

A Nepali Dictionary of Synonyms

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This paper attempts to report the progress of the Nepali Dictionary of Synonyms (Abbreviated as NDS) and discusses some of the problems related to this work. The paper is divided into five parts: 1) Background, 2) Plan of the work, 3) Nature of dictionary entry 4) Problems and solutions, and 5) Conclusion.

1. Background

Nepal is a multi-ethnic and multilingual country where more than 70 languages are spoken by a population of over 18 million. As a comprehensive linguistic survey of the languages of Nepal has not yet been made, it is difficult to give the exact number of the languages of Nepal. According to the census of 1991, Nepali is spoken by 53% of the total population as their second language. Nepali has been used as the lingua franca for centuries and is recognised as the only official language of the country.

Nepali has written records of over seven hundred years. The Nepali speaking people migrated from west to east along the mid-hills and went beyond the national territory and settled in India, Bhutan and Burma also. Nepali became a contact language between the speakers of various Tibeto-Burman and Indo-Aryan languages. The process of standardization of Nepali began very recently at the beginning of this century when scholars began to write grammars, compile dictionaries, write text books and create literature for printing.

Many of the native and foreign scholars took interest in preparing Nepali-English and English-Nepali dictionaries for foreign and native learners. *The Comparative and Etymological Dictionary of the Nepali Language* (1931) by R.L. Turner is a monumental work in Nepali lexicography. Besides the Nepali-English and English-Nepali bilingual dictionaries, there are some Nepali-Hindu, Nepali-Japanese, Nepali-Russian, Nepali-Newari and Nepali-Limbu dictionaries already published, and some other dictionaries in preparation. During the sixties and seventies several bilingual dictionaries and glossaries were prepared by SIL linguists.

Native scholars contributed by preparing some monolingual dictionaries of Nepali. Mr. Charkra Pani Chalise who pioneered the work, produced the only thesaurus of the Nepali language. *The Nepali Brihad Shabdakosh*, a comprehensive dictionary of the Nepali language, prepared by a group of scholars and produced by the Royal Nepal Academy in 1983 is considered the standard dictionary of Nepali. An abridged student edition of this dictionary was also published. Since the thesaurus of Nepali compiled by Chalise in 1946 is out of print and needs thorough revision, and *Nepali Brihad Shabdakos* (comprehensive Nepali Dictionary) produced by the Royal Nepal Academy is a desk dictionary, the need for a concise dictionary of synonyms was greatly felt. This need resulted in planning the production of the NDS.

2. Plan of the work

The plan for preparing a concise dictionary of synonyms of Nepali was conceived some four years back. The aim of the dictionary was to help the writers, editors and advanced students

to find the right words for their use, to enable them to derive words from the base for extended meaning, help them find collocations, antonyms and correct spelling of the words. To make it easy for use it was decided to minimize abbreviations and symbols. The only symbols used are = and ≠ to show which are equal to or not equal to the main entry as synonyms and antonyms.

It was planned to collect the data from various sources, i.e., published dictionaries, literary works, newspapers and magazines. Data have also been collected from the computer concordance of spoken Nepali prepared by the author which represents varieties of discourse from spoken Nepali. A list of basic words is used to collect words from different geographical areas. It was planned that the dictionary should be useful for the writers who want to use Sanskrit terms as well as Nepali colloquial words.

3. Nature of the dictionary entry

With this plan in mind the work was started by the author. The first step was to decide on the dictionary entry for which lexicological details have to be given. According to the plan, each entry should consist of a) the head entry, b) synonyms, c) collocations, d) concise definitions, if any, e) derivatives and f) antonyms. It is desirable to discuss the nature of these items to be included in the dictionary.

3.1 The head entry

A head entry is the citation form in the dictionary. In a dictionary of synonyms the head entry is one which has its synonyms. In the NDS the head entry is a word having a separate entity in terms of its semantic equation or differentiation, collocation and derivation. Compound words also are included if they have different meanings from those of their combined meanings.

In terms of the sources, the headwords are **tatsama** (Sanskrit), **tatbhava** (developed from Sanskrit) as well as the **agantuk** (borrowed). The neologisms accepted by the users have been taken as headwords. The words from high and low strata of the society as well as general and professional domains of the language appear as headwords.

The head entries are given in their canonical forms which are the most frequent of all the forms. The nouns, pronouns and adjectives ending with -o in their masculine gender and singular number and the verbs in their infinitive form represent the canonical forms in the NDS. Other forms of the words may appear in the derivatives.

3.2 Synonyms

The main aim of the dictionary is to give synonyms of the words in order to make them accessible for selecting appropriate ones from the alternatives. When there are more than one word, groups and idioms in the entries, they are given in a particular order in accordance with their semantic nearness. Sometimes the head entry needs short explanations and collocations first, and then the synonyms may follow. In most cases the real or absolute or near absolute synonyms are given, followed by the ones with extended meanings. The words from all sources are given as synonyms, but selection has been made in the case of synonyms from borrowed sources with suggestions for appropriate usage. Present decision for selection is ad-hoc, which needs to be revised as the work progresses.

3.3 Collocations

The collocational characteristics of some of the entries are given for clear understanding of the meanings of the words. Benson (1985) has described two types of collocations—Grammatical and lexical: “Grammatical collocation is defined as a recurrent combination, usually consisting of a dominant word followed by a ‘grammatical’ word, typically a preposition,” On the other hand the “lexical collocation contains no subordinate element, they usually consist of two equal lexical components.” The pre-positions of Sanskrit collocating with the nouns change the meanings of the words. The characteristics of some of the post-positions which follow the nouns will be discussed in the introduction. Though collocational characteristics of Nepali have not yet been studied in detail, some of the aspects of collocation are included in the dictionary. For example, the onomatopoeic adverbs are given with the verbs they collocate with. For example:

thepakka basnu	‘sit quietly’
surukka janu	‘go quietly’

Some words are given in N + possessive + combination. For example:

kukurko bhukai	‘barking of dog’
hattiko laskai	‘going of an elephant’

3.4 Concise definitions

Besides the synonyms, the entries may contain phrases or idioms to define the meaning. As the NDS is planned to serve also as a general dictionary for the users, some of the entries need to be explained. This is necessary when a true synonym is not available for a particular headword.

Some entries need to be explained or categorised. Attempts have been made to give the details of some of the entries on the basis of hyponymy - i. e., the meaning inclusion. Such words are given within square brackets. For example:

triratna = (three jewels) = [1. Gold, Silver, Copper, 2. **Buddha, Dharma, Sangha,**
3. **Brahma, Vishnu, Maheshwar]**

panch-pandava = (five Pandavas) [**Yudhisthira, Bhima, Arjun, Nakula, Shadeva]**

Sapta-gandaki (seven Gandakis) = [**Tadi, Madi, Mansynagdi, Kali, Seti,**
Budigandaki, and Trishuli]

3.5 Derivatives

Derivation is a morphological process which changes words from one class to another to fit in a different syntactic pattern giving a derived meaning. The derivatives are given in the brackets separating them from other synonyms. These derivatives are extremely useful for the readers to find more words of the semantic domain. Many of these derived forms also appear as headwords if they have their own synonyms other than those given with the headword they come with. The regular derivations are discussed in the introduction of the dictionary, and only the irregular derivations are given.

3.6 Antonyms

The word antonym includes all types of oppositeness of meaning which are traditionally treated under the topic. The binary opposites (i.e., alive ≠ dead), polar opposites (i.e., rich ≠ poor), conversives (i.e., sell ≠ buy) and incompatibles (i.e., day ≠ night) are grouped as antonyms. Antonyms, if there are any, are given in the NDS as the last item of the entry.

4. Problems and Solutions

As the work of the compilation of the NDS has progressed, several problems of the dictionary have been resolved. I would like to discuss some of the major problems here.

4.1 Selection of the synonyms

The main work of this dictionary-making is to select proper synonyms and arrange them in the entries. As in other languages of this area, Nepali has several words borrowed from Sanskrit, Persian, English and other languages. Because of the long tradition of the study of Sanskrit synonyms, the ready stock of the words available in Sanskrit have been used by the lexicographers of Nepali and modern Indian languages, but, it is useless to include all the words of the Sanskrit lexicon in the NDS. For this, a careful selection has to be made. For example, from a list of twenty-seven synonyms of water given in *Amarkosh*, only ten of them may appear as synonyms in the NDS under the entry **pani** 'water' and only two of them (**pani** and **jala**) may appear as head entries. These head entries repeat those ten words together with the other words with connotative meanings. The need of writers and advanced students for Sanskrit words are unlimited and new words also are to be borrowed and coined, but a concise dictionary of synonyms must limit itself to making careful selections.

English words of common use have been included. Use of English words is growing as a language of scientific development and international communication. Because of the large number of words from English currently in use, it has been decided to use some of them as synonyms. Some more words of English may appear as head entries in order to suggest better Nepali words for them. Because of the lack of a suitable dictionary of synonyms, users are not able to find proper words and are compelled to borrow words from English which are easily available.

Most of the Perso-Arabic words are naturalised in Nepali and do not pose any problems. They are written in Nepali without any diacritics. There are several words which are common for Nepali and Hindi but many of them are semantically and morphologically different. Some of the words are included as synonyms and some others find their place as headwords.

It has been decided that the dictionary should exclude archaic and obsolete words not in common use and avoid long descriptions and definitions. The concise nature of the dictionary, with limited words for general use and necessary synonyms for professional purposes, is taken into consideration.

As synonyms under the headwords are arranged in terms of semantic nearness, not in the alphabetical order, words from different sources pose problems. Generally a Nepali word in the head entry is followed by Nepali words in the subentries as synonyms. Likewise the Sanskrit words are followed by Sanskrit synonyms. If the order of semantic nearness is strictly applied,

this rule can not be followed. So, adjustment of the order of the words and phrases in accordance with their source as well as semantic nearness is considered.

4.2 Spelling

One of the aims of the dictionary is to help the users to see the standard spelling of Nepali words. Some of the basic decisions in spelling reforms of the Nepali language that have been made recently is included in the *Nepali Brihad Shabdakosh* of the Royal Nepal Academy. As the reformed version of the spelling has not yet come fully into common practice, it is hoped that the reformed spellings of the Nepali language used in the NDS will be helpful for the users. Some of the major features of the spelling are:

- (a) Sanskrit words should be written in their standard acceptable spelling system as they are used in several Indian languages.
- (b) Nepali words should be written in their revised standard spellings approved by native scholars and suggested by the *Nepali Brihad Shabdakosh* of the Royal Nepal academy.
- (c) All the words borrowed from the other languages, including English and Perso-Arabic words, should be written in accordance with the spelling rules of Nepali suggested by the *Nepali Brihad Shabdakosh*.

These decisions have made certain differences in spelling practices. It is natural that in the initial stage both the old and new systems of spellings are allowed. But the time has arrived now to select the right ones and discard the others to avoid multiplicity of usage.

There is a special case when the duality of spelling is introduced in the NDS. In Sanskrit the nasals called **panchama varna** (as **ng, jna, Na, na, ma**) followed by homorganic consonants can also be represented alternatively with a dot (.) above the letter traditionally called **anushwara**. This is accepted by the scholars of Sanskrit and is widely used in India. This is also common in Nepali publications such as newspapers, magazines and books, but the *Nepali Brihad Shabdakosh* does not give the variant form with **anushwara**. The NDS has decided to give both forms as acceptable spelling variants in the head entries. The words with nasal consonants are given in their alphabetical order and the ones with **anushwara** as their alternative forms. But they are represented only with their nasal consonants when they are not used as headwords.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, this paper reports on the nature of the NDS as well as some of the problems faced by the compiler and the decisions so far taken. As Nepali is one of the languages of South Asia which shares common features in the origin and development with the languages of the region, the process and product of the NDS project can be a model for other languages of the area.

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