"These People Deprived of This Country": Language and the Politics of Belonging among Indians of Nepali Descent

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Darjeeling, India, has been the site of intense political, linguistic, and ethno-nationalist movements over the past 40 years. The city is a multilingual community in which Nepali, Bengali, Hindi, and English are regularly spoken in addition to many other languages from South Asia and the Himalayas.

The current research project explores the Nepali Language Movement in India and subsequent linguistic changes in Darjeeling. The ethnolinguistic political movement, headed by the All India Nepali Language Committee, also known as ABNBS, emerged in Darjeeling in 1972 and subsequently spread throughout India with the goal of adding the Nepali language to the list of national languages of India. In Darjeeling, the Committee organized rallies, held meetings with politicians and heads of state, wrote dictionaries, and attempted to force the West Bengal government, and people, to recognize Indians of Nepali descent as both Indian citizens and ethnically and linguistically Nepali. The Indian Nepali community believed their struggle would end when the language was recognized by the Indian government in 1992; however, the equality and recognition did not materialize, and individuals living within non-Nepali-majority communities faced continuing, or increasing, discrimination. This situation, in conjunction with changing economic realities in Darjeeling and South Asia and shifting education practices and ideas about language, have led to a move away from Nepali toward English to gain official and unofficial citizenship rights as well as what Darjeeling Nepalis view as success in life. Although English has a contentious place in India, and although it has a history of association with various elite castes and ethnic groups, many Indian Nepalis in Darjeeling reported that they adopted English precisely because they believed the language was no longer associated with any particular political party or ethnic or religious group and that they were more successful in business, education, and social situations when they spoke English.

*Quotation from Shri Swarup Upadhayay, MP from Tezpur, Assam, during the Lok Sabha debates, New Delhi, on 24 April 1992.

RESEARCH—OVERVIEW

I approached my research using ethnography, archival materials, and a matched-guise test and survey conducted in the fall of 2007. Using all three methods was vital to understanding the complexity of the lived experience of language in this politically charged, multilingual, multiethnic context. With the combinations of methods, the language ideologies expressed in the test/survey are contextualized using the ethnographic research and connected to macro level trends including the political movement to have Nepali declared a national language of India.

Historical Research

Although they now play an important role in the research, I discovered the bulk of the historical documents pertaining to the Language Committee almost by accident. One of the men from my community was a member of a local social service organization. When he and I first met early in my research, he informed me that in the storage space of their building were some "items about language." I had been down this road a number of times with many other people, and it had always ended with a pile of moldy school books or dictionaries. I assumed this time was no different, and so I didn't pursue these particular items since I was just beginning a large survey in Darjeeling.

Months later, I was interviewing the former president and founder of the Language Committee in his law office. I asked him if he had any documents from the movement. He said he did not, but that all the documents from the movement had been boxed and placed in the storage space of that same local social service organization. He had for years meant to visit that room and make copies of the documents, but his work kept him so busy that he was unable. He agreed to introduce me to the current head of the organization and ask him to make the documents available.

My research assistant and I headed down to the organization and secured permission to photograph the

documents. We set up our cameras in the meeting room and for a month during the height of the monsoon photographed boxes upon boxes of documents. In all, we took nearly 20,000 digital images of documents such as Committee meeting minutes from all over India, publications, photographs, transcripts of meetings with politicians (including Indira Gandhi and Morarji Desai), local announcements, and memoranda. The archive also included an almost complete collection of Hamro Bhasa, the publication of the Committee that circulated in the Darjeeling hills for 20 years. This publication disseminated the dealings of the Committee, articles pertaining to the language movement and Nepalis in India, editorials, and letters from readers. It served as a major node around which 'language lovers' gathered.

Ethnographic Research

I first visited Darjeeling during the summer of 2005; during this trip I identified a major shift in language use between older and younger residents. I spent much of that trip making contacts and learning the history of Darjeeling's complex governance. I was accustomed to village life in Southern Nepal where politicians were rarely glimpsed and certainly not personally known. Darjeeling was vastly different; I found it to be a city where politics were part of daily life and conversation. I was forced to grasp quickly the intricacies and maneuverings of all political parties and actors, but none was more important than the GNLF [Gorkha National Liberation Front], headed by the 'Maharajah' of the Darjeeling Hills, Subash Ghisingh. As I later learned from the Committee documents, Ghisingh took a political and personal interest in the language movement; locally notorious for his dislike of intellectuals, Ghisingh saw ABNBS (headed by lawyers, writers, and other intellectuals) as standing in the way of an Indian 'Gorkha' identity and statehood.

When I returned to Darjeeling in 2007, my ethnographic research focused both on tracing people's beliefs about the political maneuverings of the city and its relationship to language as well as on studying the linguistic practices of college students and young adults between 18 and 25. For these young people, the focus was not only on the intersection of language and politics, but also how they saw and planned their futureh their identity, how and with whom they socialized, and their understandings of language and social difference. Some of this research involved visiting them at home, but most took place at the gathering spots of their generation: tea shops, internet cafes, momo stands next to colleges, and along Chowrasta, the main tourist street and square at the top of the hill. For the older generation, this research overwhelmingly occurred at home, during local public events, and at the market.

Linguistic Research

To complement the ethnographic and archival material and to utilize another approach to understanding peoples' perceptions and attitudes towards the variety of languages and usages of these languages, I decided to conduct a matched-guise test. The results of this test expanded my data and understanding on current ideas about language and linguistic practices among college students in the Darjeeling area. Although I originally planned to include only those students who were native Nepali speakers from the Darjeeling area, I ended up including more than 600 students from many areas and many native languages for reasons I will explain below.

The matched-guise test was originally devised as a way to discover people's language attitudes (see Lambert, et al. 1960). Since the original study, this method has been utilized by researchers in a number of different fields particularly linguistics, linguistic anthropology, and psychology but also medical researchers and legal scholars. These studies often place the results at the center of study as the primary source of data rather than using the test in conjunction with ethnographic results.

Qualities
Ranked from 0 [not at all] to 4 [very]

Pleasant [फरसाईल्को]	Intelligent [ज्ञानी]	Honest [ईमानदार]	Hardworking [मेहनती]	Happy [खुसी]
Cultured [सभ्य]	Authoritative [गहकिल्को]	Friendly [मिलनसार]	Proud [घमन्डी]	Rich [धनी]
Poor [गरीब]	Hard-Hearted [कठोर]	Traditional [परम्परावादी]	Modern [आधुनिक]	Educated [शिक्षित]

Figure 1

The overall structure of the test is as follows. Respondents were given the study and listened to the first of 12 recordings (which I will detail below). Respondents would rank the speaker on the basis of 15 qualities, also explained below. After they finished ranking the qualities, the next recording would be played. The process would be repeated until all 12 recordings were ranked.

I did not compose the test itself until I had completed 7 months of ethnographic research. This allowed me to ensure that the qualities I chose all had clear salience in the local context for as wide a range of individuals as possible. I vetted these qualities with a number of people to make sure, as much as possible, that I was not imposing my own ideas about language onto the linguistic landscape. The qualities chosen were a mixture from those used in other scholars' matched-guise tests as well as those taken from the locally culturally salient terms. The qualities used are as follows:

I first attempted to use only Nepali for the test and survey; however, a number of factors made this goal impossible. First, the Nepali versions of the qualities were not always the most commonly used in conversation. Second, the language ideologies that people held about the written version of Nepali—that it must be the 'intellectual,' 'dictionary,' or 'pakka' (meaning real, genuine, or authentic and is associated with a broadly constructed Nepal or Kathmandu dialect)—clash with what people use in their everyday lives. This particular language ideology about the use of pakka Nepali in public events and in written materials meant that when I attempted to use the everyday Nepali version of the qualities, the test was not taken seriously. Those with whom I discussed the early versions of the test even expressed concern that no principal of a college would allow me to distribute it because it showed that I "didn't understand" the Nepali language. Although I considered using the everyday words anyway with an explanation of why I had done so, in the end it proved more distracting than just using the expected version of the word while also providing the English 'equivalent' or as close to it as possible. I was also told by many of the younger individuals with whom I discussed the qualities that they preferred the English word and they believed other college students would not understand either the pakka Nepali or the Darjeeling Nepali words.

Once I chose the qualities, the next task was to find (broadly constructed) representative speakers of the three groups that were most central to the research project: urban Darjeeling Nepali speakers, rural Darjeeling Nepali speakers who regularly visited or lived in the city, and Bengali speakers who lived in the area. To limit the variability of the voices, I choose 4 young women between 18 and 30 who had no immediately distinguishing features in their voices (such as a lisp). Finding four women of equal fluency in all four languages proved incredibly difficult given the time constraints of my fieldwork. It would have also been difficult for the respondents to listen to 16 recordings in addition to completing the rest of the survey. Considering these factors

and in an attempt to keep the survey to a more manageable 1 hour, I decided to limit the recordings to 12.

The goal of the matched-guise test is to attempt to find hearers' unconscious ideas about language. Therefore, the 625 respondents who completed the test in Darjeeling were not told that the 12 recordings were created by only 4 different speakers. The respondents were only told that they would be hearing 12 recordings and that they would need to rank each recording in a series of qualities. Since respondents are not told that one person provided more than one recording, it was vital that one individual's recordings be distributed among other individual's recordings; speaker A's recordings, therefore, would not be played in order so that respondents would be less likely to remember her voice.

After ranking the recording text on the basis of the qualities on a scale from 0 (meaning not at all) to 4 (meaning very), the participant was asked to answer these two questions: Would you like this person (and why), and, what is the ethnicity of this person. These questions had no guided answers so that participants would need to supply their own categories and reasoning for these answers. These questions were repeated another 11 times for the other 11 recordings.

The second section of the test was dedicated to general biographical information and questions about language. Biographical questions included gender, age, residence information, profession (of self and parents), ethnicity, and the native languages of self, mother, father, and grandparents. It also included the level of education and the medium of instruction of the school they attended. This question was important not only to help gauge knowledge of a language but also the students' economic status or, rather, the economic status of their families.

After eliciting this basic information, the next section asked the question of language knowledge and fluency in additional modes to allow for comparison. Since the biographical section asked individuals to report about their "native language(s)" and "other language(s) you speak well," the next section asked participants to evaluate their ability to understand, speak, read, and write in Nepali/Gorkhali, English, Bengali, and Hindi. There were also three blank spaces for participants to write in additional languages to rank. Language ability was ranked on a scale from 0 (none) to 3 (perfectly). They were also asked to report about the frequency of language use in particular locations and situations from 0 (never) to 3 (always). I provided the categories of Nepali/ Gorkhali, English, Hindi, Bengali, and Other. Participants often wrote in the name of the language they ranked in the other category, although some did leave the category blank. Locations and situations were a mix of home and public, interactions with locals and outsiders, and included films and literacy practices. These categories were chosen to get a mix of language patterns: parents' language use, medium of school, literacy practices, economic associations with languages, and personal language preferences.

Finally, the survey ended with more open-ended questions

about language use in Darjeeling and among Indians of Nepali descent: 1) What is your opinion about the current language situation in Darjeeling? 2) What is the status and situation of Nepali/Gorkhali language within India? 3) What is the status and situation of Nepali/Gorkhali people in India?

Results and implications of the survey require more space than is available here; they will, however, be explored in detail in my dissertation.

SIGNIFICANCE AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

Although my dissertation focuses on the interaction between Darjeeling and the Indian government as well as the linguistic changes among Indians of Nepali descent, there are many future projects that will emerge from the data gathered during the 2007 research. First, a more complete history of the language movement including an in-depth analysis of the documents, integration of the many interviews with language movement members and Darjeeling residents who were active in the movement will be make an important contribution to the scholarship on South Asia. This complex history is vital to understanding the subsequent linguistic and social shifts in Darjeeling and throughout the Subcontinent over the past 40 years and is also of theoretical importance; tracing the "historiography of language ideologies" (Blommaert 1999:1) is difficult without such a wealth of documentation. Second, the data from the matched-guise technique and survey with contextualization from the ethnographic material will provide a more complex picture of the linguistic landscape of Darjeeling.

It is my hope that by approaching language and social belonging in Darjeeling from these various perspectives, I will contribute to research on the Himalayas and South Asia, language ideologies (see Kroskrity 2000, 2004; Schieffelin et al. 1997), the production of social and political difference, language and power (see Blommaert & Verschueren 1992; Bourdieu 1999; Errington 1992), citizenship, and methods for linguistic and historical research.

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