

PRESIDENTIAL ADDRESS
39TH ANNUAL CONFERENCE OF THE LINGUISTIC SOCIETY OF NEPAL*

Bhim Narayan Regmi

Honorable Chief Guest, Shree Ganga Prasad Uprety,

Chairman, Language Commission, Dr. Lava Deo Awasthi,

Vice Chairman, National Foundation for the Development of Indigenous Nationalities, Mr. Chandra Bahadur Gurung,

Dean, Tribhuvan University, Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Professor Dr. Shiva Lal Bhusal,

Keynote Speaker, Professor Dr. John Peterson, Christian-Albrechts-Universitats zu Kiel,

Former President and Former Head of the Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University, Professor Dr. Tej Ratna Kansakar,

Former President and Former Head of the Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University, Professor Dr. Dan Raj Regmi,

Chief, Cultural Division, Ministry of Culture, Tourism and Civil Aviation,

Dr. Arun Thakur, Executive Director of Centre for Economic Development and Administration, Tribhuvan University

Head, Central Department of Nepalbhasha, Tribhuvan University, Professor Dr. Omkareshwor Shrestha,

Dr. Dubi Nanda Dhakal, Head, Central Department of Linguistics, Tribhuvan University,

Mr. Prithvi Chaudhary, Country Director, SIL International Nepal,

Former Presidents of Linguistic Society of Nepal, Distinguished linguists, dignitaries from other institutions and scholars,

Good morning!

On behalf of Linguistic Society of Nepal, I would like to extend my warm welcome to Shree Ganga Prasad Uprety, Chancellor, Nepal Academy, for gracing and inaugurating the 39th Annual Conference of the Society as Chief Guest. Warm welcome to all the Guests, presenters and participants. In this cold morning, we are here, with the same excitement, curiosity and passion to learn and share findings carried out in the fields of linguistics in this historical hall, where most of the past Annual Conferences were inaugurated on the same date, i.e., November 26.

Few days ago, we heard the sudden demise of Professor Dr. Kamal Prakash Malla, my respected Guru, also the guru of most of us, and the founder President of Linguistic Society of Nepal, a renowned scholar of Nepalese Languages, culture and history. His demise is a great loss to us, the Linguists' community. We wish the departed soul may rest in peace and the bereaved family may have courage to endure this loss.

The society has completed its journey of 40 years since its establishment in 1979. As a living institution, it has witnessed many ups and downs which we can see documented in the volumes of journals and newsletters of the society. My predecessors carried the society ahead no matter how tough the time was. I express my sincere thanks to them and I will be happy if I successfully continue the tradition and handover the Society to my successor.

The Society has two hats on its head, one represents its role of activists looking after the policies, plans and actions for preservation and promotion of the languages of Nepal, and the other is the role of an academic society that always seeks for the promotion of researches, discussions and publications on the various fields of linguistics.

* This Presidential Address was delivered at the Inaugural Ceremony of 39th Annual Conference of the Linguistic Society of Nepal at CEDA Hall, Tribhuvan University, Kirtipur, Kathmandu on 26 November 2018.

There are many issues related to Nepalese languages which the Society has been raising since its inception. Many of the issues have been addressed. However, some issues still remain to be addressed, and more issues are emerging as well. I am thankful again to our predecessors for their continued efforts to get them addressed appropriately. I will not talk on the issues which have already been solved, but raise other issues which are either already raised but yet to be addressed and new issues. I wish the Linguistic Society of Nepal, wider community of linguists, language users, planners and policy makers and scholars in the field own these issues.

Some of the issues I would like to mention here are as follows.

There are some gaps in the Constitution of Nepal (2015) regarding language related issues. The constitution has provision of official use of languages at province/state levels (article 7). This implies that there will be at least two languages at a province level. That means there will be at least seven other languages in addition to Nepali which provides us with a practice of multiple official languages. In this situation, there needs to be a provision of language of record which can be used as authoritative while resolving disputes in the courts and elsewhere. Though already present in the interim constitution of Nepal (2007), unfortunately the current constitution has omitted this provision.

Another issue is the unit of official use of languages. Province as a unit appears to be less practical from the perspectives of users' need and inclusion. This results into an awkward situation in that where services are needed, there will be no services, and where services are available there will be no use of it. Had the unit of official use of languages been local level, the services and their users would closely come to be congruent and the spirit of language rights would effectively be realized.

The constitutional provision of multiple official languages demands trained linguists at various positions of Government agencies as staff right from the front desk to the planning and language development experts. If we assign one person at a unit from the ward level upwards to handle the

tasks related to the issue of official languages, it results into about eight thousand staff under "language group" in the government service. This is the issue to be addressed by the Public Service Act.

We need some sort of mechanism at various levels under government agency with representatives from various language related fields to facilitate staff under the language group and to cope with the language issues that are being emerged with technological development (multimodal online platforms, common orthography, local content in education etc.)

On the academic part, the Society seeks collaboration with the international, regional and local agencies working in the fields of language and linguistics. The society has already begun this practice and has got successes in few areas, and will move further in this direction in the days to come.

I am happy to share with you that we are planning to expand the activities of the Society. It is my pleasure to announce that the Society has started to peer review its journal *Nepalese Linguistics* to follow the international standard of research publications. I would like to thank the Editorial Board members for their effort in leading the journal to this direction.

The Society is also planning to organize other events such as seminars, conferences in various regions of the country to expand its area so that more people can be involved in the activities related to language preservation and promotion.

It is well known that the Society has been organizing Nepali medium sessions in the conferences for the last few years. We have decided to publish a separate volume of the journal in Nepali as soon as possible.

I would like to thank all the guests, presenters, participants, volunteers, co-organizer, supporters and Members of the LSN Executive Committee, the people. Without your participation and active involvement, this program would not have happened.

Thank you for your patience.

Thank you all.