Review Article

The Origin of Linguistic Landscaping in South India: A Political and Economic Perspective

Mayengbam Nandakishwor Singh

Abstract

Author Affiliation
Faculty of Political Science,
National Law University and
Judicial Academy,
Hazo Road, Amingaon
Kamrup, Guwahati, Assam
781031, India.

Reprint Request
Mayengbam Nandakishwor Singh
Faculty of Political Science,
National Law University and
Judicial Academy,
Hazo Road, Amingaon
Kamrup, Guwahati, Assam
781031, India.
E-mail: nkishwors@gmail.com

Linguistic landscaping is relatively a new realm and it appears elusive in terms of its precise meaning. In a general parlance, linguistic landscaping refers to the languages being visibly used in different public and commercial places. Linguistic landscaping is prevalent today in many regions and more so in multilingual societies. In the context of India, linguistic landscaping is a quite phenomenon in the contemporary times. For my purpose, I have taken up South India, which comprises of five states having distinct Dravidian languages, as the area of my study for linguistic landscaping. As compared to its counterpart north India, linguistic landscaping is more crystal conspicuous in south India owing to some fundamental reasons. Politically, there has been strong anti-Hindi fever across south India led by some Dravidian movements, particularly in Tamil Nadu. Today south India is considered to be the IT hub, and it throws lots of job opportunities in many sectors. This paper basically aims at examining the origin of the linguistic landscaping in south India, essentially focusing on the cosmopolitan capital cities. I intend to address this objective by delving into the effects of underpinning linguistic politics and the economic development on linguistic landscape in south India.

Keywords: Cosmopolitan; Globalisation; Community; Identity; Culture; Language.

A Conceptual Grounding of Linguistic Landscape

Linguistic landscaping, as an innovative creation, is an integral part of human evolution. It is a tool for human communication and advancement in various aspects. Needless to say that Linguistic landscape hugely matters in comforting human life. From the epistemological point of view, linguistic landscaping means the study of how languages are visually used in public and commercial arenas, such as road signs, advertising billboards, street names, shop signs, airport, and railways etc. As a matter of fact, the idea of linguistic landscape was first used by Landry and Bourhis when they refer to it as "The Language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region or urban agglomeration" [1]. In simple parlance, linguistic landscape can be defined as the language, words, image, signs displayed in public places indicating some meanings in a territory. One simple way of defining linguistic landscape is to focus on language signs in a specific area [2].

Linguistic landscape cane be mostly visible in urban environment though I am not under the impression that linguistic landscape just confines to the urban settings. It is precisely because of the multicultural dimensions and the literacy altitude in urban areas as against the remote rural areas.

Linguistic landscape is a global phenomenon today. The very study of linguistic landscape in the domain of academic discipline is relatively new and it draws its subject matter from diverse fields. There are inherent difficulties in defining linguistic landscape in precise terms as the aspects it covers is wide and open. Linguistic landscape carries varied meanings in relation to the subjects it is dealt with. In fact, linguistic landscape can be in the form of 'monolingual linguistic landscape,' or 'bilingual linguistic landscape,' or multilingual linguistic landscape.' For long, attention is not paid by people to the linguistic landscape surrounding them [3]. But new interest on the study of linguistic landscape has emerged. Also the recent development in the digital camera technology makes the study of linguistic landscape relatively less expensive [4].

The Emerging Trend of Linguistic Landscape and Significance

There is no doubt in claiming the fact that linguistic landscape is a mode of communication in wider common public spaces. As human civilization advances, the phenomenon of linguistic landscape also gets growing rapidly. Without doubt, linguistic landscape is constantly evolving since the primitive days of human civilization in various forms. Today, the entire world is under the spell of globalization. As an inevitable result, we are inundated with multicultural and multilinguistic societies. World becomes so interconnected with people around the globe intermingling with each other and it is in such scenario, the essence of linguistic landscape becomes so paramount. In fact, linguistic landscape is a unique character of a multilinguistic societies today. Generally, linguistic landscape is carried in a two tier way. In one side, it is the government or the state that executes the act of linguistic landscaping. This can be seen in public institutions, governmental offices, government medical centers, public announcements, governmental transport areas and so on. On the other side, linguistic landscape is conducted by private individuals and such can be observed in private shops, plazas, clothing shops, restaurants, hotels, private offices, factories etc. Most interestingly, the very order of bi or multilingual signs indicates relative importance of the language. The order of the languages also signifies the dominance of the language over other. It must be also noted that in the expansion of the trend of linguistic landscape throughout the globe, globalization also shapes the pace. With globalization, the necessities to ease out the intricacies become pertinent and linguistic landscape plays a big role in the form of effective communication to people of different origin within a region. Globalisation carries the culture of infusing multiple languages in any given place thereby increasing the horizon of linguistic landscape around the world. Due to the effect of globalization, pure monolingual linguistic landscape is a rarity today [5].

Earlier, linguistic landscaping appeared to have been so sparse and archaic as there was absence of modern equipment. But today, there are enough cutting edge technology that transforms linguistic landscape so visible and amenable. With the increasing human space, there is increasing need for linguistic landscape and new modern technology quickly enhances the necessary volume. And there are hordes of merits for linguistic landscape. Linguistic landscape is displayed in the public places in which general public life centers around. Linguistic landscape is an open and free mode of interaction to the people. It indicates important message, location, guides to people and general awareness of any particular issue. It disseminates message of public interest in public spaces. Beyond doubt, linguistic landscaping provides the scope of interaction through absolute freeness and openness. Moreover, linguistic landscape signifies the emblem and culture of a community or region. It indicates the peculiar identity of a given region. More importantly, it signifies the linguistic background of a territory. In the words of Lanza & Woldemariam, linguistic landscape provides excellent means to study language ideology, how people themselves evaluate language and multilingualism [6].

Politics and Linguistic Landscape in South Indian Context

In the Post-independence era, language becomes a big issue for various reasons in India. India is linguistically diverse and linguistic pluralism is one major cause for tensions all over the country. As per the 1927 Linguistic survey of India, there are roughly 179 languages and 544 dialects. And pertaining to the diversity, monolingual linguistic landscape is far beyond possibility in India. However, in the context of south India, the genesis of linguistic landscape reveals a fascinating picture which can be traced back to the times even before the independence.

Anti-Hindi Stand: In the early years, even right before India's independence, anti-Hindi agitation took place in the then Madras presidency under the leadership of Periyar when Rajaji and his cabinet took the decision to make Hindi compulsory in secondary schools in 1937, August. Rajagopalachari however later disputed the notion that national unity is brought by Hindi as the official language of India and he preferred the contoured use of English as the official language of the union, because for Rajaji, English is the medium of modern knowledge while Hindi is not [7]. Then number of agitations followed against the imposition of Hindi language to non-Hindi speaking people. Periyar E. V. R was strongly advocating for a separate Dravida Nadu wherein he emphasized upon the need to protect Tamil language as against the North India domination. As a matter of fact, rooting out Hindi from Dravidian land was one of his main agendum [8]. In the contemporary times, Dravidian parties like, DMK, PMK, DMK still rally around the Tamil language identity. The sentiment for preserving Tamil language is so strong that even there were reports of Tamil Nadu government giving pensions to the agitators of anti-Hindi. In fact, it is not just about Hindi; it is about opposing the imposition of culture, hegemony of North Indians over the Dravidians. In the recent times, there have been reports of Dravidian parties strongly making hue and cry against any attempt to replace English signboards in couple of national highways with Hindi in Tamil Nadu [9]. Even the more buttressing point is the very recent agitation erupted in Bengaluru, Karnataka (2017) for the removal of Hindi from the signboards in all metro stations, echoing the prominence of Kannada language in the state.

It is not beyond our knowledge that the constituent assembly of India had deliberated on the question of national language and Hindi was proposed to be the one. The idea of having a single national language is to have a compact national identity and having a common language which vast population can understand. Even B. R. Ambedkar vouched for Hindi as the common national language of India although he did not voice for it at the strongest possible sense [10]. But there have been oppositions from many quarters and even there emerge one section that favours English to be the national language. Notable uproar against making Hindi as the national language of India came strongly from south Indian states. It is because, the rationale is that language is connected with deep emotion, identity and it is an integral part of culture of a community. Making Hindi means the imposition of Hindi language over non Hindi speaking states and reduction of non-Hindi speaking into a second class citizens. It must be also remembered that only 42 percent speak in Hindi in India as per some surveys. The earlier resolution of continuation with English as the official language for 15 years till Hindi replaces it is far from materialization. The Official Language Act 1963 which clearly specifies that English may continue to be used in the Union and business of parliament in addition to Hindi was met with widespread opposition all over the country. There was anti English agitation too in the Hindi heartlands. Then the Act was amended in 1967 and the statutory guarantee for the use of English at the central level as an associate language so long as the non-Hindi states desires was given [11]. The present status is that Hindi will not be imposed on all the states and English will continue to be the official language. At present, Hindi is an official language, not a national language. Then government of India came out with 3 language formula in 1968 to mitigate this hovering problem, but it is not properly implemented in all the states.As per the three language formula, Hindi, English and one modern language for the Hindi speaking states and one Dravidian language, English and Hindi for non-Hindi speaking states are to be studied.

Post-independence, language is the one major basis that creates separate states. The erstwhile united Andhra Pradesh is the first state that was carved out of madras presidency based on the Telugu language and others quickly follow the suit. The recognition of linguistic pluralism panders to the idea that there is no singular identity of India and Nehru later saw linguistic states as a way towards comprehensible democratic government [12]. Mostly after independence, English language has become increasingly part of linguistic landscape. Apart from the effect of globalization, English signs unmistakably represents international orientation, sophistication, modernity, success and status. English has become one of the major languages in India, but in south India, Dravidian languages mark as the major language.

In South India, literacy is comparatively higher and urban populace are almost bi lingual and rural dwellers are monolingual. In South India, linguistic landscape can be generally displayed in two languages. State language is the one Dravidian language and English is the lingua franca. For instance, in Tamil Nadu, two language policy is in practice in which state language is Tamil and national language is English, not Hindi. So the linguistic landscape can be vividly seen in terms of bilingual norm. In the major cities, linguistic

landscape is clearly marked by both Dravidian language and English. The origin of this nature of linguistic landscape is clearly the result of the language issue that these states encounter. Hindi is more or less omitted in all southern states, except some pockets like Hyderabad which was under Nizam rule. For the native speakers, Dravidian language is put up and for the outsiders who cannot comprehend local language, English is used in the public signs. More importantly, the pattern of linguistic landscape in south India presents three significant meanings. First, the Dravidian language being put up on the top represents the dominance and preference of it over other languages. Secondly, the Dravidian ideology, identity and culture are being represented by the bilingual linguistic landscape. And third, it signifies the multilingual culture of south Indian cities.

The character of linguistic landscape can be also different. In the case of Tamil Nadu, linguistic landscape is usually bilingual in that Tamil and English are written. Trilingual linguistic landscape is not common and it may be due to the strong abhorrence towards Hindi language in the state. Today, in the Karnataka state, particularly in capital city, trilingual linguistic landscape can be seen and it is largely because of the cosmopolitan culture of the city. In Telangana, trilingual linguistic landscape is visible in some areas. It can be explained from the fact that the region is under the influence of Nizam rule and sizable Muslims speak in Urdu. In Kerala, trilingual linguistic landscape is visible in major cities. Malayali language has enormous Sanskrit influence and Malayalis use Mulayam language along with English and Hindi. But the fact remains that Dravidian languages are given foremost place in public signs. The inference would be that in government premises, trilingual linguistic landscape is visible; while in local outlets, monolingual linguistic landscape is vastly found. The factual scenario is that no singular public sign written in Hindi alone is observable in south India.

Economic Growth & Linguistic Landscape in South India

Another factor for the bilingual linguistic landscape in south India can be explained from the point of the economic development in the region. Economy stability in south India is relatively stable as compared to other parts of the country. The region is largely urbanized and it has long open sea borders for trading. Most importantly, IT sector in south India is booming post economic liberalization in India.

(a) *IT Boom:* In fact, the capitals of south Indian states are considered to be the IT hubs, especially in software field, today.In popular conversation, one reason why Indians are good at software field can be explained from the fact that the Indian upper caste elites always value abstract clean works and they disdain murkier works. Similar line of argument is also put forward by Devesh Kapur [13]. Without an iota of doubt, it can be claimed that software industry contributes enormously to the economic growth in south India. There are some cognizable reasons that lead to IT boom in south India. First, the economic liberalization taken in 1991 opens up the avenues for IT sector in several ways. With opening of the international market, IT sectors mushroom and foreign investments started flowing. Secondly, there are vast reservoir of technically skilled IT professionals. It is because the south states have the highest number of educational institutions that generate thousands of IT graduates each year. So there are abundances of cheap labours and market is naturally expanded. Thirdly, government also took some relaxationsin the regulation of IT sector. There is relaxation in tax policy in relation to the IT sector. With the tax heaven environment, IT industries get some sort of incentives and excel. Moreover, special economic zones are established by the government and IT companies are encouraged to grow. Fourthly, with the stand of anti-Hindi, southern states have emphasized on English education and it really creates a large pool of human capital. These factors turn south India to be conducive for IT growth.Today, Bengaluru, the capital of Karnataka, is known as the Silicon Valley of India and undoubtedly it is the biggest hub of information technology companies in India. Closely, Chennai, the capital of Tamil Nadu is the second biggest IT sector. Very interestingly, the erstwhile government of united Andhra Pradesh created a special city with all the modern infrastructures for information technology. This city is christened as HITEC city and it houses several MNCs. Not to be left behind, the government of Kerala has also started some information technology parks in its major cities. Needless to say, three out of six IT clusters in India are located in south India. Today, IT giants like TCS, Infosys, Wipro and other major players are clustered round the south Indian cities. Naturally, these cities become the attractive destinations for the wealthy people. Besides, number of BPOs, call centers have also sprung up that attractlots of youths who are proficient in

English. English language play a major role in the history of IT boom in south India. Then how can IT boom explain the nature of linguistic landscape in south India? The idea is that with the IT boom, all south Indian major cities become the hub of information technology not only for the country, but for the foreign countries. Many MNCs have their offices in these cities and clients comprises of both Indians and foreigners. Apart from IT industries, there are many public undertakings. Every day, new connections are made and huge migration takes place in the cities. For all convenience, the linguistic landscape in southern states is bound to be in bilingual form. For the people coming from other state, the local language is not comprehensible to them, and thus the English becomes the necessary part of bilingual linguistic landscape in south India. Use of English language is to attract varied customers and it also symbolizes the sign of prestigeand global exposure.

b. *Service Sector*: Alongside IT, service sector also has also witnessed huge jump in the south India. Service sector has a massive growth in south India that include education, banking, hospital, tourism, hotels, entertainment industry, and media. Massive development in service sector plays a big pull factor for jobs all over country. For instance, there are world class hospitals that draw patients not only from all the states within, but also from neighboring countries. And film industry is extremely thriving and the biggest film city, Ramojifilm city is situated in Hyderabad. Naturally, these factors pull people for jobs and livelihood. There is continuous interstate migrant population from other states in south India. Along with it, foreign nationals also visit the southern states for various purposes. So it becomes so imperative for the major cities in south India to implant bilingual linguistic landscape, mostly in urban areas for better communications.Today, Indian entrepreneurial class is no longer exclusively composed of the traditionally business communities like Jain, Banias, Marwaris, Parsis, Chettiars. There is an upheaval in the social composition of the Indian entrepreneurial class and the new capitalist class come from several castes [14]. This trend is so true in the context of south India. The overall point is that business community in south India has massively expanded and it helps in the growth of service sector. Along with it, the major south Indian cities are becoming more and more cosmopolitan. South Indian wears the picture of a melting pot and people from all over the country come here in search of jobs, education and livelihood. Being cosmopolitan it itself also influences the nature of linguistic landscape and hence we find bilingual linguistic landscape in south India. Hence, linguistic landscaping has become more imperative in south India than ever before owing to these reasons.

Concluding Remarks

Linguistic landscape is an old phenomenon though it is relatively considered new in the field of academic research. There is a spiraling interest in the study of linguistic landscape of late and research has been snowballing in this area. Linguistic landscape has no stable nature and it keeps expanding. In this age of digital era, linguistic landscape too transforms into new shapes. In fact, globalization also caps linguistic landscape in multiple ways. As the result, linguistic landscape is less monolingual today. Without doubt, linguistic landscape has inherent merits.At the same time, linguistic landscape has it pertaining challenges. For instance, in south India, not all the migrants are educated and the pattern of linguistic landscape is overwhelmingly bilingual. The migrants from other states engaging in various manual works, construction and small enterprises cancomprehend neither English nor the local language. And there are no strict state laws in this regard, and in a multi-diverse country like India, linguistic landscape has its peculiar challenges.

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