Semantic Volte Face of English Words in Nepal

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Abstract

With the spread of English globally and its contact with the local languages, English words have undergone some changes in their pronunciation, forms, meanings, and functions. This paper attempted to explore the changes in the meaning of English words in Nepal. From different literary texts, I purposively selected thirty English words that I found unique in their meanings, four English language teachers who could provide information about the semantic changes of some English words, and my own experiences. The selected words were categorized into five themes: semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic shifts, which were then analyzed and interpreted. The study reveals that English words in Nepal have changed their meanings from narrow to broad, from positive to negative and vice versa, and to something different or new in meanings, which are the variety markers of Nepali English (NE). The results of the study are useful for teaching profession, World Englishes, corpus linguistics, contact linguistics, contact literature, semantics, and pragmatics.

Keywords: Semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, semantic shifts

Introduction

With globalization and the unprecedented spread of English worldwide, bilinguals' creativity and nativization, a different variety of English has emerged in Nepal. The localized variety of English spoken and written in Nepal is known by different names such as Nepalese English (Crystal, 2003; Dewan & Laksamba, 2020; Karn, 2011; McArthur, 1987), Nepali English (Adhikari, 2018; Brett, 1999; Dewan, 2021; Giri, 2020; Hartford, 1993; Kachru, 2011), Nenglish (Daniloff-Merrill, 2010, as cited in Karn, 2011; Duwadi, 2010; Koirala, 2021; Paudyal, 2019; Rai, 2006),

Neplish (Homes, 2007), Nepanglish (Kamali, 2010), and Nepenglish (Sharma et al., 2015). All these studies describe NE and its different features. In fact, English has been Nepalized in Nepal. In other words, the global character of English has been localized that has led to the emergence of a nativized and indigenized variety of English in Nepal. As Karn (2006) stated, "…the English language has been acclimatized here according to Nepali soil, Nepali culture, Nepali accent, and so on. As a matter of fact, some kind of Nepaliness has been added to the English spoken here" (p. 75), or some kind of hybrid English has emerged in Nepal (Dewan & Laksamba, 2020). The Nepaliness of English can be found at the levels of phonology, grammar, lexis/semantics, and discourses.

The phonological, lexical, semantic, grammatical, and discourse changes in localized varieties of English are becoming increasingly important areas of study in World Englishes. Previous studies (e.g., Brett, 1999; Jora, 2019; Rai, 2006; Sharma et al., 2015) have reported that English words have undergone the semantic volte face in Nepal, which means a major change in the meaning of words. Stevenson (2010) defined volte-face as a complete change of position in one's attitude or opinion. In semantic volte-face, the shift of meaning can be upside down; that is, words used in the positive sense are used in the negative sense, and vice versa (Rai, 1993). The semantic change in NE makes it different from other varieties of English, such as British English (BE) or American English (AE). Giving some examples of NE, Rai (2006) claimed, "Nenglish has its own specialties that make it different not only from English but also from Hinglish" (p. 34). Such specialties are evident in lexis and semantics. By using English words with new meanings, speakers of local varieties of English fulfill their communicative needs. If the speakers of other varieties of English do not know the new local meaning of English words, effective communication is not possible.

In recent years, there has been an increasing interest in the study of lexical and semantic changes in World Englishes. The study of the semantic volte-face of English words informs why and how words get changed in different local contexts. The research to date has not studied the semantic changes of English words in terms of semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic shifts in Nepal. Therefore, this paper seeks to explain the semantic changes of English words in Nepali contexts.

Literature Review

The majority of linguists in the past believed that language change was imperceptible and untraceable, despite the fact that it occurred. Since the 1970s, linguists have realized that language change is observable, provided one knows where

to look (Aitchison, 2001, p. 42). Labov showed that variation and fuzziness, which are quite often indications that changes are in progress, are amenable to strict observation and statistical analysis (Aitchison, 2001). Among the various factors of language change, Rai (1993) maintained that sociolinguistic factors are the main causes of meaning change. Aitchison (2001) mentioned fashion, foreign influence, and social need as the main sociolinguistic causes of language change. For her, language change is as unpredictable as fashion in clothes. Her substratum theory suggests that "when immigrants come to a new area, or when an indigenous population learns the language of newly arrived conquerors, they learn their adopted language imperfectly" (p. 137). Language, in this sense, changes naturally when it is acquired or learned by different language speakers. Such changes take place internally and externally. Kachru (2011) accepted that English lexical items have undergone semantic extension or restriction in South Asian English.

The English language has undergone formal and functional changes as a result of its spread from its original habitus to a new habitus (Patil, 218). The users deliberately change English to adapt to their situations. D'Souza (2001) reported how English was borrowed, transcreated, recreated, extended, stretched, and twisted in India.Therefore, English words have acquired specific meanings in India (e.g., "family" is used for "wife"). Achebe (1965) maintained that English needs to carry the weight of his African experience, which is possible only through a new English, still in full communion with its ancestral home but modified to fit its new African environment. He highlighted why nativized English is today's need. On writing in English, a similar experience was expressed by Rao (1938) in his novel *Kanthapura* as "the telling has not been easy since one has to convey in a language that is not one's own the spirit that is one's own" (p. vii). His experience also justifies the fact that the native variety in its unchanged form is inadequate to express one's inner feelings and desires. Therefore, it is necessary to adapt and modify the English language to make it able to express local cultures and meanings. As Larsen-Freeman (2007) stated, "Indeed, English is one of the most hybrid and rapidly changing languages in the world. You yourselves have experienced this in Nenglish where 'cold store' has come to mean corner shop" (p. 70). In this way, English words are used to mean different things in the local contexts.

All languages experience gradual changes in word meaning throughout time. Murray (1997) maintained that semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic shifts are the five different phenomena or processes that undergo semantic changes in words. In semantic broadening, the meaning of a word becomes more general or inclusive than the native speakers' usage. Brett (1999) described that "bored" in Standard English means "not interested," but NE uses this word to describe everything from "not interested" to "frustrated" and "annoyed."

Similarly, she claimed that the meaning of the word "romantic" has been overextended to mean "nice" or "pleasant" in NE. In Rai (2006), the word "cheat" means "deceive" or "trick" in Standard English, but it also means "use unfair means in the examination" in NE. All these examples show that the meaning of English words has undergone semantic broadening in Nepal.

In semantic narrowing, the meaning of a word becomes more specific or restricted than its earlier meaning or the native speaker's usage. Rai (1993) maintained that native Hindi speakers use the word "betaa" for both their son and daughter, whereas Nepali speakers use it only to refer to their daughter. Such semantic narrowing confirms the sociolinguistic cause. He added, "The modern attitude of treating son and daughter equally is being firmly established specially in the elite class, and the use of 'betaa' to address daughter reflects this attitude" (p. 70). Similarly, the word "wife," which meant "any woman" in Old English, has narrowed in its application nowdays to "only married women" (Yule, 2010). This change of meaning also reflects the attitude of the people towards women.

The meaning of a word can also change, both positively and negatively. In the case of amelioration, the meaning of words becomes more positive or favourable; for example, the word "pretty," which meant "tricky, shy, cunning," has changed its meaning to "attractive" now, whereas the meaning of the words becomes more negative or unfavourable in the case of pejoration; for example, the word "silly," which meant "happy, prosperous," is used to mean "foolish" now (Murry, 1997). In this regard, Rai (1993) described that the word "guru" was very honorific and referred to a highly respected person such as someone who was devoted to teaching and learning, highly learned, honest, and having a very strong moral character, but it is now used to denote a person who teaches in schools and campuses but not necessarily a scholar, and even to the bus and truck driver. Similarly, he exemplified that the word "hero," which means "a boy or man respected for bravery or noble qualities," is used to refer to a hooligan, or a dandy. In both examples, the meaning of the given words has become more negative. In another article, Rai (2006) described that the word "typical," which means "the most common of its kind" in Standard English, is used in the opposite sense by Nepali speakers; for example, "He's a typical man" means "an uncommon man or a weird man." All these examples show that semantic change is common in every language.

Another process of semantic change is known as semantic shift, in which a word loses its earlier meaning and receives a new, but often related, meaning. For example, the word "immoral," which meant "not customary," is used to mean "unethical" now (Murry, 1997). In NE, the word "scale" is used to mean "ruler" (a material used to draw lines or measure distances) (Brett, 1999). Similarly, Pingali (2009) found that

some English words have different Indian meanings, such as shift "move, especially house or office," smart "well-dressed or cunning," bearer "waiter," clever "intelligent, especially cunning," and latrine "a toilet in any place." Such shifts in meaning can also be found in other varieties of English.

Dewan and Saud (2022) analyzed the growing craze in the use of English in Nepali public domains, and found that there has been a growing craze in the use of English in Nepali discourses and public domains, along with code-mixing in speech and writing. Similarly, Saud's (2022) study discussed the phenomenon of mixing multilingual terms in Nepali folk pop songs and the reasons for mixing such codes from other languages, and found that the young generation is mostly attracted towards the folk pop songs with code mixing, and such songs become popular among the youths due to their multilingual flavour. Researchers from home and abroad have focused on different areas of NE in their research, such as Adhikari (2018) on phonology; Brett (1999) on lexical features (a glossary of NE words); Dewan (2021) on bilinguals' creativity; Dewan and Laksamba (2021) on hybridity; Jora (2019) on some phonetic, syntactic, semantic, and discourse features; Karn (2012) on nativization in English literature in Nepal; Rai (2006) on specific spoken and written features; and Sharma et al. (2015) on some lexical and grammatical features of NE. Some studies have given only a few examples of semantic changes in NE. However, no research has yet been carried out focusing on the semantic volte-face of English words in Nepal. Therefore, this is a new area of research in NE, which distinguishes it from other varieties of English.

Methods and Procedures

I adopted the qualitative content analysis approach, which analyzes perceptions after close reading of texts (Given, 2008), particularly the manifest and latent content or meaning of texts (Bryman, 2016; Schreier, 2013), or the main contents of data and their messages (Cohen et al., 2008). I purposively selected four English language teachers from Morang district as the sample. They had had the experience of teaching from school to college level students for about a decade. At first, I informed the participants about the purpose of my study and briefed them on how their privacy would be maintained. To ensure anonymity, I used an alpha-numeric identity (T1-T4) for all participants involved in this study. After receiving the consent of the participants, I conducted semi-structured interviews with them and recorded the interviews using my mobile. The interviews contained open-ended questions. I also purposively selected three anthologies of stories, namely *Martyr and Other Stories* by Vishnu Singh Rai (2016), *The Royal Ghosts* by Samrat Upadhyay (2006), and *Arresting God in Kathmandu* by Samrat Upadhyay (2018);

four novels, namely *Seasons of Flight* by Manjushree Thapa (2012), *The Other Queen* by Sheeba Shah (2018), *Crossing Shadows* by Shiwani Neupane (2015), and *Palpasa Café* (translated version) by Narayan Wagle (2005/2016); a travel essay *A Day in the KalaksetraGuwahaty, Assam* (2016) and *a memoir-like essay Reminiscing my Childhood Days (Ignorance of Bliss)* (2012) by Govinda Raj Bhattarai; *an autobiography Atmabrittanta: Late Life Recollections* (2017) by B.P. Koirala; and an essay *Is Nepal Small?* by Laxmi Prasad Devkota (2017). I read the sampled texts and picked up the English words that have undergone semantic changes in Nepal. I purposively selected thirty words from the interview, texts, and my own experiences, categorized them into five themes: semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic shifts, and analyzed and interpreted them.

Findings and Discussion

The study revealed that English words have undergone semantic changes in Nepal. The meanings of some English words have become more general, others have become more specific, and some others have become more positive as well as more negative.

Semantic Broadening

Semantic broadening is the process by which a word's meaning expands from its original context to become more inclusive or general (Murray, 1997). Findings of this study show that Nepali writers and speakers of English use some English words which have more extended meanings than in BE or AE. They use the verb "eat" not only with edible things but also with drinkable things (e.g., I eat beer) and non-edible things. In the example "Some ate bridges and roads, some fertilizers and aeroplanes" (Rai, 2016, p. 114), the verb "ate" means "corrupted the budget allocated to construct bridges and roads and to buy some fertilizers and aeroplanes." Perhaps, this is the typical NE usage of the verb, which may be difficult for English speakers to understand unless they understand the pragmatic meaning of "eat" in the Nepali context. NE speakers also use the verb "eat" with "water" (e.g., I eat water) to mean "drink" and with "promises" (e.g., I eat promises) to mean "make" because of the influence of Nepali. The verb "eat" is more commonly used than "have" and "take." For example, "I ate my dinner while she sat there" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 22). But in Standard BE or AE, the verbs "have" and "take" are more common. The use of "ate" in the above examples reflects both the influence of Nepali and the bilinguals' creativity. It also indicates that when any word is used in a new local context, its meaning may also be changed. The speakers of other varieties of English need to understand the local pragmatics of Nepal.

In Nepal, the teachers are generally addressed as "masters." In sentences like **"**What did the masters do to you today *Saila*? Did they beat you?"and "Let's have a look at your works– how your masters have written in your notebook" (Bhattarai, 2012, para. 16), the word "masters" refers to school teachers. Now, the meaning of "master" is not limited to the teacher. In the sentences such as, "The classmate replied, 'No, I'll be a schoolmaster, Sir.' This time the teacher had laughed. 'Oh, you'll be a master all right. A master tailor!'" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 117), the word "master" refers to both the school teacher and the tailor. In this regard, T1 explained:

> The word "master" is an English word that was used to address a specific person who had mastery over any specific subject. Now its meaning has been extended. It is used to refer to a tailor as well as a school teacher.

The meaning of the word "master" is much more extended since it is also used to address the tailor as well as the boss or house owner. In the sentence "My master was calling me again, so I hurried to the kitchen to heat water for him" (Upadhyay, 2018, p. 167), the word "master" refers to the boss or house owner. This is a typical lexical feature of NE because the word "master" is not generally used in these senses in BE or AE.

The finding revealed that the word "guru," a borrowed word in English from Sanskrit, is used in a much broader sense in NE, which endorsed Rai (1995). The word "guru" has two meanings: a Hindu or Sikh religious teacher or leader, and a person who is an expert on a particular subject or who is very good at doing something (Stevenson, 2010). In Nepal, *guru* is commonly used in our day-to-day communication to refer to anyone who is not a religious teacher or an expert, for example*, ke chha guru*? (How are you *guru*?). In my interview, T1 explained:

> The term "guru" is used in Nepali English, but the meaning of guru in the past and present is different. Its meaning at present is extended. In the past, "guru" was used to refer to a specific person, but now it is used to refer to many people, whether they have knowledge of any specific subject matter or not.

In this way, the meaning of "guru" has gradually moved from a religious teacher or an expert to anyone without any expertise and then to a driver. Moreover, the driver is addressed by adding the suffix "–*ji*" to the word "guru." For example, "Guruji not only gave her a free ride…[.]" (Rai, 2016, p. 135). Therefore, the word"guru" is prestigious, as the suffix '*ji*' is attached to it, and the drivers are always addressed as "guruji," not simply "guru," which indicates that teachers are less paid than the drivers and have less respect in the present Nepali society (Rai, 1995). With the extension of its meaning, the word "guru" has completely lost its glorious position in Nepal.

The study showed that the word "line" is used uniquely in Nepal. NE speakers extend the meaning of this word to mean "electric supply." In the words of T3:

> When the electric supply is gone, we only say "line," that is, "line is gone" or "line has come." I think the word "line" might be uniquely used in Nepal.

In BE or AE, "line" refers to the thick wire that carries electricity from one place to another, but in NE, it is used to mean electricity. It indicates that the speakers of the local variety of English use the English word with a different meaning according to the local context.

Another word that has undergone semantic broadening is "manpower," which simply refers to the human resources or workers needed to do a particular job in BE or AE. In Nepal, its meaning has been extended; for example, I have heard many people say, "I work in the manpower" and "I have opened the manpower in Kathmandu." In my interview with T3, he said that the agency that sends workers abroad has been named "manpower." In NE, "manpower" refers to not only the workers or human resources but also the agency/office/organization that sends workers abroad. Similarly, the word "tiffin" is uniquely used in NE. In a sentence by Bhattarai (2012, para. 15), "There was no Tiffin hour, no break, and no pocket money, nothing to eat," the word "tiffin" refers to break time to have a snack rather than a snack or lunch itself. To its usage, T3 stated:

> The word "tiffin" might be used as "snack or meal" by foreigners, but we use "tiffin" to mean "the break time to take a snack." Now it is about to have tiffin.

T3 opined that the word "tiffin" is used to mean not only the snack one eats in the middle of the day at school but also the time to take such a meal. Its meaning has been extended in the NE.

The study revealed that the meanings of the words "boarding," "tower," and "read" have been extended in NE. In this regard, T3 responded, "The word "boarding" is used to refer to a private school, although there is no boarding facility in that school, that is, a facility for accommodation and meals." The boarding school is called a private day school in Britain and a public day school in other countries (Brett, 1999). Similarly, in NE, the meaning of "tower" is extended from "a tall, narrow building" to "a mobile network." In day-to-day communication, I have heard many mobile users say, "There is no tower in my mobile today" or "Check whether there is a tower in my mobile." In a similar vein, the verb "read" is used to mean "study" and more than this. A very common question asked by the English teacher in Nepal is "In which class do you read?" rather than "In which class do you study?"

In my interview, T3 also responded that NE uses the verb "read" (e.g., I read in class three) where "study" is used in BE or AE. This finding endorsed Brett (1999) that the Nepali people say "My son reads in K.G." to mean "My son is in kindergarten" (as children neither read nor study in kindergarten).

Nepali speakers of English tend to use the words "give" and "take" for reverse meanings. In NE, the verb "give" is used to mean "to hand over or provide something to somebody," "to take," and "to lend." I have frequently heard Nepali students of English say, "When will you take our exam, sir?" and "Give me your dot pen," and some English language teachers say, "Give your exam properly." Such expressions reflect the speakers' mother tongue influence or their bilingual creativity. In a sentence like"Say that you have a meeting to attend or I have an exam to give!" (Neupane, 2015, p. 18), the word "give" has been used instead of "take." In BE or AE, students or examinees take an exam or a test, and the examiners give it. In NE, the verb "give" is commonly used "to take" an exam.

The study also revealed that the words "romantic" and "straight" have undergone semantic broadening. In the sentences "That's why your works seem so romantic" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 23) and "One day, I heard the voice of a man singing a romantic song… [.]" (Koirala, 2017, p. 144), the meaning of the word "romantic" is "nice or pleasant," which endorsed Brett (1999). In another sentence, "Don't I look like a romantic?" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 260), the word "romantic" is a noun that refers to a person who is not serious but makes a lot of fun. In Nepal, a person who constantly makes fun of themselves or always cracks jokes is typically referred to as a romantic. Brett (1999) mentioned that the word "romantic" has two specific meanings in Standard English: one is synonymous with "dreamy"- a person whose feet are not quite on the ground or one who has an active imagination, and the other is connected or concerned with "love." Stevenson (2010) mentioned its meaning as a person who is very imaginative and emotional. But in the NE,"romantic" means more than this. Similarly, the word "straight" is concerned with not only direction, size, and shape but also someone's attributes or character in NE. In the sentences "We're both equally straight" and "And she told me you were as straight as a rod" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 260),the word "straight" means "not talented" or "simple-minded." The writer produced these sentences because of the influence of the Nepali language. It is the direct translation of *sojo* or *sidha* from Nepali. It indicates that the meaning of "straight" is overextended in NE.

Semantic Narrowing

Semantic narrowing refers to a semantic change in which a word is used with a less general or less restricted meaning (Yule, 2010). The findings indicated

that some English words have undergone semantic narrowing in the NE. Words, such as degree, don, knife, bike/cycle, basket, safari, and hero/heroine, which have broader meanings in BE or AE, have a narrower meaning in NE. In BE, the word "degree" refers to the qualification obtained by students who successfully complete a university or college, that is, the bachelor's degree, or the master's degree, or the postgraduate degree (Stevenson, 2010). In NE, it is often used to refer to only the master's degree. For instance, there is a post graduate campus in Biratnagar, which is also known as the Degree Campus, where only master's level courses are taught. I have heard many students who study at the master's level say, "I am studying for a degree." Similarly, the teachers also say, "I teach degree-level students." In these examples, the meaning of "degree" is restricted to "master's level only." In BE, the word "don" has two senses: a teacher at a university and (informally) the leader of a group of criminals involved with the Mafia (Stevenson, 2010). In NE, it is restricted to the second meaning only.

In NE, the word "knife" is not used to denote all sharp cutting instruments. For the Nepali people, the *khukuri, karda,* and knife are different weapons. The Nepali writers have restricted its meaning by using more redundant words, such as *khukri* in the sentence **"**And Ganesh would hoist the *khukri* knife high in the air… [.]" (Upadhyay, 2018, p. 97)and *karda* in the sentence "…he would bring me a *karda* knife or *chulesi*… [.]" (Bhattarai, 2012, para. 16). In this regard, T4 also responded that the word "knife" is used in a more restricted sense, that is, a specific type of cutting instrument, particularly *chakku* in Nepali. It indicates that the meaning of English words changes when they are used in different local contexts.

Stevenson (2010) incorporated meanings of "bike" and "cycle" as "a bicycle or motorcycle." In this regard, T3 also responded that the words "bike" and "cycle" refer to both bicycles and motorcycles. But in Nepal, "bike" is used to refer to a motorcycle and "cycle" to refer to a bicycle. In NE, both words are used in a limited sense. Similarly, "safari" in Nepal is now commonly used as a vehicle in the small cities. Regarding this word, T3 explained:

> Until a few years ago, I had not seen a safari in Nepal. A vehicle which is generally used as local transport in Nepal is called a safari. I think "safari" might have a broad meaning, but we have been giving the name of the electric rickshaw "safari." I don't know whether it is called a safari in foreign countries.

Stevenson (2010) incorporated the meaning of "safari" as a trip to see or hunt wild animals, especially in East Africa. In Nepal, it is used differently to denote an electric *rickshaw* used locally fortransportation.

Regarding the meaning of the words "hero" and "heroine," Stevenson (2010) mentioned that the word "hero/heroine" refers to a man/woman or girl who is admired by many people for doing something brave or good. It also refers to the main male/female character in a story, novel, or film/movie. In Nepal, these two words are generally restricted to mean an actor or an actress, for example, "You should be the heroine in an action movie" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 178), "You presented me as a romantic hero, an individual" (p. 90),"She had sympathized with the heroines and heroes and felt sorry for them but all of it was fiction" (Neupane, 2015, pp. 27-28), "…the first time she saw that it made her look like a Bollywood heroine (Thapa, 2012, p. 128), and "Akhil shouted from behind the camera, and Ranjit fell to the ground, clutching his heart, 'Now, the hero chasing the heroine!'" (Upadhyay, 2006, p. 68). In Standard English, the words "actor" and "actress" are preferred. In Nepal, the terms "hero" and "heroine" are also used to describe someone who is brilliant or talented, physically handsome or attractive (a "hero"), or beautiful (a "heroine"). In the sentence, "What came over you, Umesh? I never knew you wanted to be such a hero…what are you saying? I only want to help" (Upadhyay, 2006, p. 38), the word "hero" refers to someone who does something good for others. Rai (1995) explained that the word "hero" refers to a hooligan, or a dandy, rather than a man who ought to be respected for his bravery or noble qualities. In Nepali society, hooligans are not only feared but also praised and respected as heroes. Rai further added that it is not at all surprising because, in the long run, these hooligans will take the saddle and bridle of the government. In this way, the meaning of "hero" and "heroine" has changed in Nepal.

The word "basket" in BE or AE has a broad sense because they use the same word to refer to a container for holding or carrying things. In NE, the word "basket" refers to a small bamboo object such as a *dali* or *tokari*. In this regard, T1 explained:

> The word "basket" has one type of meaning in British or American English. In our context, it refers to only a specific thing. We have several words to refer to different forms of basket. Its meaning seems to have been narrowed down in our context.

NE is richer than BE or AE to refer to the basket. This word is not used to refer to *doko* "a big-eyed bamboo basket carried on the back," *dhobe* "a large bamboo basket used to carry dungs," *thunse* "a large bamboo basket that the hill women carry grains or shopping items in it," and *dhakar* "a large bamboo basket used to carry things while traveling a long distance." Therefore, the authors borrowed the word "doko" and did not use the word "basket" in the sentences "As I was watching them, a group of girls with *dokos* on their head came… [.]" (Rai, 2016, p. 54) and "How long do we have to keep carrying these *dokos*?" (Wagle, 2005/2016, p. 102) since the Nepali

speakers of English have narrowed down the meaning of the word "basket." English does not have fully equivalent words to refer to different Nepali words such as *dali/ dalo*, *doko*, *dhobe*, *thunse*, and *dhakar*.

Amelioration

Amelioration refers to the development of a more positive or favourable meaning of a word (Murry, 1997). The study revealed that English words like "silly" and "danger" have changed their meaning from negative to positive in NE. In BE or AE, the word "silly" has a negative connotation, that is, it is used to mean "stupid or embarrassing," but in NE, it has a more positive connotation. In this regard, T1 said:

> The word "silly" was used in the negative sense in the past, but now it is used to refer to someone who is clever and wise and can easily trick others.

In Nepali culture, if someone is silly, it does not always imply that they are stupid. They might be much cleverer or more intelligent than others. This view is also expressed by T2 as follows:

> I think words like "silly" and "cunning" are used much more positively in our context despite having many negative connotations. We call those politicians "silly" or "cunning" who have easily reached the upper positions.

Both teachers agree that the word "silly" is used much more in the positive sense in NE. It is used to describe someone who is clever, wise, and intelligent rather than foolish, rude, or weak-minded. Let us observe the meaning of "silly" in the following paragraph from Shah (2018):

> He is a poor man. But he holds fast to his religion and his honour. Oftentimes, I have told him to take a wife, but that he won't. He says that he loves me and if he cannot have me, he will never marry. Silly boy!

In the above context, the word "silly" does not seem to have a negative connotation. The boy seems to be clever, not stupid. Regarding the semantic volte-face of the word "danger," it has a negative connotation in BE or AE, but it also has a positive connotation in NE. It is because of the direct translation of the Nepali word *khataraa*. The word *khataraa* has undergone the volte face, which was used to show negative quality previously, but it is not used in its previous sense anymore (Rai, 1993). In this regard, T2 explained:

> We call someone a danger if he does something perfectly. We use it to mean "brilliant" and "talented." We say that he gives a danger speech, which means a good speech.

In the above excerpt, the meaning of the word "danger" has a positive connotation. It is used to mean perfect, brilliant, and talented.

Pejoration

Pejoration is a process in which a word acquires its negative meaning, or has its meaning downgraded or depreciated. The study revealed that some English words like "sexy" and "drugs" have changed their meaning from positive to negative. Some words that have positive meanings in BE or AE are used in negative senses in NE. In Standard English, the word "sexy" means attractive, beautiful, or sexually exciting. It also has a positive connotation. In Nepal, it is used in a restricted and negative sense. In this regard, T4 responded:

> In America, when we say "How sexy?" to a woman, we might get a "Thank you" response from her, but if we say the same to a woman in Nepal, she might slap or scold us. It has a negative connotation in Nepal, where it is generally associated with sex.

T1 also agreed with T4 that the Nepali people generally understand "sex" as "sexual intercourse" rather than the word to distinguish between male and female. Therefore, people often feel uncomfortable when they hear it. Let us observe the meaning of "sexy" in the following sentences:

> "We like your sister, donkey," another man said. "She's sexy." Jay laughed at him. The three men pummeled Jay, who was trying to protect himself and strike back at the same time (Upadhyay, 2018, p. 149).

Ranjit laughed. "It will be a sexy movie, eh, Diwakarji? (Upadhyay, 2006, p. 70).

The word "sexy" has the negative connotation in these two examples. One of the reasons is that sex is not openly discussed in Nepali society. Therefore, the Nepali people do not prefer to be called or addressed by the word "sexy." Similarly, the word "drugs" is used in Nepal in a narrow and particularly in a negative sense. In this regard, T1 explained:

> Drugs generally refer to medicinal substances, but in Nepal, we generally understand them as something taken by addicted people, not as something used by all patients. When someone says he usesdrugs, we interpret it negatively. Actually, we are all having drugs.

What can be inferred from T1's explanation is that the Nepali people generally view drugs as illegal substances that some people smoke or inject but not as medicine. In AE, a drugstore means a shop or store that sells medicines and other types of goods, for examples, cosmetics (Stevenson, 2010). For Americans, "druggist" means

"chemist" or "pharmacist," but in Nepal, it refers to someone who consumes illegal substances called drugs. In the NE, this word has a more negative connotation.

Semantic Shifts

Semantic shift refers to the loss of the original meaning and the acquisition of a new meaning for a word. Findings revealed that Nepali speakers of English use some English words "pass out" to mean "graduate," "handle" to mean "steering wheel," and "back mirror" to mean "rear view mirror," indicating a semantic shift. The word "cinema"is used interchangeably with "film" or "movie." I have heard several times that Nepali people say "cinema *herna najane?*" (Don't you go to watch a cinema?). In the sentences "When I am in a foreign land, I am watching cinema or a drama" (Devkota, 2017, para. 14) and "Luis was not cinema-hero handsome" (Thapa, 2012, p. 47), the meaning of the word "cinema" has shifted from a building in which films or movies are shown (Stevenson, 2010) to a movie/film. Similarly, the word "tuition" means "teaching in a college or university" in BE and "the amount of money paid for teaching in a college or university" in AE. But it is commonly understood as teaching privately by charging some fees in the private centres in Nepal. People can see several privately run tuition centres, particularly in the cities or around the schools, campuses, and universities where the students take tuition classes out of school, college, or university class hours.

All the kinds of semantic changes discussed above represent innovation, not degradation, and they make perfect sense to the native speakers of that variety (Baratta, 2019). Such semantic innovations demonstrate how words lose their original meanings and acquire fresh meanings, or are used in local contexts (Crystal, 2005). The reason behind it is that the speakers of NE are not only the consumers of the meanings of others but also the creators of meanings who shape and reshape the meanings of words (Halliday, 2006). They use their agency to appropriate word meanings based on local needs. In this regard, Pennycook (2010) maintained that language is a local practice in which words acquire new meanings as a result of their use in the local context. All kinds of semantic changes of English words occur as a result of change in the world, change in linguistic context, and change resulting from borrowing (Meillet, 1926, as cited in McColl Millar, 2015). When words move from global to local contexts, multiple layers of meaning are generated.

Conclusion

NE is a distinct variety of English that has words with different local meanings than BE or AE. English words have undergone semantic broadening, semantic narrowing, amelioration, pejoration, and semantic shifts in Nepal because speakers, listeners, writers, and readers produce new meanings as they move, write,

read, and travel through different local spaces (Pennycook, 2010). Such changes are not for the worse, but for appropriation in local contexts. In this regard, NE, following Anesa (2019), often undergoes appropriation processes, which allow its speakers to adapt English to fit the local milieu in a creative way.Therefore, according to Schneider (2003), "It is absolutely necessary to develop some tolerance toward such changes" (p. 273). The local practices and local meanings of English are not idiosyncrasies but innovations, which show agency and bilinguals' creativity (see Dewan, 2021, for details). These realities should be duly considered in teaching, corpus linguistics, contact linguistics, contact literature, and lexicography. The study provides information on local semantics and local pragmatics to those working in the semantic and pragmatic sectors. Teachers can encourage their students to understand and use the local meanings of English words. Furthermore, it is necessary for applied linguists to change their traditional perspectives on error analysis while dealing with the semantic features of NE words.

This study was limited to the semantic analysis of some English words obtained from different texts; interview with English language teachers; and my own experiences. Future researchers can collect more English words from different sources, such as English newspapers, billboards, speeches in English, everyday discourses, email/massager/Facebook chats, and different literary texts, and study the semantic volte-face of those words in the Nepali context. They can also study the semantic volte-face of English words at the acrolect (standard or high variety of English), mesolect (informal variety of English), and basilect (low variety of English, also known as broken English) levels.

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