably conclude that the child could not speak Dhimal, and usually continued with a lament about the current generation and the imminent disappearance of the language. A representative example comes from an interview with retired teacher Buddhi Lal Dhimal, in which he addressed his two grandsons, both around six years old, as they played in the courtyard of Buddhi Lal’s house:

1 Buddhi Lal: *aba ta sikāunu parcha aba uniharu. uniharulāi āphno bhāshā āundaina. oy! bhāshā.*
       Now we need to teach them now. They don’t know their own language. Oy! Language! Oy!

2 oy! Oy! *bat mare ja. oy! nāy mij hai ko?* Oy! Go talk. Oy! What’s your name?

3 Buddhi Lal: *nāyko mij hai? nāyko mij hai?* Oy! What’s your name? What’s your name?

4 Rijan: [unintelligible] [unintelligible]

5 Sajan: [unintelligible; maybe nonsense?]

6 Rijan: [unintelligible; maybe nonsense?]

7 Buddhi Lal: *nāyko mij hai? nāyko mij hai?* Oy! What’s your name? What’s your name?

8 Rijan: *ma hū* I am

9 Rijan: [squeaks] [squeak]

10 Buddhi Lal: *nāyko mij hai? nāyko mij hai?* Oy! What’s your name? What’s your name?

11 Rijan: [squeaks]

12 Buddhi Lal: *thukko, yasto [laugh]* damnit, like that [laugh]

[Interview, 4/24/2015]

In this excerpt, Buddhi Lal, who ordinarily address his grandchildren in Nepali, transitioned from a lament about children not knowing their ‘own language’ (“āphno bhāshā”) to quizzing his grandsons, who were playing nearby. After receiving no response to the command to come speak, Buddhi Lal asked the more specific question, “What is your name?” (*nāyko ming hai?*). His grandsons refused to provide an answer; even if they had, the question did not necessarily require a response in Dhimal because personal names cross language boundaries. Nevertheless, the two boys offered
only nonsense syllables and silly noises, leading to Buddhi Lal expressing his disgust ("thukko," an onomatopoetic depiction of spitting), but also laughing and changing the subject.

I observed similar interactions with a number of children, who usually failed to answer even one question:

At an aunt’s house in Athiyabari, I ask if kids around here speak Dhimal. She says “herūm” (‘let’s see’) and asks her youngest child, who is around four or five years old, “gikhena ma gikhena?” (‘Do you understand or not?’) Barsha doesn’t respond, but she also has yet to speak in front of me so she seems like an unreliable source of information. (f/n 4/20/2015). This woman’s daughter failed to answer the question of whether or not she understood when she was asked in Dhimal. I noted that she had been shy the whole day, making this hard to interpret as an actual evaluation of her proficiency. Nevertheless, her mother took this as an example of her daughter’s lack of Dhimal language proficiency, much as Buddhi Lal had done with his grandsons in the interview excerpt discussed above.

This kind of quiz-like questioning of children to determine the extent of their Dhimal comprehension and speaking proficiency was the second context in which I heard child-directed Dhimal speech. In contrast to the scolding discussed above, here children were supposed to answer the Dhimal-speaking adults. The answers that children were expected to provide in these quizzing events were still limited, in many cases to the child’s name, which required no unambiguously Dhimal lexemes, or at other times only a few words. In addition, as I will discuss in greater detail, on the occasions when children provided a few correct answers, they were eventually dismissed as not speaking Dhimal when they reached a point when they either refused to continue answering or failed to answer a question correctly.
A final example of child-directed Dhimal language comes from the fieldnote that opened this chapter, in which an eight-month-old baby was addressed in Dhimal by her neighbors. As opposed to the types of interactions described above, which happened on more than one occasion this was a single exceptional event; I saw no other interactions like it. The baby’s mother, after playing along for a couple turns by providing the baby’s supposed answers (a common routine that served to socialize children into appropriate interactional behaviors), ended the strange interaction by commenting, ‘this one [the baby] can’t speak Dhimal.’ This interactional move began a new sequence of conversation about the Dhimal proficiency of other children and the need to speak Dhimal with them in order for them to learn, but it also had the effect of changing the code of child-directed utterances back to Nepali. While she was willing to play along for a few conversational turns, the mother’s comment that the baby did not speak Dhimal, nonsensical as a statement of fact (the infant didn’t yet speak any language, let alone Dhimal), served to mark the inappropriateness of addressing a baby in Dhimal. By commenting on the baby’s supposed lack of comprehension, rather than the odd behavior of an adult, her comment indirectly noted that an adult was using an unexpected, and perhaps unwelcome, code, and returned the interaction to a more familiar footing. In addition, the mother’s comment was made in Nepali rather than Dhimal, metapragmatically reinforcing her commentary on the inappropriateness of Dhimal in that context.

So far in this section, I have discussed breaches of the language distribution pattern that involved addressing children in Dhimal; now I turn to the few moments when children produced Dhimal utterances. Despite the prevalence of an interactional pattern in
which children never produced Dhimal, there were some moments when they did produce Dhimal words. However, it is notable that in all my notes and transcripts, I have found only a few tokens of children producing a string of more than one unambiguously Dhimal word.³² One, also discussed in chapter 5, was an example of children showing off their knowledge of common Dhimal phrases to each other. On another occasion, one of the same children from that classroom interaction produced the noun phrase *piyako biha* (‘chicken meat’) in a quizzing context like those discussed above. Most tokens of children speaking Dhimal, though, were single unambiguous Dhimal words, sometimes in combination with bi- or multivalent lexemes like names that function similarly in multiple languages (Woolard, 1999), such as the following example:

**Aunt:** *Samir koi?*
  *Samir where*
  ‘Where is Samir?’

**Niece:** *Samir manthu*
  *Samir NEG,EXT*
  ‘Samir’s not here’

In other examples, children provided single-word Dhimal utterances that were fully-formed predicates:

**MW:** *Yo ke ho?* (Pointing to picture of a snail)
  *this what is*
  ‘What is this?’

**Samir:** *cudur*
  *snail*
  ‘It’s a snail’

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³² Meek (2010) notes that “participant-observation and socially occurring speech are both limited…providing evidence for a subset of a speaker’s grammatical knowledge” (p. xi). This caveat applies to my participant-observation research.
In this example, Samir answered my question with the Dhimal noun *cudur* (which is discussed further below) and a zero copula. Samir’s response used the zero copula in an entirely appropriate manner: “Typically, a zero copula is used to mark predicate nominal constructions with non-human referents” (King, 2009, p. 109); to have used a verb here would have been the anomalous utterance. At the same time, though, my corpus provides no evidence that children under the age of 16 could put together a multi-word phrase in Dhimal.

With this limitation in mind, I now turn to the few times when did produce Dhimal utterances. As with the previous section, it is important to remember that these were exceptions to a rule that held nearly all the time. The moments when children did produce Dhimal, though, were notable both for their exceptional nature and the level of metacommentary that generally accompanied such deviations from the rule. The kinds of exceptions that I detail range from the times when children responded to quizzing events with Dhimal; the exceptional case of *cudur* (*snail*), and short stretches of Dhimal speech. These examples lead to a reflection on what it means to say that children do not speak or are not learning a language.

In the examples I discussed above, children who failed to answer quiz questions were held up as evidence that children were failing to learn Dhimal. However, even when children answered questions correctly, similar interactions were taken as evidence of their inability to speak Dhimal, as in the following fieldnote excerpt:

During the middle of our conversation, eight-year-old Suyesha comes over to find her mother. Som asks, “[naŋ ko miŋ hai]” (‘what’s your name?’), and she answers, “Suyesha.” Then he asks some other things about where her house is and school and things and she just doesn’t answer. Suyesha’s mother says that she doesn’t talk [Dhimal], goes back and forth on saying whether or not Suyesha understands. (f/n 11/22/2015)
Suyesha’s refusal to answer a Dhimal language quiz in this interaction was taken as evidence that she did not know Dhimal. On another occasion, though, Suyesha demonstrated that she had some Dhimal proficiency, and saved me from failing a similar quiz directed toward me: I had gone with her family to an annual Dhimal religious ceremony attended by many members of the Dhimal community. Toward the end of the day, one of the central committee members of the Dhimal Jāti Bikās Kendra (Dhimal Ethnic Development Center), an old man widely respected for his deep knowledge of Dhimal culture and history, spotted me and came over to chat. After exchanging greetings in Dhimal, he began asking about how I had spent the day. I seemed to be passing the Dhimal language test implicit in the conversation until he asked what kind of meat we had eaten for lunch. Knowing that I frequently confused the rhyming words *kiya* (dog) and *piya* (chicken), I froze, and was surprised to hear Suyesha answer “*piyako biha*” (‘chicken meat’) (f/n 4/16/2015). Suyesha’s answer saved me from an embarrassing moment, in which I would have been positioned as not knowing Dhimal. I commented, in Nepali, “*bahinilāi jāndo rahecha*” (‘I see that little sister knows’); my attempt to praise her proficiency was not taken up by my interlocutor, who instead complimented my language learning even though her help had allowed me pass the Dhimal language test. While the Dhimal elder ended this interaction by praising my progress in learning Dhimal language, he did not accept my evaluation of Suyesha’s proficiency.

Suyesha was not the only child who I observed providing correct answers in a similar quiz-like interaction. On another occasion, I was surprised to hear four-year-old Angela, whose mother described her as not speaking Dhimal in the vignette that opened this chapter and again when I asked in the context of conducting a survey, competently
answering questions posed to her in Dhimal. While Angela answered in Nepali, the questions demonstrated comprehension well beyond the standard “नाखो मिह हाँ?” (‘what is your name’) (f/n 11/15/2015). Her answers showed that she understood questions posed in Dhimal, even if they simultaneously demonstrated her preference for speaking in Nepali over Dhimal. As the examples of Suyesha and Angela demonstrate, children who rarely spoke Dhimal were able to produce answers to questions, sometimes in Dhimal and sometimes in Nepali, displaying comprehension and sometimes even producing Dhimal words.

Among the tokens of Dhimal produced by children, one occurred far more frequently than others: **cudur**, snail. Children who ordinarily did not produce or even understand Dhimal used and recognized this word, iconic of Dhimal identity, more readily than the Nepali equivalent. The following fieldnote excerpt demonstrates that some children understood **cudur** more readily than its Nepali translation:

There is a days-long ceremony going on at the nearby Durga temple. Since early this morning, they have been blowing conch shells; the sound system is amplifying the sound across the village. Six-year-old Anuja, who is visiting her aunt in Buttabari, is scared of the sound of the conch shells. She’s quite upset, complaining “काति शंकर भज्ञुँचा!” (“They blow the conch shell so much!”) and tries to hide from the sound by going into the kitchen. When her mother encourages her not to be scared, Anuja puffs herself up in a display of fearlessness, and tells her mother, “मलाई उँचाइकी शंकर भान्न मान्चान?” (‘Then buy me one! Where can you buy them?’) At first her aunt says you can buy them in the bazar [a non-answer, equivalent to saying that you buy it at the store]; when Anuja asks again, her older cousin says, “तेरो बुवाहो तिरा पाउँन्चा” (‘you can get them where your father is [in Saudi Arabia]’). Anuja’s aunt follows up, saying that they grow in the ocean; they’re big snails [N; *ghunghi*], like the snails [N; *gunghi*] you harvested the other day. Anuja’s mother, noticing that her daughter hadn’t understood, recasts snail in Dhimal, saying, it’s like a **snail** [Dh; *cudur*], they’re big **snails** [Dh; *cudur*]. Anuja, wide-eyed, asks, “**cudur ho?**” (‘It’s a **snail**?’) and on getting confirmation claims boldly, “मा खाईदिन्छुँ” (‘then I’ll eat it!’). (f/n 10/19/2015)
Six-year-old Anuja was often described as not speaking Dhimal; she told me that she did not understand what people said around her when they spoke Dhimal. However, despite these general claims and patterns, when it came to this particular lexical item, she was more familiar with a Dhimal word than the Nepali. On another occasion, described in Chapter 5, I was leading a science class at Jan Chetana Primary School, and asked students to identify the animals in a picture in their textbook. Among the words called out, I heard a student contribute *cudur*. I knew the word, so I accepted the student’s answer, and also provided the English translation, the translation serving as metapragmatic commentary on appropriate classroom linguistic behavior (f/n 5/6/2015).

The case of *cudur* was a special one; as a food consumed almost exclusively by Dhimals, children and adults had far more occasion to talk about *cudur* than to use the Nepali synonym. However, this was not the only evidence I saw for Dhimal influence on children’s speech, and for children having significantly more Dhimal proficiency than they were generally given credit for. Many of these were minimal and formulaic uses of Dhimal speech. For example, Shemu, a nursery level student at Jan Chetana Primary told me that she did not understand Dhimal, an opinion that her parents shared. However, when I heard her playing with another Dhimal student, I was surprised to hear her repeatedly say *te te* in agreement (King [2009, p. 632] glosses this as okay, alright); I would have expected to hear her use the equivalent Nepali interjection *la la* (f/n 8/25/2015). On another occasion, Shemu’s frequent playmate Smarika was playing in the evening with her baby cousin, and surprised me by singing a Dhimal nursery rhyme, *janja lho lho* (‘come, come moon’), complete with hand gestures at the appropriate moments. Even the six-month-old baby knew a handful of the gestures, waving at the
moon and giggling when Smarika tickled him at the end of the rhyme. When I asked Smarika how she knew the song, she answered that her father used to sing the song like that (f/n 10/25/2015).

These examples demonstrate that the issue of language shift is more complicated than a question of children not learning a language. In fact, Dhimal children demonstrated in a variety of ways that they understood and could produce certain pieces of this code; however, their proficiencies were not recognized as knowing or speaking Dhimal either by their older relatives or, in many cases, by the children themselves. I discuss these negative evaluations of children’s lack of Dhimal knowledge in the next section.

### 8.2.3 Evaluations of children's Dhimal proficiency

Evaluation of children’s speech was a common occurrence in Dhimal conversations. A typical example came from a conversation between two teachers, both first-language speakers of Dhimal who had learned Nepali at school:

In a conversation at Man Sir’s house, Krishna Sir says that in ten-fifteen years, no, ten years, we’ll be in trouble with our language because we all spoke when we were young, but our children don’t speak. He said his grandson doesn’t speak Dhimal at all. Man Sir says that his own kids don’t really speak. He points at his older son and says he speaks futafut, an onomatopoeia to represent what he represents as the awkward cadence of his son’s Dhimal speech. (f/n, 3/6/2015)

This brief excerpt demonstrates two different levels of evaluation of children’s Dhimal language proficiency. Krishna Sir’s grandson\(^{33}\) was described as not speaking Dhimal at

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\(^{33}\) Krishna Sir’s daughter, Reshma Miss, is married to Buddhi Lal Sir’s son, so we have already met this grandson in the interview excerpt where Buddhi Lal discussed this child’s lack of Dhimal proficiency.
all, while Man Sir described his son as speaking poorly, or awkwardly. Reminiscent of Kulick’s (1992) finding that adults in New Guinea blamed children for not learning a language that the parents had not taught to their children, children were often described as not speaking Dhimal. When I pushed for details, more detailed descriptions included that young people understood but didn’t speak (*bujcha tara boldaina*), knew a little bit (*ali ali āuncha*), or knew one or two words (*ek-dui wata āuncha*). In the previous section, I described the interactional routines in which children were asked to speak Dhimal, always ending with the conclusion that children did not speak Dhimal.

In some cases, though, children identified themselves as speakers of Dhimal even when their parents did not; for example, five-year-old Nidingma’s mother reported Nidingma as not speaking Dhimal at all when I talked to her as part of a survey. When I asked Nidingma, while playing with her at school, “*Dhimal bhāshā bolna āuncha?*” (‘Can you speak Dhimal?’), she hurriedly replied “āuncha, āuncha” (‘I can, I can’), as if annoyed about being asked this question in the middle of the game we were playing, and immediately went back to covering my face with my shawl and running away in mock terror at the sight of a ghost (f/n 10/9/2015).

Similarly, four-year-old Angela, along with her eight-month-old younger sister, were identified by their mother as not speaking Dhimal both in the conversation cited above and again when I asked her as part of the language survey. However, Angela viewed the situation differently:

Yesterday I was playing with Angela. At one point she sits on my lap and I ask her “āphno bhāshā ke hō?” (‘what’s your own language?’) to which she replies “*ma Dhimal*” (‘I’m Dhimal’). I ask “*Dhimal bhāshā bolna āuncha?*” (‘Can you speak Dhimal’) and she says “āuncha” (‘I can’). (f/n 9/4/2015)
Angela’s claim is interesting for two reasons: first, she claimed to speak Dhimal even though the adults around her would unanimously contradict this claim. Her claim to speak Dhimal was bolstered by other conversations, for example in a conversation when her neighbors across the street asked her questions in Dhimal, which Angela consistently answered correctly, though in Nepali (f/n 11/14/2015). Second, her response demonstrates the iconization (Irvine & Gal, 2000) by which the question of someone’s language proficiency becomes a question of ethnic identity. Because of this iconization, claiming that children did not speak Dhimal could serve not only as a claim about linguistic proficiencies but also as a way to cast doubt on a child’s belonging as a Dhimal.

The connection between speaking Dhimal well and being seen as a fully Dhimal person was more explicitly put in a dinnertime exchange in a Dhimal family:

At dinner, 23-year-old Sangeeta arrives after her mother has served food on all the plates and asks “mero kun ho” (‘which one is mine?’). Her mother says “nuhe” (‘east’); Sangeeta asks “nuhe bhaneko ke ho” (‘what does nuhe mean?’). This causes quite a reaction; her mother repeats the translations of all the directions several times to instruct her (and possibly me). Sangeeta’s younger brother, who’s been annoyed with her all day and clearly looking for a way to get even with her for a variety of slights, says several times: “nuhe bhaneko thāhā chaina, Dhimalko camdi ho bhāncha” (‘she doesn’t know what nuhe means, but she still says she’s a Dhimal’s daughter’). (f/n 10/28/2015)

In this exchange, Sangeeta’s brother moved quickly from a comment about Sangeeta’s understanding of Dhimal (“nuhe bhaneko thāhā chaina”; ‘she doesn’t know what nuhe means’) to an evaluation of her belonging as a Dhimal’s daughter (“Dhimalko camdi ho bhāncha”; ‘[and yet] she says that she’s a Dhimal’s daughter’). The same phrase about being a Dhimal’s son or daughter was frequently used in evaluating children’s behavior as properly Dhimal, often in semi-joking contexts, as in when a toddler insisted on running around without shoes (clearly a Dhimal’s son) or refused to eat meat (is she
really a Dhimal’s daughter?). The implication here is that Sangeeta, by demonstrating a gap in her Dhimal proficiency, exposed herself as less than fully Dhimal, or at least as not behaving normatively Dhimal.

Ironically, Sangeeta was one of the most proficient Dhimal speakers of her age I had met. She frequently used Dhimal in conversation, including with her peers, and would often initiate a switch from Nepali to Dhimal in conversations with her friends. She also assisted me in conducting interviews in Dhimal during the language and education survey, so I had heard her speak in Dhimal with some of the oldest members of the community. Nevertheless, this was not the only time I heard her described as a non-speaker of the language. On another occasion, a Dhimal neighbor and distant relative of Sangeeta’s family who I had run into at the store claimed that Sangeeta’s parents did not speak Dhimal much in the home, and that Sangeeta could not speak Dhimal at all (f/n 5/14/2015). Evaluations like this demonstrated that my perceptions of who spoke or did not speak Dhimal diverged from those of my Dhimal interlocutors.

This observation, rather than being a mere relativistic argument about differing perceptions has implications for the future of the Dhimal language. When the neighbor claimed that Sangeeta did not speak Dhimal, this was based on largely formal interactions outside of the house; the woman who made this evaluation was not someone who spent time at Sangeeta’s house or vice versa. Instead, they interacted largely in public spaces like the store where this exchange took place. Sangeeta and others tended to use Nepali rather than Dhimal in public spaces, even when interacting with fellow Dhimal speakers. Thus, the woman’s seemingly anomalous evaluation of Sangeeta’s Dhimal language proficiency was perhaps accurate for the domains in which they interacted, demonstrating
that Dhimal was used in increasingly limited domains (Fishman 1991). At the same time, as I discuss in the conclusion of this chapter, the neighbor’s evaluation of Sangeeta’s language may shade the way we hear claims by adults about the linguistic proficiencies of young people.

8.3 Conclusion

“Most basically a speaker needs a hearer.”  
(Duranti & Goodwin, 1992, p. 148)

One evening, while enjoying the relatively cool air on the porch, I overheard a heated argument in a house across the street. The next morning, I was among several neighbors who visited the woman who had been shouting at her husband the night before. She still spoke in Dhimal, but slowly enough, and with enough overlap with a Nepali lexicon, that I could pick up the thread of the disagreement with her husband that had prompted the previous night’s outburst. “tenshan jeŋ hoi,” she concluded; ‘I’m feeling tension.’

(f/n 3/31/2015)

What does it mean to be speaking Dhimal? So far in this discussion, I have used the categories of Nepali, English, and Dhimal as if they are unproblematic. However, language and named variants of languages are multivalent concepts, with the separation of phonological, lexical and grammatical systems into separate named categories the product of historical trajectories (Makoni & Pennycook 2006). In addition, scholars of language shift have documented the ways that language shift can involve various linguistic ruptures and continuities. In some cases, speakers have maintained or learned the lexicon of a heritage language while adapting morphosyntax to be more like a newly dominant language, as in Kaurna in Australia (Amery, 2000); in others, discourse patterns from a heritage language may be maintained despite the use of a different phono-lexico-
grammatical system, as in the case of Navajo (M. Field, 2001; House, 2002). In the example above, the woman’s comment “ṭenshan jey hoi” (‘I’m feeling tension’) used a Dhimal phrasal verb (jey hoi) and an English-derived lexeme that is frequently employed in Nepali and Dhimal (ṭenshan).

In addition to the question of what counts as speaking Dhimal, a related but not identical question is: who is heard as speaking Dhimal? Inoue (2006) demonstrates that linguistic moral panic (such as some Dhimal adults’ panic over children not learning to speak ‘their’ language) is not based solely on empirically observable features of speech but rather voiced from a particular subject position and addressed to other subject positions about someone else. In Inoue’s study of Japanese women’s language, middle-aged businessmen expressed moral panic about the supposedly degenerate speech of young women. She develops the idea of the listening subject, who hears and comments on notable features of someone else’s speech. Flores and Rosa (2015) build on the notion of the listening subject to explore the ways that white listening subjects hear the speech of racialized others as deficient, no matter the actual content or manner in which they speak.

As in Inoue’s case of Japanese schoolgirl speech, age is a key dimension of difference in the case I have described here. Even when young people produced speech that the speaker or I heard as Dhimal, older Dhimal listeners did not hear them as speaking Dhimal. An additional example will help clarify this point: toward the end of my survey collection, I spoke with a family I knew well, who quickly told me that none of the children spoke Dhimal. I pointed out that I had heard the nine-year-old girl in the family (the niece, cousin, and daughter of the adults gathered in the courtyard) say things
that used the Dhimal negative existential verb *manthu* several times (and had noted this in my fieldnotes, 9/20/15, 10/14/15). They laughed and said that *manthu* is easy, anyone can say that. A statement that some would have heard as being an example of Dhimal language thus was understood by adults not to be evidence of her proficiency in the language.

This was not universally true among adults, though. During the survey, my research assistant and I were frequently invited to the houses of Bahuns who lived near the Dhimals I interviewed. When I explained that I was conducting a survey of who in the Dhimal community was able to speak the language, several laughed at the idea that Dhimal people would not speak the language, and initially refused to believe Sangeeta and me when we claimed that Dhimal children today often do not speak the language. The Bahun neighbors seemed to have a listening subject position rather different from that of the Dhimal adults: where Dhimal adults heard children as only speaking Nepali, their neighbors heard all Dhimals as speaking Dhimal, or at least as being deficient in their Nepali speech. This characteristic of the listening subject is reminiscent of the argument that Flores and Rosa (2015) make about the racial dynamics of speaking and listening, in which listeners in a position of power always hear the speech of racialized others as deficient. No matter what linguistic forms were produced by Dhimals, their Bahun neighbors heard it as Dhimal. At the same time, while children could produce what seemed to me and maybe them to be Dhimal utterances, their words were not heard by their older relatives as Dhimal speech.

These reflections on who is heard as speaking which languages have a number of implications. First, they cast significant methodological doubt on accounts of language
proficiency that rely on either self- or other-report. As Moore, Pietikäinen and Blommaert (2010) point out, quantification is a central element of the discourse of language endangerment; other critical investigations of language endangerment discourse similarly note the emphasis on small speaker numbers or rapid declines in speaker numbers (e.g., Errington, 2003; Hill, 2002). Usually these speaker numbers are based on responses to surveys, and often with one member of a family answering about the rest of the family. This information is then recontextualized and recycled, often in forms that reach increasingly wider audiences, so that the methods used to collect the data is even more obscured than it might be in an initial report. For example, Nepali census data is a frequently cited source for speaker numbers; census data is usually collected by talking to a single member of a household, who reports what language(s) each member of the family speaks, among a laundry list of other items on the census form. These numbers are recycled in additional government documents, in the Ethnologue, and in scholarly reports. Even more in-depth research relies on self- and other-report; for example, the Linguistic Survey of Nepal employed more involved methods, such as community mapping and participatory research techniques beyond a survey form (Regmi, Khatiwada & Regmi, 2014). These techniques, while clearly an improvement beyond the single survey form of the census remain in the realm of reporting on proficiency, rather than demonstrating or observing it.

The survey I conducted as part of my fieldwork similarly, relied on reports by one or two members of a family about the rest of their family members. My results showed patterns that largely matched my own observations: with older people largely spoke Dhimal and younger people largely did not, with a middle area of those who only spoke a
little or understood but could not produce Dhimal (See Figure 13). While these results seem plausible based on triangulation with observations and other conversations, I would expect to get slightly different results depending on who I actually spoke with. As Moore et al. (2010) argue, speakerhood is a “matter whose complexity poorly suits [it] for numerical representations” (p. 2); the differences in reports of who speaks Dhimal based on the listener’s subject position is further evidence in support of this point.

A second implication of this exploration is to cast a modicum of doubt on the interpretation of the chart above as seeming to show the language in grave danger of being lost. It appears from looking at Figure 13 that as time progresses, and the individuals from the young age groups inevitably move into the older age groups, with their language proficiencies remaining intact, the Dhimal language will remain spoken only by only the barest sliver of the population, if that. However, the evidence discussed above casts some doubt on the predictive possibility of this chart; is it possible that when adults predict that children will learn the language as they get older (see also Hornberger, 2013b; Meek, 2010), they are not merely clinging to a misguided hope but rather acknowledging that children’s speech is not recognized as Dhimal until they grow older. What seems to be a naïve or overly optimistic view on the part of older Dhimal speakers may in fact be a recognition that young children are not given the opportunity to speak in Dhimal, or to be heard as speaking in Dhimal.
At a broader level, this line of thinking contributes to the longstanding critique of the folk category of speaker of a language (e.g., Blommaert, 2010; Hornberger & Swinehart, 2012; Hymes, 1996). As Blommaert (2010) points out, people do not speak languages but rather have a “complex of specific semiotic resources” that they “actually possess and deploy” (p. 102). Blommaert argues that we can follow the biography of an individual to understand the repertoires that they control in various codes, in which individuals may be able to talk about only certain topics or in particular genres (Blommaert, 2010; Blommaert & Backus, 2011). Contributing to a semiotic view of multilingualism, Blackledge, Creese and Takhi (2014) argue that, in analyzing multilingual discourse, “it becomes clear that the most important question is not ‘what language is in use,’ but rather what signs are in use and action, and what do these signs
point to” (p. 77). Taking a Peircian semiotic approach to understanding the distribution of linguistic signs into named languages returns us to the importance of the listener, since the sign relationship requires not just a sign and object but also an interpretant; crucially, a sign is not a single thing but a relationship of significance which is established by activities (Agha, 2007 Parmentier, 1994; Peirce, 1995). Similarly, signs of linguistic proficiency cannot exist separately from relationships between sign, object, and interpretant.

Returning to the example of language shift, this helps to explain why the same phonemic string could be heard by different people as belonging to different languages. The phonemic string /ṭenʃən/ could be interpreted as an English, Dhimal, or Nepali depending on the context in which it is uttered. Similarly, there is nothing inherent in a phonemic string that means that all of its listeners must hear it as the same language. In order to understand the phenomenon of language shift, then, it is important for the ethnographer to recognize that her understanding of “what do these signs point to” may be different from that of other listeners. Fortunately, these meanings emerge in interaction through explicit metapragmatic commentary or more implicit actions such as laughing or responding with signs that unambiguously point toward one language or another. This approach allows us to see that, on some occasions, when children think that they are speaking Dhimal they may be heard as speaking Nepali.

In this chapter, I have discussed multiple ways of understanding the phenomenon of language shift in the Dhimal community, or the ways that Nepali has come to be used in conversations that would have taken place in Dhimal in past years. Some crucial dynamics are large-scale social processes, such as in-migration of first language Nepali
speakers, mass participation in formal schooling, and international labor migration. At the same time, individual interactions now take place using different linguistic patterns than would have occurred previously, and I have detailed the common interactional patterns that make it easy for children to grow up without learning a language that they hear spoken by their older relatives every day. Finally, I have detailed exceptions to this common pattern, and described the ways that children are always heard by their older interlocutors to be deficient in Dhimal knowledge, no matter what amount of Dhimal language they produce. This analysis emphasizes the importance of considering what listeners hear as well as what speakers produce, or consider themselves to be producing, in understanding the distribution of linguistic proficiency in a community.
Chapter 9: Conclusions: Voice, language, and development

The Country is Yours

These soles of yours which steer rickshaws
must now steer the country and the universe
Your tireless hands which shove load carts
must raise your own culture and people

Deceived sometimes by religion
and sometimes by your facial features—
seek now the sky of your own sunrise

Seek out feet which will take you to high peaks
You too are a person like others
You too are a citizen—like the others of this country
Give up your foolish sincerity now
alongside your auctioned identity
The country is yours as well
The universe is yours as well
Your rights exist here too

And so
search for your missing self
recall your forgotten history
and...
and Aasyaang—
your son Theba birthed by your young lass:
what should his future be like?
Think—think about this for yourself

(Pratap Bal Tamang, translation by Manjushree Thapa [2009])

What does it look like to tell a group of people, as Tamang’s poem imagines: You
too are a citizen, the country is yours as well, your rights exist here too? And for those
citizens, reassured that they have rights, to think for themselves about what their
children’s future should look like? In many ways, this poem, originally written in
Tamang, another Tibeto-Burman language spoken in Nepal, summarizes the central
themes of my dissertation.
In order to think about these questions, I have looked at one such arena of imagining what the future should be. Through the case of one language in a handful of schools, I have examined what the promise of democratization looked like in Nepal at a particular moment. At the same time, I have considered the possibilities of schooling to reshape or at least interfere in linguistic and social hierarchies. In this conclusion, I summarize the conclusions of the individual chapters before reflecting more broadly on the implications of this study for theory and practice.

In this study, I have shown through a historical study of language policy (Chapter 4) that there have been mixed views in Nepal about the ideal language policy since the establishment of widespread schooling, and that demand for multiple languages in schooling has existed for as long as there have been schools. In addition, the historical chapter demonstrates the importance of looking beyond a national frame for important influences in international actors and organizations.

In an investigation of language policy at the school level (Chapter 5), I have demonstrated that the state is not a unitary thing that behaves the same way in every moment but that policies are implemented in part based on the decisions of specific actors, who may choose not to follow what they know is official policy. Even when we acknowledge the importance of individual agency (cf. Johnson, 2013b), we need to think about matters like a person’s hometown or party affiliation that may not immediately seem obvious in the outcomes of language policy decisions. This is another example of how scales are simultaneously relevant: one school adopted the Dhimal language subject in large part because a national-level Constitutional Assembly member was from the
school’s catchment area. Even when focusing on the level of an individual school, for this case we must consider national politics.

Just as the example above points to the importance of deconstructing the state into empirically experienced things, the focus on the textbook level (Chapter 6) demonstrates that “the language” is not necessarily unitary. Debates over the entextualization of the Dhimal language have repercussions on multiple scales of time and space because as texts have the potential to mediate multiple future interactions. Through the analysis of the voicing structure of a text, I have considered the polyphonous nature of a single lesson within a Dhimal language textbook in order to demonstrate the conflicting indexical social orders that drafts and revisions were pointed to in different version of the text produced by actors with varied goals. Through this focused examination of the text, I also showed the methodological importance of looking at the production of a text, especially a text intended to serve as a metapragmatic script for future interactions, in addition to the use of the text.

Through looking at classrooms (Chapter 7), I aimed to look at use of the textbook as well. While these were different grade level texts, the examination of classroom discourse gave some insight into the interactions that would be structured using the Dhimal language textbook. The focus on the classroom demonstrated that having a phono-lexical string produced in a particular space does not have a fixed social effect; that is, introducing a language into a new social space did not immediately lead to the inclusion of cultural information or even the use of that language as a means of communication. Instead, the way the language was taught had metapragmatic effect that included emphasizing “wordism” (Blum, 2015) as an ideology of language (see also
Whorf, 1956) and reinforcing the teaching of literacy as decontextualized symbols free from referential content.

The ideology of language as a collection of words is further challenged by observations of language shift (Chapter 8) that demonstrated that children could produce what seemed to me to be Dhimal utterances that were heard by older listeners as always being in Nepali. Dynamics of language shift were partly a result of interactional patterns that involved children rarely being required to produce utterances in Dhimal. At the same time, no matter what children did they were never evaluated as speaking Dhimal. This investigation points to another way that scales are laminated upon each other in ways that are impossible to separate: the emphasis that adults placed on English language education was both a result of and cause of international migration. Dynamics of language shift in this community were therefore intimately tied to the global circulation of capital and labor.

9.1 Scales and States: Analytical implications

As the discussion so far makes clear, an overarching concern in this dissertation is the role of scale in social analysis. Following Carr and Lempert (2016), I have endeavored to avoid assuming that scales preexist the interactional work that creates scales as things. Instead of assuming scales to be arrayed in a pre-existing hierarchical arrangement (see Blommaert, 2010), through examination of various parts of a multifaceted and multiscalar process of changing the linguistic distribution of time within a school and a community, I have illustrated that various scales of human organization may be at play in any given process. I argue that an investigation of Nepal’s language
policy history that confined itself to the national boundaries of Nepal, a study of which schools introduced the Dhimal language subject without attention to political party, or a discussion of language shift that omitted the dynamics of labor migration would all omit crucial information.

Similarly, a study involving the state that falls into the trap set by the Whorfian projection of the count noun of the state, taking it to be a single, permanent entity, fails to account for the behavior of the collection of actors and processes that gets labelled as the state. The history of Nepal’s language policy demonstrates that state actions have been deeply influenced by seemingly non-state actors, whether outside expert Hugh Wood, who brought monolingual ideologies straight from America or international non-governmental organizations like UNESCO and SIL. At the same time, within the state, things like laws were not necessarily seen as binding at various levels. Especially in language policy studies, we must be careful to avoid assuming that a state acts in one concerted direction, or is even relevant at all moments. For understanding language policy, there may be more relevant frames at both more global and local levels of analysis than the singular state.

9.2 Schooling Languages: Implications for Practice

What are the implications of this study for educational practice? While educational research shows that students learn best in school when they are taught in their first language (e.g., August & Shanahan 2006; Thomas & Collier 1997), languages spoken by about 40% of the world's population are not used in schools (Pinnock 2009). Nevertheless, despite an increase in policies that permit or support instruction in
minoritized languages around the world, many languages around the world are facing the predicament of having declining numbers of largely aging speakers (K. Hale, et al., 1990; Harrison, 2007). At the same time, some communities have rejected attempts to teach in indigenous languages (e.g., Aikman 1999; M. García 2005; Hornberger 1988). Teaching children in their so-called mother tongues in schools has been proposed as a solution to this predicament, one that is meant to simultaneously improve educational achievement and slow the worrisome trend of decreasing numbers of speakers of minoritized and indigenous languages (Malone, 2004; Pinnock, 2009).

But wait: Clifford (2000) summarizes the task of anthropologists, “anthropology has characteristically made two irritating but crucial interventions, calling everyone up short: ‘What else is there?’ ‘Not so fast!’” (2000, p. 13). In that vein, the findings of this study are a cry of “what else is there?” and “not so fast!” directed toward multilingual education programs in Nepal and other low-income countries. As the examination of language policy history (Chapter 4) demonstrates, schooling practice has maintained certain ideas of language, culture, and identity that may not be accurate depictions of how those concepts are experienced in Nepal or other parts of the world, nor are they necessarily reflective of imaginations of a better future. Following Clifford’s questions, then, I aim to ask: what else is possible for indigenous language education? And not so fast; development-oriented solutions to challenges of languages in school often fail to account for the complexities of schooling and language. In particular, they treat languages as equivalent objects that can be plugged in, one to replace the other, without attention to the ever-present indexical ties of semiotic behavior to figures of personhood (Agha, 2007a). As Mortimer (2012) clearly demonstrates, language policies function
through the circulation of these figures of personhood at the same time that they are technical policy solutions. While the characterological types involved in the present case are less clear than the Guarani speakers Mortimer describes, I argue that the indexical links of especially English are central to understanding the function of schools, and their role in educational aspirations.

Ruiz (2016/1991) draws a crucial distinction between the notions of language and voice in bilingual education. While bilingual education is generally billed as a project of empowerment, Ruiz argued, the mere presence of a language (in the form of a phonological-lexical-syntactic system) in a classroom would not inherently have this effect if the schooling situation failed to provide space for students’ voices. While the Nepali school system is far from embracing the kind of critical pedagogy that Ruiz argued for, the examples of Dhimal language textbooks (Chapter 6) and classes (Chapter 7) seem to point to the limitations of opportunities for student and community voices to be heard in the curriculum and classroom. On the other hand, perhaps teaching Dhimal as a decontextualized code without connections to the rest of the world, in a similar manner to the ways that other languages were taught, was what community members would have wanted. In addition, Ruiz argued for the importance of student voice, which was not included in any part of the policy processes or classrooms that I studied.

In an edited volume, Hornberger (2008) asked: Can schools save indigenous languages? The contributors to that volume, along with many other scholars of endangered language revitalization, concluded that schooling is not sufficient to revitalize an endangered language, but that schools can have a large role to play in raising the prestige of a language. Educational linguists and linguistic anthropologists have pointed
to the importance of examining multiple factors, such as voice (Hornberger, 2006; Hohepa, May & McCarty, 2006), communities of practice formed in educational spaces (Hornberger, De Korne & Weinberg, 2016), and globalization (Hornberger & McCarty, 2012), among others. Arguing that development discourses that view complex problems as clearcut and solvable problems are overly simplistic is not new (Escobar, 1995; J. Ferguson, 1994; Li, 2007), nor is applying these insights to issues in languages, literacy, education and development (Ahearn, 2001; Bartlett, 2010; Leve, 2007; Robinson-Pant, 2000).

In undertaking this project, the goal is not merely to illustrate that policymakers misunderstand the nature of language use and language learning, though this is one step of the process. Instead, through demonstrating the tension between notions of language and encounters which demonstrate that language is a different sort of object than some policymakers treat it, I hope to point to the effects of notions and ideologies of language and the importance of escaping from notions of language(s) that seem like common sense to global policy makers. In the realm of languages in education as well, the notion of neatly bounded languages, assigned to their particular timeslots and classrooms, has been questioned in recent years. Drawing from notions like translanguaging, or bilinguals’ flexible use of multiple named codes that they control, recent innovations in teaching and learning have involved acknowledging the possibility that fluid use of multiple languages might support learning, even for those contexts where linguistic codes must be rigidly separated. These innovations, though, have so far remained largely out of view outside of North America and Europe. In the case of Nepal, while translanguaging may be the norm in most settings, educational theory remains firmly fixed in the idea of bounded, separate
languages. Multilingual education, as promoted by organizations like SIL and UNESCO, is, as Bidya Nath Koirala (2010) puts it, more a matter of serial monolingualism than a reflection of societal multilingualism. This dissertation has in many ways demonstrated that a potentially innovative project, of introducing a new language into school spaces, has failed to transform stifling ideologies of bounded normative languages and hierarchies of correctness. At the same time, I have aimed to show the spaces where there is potential to imagine a different future of language education, from the respondents to an educational survey in the 1950s who asked for education in multiple languages to children who enjoy playing with each others’ languages. If we tell everyone, in Nepal or anywhere, “The country is yours as well…Your rights exist here too,” what futures of language and schooling might we be able to imagine for our children?
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