

Language Policy in Bhutan

George van Driem

(University of Leiden)

The linguistic situation in Bhutan is complex. Nineteen different languages are spoken in this Himalayan kingdom, which is only slightly larger than the Netherlands but comprises considerably less habitable surface area. The population numbers approximately 650,000 and there is no majority language. The Royal Government of Bhutan has adopted an official language policy aimed at establishing a single national language and also accommodating and preserving the country's linguistic diversity. The government's language policy is a balanced approach characterised by two complementary policy lines. The first line of policy is the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language. The second line of policy is the preservation and, indeed, study of the country's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. Here I shall provide a sketch of the ethnolinguistic make-up of the country, explain the rationale behind both of the Royal Government's language policy guidelines, and elucidate how both guidelines are being implemented in practice.¹

The linguistic situation in Bhutan

This section is a concise sketch of the ethnolinguistic situation in Bhutan, of which I provide a more detailed and historical account elsewhere (van Driem 1993b). Reliable language statistics are provided in the table below. These statistics are based on unreleased Bhutanese census data, estimates by knowledgeable foreign specialists working in Bhutan, local village authorities and my own roof counts during the linguistic survey work which has taken me throughout Bhutan. In order to properly assess these statistics, however, certain background information is required.

First of all, Dzongkha is the only language with a native literary tradition in Bhutan. Both Lepcha and Nepali are also literary

languages, but neither has ever played any role as a literary language in Bhutan. Dzongkha derives from the local vulgate of Old Tibetan through many centuries of independent linguistic evolution on Bhutanese soil. Linguistically, Dzongkha can be qualified as the natural modern descendant in Bhutan of the language of which Classical Tibetan or Chöke, literally “language of the dharma”, is the literary exponent. Chöke is the language in which sacred Buddhist texts, medical and scientific treatises and, indeed, all learned works have been written throughout the course of Bhutan’s history. Dzongkha is the native language of Western Bhutan, comprising eight of the twenty districts of the kingdom, viz. Thimphu, Punakha, Gâsa, ‘Wangdi Phodr’ā, Paro, Hâ, D’agana and Chukha.

Literally, Dzongkha means the kha “language” spoken in the *dzong* “fortress”. These *dzongs* dominate the mountainous landscape of Bhutan from east to west and have traditionally been both centres of military and political power as well as centres of learning. Dzongkha is thus the cultivated form of the native language of Western Bhutan, the inhabitants of which as well as their language have traditionally been known as ’Ngalong. A popular but false folk etymology for the term is that it means “the first to rise” to the teachings of Buddhism in the land. An early form of Lamaist Buddhism had already taken root in Bhutan before the *Einwanderung* of the ’Ngalong. The term ’Ngalong probably derives from ’Ngenlung “ancient region”, a term first recorded for the people of Shâ and Paro by the Tibetan sage Künkhen ’Longchen Ramjam (1308-1363) during his travels through central Bhutan. The ’Ngalong, or ’Ngalop, colonized Western Bhutan from central Tibet during the religious persecutions under the reign of the Tibetan king ’Langdarma (r. 836-842) in the 9th century, just four centuries after the Anglo-Saxons first came to Great Britain and brought with them the language that was to become English.

It should be kept in mind that the term “Dzongkha” is used in various, linguistically distinct senses in Bhutan to mean (1) formal, written Dzongkha as used in official documents, which is in some cases essentially Chöke, although more vernacular registers are also used in writing, (2) the cultivated form of the vernacular as spoken in formal situations, (3) the colloquial spoken language of the ’Ngalop of Western Bhutan. This explains why a native ’Ngalop of Western Bhutan might say that he has a poor command of Dzongkha, by which

he could mean either the cultivated formal style registers of spoken Dzongkha or the written language. It also explains in which sense Dzongkha is said to have an ancient literary tradition because Chöke is to Dzongkha as Latin is to Portuguese, and the process of vernacularisation currently in progress in Bhutan has numerous parallels with the linguistic situation in the mediaeval Romance world. Just as Latin used to exercise and continues to exercise great influence on the vocabulary of the Romance languages and even English (e.g., video, multilateral, disinfectant, international, credit), so too Chöke, the language of learning and liturgy, continues to strongly influence modern spoken and written Dzongkha. This influence is manifest in the vocabulary, where Dzongkha has acquired many words directly from Chöke, and in the liturgical Chöke pronunciation of some literary words.

Sanggä Doji (forthcoming) provides an interesting list of traditional Bhutanese poems and songs extant in Dzongkha vernacular. During the tenure of the ninth jékhembo Gäwa Shaca Rinche (1744-55), a “tax” known as the *tsünthrä* specified that one male offspring from each household was to enter monastic life. Sumd’ā Trashi of Shânyishokha village who, although already a married father, was compelled to enter monastic life because he was an only son. His melancholic verse narrative of the genre known as *loze* was sung in the vernacular and is still a popular Dzongkha poem today. During the reign of the 37th Desi or “Deva Rājā”² Trashi Doji (1847-51), a servant to the Gâsa ’Lam by the name of Singge, betrothed a young maiden named Galem, but their parents denied them the right to marry. The grief-stricken Galem took her own life, and her moving song of lament of the genre known as *co’lu* is sung in Dzongkha to this day. Similarly, the Dzongkha *loze* of the *zimbö* of ’Wangdi Phodr’ā, Pêmi Tshe’wang Trashi of Shâkazhi, commemorates the tragic war between Trongsa and Bumthang during the reign of 43rd Desi ’Nâdzi Pâsa (1861-64). The vernacular *loze* of Jami Tshe’wang Pâdrö of Shâphang Ü village commemorates the skill and distinction of Bhutan’s first hereditary monarch ’Ugä ’Wangchu during his performance as arbiter in the Tibetan-British negotiations of 1904. In addition to these famous airs, old formal songs of the *zhungdra* genre have traditionally been sung in Dzongkha vernacular throughout the various different language communities of Bhutan.

Legal documents and contracts are generally still written in Chöke, although short stories, for example, have been written in Dzongkha, but legal contracts and short stories represent opposite ends of a stylistic spectrum. In writing, the more formal the subject and style, the more the use of Chöke prevails above that of the vernacular. Radio programmes and news broadcasts are in Dzongkha, as well as the national weekly newspaper *Kuensel*. Traditional folksongs and dances are in Dzongkha, and some western drama, such as *The Merchant of Venice* and *Othello*, has been quite successfully translated and performed in modern Dzongkha.

Secondly, today Dzongkha is not the only *lingua franca* in Bhutan. Tshangla, or Shâchop, has long served as a *lingua franca* between various population groups in Eastern Bhutan, and in recent historical times both Nepali and English have come to serve as *lingue franche* in various domains, Nepali predominantly in the south, and English throughout the kingdom. In Thimphu, the capital, every language of Bhutan can be heard.

Thirdly, two languages, Tibetan and Nepali, are not originally native to Bhutan, and the antiquity of the residence in Bhutan of the Lepcha-speaking population is moot. Tibetan is spoken by the relatively modest number of Tibetan refugees in Bhutan and by their offspring. Second-generation Tibetans, however, are linguistically assimilated and speak Dzongkha, sometimes in addition to another indigenous local language. Nepali, on the other hand, is the native language of a considerable minority which has in recent history come to inhabit the country's southern belt. Nepalis began arriving in Bhutan in the first half of the twentieth century, and this migration is well documented in the historical sources (cf. van Driem 1993b). Most Nepalis in Bhutan, however, are of more recent immigration. Nepali-speakers are not losing their language in the same way as second-generation Tibetans, nor are they under any pressure to do so. In point of fact, no pressure is, or ever has been, deliberately exerted on any group in Bhutan to assimilate linguistically in this sense, although socio-economic and demographic pressures on one small ethnolinguistic group, the native "Monpas" of the Black Mountains, is unmistakably leading to the extinction of their language. It is unclear whether the Lepcha-speaking minority of Samchi district represents an ancient native population, as the Lepcha do in neighbouring Sikkim. It is certain, however, that the

Lepcha have inhabited portions of southwestern Bhutan for no less than several centuries. Native language retention amongst the Bhutanese Lepcha is perhaps even higher than amongst their brethren in Sikkim.

Fourthly, it is a linguistically defensible position to consider Khengkha, Bumthangkha and Kurtöpkha to be dialects of a single "Greater Bumthang" language. However, these dialects or dialect groups are listed separately in the table below in recognition both of linguistic differences and of the strong ethnic or regional identity felt by the speakers.

Finally, the genetic groupings in the table show linguistic affinity and do not reflect ethnic divisions. For example, no special ethnic bond exists between speakers of "the Eastern Bodish languages" which sets them apart from other Bhutanese. There are ethnic groups in Bhutan, to be sure, which can be defined along cultural lines. The Lhokpu are animists who bury their dead in cylindrical sepulchres above ground and, like the Lepcha, have a distinct native costume. The Brokpa live in yakherd communities and wear a peculiar native dress, although speakers of other languages as well, particularly Dzongkha speakers in Laya, Lunana and 'Lingzhi, lead a similar lifestyle and, in Laya, also have a distinct native costume similar to that of the Brokpas of Mera and Sakteng in Eastern Bhutan. A large proportion of the allochthonous Nepali-speaking population in the south practise the Hindu religion. Some Nepali-speakers are Buddhist, however, e.g. the Tamang, and many practise an indigenous eastern Nepalese form of shamanism with only a historically recent veneer of Hinduism, e.g. the Limbu and Rai. The Nepali-speaking population, who had already abandoned Nepali costume in favour of European attire, have recently taken to wearing Bhutanese dress in keeping with the government's policy on national dress.

These cultural differences are not the topic of the present discussion and have been discussed in their historical context elsewhere (van Driem 1991a, 1993b). It is, however, germane to the issue of language policy to note that, despite the large number of languages spoken in the country, Bhutan is a surprisingly culturally homogeneous country. The native Bhutanese dress is the same throughout most of the kingdom. The vast majority of the population was converted to Lamaist Buddhism a millennium ago. The now prevailing orders are the

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popular, unreformed 'Nyingmapa order and the Drup ("Drukpa" in Chöke) or "Dragon" sub-order of the Kâjüp or "Oral Transmission" order, which is the state religion. Yet no attempt has been made to convert the Lhokpu to Buddhism, and the Royal Government of Bhutan has even constructed Hindu temples and subsidized Hindu religious education in the south.

Central Bodish languages	Dzongkha transliteration	number of speakers
Dzongkha	(rDzong-kha)	160,000
Chocangacakha	(Khyod-ca-nga-ca-kha)	20,000
Brokpa	('Brog-pa)	5,000
Brokkat	('Brog-skad)	300
Lakha	(La-kha)	8,000
B'ökha (Tibetan)	(Bod-kha)	1,000

East Bodish languages		
Bumthangkha	(Bum-thang-kha)	30,000
Khengkha	(Khengs-kha)	40,000
Kurtöpsha	(Kur-stodp-kha, Kur-stod-pa'i kha)	10,000
'Nyenkha	(sNyan-kha, Hen-kha, Mang-sde-pa'i kha)	10,000
Chalikha	(Phya'-li-kha)	1,000
Dzalakha	(Dza-la-kha, Dza-la-pa'i kha)	15,000
Monpa, 'Olekha	(Mon-pa-kha, Mon-pa'i kha, O-le-kha)	1,000
D'apkakha	(Dwags-pa'i kha)	1,000

Other Bodic languages of Bhutan

Tshangla (Shâchop)	(Shar-phyogsp)	138,000
Lhokpu	(no Dzongkha spelling)	2,500
Gongduk	(spurious Dzongkha spelling: dGongs-'dus)	2,000
Lepcha	(no Dzongkha spelling)	2,000

Indo-Aryan

Nepali	(Lho-mtshams-kha)	156,000
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The predominant language in Western Bhutan is Dzongkha. The Dzongkha language area covers well over a third of the country's surface area. The predominant language in Eastern Bhutan is Tshangla, known in Dzongkha as Shâchobi kha "The language of the easterners, or Shâchop", and the modern Shâchop appear to represent an ancient population of Eastern Bhutan. The predominant language in central Bhutan is Bumthang with the closely related Khengkha and Kurtöpsha. The predominant language in the southern belt is Nepali, known in Dzongkha as Lhotshamkha "southern border language".

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Other important regional languages include Dzalakha in northeastern Bhutan and 'Nyenkha, also known as Henkha or Mangdebikha, in the Black Mountains, and Chocangacakha, a sister language of Dzongkha, spoken along the most populous portion of the Kurichu Valley.

Lakha, Brokkat and Brokpa are languages of what were originally pastoral yakherd communities. Lakha is spoken in the north of the Black Mountains. Brokkat is spoken in the village of D'ur in northern Bumthang. Brokpa is spoken in the alpine yakherd communities of Mera and Sakteng in Eastern Bhutan. A Khampa dialect of Tibetan is spoken by yakherds who tend the herds of affluent Dzala speakers in the north of Trashigang district.

The Lhokpu represent the ethnolinguistic remnant of the primordial population of Western Bhutan, and Lhokpu or a closely related language appears to have been the substrate language for Dzongkha, which provides an explanation for the various ways in which Dzongkha differs from Tibetan. 'Olekha is the linguistic remnant of the primordial population of the Black Mountains, and Gongduk is the modern ethnolinguistic representative of an ancient population of central Bhutan before the southward expansion of the ancient East Bodish tribes.

The national language

In 1961 His Late Majesty King Jimi Doji 'Wangchu decreed Dzongkha the national language of the Kingdom of Bhutan, thereby conferring official status to the role which Dzongkha had acquired in the course of Bhutanese history. Dzongkha has traditionally served as the spoken vernacular of the royal courts, the military élite, educated nobility, government and administration at least as far back as the twelfth century. Because of the role of Dzongkha in the emergence of Bhutan as a modern state and because of the common Chöke literary tradition of the country, modern Dzongkha was a natural and obvious choice for the national language. This choice is generally felt to be appropriate throughout Bhutan, and Dzongkha constitutes a component of the national identity. For example, even in the extreme northeast of the kingdom, speakers of the Dzala language call Dzongkha *garkê*, which means "the language of the *garpas*". *Garpa* in Dzala means "official" or "chief" (*pön* in Dzongkha). The Dzala term therefore reflects the ancient status of Dzongkha as the language of government and

administration in the far northeast of the kingdom. In 1909, the first Western description of modern Dzongkha by St. Quintin Byrne of the India Police appeared under the title of *A Colloquial Grammar of the Bhutanese Language*, in which the Dzongkha material is presented in an improvised romanisation and the main grammatical features are described "of the language spoken by the people whose habitat is Bhutan".

Dzongkha is closely related to Dränjoke or, as it is called in Dzongkha, Dränjobikha, the national language of the erstwhile Kingdom of Sikkim. Dränjoke is the kê "language" of Dränjo "the rice district", i.e. Sikkim. There are several different dialects of Dzongkha, particularly in the far north and far west. The Dzongkha spoken in Hâ has a character of its own and is the Dzongkha dialect most resembling Dränjoke. The dialects of the alpine yakherd communities of Laya, Lunana and 'Lingzhi in northwestern Bhutan have a pronounced *couleur locale* resulting mainly from structural and lexical similarities with Tibetan. The standard dialect of Dzongkha is spoken in Wang, the traditional name for the Thimphu Valley, and Thê, as the Punakha Valley traditionally used to be known. There are also several highly divergent dialects of Dzongkha spoken in the south, e.g. in Pâsakha east of Phüntsho'ling.

Dzongkha has many avid supporters amongst speakers of other languages of the kingdom, and native Dzongkha speakers in fact constitute a minority of the staff of the Dzongkha Development Commission, the organ of the Royal Government of Bhutan dedicated to the advancement of the national language. Dzongkha is spoken as a *lingua franca* throughout Bhutan, although in the east and in the south it shares this function with Tshangla and Nepali respectively, and Dzongkha is simultaneously the official language of the kingdom. Together Dzongkha and English are the administrative languages and media of formal education in Bhutan.

Education and learning have always been accorded a place of high esteem in Bhutanese culture, and the lamaseries have served as centres of education and scholarship. Traditional scholarship focused on Buddhist philosophical teaching, classical scriptures and Buddhist mental and spiritual discipline. Subjects such as history, philology, medicine, ethics and a variety of other subjects could also form part of an individual's curriculum in a Bhutanese lamasery. The vehicle for

instruction was the liturgical language Chöke, and in the course of centuries a vast quantity of learned treatises and scholarly work had been written in Chöke.

Alongside the traditional network of lamaseries, formal secular education was introduced into the country during the reign of king 'Ugä 'Wangchu (1907-26) with the opening of two schools. This number was expanded to five schools during the reign of king Jimi 'Wangchu (1926-52). In the mid 1950s during the reign of His Late Majesty Jimi Doji 'Wangchu (1952-72), it was decided to set up a nationwide network of formal secular education: sixty-one schools were built and opened throughout the country, and the school system has been expanding ever since.

Naturally, Chöke, the traditional language of learning in Bhutan, was taught at Bhutanese schools from the start. However, because of the lack of modern learning materials in Chöke, a second language had to be chosen as an ancillary medium of formal secular instruction. Until 1964, this second language was, rather surprisingly, Hindi. Modern, affordable learning materials in Hindi were readily available from neighbouring India, and the choice of a Hindi medium enabled the new system of formal secular education to get off to a quick start. Yet Hindi is neither a native language of Bhutan nor an international language, and along with Hindi medium instructional materials Bhutan also ended up importing the old-fashioned didactic methods characteristic of Indian-style formal secular education. These considerations soon led the Royal Government to abandon the Hindi medium for English in 1964. Not only were special instructional materials developed in English specifically for use in Bhutanese schools, but the Royal Government had already launched a programme for the modernisation of the national language. The liturgical and archaic Chöke was felt not to be ideally suited for modern formal secular education, and so the modern form of the language, Dzongkha, was to be the medium of instruction. In 1961 the first systematic efforts were undertaken to "modernise" and codify the national language. However, the depth of tradition was so great that the Dzongkha which was taught in the schools until 1971 was actually Chöke.

In 1971, the Dzongkha Division of the Department of Education was set up whose task it was to develop instructional materials in Dzongkha medium. The newly developed learning materials and

textbooks in Dzongkha produced by the Dzongkha Division for use in the schools have increasingly enabled the use of Dzongkha as a medium for instruction in the schools, and the work of the Dzongkha Division led to the development of entire curricula in Dzongkha for primary and secondary instruction. In 1971 the *New Method Dzongkha Hand Book* was written at the behest of His Majesty by 'Löbö 'Nâdo, 'Löbö Pemala and 'Löbö Sanggä Tendzi. This book, written in Dzongkha, is a careful study of the differences between the liturgical language Chöke and modern, written Dzongkha. Also at this time, upon the instigation of Foreign Minister Dawa Tsering, Lieutenant Rinchen Tshering of the Royal Bhutanese Army and Major A. Daityar of the Indian Army produced a pamphlet entitled *A Guide to Dzongkha in Roman Alphabet* for the use of Indian army training personnel serving in the Kingdom of Bhutan. In 1977, 'Löbö 'Nâdo, assisted by Dr'âsho Rindzi Doji, Boyd Michailovsky and Martine Mazaudon produced the useful *Introduction to Dzongkha* in Delhi, and in 1986 Doji Chödrö wrote the highly useful *Dzongkha Handbook*. Both booklets contain a brief introduction to Dzongkha pronunciation and script in English, some vocabulary and sample sentences.

In 1986, a special Dzongkha Advisory Committee was set up under the chairmanship of the Minister of Social Services 'Lönpo Sanggä Pänjo in order to formulate policy guidelines connected with the advancement of Dzongkha and to solve issues of standardisation, orthography and problems arising during the implementation of Dzongkha as the national medium of instruction. The beautiful *Dzongkha Dictionary*, which appeared in that same year, had been written by Künzang Thrinlä and Chöki D'öndr'u under the direction of the late 'Löbö 'Nâdo, and stands out amongst the other valuable works produced by the Royal Department of Education as a work of great scholarship. Also in 1986, with the appearance of his *Miri Pinsum Integrated Dzongkha Language Book* Hâp Tsentsen was the first to respond to the need for Dzongkha learning materials specifically designed for Nepali-speaking Bhutanese in the south of the kingdom. In that same year, Boyd Michailovsky wrote a "Report on Dzongkha Development" for the Department of Education of the Royal Government of Bhutan, which included a useful first study of Dzongkha phonology. This ultimately led to the study entitled "Lost syllables and tone contour in Dzongkha" by Boyd Michailovsky and Martine

Mazaudon, which appeared in 1989 and recapitulates the authors' research on Dzongkha phonology and provides diachronic explanation for the Dzongkha contour tone.

In 1989, both the Dzongkha Advisory Committee and Dzongkha Division of the Royal Department of Education were replaced by a new, independent government organ called the Dzongkha Development Commission under the chairmanship of the Minister of Finance Doji Tshering. The Dzongkha Development Commission develops curricula in Dzongkha for the Bhutanese school system, coordinates and conducts linguistic research on Dzongkha in order to produce linguistic studies for scholarly as well as didactic purposes, develops Dzongkha dictionaries, is currently developing a bilingual Dzongkha-English and English-Dzongkha dictionary, and sets standards for orthography, spelling and usage. The Dzongkha Development Commission does not only deal with all matters pertaining to the advancement of the national language, but is also responsible for all matters linguistic in Bhutan, and coordinates and conducts linguistic research on other languages of Bhutan in order to produce scholarly studies and preserve the rich linguistic heritage of Bhutan.

In addition to the increasing package of instructional materials in Dzongkha for school curricula, the Dzongkha Development Commission put out the *Dzongkha Rabsel Lamzang* in 1990, which is an expanded version of *An Introduction to Dzongkha* (1977), a phrase book written in English for foreign learners of Dzongkha. In the same year Dr'âsho Sanggä Doji of the Commission published the excellent *New Dzongkha Grammar*, written in Dzongkha for advanced native speaker education, and explaining many points of Dzongkha grammar and orthography. In the same year, Yoshiro Imaeda wrote a booklet entitled *Manual of Spoken Dzongkha* for the Japan Overseas Cooperation Volunteers.

The Dzongkha Development Commission introduced a standard Roman orthography for Dzongkha with its *Guide to Official Dzongkha Romanization* by Geshê Jam'yang Özer. This orthography called "Roman Dzongkha" is based on a phonological analysis of Dzongkha, and on the 26th of September 1991 Roman Dzongkha was adopted by the Royal Government of Bhutan as the official standard, currently for use in scholarly works and the bilingual dictionary and ultimately intended for general use, although it is not meant to replace the

traditional orthography in Bhutanese script. The romanisation is suitable both for the representation of modern Dzongkha and Bhutanese Chöke. In 1992, the Dzongkha Development Commission published *The Grammar of Dzongkha* and a *Dzongkha Language Workbook*, written in English by Geshé Jam'yang Özer. The former is intended for use as a linguistic reference grammar and as a Dzongkha language textbook to be used in conjunction with the workbook. A soundtrack is also currently being produced for the workbook.

The educational facilities and learning materials for the acquisition of Dzongkha in the schools are provided free-of-charge by the government. A first codification of Dzongkha grammar has been completed, and a modern Dzongkha-English and English-Dzongkha dictionary, replete with all the necessary neologisms for modern life, is currently being composed. The linguistic and historical arguments for the choice of Dzongkha as the national language are stronger than for any other language spoken in Bhutan. Because Dzongkha is the direct natural descendant of Chöke on Bhutanese soil, the language is moreover felt to be the common property of all indigenous Bhutanese, who share and pride themselves on the same literary and liturgical heritage. The language is continuously being standardized and modernized, and Dzongkha is also the best linguistically studied language in Bhutan. Because of the coordinated efforts of the Dzongkha Development Commission and the Royal Department of Education the upcoming generation now being educated in the Bhutanese schools will share Dzongkha as their common national *lingua franca*.

Unity through diversity

The Royal Government of Bhutan maintains an equilibrium between her policy of the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language and her policy of the preservation and study of the country's rich linguistic and cultural heritage. This healthy balance is upheld both by the sensitive way in which these policies are actually implemented in practice in Bhutan and by the active interest of the Royal Government of Bhutan in other indigenous languages of the kingdom.

Bhutan's Minister of Foreign Affairs 'Lönpo Dawa Tsiring points out that "It is a misconception to think that the promotion of Dzongkha means the suppression of other languages". Yet, it is easy to

understand how such a misconception could arise in view of the widespread familiarity of many people with the dogmatic approach adopted by other, particularly Western, governments in the past. The linguistic policies of France have traditionally been characterised by adamant intolerance towards the use of native languages other than French, viz. Basque, Breton, Provençal, Flemish and German, in all domains of public life. In the past, governmental policy in Great Britain and Ireland was designed to encourage the demise of Cornish, Gaelic, Manx, Irish and Welsh in favour of English. In Belgium, Flemish people who understood no French were forced to defend themselves in courts of law in which only French was allowed to be spoken. Dutch colonists in South Africa who spoke only Cape Dutch, or Afrikaans, were likewise forced to defend themselves in British colonial courts in which only English was permitted. In the Netherlands, speakers of Frisian and Papiamentu have had to struggle for the recognition of certain language rights. Even Nepal, under the Rānā regime, pursued a policy of actively suppressing the literary traditions of the Newar and Limbu. Such ways of thinking are in sharp contrast with policy and practice in Bhutan. Whilst the Royal Government of Bhutan has designated Dzongkha as the only language of official intercourse, in practice Dzongkha is promoted in a gentle and pragmatic way, designed not to give rise to antagonism. The approach is polyglot, characteristically Bhutanese and in keeping with a benevolent Buddhist view of life.

The language of diplomacy is quite naturally English. Dzongkha and Nepali are the two languages used in the Tshôdu, or National Assembly, in the same way as Dutch and French are currently both used in the Belgian parliament. In governmental committees, the language spoken is generally Dzongkha, whereas both English and Dzongkha are used in correspondence. In the southern belt of Bhutan, Dzongkha, English and Nepali are all three used as the language of administration, both as spoken languages in committee and in official correspondence. The fact that Nepali, an allochthonous language by origin, enjoys the status of language of administration in the predominantly Nepali-speaking southern belt and even of spoken language in the National Assembly is indicative of the accommodating and hospitable attitude of the Royal Government vis-à-vis the Indo-Aryan immigrant population. No such special provisions are made for

the speakers of any other indigenous language in Bhutan, even the numerous Tshangla-speaking Shâchop, but in practice language barriers are overcome in Bhutan in a friendly way. Bhutanese happily take pride in showing whatever command they have of another language of Bhutan. The haughty attitude of expecting the person addressed to conform to one's own language which is both the caricature and sad reality of the francophone-flemish conflict in Belgium and the anglophone-francophone conflict in Canada is alien to Bhutanese norms of behaviour.

On the contrary, an active interest in the many indigenous languages of the kingdom is seen as being in accordance with the governmental policy of preserving Bhutan's cultural heritage and natural habitat. It is viewed as a matter of national prestige that scholarly research on the country's indigenous languages is conducted under the auspices of the Royal Government. A "First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan" was carried out by the Dzongkha Development Commission from 1990 to 1991. This survey comprised the research results of previous fieldwork which had individually been carried out by Dr'âsho Sanggä Doji, Hâp Tsentsen and Geshê Jam'yang Ö'zer, as well as the results of field research jointly conducted by this triumvirate in 1991. The preliminary results were published by the Commission in the *Report on the First Linguistic Survey of Bhutan* by Geshê Jam'yang Ö'zer, and in 1993 the Dzongkha Development Commission put out a more comprehensive ethnolinguistic study entitled *The Languages and Linguistic History of Bhutan* by Geshê Jam'yang Ö'zer, which also incorporated the results of additional fieldwork conducted in 1992.

The Permanent Linguistic Survey of Bhutan, initiated by the Dzongkha Development Commission in 1992, aims at producing in-depth descriptions of individual Bhutanese languages. The Permanent Linguistic Survey is a programme of ongoing linguistic research under the auspices of the Royal Government of Bhutan, which includes both the lexical and grammatical study of all of Bhutan's indigenous languages and toponymical studies, whereby the Dzongkha and Romanised spellings of place names throughout the kingdom are standardised and their local etymologies investigated. The Survey will record for posterity and make accessible to the international scholarly community the results of linguistic research on the languages of Bhutan.

Because of the current situation in southern Bhutan, it is germane to the present discussion to explain how what has been called the "southern problem" relates to the official language policy of the Royal Government. Bhutan closed its frontiers to Nepali immigrants in 1958, but no practical measures could be taken at that time to curb the flow of illegal migrants. In fact, the promise of free government-sponsored education and health facilities and arable land made Bhutan attractive to migrants. Education was not only free-of-charge, but in southern Bhutan education was even offered in Nepali medium, so that Nepali speakers in southern Bhutan enjoyed greater language rights than most of their Nepalese brethren in Assam or West Bengal. In addition to secular formal education in Nepali, the Royal Government of Bhutan funded and operated five regional Sanskrit *pâthśâlâs* in southern Bhutan to provide Bhutanese citizens of Nepali extraction with Hindu religious instruction and education in Sanskrit and literary Nepali. To encourage assimilation of the southern migrants, the Royal Government for some time even awarded subventions to couples of "mixed marriage" between native Bhutanese and Indo-Aryan immigrants.

In the early 1990s, the Royal Government of Bhutan implemented strategic administrative barriers to effectively impede the vertical social mobility of those who could not prove legal residence in the kingdom. These measures encouraged the emigration of illegal immigrants, but did not constitute a *Zwangsaussiedlung*. Whether or not the efflux of ethnic Nepalis from Bhutan can be attributed to these measures alone, the government's language policy was hardly a causative factor. Nepali medium was removed from Bhutanese schools in southern Bhutan in 1990. Yet this measure was not directly connected with the southern problem, but had a more complex background, although it did fuel the fire of the militant response. As early as the late 1980s, it had already been decided to discontinue the use of Nepali as a medium for formal education in Bhutan. The reasons for this decision were threefold. First of all, the use of Nepali medium in the south was found to be directly counter-productive to the advancement of the national language, since the accommodating stance of the Bhutanese people and authorities had effectively hampered the learning of Dzongkha by the immigrant population. Secondly, the use of Nepali medium in schools accorded special status to an originally allochthonous language which no native

language of Bhutan enjoyed, other than Dzongkha. Nepali medium was felt to have been a mistake in the same way as Hindi medium had been previously. Moreover, the use of Nepali in free educational facilities had only encouraged illegal immigration into Bhutan. Thirdly, in the 1984 National Education Plan, the Royal Department of Education had decided to adopt the controversial Fröbelian pedagogic philosophy known as the "New Approach to Primary Education" which necessitated the development of new curricula and learning materials. Western proponents of the approach advocated a more Bhutanised, "learner-centred" and "environmental" curriculum in which little stress is placed on forms of knowledge acquired by rote learning. These new materials had to be developed in both Dzongkha and English, and the Department thought it unwise to utilise its scarce financial resources for developing new curricula in Nepali as well, particularly after it had been determined that the use of Nepali medium in southern Bhutanese schools was impeding the assimilation of the immigrant population and counteracting the government policy of advancing the national language.

The closing of the five regional Sanskrit *pāthśālās* in southern Bhutan was not a policy decision but the direct result of terrorist activity in southern Bhutan. The Royal Government of Bhutan will not reintroduce Nepali into the school system in southern Bhutan, but the Director General of Education Dr'âsho Thrinlæ Jamtsho and the Minister of Foreign Affairs 'Lönpo Dawa Tséring have both expressed the hope that the Sanskrit *pāthśālās* will be re-opened once the situation in southern Bhutan has normalised and the security of personnel and pupils can be guaranteed. The Royal Government has on many occasions provided subventions for the construction of Hindu shrines in southern Bhutan and continues to respect the freedom of religion of the predominantly Hindu southern Bhutanese. Alongside Dzongkha, Tshangla and English, Nepali still remains one of the four languages used by the Bhutan Broadcasting Service, and one of the three languages in which the national weekly *Kuensel* is published. As pointed out above, Dzongkha and Nepali are both used in the National Assembly, and Nepali is used in addition to Dzongkha and English both as a spoken and a written language of administration in southern Bhutan. It could be argued that the use of Nepali, even as an ancillary language of administration in southern Bhutan, is counter-productive

to the governmental policy of the advancement of Dzongkha. However, it is not part of the government's language policy to make life difficult. It may be possible to dispense with Nepali as an ancillary language of administration in the south once the upcoming generation of southern Bhutanese has received a proper education in Dzongkha. Meanwhile, language use in administrative practice in southern Bhutan remains reasonably polyglot, versatile and humane. Despite the vast differences in phonological and grammatical structure between Dzongkha and Nepali, southern Bhutanese are fervent and diligent learners of both spoken and written Dzongkha.

Elsewhere in Bhutan, local languages such as Dzalakha, Tshangla (Shâchop), Bumthang and so forth may also be heard in the regional *dzongs*. In fact, all these languages may be heard from time to time in Trashichö Dzong in Thimphu itself. Multilingualism is the normal situation, and the need for a unifying language in such a context is self-evident. This unifying language in Bhutan has always been Chöke, and now the modern daughter language, Dzongkha, has taken over this role. It is the official policy of the Royal Government of Bhutan that every Bhutanese citizen should be educated in and acquire a working command of Dzongkha. It is expressly not government policy that people give up speaking their native languages and assimilate linguistically to the 'Ngalop population of western Bhutan. Just as Chöke has been a unifying factor throughout Bhutanese history, now the modern national language Dzongkha will continue to act as a unifying force. On the other hand, the linguistic diversity of Bhutan's people represents a rich native cultural heritage, and the study and preservation of this highly treasured linguistic heritage is in harmony with the governmental policy to promote the national language Dzongkha.

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Notes

- ¹ The author would like to thank the Minister of Foreign Affairs His Excellency 'Lönpo Dawa Tshering, the Minister of Home Affairs His Excellency 'Lönpo D'âgo Tshering, the Minister of Finance and Honorable Chairman of the Dzongkha Development Commission His Excellency 'Lönpo Doji Tshering and the Director General of Education Dr'âsho Thrinlæ Jamtsho for their time and valuable assistance.

The system of romanisation employed in this article is known as Roman Dzongkha. This newly devised system was adopted as the official romanisation for Dzongkha by the Dzongkha Development Commission of the Royal Government of Bhutan on 26 September 1991. Roman Dzongkha is a phonological transcription of the standard form of modern spoken Dzongkha, not a transliteration of the traditional orthography. Roman Dzongkha can also be used to render Bhutanese pronunciations of Chöke. Roman Dzongkha makes use of 22 of the letters of the Roman alphabet (F, Q, V and X are not used) and of three diacritics. The initial consonant symbols are: k, kh, g, g', c, ch, j, j', t, th, d, d', p, ph, b, b', pc, pch, bj, bj', tr, thr, dr, dr', ts, tsh, dz, zh, z, zh', z', sh, s, y, 'y, w, 'w, r, hr, l, l', lh, ng, ny, n, m, 'ng, 'ny, 'n, 'm, h. The vowel sounds are a, â, ä, e, ê, i, î, o, ô, û, ü. The apostrophe at the beginning of a syllable marks high tone in syllables beginning with a nasal, liquid or vowel. The apostrophe following an initial plosive or sibilant symbol indicates a devoiced consonant followed by a low tone murmured vowel. The circumflex accent indicates vowel length. The diaeresis indicates a long, apophonic vowel. The system is explained fully in the *Guide to Roman Dzongkha* (1994).

- ² A pseudo-Indo-Aryan term used by some Indian and Anglo-Saxon scholars, derived from a folk etymological interpretation of sDe-pa, a variant of sDe-srid.