

Signages, Posters and Notices in Rural India: Trends in Linguistic Landscaping from Bihar and Himachal Pradesh

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ABSTRACT

The colonial tongue, English, has been rebranded as an “aspirational language” in India, despite low levels of mastery. Based on surveys and documentation of signages, posters, and public notices in rural Bihar and Himachal Pradesh, this paper ascertains the English language penetration in rural India. A liberal and functional viewpoint is adopted to analyze the linguistic landscape – to ultimately present a hypothesis as to why English has spread across the rural parts, especially in the villages of Malisandh (Nalanda, Bihar) and Shat (Kullu Tehsil, Himachal Pradesh).

Keywords: Linguistic landscaping, rural development, learning outcomes, school education and English in India.

1. BACKGROUND

In multilingual India, language is not a mere linguistic indicator, but also a marker of the socio-cultural and economic attributes of people and communities. The linguistic complexity of India is evident from the variation of total documented languages across multiple established sources. In one account, 461 languages are used in India, if one goes by the *Ethnologue*, while 780 languages and 66 recorded scripts are documented in the *People’s Linguistic Survey of India (PLSI)*. As per official census of India figures, there are 234 identifiable mother tongues. Despite these variations, it is clear that India communicates and