

Kamal Kumar Poudel<sup>1</sup>  
Tribhuvan University  
Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal  
Kathmandu, Nepal

Original scientific paper  
UDK: 371.315.2  
DOI: 10.17810/2015.62  
[Creative Commons](#)  
[Attribution 4.0](#)  
[International License](#)

=====

## THE METAPEDAGOGIC FUNCTION OF LANGUAGE: LANGUAGE FOR LANGUAGE TEACHING (Cases from the Nepalese context)

**Abstract:** The metalingual (also called 'metalinguistic') function of language is a well-discussed concept in the literature of functional linguistics. It is often conceived as a purpose in which language is used to define or talk about language itself. Similarly, the purpose in which language is used for teaching in general is explained as the 'instructional function'. However, it has not yet explicitly been recognized by the literature that language is used for teaching language itself- a concept termed in this article as the 'metapedagogic function'. As the 'cases' explored from the Nepalese context reveal, language is very often used metapedagogically by adults from the family to the social context. This article also investigates how adults informally shape and contribute to children's first language (L<sub>1</sub>) acquisition, more particularly the appropriate use of language in its actual social context, in most cases and to the language awareness of other adults in some other cases. As the future directions, it also indicates towards investigating the potential applications of the informal, assisting strategies to L<sub>1</sub> and L<sub>2</sub> learning in the classroom.

**Key words:** metapedagogic function, language function, assist, linguistico-pedagogic strategy, immediate context, communicative event.

### Introduction

There remains a purpose behind almost every action or activity we carry out. To put the same proposition in linguistic terms, nearly all language utterances or scripts are used to meet the purposes in the speaker's mind at the time of speaking or writing. The purposes language is used for are termed as language functions. In Finch's (2003) words, language functions are "what we use language for" (p. 21). At the very macro (if not superficial) level of understanding, what we use language for is to communicate with other people. Surely, and fundamentally, language serves the purpose of communication in which we use language for clarifying or arranging our ideas and expressing our thoughts or feelings (Finocchiaro & Brumfit 1983). Given the transmission channel, for the communicative function of language to take place, at least three elements are, compulsorily required: the speaker/transmitter, the hearer/receiver and the message (Akmajian et al., 2006).

However, communication is not the only purpose for which language is used. In addition to serving as a strong means of communication between/among human beings, language serves

---

<sup>1</sup> [kkpoudel2023@gmail.com](mailto:kkpoudel2023@gmail.com)

some other purposes. A few of them, for example, may include the phatic function which suggests that it is used by interlocutors forestablishing contact or maintaining 'encounter regulation' among or between them (Robinson, 2003); as the referential function which suggests that language is used as a reference in mind and, thus, to provide some information about it (Holmes, 2008); as a means of 'exploring and objectifying facts and realities around us' (the Isaacs, 1930-1974, as reported in Smith, 1984) or, in different words, the heuristic function; as 'the instrument of thought' (Crystal, 2007), which the researcher-author might call the cognitive function; as an aesthetic object, if not purely 'sensuous', or the aesthetic function (Isenberg, 1949); as a means of defining or talking about the language itself, or the metalingual (metalinguistic) function (Jakobson, 1973; Holmes, 2008); to regulate others and self (Dune and Qutierrez, 1972), or the regulatory function; as a way to an exercise of judgment, or the 'verdictive act' (Austin, 1973), a concept which the researcher-author calls the evaluative function.

### **The term 'metapedagogic function'**

As indicated above, the term 'metalingual' (metalinguistic/metalanguage) has commonly been used in the literature of linguistic functionalism to refer to 'defining' (Jakobson 1973) 'talking about' (Finch, 2003; Bloor & Bloor, 2004), or 'commenting on' (Holmes, 2008) language itself. However, one can only rarely find the term 'metapedagogy' (metapedagogic/metapedagogical) and its concept in the literature. One scholar-researcher who seems to be typically interested around this term/notion is David Block. Block (2000) uses the term 'metapedagogical awareness' to refer to the concept that (language) learners, chiefly adults, are educational theorists in that, when asked to do so, they are able to consciously describe, analyze, explain and evaluate the teaching practice (theory and methodology) of their teacher(s). Thus, Block's concept of 'pedagogical awareness' exemplifies the learner perspective of the teacher's teaching practice in the formal classroom setting. The researcher-author, however, uses the term 'metapedagogic function' to denote a purpose in which language is used to teach language itself. By so doing, the researcher-author recognizes the co-occurrence of both metalingual (metalinguistic) and instructional (pedagogic) functions of language which separately exist in the related literature. At this point, thus, he defines the metapedagogic function as a purpose in which language is used for teaching language itself including the assistance for raising language awareness in the learner(s).

### **Mackay's views on the nature of first language acquisition and pedagogy: A review**

A literature that seems to be closely relevant to this study is Mackay (2015) in that it deals with: (i) how young children acquire their mother tongue (MT) in its natural communicative contexts; (ii) how adults support (or 'scaffold') the young children in doing so (iii) whether and how these conditions (i & ii) could be exploited as classroom language learning/teaching strategies. So, the researcher-author has briefly reviewed his views, as a theoretical framework, with a purpose to discuss his own results related to language acquisition and pedagogy.

So, Mackay (2015) recommends us to answer three 'basic questions' before setting about the task of language teaching: *how does language work?*; *how do we learn language?*; and *how should we teach language?* He also sets out to answer these questions one by one.

As the answer to 'how does language work?' he opines that "Language has (works with) both form and function and that teaching the form is not enough; we must also teach language function" (p. 3) which also includes the stress and intonation patterns of that language.

As regards 'how do we learn language?', he reminds us that children acquire their mother tongue (MT) 'incidentally as a by-product of interacting socially with adults (parents, older siblings etc.)', a distinct process from language learning in the classroom which contrarily involves 'many variables of the learners (age, educational background, parental supports, attitude to the target language etc.) and contexts in which they are learning'. He also states that in learning a language we learn 'propositional knowledge' – the knowledge of the language system, as well as 'procedural knowledge' – learning 'how to do something', or the ability to communicate through the language.

Regarding the third question 'how should we teach language?', he offers an 'integrated teaching/ learning model' (Figure 1):

Knowledge	
<i>Propositional</i>	<i>Procedural</i>
'knowing that'	'knowing how to'
cognitive	behavioural
rules, etc.	skills
clear explanations	sufficient practice

**Figure 1:** Integrated teaching/ learning model (Source: Mackay, 2015, p. 8)

According to Mackay, it is notable that the *propositional* knowledge features promote the ability to understand but the *procedural* knowledge features promote the ability to communicate. He further suggests that both kinds of language learning experience are necessary for good language development.

Regarding the adult-child conversation in the family as the key to successful language acquisition, Mackay (p.11) makes three 'important observations' which follow (the sub-points irrelevant to this study are signaled with the dots) (p.11).

- a) Adults talk to children so that they [the children] can understand:
  - ...
  - ...
  - they usually talk about the here and now- what is in the child's environment
  - they usually use physical gestures to help comprehension
  - ...
  - ...
- b) Adults welcome the verbal efforts of the children:
  - they encourage the children to communicate
  - ...
  - they 'correct' by re-phrasing (i. e. if an English speaking child says, 'Two mouses', the parent will say, "Yes, that's right. Two mice.", but not "No. You don't say 'Two mouses', you say 'Two mice' ")
- c) Adults ask children to perform tasks.

Furthermore, some other Mackay's generalizations about language acquisition/learning through interaction-based natural contexts, which are also associated with this study, include the following:

- Young learners should have tasks, communication/interaction, a lot of language exposure, language support or 'scaffolding', and fluency before accuracy (pp. 11-18).
- 'So language must be appropriate to its context' (p.4).
- 'So, what the learner acquires is comprehensible input' (p. 16).
- '... providing an example of what they have to produce ... This kind of support is also called 'scaffolding' '(p. 16).
- 'Provide support (or 'scaffolding') for the pupils during the process'(p. 17).

The researcher-author will be considering this framework to discuss the results of this study, particularly the pedagogic kinds.

### **Context**

If one closely observes the adult-child/baby talk targeted at assisting the child/baby to use language in the Nepalese context one can commonly notice some typical patterns in the informal family and community settings (The words 'child/baby' and 'adult' are loosely employed throughout the article to refer to the young one and the grown-up respectively). One may also notice two common purposes in using the language thus: (i) to assist (teach) somebody (most often the child/baby but sometimes even an adult) to learn language (i.e. the concept of pedagogy), and (ii) to assist (teach) learning language by means of language itself (i.e. the 'meta' concept of 'aboutness'). Such patterns do not seem to be explicitly recognized and explained in the literature of language functions yet. Inspired by this gap, the researcher-author observed some actual field-based communicative events (the adult-child/baby or adult-adult talks practised in the actual settings of communication) and developed them into the cases (presented below) as an endeavour to illustrate how the metapedagogic function of language is practised in contextual informal family and community environments in the Nepalese context. In other words, this article assesses those cases as an attempt to: (i) illustrate the metapedagogic function of language, (ii) bring into fore the functional language teaching strategies inherent in the talks, and (iii) examine those strategies in relation to the relevant concepts existing in the literature of language teaching and learning. Finally, it points towards some future directions for further research in similar areas.

### **Objectives**

The study had the following objectives:

- to illustrate the metapedagogic function of language by means of the adult-child/baby and adult-adult talks typical of the Nepalese context,
- to explore the language teaching strategies inherent in those talks, and
- to pinpoint the links between those strategies and the relevant concepts in language pedagogy.

### **Methods**

Through observation, the researcher-author, as an 'outsider', noticed some examples of the adult-child/baby and adult-adult talks in its actual social context where he noticed that, among others, language was being used by the adult to assist (teach) the child/baby and an adult to

assist (correct) another adult so that the language would be contextually appropriate to the immediate situation. Then he recorded (noted as a diary) some representative examples through the observations of the actual fields, which he developed into the cases (Cases 1- 4) presented below. In developing the dairy notes into the cases, he adopted 'simultaneous analysis', or in other words, he began analyzing with the first observation so as to ensure that "the common patterns across the data" would not be dropped along the way (Merriam, 2002). The cases were analyzed and interpreted in connection with the relevant linguistic and language teaching perspectives, so some linguistico-pedagogic strategies could be explored. Then he thoroughly studied the relevant existing literature of language teaching in order to identify the linkages of the resultswith them, if any. In a nutshell, this study was based on the observational case study method of data collection and the data were analyzed by means of the thick'prose descriptions of the themes'(Casanave, 2015).

## Results

Some 'patterns' were explored as the results of the closeobservations of the ways one assists (teaches) another in using language appropriately in its natural social setting in the Nepalese context. The results are organized and presented under these headings: *telling how to say when, to whom and why; tellingwhat to say and when; telling what to say, to whom and where as a cultural habit; telling what to say instead of what: correcting the other; exploring the functional embeddings; and exploring the major strategies.*

### Telling how to say when, to whom and why

The appropriate use of the honourifics is paramount both culturally and linguistically in the Nepalese context. It can commonly be noticed that adults are involved in shaping the child's/baby's language regarding the right choice of language forms including morphology (word grammar) and syntax (sentence grammar) so that the baby/child has an opportunity to correct his/her language in the immediate setting appropriately in terms of how to say something, when, to whom in order to 'get things done'.

#### **Case: Getting things done**

Sanjeev and Pratima (both ages five) were born and are being grown up at Kirtipur, a suburb ofKathmandu. They live in houses not far from each other's, so they are both classmates as well as playmates. They usually go to school together on school days and are fond of playing together on holidays or at times when they find themselves free on a narrow road, not black topped, that stretches to their houses from the main road which is much wider and black-topped.Once when they were playing a tennis-ball game the ball kicked by Sanjeev bumped onto the wall by the side of the road and jumped back across the road into the neighbour's garden which was loosely fenced on the side towards the road. Both of them scooted to the corner of the road meaning to locate the ball; stood still and spotted the area where the ball had possibly hidden deeper inside the pumpkin creepers and leaves but none of them dared to enter the garden. It seemed as if they had fallen back from going into the garden to fetch the ball for at least two reasons:

- i) they were too young to reach the ball by crossing the weeds, creepers, leaves and other plants in the garden, and
- ii) they had already marked that some family members, to whom the garden belonged, were watching them closely from their yard.

The physical (i) and socio-psycho-ethical (ii) challenges had obviously created a conflict in the children, particularly more strongly in Sanjeev because it was he who had kicked the ball that was Pratima's. Meanwhile, to their good fortune, there appeared Raju, their acquaintance aged about 16, nearby. Upon seeing him, Pratima said (in Nepali), "Hey *dada* (elder brother), you come here... to bring the ball." Raju neglected as though he had not listened to Pratima. She insisted, in a bit crying tone, "*Dada*, look at my ball over there. Sanjeev hit it there. You bring it for us."

As Raju approached and knew where the ball was, still he was not very willing to help them, i.e. bring it to them immediately. Raju responded (in Nepali), "Is that your manner of asking? Tell me in a different way. Only then I will bring the ball for you. Tell "*Please, dada, bring the ball to us*". Pratima caught her own ears and said, "*Please, dada, bring the ball to us*." Then Raju brought the ball back to them from the bush..

As the example illustrates, Pratima first failed to get a thing done, i. e. to have Raju bring the ball back because her language was not appropriate enough to the situation. First, Raju was an elderly person to Pratima. In the Nepalese culture, it is not usually customary that commands are extended to the older or elder ('superior') by the younger ('subordinate'). Secondly, the situation itself demanded for 'soft' language forms (such as requests rather than commands apart from the appropriate honourific forms) which are normally desirable for getting things done. Thus, the main reason for Pratima's failure to have Raju bring the ball back at first can be attributed to her failure in assessing the situation correctly. In this case, we can notice an intense need for appropriacy in the use of language. Being linguistically appropriate includes, among other things, how to say something and 'who you are talking to' (Blundell, Higgins & Middlemiss, 2010) and also why.

As the case illustrates, Raju did not respond to Pratima in the beginning because he did not 'like' the type of language utterances she used in that situation. Then he assisted Pratima with the utterances (forms) that fitted the situation better. As Pratima 'picked up' those language forms, she was able to get the ball brought back to her. In this case, Raju supplied the language input needed for effective communication. After all, this case illustrates how Raju (an adult) taught Pratima (a child) what to say, when and to whom so as to get things done by using language itself.

### Telling what to say and when

In the Nepalese context guests and relatives usually find it comfortable to carry the babies of the host (or others' in the family) and interact with the kid(s) in a close manner which needs the type of language that can bring them in contact together (Case 2a). On the other hand, parents and/or other grown-ups in the family can be found assisting the baby/child with language input needed to break the child's linguistic suffocation, a speech situation in which one of the interlocutors finds him/herself embarrassed or confused without knowing what to say in the immediate context of natural speech, by giving the baby/child the language input required 'to say the right thing at the right time' (Blundell, Higgins and Middlemiss, 2010) as in Case 2b.

#### **Case 2: "Kukku...haa...!!" and 'At Dashain!'**

##### a. Establishing contact with the baby

Kailash was away from the country for a couple of years for work leaving Muna, his wife, and two of their children, Sunita (daughter age 5) and Saurabh (son age 2), back at home in

Jamuna, a somewhat remote village in Ilam district of Nepal. Having known that their *mama* (mother's brother), Bishal, was coming to stay with them as a guest for a week the children were especially happy and were waiting eagerly for his arrival. Having walked all day, Bishal, a 24 year man, turned up in the afternoon. As a rule, Bishal, joining his palms together, greeted his elder sister: "*namaste!*". Muna 'returned' (responded to) the greeting in the same fashion. Almost simultaneously Sunita greeted Bishal in the same manner as Bishal did with Sunita but Saurabh kept on hiding his face on his mother's chest in shyness. Muna tried her best to persuade him to say '*namaste*' but failed in making him do so this time.

After refreshment and some snacks, Bishal tried to talk to Saurabh whose shyness had not yet faded off completely. After a number of attempts Saurabh, still on his mother's chest in a blushed face, just glimpsed at Bishal with a smile and then hid in shyness on his mother's chest again. Meaning to attract the baby to him, Bishal hid his face with his palms and said "*kukku...!*" (the signal of hiding). With this, the baby looked at him. As Bishal knew that the baby was looking at him (because he was looking through his fingers which were only loosely closed), Bishal said "*haa...!*" (the signal of disclosing) as he removed his palms off his face. Saurabh cackled at this and stopped burying himself on his mother's chest this time. Then after a while, the role shifted, as outlined below:

Bishal: Ok, now you do *kukku... baby!*

Saurabh: (Hid his face with his palms)

Bishal: *Haa...!!*

Saurabh: (Removed his palms and cackled)

This pattern of the adult-baby "*kukku...haa...!!*" game continued between the two for a couple of minutes. After an hour, Bishal and Saurabh were walking hand-in-hand around the yard talking in a simplified way and laughing.

b. Telling the child what to say

After a week's stay as a guest Bishal, surrounded by the children and Muna for his farewell a bit further away from the house yard, was about to return back home. As the children waved their hands to mark a 'bye-bye' Bishal asked Pratima when she would come to *mawala* (their mother's parents' house) which, in other words, was his own house. Pratima, confused with Bishal's phatic query, kept silent and slightly blushed. Muna 'assisted' Pratima, "Tell At *Dashain!*" (*Dashain* is a highly valued festival practised in Nepal). Pratima, repeated "At *Dashain!*". With the informal Nepali farewell marker *ma lagen* (literally 'I went', an equivalent to English 'see you'), Bishal set out.

Although in the beginning (Case 2a) the hosts including the baby (Saurabh) were waiting eagerly, the baby was naturally shy at the actual arrival of the guest (Bishal). As soon as he arrived, contact was marked between Muna and Sunita (hosts) and Bishal (guest) with the greeting form *namaste* as proper but not between the baby (Saurabh) and Bishal yet. With an intension of breaking this situation, Muna tried to persuade (and assist) the baby to take part in the communicative event but her attempt did not work so initially. In the next phase, after a couple of hours, as Bishal applied the "*kukku... haa!*" strategy, he was gradually successful to attract the attention of the baby and play the language game with him. It is apparent from this example that the game in the form of an adult-baby talk had a two-fold function: language as a means of contact between individuals (the phatic function) and teaching language itself (the metapedagogic function).

Case 2b provides us with an example of what the researcher-author would term as linguistic suffocation. In this case, Pratima got embarrassingly confused without knowing what to say as a response to her *mama's* query (which again was a part of farewell). As she was assisted

by her mother with the expression "At *Dashain!*" as a language support, she comfortably used it to respond. Then there is no need to mention that this is also a good example of the metapedagogic function of language.

Such examples can also be commonly observed in situations in which the child is talking on the audio (e. g. the phone) or the audio-visual (e. g. the 'Skype') with his/her close relative who is away ('missing') from home for relatively a longer period of time.

### **Telling what to say, to whom and where as a cultural habit**

Through observations one can also explore language learning as part of cultural habits which are also usually associated with religion. In the Nepalese context, many linguistic forms used for greeting each other, mainly among the old generation, are associated with gods/goddesses. Some common examples of such greetings are *Ram-Ram! Shree Hari! Radhe-Radhe! Om Shanti! Darshan Prabhu! Pranam!* etc. Therefore, mostly old people tend to cultivate such greeting habits in their offspring as part of their cultural habits, especially while greeting the elderly people. The choice of such greeting forms is also influenced by situational factors such as place and the interlocutors' professional practices.

#### **Case 3: "*bhagawan sharanam!*"**

Bishnudevi Temple is located beneath Panga, a suburb in Kathmandu. Near Bishnudevi, about a kilometer away, is Adinath Temple at the top of a beautiful hill called Chobhar. A good number of the local people around these communities go on a morning walk to these temples every day so that they can additionally take sights of the Goddess and God respectively. It is customary among

these shrines to say "*bhagawan sharanam!*" (at God's surrender) to greet each other mainly as they meet during their morning walk.

Among others, the author has observed an old Newar woman carrying a little baby (of about 3 years), her granddaughter, at Bishnudevi Temple and telling the baby to raise her hands and say "*bhagawan sharanam!*" as they see a familiar elderly person around them. Now-a-days it can be observed that the baby greets an elderly person familiar with her in the same fashion even at her home and even without being assisted or instructed by anybody else.

As Case 3 illustrates, the elderly woman (an adult) assisted the child in using the cultural language form "*bhagawan sharanam!*" to meet an appropriate function (here, greeting) to address the 'familiar elderly person' around the temple. Initially, she trained the baby a bit in doing so, so that the baby would 'pick up' the form to accomplish the given function appropriately. Later, as the Case also illustrates, the child started using the greeting form autonomously in other situations as appropriate as part of her cultural habits. This is, therefore, another example in which language is used metapedagogically. On top of that, Case 3 exemplifies the time-greeting system (greeting varies according to the time of the day) which is only rarely practised in the Nepalese context.

### **Telling what to say instead of what: correcting the other**

In the Nepalese context, not only do we commonly find talks involving an adult assisting (teaching) a child/baby to use language appropriate to the situation but also sometimes encounter adult-adult talks which involve an adult assisting (teaching) another adult in what to say instead of what to be correct (Case 4).

#### Case 4: The 'green milk'!

Ramesh is a retailer who sells goods of different kinds, mainly needed in kitchens, ranging from spices to the gas cylinder at a *chowk* in the suburb of Kathmandu. He is pretty sociable, so often he can be seen with other people and customers talking and merry making with them outside the shop, especially when his wife (called 'woman' in the conversation below) is there to assist him in the shop. One day when a customer, of course quite familiar with the shop, came to get a packet of milk he was sitting and talking outside the shop with someone unfamiliar with the customer (called 'stranger' in the conversation below). Meantime, the customer asked his wife in the shop for a packet of milk. Here goes a part of the conversation while the transaction was on (translated from Nepali):

Customer: Give me a packet of milk (please). The green one if there is.

Woman: The green one? Yes, today there... (interrupted by Ramesh from outside)

Ramesh: Is there any green milk? We don't sell any green milk! (All laughed)

Customer: (Smiling as he looked towards Ramesh) Don't you sell? You are just trying to twist (the matter) because you are with him (pointing to the stranger)... I mean someone to monitor your shop? You always do.

Stranger: Erm... you said, "Green milk!. Of course, you should have said "Milk in the green packet".

Customer: Ok, milk in the green packet! But that was easier (for me). I will say so ever after.

In the first part of the conversation the language was being used for the aesthetic purpose/function (Isenberg, 1949). We know that, from the physical context as a pragmatic element, it was clear to the woman that the customer had asked for 'milk in the green packet' (because she was about to give it to him) as Ramesh interrupted. We also know that Ramesh had no any confusion about the speaker's intended meaning' (Widdowson, 1996). However, for the aesthetic purpose, he twisted the sense of the customer. In return, in this example, the customer also used language aesthetically at first so as to defend himself against his 'incorrect' usage by insisting that they usually sold 'green milk'.

Intending to mediate between Ramesh and the customer, the stranger pointed out what words the customer should have used instead of what in order to be clearer or correct. Finally, in this example, the customer realized that what he had said was only for his ease and, at the same time, herepeated the actual words given to him by the stranger. Moreover, he said that next time he would say it in the way the stranger showed him. Therefore, in other words, language is serving the metapedagogic function in this case, too.

#### Exploring the functional embeddings

If one closely observes the cases above, one can explore some instances revealing that one linguistic form can non-alternatively combine with more than just one communicative function. To quote Criper and Widdowson (1974, p.197) "Most acts of speech combine more than one function". I shall recognize this tendency as 'functional embedding'. Some explicitly employed embeddings explored from the cases above are highlighted in this section.

Muna tried to make her baby say *namaste* (Case 2a). In this single event in the actual context two functions are explicit: (i) making the baby use the form *namaste* appropriately (metapedagogic) (ii) using greeting appropriately as a means of establishing contact or a rapport (phatic). The same event also implicitly indicates towards persuasion. Similarly, we also have 'Bishal asked Pratima when she would come to *mawala*', which on the surface

appears to be a query (heuristic) but at its depth it is also a symbol of closing the event or leave taking (phatic) so, termed by the researcher-author as a 'phatic query'.

Likewise, by training the baby to say "*bhagawan sharanam!*" in a contextually appropriate fashion (Case 3) the elderly woman explicitly or implicitly intended to teach the baby the actual language form *bhagawan sharanam!* as a cultural/religious habit (metapedagogic), and to establish contact/rapport as a 'psychological channel' with the addressee (phatic).

Further, Ramesh, the retailer, remarked, "Is there any green milk? We don't sell any green milk!" (Case 4). Although Ramesh intended explicitly to entertain all those participating in the scene by articulating these expressions (aesthetic), he also intended implicitly to show how to say something correctly (metapedagogic).

In fact communicative events, conversations, utterances and even single forms are not necessarily always unifunctional, so the cases above are not exclusive of other language functions. Yet, it is worth mentioning that the metapedagogic function was the focus of this study.

### Exploring the major strategies

Raising linguistic awareness is the central strategy employed in the communicative events inherent in the cases. Within this central strategy one can explore some other subsidiary strategies in the cases, which are pointed out below.

- **Joyful contact first:** In Case 2a, Saurabh was initially unwilling to even show his face and was rejecting to greet Bishal with *namaste*. Having known that it would be pointless, almost adverse, to force the baby to greet verbally in such a situation, Bishal preferred the language game intending to establish a joyful contact with the baby, thus to 'open a psychological channel' first. In this course, he taught the baby the language form "*kukku... haa!!*" and its meaning successfully. In other words, he tactically waited for the right time to go further into verbal communication ('talking in a simplified way') with the baby.

- **Breaking linguisticsuffocation:** Bishal asked Pratima when she would come to *mawala* (Case 2b). Having seen Pratima 'suffocate' ('silent and slightly blushed') with Bishal's unexpected phatic query, Muna assisted Pratima with the immediately needed language support ("Tell At *Dashain!!*") which came to Pratima as medicine against her suffocation.

- **Entertaining:** Of course, having patiently waited for a reasonable time, Bishal chose the language game ("*kukku... haa!!*") to establish a joyful bond with Saurabh (Case 2a). Indeed, Ramesh, the retailer, entertained himself and the others as he corrected the customer by deliberately emphasizing the issue of 'the green milk' (Case 4).

- **Integrative training:** The Newar woman, perhaps primarily, attempted to show her granddaughter how to act (greet) in a culturally appropriate way (Case 3) but by so doing repeatedly she was also showing the baby what language form to use for this purpose ("*bhagawan sharanam!*").

- **Tactfulness in adult-adult talk and directness in adult- child/baby talk:** As can be seen in the cases, the stranger (an adult) was quite careful about showing tactfulness by using the filler 'Erm..' to correct the customer (another adult) (Case 4). The adult directly assisted (corrected) the child/baby to say what they ought to say/have said providing with the actual language input (Cases 1, 2a and 2b and 3).

- **Contextual use:** In all the cases, one thing is evident and that is that language was (being) 'taught' in its natural and real context rather than as a simulation, and what was really needed in the context was 'taught' in the form of assistance.

### Discussion

As a matter of fact, this study has explored some language assisting patterns taking place in the actual interaction in the natural context of communication. Seemingly, those patterns at their first stance have brought to fore how language is employed to 'teach' language itself in such contexts, and thus, illustrate the existence of the 'metapedagogic function' of language with some evidence. Secondly, it has also brought to fore some strategies applied to first language acquisition. Some of the out-of-language-classroom strategies seem to be congruent with those already investigated in the literature of first language acquisition and second or foreign language acquisition/learning inside the classroom but some others seem to have no connection (or, are yet to be connected?) with them. Still some others seem to be refuting them. This section is set out to bring these things into light.

To begin with, as stated in the 'Introduction' section, the term/concept 'metapedagogy' does exist, albeit rarely, in the related literature. What is common to Block's (2004) notion of metapedagogy and that of this researcher-author is the meaningful presence of awareness in language learning. However, there are some points of contrast between the two. First and foremost, they differ in the emphasis: whereas the former focuses primarily on the learning-and-pedagogy aspect of language in the classroom, the latter is basically concerned with assisting the learner's acquisition of language functions in the real communicative situations (family and community). Furthermore, Block assumes that the learner (mostly an adult) is self-aware, so as a theorist, he/she can 'describe, analyze, explain and evaluate' the teacher's 'pedagogical practice' in the classroom whereas the researcher-author explores the subconscious practice of the 'assister' (it will not be suitable to say 'teacher' or 'assistant') assisting the learner (mostly a baby/child) to develop language awareness in the natural events of communication. In other words, the difference is that of perspectives: the former exemplifies the learner perspective of the teacher's teaching practice but the latter illustrates the assister's practice from the perspective of developing language use awareness. In this sense, the former regards language learners in the classroom as theorists, whilst with evidence the latter suggests towards concluding that the assister in the family-and-community environment is a theorist whilst the language learner is the recipient of language awareness.

Secondly, all the interactions in the cases are implicitly aimed at internalizing the functional aspect of language which emphasizes its use in its actual communicative context. As a result of this research, these aspects of appropriacy were investigated: telling how to say, when, to whom and why (Case 1), telling what to say and when (Case 2), telling what to say and to whom as a cultural habit (Case 3), telling what to say instead of what- correcting the other (Case 4). The interactions also implicitly reveal why to say something in the way as done (e.g. saying it differently as a 'manner' to get things done- in Case 1). These are somehow similar to the aspects of using language appropriately which, according to Holmes (2008), determine the linguistic choices one needs to as the components of situations: 'who'? and 'who...to'? (participants), 'where'? (setting), 'what'? (topic) and 'why'? (function). Moreover, the notion of *functional embedding*, a further category of form-function relations, was also explored to highlight that more than just one communicative function can co-occur in a single linguistic form.

Next, the features of the pedagogic dimension explored through this research seem to be both congruous with and refuting what already exists in the relevant literature. The 'joyful contact first' and 'entertaining' strategies are compatible with the generally accepted principle that language learning experiences need to be joyful (sometimes even fun). The 'breaking linguistic suffocation' strategy is in line with what the literature calls 'language support' or 'scaffolding' (e. g. Mackay, 2015). Similarly, the tactfulness observed in the adult-adult talk (Case 3) tends to be a useful strategy as far as language andragogy is concerned. The directness of correction in the adult-baby/child talk (Case 1) sounds to be similar to the 'explicit correction' technique (Lyster and Ranta, 1997, as mentioned in Lightbown and Spada, 2006). The child's repetition of the same language form as provided by the adult (Case 1) exemplifies Lyster and Ranta's (1997) notion of 'student uptake'- an immediate response to teacher feedback- in the context of second language learning. Overall, all those strategies are subconsciously targeted at raising functional awareness in the recipient.

The strategies explored through the cases share substantially with Mackay (2015). First, they are in harmony with his claim that both form and function must be taught. Like what was reflected in the cases in this research, he urges upon the appropriacy of language to its contexts (i. e. 'contextual use'); adults' use of physical gestures; encouraging the children to communicate and perform tasks; acquiring language through interactions with adults; focusing on interaction, exposure, language support and fluency before accuracy; and providing support during the process. Nonetheless, the explicit correction on the child's functional inappropriacy 'Is it your manner to say... '?...' Say...' (Case 1) provides evidence against Mackay's claim that 'they [parents or adults] 'correct' by re-phrasing' (p.4). This tendency is probably a linguistic reflection of the repressive type of socialization (Crisogen, 2015) imposed on the young ones by the parents/grown-ups in the Nepalese society.

It is also evident that the knowledge features (Figure 1) inherent in most of the strategies are close to the *procedural* kind but the one close to the *propositional* kind is the 'integrative training' strategy.

It seems that the strategies explored through the cases can have some implications for the various aspects of language classroom pedagogy- from further investigations to the policy and implications. As a future direction, it seems reasonable that through further research one might seek their implications and applications for the formal language classroom involving learners from varying background parameters (such as culture and other social values, needs and expectations, perceptions, beliefs, proficiency levels, ages etc.). They can also have implications for curriculum and materials design, teacher education and professional development. More importantly, researchers can also investigate how far people, both children/babies and adults, independently apply the effects of this kind of language learning assistance to their actual linguistic life.

Of course, this study, like any other, is not free from its limitations. First, this was limited to four cases observed in some Nepalese communities involving Nepali as the medium of oral communication. It had a primary focus on illustrating the metapedagogic function of language and secondarily the pedagogic aspect. As regards the pedagogic aspect, the data only covered adults assisting children (Cases 1, 2a and b and 3) and an adult assisting another adult (Case 4). This is to say that some of such potentially important pedagogic aspects as children assisting children; children assisting adults; people (children or adults) assisting each other interlingually/interculturally; and learners formally learning in the classroom (which also

involves teaching and learning the secondary modes of language - reading and writing) remained beyond the scope of this study.

### Conclusion

Through this research conducted in the Nepalese context a set of dimensions determining the appropriate use of language in its natural context were explored, namely, telling how to say; when, to whom and why; telling what to say and when; telling what to say and to whom as a cultural habit; and telling what to say instead of what- correcting the other. The cases also illustrated the notion of *functional embedding*. The dimensions, along with the strategies drawn from the cases, illustrated the metapedagogic function of language, and provided the researcher-author a ground for defining the function as a purpose for which language is used for teaching language itself. The major strategies used for assisting language acquisition in the cases included: joyful contact first, breaking linguistic suffocation, entertaining, integrative training, tactfulness in adult-adult talk and directness in adult-child/baby talk, and the contextual use of language.

As for the pedagogic aspect, most of the findings based on the analysis of the cases drawn on L<sub>1</sub> acquisition indicated large congruity with what exists in the literature relevant to L<sub>1</sub> acquisition and L<sub>2</sub> learning, though a minority of them contrasted with it.

The findings also suggested some implications related to language pedagogy, both acquisition and learning. They could potentially be language teaching designs involving such patterns as: adults/teacher assisting children/students; children assisting adults; adults assisting adults; children assisting children; people (children or adults) assisting each other interlingually (e. g. natives assisting non-natives), cognitively (e. g. the proficient assisting the poor), and interculturally (e. g. the indigenous assisting the culture-aliens). What is required is to investigate whether, and to what degree of success, the findings of this research could be transferred to the actual classroom language pedagogy. Right now it can simply be inferred that these experiences could also be effective for L<sub>2</sub> learning/acquisition because correspondence could be established between these strategies and the strongly rooted concepts of language teaching and learning.

Doubtlessly, further research would be necessary to overcome all the shortcomings and limitations of this research.

### Acknowledgements

This article grew out of the insights gained in course of my PhD pursuit which was:

- i. registered with the Faculty of Education, Office of the Dean, Tribhuvan University,
- ii. inspired by the fellowship for PhD students (2016) awarded by UGC Nepal.

Therefore, I would like to acknowledge both of the institutions as well as Dr. Binod Luitel, my PhD supervisor, for his insightful guidance and encouragement.

### References:

- Akmajian, A., R. A. Demers, A. K. Farmer & Harnish, R. M. (2006). *Linguistics: An introduction to language and communication* (5<sup>th</sup> ed.). New Delhi: Prentice-Hall of India.
- Austin, J. L. (1973). Paralinguistic communication. In: Allen, J. B. P. and S. P. Corder (Eds.), *Readings for applied linguistics*. London: Oxford University press, 37-52.
- Block, D. (2000). Learners and their metapedagogical awareness, *International Journal of Applied Linguistics*, 10(1), 97-123.
- Bloor, T. & Bloor, M. (2004). *The functional analysis of English: A Hallidayan approach* (2nd ed.). London: Arnold.
- Blundell, J., Higgins, J. & Middlemiss, N. (2010). *Function in English*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Casanave, C. P. (2015). Case study. In: Patridge, B. & Phakiti, A. (Eds.), *Research methods in applied linguistics*. London: Bloomsbury Academic.
- Criper, C. & Widdowson, H. G. (1974). Sociolinguistics and language teaching. In: Allen, J. B. P. & Corder, S. P. (Eds.), *Papers in applied linguistics*, 2. 155-209.
- Crisogen, D. T. (2015). Types of socialization and their importance in understanding the phenomena of socialization, *European Journal of Social Sciences, Education and Research*, 5(1), 331-335.
- Crystal, D. (2007). *The Cambridge encyclopedia of language*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Duyn, V. J. H. & Qutierrez, G. (1972). The regulatory function in bilingual children, *The Journal of Educational Research*, 66 (3), 122-24.
- Finch, G. (2003). *How to study linguistics*. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Finocchiaro, M. & Brumfit, C. (1983). *The functional-notional approach*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Holmes, J. (2008). *An introduction to sociolinguistics* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Harlow: Pearson.
- Isenberg, A. (1949). The esthetic function of language, *The Journal of Philosophy*, 46 (1), 5-20.
- Jakobson, R. (1973). Functions of language. In Allen, J. B. P. & Corder, S. P. (Eds.) *Readings for applied linguistics*, 1. Oxford: Oxford University Press. 53-57.
- Lightbown, P. M. & Spada, N. (2006). *How languages are taught* (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.). Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Lyster, R. & Ranta, L. (1997). Corrective feedback and learner uptake: Negotiation of form in communicative classrooms, *Studies in second language acquisition*, 26 (3), 399-432.
- Mackay, R. (2015). *A basic introduction to English language teaching*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Merriam, S. B. (2002). Introduction to qualitative research. In: Merriam, S. B. (Ed.) *Qualitative research in practice: Examples for discussion and analysis*. San Francisco: John Wiley & Sons, Inc.
- Robinson, P. W. (2003). *Language in social worlds*. UK: Blackwell Publishers Ltd.
- Smith, L. A. H. (1984). The function of language for the child: A report on research and experiences in England 1972-1982, *The Journal of Education*, 166 (3), 273-290.
- Widdowson, H. G. (1996). *Linguistics*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

**Biographical notes:**

**Mr. Kamal Kumar Poudel** is an Associate Professor in English Education, currently working at Tribhuvan University, Mahendra Ratna Campus, Tahachal, Kathmandu, Nepal. He is particularly involved in teaching Applied Linguistics and Research Methodology courses to post-graduate students of English Education. He has considerable experience in teacher training and language pedagogy and conducted a number of research projects of national and international levels related to his specialization areas. Currently a PhD scholar under the Faculty of Education, Tribhuvan University, he is researching in the field of functional linguistics.