Language Policy and Planning in Bhutan[1]

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1. Introduction

Dr. Johnson, the lexicographer who authored *A Dictionary of the English Language*, published in 1755, said, "I am sorry when any language is lost because languages are the pedigree of nations". Nothing could be more profound than this because language is the lifeblood and soul of a country, just like blood is to a person. Every country should take this seriously and implement sound language planning and policy. The Bhutanese proverb *ro kha 'mashê rang kha bjang*, which translates to "not knowing the language of others, one's own language is lost", is an excellent piece of advice. To offer an exegesis of this statement, if you make any effort to move over to utilising another language, you will never wholly learn that language; instead, your own language may be lost entirely in the process.

This paper analyses and describes Bhutan's language policy and planning, using Spolsky's (2004) *Theory of Language Policy* as a theoretical framework. It will argue that, to keep up with the times, reversing the notion of that adage and following *ro kha shê rang kha ma-bjang* "Know others' languages but never lose one's own", is the prudent thing to do. A language planning model will also be proposed, considering Bhutan's language requirements, linguistic landscape, and cultural aspects.

Section 2 of this paper discusses the language constellation of Bhutan, which includes the number of languages spoken in Bhutan and their genetic subgroups. Section 3 briefly discusses the traditional writing systems, including their origin. Section 4 focuses on Bhutanese linguistic culture, which includes how language and script are associated with spiritual belief.

[1] The views stated in this article are solely those of the author and do not represent the views of any government agency.
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Section 5 examines existing Bhutanese language policy, both *de jure* and *de facto*. Section 6 briefly discusses Bhutan's endangered languages and the potential disaster of language extinction. In section 7, I suggest a language policy model for Bhutan based on the country's linguistic constellation and language requirements. Finally, section 8 gives a brief conclusion.

2. Language Constellation of Bhutan

Bhutan is a tiny nation with a land area of 38,394 square kilometres and fewer than a million people. Yet, it is linguistically diverse, with over nineteen languages spoken. Aside from natural language change and development, the nature of Bhutan's physical topography is an obvious explanation for the creation of these various linguistic groups. People's movement from one location to another may have been strenuous due to the presence of mountains, dense forests, and rivers in between, and dialects of different villages may not have been in close contact to the point of remaining entirely mutually intelligible, even though they descended from the same language family at a higher level.

Bhutanese languages are all Tibeto-Burman, also known as Trans-Himalayan, except for Lhotshamkha (Nepali). Lhotshamkha is an Indo-Aryan language spoken in the southern border region. There are two main groups that the Bhutanese languages fall into: Central Bodish and East Bodish. However, there are a few languages that might possibly constitute their own separate group (see van Driem 1998). The Central Bodish languages include Dzongkha, Cho-ca-nga-ca-kha, Brokpake, Brokkat, Lakha, and Bökha. The East Bodish languages include Bumthangkha, Khengkha, Kurtöpkha, Nyenkha (also known as Henkha), Chalipakat, Dzalakha, Monkha (referred to as Olekha), Dakpakha, and possibly Gongduk. Tshangla and Lhokpu could form their own subgroup within the Trans-Himalayan language family.

According to the most recent edition of Ethnologue, Bhutan is reported to have 23 languages. Among these, languages such as Adi, Assamese, Bantawa, Hindi, and Santali are classified as "Immigrant Languages" of

Bhutan. Additionally, English is recognised as one of the two main languages spoken in Bhutan, alongside Dzongkha.

In the early days, people spoke the language in use at the time, which was Dzongkha at the official level and other native languages at the grassroots level. When Bhutan's First King, Ugyen Wangchuck (1907-1926), established a few schools for the first time, Chökê (Classical Tibetan) and Hindi (Hindustani) were the mediums of instruction. Dzongkha was not a written language, and English was too distant then, so Chokê and Hindi were the most apparent options. Chokê was an official language, but it never became a medium of mass communication because it was a literary language with no native speakers in Bhutan, and much of the population, except for a few individuals with a classical education, did not understand the official language at the time. Despite this, Chokê remains the primary medium of instruction for monastic education, and it is also used in other aspects of Bhutanese life to a lesser extent.

During the reign of Bhutan's Second King, Jigme Wangchuck (1926–1952), the number of schools in the country increased dramatically. Around the same time, the English language was gaining popularity in India. During this period, English was also gradually becoming an essential foreign language in Bhutan, so it was chosen as one of the mediums of instruction, along with Chokê and Hindi.

The Third King of Bhutan, Jigme Dorji Wangchuck (1952-1972), recognised the need for a national language that could serve as a lingua franca nationwide. When Bhutan joined the United Nations in 1971, there was also a need for a language to represent the nation. In light of this exigency, the Third King of Bhutan proclaimed Dzongkha as the official language of the nation. Dzongkha was a natural option both because of its historical function as the spoken vernacular of the royal courts, the military, educated nobles, government, and administration, as well as because of its shared literary tradition with Chokê (see also van Driem 1994).

3. The Writing Systems

Dzongkha and Classical Tibetan are written using the same script, Uchen. In the seventh century, Thonmi Sambhota developed Uchen (*dbu can*) "head-seriffed" and Umê (*dbu med*) "Un Head-seriffed". Sambhota was the son of Anu of the Thonmi clan in central Tibet, and he served as a minister under Tibetan King Songtsen Gampo. The King sent Sambhota to India to learn Sanskrit. He studied Indian linguistics, including Paninian grammar, under the tutelage of Pandit Devavidhayasinha and Lipikara, and upon his return to Tibet, he invented two scripts: Uchen, based on the Devanagari script and the Lantsa Indian letter forms; and Umê, possibly based on the Wartu script of North India. This writing system contains 30 consonant symbols and four vowel symbols.

One distinctive script, Joyî, originated in Bhutan around the 8th century and was created by Demang Tsemang. Demang Tsemang travelled to Bhutan with Guru Rinpoche after the latter was invited there by Sindhu Raja, a local ruler of Bumthang located in central Bhutan. While there are visual distinctions between the Joyî letters and the Uchen letters, these differences are comparable to the distinction between lowercase and uppercase letters in the Roman alphabet. It is worth noting that the Joyî script has the same number of consonant and vowel symbols as the Uchen script.

Since the phonemic inventories of the Bhutanese languages are relatively similar, although, with certain modifications, the Uchen and Joyi scripts may be used to write Dzongkha and other Bhutanese languages with roughly the same level of consistency and economy. Dzongkha is the only language written officially in Bhutan. Other indigenous languages are sometimes written for communication in informal settings and on social media platforms. The Nepalese script, also known as Nepal Bhasa, is one of the Brahmic scripts used in the Kathmandu valley of Nepal. Lhotshamkha is written in this script.

In addition to the native writing script, the Roman (Latin) script is used to write Dzongkha and other Bhutanese languages. Both transliteration and

transcription, the two Romanization techniques, are employed. Transliteration, the one-to-one mapping of characters from the source language to the target script, is used to represent a text written in one script in another script for academic purposes exclusively. Transcription, the systematic representation of a language in written form, either phonemically or phonetically, is used to enable one to pronounce the source language with a reasonable degree of accuracy; in Bhutan, it is primarily used to write personal and geographical names. People may utilise Roman transcription in informal contexts, such as social media.

Despite the widespread use of Romanization as a discretionary writing system, the absence of a standard Romanization system is seen throughout the nation. Several organisations use Romanization, either directly or indirectly. The civil registry of the Ministry of Home and Cultural Affairs (MoHCA) is responsible for maintaining personal names and place names in both Dzongkha and Roman script. The Election Commission of Bhutan (ECB) is another agency that keeps track of place names in both Dzongkha and Roman script for electoral purposes. The Land Commission of Bhutan keeps records of geographical names in Roman script for maps and other cadastral uses.

Romanization systems used by all these organisations are neither phonemic nor phonetic; they are, at best, how a native speaker would transcribe without regard to linguistic norms. Despite the efforts made by the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) in 1991 to disseminate an official guide on Dzongkha Romanization, aimed at mitigating issues of inconsistency and ambiguity, the adoption of this guide has yet to gain widespread acceptance. Because this guide advises using various diacritics in line with our languages' phonological and phonetic features, the rules look very hard to the public. In 1997, the MoHCA distributed a booklet comprising examples of Bhutan's geographical names in Dzongkha and Roman script; this also needed more phonological basis and precision. Consequently, the Romanization of Dzongkha and other Bhutanese languages remains arbitrary and inconsistent. As an illustration, consider the personal name ‘Ngödrup’,

which carries a singular connotation of 'accomplishment' and is represented in the Dzongkha language with the unambiguous spelling དངོས་གྲུབ་ <dngos grub>. However, it is observed that variations in the transcription of this name exist, such as /Ngoedrub/, /Ngedrup/, /Ngidrup/, /Nidrup/, /Nidrub/, and /Nguldrup/. Similarly, both *lám,* meaning 'Buddhist Master' and *lam,* meaning 'road/footpath', are written /lam/with no tone distinction.

4. Bhutanese Linguistic Culture

It is necessary to be acquainted with the linguistic culture of a nation-state to properly understand its language policy. This is because language policy is typically determined by or rooted in its linguistic culture. According to Schiffman (1996: 149), the South Asian linguistic culture may be characterised as the whole collection of concepts, principles, convictions, attitudes, prejudices, legends, religious norms, and all other cultural elements that South Asians incorporate into their language-related interactions, stemming from their cultural background. In the Judeo-Christian tradition, it is believed that God directed Adam to name things. Based on this belief, it is believed that God brought language variety into existence as a reaction to human arrogance. According to Schiffman (1996), since the Bible is the Word of God, it must only contain the truth, and nothing can alter or contradict what it says. Likewise, across several cultural and religious traditions, language is often seen as having a divine origin, thereby giving it a sacred and revered status.

Bhutanese language and script are also deeply linked with Buddhist beliefs. The Lankavatara Sutra states, "If things were not given names, the world would be bewildered; so Lord Buddha, skilled in means, names various phenomena". Kangyur (*bka' 'gyur*) is one of the most important Buddhist scriptures, and its name translates to "Buddha-word Translated." Therefore, everything in the Kangyur is accurate, and nothing may contradict it. Chökê, the language into which the teachings of Buddhism were translated from Indian sources, literally means "Dharma Language", and the Bhutanese

people hold this sacred language of Dharma in high regard. Because this Dharma and Bhutanese languages, especially Dzongkha, share numerous cognates, all of them might be regarded as equally sacred. Bhutanese people likewise hold the traditional script in high regard. It feeds on one of Buddha's statements in the Avatamsaka Sutra: "...I will appear in the form of letters. Consider them to be like me and respect them accordingly". Many were opposed to the regulation of writing vehicle numbers in Dzongkha alongside English when the Road Safety and Transport Authority initially implemented it because they believed Dzongkha letters were sacrosanct.

5 Bhutanese language policy, both *de jure* and *de facto*

A country's language policy may be examined in terms of both its overt and covert policies. Overt policy refers to a policy that is explicit, formalised, codified, or exhibited, while covert policy refers to a policy that is implicit, informal, unstated, or latent (see Schiffman 1996).

The Constitution of Bhutan, which is the supreme law of the land, contains the fundamental principles that underpin the country's language policy framework. Section 8 of Article 1 of the Constitution states that "Dzongkha is the national language of Bhutan". Additionally, Section 1 of Article 4 of the Constitution states that "language" and "literature" are to be preserved, safeguarded, and promoted in addition to the other forms of cultural heritage that Bhutan has. This language policy of Bhutan, which is established in its Constitution, may be referred to as the official, *de jure*, or overt language policy. This language policy is notably an effective language strategy. It offers a clear framework for developing and promoting Dzongkha as the national language of Bhutan, and it also gives a clear framework for maintaining the other languages of Bhutan as the rich linguistic and cultural legacy of Bhutan.

George van Driem, now the Chair of Historical Linguistics at the University of Berne in Switzerland, was the first foreign linguist formally commissioned by the Royal Government of Bhutan to conduct linguistic

research in Bhutan. He characterises Bhutan's language policy as a balanced approach with two complementing policy lines in his article “Language Policy in Bhutan” (1994). According to him, the two complementary policy lines are 1) the promotion of Dzongkha as the national language and 2) the preservation and study of the country's rich linguistic and cultural heritage.

His Majesty King Jigme Singye Wangchuck, the Fourth Druk Gyalpo, set the framework for this noble language policy when the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC) was established at his directive in 1989. Since its creation, the DDC has been carrying out national language planning efforts under this complementary language policy framework under the leadership of the Fourth Druk Gyalpo. The Fourth Druk Gyalpo's lofty but covert language strategy finally crystallized in the shape of two clear clauses in the Constitution.

Today, under the visionary stewardship of His Majesty the Druk Gyalpo, the DDC continues its national language planning efforts with this policy framework. In an official document titled "National Policy and Strategy of Dzongkha Development and Promotion", the DDC has established a set of positions, principles, and decisions. The DDC has identified four policy objectives in its Annual Performance Agreement (APA) with the government, using this policy document and the Constitution of Bhutan as a guiding framework. The four policy objectives are as follows: 1) to enhance the Dzongkha proficiency of the Bhutanese; 2) to enhance the Dzongkha-English bilingual proficiency of the Bhutanese; 3) to develop and promote the national language through the other native languages of Bhutan; and 4) to develop and promote the national language through information and communication technology. Under each policy objective, various national language planning activities are carried out.

Language planning in Bhutan is a governmental endeavour facilitated by the DDC, aimed at aligning the role of Dzongkha with the evolving societal and national development requirements. Since there is little need for the DDC to engage in status planning, it concentrates on corpus planning to expand the use of Dzongkha in governance, education, commerce, and other spheres

of human activity. The DDC develops official grammars, dictionaries, orthographic guides, and other language reference materials as part of corpus planning. Furthermore, it endeavours to fulfil the need for translation by creating bilingual dictionaries that include Dzongkha in relation to English and other indigenous languages. Additionally, as a component of its implementation initiatives, it disseminates its language planning resources to government workers, students, and the wider populace. Additionally, it assists in advancing the Dzongkha curriculum inside educational institutions, including schools, institutes, and university colleges. The primary objective of the DDC is to achieve standardisation in Dzongkha. In pursuit of this aim, the organisation also undertakes the task of commissioning publications and enforcing guidelines for grammar and spelling use. In addition to assisting people and commercial enterprises engaged in creating and producing language resources, the organisation also offers training, prize competitions, and recognition awards.

Aside from Bhutan's official, *de jure*, or overt language policy, we must also consider its covert, or *de facto*, language policy—the policy that is implemented in practice. In Bhutan, like in other nations, the Ministry of Education (MoE) is responsible for carrying out national language acquisition planning. In 1971, the MoE formed a Dzongkha Division to provide resources for education in Dzongkha, the national language. This division was responsible for creating Dzongkha textbooks and learning materials for elementary and secondary school. That division has now evolved into a full-fledged department known as the Department of Curriculum, Research, and Development (DCRD), with curriculum creation as its primary responsibility.

During the interim period, the medium of instruction in Bhutan continued to be exclusively English, with Dzongkha being taught only as a language subject. However, in present times, subjects such as social studies and environmental studies are now being taught in Dzongkha at the elementary level. There was once a plan to include history teaching in Dzongkha up to the intermediate secondary level; however, this decision was subsequently revoked.

It is worth mentioning that the usage of the national language in mainstream education is currently severely limited. English continues to serve as the primary teaching language, whereas Dzongkha has not yet assumed its rightful place within the education system. According to Christopher Fynn (personal communication), a native English speaker who spent years working in Bhutan as a developer of Dzongkha fonts, Bhutan is the only Asian country that does not use its national language as a medium of instruction, and it is also the only non-colonized country that adopts only English as the medium of instruction. In Non-Formal Education, Dzongkha serves as the primary instructional language. Historically, Dzongkha has been the exclusive medium of instruction. However, English has recently been included in the Non-Formal Education curriculum.

Throughout the years, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) has consistently advocated for implementing bilingual and multilingual educational practices that prioritize using students' mother tongues. According to UNESCO, the implementation of mother tongue-based education has been found to have a beneficial influence on the learning process and the resulting educational achievements. Furthermore, UNESCO asserts that adopting multilingual education, beginning with instruction in one's mother tongue and transitioning to other languages, such as the national and international languages, has proven to be highly effective in numerous developing nations. Research has shown that pupils who have received early instruction in their mother tongue have enhanced academic performance in subsequent years, even when faced with the challenge of transitioning to other languages. In Bhutan, multilingual schooling is foreign; nonetheless, the other local tongues are utilised as spoken languages at the grassroots level.

6 Endangered languages of Bhutan

Linguist Michael E. Krauss, cited in one Wikipedia article ("Endangered language", n.d.), defines three levels of language endangerment: "safe" if

children are likely to speak them in 100 years; "endangered" if children are unlikely to speak them in 100 years; and "moribund" if children are not speaking them now. Linguists believe that over half of the world's 7102 languages (Ethnologue, 18th edition) will become extinct or moribund in the next 100 years. Moreover, it has been estimated that around half of the world's languages are spoken by fewer than 7500 individuals, indicating a state of endangerment in varying degrees. The languages of Bhutan, except Dzongkha, Tshangla, and Lhotsham, may be considered endangered. Three languages, namely Monkha, Lhokpu, and Gongduk, are now facing a catastrophic state of endangerment. Olekha, a dialect of Monkha spoken in Rukha under Wangdue Dzongkhag, is under imminent threat of extinction. The passing of Aum Chödrön, who is over 85 years old and potentially the last fluent speaker of the language, along with a few others who possess limited proficiency, will likely result in the extinction of Olekha as a living language.

Some people may wonder why we should be concerned when a language becomes extinct. When a language dies out, it not only goes with its speakers' words but also their whole way of thinking. Languages cannot be easily substituted simply because a language embodies the condensed expression of thoughts and feelings of its speakers over generations, including their whole historical and cultural development. What we say in our mother tongue influences what we think, feel, and believe since our native language and our mental processes are so intricately intertwined. Even if we can speak a foreign language, no matter how fluently, our thoughts are first formed in our native language, and then we translate those thoughts into the target language. Because it occurs so rapidly, we aren't even aware that a conversion is taking place in our mental lexicon simultaneously.

Next, as a language dies out, the cultural traditions intertwined with it, such as songs, stories, and poetry, also die out for good. This loss of cultural traditions may be very devastating. The intellectual treasure contained in one language cannot be easily transmitted to another. This is especially true for unwritten languages, as only 300 of the 7102 languages in the world have writing traditions. Another noticeable effect will be a weakening of social

cohesiveness when the values and traditions of one language group are replaced with new ones. When you borrow a robe, it seldom fits properly, and even if you try to force yourself to wear it, you won't feel comfortable. The same holds for picking up a new language. Then, we face the danger of losing our ethnicity status since ethnicity is often defined in terms of language; lastly, it should go without saying that the loss of a language would result in the loss of identity, first for the community that speaks that language and eventually for the country as a whole. There may be a whole host of additional terrible consequences.

Linguists are worried about the world's languages that are on the verge of extinction because they are aware of the devastating implications of language loss, and they work to record as many endangered languages as possible. The primary focus of many universities is the scholarly examination and comprehensive recording of the world's languages, with a specific emphasis on endangered languages. The DDC engages in collaborative efforts with national and international students and researchers who conduct research on Dzongkha and other languages spoken in Bhutan. To date, several linguistic studies have been undertaken on Dzongkha, Tshangla, Gongduk, Kurtöp, Monkha, Bumthangkha, Khengkha, and other languages by both foreign and national researchers, with the support of the DDC. The DDC aims to independently undertake bilingual studies of Dzongkha in relation to other languages spoken in Bhutan as part of its planned initiatives.

7 Quadrilingual Model

Spolsky (2004) provides three major components of the theory of language policy: 1) language practices, 2) language ideology or belief, and 3) language management or planning. According to him, language practices are what people do, whereas language ideologies or beliefs are what people believe should be done. Language management or language planning refers to the deliberate and systematic actions taken to address and regulate language situations within a given context.

These three components can be used to describe and analyse the language policy of Bhutan quite effectively. The following is a condensed overview of the language practices followed in Bhutan: While Dzongkha is utilised effectively as the official language of Bhutan, Chokê is used as the language of liturgy. English is employed as the essential foreign language, while mother tongues are used at the grassroots level.

The language ideology in Bhutan aligns closely with the prevailing language practices, as individuals believe that the existing language practices in Bhutan are appropriate and should be maintained. Furthermore, there is a shared conviction that all languages used in Bhutan should coexist in harmony.

Regarding language management and planning, there is an approved government agency known as the Dzongkha Development Commission (DDC). This organisation is entrusted with the responsibility of upholding the language practices and beliefs held by the Bhutanese community. In addition to overseeing the management of the national language and carrying out any actions related to its development or promotion, the DDC has also begun undertaking study and documenting Bhutan's other languages. The DDC works on all aspects of the national language, such as pronunciation, spelling, vocabulary, grammar, and style. It also plans to develop strategies for addressing bad language, racist language, obscene language, correct language, etc.

Based on these language practices, language ideologies, and language management techniques in Bhutan, a Quadrilingual Model would be a suitable language planning framework for Bhutan. This Quadrilingual Model will include four languages: Chökê, Dzongkha, English, and Mother Tongue. The term "mother tongue" refers to the language that you naturally pick up from infancy forward, which may be your father's language, your mother's, or both of your parents. The term "mother tongue" refers, in the context of this definition, to the aggregate of all the many mother tongues spoken in Bhutan.

This model is unlike the quadrilingual language model used in other countries, like Switzerland, where all four languages have the same planning for learning. The Bhutanese model is unique, and under the Quadrilingual Model, each language must function quite differently in different sociolinguistic domains. Because of this, each language should be handled separately, even though they rely on each other. For this language planning model to work, four main sociolinguistic domains need to be in place. They are the education sector (schools and colleges), the government (three branches), religion and religious organisations, and the family. This language planning model must include the education sector as its central domain.

The education sector, the first and most crucial sociolinguistic domain, must employ both Dzongkha and English as a medium of instruction. While it can maintain the status quo regarding English, it can consider increasing the share of Dzongkha in education so that the national language plays a more significant role; this will allow students and university graduates to acquire bilingual competency in Dzongkha and English. A basic level of Chökê might also be taught in schools so that students can study, comprehend, and appreciate fundamental Buddhist terms and concepts; also, those who choose to specialise in Buddhist studies later can make a smoother transition.

The decision regarding the inclusion of mother languages as a medium of instruction in elementary education, as advocated by UNESCO, alongside English and Dzongkha, is within the purview of the Ministry of Education (MoE) to deliberate over. Despite the growing evidence of the efficacy of mother tongue-based multilingual education in the early years of education in other countries, the availability of teachers who are proficient in several mother tongues and the development of curriculum resources at the beginning could be some of the challenges in the case of Bhutan.

Government, the second sociolinguistic domain, should encompass three branches: the judiciary, the legislature, and the executive. In general, all three branches of government may conduct public affairs in both Dzongkha and English. The executive may utilise Dzongkha as the principal language for meetings, formal letters, documents, internal memos, and so on,

with English translations and interpretation as needed. While authorised translations of parliamentary legislation in Dzongkha may be issued in English, the legislature must continue to utilise Dzongkha as the exclusive language of parliament. Members of Parliament may use their mother tongue, in addition to Dzongkha, to communicate with the people in their constituency. Only Dzongkha may be the language of the Supreme Court, High Court, and district courts in the judiciary; all law court proceedings can be entirely in Dzongkha; and the language of judgments, decrees, or orders in all districts must be Dzongkha. In other settings, like the executive and legislative, Dzongkha and English may be used.

Chokê had been the literary language of ancient Bhutan, and it continues to be one of the written languages in contemporary Bhutan. Chokê had a significant impact on Dzongkha and other languages spoken in Bhutan. Even though there is no colloquial version of this language, all the indigenous languages of Bhutan share roots with it. In addition, a significant portion of our previous literature is written in this classical language. So, in religion or religious organisations, which is the third sociolinguistic domain, Chökê must be the medium of instruction and the language of liturgy; Chökê can be considered the sacred and classical language, and it can be cultivated for religious as well as other literary purposes. Our monastic education can incorporate, in addition to Chokê and Dzongkha, both English and Dzongkha as language courses. This would allow our monastic communities to become trilingual or multilingual and better adapt to changing circumstances.

The family, being the last and equally significant sociolinguistic domain as the preceding three, can significantly contribute towards achieving our language policy and planning objectives, especially concerning Mother Tongue, the fourth language in our Quadrilingual Model. Chokê, Dzongkha, and English stand independently in this model, whereas the Mother Tongue, as explained previously, is the aggregate of all the individual mother tongues in the country. In addition to promoting the acquisition of Dzongkha, English, and elementary Chökê, each family needs to make the most significant effort in transmitting their native language to their offspring. Only in this manner

can all of Bhutan's indigenous languages be maintained for future generations.

8 Conclusion

In Bhutan, children who attend school have grown up at least trilingual—Dzongkha, English, and their mother tongue—with varying fluency levels in the first two and, given sufficient motivation and periods of formal study, as well as opportunities to use, children in general, and Bhutanese children in particular, can acquire competency in several languages. So, given our linguistic situation, we want a policy framework that can address all our language demands, and the suggested Quadrilingual Model, as described in this study, would be the most excellent viable model.

English is an essential foreign language for us. We need it to connect with the outside world, to stay up with technological advancement, and for higher education and trade. Because English is a global language, not merely an international language, it goes without saying that it must be included in our language planning model. However, our national language and other native languages are of equal importance, as each of the four languages under the Quadrilingual Model performs a specific function, and we cannot afford to disregard any of them lest we make a grave error in language planning. If we err in economic policy and planning, it is not a catastrophic error because we can always pool our resources and get things back on track. But if we make a mistake in language policy and planning, it will be a mistake forever. A language planning process is often irreversible, and reversing a language shift is almost impossible regardless of how many resources are allocated or reallocated.

In conclusion, the Quadrilingual Model is consistent with Bhutan's language needs, traditional multilingualism, and linguistic diversity. It suits our linguistic culture despite facilitating national, intra-national, and international communication. Moreover, this mutually reinforcing model is consistent with our noble vision of Gross National Happiness (GNH) because

it directly supports two of its pillars, the preservation and promotion of cultural values and the establishment of good governance; in particular, it can contribute to the achievement of GNH through social and community vitality, cultural vitality, education, and good governance.

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