

CHAPTER 4

LANGUAGE

- Dr. Yogendra P. Yadava*

4.1 Background

Despite its small size, Nepal accommodates an amazing cultural diversity including linguistic plurality. The 2001 census has identified 92 languages spoken as mother tongues. Besides, a number of languages have been reported as 'unknown' languages (CBS, 2001), which need to be precisely identified on the basis of field observation and its analysis. This multilingual setting confers on Nepal a distinctive position on the linguistic map of the world and renders it as one of the most fascinating areas of linguistic research. It is important that the language situation in Nepal be analyzed to facilitate linguistic studies and language planning. Such an analysis is also important to examine the social structure of the country's population since language constitutes one of its main indicators.¹ This chapter is an attempt to deal with these issues related to the languages used in Nepal.

Census in Nepal was first introduced in 1911 to carry out a survey of population and its related aspects including its growth, migration, and social structure. It has, however, been only since the first modern census in 1952/54 that languages have been regularly reported. There have been reported varying number of languages in different censuses. Of them the 2001 census has mentioned their largest number (viz. 92).

Owing to its small area with multiple languages, it is but natural in Nepal that speakers of different languages are sometimes settled in the same locality, esp. in urban area, and come into closer contact. As a result, they need a link language to communicate and interact in carrying out interpersonal and socio-economic activities. Most of non-Nepali speakers are found using Nepali as a lingua franca. However, educated people from the Terai region often tend to use Hindi as a lingua franca for inter-community communication in the region.

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¹ See the various population censuses (1911-2001).

In addition to using Nepali as a lingua franca, most of non-Nepali speakers also have to learn Nepali for its use in education, administration, communication media, etc. Consequently, bilingualism/multilingualism, i.e. use of two/more languages, has firmly established itself in Nepalese context. However, there do exist some isolated communities such as Raute which are confined to their native languages and have remained aloof from other speech communities. In addition, there are a number of speech communities which have either lost their native languages or whose languages are threatened with extinction under the pressure of linguistic and socio-political forces. Such linguistic diversity is not to be looked upon as a barrier to peace and development. What is required is to analyze and plan it as a social resource to mobilize its full potential (Eastman, 1983: ix).

From this language situation, there emerges a context in which Nepalese obligatorily use a mother tongue and optionally a second language. The term ‘mother tongue’ has been defined as “the language acquired first by children in their childhood from their parents and used in their households since they start speaking.” In case of an infant, the language ordinarily used in his/her household is the mother tongue while the mother tongue of inborn deaf persons has been recorded as the Nepali Sign Language, which makes use of movements of the hands, arms, body, head, face, eyes, and mouth to communicate meanings. (CBS Guidelines). The ‘second language’ has been defined as any language other than the mother tongue learned for use while speaking with neighbours. Thus, a person may have Maithili or Nepal Bhasha as his mother tongue and Nepali as his second language for inter-community communication. As mentioned above, there also exist multilingual communities with proficiency in more than two languages. For example, a Newar-speaking person may use Nepali and English besides his mother tongue Newar, but no provision has so far been made in any census for the return of a language or languages other than mother tongues and second languages.

The questionnaire designed for the 2001 census sought to specify one item for mother tongue and second language each. These items are as follows:

- (i) Which language do you speak as a mother tongue?
- (ii) Which language do you speak as a second language?

To elicit responses to these and other questions, people were contacted and interviewed individually. Since enumerators were not provided with a working list of languages/dialects

spoken in Nepal², some vague language names were sometimes reported by various communities. To resolve this uncertainty a committee of linguists with different linguistic background was formed at the CBS. This committee tried to keep the returned language names intact unless it was obvious that the various names belonged to a single language. Finally, 92 languages were identified pending a number of languages as ‘unknown’ (or unidentified) since it was then not possible to ascertain their precise identity without doing their on-the-spot observation and study.

This chapter is an attempt to deal mainly with the situation of Nepalese peoples’ mother tongues and their second languages. It consists of five main sections. Section 4.1 presents an overview of the language situation in Nepal vis-à-vis the various population censuses. Section 4.2 seeks to address the mother tongues and their related issues such as their identification, nomenclature, genetic affiliation, distribution, writing systems, and ethnicity. In section 4.3 second languages have been discussed. Some languages other than mother tongues and second languages have been referred to in section 4.4. Section 4.5 briefly deals with the language use, policy and endangerment existing in the country. Finally, we sum up the major findings concerning the overall language situation in Nepal based on censuses, esp. the 2001 census and suggest some measures for improving the language database in Nepal. At the end there are appendices containing the database on some aspects of language and population.

4.2 Mother Tongues

There have been identified 92 mother tongues (barring some ‘unknown’ languages) in the 2001 census. The main aspects of these mother tongues to be discussed in this section include their identification, nomenclature, genetic affiliation, distribution, writing systems, ethnic relation, and also their use, policy and endangerment.

4.2.1 Identification

There have been made some attempts to identify the numerous languages spoken in this country as mother tongues. One of these attempts is the enumeration of languages in the various censuses. Since the 1952/54 census languages have consistently been reported. However, their number shows variation in these censuses. Except ‘other’, ‘unknown’ and ‘not stated’ languages, there

² In the 1961 Census of India *Language Handbook on Mother Tongues in Census* (Nigam, 1972) was provided to find out whether or not such a language entry had been returned in an earlier census and to identify the language family to which it belongs.

were recorded 44 (1952/54), 36 (1961), 17 (1971), 18 (1981), and 32 (1991) languages in the last five censuses (Gurung, 2002:37), but their figures have drastically increased to 92.³ However, there still remain quite a few languages (used by as many as 168,340 strong speakers, i.e. 0.74 per cent of the total population) which are lumped together into an ‘unknown’ slot in the lack of adequate information⁴. This increase is due to the fact that a large number of languages used as mother tongues have been returned for the first time because of the growing awareness of several ethnic minorities about their distinct cultural and linguistic identity. Such mother tongues include Bram/Bramu, Bhujel, Chhantyal, Dura, Ghale, Kaike, Kisan, Kusunda, Munda, Raute, Bajjika, Angika, Yholmo, Khariya, Lhomi, Dungmali, and Sadhani. Deaf’s Nepali Sign Language has also been reported. Besides, the earlier censuses recorded all the Rai languages under a single heading, called ‘Rai group of languages’. In the 2001 census, however, there have been enumerated 25 separate languages in this group. Similarly, Angika and Bajjika, which were earlier considered the dialects of Maithili and Bhojpuri, respectively, have now emerged as distinct languages. In addition, there have also been reported some foreign languages (mostly spoken in India) for the first time; they are Hariyanwi, Magahi, Kuki, Mizo, Nagamese, Sindhi, Assamese, Oriya, Kurmali, Koche, Dzonkha, and Chinese, apart from English.

This considerable rise in the number of languages spoken in Nepal may be ascribed to a number of reasons. Since the restoration of democracy there has been continual increase in awareness among linguistic minorities (including indigeneous peoples) about their mother tongues. Their ethnic organizations had been creating awareness of preserving and promoting their cultural identity including their languages. Taking cognizance of this reality, the CBS also sought the cooperation and support of these organizations during the enumeration for the 2001 census. Following the enumeration, some linguists were also consulted for the precise identification of Nepal’s languages.

Presented below is the complete list of the languages arranged in order of their number of speakers reported in the last six censuses (1952/54 – 2001).

³ But this census, unlike some previous ones, has not reported population with ‘not stated’ languages.

⁴ The speakers of the unidentified languages are sufficiently large in number and cannot be ignored. It is important to visit the related fields in order to elicit necessary information for their precise identification.

Table 4.1: Distribution of population of Nepal by mother tongue (1952/54-2001).

Mother Tongue	Population											
	1952/54	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%	2001	%
A. Indo-European	6351899	77.13	7449604	79.14	9062435	78.42	12417886	82.66	14701283	79.50	17982769	79.1
1. Nepali	4013567	48.74	4796528	50.96	6060758	52.45	8767361	58.36	9302880	50.31	11053255	48.61
2. Maithili	1024780	12.44	1130402	12.01	1327242	11.49	1668309	11.11	2191900	11.85	2797582	12.30
3. Bhojpuri	477281	5.80	577357	6.13	806480	6.98	1142805	7.61	1379717	7.46	1712536	7.53
4. Tharu	359594	4.37	406907	4.32	495881	4.29	545685	3.63	993388	5.37	1331546	5.86
5. Awadhi	328408	3.99	477090	5.07	316950	2.74	234343	1.56	374635	2.03	560744	2.47
6. Rajbansi	35543	0.43	55803	0.59	55124	0.48	59383	0.40	85558	0.46	129829	0.57
7. Hindi	80181	0.97	2867	0.03	–	–	–	–	170997	0.92	105765	0.47
8. Urdu	32545	0.40	2650	0.03	–	–	–	–	202208	1.09	174840	0.77
B.Sino-Tibetan	1795337	21.08	1813083	19.26	1982635	17.16	1811944	12.06	3098698	16.76	4183995	18.4
9. Tamang	494745	6.01	528812	5.62	555056	4.80	522416	3.48	904456	4.89	1179145	5.19
10. Newar	383184	4.65	377721	4.01	454979	3.94	448746	2.99	690007	3.73	825458	3.63
11. Magar	273780	3.32	254675	2.71	288383	2.50	212681	1.42	430264	2.3	770116	3.39
12. Rai, Kirat	236049	2.87	239745	2.55	232264	2.01	221353	1.47	439312	2.38	-	-
13. Gurung	162192	1.97	157778	1.68	171609	1.49	174464	1.16	227918	1.23	338925	1.49
14. Limbu	145511	1.77	138705	1.47	170787	1.48	129234	0.86	254088	1.37	333633	1.47
15. Bhote, Sherpa	70132	0.85	84229	0.89	79218	0.69	73589	0.49	121819	0.66	129771	0.57
16. Sunuwar	17299	0.21	13362	0.14	20380	0.18	10650	0.07	–	–	26611	0.12
17. Danuwar	9138	0.11	11625	0.12	9959	0.09	13522	0.09	23721	0.13	31849	0.14
18. Thakali	3307	0.04	6432	0.07	–	–	5289	0.04	7113	0.04	6441	0.03
C. Austro-Asiatic	16751	0.20	29485	0.31	23853	0.21	28208	0.19	33332	0.18	40260	0.2
19. Satar	16751	0.20	18840	0.20	20660	0.18	22403	0.15	25302	0.14	-	-
20. Santhali	–	–	10645	0.11	3193	0.03	5804	0.04	8030	0.04	40260	0.18
D. Dravidian	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	15175	0.1	28615	0.1
E. Other	70340	0.85	114392	1.22	487060	4.21	764802	5.09	648627	3.51	28615	0.13
F. Not Sated/Unknown	752	0.01	6432	0.07	–	–	–	–	9157	0.05	503295	2.2
Total	8235079	100.00	9412996	100.00	11555983	100.00	15022839	100.00	18491097	100.00	22738934	100.00

Source : Population Censuses (1952/54-2001).

The languages recorded in the 2001 census but not enumerated in the earlier censuses are presented in Table 4.2.

Table 4.2: Additional languages (2001).

Mother tongues	Speakers	%
Bajjika	237947	1.05
Angika	15892	0.07
Chhantyal	5912	0.03
Nepali Sign Language	5743	0.03
Meche	3301	0.01
Lepcha	2826	0.01
Khariya	1575	0
Sanskrit	823	0
Raute	518	0
Kisan	489	0
Baram	342	0
Dungmali	221	0
Kusunda	87	0
Sindhi	72	0
Koche	52	0
Hariyanwi	33	0
Magahi	30	0
Kurmali	13	0
Dzonkha	9	0
Kuki	9	0
Mizo	8	0
Nagamese	6	0
Assamese	3	0
Sadhani	2	0

Source : Population Census 2001

In addition to these fresh entries, the Rai/Kirant group of languages, lumped together into a single entry, have been returned with separate languages. These languages have been presented in Table 4.3.

Table 4.3: Rai languages (2001).

Languages	Speakers	%
Bantawa	371056	1.63
Chamling	44093	0.19
Sunuwar	26611	0.12
Kulung	18686	0.08
Yakkha	14648	0.06
Thulung	14034	0.06
Sanpang	10810	0.05
Khaling	9288	0.04
Dumi	5271	0.02
Umbule	4471	0.02
Puma	4310	0.02
Nachhering	3553	0.02
Bahing	2765	0.01
Kou/Koi	2641	0.01
Hayu	1743	0.01
Yamphu	1722	0.01
Chhiling	1314	0.01
Lohorung	1207	0.01
Mewahang	904	0
Tilung	310	0
Jerung	271	0
Dungmali	221	0
Lingkhim	97	0
Sam	23	0
Chhintang	8	0

Source : Population Census 2001.

This uncertainty about the number of Nepal's languages and their reduced enumeration in the last five censuses may be attributed to their lack of required information and awareness about mother tongues and also the "one nation – one language" policy adopted during the Panchayat regime.

Setting aside the various censuses, attempts have also been made by some linguists to identify Nepal's languages. Malla (1989) and Toba (1992) mention 70 while Grimes (2000) lists 121 languages one of which, called Kusunda, has been claimed to be dead. All these attempts (including censuses) for identification of languages spoken in Nepal as mother tongues are some sort of approximation or rationalization of information and cannot be deemed final.

4.2.2 Nomenclature

The nomenclature of Nepal's languages (including Tibeto-Burman (Marrison, 1967; Matisoff, 1996:ix)) is found to be complex. The names for several languages have been derived from the country or place names (toponyms/loconyms). Such toponyms/loconyms have gradually gained currency among their users and others. One of such languages is Nepali, which has been established as the state language of the Kingdom of Nepal since Gurkha conquest in the eighteenth century. Its main alternative names used earlier include Khas Kuraa, Gurkhaali and Parbatiyaa. Other languages of Nepal whose nomenclature is based on place names are Maithili (< Mithilaa), Bhojpuri (< Bhojpur), Awadhi (<Awadh), Hindi (<Hindustaan), Santhali (<Santhal), Bangala (<Bangaal), Marwadi (Mawraad), Angika (<Ang), Tibetan (<Tibet), Meche (<Mechi), Punjabi (Punjab), Oriya (<Orissa), Sindhi (<Sindh), Marwari (< Marwar), Hariyanvi (<Hiwiyana), Magahi (<Magadh), Assamese (<Assam), etc.

Secondly, there are many examples in Nepal of a language name (glossonym) derived from a community or tribe name (ethnonym). Such languages include Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, Kiranti languages, Gurung, Rajbanshi, Sherpa, Chepang, Majhi, Danuwar, Sunuwar, Thami, Dhimal, Bhujel/Khawas, Darai, Kumal, Thakali, Bhujel, Chhantyal, Pahari, Lepcha/Lapche, Bote, Raji, Byanshi, Ghale, Khariya Raute, Kisan, Churauti, Baram/Maramu, Kusunda, Dhangar, Dura, Yolmo, Munda, etc. Some of the tribe names on which their language names are based have been further derived from place names, e.g. Sunwar (< Sunuwar 'a tribe' < Sunkoshi 'a river'), Jirel (<Jiri, 'a place in Dolakha district'), etc.

Thirdly, Churauti is the only language spoken in Nepal named after the profession of its speakers. Even this name given by Nepali speakers is not palatable to its native speakers; instead, they prefer to call their speech 'Muslim Bhasha'.

Fourthly, Urdu, Sanskrit, and Tibetan are the three languages which are very much restricted to religions. Urdu, originated as Dakshni (the 'southern' language) used by the Muslim conquerors in northern Deccan and later called Urdu, the language of the court, called the Horde, in the main stronghold of Northern Hindustan, was finally adopted as the language of the Muslim community in India as well as Nepal (Cf. Breton, 1997:74). Sanskrit, enumerated only with 823 native speakers, is hardly used as a medium of mass communication but it has been actively used by Hindus in performing their religious rituals and also by scholars in scholastic study and deliberations.

Finally, Nepali Sign Language, which has been reported in the 2001 census, has been named after the medium or 'signs' used by the deaf in their communication.

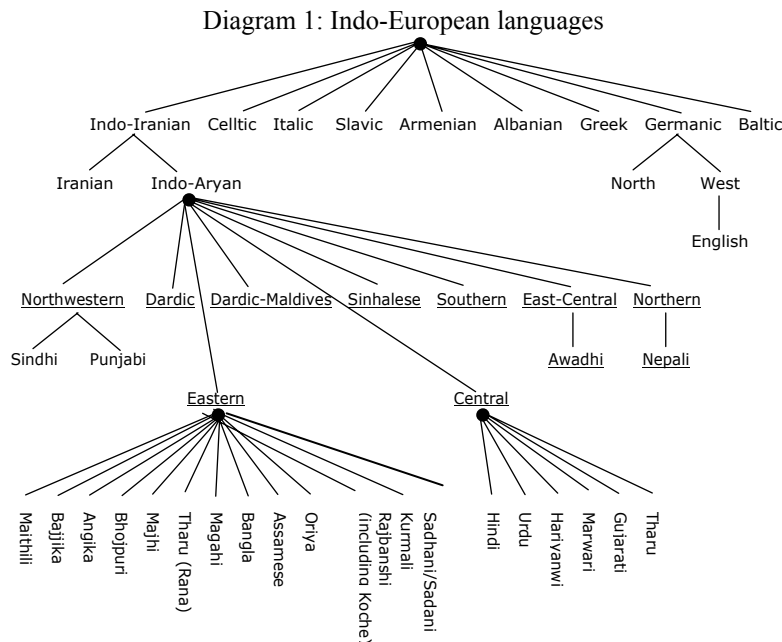
There are quite a few languages with more than one name (*allonyms*), e.g. *Gorkhali*, *Khas Kuraa*, and *Parbatiyaa* for Nepali, *Tirhutiya* and *Dehati* for Maithili, and so on⁵. Etymologically, the derivation of an Indo-Aryan language name may involve a productive adjectival Nepali suffix *-i* attached to a nominal stem (indicating place), e.g. *Nepal* (noun) + *-i* = *Nepali*, *Mithila* + *-i* = *Maithili*, *Bhojpur* + *-i* = *Bhojpuri*, *Awadh* + *-i* = *Awadhi*, etc. The Tibeto-Burman languages, however, do not involve such suffixation.⁶

4.2.3 Genetic Affiliation

The languages enumerated in the 2001 census belong to the four language families, viz. Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan⁷, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian.

In Nepalese context, Indo-European family of languages mainly comprise Indo-Aryan group of languages, which forms the largest group of languages in terms of speakers, viz. nearly 80 per cent.

The Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal can be genetically subcategorized in the following diagram:



⁵ See Grimes (2000) for the various names used for a language.

⁶ The only exception was Newari, which has ceased to be used now.

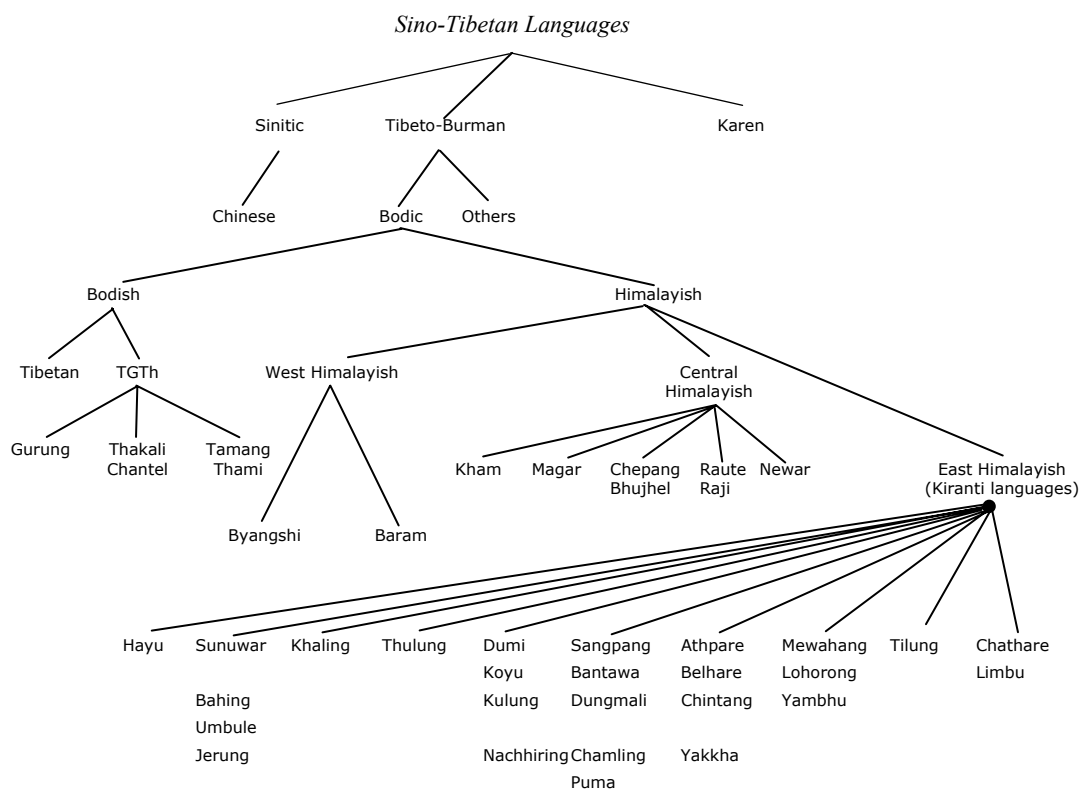
⁷ Kusunda, whose genetic affiliation was considered undecided earlier, has been now said to belong to the Himalayish group of Tibeto-Burman (Sino-Tibetan) languages (Grimes, 2000).

Some of the Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal are yet to be subclassified in the lack of their adequate description. These languages include Tharu, Bote, Darai, Kumal, Churauti and Danuwar.

Another important group of Nepal's languages is the Tibeto-Burman group of Sino-Tibetan family. Though it is spoken by a relatively lesser number of people than the Indo-European family, it consists of the largest number of languages, viz. about 57 languages. Contrary to speakers of Indo-Aryan languages, there has been a steady decline in speakers of Sino-Tibetan languages from the 1952/54 to the 1981 censuses, viz. 21.8 (1952/54), 19.26 (1961), 17.16 (1971), and 12.06 (1981) per cent. In the last two censuses, they have, however, increased to 16.76 per cent (1991) and nearly 19 per cent (2001). Their decline and increase may also be due to the reasons ascribed to those of Indo-European languages.

The Sino-Tibetan languages spoken in Nepal can be subcategorized as follows:

Diagram 2: Sino-Tibetan languages

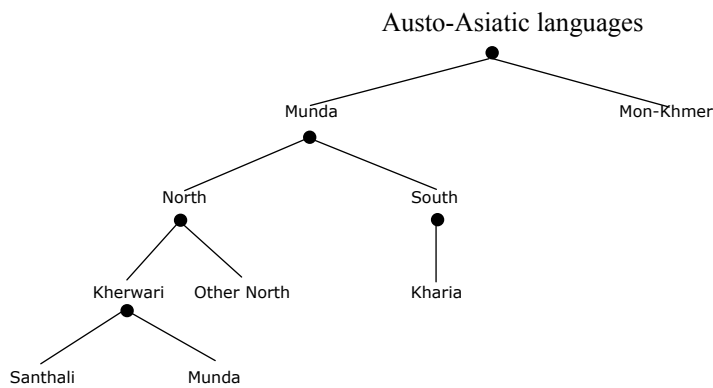


Adapted from Bradeley (2002) and David Watters (personal communication)

In addition to these two major language families, there also exist a few languages belonging to two minor language families. They are Austric branch of the Austro-Asiatic family and Dravidian family of languages. The Austric languages comprise Santhali of the northern Munda group and Kharia of the southern Munda group. It is to be noted that Satar has been reported in all the

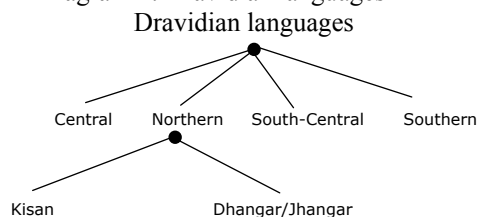
censuses but Santhal has been wrongly reported as a separate language except in the 1952/54 census. The 2001 census lumps both Satar and Santhal together into a single language, called Santhali. It is suggested that Munda (with 67 speakers) should also be included within Santhali, in that it is just a variant name of the same language. According to the 2001 census, Santhali speakers are 40, 193 in number, i.e. 0.18% of Nepal's total population, as compared to 0.20% (1952/54), 0.31% (1961), 0.21% (1971), 0.19 (1981), and 0.18% (1991). Another Austric language of Munda branch is Kharia, which has been introduced in the 2001 census for the first time. This language is spoken by 1575, i.e. 0.01%. All the Austric languages are spoken by groups of tribal peoples from the eastern Terai and make up approximately 0.19 per cent of the total population. The genetic affiliation of the Austric languages spoken in Nepal is shown in the following diagram:

Diagram 3: Austro-Asiatic languages



Dravidian language family includes the two languages spoken in Nepal. One of them is called Jhangar in the region east of Kosi river but Dhangar in the region west of Kosi river. It constitutes the northernmost part of Dravidian family of languages. It is said to be a regional variant of Kurux spoken in Jharkhand State of India though it shows divergence in its vocabulary and grammar (Gordon, 176; Yadava, 2002). According to the 2001 census, it is spoken by 28,615, i.e. 0.13% of the total population of the country. Its speakers have been reported to be 4832 (1952/54), 9140 (1961), and 15175 (1991). But it was not listed in the 1971 and 1981 censuses. Another Dravidian language is Kisan with 489 speakers settled in Jhapa district. It has been returned first time in population censuses. The genetic affiliation of Dhangar/Jhangar and Kisan is presented in the following diagram:

Diagram 4: Dravidian languages



4.2.4 Distribution

The Indo-Aryan languages are spoken by the majority of Nepal's total population and thus constitute the largest group of Nepal's languages in terms of their speakers. In the last six censuses, their speakers constituted 77.13 per cent (1952/54), 79.14 per cent (1961), 78.42 per cent (1971), 82.66 per cent (1981), 79.50 per cent (1991), and nearly 80 per cent (2001) of the total population. These figures show increase in the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages except their slight decline in the 1971 and 1991 censuses. Of the Indo-Aryan languages, there had been steady increase in the percentage of Nepali speakers from the 1952/54 till the 1981 censuses but it has declined in the 1991 and 2001 censuses. On the contrary, the non-Nepali Indo-Aryan languages except Bhojpuri declined from the 1952/54 till the 1981 censuses but they have increased in the 1991 and 2001 censuses. This increase in Nepali speakers and decline in other Indo-Aryan languages during the 1952/54-1981 may presumably be attributed to the growing emphasis on the "one nation-one language" policy imposed during the Panchayat regime. Conversely, the decline in Nepali speakers and rise in other the speakers of Indo-Aryan languages may be ascribed to the people's awareness of promoting and preserving their mother tongues following the restoration of democracy in 1990.

The Indo-Aryan languages spoken in Nepal are mainly distributed from the western to the eastern hills and the Terai and also the far western mountain though they are spoken with low density in almost all the remaining parts of the country.

Another group of languages spoken in Nepal are the Tibeto-Burman languages. Their number is the largest, viz. 57 languages, as compared to other groups of languages including the Indo-Aryan languages. The Tibeto-Burman languages which are mentioned in all the censuses are Tamang, Newar, Magar, Rai (Kirant), Gurung, Limbu, Bhote (Sherpa), and Thakali. Sunuwar has not been listed in the 1991 census. Similarly, Thakali did not appear in the 1971 census. According to the 2001 census, these languages are spoken by 18.4 per cent of Nepal's total population and occupies the second position. However, the percentages of their speakers vary in the different censuses: 21.8 per cent (1952/54), 19.26 (1961), 17.16 (1971), 12.06 (1981), 16.76 (1991), and 18.4 (2001). The Tibeto-Burman languages mainly extend over the eastern, central and western mountain and hills though they are also sparsely spoken in the other parts of the country.

The two Austric languages, viz. Santhali (inclusive Munda) and Khariya, have been returned in various censuses with some variations. They are reported to have been spoken by 0.2 per cent (1952/54), 0.31 per cent (1961), 0.21 per cent (1971), 0.19 per cent (1981), 0.18 per cent (1991), and 0.2 per cent (2001). They are mainly distributed in the southern parts of Jhapa and Morang districts.

In Dravidian family, Dhangar/Jhangar is spoken by 4,812 (1952/54), 15, 175 (1991) and 28,615 (2001) people. Mainly spoken in Sunsari district, it is also marginally used in Siraha and some other districts. Another Dravidian language is Kisan, marginally spoken in Jhapa district.

The distribution of the four language families and their speakers have been presented in the following table.

Table 4.4 : Distribution of population by the language families of mother tongues (1952/54-2001).

Mother Tongue	Population											
	1952/54	%	1961	%	1971	%	1981	%	1991	%	2001	%
A. Indo-European	6351899	77.13	7449604	79.14	9062435	78.42	12417886	82.66	14701283	79.50	17982769	79.1
B. Sino-Tibetan	1795337	21.08	1813083	19.26	1982635	17.16	1811944	12.06	3098698	16.76	4183995	18.4
C. Austro-Asiatic	16751	0.20	29485	0.31	23853	0.21	28208	0.19	33332	0.18	40260	0.2
D. Dravidian	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	–	15175	0.1	28615	0.1
E. Others	70340	0.85	114392	1.22	487060	4.21	764802	5.09	648627	3.51		
F. Not Stated	752	0.01	6432	0.07	–	–	–	–	9157	0.05	503295	2.2
Total	8235079	100.00	9412996	100.00	11555983	100.00	15022839	100.00	18491097	100.00	22738934	100.00

Source : Population censuses (1952/54-2001).

A comparison of the distribution of rural and urban population by the language families according to the 2001 census figures shows that Indo-European languages are spoken as mother tongues by 87 per cent in rural areas but 13 per cent in urban areas. Compared to the 1991 census there has been an increase of almost 5 per cent in the Indo-European speakers of the urban area. This increase suggests a trend of population shift from rural to urban area. Sino-Tibetan languages are spoken by 82 per cent in rural areas as compared to 18 per cent in urban areas. These figures also indicate an increase of Sino-Tibetan speakers in the urban area by about 3 per cent. Similarly, Austro-Asiatic languages have been reported to be spoken by 96.30 per cent and 3.70 per cent in rural and urban areas, respectively. Dravidian speakers constitute 95.28 per cent and 4.72 per cent of their total population in rural and urban areas, respectively. There has been a considerable increase in the percentage of ‘unknown languages’ in the urban area. It has risen by about 10 per cent; this increase may be ascribed to the gradual shift of rural population to the urban area.

Table 4.5 : Distribution of rural and urban population by mother tongue (1991-2001).

Language Families	1991		2001	
	Rural	Urban	Rural	Urban
Indo-European	91.99	8.01	87.00	13.00
Sino-Tibetan	84.87	15.22	82.00	18.00
Austro-Asiatic	97.97	2.10	96.30	3.70
Dravidian	–	–	95.28	4.72
Not stated/Unknown	93.05	6.95	83.89	16.11

Source: Population Censuses (1991-2001) (For details, see Appendix 4.2)

4.2.5 Writing Systems

Most of the languages spoken in Nepal are still confined to their oral traditions. Each of them has a rich oral heritage of traditional folk stories and songs handed down from parent to child over a long period of time, e.g. Salhes in Maithili and Mundhun in Kiranti languages. However, they are disappearing with the growth of literacy and language shift. It is, therefore, time to document them before they are lost to posterity to come.

Only a few of Nepal’s languages have literate traditions. They include Nepali, Maithili, Tibetan/Sherpa, Newar, Limbu, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, and Lepcha in particular. All of them have long tradition of written literature. These languages have employed various writing systems or scripts. Most of the Indo-Aryan languages such as Nepali, Maithili (originally written in Mithilakshar or Kaithi script), Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Hindi and Rajbanshi use the Devanagri script

though Bengali is written in a different version of Devanagri script. The Tibetan script is used by Lamas for Tibetan. Newar has its own traditional script called Ranjana but it has also adopted the Devanagri script for the sake of convenience in reading and printing. Limbu uses its own Kiranti Srijanga script. Lepcha is written in Rong script.

Of late some other languages have taken to literate traditions. Initiatives have been taken by various language communities to develop writing systems appropriate to the sound system of their languages and practically acceptable to them. They are Tharu, Tamang, Magar, Gurung, Rajbanshi and Rai group of languages such as Bantawa, Thulung, Chamling, Khaling, Kulung, and so on. Tharu, Tamang and Gurung use the Devanagri script but some of the Gurung speakers advocate for the use of Roman script for this language. Magar has developed its own script, called Akkha. Recently, these languages have started developing some written literature in the form of newspaper, magazine, textbooks for adult literacy and primary education, and folk literature.

As in India, Santhali in Nepal is written in Roman script. In addition, some of the languages have adopted Devanagri script. Arabic script is used for writing Urdu. Thus, there have been used about nine scripts in writing Nepal's languages.

4.2.6 Language and Ethnicity

Nepal is a multiethnic nation, comprising various ethnic and religious communities. Its ethnic and religious diversity is coupled with its linguistic plurality. They are found to interact with one another, resulting in the threefold ethnic/religious-linguistic structure. First, there are a number of ethno-linguistic communities in Nepal each of which has a common mother tongue. The mother tongues associated with various ethnic groups include Magar, Tharu, Tamang, Gurung, Limbu, Sherpa, Rajbanshi, Sunuwar, Kumal, Majhi, Danuwar, Chepang, Thami, Thakali, Bhoté, Dhimal, Darai, Lepcha, Byansi, Raute, Raji, Dhangad/Jhangad and so on. Such a situation having one-to-one relation between languages and ethnic groups is characterized by "one tribe one language" formula. Besides, Urdu is the mother tongue of a community belonging to a particular religion, viz. Islam. Similarly, Tibetan-speaking Bhotiyas or Sherpas are Buddhists. (Cf. Breton, 1997: 16-17). It is, however, to be noted that this formula is not exempt from exceptions. Secondly, there are, on the other hand, ethnic communities each of which speak several mother tongues. This "one tribe with several languages" in Nepal is the Rai (Kiranti) group in the eastern hills and mountain. This single group speaks various Kiranti languages such as Bantawa, Chamling, Kulung, Yakkha, Thulung, Sangpang, Khaling, Dumi, Jirel, Puma, Umbule, Bahing, Yholmo, Nachiring, Dura, Koi, Hayu, Yamphu, Chhiling, Lohorung, Mewahang, Kaike, Tilung, Jerung, Lingkhim, Sam, Kagate, Chhingtang, Lhomi, etc. This trend is illustrated in the Terai region also. In this region,

various castes and tribes such as Brahmin, Rajput, Yadav, Teli, Kurmi, Chamar, Khatawe, etc. speak Maithili in the Maithili-speaking area, Bhojpuri in the Bhojpuri-speaking area and Awadhi in the Awadhi-speaking area. Thus, there exists no one-to-correspondence between ethnic communities and their mother tongues in the Terai. Thirdly, we find the “several tribes with a common language” formula. Different ethnic groups are found to speak a single mother tongue. This formula has been exemplified by Nepali, which is spoken as a mother tongue by various ethnic groups such as Bahun, Kshetri, Kami, Damai, Thakuri, Sarki, Sanyasi, and so on. Being a lingua franca, it has also been adopted as a mother tongue by people from different ethnic groups as well. Hence, it is called an “interethnic language.” Similarly, the Newars consist of various ethnic groups but all these groups speak a single language, viz. Newar or Nepal Bhasa.

In case of one-to-one relation between the tribes and their languages, a comparison of the population of different tribes and their languages can show the extent of language retention by each tribe. According to Gurung (2002: 7-8), there has been considerable increase in the speakers of the languages spoken by various ethnic groups except those of Dhimal, Bhote-Sherpa and Thakali languages. Rajbanshi and Raji are the two languages whose population exceeds the population of their tribes. Besides, Limbu, Jirel, Thami, and Magar have shown significant increase in their speakers. This is evident from the following table:

Table 4.6 : The population of tribes and their languages.

Ethnic Groups	1991 (%)	2001 (%)	Ethnic Groups	1991 (%)	2001 (%)
1. Rajbanshi	104.1	135.2	18. Chepang	68.5	70.5
2. Raji	90.4	100.6	19. Darai	60.0	68.7
3. Hayu	-	95.7	20. Newar	66.2	66.3
4. Satar	-	94.1	21. Dura	-	65.7
5. Limbu	64.0	92.9	22. Gurung	50.7	62.4
6. Jirel	86.5	92.5	23. Chhantel	-	60.2
7. Tamang	88.8	92.0	24. Danuwar	46.7	59.8
8. Dhimal	89.5	88.6	25. Kusunda	-	53.0
9. Meche	-	87.7	26. Thakali	51.8	49.6
10. Tharu	83.2	86.8	27. Magar	32.1	47.5
11. Yakkha	-	86.1	28. Jhangad	-	36.3
12. Dhami	75.4	82.6	29. Bote	-	35.4
13. Byansi	-	82.4	30. Sunuwar	-	27.9
14. Raute	-	78.7	31. Pahari	-	26.0
15. Rai-Kirant	83.6	78.3	32. Majhi	20.6	23.6
16. Bhote-Sherpa	99.1	7.6	33. Bhujel	-	9.1
17. Lepcha	-	77.2	34. Kumal	1.8	6.6
			35. Baramu	-	4.5

Source : Population Censuses (1991-2001) and Gurung (2002:8)

All these aspects of language-ethnicity relation reflect the dynamism of language shift in Nepalese context. They suggest a common tendency to shift toward regional and ethnic languages. As a result, there has been continuous decline in the numerical strength of Nepali speakers.

4.3 Second Languages

The linguistic diversity existing in the country has given rise to the three situations in the country, viz. monolingualism, bilingualism, and multilingualism. Of these language situations, only monolingualism or the use of just mother tongues has been regularly reported since the first modern census in 1952/54. The 2001 census data on monolingual communities has been presented in Appendix 4.1. The linguistically homogeneous communities figure 70 per cent of the total population of mother tongue speakers. They are mostly Nepali-speaking people, viz. 46 per cent. Their mother tongue Nepali is also a lingua franca; they hardly need to learn a second language to communicate with a group of people, speaking a different language since they know Nepali. Besides Nepali speaking people, there are people from indigeneous groups and also from the Terai who are able to use only their mother tongue. These people are usually old and illiterate and/or hail from remote rural areas with minimum contact with people speaking other languages.

Bilingualism or the use of mother tongues and their speakers' second languages (i.e. the languages most commonly used by them) has, however, been reported since the 1991 census. The 2001 census has reported only 12 second languages used by 92 mother tongue speakers. The total percentage of bilingual speakers for the 12 reported languages constitute 27.36 per cent (5722151) of the country's total population. Other enumerated second languages are Maithili (115877), Bantawa (71713), Bhojpuri (64724), Tharu (64274), Magar (49378), Tamang (46078), Newar (34431), Gurung (29655), and Awadhi (23577). For details about mother tongues and their associated second languages, see Appendix 4.1.

Nepali as a second language has been mostly returned by speakers of Tibeto-Burman languages. In such language communities it serves as a lingua franca. There are also quite a few Indo-Aryan languages whose speakers have returned Nepali as their second language in a large number. Such speakers also live in close proximity with Nepali speakers. They are by and large bilingual except for a few isolated communities. Apart from contact with Nepali-speaking community, non-Nepali speakers also use Nepali as medium of education, media and administration.

The choice of a speaker's second language is not constrained by the condition that it must belong to the language family to which his mother tongue belongs. For example, a Tibeto-Burman (e.g. Newar) speaker may use an Indo-Aryan language (e.g. Nepali or Maithili) as his second language.

Instead, the use of a second language is conditioned by contact and pressure for inter-community communication. It is thus found that many people make vigorous use of second languages while conversing with speakers of other mother tongues. However, this fact does not suggest any details about their level of proficiency in the second language they use. There is a need to evaluate their bilingual proficiency through a sociolinguistic survey.

Multilingualism, i.e. the use of more than two languages, is presumably not as widespread as bilingualism in Nepal. However, it does exist in the country to a large extent. A number of Nepalis are found proficient not only in their mother tongues but also in their lingua francas such as Hindi and English and/or neighbouring indigeneous languages. But Census data is not available about people's proficiency in languages other than their mother tongues and second languages. It does not mean that they are equally proficient in all these languages. Such a multilingual situation can be attributed to electronic media, employment and education in India and abroad.

Most speakers of Nepal's languages have been found to be in close contact. As a result, these languages tend to converge through mutual borrowing and influences and gradually share a number of lexical and grammatical features. For example, we find Tibeto-Burman languages "Indo-Aryanized" and Indo-Aryan languages "Tibeto-Burmanized". There is a need for an intensive study of convergence as well as divergence to ascertain the precise nature of Nepal as a linguistic area.

The Indo-Aryan languages spoken in the Terai (e.g. Rajbanshi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Avadhi, and Tharu) constitute a curious case, in that they are linked uninterruptedly from the viewpoint of intelligibility. That is to say, it is rather difficult to say where one language ends and another begins. However, the degree of intelligibility goes on decreasing with the increase in distance between the adjacent languages. In such a case, people adopt Hindi as a link language. Thus, these languages form a continuum.

In the hills and mountains as well, Nepali language forms an uninterrupted line of its various regional varieties. However, speakers of linguistically distinct Tibeto-Burman languages generally fail to communicate through their mother tongues. Instead, they adopt Nepali as a link language for their interpersonal communication.

A comparison of the various census reports (1952/4 –2001) indicates two conflicting tendencies in language use, viz. language shift and language maintenance. Language shift is a change from the use of one language to the use of another language. This tendency is reflected by decreases in languages and increase in Nepali, the language of the nation, in the censuses ranging from 1952/54 to 1981.

This language shift may be attributed to “one language – one nation” government policy to prescribe a single language for use in administration, education, and media. It may also be due to the pace of migration from one speech community to another (esp. a multilingual community often in urban areas) with the increasing facilities of transport and communication. Besides, it may also happen because Nepali, a single language, is required for employment, opportunities and wider communication as a lingua franca.

There has, however, been perceived a different tendency since the 1991 census. This tendency, called language maintenance, occurs when a group is loyal to its native language and tries to promote, preserve and use it even in a bilingual or multilingual situation. As a result of this tendency, there has been decrease in Nepali and increase in minority languages by 1.7 per cent. It is evident from the comparison of population by mother tongues in the last three censuses (1981-2001) (Table 4.1) The language maintenance may be due to a number of socio-cultural factors such as restoration of democracy, constitutional provisions, linguistic (including ethnic) awareness and so on.

4.4 Other Languages

In the 2001 census, there have been returned quite a few non-Nepalese languages as mother tongues. Table 4.7 presents these languages with the number of their speakers.

Table 4.7: Non-Nepalese languages in 2001 census.

Languages	Number of Speakers
1. Chinese	1,101
2. English	1,037
3. Oriya	159
4. Sindhi	72
5. Koche	54
6. Hariyanwi	33
7. Magahi	30
8. Kurmali	13
9. Dzonkha	10
10. Kuki	9
11. Mizo	8
12. Nagamese	6
13. Assamese	4
14. Sadhani	2

Source : Population Census, 2001.

These languages include Chinese (1,101 speakers), English (1,037 speakers), Oriya (159 speakers), Sindhi (72 speakers), Koche (54 speakers), Hariyanwi (33 speakers), Magahi (30 speakers), Kurmali (13 speakers), Dzonkha (10 speakers), Kuki (9 speakers), Mizo (8 speakers), Nagamese (6 speakers), Assamese (4 speakers) and Sadhani (2 speakers).

Chinese (1,101 speakers), mostly reported from the Kathmandu Municipality, are presumably spoken by business communities. In Nepalese context, English (1,037 speakers) functions as the language of prestige in Nepal. It is considered as a means of upward mobility. It has assumed even greater significance in the age of globalization. It has been used as an international language and a link to the rest of the world. For these reasons, it has been not only taught as a compulsory subject at public school and university levels but also used as medium of instruction in private schools. Besides, it has been employed as medium of science, technology, and commerce.

The remaining non-Nepalese languages, spoken by marginal number of speakers, are all Indian languages except Dzonkha, the national language of Bhutan and may be spoken by immigrants.

In the 2001 census Sanskrit has been enumerated as a mother tongue with 823 speakers, who may be presumably Sanskrit scholars with zeal to preserve and promote the language. This classical language has ceased to be spoken as a mother tongue by a speech community. However, it has continued to be used for many centuries as a medium of scholastic study and deliberations and has been actively used by Hindus in performing their religious rituals. Sanskrit is still learned by some students as an optional language. There are even television programmes (including news) carried out in Sanskrit.

4.5 Language Use, Policy and Endangerment

In the lack of a comprehensive study, it is difficult to say anything definite about the patterns of language use in Nepal. However, some broad generalizations can be made in this regard on the basis of some sporadic studies on the extent and domains in which some individual languages are used in the country⁸.

In all speech communities, mother tongues are normally used as intra- and inter-household languages. When they speak to others with mother tongues different from their own, they generally tend to switch to a lingua franca. Moreover, non-Nepali mother tongues have gradually

⁸ See Varenkamp (1996) and other sociolinguistic surveys.

ceased to be spoken by their speakers of younger generation under the influence of their Nepali-medium community school education and mass media. Nepali, spoken by the largest number of Nepalese people (48.61 per cent), has been adopted by various language communities as a lingua franca for broader communication as well. It is, however, to be noted that apart from this national lingua franca, there also exists a regional lingua franca, namely, Hindi, which has been used as medium of broader communication mainly in the Terai.

The Constitution of the Kingdom of Nepal (1991) has recognized Nepali as ‘the language of the nation’ (raashtrabhaasaa) and all mother tongues spoken in Nepal as its ‘national languages’ (raashtriyabhaashaa) (Article 6). It also accepts Nepali as the only official language. In addition, the constitution has also adopted the policy to promote and preserve Nepal’s national languages. It has also ensured the freedom of using mother tongue as medium of instruction at the primary level of education. It has been for the first time that some constitutional provisions have been made for languages other than Nepali in consonance with the existing linguistic plurality in the country.

Since these constitutional provisions, there have been made some efforts to promote and preserve Nepal’s national languages at both government and non-government levels. In 1993/4 HMG/Nepal constituted a commission to spell out the details of language policy for developing the national languages and using them in education and mass media. Though the commission’s recommendations were not fully implemented, they at least paved way for using some of the national languages in education and mass media and also helped to create awareness among various language communities for the preservation and promotion of their mother tongues. So far 18 languages (viz. Maithili, Bhojpuri, Eastern Tharu, Western Tharu, Tamang, Newar, Magar, Awadhi, Rai (Bantawa), Limbu, Tamang, Maithili, Newar, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Gurung, Sherpa, Urdu, and Hindi) have been used by Radio Nepal for broadcasting news. Besides, textbooks have been prepared for 12 mother tongues (viz. Limbu, Tamang, Maithili, Newar, Bhojpuri, Awadhi, Tharu, Rai(Bantawa), Magar , Gurung, Sherpa, and Rai (Chamling) to teach them as a subject at primary level of education and also secondary level in some cases.

In addition, various language communities have been continuing with their efforts to develop writing systems (e.g. Gurung and Magar), prepare dictionaries and grammars and compile reading materials. The Central Department of Linguistics at Tribhuvan University has been engaged in developing expertise to boost up linguistic studies in Nepal. Its recent thrust on preparing an “Encyclopedia of Nepal’s Languages” for their systematic study can be taken as a significant step in the field of documenting Nepal's languages.

An important consequence of bilingual/multilingual situation is language endangerment. In Nepal, speakers of minority languages (with marginal number of speakers) tend to shift to Nepali under socio-psychological pressures. A quite few of Nepal's minor languages are on the verge of extinction. These languages include Kumal, Majhi, and Bote of Indo-Aryan family and Bramu, Dura, Pahari, Raute, Raji, Hayu, Mewahang, Koi, and Tilung of Tibeto-Burman family (Toba and Rai, 2002). Kusunda has 87 speakers and is also endangered though it was earlier reported to be dead. It has been suggested that the very few surviving speakers of Kusunda now remember just a limited number of lexical items (Personal communication to C. M. Bandhu, M. P. Pokharel, and B.K.Rana).

There have been suggested a number of factors responsible for language loss and endangerment in Nepal. They weaken language vitality and induce a language to become extinct. The major factors include lesser number of speakers, poor economic status, lack of language transmission to younger generation, migration to urban areas and foreign countries for job and/or education as well as the lack of literate tradition, official recognition and initiatives for language maintenance, language use in domains such as education, local administration, and mass media, official status and use and, above all, language community's awareness. In these circumstances, it is important to initiate the documentation of endangered languages in collaboration with language communities, linguists and government and non-government agencies and preserve and promote them for future generation.

4.6 Conclusion

This chapter has presented a glimpse of the language situation in Nepal on the basis of the data available from the 2001 census and some additional sources. There have been identified 92 languages. There has been, no doubt, improvement in the identification of Nepal's languages. However, there remain some issues, which need to be addressed before we arrive at a more reliable picture of the language situation in Nepal. These issues include:

- A number of languages spoken by a sizable chunk of population have to be lumped together as 'unknown' in the lack of information necessary for identifying languages. Such languages are yet to be identified on the basis of field study.

- Languages such as Athpare⁹, Kham and Belhare have already been identified and well-documented (Ebert, 1994, 1996; Neupane, 2003; Watters, 2002; Bickel, 1996) but they have not been enumerated in the 2001 census.
- In many a case distinction between language and dialect has been problematic and needs to be sorted out through sociolinguistic studies.
- Language data are not strictly comparable in various censuses.

Such uncertainty about the identification of Nepal's languages will continue unless reliable census enumeration is coupled with the linguistic survey of Nepal comprising both linguistic as well as sociolinguistic study of the languages and dialects used in the country.

Apart from mother tongues, the 2001 census has also recorded 12 specific second languages used by various mother tongue speakers. Nepali has been used as the largest-speaking second language. The return of second languages in the present census is helpful to ascertain the degree of bilingualism in Nepalese communities. In addition to bilingualism, there also exist multilingualism, the study of which requires the enumeration of languages other than mother tongues and second languages.

Barring a few unclassified languages, Nepal's languages mainly belong to four language families – Indo-European, Sino-Tibetan, Austro-Asiatic, and Dravidian. The uncertainty and controversy in their genetic affiliation will persist unless they are adequately documented and analyzed.

Most of the minor languages spoken in Nepal lack literate tradition. As a result, if they cease to be spoken they are likely to lose their identity. However, there seems to be a positive sign for their retention since the 2001 census shows a tendency towards growing language vitality among various minor ethnic groups. Similarly, bilingualism has been found vibrant in different speech communities. Finally, a number of minor languages with critical number of speakers are on the verge of extinction and need to be preserved and promoted through the elaboration of domains of their use as well as their documentation.

⁹ Ebert (1997) and Neupane (2001) have worked on a comprehensive grammar of Athpare while Bickel (1996) has worked on the grammar of Belhare. Similarly, Watters (2002) presents a comprehensive grammar of Kham.

In view of these factors, it is important to suggest the following measures:

- To provide orientation and a list of Nepal's languages to enumerators in order to record all the languages and avoid inconsistency
- To resolve language-dialect controversy and identify specific languages through a linguistic survey
- To facilitate the return of languages (other than mother tongues and second languages) that people know
- To identify the genetic affiliation of unclassified languages through their adequate linguistic studies
- To develop writing systems appropriate to specific languages with no literate traditions
- To promote the domains of language use for their preservation

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Appendix 4.1: Population by mother tongue and second language.

Mother Tongue	Total	Population that speak second language													
		Nepali	Maithili	Bhojpuri	Tharu	Tamang	Newar	Magar	Awadhi	Bantawa	Gurung	Limbu	Bajjika	Others	Not reported
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Total	22736934	5722151	115877	64724	64274	46078	34431	49378	23577	71713	29655	35272	7612	632443	10784
Nepali	11053255	0	54488	24761	42921	29959	29959	40150	14796	9841	18426	10043	966	178991	4802
Maithili	2797582	880593	0	14997	11629	228	76	157	460	542	74	1768	2104	208438	912
Bhojpuri	1712536	308756	5727	0	1469	31	99	50	114	73	8	21	618	61830	10
Tharu (Dagaura/Rana)	1331546	695550	9752	10580	0	44	36	127	5569	145	8	101	467	3318	260
Tamang	1179145	929660	390	56	75	0	971	1928	10	1317	7314	1096	0	5237	388
Newar	825458	626813	201	82	71	407	0	373	13	386	149	294	1	8544	419
Magar	770116	648600	208	54	657	1802	240	0	1	1302	2514	1801	0	971	531
Awadhi	560744	71631	130	25	887	21	13	43	0	111	4	27	0	79086	14
Bantawa	371056	314505	30	13	67	777	95	1279	13	0	123	17169	0	3173	1085
Gurung	338925	262076	23	24	103	10161	202	2649	3	447	0	327	0	2479	968
Limbu	333633	231161	78	9	40	682	87	1785	2	54534	106	0	0	2751	253
Bajjika	237947	31389	1102	6304	185	2	1	21	0	3	3	3	0	27628	2
Urdu	174840	57965	22423	3246	372	5	26	9	2076	27	0	17	3378	22484	23
Rajbansi	129829	80274	7402	9	1218	15	0	1	51	83	3	19	0	6453	350
Sherpa	129771	109312	12	12	4	941	53	4	0	179	34	168	0	386	198
Hindi	105765	61609	1693	2624	280	2	158	17	352	11	1	6	75	2415	2
Chamling	44093	39842	2	1	19	43	9	140	1	559	0	485	0	93	49
Santhali	40260	25420	2855	6	323	10	0	1	0	58	4	8	0	3312	2

Mother Tongue	Total	Population that speak second language													
		Nepali	Maithili	Bhojpuri	Tharu	Tamang	Newar	Magar	Awadhi	Bantawa	Gurung	Limbu	Bajjika	Others	Not reported
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Chepang	36807	29829	349	148	0	7	1	30	0	2	369	1	0	23	4
Danuwar	31849	24012	1878	3	16	6	1	12	0	40	0	1	0	39	0
Jhangar/ Dhangar	28615	15441	2921	889	2221	2	0	8	0	5	1	4	0	198	2
Sunuwar	26611	21022	1	2	2	114	4	13	0	587	1	77	0	258	403
Bangla	23602	12060	1796	229	64	2	22	8	35	7	0	3	0	2349	2
Marwari (Rajsthani)	22637	16772	258	36	2	1	20	0	47	3	0	0	0	1829	0
Manjhi	21841	17544	1	85	34	317	4	237	0	245	2	20	0	367	12
Thami	18991	15173	0	0	0	9	0	28	4	9	0	4	0	15	1
Kulung	18686	15771	84	0	0	0	3	5	0	40	0	76	0	10	1
Dhimal	17308	13132	4	3	807	19	3	85	0	93	0	178	0	1043	2
Angika	15892	7940	865	3	0	1	0	0	0	8	1	1	0	3852	0
Yakkha	14648	12140	0	3	1	10	8	1	0	110	0	1066	0	34	29
Thulung	14034	12795	3	1	0	4	2	0	0	205	1	106	0	84	3
Sangpang	10810	8930	0	0	0	5	3	0	0	302	0	148	0	58	18
Bhujel/ khawas	10733	8554	80	0	477	1	3	0	0	20	0	12	0	118	0
Darai	10210	8500	2	0	3	0	0	1	0	1	1	1	0	16	0
Khaling	9288	8804	6	2	0	0	0	8	0	71	4	30	0	18	2
Kumal	6533	6007	15	0	6	1	3	16	0	3	0	0	0	54	0
Thakali	6441	5667	59	2	34	0	29	3	0	4	22	2	0	24	0
Chhantyal/ Chhantel	5912	5010	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	0
Nepali Sign Language	5743	1257	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	3	3

Mother Tongue	Total	Population that speak second language													
		Nepali	Maithili	Bhojpuri	Tharu	Tamang	Newar	Magar	Awadhi	Bantawa	Gurung	Limbu	Bajjika	Others	Not reported
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Tibetan	5277	4334	0	8	1	2	4	1	0	0	35	0	0	30	1
Dumi	5271	4054	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	27	0	17	3
Jirel	4919	4317	0	1	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	8	0
Wambule/ Umbule	4471	4314	0	0	0	0	61	0	0	4	0	0	0	10	0
Puma	4310	4061	0	0	0	0	1	0	0	10	0	0	0	0	0
Yholmo	3986	3683	2	0	35	12	0	0	0	0	46	1	0	0	0
Nachhiring	3553	3293	2	0	0	2	0	0	0	68	0	12	0	15	0
Dura	3397	3013	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	1	17	0	0	0	0
Meche	3301	2970	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	8	0	17	0	79	6
Pahari	2995	1985	0	1	0	6	92	0	0	9	0	0	0	195	0
Lepcha/ Lapche	2826	2222	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	24	1	7	0	2	0
Bote	2823	2413	0	0	161	0	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Bahing	2765	1571	0	0	1	0	0	0	0	6	0	17	0	816	1
Koi/ koyu	2641	2487	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	31	0	26	0	2	0
Raji	2413	1098	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	0	3	0	17	1
Hayu	1743	1603	2	0	1	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	1
Byangshi	1734	1324	0	1	2	1	0	0	0	0	38	0	0	23	0
Yamphu/ Yamphe	1722	1659	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	16	0	4	0
Ghale	1649	1474	0	0	0	9	0	0	0	0	94	0	0	0	0
Khariya	1575	137	1	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	320	0
Chhiling	1314	1292	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mother Tongue	Total	Population that speak second language													
		Nepali	Maithili	Bhojpuri	Tharu	Tamang	Newar	Magar	Awadhi	Bantawa	Gurung	Limbu	Bajjika	Others	Not reported
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Lohorung	1207	712	0	0	0	1	0	0	0	49	0	20	0	9	3
Punjabi	1165	530	1	9	3	0	0	0	22	1	0	0	0	255	9
Chinese	1101	767	0	0	0	0	9	0	0	1	0	3	0	42	3
English	1037	535	7	1	0	0	7	4	1	6	0	0	0	34	5
Mewahang	904	522	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	17	0	0	0	0	0
Sanskrit	823	663	0	0	3	0	1	0	1	31	0	9	0	6	0
Kaike	794	792	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Raute	518	270	3	0	0	0	1	0	0	1	0	0	0	11	1
Kisan	489	366	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0
Churauti	408	391	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Baram/ Maramu	342	89	0	0	0	14	0	3	0	0	92	0	0	13	0
Tilung	310	281	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	1	0	0	0
Jero/ Jerung	271	270	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dungmali	221	162	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	13	0
Oriya	159	85	19	0	0	5	0	0	0	0	0	1	0	25	0
Lingkhim	97	97	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kusunda	87	59	1	0	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sindhi	72	26	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	7	0
Koche	54	52	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Hariyanwi	33	32	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	1	0
Magahi	30	30	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0

Mother Tongue	Total	Population that speak second language													
		Nepali	Maithili	Bhojpuri	Tharu	Tamang	Newar	Magar	Awadhi	Bantawa	Gurung	Limbu	Bajjika	Others	Not reported
(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)	(10)	(11)	(12)	(15)	(16)	(17)	(18)
Sam	23	23	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kurmali	13	11	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kagate	10	10	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Dzonkha	9	1	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Kuki	9	9	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Chhintang	8	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	2	0	0	0	0	0
Mizo	8	8	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Nagamese	6	6	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Lhomi	4	4	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Assamise	3	0	0	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sadhani	2	2	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
Unknown Language	168340	20520	995	491	62	396	117	181	5	36	159	28	3	2503	0

Source : Population Census 2001.

Appendix 4.2 : Urban-rural composition of population by mother tongue (2001).

Mother Tongue	Total	Urban	Rural
Total	22736934	3227879	19509055
Nepali	11053255	1680835	9372420
Maithili	2797582	266901	2530681
Bhojpuri	1712536	171283	1541253
Tharu (Dagaura/Rana)	1331546	98295	1233251
Tamang	1179145	88401	1090744
Newar	825458	474448	351010
Magar	770116	49757	720359
Awadhi	560744	69689	491055
Bantawa	371056	41945	329111
Gurung	338925	62257	276668
Limbu	333633	21351	312282
Bajjika	237947	4231	233716
Urdu	174840	35375	139465
Rajbansi	129829	9063	120766
Sherpa	129771	14390	115381
Hindi	105765	59068	46697
Chamling	44093	1235	42858
Santhali	40260	1211	39049
Chepeng	36807	186	36621
Danuwar	31849	2387	29462
Jhangar/ Dhangar	28615	1351	27264
Sunuwar	26611	2208	24403
Bangla	23602	7021	16581
Marwari (Rajsthani)	22637	18349	4288
Manjhi	21841	682	21159
Thami	18991	1019	17972
Kulung	18686	347	18339
Dhimal	17308	3365	13943
Angika	15892	5	15887
Yakkha	14648	437	14211
Thulung	14034	306	13728
Sangpang	10810	262	10548
Bhujel/ Khawas	10733	179	10554
Darai	10210	3540	6670
Khaling	9288	83	9205
Kumal	6533	523	6010
Thakali	6441	2616	3825
Chhantyal/ Chhantel	5912	127	5785

Mother Tongue	Total	Urban	Rural
Nepali Sign Language	5743	431	5312
Tibbetan	5277	509	4768
Dumi	5271	39	5232
Jirel	4919	84	4835
Wambule/ Umbule	4471	3	4468
Puma	4310	28	4282
Yholmo	3986	131	3855
Nachhiring	3553	49	3504
Dura	3397	106	3291
Meche	3301	637	2664
Pahari	2995	0	2995
Lepcha/ Lapche	2826	40	2786
Bote	2823	299	2524
Bahing	2765	53	2712
Koi/ Koyu	2641	45	2596
Raji	2413	80	2333
Hayu	1743	35	1708
Byangshi	1734	73	1661
Yamphu/ Yamphe	1722	8	1714
Ghale	1649	58	1591
Khariya	1575	155	1420
Chhiling	1314	8	1306
Lohorung	1207	79	1128
Punjabi	1165	894	271
Chinese	1101	807	294
English	1037	650	387
Mewahang	904	15	889
Sanskrit	823	91	732
Kaike	794	0	794
Raute	518	47	471
Kisan	489	273	216
Churauti	408	22	386
Baram/ Maramu	342	1	341
Tilung	310	0	310
Jero/ Jerung	271	0	271
Dungmali	221	22	199
Oriya	159	70	89
Lingkhim	97	0	97
Kusunda	87	55	32
Sindhi	72	66	6

Mother Tongue	Total	Urban	Rural
Koche	54	0	54
Hariyanwi	33	31	2
Magahi	30	16	14
Sam	23	1	22
Kurmali	13	0	13
Kagate	10	6	4
Dzonkha	9	0	9
Kuki	9	0	9
Chhintang	8	0	8
Mizo	8	4	4
Nagamese	6	0	6
Lhomi	4	1	3
Assamise	3	0	3
Sadhani	2	0	2
Unknown language	168340	27129	141211

Source : Population Census 2001