

## Editorial

The editors believe, the special issue of *Indian Journal of Applied Linguistics* on Linguistic Landscaping (LL) is warranted given India is a country where,

1. more than half the languages (out of a total of 7500 or more) i.e. 3,490 are spoken and also among the world's 22 countries where the world's 75% languages are spoken
2. 2 of its official languages – English and Hindi are ranked among the world's top 10 languages
3. 4 scheduled languages figure among the world's top 20 languages
4. 14 scheduled and non-scheduled languages are included among the world's top 50 languages
5. 7 newspapers, in three languages, are among the world's top 20 newspapers by circulation
6. the largest number of television channels is available by languages in the world (besides being the largest producer of films by languages in the world)
7. 1556 mother tongues are in use and every 6<sup>th</sup> speaker of the world is an Indian having knowledge of at least one Indian language
8. every third person in urban area is a youth who is making it the youngest country in the world
9. the Google Indic keyboard is available in 23 languages for text entry
10. the highest literary awards in the country are given by the National Academy of Letters in 24 literary language
11. more than 50 languages have written modes of expression and many more are in process of developing
12. 3,592 newspapers and periodicals are published in 35 Indian languages every year
13. 69 to 72 languages are taught in schools, either as subjects or as a medium of instruction

14. 146 languages and dialects are beamed in regional and national radio networks<sup>1</sup>
15. half of the nation may not afford newspaper and drinking water but more than half of the nation is on a multilingual phone work
16. people live in an era of unwired multilingualism, where a minimum of three languages formula is working without technical and social snags
17. no linguistic region and state is monolingual or monolithic – in fact, every language area consists of atleast more than one inter-language
18. in terms of absolute number of speakers, 10.7% percent of Indian population speaks some English,<sup>2</sup> which is next to that of USA
19. widely accepted and understood languages have variants (such as Hindi alone has 48, and Magahi, a variety of Hindi, has more than six regional variants)
20. deep linguistic ecology has different inventories of speech, expression and imagination; languages reflect intricate levels of social hierarchy and caste and often individuals have in their speech repertoire, a variety of styles and dialects appropriate to various social situations
21. language (English) is worshiped as a Goddess in the temple, (as on the historic day of 30<sup>th</sup> April 2010, at Bankagaon near Lakimpur Khiri, Uttar Pradesh, in front of 1500 Dalits, foundation for temple dedicated to English as the Dalit Goddess was laid)<sup>3</sup>
22. individuals being a multilingual and the nation as a whole is emerging as a manufacturing hub of multilingualism by creating new linguistic opportunities yet linguistic fervor to annihilate “a” language is not unusual<sup>4</sup>

Language, thus, is more than just a means of communication. It is a focal point of identity, access and participation aspirations, sign of sociocultural mobility and a strategic means for ensuring visibility and capturing space. It is a political tool and hence the relevance of Linguistic Landscape studies cannot be questioned in a deep multilingual nation like India. The special Issue of

IJOAL is on the topic of LL which has unfortunately not yet been set in motion in India – or, at least LL studies is neither acknowledged nor institutionalized in the Indian academia. We hope this Issue of LL will stimulate and enable linguists and social scientists to explore the field from different dimensions.

Language is among the few things that Indians endlessly attempt to make visible in the public space without constraints, but neither its politics nor its space manipulating role has hardly been understood. Needless to say, LL is India's largest visible space that is little researched and unexplained. In the present volume, a serious attempt is made to describe (as a start) of the richness of linguistic visibility in India that we make and are made to take notice in day to day life.

Languages have always been spoken and written in a living environment. Attention to the visible display and representation of languages in the living environment i.e. the public and private space through signs, billboards, advertisements, public notice signs, letters and images has been the cynosure of research for some time now and has been referred to as Linguistic Landscape. LL research has focused on the written representations because they not only showcase the sociocultural contexts of the spaces, but also the intentional constructions of identity, power and struggle for visibility by actors either as negotiating the language policy of the country or as identity marking or identity annihilation. What do such LLs mean? What is the reality of the context as shown by the LL? and beyond? The study of LL is clearly more than just the visibility of languages. There is a need to study and unearth the deeper and hidden meanings, intentions and messages conveyed through languages and the spaces in which the languages are represented in both written and oral forms.

Itagi & Singh (2002) call for understanding the actions of players in the act of linguistic landscaping. Linguistic landscaping (present participle verb) as they argue is an intentional activity undertaken by actors in a specific sociocultural context for specific purposes to reorient the Linguistic Landscape. The specificity of the actions may or may not adhere to the language policy of the country, while they

could represent the intentionality of the sign maker to assert their existence and their claim over the public space. One can find many such instances. In multilingual India, where languages are a way of life and multilingual signs are a norm rather than exception, we argue that the linguistic landscape and the processes of linguistic landscaping are part of manipulating the public and the private space where neither of them are neutral nor are the spaces rigid and bounded. As Shohamy & Waksman (2009) argue, spaces are negotiated and contested by the players, in which case we need to ask: Who are the actors in the LL? What intentions propel the actions taken? Which languages are visible and which are masked? Why? What political power play is in action in manipulating the LL? Why and how do discursive practices manipulate the space of the LL i.e. landscape the linguistic landscape? Consequently, linguistic landscaping is recognised as the process, the product and the place of political (and sociocultural) activism, intervention and invasion of a specific space with specific intentions.

Given the preference for studying of constitutionally and policy-backed literate languages displayed in these spaces, any investigation of the LL essentially is an acknowledgement of the LL as the “physical form” of the political ideologies’ or as a sociolinguistic relationship between policy and communities or as a tool that shapes and is constantly shaped by the sociolinguistic scenario of a specific context. There is a dire need to describe, understand and analyse the LL and the processes involved in constructing the LL in the Indian multilingual context as a complex activity between the individuals, the community, the context and the policy given the diversity in interests and intentions. Therefore, in this issue on ‘The Linguistic Landscape of Multilingual India’ the contributions have investigated the language environment of spaces, be it private or public; Urban or rural or ru-urban or tribal or metropolitan. It is common knowledge that designing and manipulating the LL of a specific location is affected by a multitude of different factors not to mention just migration and globalization as significant players. Factors such as State’s commitment to the type and token of nationalistic fervor of development and development discourse;

State's linguistic ideologies; States commitment to the Regional languages; the presence of diverse sociocultural economic interests of the sign maker, sign reader and sign interpreter; linguistic assertiveness of the communities that share the space coupled with their linguistic tolerance; conditions that favour language contact are a few factors. The different papers in this issue reflect these factors in actions.

**Rajarshi Singh** in 'Signages, Posters and Notices in Rural India: Trends in Linguistic Landscaping from Bihar and Himachal Pradesh' captures the notion of English as the universal recipe for socioeconomic mobility and aspiration through the ubiquitous developmental discourse. He portrays the aggressive penetration of English as the language of mobility in the LL of two different rural localities of two different states of India to question the presumption of language allocation for nationalistic fervor and brand building. English, he says has been indigenized to cater to local needs of visibility and garnering attention.

**Uma Maheshwari Chimirala** in 'Appropriating to the Schoolscape: A Study of Reference of Linguistic Landscape in Dyad Text Construction' points out that that visible spaces of the schoolscape which are prone to policy-based LL activity given that they are the State sponsored public spaces, are bound to be top-down and hence not true representations of the multilingual reality of the school space. Further such an arrangement necessarily need not annihilate private use of linguistic landscape for idiosyncratic purposes in the private spaces of the school. Chimirala shows the many ways in which the LL finds meaningful use in the text creation talk by dyads.

**Nusrat Begum** and **Swetha Sinha** in 'A Study of the Linguistic Landscape of Patna, Bihar', survey the LL as a representation of the Indian Language Policy in action. Through an analysis of the signages collected from 2 shopping streets of Patna, the authors underscore the presence of several languages like Angika, Bajjika, Magahi, Maithili, Santali and Bhojpuri in the spatiality of the city though none of them find place in the scriptural representation of the linguistic landscape of the city.

**Samhita Bharadwaj** and **Priyanka Shukla** in their study ‘Linguistic Landscaping in North-east India: A Case Study of Tezpur Town in Assam’ study the linguistic landscape of Tezpur and Sonitpur – two multilingual spaces in the Brahamaputra Valley. Through their enquiry of the official signages and the non-official signages, they present a language use tension that looks like a love-hate relationship between the official languages namely Assamese, Hindi and English. While Hindi is *put up with* the tension is between Assamese and English. The authors seem to suggest that languages are grooved for specific functions but then the grooving is not water tight. English seems to be entering the ethnic-cultural space as well.

**Gordon Dkar** and **Shailendra Kumar Singh** in ‘Linguistic Landscaping, Language Ideology and Language Policy: The Case Study of Meghalaya’ discuss the lack of State commitment to the implementation of the Meghalaya language policy (2005) according to which Khasi and Garo languages are accorded associate official language status though it does not specify the functional load and exclusivity of the languages. When current research attributes the complexity of implementing the Indian language policy to the conflict of interests between the heterogeneous sociocultural and linguistic communities, the authors prescribe the need for “small but conscious steps in promoting the visibility, vitality and status in different domains” of the languages in question.

**Moumitha Singha** in ‘Linguistic Landscaping of ‘Ghoti’ and ‘Bangal’ in West Bengal: A Case of Bilingualism’ analyses the *inevitable* inter-relationship between language and its play arena – the landscape in the LL of shopping lanes of Kolkatta. Bangal is spoken by the refugee immigrants from Bangladesh while Ghoti is spoken by the people of West Bengal. Through her analysis of the LL, Moumitha captures not just the sweet-sour-rivalry-riddled relationship between the speakers of Bangal and Ghoti versions of Bengali language but underscores the nature of linguistic variations as a result of language contact on.

**Shailendra Kumar Singh, Lalhmingmawia** and **Uma Maheshwari Chimirala** in ‘Understanding the Linguistic Landscaping in North East India with Reference to Three Case

Studies: Aizwal, Shillong and Thahekhu Village' describe and synthesise three case studies which have documented the linguistic landscape of multilingual North East India. Across the three studies, English is positioned as the language of power, prestige, trade and commerce, governance and other domains while the community languages are relegated and thus shadowed to localised culturally-concrete, functionally less-symbolic purposes and domains.

Finally, **Bishwanandan Das** and **Subrat Kumar Prusty** in 'Exploring Invisible Speech in Ritual Art: A Combinational Study in Cultural-Linguistic Landscape' explore the question "what is landscape?" highlight the research fixation with language in the landscape through the emphasis on linguistic landscape. The authors, in consonance with the call to expand the ambit of LL research, argue for the importance of "incorporating culture embodied drawings" so that ethnic creativity that is a manifestation of the "invisible speech" (or rather made invisible) of what the authors call "territorial cultural landscape."

#### NOTES

1. <<https://www.newsgram.com/all-india-radio-415-stations-23-languages-146-dialects-and-counting/>>.
2. <<http://www.thehindu.com/thread/arts-culture-society/india-a-land-of-many-tongues/article19445187.ece>>.
3. <<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Dalit-Goddess-English-temple-in-UPs-Banka-village/articleshow/6819990.cms>>.
4. <<http://www.thehindu.com/thread/arts-culture-society/india-a-land-of-many-tongues/article19445187.ece>>.

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