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A CASE STUDY OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPING IN BANGLADESH: PABNA CONTEXT

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Abstract

The present comprehensive study deals with the linguistic landscaping of Pabna context in Bangladesh. Linguistic landscapes are typical specimens to how languages are used in bi-lingual or multilingual societies and public spaces. Very few respondents of different professions are bilinguals (Bangla and English) and rest are monolinguals (Bangla)). On the other hand the people of shoemaker community are monolinguals. The study reveals the influence of colonial language in Pabna area reflected through the signboards and other signs. Pabna town remains unique in its numbering the doors of houses in every street which is a systematic approach in other cities of Bangladesh. The signboards of public spaces are mostly bilingual with English and the native language of Bangladesh but the signboards of government offices are mostly written in Bangla. Out of sixty-two shops 77.41% are bilingual (written in Bengali and in English), 19.35% are monolingual (written in Bangla) and 3.24% are also monolingual (written in English). Finally, the researchers provide some recommendations.

Keywords: *Linguistic landscape, language, billboards, signboards, street signs*

1. Introduction

Language is the most common universal medium of communication. Language is all around us in textual form as it is displayed on shop windows, commercial signs, posters, official notices, traffic signs, etc. (Gorter 2006). From flashy advertisements and commercials, names of buildings, streets and shops, instructions and warning signs and graffiti to cyber space, different languages present themselves to us round the clock. As people move, the surrounding languages of a particular setting or 'landscape' catch their eyes which get them thinking about the variety, style and associated purpose of the languages used. But most of the time people do not pay much attention to the 'linguistic landscape' that surrounds them. However, in recent years an increasing number of researchers have started to take a closer look and study the language texts that are present in public space (Gorter 2006).

Linguistic Landscape (LL) is an emerging and dynamic field of research in applied and socio-linguistics which attempts to understand the motives, uses, ideologies, varieties and contestations of multiple forms of 'languages' as they are displayed in public spaces. Linguistic landscape is defined as "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (Landry and Bourhis 1997:23). It has been described as being "somewhere at the junction of sociolinguistics, sociology and social psychology. The classic definition of linguistic landscape was given by Landry and Bourhis (1997:25) who defined linguistic landscape as:

> "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to from the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration."

This is a well comprehensive definition of LL which encapsulates the objects of linguistic landscape. However, this is not a cover-all definition as the scope of LL can go beyond the types of signs mentioned herein. For example, recent technological developments have added many new types of signs: electronic flat-panel displays, LED neon lights, foam boards, electronic message centers, interactive touch screens, inflatable signage, and scrolling banners (Gorter, 2013). The use of language in its written form is the main focus of linguistic landscape studies (Gorter, 2006). As globalization has seen English to spread to almost every corner of the globe including less advanced non-English speaking countries, most often linguistic landscape studies are conducted in multilingual settings. Research on linguistic landscape is important for both synchronic and diachronic reasons as this kind of study can document important factors such as official language policy, variety and hierarchy of languages used, as well as people's attitudes and feelings associated with the languages used in a particular setting.

The linguistic landscape that this study deals with is Pabna, a district located in central Bangladesh. It is one of the most valuable districts of Bangladesh. Its administrative capital is eponymous Pabna town. Pabna forms the south-east boundary of Rajshahi Division. Sirajganj District is on the north-east, while the Padma River, main stream of the holy river Ganges, in the south separates it from Rajbari District and Kushtia District. In Pabna area, there are no regional languages but the inhabitants use the local dialect.

Bangla is the state language of Bangladesh and the lingua franca for Bangladeshis. Apart from the standard Bangla variety, there are a good number of local dialects prevailing across Bangladesh. Since English, by dint of globalization, rapid growth in international trade and commerce and different types of internationalization processes, has reached almost every nook and corner of the present world rendering it multilingual, it is quite expected that Bangladesh is not an exception in this regard, especially given the fact that once this part of the world was ruled by the British. Additionally, what is now known as Bangladesh was once called East Pakistan as it was part of and ruled by West Pakistan whose first language is Urdu. So, synchronically there have been many twists and turns in the course of the history of Bangladesh.

2. Objectives

The present study was undertaken with the following concentrated objectives:

- To know the languages spoken by the people in Pabna
- To identify the languages used in different billboards and signboards
- To identify the languages used in different public and private organizations.

3. Literature Review

The term 'Linguistic Landscape' first appears in Landry and Bourhis' (1997) report on the perceptions of Francophone high school students of public signs in Canadian provinces. The study of the language on public signage, however, as an object of linguistic research, has a longer history. Masai (1972) focused on Tokyo and noted a presence of English in the 1970s. Backhaus (2005, 2006 & 2007) showed huge interest in linguistic landscape originating from the area where

linguistic conflict has traditionally been relatively obvious like in Tokyo. Rosenbaum and colleagues (1977) investigated English and Hebrew signs in a street of Jerusalem, and indicated the public tolerance for foreign languages existing in signs. More contributions to linguistic landscape are from: Spolsky and Cooper (1983, 1991), who described the languages of the old city of Jerusalem. Calvet (1990, 2006) compared the linguistic landscape of Paris and Dakar, and Leclerc (1989) summarized the legal provisions regarding the language of signs in a variety of places worldwide.

Bangla is the State language of Bangladesh. Bengali people of this country protected Bangla from the clutches of the Pakistani oppressors in 1952 by preventing Urdu from being the state language of East Pakistan where a vast majority of people spoke in Bangla. Bengalis sacrificed their lives for their mother tongue on 21st February, 1952 which was recognized later as *International Mother Language Day* by UNESCO. Bangla, in the present time, has two literary styles. One is called "Sadhu Bhasha" and the other "Chalit Bhasa". The former is the traditional literary style based on Middle Bangla of the sixteenth century. The latter is practically a creation of the present century, and is based on the cultivated form of the dialect and day-to-day talks. The difference between the two literary styles is not very sharp.

The vocabulary is practically the same. The difference lies mainly in the forms of the pronunciation and the verb. The Sadhu Bhasa has old and heavier forms while the Chalit Bhasa is used as modern and lighter forms. The former shows a partiality for lexical words and for compound words of the Sanskrit type, and the latter prefers colloquial words, phrases and idioms. The Chalit Bhasa was first seriously taken up by Pramatha Chawdhury at the instance of Rabindranath Tagore during the early years of the First World War soon after Tagore practically discarded Sadhu Bhasa. Chalit Bhasa is now generally favored by writers who have no particular fascination for the traditional literary style ("Language", 2018).

4. Methodology

The present study discussed issues related to language used by different types of people, languages used in different billboards and signboards of various types of institutions. It investigated the perceptions of people who regard using language as an inseparable part of their instructional methodology. The research was conducted in November 2018 (11/11/18 to 26/11/18) at different parts of Pabna town.

Twenty-five government institutions, thirty private institutes and fifty shops were selected for the study. The researchers visited the area and took photograph and talked to different types of people to understand their language. The researchers also talked to fifty people of different professions to find out the languages used by them. The researchers also attended formal occasion to observe their communication system. The collected information was analyzed through the appropriate statistical technique.

5. Findings and Discussion

The official and de facto national language of Bangladesh is Modern Standard Bangla (Literary Bengali). It serves as the *lingua franca* of the nation of which almost all of Bangladeshis are fluent in Bangla (including dialects) as their first language. English, having treated as EFL, is prevalent across government, law, business, media and education, although it can be regarded as the de facto co-official language of Bangladesh.

In addition, it is seen that Hindi is also understood by the young country generation as a foreign language. According to the Constitution, Bangla language must be used as an official language in every sphere of life whereas English would be taught as a compulsory subject from primary level to tertiary level. It is true that, through the signs and languages of a particular area, residents' standard of living can be identified.

Some dialects of Pabna area are given in Table-1.

Table 01: An interview with Sonchoy Paul, a university student of Pabna

English	Bangla (Shadhu/Chalit)	Dialect of Pabna
What is your name?	Apnar nam ki?	Bhai nam ki?
Where have you come from?	Kotha theke esesen?	Konten aisen?
Do not waste this food.	Na kheye nosto karer darker ki?	Khabula to makhalu ka?
Where are you going?	Kothai jaiteso?	Kone jacchish?
When will you come?	Kobe asben?	Kobe aspu?
Do not eat it.	Eta khabena.	Adye khabula.
When will you go to Dhaka?	Tumi kokhon Dhaka jabe?	Bhai Dhaka jobu kobe?
What have you said?	Eta ki ballen?	Aide ki kalu?
Please show me your ticket.	Tiket khana dao.	Tiket khen dao.
How has it happened?	Eta kivabe holo?	Aide kebe holo?

This interview was taken from a student of a university to find out the dialect used by the people of this area. These sentences had been taken under consideration at the time of talking to the people of different professions. The respondents of different professions were able to speak Shadhu and Chalit Bangla. Very few of them were able to speak in English. Most of the people belonged to Pabna area were interested to speak in local dialect. The shopkeepers specially spoke in local dialect but in case of talking to customer of other districts they generally used Chalit Bangle. They sometimes spoke in English for talking to foreigners. The respondents of shoemaker community were habituated in speaking Chalit Bangla.

On the basis of the survey, it seemed that majority people of different profession were monolingual. Very few bilingual were found in the survey but most of the people were interested in speaking dialect.

5.1. Language in billboards and signboards

On the basis of the collected photos of the vital public offices, it has been observed that the signboards of all offices are written in Bangla. The snapshots of the signboards of DC Office, Office of the Deputy Director (Department of Agricultural Extension, District information Office, Upazilla Land Office, Office of the Civil Surgeon, Office of Public Works etc. are given below. During the survey, no signboards of important public offices were found to be written in English.



Figure-2: DC Office, Pabna



Figure-3: Upazilla Land Office



Figure-4: Deputy Director (Agricultural Extension)



Figure-5: Office of the Export Import



Figure-6: District Information Office



Figure-7: Office of Public Works Directorate



Figure-8: Civil Surgeon Office



Figure-9: Office of Archeological

5.2. Directorate

A lot of foreigners are working in Pabna area. In case of important offices and institutions, for example, DC office, hospitals, post offices, police stations, passport offices etc., Bangla must be written on the signboards. Since these are emergency offices, due to the necessity of the foreigners it would be wise to write names and information in English too under Bangla so that they can identify things easily.

As seen below, there are two signboards of which one is of BSRI and the other one is of Pabna Sugar Mills Limited. The signboard of BSRI is written in two languages using Bangla and English which makes it a bilingual signboard but the signboard Pabna Sugar Mills Limited is monolingual written only in Bangla. Since many foreign experts visit BSRI, it is appropriate to write the name of the institution in English under Bangla.



Figure-10: BSRI, Pabna



Figure-11: Pabna Sugar Mills Limited

5.3. Educational Institutions

The following is the gate of Pabna University of Science and Technology. It seems that the signboards of main gate are written in Bengali. It is an international educational institution and many foreign experts visit here and there may be some foreign students too. Therefore, it would be wise to write the name of the university in English under Bangla. In other educational institutions (School level and College level) the signboards are written in Bangla. It is appropriate to write in Bangla on the signboard where Bangla version is only taught. In case of schools where two versions are taught, on the signboard the name of the institute should be written in both the languages.



Figure-12: Pabna University of Science and Technology

At the college level institutions, it would be wise to write signboards at the main gates both in Bangla and English.



Figure-13: Pabna Govt. College



Figure-14: Govt. Edward College, Pabna



Figure-15: Pabna Zilla School



Figure-16: Square High School and College

There is a school in Pabna named ‘Square School and College’ that offers education in English following the English version of National Curriculum. The signboard of the school is found to be written solely in English. As Bangla is used in every sphere of life by majority of the people in Pabna, an amalgamation of Bengali and English is generally expected in signboards.

There is an important place in the studied area where legendary actress Suchitra Sen was born and brought up. She was a well-known actress all over the world. Everybody desires to visit

her birth place. The government took initiative to preserve her memories and now the birth place of the illustrious actress is maintained by the government.



Figure-17: Picture of Suchitra Sen



Figure-18: Birth place of Suchitra Sen

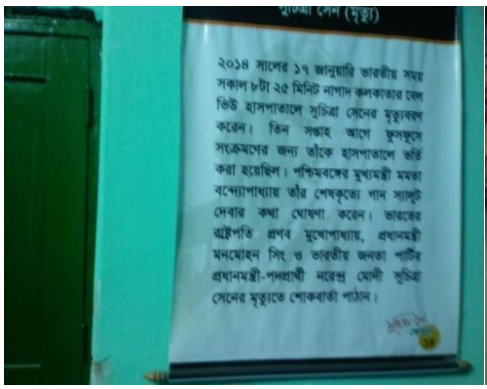


Figure-19: An obituary of the actress



Figure-20: File photo of a procession banner

It creates a linguistic problem when foreigners visit the birth place of the actress and the museum of her memories.They are unable to understand what has been written without a Bangali translatoras almost everything regarding the actress is written in Bengali.Bangla is the state language and so things must be written in Bangla.At the same time, English translation is necessary for the foreign tourists to understad things easily.

5.4. Mills and Factories

The Government of Bangladesh is building its first nuclear power plant in Rooppur on the east side of the river Padma near Ishwardi in the Pabna district of Bangladesh. The project is being implemented by the Bangladesh Atomic Energy Commission (BAEC), under the guidance of Science and Technology Ministry of the Government of Bangladesh.



Figure-1: Rooppur Nuclear Power Plant Project (Source: http://www.rooppurnpp.gov.bd/)

Due to this project a lot of Russians who have come to establish the power plant have to talk to the local people in English language. It creates a linguistic challenge among the business men in this area. The shopkeepers have to speak English to them. As a matter of fact, they must be proficient in speaking and listening English. As a result of the increasing number of mills and

factories, a huge number of immigrants have come to Pabna from other districts in search of better living and have settled here. Multidialectal situation which refers to a mixture of many dialects has thus been created in this area.

Similarly, square Pharmacuticals limited and its other factories are situated at Pabna.Since it is a prominant and international company,the signboards were written in English.



Figure-21: Square Pharmacuticals Limited

Different workers and officers come from various districts of Bangladesh to work here and it creats a multidialectal situation among the staff.

6.1. Banks and Financial Institutions

Since Bangla is the state language of Bangladesh, names of different institutions are supposed to be written in Bangla.However, considering the necessity of the foreigners,English should also be used under Bangla.The signboards of some banks situated in the study area are as follows:



Figure-22: Sonali Bank limited



Figure-23: Mutual Trust bank limited



Figure-24: City Bank limited



Figure-25: Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited



Figure-26: First Security Islami Bank Limited



Figure-27: Prime Bank Limited

During the survey the signboards of Rupali Bank Limited, Pubali Bank Limited and Prime Bank Limited were found to be monolingual written in Bangla while the signboards of some other banks were bilingual: written in Bangla and in English. The signboards of Islami Bank Bangladesh Limited and First Security Islami Bank Limited, Bangladesh were multilingual-written in English, Bangla and Arabic. The signboards of rest of the banks were monolingual. It seems that the bank authorities have strong feeling to use Bangla in every stage.

6.2. Business Organizations

The language of the signboards and billboards of different shops, business firms reflect the lingua franca and known languages of the general people of a particular area. Photographs of some of the business enterprises present at the study area are given below:





Figure-28: Shops and Business enterprises of different areas in Pabana

It may be pointed out that out of sixty-two shops 77.41% were bilingual (written in Bengali and in English), 19.35% were monolingual (written in Bangla) and 3.24% were also monolingual (written in English).The signboard of every shop should be bilingual written both in English and in Bangla.

The signboards of the highest standard hotels were written only in English (monolingual) whereas the signboards of medium standard hotels were seen to be bilingual. Signboards of some other hotels were monolingual but written using Bangla only.



Figure-29: Hotels of different areas of Pabna

Out of ten hotels the signboards of 10% hotels were monolingual written in English when 20% were bilingual written in both Bangla and in English and rest of the 70% were monolingual written solely in Bangla.

7. Limitation

There was a limitation of the study. Taking photograph was a problem within the offices without permission. The photographs were taken from the open streets, in front of the offices and institutions and even from the internet. The research was not government funded project but was self-financed.

8. Recommendation

a. Since Bangla is the state language, all signboards must be written in Bangla. For proper communication English should also be used.

b. In emergency government offices, the signboard must be written in Bangla, but the use of English should also be considered.
c. Since there are a huge number of foreigners in Pabna, the government may consider establishing a language training institute so that the foreigners and the locals both can learn different languages and thereby develop their communication skills.
d. Not only the government but also the NGOs should take proper step towards this.

9. Conclusion

It may be concluded saying that the people of Pabna area are fond of speaking Chalit Bangla with the local dialect. The people who are holding jobs and engaged in standard businesses are fond of speaking in Shadhu Bhasha variety of Bangla and in English. Bangla is the widely spoken language in Pabna and many dialects of Bangla have also been found to be used by the residents of this important district as the primary language of communication in their day to day lives. In Pabna area, Bangla is most commonly seen at different government offices, public places and on public commercial signs. The signboards of most of the government-run organizations are monolingual which is in contrast with the banking sector where signboards of different banks are observed to be monolingual, bilingual and even multilingual. The present study finds that majority of the signboards are inscribed bilingually using both Bangla and English while some are monolingual written either in Bangla or English. In the case of different hotels, all types, that is, monolingual, bilingual and multilingual signboards have been noticed. Finally, the findings of the study can be used by the appropriate authority for linguistic policy making.

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