

Politics of Hegemony and Denial in the Rhetoric of Language and Education Policy in
Nepal: A Critical Discourse Analysis of Policy Documents and Government Sponsored
Textbooks
(1960-2009)

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2010

PREVIEW

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DISSERTATION

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

The University of Texas at El Paso

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements

for the Degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

Department of English

THE UNIVERSITY OF TEXAS AT EL PASO

December 2010

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Acknowledgements

It is a great pleasure to thank all those who helped me make this dissertation a reality. I would start by sincerely appreciating my advisor Dr. Kate Mangelsdorf's consistent and thoughtful guidance from the very day this topic came to my mind. I always walked out of her office room with positive thoughts, as she would patiently listen, and encourage me to move ahead with suggestions that were always insightful and challenging.

I am equally delighted to thank Dr. Beth Brunk-Chavez, the member of my dissertation committee, for her consistent support throughout my studies at UTEP. Her amicable nature and lightening fast response to my queries and drafts always energized me to work on a similar pace. I am also very thankful to Dr. Richard Pineda, the other member of my dissertation committee, who provided me with insightful and thought provoking ideas, especially in the field of intercultural and international communication that I could use in my dissertation.

I am indebted to Dr. Helen Foster for her kind and always helping nature. Her insistence on identity and space has had a big influence on me and my dissertation. Similarly, I am equally indebted to Dr. Elaine Fredericksen for the extensive discussions on race theories that helped me establish the theoretical framework of my dissertation. I would also like to thank my professors at UTEP, Dr. Carol Clark and Dr. Carlos Salinas for the wonderful classes that they taught. I would also like to thank Dr. David Ruiter, Chair, Department of English, UTEP, who helped me get some funds to conduct my research in Nepal. I would also like appreciate the very helpful and friendly nature of Ceci Rhymers and all the English Department Office members at UTEP.

I would also like to thank my friends and colleagues in my PhD program at UTEP and at El Paso for their help and support to make this endeavor a success. Without their help and moral support living in El Paso, Texas, and studying at UTEP would not have been that appealing.

My very special thanks go to my friend Dr. Lav Deo Awasti, Joint Secretary in the Department of Education, Nepal, for all his support in collecting the required materials for my research. Special thanks also go to all the officials at the Education Ministry, and the officials at the Curriculum and Material Center for going out of the way to provide me with textbooks and other materials that were hard to find otherwise.

I would not have thought about embarking on my doctoral studies without the encouragement of Professor Dr. Shreedhar Prasad Lohani, Tribhuvan University, Kathmandu, Nepal, who always believed in me, and wanted me to go for it. Thank you Dr. Lohani!

My Mom and my brother's family, my sons Mani and Punit, and my daughter in law Pooja, need a very special mention here, as they always stood by me during the whole four years of my studies.

Finally, I owe to my wife more than I can put in words. She agreed to leave the comfort of our home in Nepal to once again bear with me as a graduate student's spouse. She looked after all my needs while I labored hard towards my PhD, and still found some time to spend a few hours as a volunteer at the Las Palmas Hospital in El Paso, Texas. I dedicate every page of my Dissertation and my doctoral degree to her. Thank you Sudha!

Thank you all!

Abstract

My dissertation analyses the power dynamics of policy documents and government sponsored text-books in Nepal since the 1960s making use of critical applied discourse analysis as its theoretical lens. It looks into the rhetoric of language policies and planning in Nepal and shows how such rhetoric has shaped the overall linguistic, ethno-linguistic, ethno-religious and educational scenario, both overtly and covertly. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's "notion of hegemony" and Teun A. van Dijk's "theory of denial," I have shown that there are groups and individuals in societies that try to keep language under control for the promotion of their political, social, economic, personal and cultural ideologies. This control, overtly or covertly, is further perpetuated through education policies and the government sponsored textbooks that emerge. I have, through critical discourse analysis of such texts, revealed how language in all these documents is used to create group membership (us/them) and to demonstrate the difference through inclusion or exclusion, to determine loyalty and/or patriotism, and to classify people based on various socio-economic and socio-cultural factors. My analyses further authenticates the notion that language, rather than being an open and free system, is manipulated by those in power with the support of linguists and educationalists to impose, colonize, and create a distance between the us and them, resulting in the existence of a kind of push and pull between language ideology and language practice.

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List of Abbreviations

HLNEC	High Level National Education Commission
MOE	Ministry of Education
MOES	Ministry of Education and Sports
NEC	National Education Commission
NEPC	Nepal Education Planning Commission
NLRPC	National Languages Policy Recommendation Commission
UNDP	United Nations Development Program

PREVIEW

Chapter I: Introduction

How do we recognize the shackles that tradition has placed upon us? For if we can recognize them, we are also able to break them. Franz Boas.

1.1. The aim of the study

This dissertation analyses the power dynamics of policy documents and government sponsored textbooks in Nepal since the 1960s by making use of critical applied discourse analysis as its theoretical lens. It looks into the rhetoric of language policies and planning in Nepal and shows how such rhetoric has shaped the overall linguistic, ethno-linguistic, and educational scenario, both overtly and covertly. Drawing on Antonio Gramsci's "notion of hegemony" and Teun A. van Dijk's "theory of denial," I have shown that there are groups and individuals in societies that try to keep language in discourse¹ under control for the promotion of their political, social, economic, personal, religious and cultural ideologies. This control is further perpetuated through education policies and government sponsored textbooks that emerge. I have, through critical discourse analysis of such texts, revealed how language/discourse in all these documents "is used to create group membership (us/them), to demonstrate inclusion, or exclusion, to determine loyalty or patriotism, to show economic status (haves/ have not's) and classification of people and personal identities" (Shohamy, 2006, p. xv). My analyses further authenticates the notion that language, rather than being an open and free system, is turned, by those in power into "a tool for imposition, manipulation, and colonization, mostly used by ideologues and politicians with the support of linguists and educationalists" (p. 23), and there always exists a kind of push and pull between language ideology and language practice.

1.2. Implications of my research:

Though my research basically focuses on critical discourse analysis (CDA) of texts and context of Nepal, it has a very wide appeal. In both the new and the old democracies around the world, the

¹ I have used the terms "language" and "discourse" interchangeably in my dissertation, both denoting –"language use" in speech and writing, as used by CDA theorists like Norman Fairclough & Ruth Wodak (1997).

scenario is almost the same as far as the hidden agendas behind the dominant discourse are concerned. CDA researchers univocally agree that one of the pivotal attributes of dominant discourse is its unwavering desire and power to manipulate the overall socio-political, socio-cultural, and socio-economical conditions in the favor of the ruling elites and/or the traditionally powerful groups in any society. Therefore, by uncovering the ideological assumptions behind the discourse of public documents and government sponsored text-books in Nepal over a period of five decades, I firmly believe that I will be able to show how ideologies, language and power work in connivance to maintain hegemony through “consent and coercion.” This revelation based on the case study of Nepal, will further accentuate the importance of recognizing the role played by ideologies, language and power of the dominant groups throughout the world in ensuring the domination of people of different ethnic, cultural and linguistic backgrounds. Understanding the rhetorical nature of discourses of similar kinds will help in the formulation of future plans and policies that are inclusive and pragmatically pluralistic in any nation.

Similarly, I am convinced that conducting such research with the help of CDA is useful to both rhetoric and composition teaching and research. For researchers, CDA is a pertinent analytical tool that requires close reading of the texts “in conjunction with a broader contextual analysis, including consideration of discursive practices, intertextual relations, and sociocultural factors.” CDA, no doubt, heavily emphasizes on “fine grained details” of the text and “the political aspects of discursive manipulation” (Huckin, 2002, p.156).

Likewise, my interest in this topic as a teacher of rhetoric and composition is in line with my belief that writing is a social practice, and CDA sees discourse as a form of social practice where language use is both socially influential and influenced. Conducting this CDA study is, therefore, more engaging as it attempts to reveal the relationship between language use, power, and ideology. I am convinced that this critical approach to language study will enable us to achieve our teaching goals that prioritize development of our student capabilities.

The understanding of this approach has distinct pedagogical implications as it helps the students to become more efficient in examining and critically judging the world around them, and make necessary changes. They will be in a better position to see how knowledge is socially constructed, or in other words, how meaning is constructed and negotiated in discourse, and the role that discourse plays in the real life scenario.

1.3. Brief political, linguistic and educational history of Nepal

1.3.1. From 1769-1950

The history of modern Nepal can be traced back to 1769 when the then Shah Dynasty King Prithvi Narayan Shah captured small principalities of the Kathmandu valley and other areas of the Himalaya region, and declared Kathmandu to be the capital of the nation called Nepal. Though the land area conquered by Prithvi Narayan Shah and his successors was much larger than today, the British regime in India later on took away some of it and roughly confined Nepal to its current area of 147,181 square kilometers. Remembered as the unifier of the nation, King Prithvi Narayan Shah, is considered to be a far-sighted ruler, and his social, economic, and foreign policies, no doubt, guided the policies of Nepal for a long time after. He was apt in constructing nationalist identity through his metaphorical rhetoric. The metaphorical and pluralistic rhetoric like “Nepal is a garden of four castes and 36 sub-caste” that the king came up with, is a distinct example of denial of people outside the caste system and creation of fictive identity. His whole idea of integration was based on four tenets to be followed by everyone in the kingdom: a. Unquestioning power of the king; b. Hindu values as ethos of national life; c. Hindu value system based on caste; and d. Nepali language as the language for official and educational purposes. As the newly formed nation was mired in poverty and illiteracy, the ruling class and the ruling elites made use of the Hindu values and created an environment that could not be questioned. Hindu value based caste system was the ethos of national life and Nepali language was the official language and medium of education (Regmi, 2003). People were made to believe that caste

inequality and difference of status was preordained fact governed by “Karma and Dharma,” and nothing could be done to change it in this life. This belief was ingrained in the people in such a way that they, in their hope to attain a better position in their next life, toiled hard and never questioned the hegemony. They blamed the ‘Karma’ of their past life for their current status (Sharma, 1986). Critical race theorist Maria P.P. Root (2002) calls this acceptance of the domination, “oppressed’s internalization of the mechanics,” which she compares with the “hostage syndrome” among the prisoner of war, when the prisoners “take on the characteristics of their captors,” and start to question their own selves rather than the oppressor’s oppression (p. 357). People were made hostage by the religio-political rhetoric of the dominant class. There was “absolute control in political authority, monopolization of economic resources, and penetration and expansion of social value systems of the victorious groups in vanquished areas...” It was an "empire model" of national integration” (Pfaff-Czarnecka, 1996, p. 421).

The autocratic rule propagated by the Hindu Shah Dynasty Kings, where monarchy and religion played decisive role in governance, was further fueled by dynasty of prime ministerial rule of the Ranas that followed. The Ranas, who came to power because of the intensive infighting that ensued among the royalties and between different powerful families of courtiers, continued for 105 years from 1846 to 1951 (Khadka, 1986). After defeating all his rivals in the King’s Palace and consolidating his political power, Jung Bahadur Rana became the first prime minister of the Dynasty of prime ministerial rule with sole executive powers. The royalties basically became rubber stamps and had no say in the political affairs of the country.

According to Mahendra Lawoti (2001), in 1854 Jung Bahadur Rana initiated the first civil code in Nepal that brought all the indigenous people into the Hindu hierarchical fold that “categorized the Indigenous Peoples into enslavable and non-slavable *matwalis* or alcohol drinking communities”(par. 6). People were bound in a mono-cultural nationalism, through one language, one religion, and one dress. This “cultural imperialism” was given a legal status by Jung Bahadur Rana, and it not only de-

cultured the several indigenous cultures that existed in the society, but also marginalized their status socially, politically, economically and religiously. The homogenizing process that followed failed to recognize the diversity present in the society; it rather promoted legalized inequality. Although the civil code, says Rajendra Pradhan (2002), “recognized and accepted some degree of cultural diversity, it translated cultural differences into hierarchical ‘caste’ categories” (p. 9).

Education during the Rana rule was the privilege of the rulers and religious leaders. The Ranas feared educated public, and therefore, “kept education the exclusive prerogative of the ruling elite; the rest of the population remained largely illiterate” (Galatin, Par. 2). Organized and formal education for the common masses was a taboo in the Rana Oligarchy, as they were least interested in nation building: “Their hostility towards education... was natural and consistent with the requirement of maintaining themselves in power” (Aryal, 1970, p. 26). However, for his family members and other close relatives, Jung Bahadur Rana made provisions to learn English and provide western style education. Sonia Eagle (1999) says, “English and a Western-style education were not only a privilege of the elite, but a factor in reinforcing their despotic rule. Teachers were brought from England or India and classes were taught in English” (p. 284).

In 1885, the school for the Rana family members that was confined in the palace premises was moved to present-day Durbar High School in Kathmandu, though it was still only for the ruling elites and non-Rana children of high status (Aryal, 1970). For higher education these affluent and ruling elites went to convent schools in India. Finally in 1918 Trichandra College was set up for the graduates of the Durbar High School. Though Western style education was promoted by the Ranas, they were also concerned about the importance of Nepali language, especially, as an identity marker. In 1901 education in Nepali was initiated in primary schools and Nepali as a subject was introduced in High School (Sharma, 2002). Bids towards its modernization and standardization were made, thus undermining all the other languages that were spoken in the kingdom (Dahal, 2000).

The urge to create a homogeneous society by imposing one national language (Gorkha Bhasha) was so strong that other languages spoken by indigenous tribes were deemed “wild” and it was believed that unless other languages are “kicked out,” “Gorkha Bhasha” (today known as Nepali), could not be developed as primary language of Nepal (Yakha Rai, cited in Subba et al, 2002, p. 32). In 1939 the first ever education ordinance came into effect and the government tried to streamline the meager number of primary, secondary and religious schools that existed in Nepal. Apart from introducing several measures for governance and financing of schools, the ordinance assumed only boys as students, introduced Nepali as the medium of instruction, and insisted on quality education. A strict restriction was imposed by the ordinance on teachers and staff going against the government (MOE/Nepal, 2009).

1.3.2. From 1951-1960

The archaic Rana rule that lasted for 105 years started showing signs of fatigue during the 1940s, as heavy air of dissatisfaction among the common masses loomed everywhere in the country. The Ranas, even though they eliminated, jailed, and tortured hundreds of people who were a threat to their regime, could not resist the 1950-51 revolution. The uniqueness of this revolution was the alliance between the then defunct Shah Dynasty King Tribhuvan Bir Bikram Shah Dev and the Nepali Congress party to uproot the Rana rule. Democracy dawned in Nepal in 1951, and “the institution of monarchy, overshadowed as it was for over a century, was thrown into the vortex of party politics in order to play an assertive role in the post-revolution period” (Baral, 1983, p.13). The interim government that was formed came up with Nepal Act 1951 that declared the king as the constitutional head. The executive powers were held by both the council of ministers and the monarch. Unfortunately, the newly formed government collapsed within a few months and because of inter-personal and intra-party feuds, the governments that followed until 1960 paved way for Royal ascendancy led by King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah Dev, who had ascended the throne after King Tribhuvan’s death in 1955. The democratic exercise that had started in 1951, ended in 1960. The democratic constitution of 1959 was suspended,

political parties were banned, and most of the leaders of the political parties were jailed and eventually exiled.

Even though the period from 1951-1960 was one of tumultuous political activities, the importance of educating the masses was prioritized. Within three years of democracy the number of primary schools around the country soared from 100 to 1200, high schools from 6 to 83, and colleges from 1 to 14 (Wood, 1959). The report of the National Education Planning Commission that was set up in 1954 became the baseline for the education plans and policies that followed in Nepal. The four major goals set by the Commission were:

- a. Five years of universal primary education within 25 years;
- b. Multipurpose secondary education for about 20 percent of the nation's youth, and at least one high school in every one of the 32 political districts within ten years;
- c. A national residential university within five years, and some form of higher education for about 5 percent of the youth within ten years;
- d. Adult education (including literacy) for all who desire it within 15 years (Wood, 1959, p. 430).

H.B. Wood, who was the 1954 commission's educational advisor, says that the above mentioned goals were based on "indigenous needs of the people served; it preserves, expands, and adapts the cultural values of an old civilization to the modern world," and is flexible. It is in line with other development endeavors of the country moving towards consolidation of the democratic way of life (p. 433). However, though the rhetoric sounds pluralistic, the aim to set up a uniform system of education for the whole country is indicative of the government's policy to homogenize the peoples of Nepal. Lav Deo Awasti (2008) in his article *Importance of Ideologies: From Macaulay Minutes to Wood Commission*, opines that even though the report looked into pertinent issues relating to medium of instruction, language teaching and learning, teacher preparation and instruction materials, and

emphasized the importance of non-Nepali speaking children in schools, “[t]he report in reality was unable to capture the spirit of the political change [----] failed to recognize the need for multilingual education [...] [i]t tried to impose linguistic restrictions, and discouraged the spread of multilingualism in the country” (cited in Awasthi, 2008, p. 23). The following remarks of Dr. Wood indicate the mindset of the Commission formed for the future strategy of the education in Nepal:

.....that two hundred years before, the very problem had started then 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 is no problem of language (cited in Caddell, 2002).

The heavy influence of the West in Nepal’s language and educational policies, or, “domination and importation of alien thoughts” (Awasthi, p. 22), ever since the democratization process started in 1951, is distinctly visible. The newly acquired democracy banked its sole rhetoric on opening the country to the modern world and all round development through education. The education policy 1956 of the Ministry of Education states:

We have become part of the world, whether we like it or not. We can no longer remain isolated; the world has come to us. How can we meet this world without education? Must we – who once were the cross-roads of civilization – bow our heads in shame to our worldly visitors? How can we evaluate the “gifts” that are offered to us – ideologies, new customs, inventions and the ways of a new strange world? How can we protect ourselves against slogans and ideologies detrimental to the interests of our country? We can do none of these without education to give us understanding and strength to lead us (NEPC, 1956, p. 2).

Interestingly, the thrust on removal of darkness through education and enter the challenging arena of the modern world through open door policy sounds really encouraging and pluralistic, however, the following statement on language policy nips the desire of minority language groups to equally participate and contribute in the nation building process, as their mother tongue is systematically sidelined and their linguistic right systematically denied for the development of Nepali:

No other language should be taught, even optionally in primary school because few children will need them, they would hinder the use of Nepali, parents would insist on their children taking them whether capable or not, time is needed for other more important and fundamental learning – there are not enough well qualified teachers, and those who wish and need additional languages, can begin them in the 6th grade. (NEPC, 1956, p. 95, cited in Yadava, 2007, p. 10-11)

Similarly,

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 ... The use of 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. (NEPC, 1956, cited in Yadava, 2007, p. 10)

Likewise,

If the younger generation is taught to use Nepali as the basic language then other languages will gradually disappear, the greater the national strength and unity will result...Local dialects and tongues other than Nepali should be vanished [banished] from the playground as early as possible in the life of the child. (NEPC 1956, cited Yadava, 2007, p.11).

Broadly speaking, these clauses in the report furthered the hegemony of the caste Hindu elites, mostly educated in India, as they were the only ones who could communicate with the outside world with the knowledge of at least three languages: Nepali, Hindi and English. The melting pot ideology of those in power is evident, as the above statements are aimed at socially constructing a single “fictive identity” (Balibar, 2002) of the diverse Nepali populace through government initiated “racial projects” (Omi & Winant, 2002). The political elites, argues Burghart (1984), tactfully “renegotiated their legitimacy and models of social hierarchy in terms of a nationalist ideology, and in doing so, gave nation building a peculiarly ‘Nepali’ identity” (cited in Maddox. 2003, p. 206), thus erasing the valuable differences in the name of unity.

1.3.3. From 1960-1990

The honeymoon period of newly acquired democracy ended in 1960, as King Mahendra Bir Bikram Shah declared that the “experiment with multi-party democracy” was a failure due to the extensive infighting that went on between all the stakeholders. He insisted on an indigenous system suitable for the sons and soil of Nepal and developed the partyless Panchayat system that exercised its authoritarian rule for 30 years to come.