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THE LANGUAGES OF THE DIVINE SPACE: A CASE STUDY FROM INDIA

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Abstract

This paper aims to present the multilingual signs used in the religious domain of Bihar's linguistic landscape. Bihar, one of the largest states of India, is located in the eastern part of the country with a population of 104.1 million as per Bihar Population Census (2011). The study investigates the relationship between language and religious identity and shows how different religious groups sharing the same space identify themselves with specific language concerning their religion that is clearly evident through manifestation of diverse languages in their respective holyscapes. A total 114 religious signage are photographed by using diversity sampling method from various religious sites and public roads in Patna, the capital city of Bihar. The findings of the study demonstrate an interesting linguistic diversity in the religious domain of linguistic landscape with the visibility of Hindi, Urdu, English, Punjabi, Arabic and Sanskrit.

Keywords

linguistic landscape, linguistic diversity, place of worship, religion in Patna, language and identity

LAS LENGUAS DEL ESPACIO DIVINO: UN ESTUDIO DE CASO DE LA INDIA

Resumen

Este artículo tiene como objetivo presentar los signos multilingües utilizados en el dominio religioso del paisaje lingüístico de Bihar. Bihar, uno de los estados más grandes de la India, se encuentra en la parte

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oriental del país con una población de 104,1 millones según el censo de población de Bihar de 2011. El estudio investiga la relación entre el idioma y la identidad religiosa y muestra cómo los diferentes grupos religiosos que comparten el mismo espacio se identifican con un lenguaje específico concerniente a su religión, que es claramente evidente a través de la manifestación de diversas manifestaciones lingüísticas en sus respectivos paisajes sagrados. Se fotografiaron un total de 114 letreros religiosos utilizando el método de muestreo de diversidad de varios lugares religiosos y carreteras públicas en Patna, la capital de Bihar. Los hallazgos del estudio demuestran una diversidad lingüística interesante en el dominio religioso del paisaje lingüístico con la visibilidad del hindi, del urdu, del inglés, del punjabi, del árabe y del sánscrito.

Palabras clave

paisaje lingüístico, diversidad lingüística, lugar de culto, religión en Patna, lengua e identidad

1. Introduction

India's linguistic diversity is not only reflected by number of languages that are spoken in the country, but also by the way how different languages are exhibited in public spaces of the country (Meganathan 2017). In recent years, a relatively new discipline called "Linguistic landscaping" (LL) came into existence that deals with the language texts that are present in public spaces.

According to Landry & Bourhis (1997) linguistic landscape comprises: "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (Landry & Bourhis 1997: 25).

Linguistic landscape can be considered as a tool that interprets language vitality in any geographical territory. The present study focuses on signs advertising a mixture of religious centers and religious activities in the capital city of Bihar. Bihar is one of the largest states of the country with a population of 104.1 million (Bihar Population Census 2011). The state is divided into 38 administrative districts and has Patna as the capital of the state. Bihar is a multilingual state where different languages like Hindi, Urdu, Bajjika, Magahi, Maithili, Bhojpuri, Surjapuri and Santali are primarily spoken. Despite this linguistic diversity, only Hindi is recognized as the official language of Bihar through the Bihar Official Language Act, 1950 (Brass 1994). The Bihar Official Language (Amendment)

Act, 1980 declared Urdu as the second official language for some specific area and functions (Mallikarjun 1986). Hence, along with Hindi, Urdu is recognised as the second official language for the following purpose in 15 districts of Bihar:

i) Receipt of applications and memoranda in Urdu language and reply thereto in the same language ii) Acceptance by the Registration Officer for registration of documents scribed in Urdu iii) Publication of important Government rules and notifications in Urdu iv) Publication of important Government orders and circulars of public importance in Urdu v) Publication of important Government advertisements in Urdu vi) Translation of Zilla Gazette in Urdu and its publication and vii) Display of important signboards in Urdu.

1.1 Religion in Bihar

Religion is one of the integral parts of the history of a civilization. The history of Bihar says that the state has seen many great civilizations on its land and produced some of the greatest persons of their time. Bihar is the place where two great religions Buddhism and Jainism took their birth. Bihar is also the birthplace of Guru Gobind Singh, the tenth Guru of Sikhs. According to Bihar Religion Census (2011), Hinduism is the major religion of the Indian state of Bihar which is practiced by 82.7% of the total state population followed by Islam, the second largest religious community of Bihar consisting of roughly 17% of the total population. Other religions like Christianity, Sikhism, Buddhism, Jainism and others are practiced by minorities.

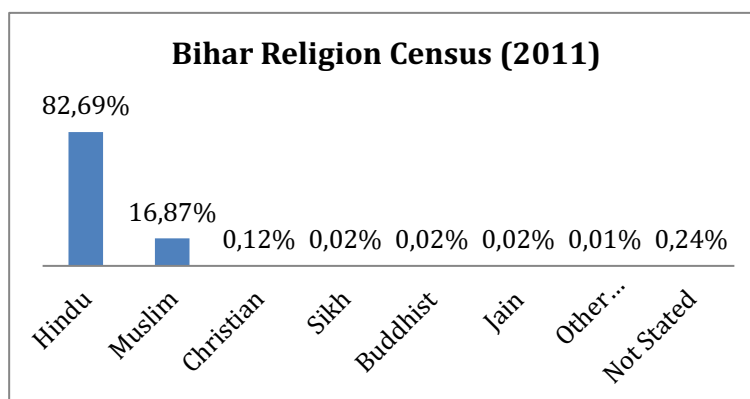


Figure 1. Religion practiced in Bihar

2. Language, religion and identity interface in India

Rajagopalan (2016) claims that “Identity is constituted in and through language”. Language builds identities (national, ethnic, religious and others) which in turn mold the distinctive identities of individual languages (Rajagopalan 2016). Religious identity being one of the specific types of identity formation describes “how a person or group understands, experiences, shapes and is shaped by the psychological, social, political and devotional facets of religious belonging or affiliation” (Jackson II & Hogg 2010). Every religion also has its linguistic demands. As Rosowsky (2006) notes, Muslims cannot perform prayer without reading the first chapter of the Holy Qur’an which is in Arabic. Similarly, there is an inseparable relation between Hinduism and Sanskrit. The origin of Hinduism can be traced to be crack of dawn of Vedic civilization. Since its inception, Sanskrit language is the medium through which Vedic thought has been expressed (Dasa 2010). Hence, Sanskrit forms the foundation of Hindu civilization. All the hymns in Hindu rituals are performed in Sanskrit. Also, the coupling of language and religion can clearly be seen in the case of Sikhs as in the Gurdwara (the place of worship for Sikh), the Guru Granth Sahib (holy book of the Sikh) is read aloud in Gurmukhi, its original language (Singh 2005). In the nineteenth century, under the *divide et impera* ‘divide and rule’ tradition of British imperialism, the religion-and-language tandem has been reflected in the set-up of separate schools for the different religious communities: Sanskrit and Hindi for Hindus, Urdu for Muslims, and Punjabi specially for Sikhs (Safran 2008). The present study focuses upon the role of the languages used in the religious domain of linguistic landscape of Patna in the construction of religious identity. It explores the relationship between language and religious identity reflected through the diverse representation of languages in the holyscapes of the city.

3. Literature review

The majority of contemporary linguistic landscape research focuses on visibility of languages in public spaces. However, in recent years, studies are being conducted that focused solely on the religious aspect of linguistic landscape. Coluzzi & Kitade (2015) studies the languages used in the place of worship in Kuala Lumpur area, Malaysia. Seven diverse houses of worship are chosen (a mosque, a Sikh gurdwara, two churches, a Chinese temple, a Hindu temple and a Theravada Buddhist temple) and brief interviews are conducted from people with an official position within those religious establishments and simultaneously digital pictures are taken of all the signs presented within the compounds where the places of worship were located. The study also surveys to determine the believers' attitudes towards the languages used in the religious signs. Wafa & Wijayanti (2018) presents the languages of the public signs at the religious places in Surabaya. The data are in the forms of photos of outdoor and indoor signs and are taken from ten outstanding religious places in the city namely two mosques, two churches, two Chinese temples (klenteng), two Hindu temples (pura), and two Buddhist temples (vihara). Three hundred and eighty-six public signs are collected. The results demonstrate that the presence of different languages at ten places of worship i.e., Indonesian, Balinese, Javanese, Madurese, Malay, English, Chinese, Arabic, Pāli language, Latin language, German, French, Dutch and Japanese. Alsaif & Starks (2019) explores linguistic landscape of the Grand Mosque in Mecca by exploring linguistic landscape of five domains within the mosque: holiness, education, workplace, local governance and the public sphere. The study also shows the omnipresence of Arabic across the domains. Kochav (2018) studies religious linguistic landscape of the town of Safed in the Upper Galilee in Israel to find out the features, properties and boundaries signifying the spectrum of belief in the Jewish orthodox world. The data collection for this study is based on photographs of Jewish religious items in the town center of Safed (known in Hebrew as Tsfat). One of the four holy cities of Judaism, along with Jerusalem, Hebron and Tiberias, since the sixteenth century, Safed had been a center of Jewish mysticism and this had influenced the religious character of the town today. The photographs are

taken with a mobile phone of 105 items with religious content in the old town center including Yerushalyim, Bar Yochai and Meganai Safed streets in addition to Ha Ari Street on the edge of the deep valley holding the old cemetery. The present work is probably one of the first studies that is conducted focusing on the religious domain of linguistic landscape in Indian and South Asian context.

4. Theoretical background of the study

The study is based on the preference model, proposed in Spolsky & Cooper (1991). This model has made a theoretical development in the field of LL which provides three relevant conditions for using one language over others in the linguistic landscape. The three rules are:

- (a) Sign makers write the signs in the languages that they know.
- (b) They write the signs in the languages that can be read by the people that are expected to read the signs.
- (c) They write in languages which they wish to be identified with.

One of the foremost ways to show socio-political control in the public sphere lies in controlling linguistic landscape of that space through the imposition of language policy of the state. In most cases, those who have political power dominate the official signage domain and transmit ideological messages about the position and status of certain language, whereas the private domain protests through the exclusion of that certain language. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) presents an interesting case in which non-Israeli Palestinians in eastern Jerusalem did not use Hebrew in the bottom-up signs which is Israel's official language. They reveal their dislike towards Hebrew by not using it on their private signs and considered it insignificant at ground level. Rather, their bottom-up flow is characterized mostly by bilingual Arabic and English signs (Ben-Rafael et al. 2006) with which they feel connected. Similarly, in the context of the present study, the third rule of the preference model is highly relevant where the signs at different religious places are written in the language with which respective religious community wish to be identified and associate themselves.

5. Research methodology

The data for the study consist of photographs of signs collected at various places of worship where different religious communities are located. Before data collection, the researcher looked at Google map of Patna, highlighting religious centers and noted religious centers that are seen in daily life. A religious center is defined as a place where religious ceremonies, worship, and prayer services come about. The search on the map reveals numerous religious centers in the city. And the choices are narrowed by aiming to represent the diversity of religious centers. Furthermore, religious signage from the streets of the city also became part of the study. A total of 114 religious signage are photographed by using purposive sampling method at temples, place of worship for Hindu; mosques, place of worship for Muslim; Gurudwara, place of worship for Sikh; Church, place of worship for Christians and its nearby areas. Cook & Campbell (1979) called it 'deliberate sampling for heterogeneity'. This method represents the diverse linguistic landscapes and helps to get a broad range of linguistic landscapes (Grbavac 2013). Later on, the corpus was classified according to the distribution of the languages visible on the diverse religious signage in Patna.

6. Findings and discussions

This section presents both the qualitative and the quantitative findings of the study. The section is divided further into two subsections. The first subsection illustrates the language based distribution of religious signs. The second subsection includes an analysis of taxonomy regarding the signs at diverse places of worship.

6.1 Language distribution in the holyscapes of Patna

This section explores how different languages and language combinations are displayed in the religious space of LL of Patna.

Languages and language combinations	Frequency of occurrence
Hindi	22
Urdu	19
Urdu & Hindi	11
Urdu & Arabic	10
Punjabi & Hindi	7
Hindi, English and Punjabi	10
Punjabi & English	9
Hindi & English	7
English	5
Punjabi	6
Arabic	3
Sanskrit	2
Urdu, Arabic & Hindi	2
Sanskrit & Hindi	1
Total	114

Table 1. Numbers of signs collected and the languages used in them

The analysis of the data finds 6 different languages and 8 different language combinations used in the religious domain of Patna's LL. Among the 6 different languages i.e., Hindi, Urdu, English, Punjabi, Sanskrit and Arabic found in the holyscapes of LL, Hindi is the most frequently used language followed by Urdu monolingual signs. Several language combinations like Urdu & Arabic, Hindi & English, Punjabi & Hindi and others are also visible on the religious signboards of the city. A Multilingual sign Hindi, English and Punjabi is also noticeable. Interestingly, Sanskrit, a language of ancient India with a 3,500 year history (Cardona 2012) has also been observed.

6.2 Taxonomy of religious signage with respect to divergent religious groups

This section demonstrates the classification of religious signage with respect to different religious communities.

Religious groups	Religious establishments	Languages (Monolingual)	Languages (Multilingual)
Hindu	Temple	Hindi, Sanskrit	N/A
Muslim	Mosque	Urdu, Arabic	Arabic & Urdu
Christian	Church	English	English & Hindi
Sikh	Gurudwara	Punjabi	Punjabi & Hindi, Punjabi & English, Punjabi, Punjabi & English

Table 2. Overview of Languages by variety of religious establishment

The above table illustrates that monolingual Hindi and Sanskrit are found in temple signboards while in mosque, monolingual Urdu and Arabic and bilingual Arabic & Urdu signs can be seen. In Church, either solo English or bilingual Hindi & English signs are present whereas, in Gurudwara, Punjabi is clearly the predominant language with different language combinations like Punjabi & Hindi, Punjabi & English and trilingual Punjabi, Hindi & English (see Figures 2 to 12). The analysis indicates that English, despite being the lingua franca of India, is absent in both mosques and temples, the two prominent religious centers of the state. Surprisingly, the invisibility of globalized language English is a clear cut indication of its invitality in most of the religious centers of the city, though it is present in Church and few places of Gurudwara. Punjabi is present with or without Hindi and English throughout the Gurudwars since the Adi Granth, also called Granth or Granth Sahib, the sacred scripture of Sikhism is written in Gurmukhi and the script for Punjabi is Gurmukhi. Similarly, Hindi is visible in all the temples and Urdu is present in all the mosques, though neither of the two is the language of the religious scriptures of Hinduism and Islam respectively. From this analysis, it can be commented that both the religious groups are associated with the scripts of their religious scripture as the Vedas, the holy scripture of Hinduism is originally written in Sanskrit and the holy Qur'an, the only religious scripture of Islam is written in Arabic. Therefore, the

representative religious followers prefer Hindi and Urdu at their respective places of worship to any other language. It must be noted here that Hindi and Urdu are written in the same script as Sanskrit and Arabic respectively. However, Church has either English monolingual or English and Hindi bilingual sign.



Figure 2. Shlokas in Sanskrit inscribed on temple



Figure 3. Hindi monolingual sign in front of Mahavir Temple



Figure 4. Urdu monolingual sign inscribed on Mosque



Figure 5. Arabic sign inscribed on mosque



Figure 6. Invocation for entering the mosque
In Arabic & Urdu bilingual sign



Figure 7. Hindi & English bilingual sign outside Catholic Church

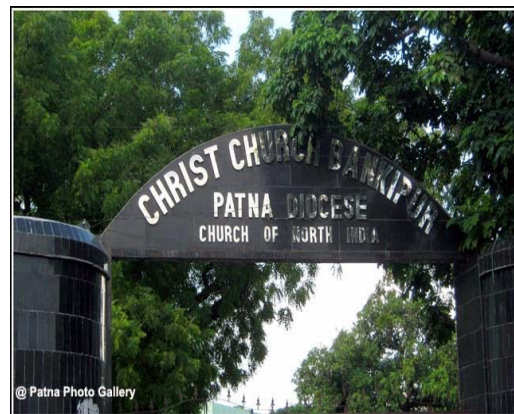


Figure 8. English monolingual sign outside Christ Church



Figure 9. Punjabi and Hindi bilingual sign at Gurudwara



Figure 10. Punjabi monolingual sign at Gurudwara



Figure 11. Punjabi & English bilingual sign at Gurudwara



Figure 12. Punjabi, Hindi and English multilingual sign at the exit of Takhtshree Harmandir jee Patna Sahib Gurudwara

Besides religious establishments, religious signage are also found in public streets advertising about various religious centres, religious activities and festive greetings.



Figure 13. Hindi Sign in Public Street



Figure 14. Urdu & Hindi bilingual sign

In the religious signage Figure 13, people are invited for candle distribution on the occasion of Deepavali which is the festival of light for Hindus. In Figure 14, All India Majlis-e-Ittehad-ul-Muslimeen (AIMIM) political party is wishing on the eve of Milad-un-Nabi i.e the birthday anniversary of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH).



Figure 15. Urdu Monolingual sign



Figure 16. Hindi, English and Punjabi in street sign

Figure 15 is the advertisement of a tour and travel agency and asking people to contact them for Haj and Umrah- the holy pilgrimage for Muslims across the globe. Unlike the other street signs in Patna which are mainly in Hindi and English, Figure 16 shows the way to ‘Gurudwara Kangan Ghat’ written in Hindi, English and Punjabi.



Figure 17. Sanskrit and Hindi signboard for making astrologic rings



Figure 18. Urdu, Arabic and Hindi multilingual sign

7. Conclusion

The study demonstrates the spectrum of religious beliefs and practices reflected through the languages used as public signs in the religious spaces of Patna. The result of the study indicates the presence of different languages like Hindi, Urdu, English, Punjabi, Sanskrit, Arabic and its various combinations in the holyscapes of Patna, Bihar. The majority regional languages spoken in Bihar like Magahi, Bhojpuri and Maithili do not find any space in Patna since none of the scriptures of religion, practiced in Bihar is written in these languages. One more reason behind the absence of regional languages in the holyscapes is that power and prestige are not associated with these languages (Begum & Sinha 2018). Hindi and Urdu, being the official language of the state enjoy a different sort of power in this regard making them strongly placed against other regional languages spoken in Bihar. The findings signify that the holyscapes of the city also has a symbolic function along with an informational function (Landry & Bourhis 1997). The variation in the religious signage of different religion symbolizes the association of particular religious community with particular language that creates religious identity. It also provides a deeper knowledge of the relationship between language and religion in public spaces. The findings clearly manifest the strong emotional connection between a particular religious community, the language and the script of their respective holy scriptures. In summation, the study has revealed the coexistence of different religious groups sharing the same space and having different linguistic ideologies and interests concerning their religion that is obvious through diverse languages in their respective holyscapes.

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