



LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPING IN BANGLADESH: A PRACTICAL STUDY IN SYLHET CITY PERSPECTIVE

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Abstract

This is a well comprehensive study which examines a new attempt to expand the scope of linguistic landscape study in Sylhet City of Bangladesh. Bangladesh's official language is known as Bangla or Bengali and is spoken by the vast majority of the population. There are a number of different Bangla dialects that are generally grouped according to the various regions in Bangladesh. Due to the British colonization of the country, English is also a widely spoken and commonly understood language in Bangladesh. The people of Sylhet are very fond of their dialect. They hardly use any language other than their own dialect for a conversation with the people of their own district. The findings indicate that most of the billboards are bilingual because both Bengali and English Language have been used. The street signs are written both in English and Bengali. It may be pointed out that twenty-five percent signboards are monolingual written in English especially for English Schools and ten percents are bilingual written in English and Bengali. Rest sixty five percent is monolingual which are written in Bengali. In public places both the Bengali and English have been used. In some areas, multilingual boards were found which were written in Bengali, English and Monipuri Language. No nameplate or signboard was written in another language. There were two places (New Nation Library and Ragib Rabeya Nagri Institute) where Nagilipi was written in their Signboard.

Key words: Books, Journals, Monipuri, Patro, Signboard, Billboard.

Introduction

Language is the means of human interactions. Every human has a fascination for native language. The number of languages is flux. The Ethnologue catalogue of the world language, which means the best language resources, currently lists 6909 living languages of the world. In Asia there are 2197 spoken languages. Bangladesh is a country of South Asia having population of 161 million (2015) with total area 57321sq miles (148460 sq kms). Sylhet division is situated in the North –Eastern part of the country bordered by Meghalaya, Assam, and Tripura states of India to the north east, south respectively where different tribal communities, Linguistic landscape means the "visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (Landry and Bourhis 1997). Sylhet is located in the north-eastern region and a division of Bangladesh. In this region the languages used here are themajor subject matters of the current empirical study.

Linguistic landscape has been described as being "somewhere at the junction of sociolinguistics, sociology, social psychology, geography, and media studies". It is a concept used in sociolinguistics as scholar's study how languages are visually used in multilingual societies.

This study was undertaken for the following objectives:

- To find out the languages used in the particular region and the history of Sylhetinagriliipi,
- To focus the language spoken by the people and used in different organization,
- To discover the languages used in different billboards and signboards.

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Literature Review

A great deal of information can be inferred through studying signs in the public spaces. Learning the linguistic landscape of an area can determine about the people who live in that area and their language, *etc.*, (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008). Throughout the world the linguistic landscape reveals competing language, ideologies, struggle for power, language policy and provides a map of language territories. (Cenoz and Gorter, 2008, Dagenais, *et al.*, 2009, Leeman and Modan 2009) Due to importance of Sylhet City the linguistic landscape of Sylhet can provide a lot of information regarding monolingual, bilingual and multilingual linguistic landscapes in Bangladesh. Bangla is the state language and official language of Bangladesh and English is used as a Foreign Language in different offices and educational institutions. Furthermore, four are institutional, 12 are developing, 16 are vigorous and nine are in trouble. (Campbell and King 2011).

Methodology

The research was conducted from January to April-2018 and the information was collected from different books and journals. The researcher himself visited several places of the city and other places to collect information and photographs of different billboards and others. Twenty educational institutions, Twenty five government offices and private business firms and houses of different communities, eighty business stores of this busy city were selected randomly for this study. The researcher also attended different formal occasion to observe their communication system. The collected information has been analyzed in a proper way with appropriate technique.

Findings and Discussion

Sylheti is the language of Sylhet, which is also known as the language of Surma Valley and it is also spoken in parts of the Northeast Indian states of Assam (the Barak Valley) and Tripura (the North Tripura district). It is also spoken by a significant population in the other north-eastern states of India and amongst the large expatriate communities in the United Kingdom, United States, and countries of the Gulf States.

Sylheti language was a branch of Hindustani in antiquity, present-day Hindi language, which used to be written in Devanagari alphabet by the Aryan people of Sylhet. Scripture of Aryan people such as Vedas are written in Devanagari. The people of Sylhet are very fond of their dialect. They hardly use any language other than their own dialect for a conversation with people of their own district, wherever they may be and whatever be their own education and cultural attainments². On its own right, it is accepted as a separate language; however it has not been given an official status by the Government of Bangladesh. According to George Abraham Grierson, "The inflections also differ from those of regular Bengali, and in one or two instances assimilate to those of Assamese". Indeed it was formerly written in its own script, Sylheti Nagari, similar in style to Kaithi but with differences, though nowadays it is almost invariably written in Bengali script.

According to Sayed Murtaja Ali, Sylheti Nagri belongs to Dev Nagri and Kaithei Lipi. During the reign of Gour Govindo, Sylhet was a place of cultural heritage. Devnagri was used in writing and every stages of life. After Hazarat Shahjalal defeated Raja Gour Gobindo, some people started converting themselves in to Muslim. "There is a Script called *Musalmaninagri* in use amongst the *Mussalmans* of Sylhet. It is on record that Many Brahman families of Sylhet embraced Islam. It is in contradistinction to Devanagri which Hindus used. That is why the experts to say if the nagri and musalmaninagri are derived from a common script.

In different temples in Sylhet area devnagri alphabet are traced. The younger generation in this area is now habituated in speaking dialect and Sylheti among the people of Sylhet and they do not know clearly how to write. Sylheti Nagrilipi is not used in public space in written form:

At present in Sylhet city, two bilingual signboards are traced at Bandar Bazar, Sylhet. In New Nation Library in the entrance gate, Sylheti Nagrilipi and Bengali language is written. In the Madhuban Market, there is an institute namely Ragib Rabeya Nagri Institute where Narilipi and Bengali alphabets have been used. A strong feeling on Bengali language is found here. It seems that this two

² Bangladesh District Gezetees: Sylhet-1975. Page No-303



organizations are trying to keep their as immortal. The person of sylhet has strong feeling on Sylheti language. Within the community they always try to speak in sylhet.

In young generation, most of them have no enough idea on Nagri alphabets.



Figure 1: New Nation Library



Figure 2: Ragib Rebeza Nagri Institute

Promoting culture, language, and customs through easy and visual sign

There is a Majar of Shahparan where the written form is in Bangla in the main gate. In the mazar gate of Hazarat Shahparan it is written in Bengali. As a matter of fact most of the people of Bangladesh can identify it properly. Since it is a religious place, it should have been written in English because a lot of foreigners come here to visit. No nagri alphabets have been used here. Though the people of Sylhet are fond of speaking Sylhetilanguage, they should have used nagrilipi here. Here it seems that in the mazar, bilingual board is found which is written in Bengali and Arabic.



Figure 3: Hazarat Shahparan (R) Majar Gate



Figure 4: Majar of Hazarat Shahjalal(R)

The information was collected from twenty-five government offices. In ninety two percent offices there are monolingual signboards which are written in Bengali. In the airport, it seems that the written form is both Bangla and English in two sides. It is not written in Nagrilipi. Here two languages are written because both foreigners and Bangladeshi can identify it properly. Since it is an international airport, it is mandatory to write in English and Bengali is written because of first language. In government offices ninety five percent signboards are monolingual written in Bengali and five percent are bilingual written in both English and Bengali (NRB office VAT collectorate. Nonagrilipi has been used here.



Figure 5: OIA, Sylhet



Figure 6: Signboard of Govt. Office



Figure 7: OIA, Sylhet



Figure 8: Export and Import Office



Figure 9: Passport Office, Sylhet



Figure 10: Govt. office of Information

Since Bengali is the state language of Bangladesh, most of the signboards are written in Bangla and sometimes it is written in English. It seems that there is a hotel in which the name of the hotel is written in English. Since it is a standard hotel, the name of the hotel is written in English alphabets. The name of the hotel like Star Pacific, Rose View is also written in English. There is lot of hotels in Sylhet city in which Bengali language has been used. No nagrilipi has been used here.

In different hotels like three stars or five star-typed, the name of the hotel is written in English but in general hotels bilingual signboards (English and Bangla) and monolingual (Bengali) signboards have been used to identify.



Figure 11: Hotel Supreme



Figure 12: Hotel Rose View

In the main gate of Shahjalal University of Science and Technology, it is written in both Bangla and English to identify the location of the university. The foreigners would be able to identify clearly. There are a number of foreign students from Nepal, Bhutan, *etc.*, studying at this university. In the main gate of Sylhet Agricultural University the sign board of the main gate is bilingual written in both English and Bangla. In case of English School, it seems that most of the signboards are monolingual which are written in English. In government educational institution like schools, colleges the signboards are monolingual which are written in Bengali. It may be pointed out that twenty-five percent signboards are monolingual written in English especially for English Schools and ten percents are bilingual written in English and Bengali. Rest sixty five percent is monolingual which are written in Bengali. There is a rule imposed by the government that Bengali should be used in every sphere of life and is the official language of the country.



Figure 13: Shahjalal University of Science and Technology



Figure 14: Sylhet Agricultural University



Figure 15: Sylhet Govt. Women College



Figure 16: Murarichand College, Sylhet

In the city there are shopping malls, business institutions, restaurants, and others. Since Bengali is the state language, everybody uses Bengali first in case of writing purpose so that everybody is able to understand and identify. Out of eighty business stores 65% signboards are bilingual, 30% are monolingual and rest are multilingual. In Bank and another finance organization seventy percent are bilingual which are written in English and Bangla. No nagrilipi is found here.



Figure 17: School, Mall, Coaching Center, Bank and other organization



Figure 18: Different organization including Bank, gym, and shops

There is a place of Sylhet, Shibgonj where there are many shops and departmental stores where nagrilipi has not been used. Bilingual and Monolingual signboards are seen here in which English and Bengali alphabets have been used. There is also a billboard situated at Tilagor area of Sylhet in which English and Bengali alphabets have been used. This is a bilingual billboard.

Manipuri Language

Manipuri, an ethnic community in Bangladesh belonging to Manipur, once a sovereign state and now the northeastern zonal state of India.



Figure 19: Billboard

In the early days, Manipur had different names such as Kyangleipak, Kyangleipang, Kyanglei, Meitrabak, and Mekhali and the Manipuri's were known as Meitei. During the reign of Maharaj Garibniwaz (1709-1748), some missionaries arrived here from sylhet. There was an opinion that these missionaries named this land 'Manipur' and its principal inhabitants, Manipuris. The Mahabharata has a mention of Manipur and the missionaries but as it was discovered later, Manipur of Mahabharata and Manipur of Sylhet were not the same place. Manipuri's migrated to the Bangladesh area and settled here at different times due to wars, conflicts and other socio-political reasons. Now they are living in the north-eastern part of Bangladesh especially in Sreemongal, Vanugachi, komolgonj and in Sylhet City. Their living standard is simple but thinking is high.

Written Manipuri

Manipuri has been written with the Manipuri alphabet, or Meitei Mayek, with the Bengali alphabet, and with the Latin alphabet. The current Manipuri script is a reconstruction of the ancient Manipuri script.

There are some organizations which are very careful to use their own alphabet for their identity. In the picture it seems that there are three types of alphabets used in the signboard as Bengali alphabet, English alphabets and also Manipuri alphabet.

The NGO namely Manipur Development Center conducts different types of social activities to develop the standard of living, communication through Manipuri language. In the signboard three types of alphabets are seen like Bengali, English and Manipuri.



Figure 20: NGO of Monipuri Community



Figure 21: Monipuri House

There was only one house in the city in which the house identity is written both in English and in

Khashi Community

The Khasi people are an indigenous tribe, the majority of who live in the State of Meghalaya which is in the north eastern part of India, with a significant population in the border areas of the neighboring state of Assam, and in certain parts of Bangladesh. The Khasi people are the native people of Meghalaya and forms the majority about 50% or 1.72 million of the state population. They call themselves KiKhun U Hynñiewtrep, which means "The Children of The Seven Huts" in their language. Their language, also called Khasi, is categorized as the northernmost language under the Austro-Asiatic family.

English is the official language in Meghalaya and khasi was recognized as an associate language since 2005, which is written using the Latin and Bengali scripts. The main dialects of Khasi spoken are Sohra and Shillong dialects. Khasi is a member of the Khasic group of Austro-Asiatic languages. It is spoken mainly in Meghalaya state in the north-east of India, and also in neighboring parts of Assam and Bangladesh. Khasi was first written with the Bengali alphabet by William Carey, a British missionary, in the early 19th century.

In Bangladesh, most of the people of Khasi community are bilingual. Since there is no scope to use their language outside their community, all people are efficient in Bengali. The educated people of Khasi community are very efficient in speaking English. There are a number of multilingual people

in the community. In case of any public function they use Bengali language. There are some shops in Jaflong where their language is not used. The speaking ability on English language is excellent in comparison to other community. In different function, they are trilingual in nature. In various cultural functions, they perform and celebrate in their own language because of having their own culture. It is found that no billboard or any nameplate is found in Khasi language in Sylhet.

Patro Community

Patro Community, the indigenous community of Bangladesh live in the forest of outer range of city near Khadimnagar, Guainghat area and some villages of Moulavibazar district. The population was 2033 from 402 members of families and 23 numbers of villages. (Field survey-1996-97) The original name of Patro community is 'Laleng'. The meaning of 'Laleng' in patro community is stone, 'Pathor' in Bengali and 'Pattor' in regional language in Bangladesh. By various specialists (Chakrabarty, Chatterjee and Hye) Patros came from the origin of Tibetan-Himalayan people popularly known as Bodo. The bodos are an ethnic and linguistic community who have no written language but spoken language. They can speak Bangla and Sylheti Bangla as well. They have to use their language within the community. No billboard or Signboard is written in their language.

Conclusion

It may be concluded here by saying that Bengali is the state language of Bangladesh and Sylheti is used as a regional language her not as written language. The people also usedialect for intercultural communication. There are tribal languages also like Khasi and Manipuri having own alphabet. Manipuri language is seen in the signboard on the organization of Manipuri community. Most of the people of Khasiand Manipuri community are bilingual. There are some multilingual also. Two bilingual signboards were found where nagrilipi has been used. In educational institution most of the signboards are monolingual but at public universities bilingual signboards have been used. In Govt. offices, monolingual signboards were found. It may be noted that the people of Bangladesh have strong feeling on Bengali language. In every signboard Bengali language has been used. There are some English schools where only English language has been used. The researchers recommend that everybody should use Bengali language in every sphere of life. The government should take proper step in this regard.

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