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Linguistic Landscaping: An Overview

Professor Udaya Narayana Singh
Chair-Professor & Head, ACLiS
Amity Centre for Linguistic Studies (ACLiS)
Amity University Haryana, Gurgaon
Pachgaon, Manesar PIN 122431
E-mail: unscil51@gmail.com

INTRODUCTION

Whenever one attempts to undertake landscaping, one implicitly promises changes that will make the object of landscaping look different – afterwards, from what it was, before. Agencies that undertake such contract guarantee a facelift. They will tell you that one is defined by the landscape that one chooses to live in. In case you point out that what you have is what you have inherited – a small cottage here or a upturned nose on your face, or this legacy of a kind of furniture, or a kind of English that is not so fashionable, those who wish to take charge of altering this scenario will assure you that any or all of these can indeed be modified – for a price, of course. That is often an attractive proposition. What if I could be a little taller, or a shade fairer? The moot point is that one cannot choose to ignore the fact that man and his surroundings are defined by differential features, ranging from color of skin to height, structure of chin, shape of eyes and nose as well as color of eye-balls, or even factors like color of hair, etc. Such lamentations are, of course, a matter of the past, would be the reaction of those who manage the affairs of keeping or altering your persona. In fact, there are so many dimensions showing natural variation – in body landscapes that there are numerous agencies – all forming a part of the large beauty industry to work on them.

The crucial quality of the elements that require landscaping can be said to be ‘unevenness’ and ‘asymmetry’. Such qualifications can be a part of a given natural landscape, or they may have been acquired in the way a space has come up over a period of time. Just as unevenness and asymmetry are natural, so are differences among languages as well as differences among different strata of our society. If a flower girl could be transformed into a sophisticated lady speaking a received

pronunciation, where the agent of change (Professor Higgins) had taken it as a personal and professional challenge, the entire process could surely be turned into a profession. The numerous English teaching shops and packages that are available in the market will tell us that such a profession will be driven by the need of the market today.

What is common among the town planners, beauticians, fitness experts and linguists is that all of them could potentially engage themselves in changing personal, performative and spatial landscapes. I think one could, therefore, talk about a theory of landscaping in the context of human languages which we would call ‘Linguistic Landscaping’ (abbreviated here as *LL*)? If *LL* is indeed a possibility, where will this discipline belong? Will it be a part of ‘Geo-linguistics’? Or, is it an endeavor in ‘Anthropological Linguistics’? I guess the ‘Language Planning’ experts, too, would like to look at it as an extension of ‘organized intervention’ in the matter of languages. Some may even like to include it under ‘Information Systems and Sciences’.

What I present here are only a few stray thoughts that can possibly contribute to the theory of ‘Linguistic Landscaping’. The practice of actual landscaping of the type we are interested in the context of large public spaces is at the initial stage of development. In actual engineering, large dams and such bridges grow out of a paper design to become a reality one day as a multi-dimensional entity fulfilling several functions at the same time, and with several consequences – for the people who live in the region or reap the benefits from far-off places, or for the ecology of the region, or for its natural beauty, etc. In case of *LL*, plans growing out of monographs and reports to become large realities are in their infancy. This may not be the case with

all instances of social engineering though. However, once such practices are begun, they would further contribute to theoretical enterprises in LL. Even though one may argue that "in theory, there is no difference between theory and practice, but in practice, there is". One would recall Ernesto Barros Cardoso saying, "Reality is under construction" which is especially true in the context of development of this new multi-disciplinary endeavor.

LANDSCAPING AND PUBLIC VS. PRIVATE SPACES

When it comes to landscaping in areas such as spatial planning, it is only now that many developing countries are waking up to addressing important questions that are thrown up by the way our public spaces have emerged in the last few hundred years. Those among our rulers under whose general direction town planning was undertaken, and who were visionaries in their own way – such as the rulers of a Jaipur or a Mysore had better and far-sighted plan for seeing how their creation would look like. Those instances of growth of a city or a town where there had been no attempt to even think of landscaping, the resultant entities (such as Kolkata) had been disastrous which violate the basic ratio accepted world-wide on how much should be allowed to be inhabited and what should be the percentage of road spaces, for instance. There are instances when later-day administrators have tried to correct whatever had gone wrong in planning, and actually undertook landscaping – just as the current Chief Minister of Andhra Pradesh has done in the context of changing the way Hyderabad is spaced and structured. Such attempts are also to be seen in the context of the history of the region. It is not surprising that a Secunderabad is planned out and executed in the wake of establishing of a military base here, which is also an attempt in similar direction. But there are not many examples of the kind of changes that are being brought in now in Hyderabad and its shadow townships. In most cases, later-day planners devote all attention to apply the best strategies available at hand on large areas adjacent to the old city where they could reclaim land-areas and create what they would consider to be a desirable landscape freely. The cases of Salt Lake City at Kolkata and Bandra Reclamation area at Mumbai are a case in point. These are extensions just as a Secunderabad or a New Delhi have grown out of the older entities.

Notice that in most commonly understood areas of landscaping, especially in the context of private spaces, we see agencies offering numerous services. Some of them go by the fancy names such as 'Modular Brick Paving', 'softscapes' such as shrubbery designs, custom scapes like entry way designing, or how to retain walls which highlight this interesting paradox that lies hidden here is that while landscaping affects nature, it also claims to be smoothening natural imbalances. Landscapers talk about numerous actions: home building, poolscaping, restoration, tree service, leisure designs, pet containments, stair-wares, brick-walling, waterfall management, driveway-building, lighting services are only a few. Notice that here landscaping experts are unwilling to give up what exists and build anew elsewhere like the town planners we have discussed above. The landscapers here specialize in customize one's requirement after

assessing which part and to what extent can one who is commissioning the work would agree to be demolished and drastically altered.

To the extent the Linguistic Landscaping projects and spatial landscaping activities merge can be seen from the way the states of the Indian Union were reorganized on the basis of languages thanks to the States Reorganization Commission. That this activity had a rolling effect can be seen in the new languages and constituencies finding place in the Eighth Schedule of the Constitution as well as in the creation of three new states on the basis of language and ethnicity. Such reorganizations have taken place in all continents when we find Tanganyika and Zanzibar come together to form an entity such as Tanzania, or when two Germanies merge into one or when a monolithic North-Eastern Frontier province is cut up into seven sisters – more or less following the lingua-ethnic boundaries.

HOW IS LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPING DIFFERENT?

The question is where LL differs from all other kinds of landscaping and to what extent is it different from what an ordinary grammarian would do within the paradigm of general linguistics? To my mind, the activities under LL are different, because they make three kinds of 'additions' to the language under an LL operation and to its community of speakers. Let me elaborate here on what gets added and altered through such planned interventions.

First, LL adds to 'functionality' of a language through its various offerings, such as:

- Scripting services
- Spelling services
- Punctuators
- Style designers
- Register creation services
- Media convertors
- Functional Glossary services
- Special-purpose translators
- Creative Communication and Copy-writing services
- Learner-specific Grammatical fragment designing.

Secondly, LL adds a 'Storage System' to the 'Frame' of the language that undergoes its operation in a number of areas:

- Word Bank and in discovering new coinage patterns
- Terminological banks or Term creation activity
- Textbook profile enhancement or Material Production activities
- Evaluation Batteries or Testing Services Development
- Encyclopaediacs, or Knowledge building activities
- Corpora Enhancement on multiple platforms and for multiple applications
- Add-ons in Database Management System for efficient language information retrieval, such as

‘word finders’, ‘paradigm generators’ or ‘synonyms searches’, etc

- Enhanced Network accessors on multilingual platforms
- Transference or Language Accession system acting as Multilingual connectors and providers for additional knowledge resources
- Creation of Language-sensitive Search engine.

Thirdly, LL also adds ‘linkages’ of a kind not possible unless one attempts a set of conscious actions; for example:

- Links with social landscapes – contiguous, discontinuous, diasporic...
- Tries reaching neighboring speech communities
- Attempts at being in contact with distant languages
- Relates to virtual landscapes
- Adds up to large info storages – static or dynamic
- Links to complex network of multi-databases

Let me elaborate them in the following sections.

LL ADDING LANGUAGE FUNCTIONS

Scripting Services: Many new languages are knocking at the doors of literacy and literary productivity now. The leaders of such communities are either finding their internal resources (just as in case of Santals, where Raghunath Murmu came out with ‘Olchiki’ writing system) or are putting their heads together under a political banner or under an institutional set up (such as in cases of ‘GNLF’ for Gorkhali and ‘Bodo Sahitya Sabha’ working for decisions in respect of how to write their language), or are approaching LL-agents at the national level (as the intellectual leaders of Idu-Mishmi community have done when they approached the Central Institute of Indian Languages either to authenticate the ‘Tani lipi’ that they have created or create a new writing system for them professionally). This is what I have referred to as ‘Scripting services.’

Spelling Services: Spelling reforms have been the subject of much controversy in the Indian set up, and different communities have tried resolving it differently. In case of Bengali, the initial attempts were purely personal as grammarians-authors such as Vidyasagar or fiction-writers like Bankimchandra demonstrated. This was later institutionalized thanks to Bangiya Sahitya Parishad activities who undertook publication, creation of science and technology terms and registers as well as formalize spellings to some extent. But this activity got a spurt when a major committee was created in 1933 under the heading ‘Bangla Bananer Niyam Samiti’ (‘The Committee on Benglai Spellings’) with eminent members from different disciplines and walks of life including writers like Tagore, linguists like Suniti Kumar Chatterji, statisticians like P.C. Mahalanobis, and a number of others. A number of individuals (such as Pabitra Sarkar) and agencies (like the newspaper group, ‘Ananda Bazar Patrika’) contributed to modify it further, but what is being said here is that this activity could be taken in amore professional manner by LL-experts for

our languages. As LL affects mostly our written languages or those that are to undergo the activity of development of a written standard, Spelling Services – like Scripting Services, could be an important activity.

Punctuators: Many newly developed languages lack in creating a firm and standardized procedure of punctuation. Notice that with greater amount of give and take between languages, there is a more or less internationally agreed upon system of what serves as a marking pattern. However, where *the* professional help would improve the situation will be in actually using these marks in the texts. Anyone who is experienced in going through written Maithili, Bhojpuri and Magahi would testify that there are so many varying standards and so much uncertainty that this needs to be set right.

Style Designers and Register Creation Services: Development of Style Manuals in Indian languages is a new activity for many. For many major Indian languages, too, we don’t have any manual so far. Designing styles and registers are very important activities for those languages that are christened as official or state languages recently, and are now to be used for purposes not envisaged earlier by the speech community – like as a medium of trade and commerce, or as a language of legal discourse. Many developing countries probably need these services urgently, in the absence of which they are forced to use the erstwhile colonial language which only a tiny percentage of their population could write in.

Media Converters: Converting a language from a literary and cultural language to a language of wider dissemination of knowledge is a very big challenge. Adding a new dimension to language function, use of a language in schools and colleges will not only mean creation of text-books, it also means creation of adequate manpower that will be able to handle it while teaching. Further, a whole battery of testing services and expected answer patterns will have to be developed for the benefit of new learners. The media converters are specialists with adequate knowledge of school curriculum and actual knowledge of teaching environments.

Functional Glossary Making Services: Glossaries are to be developed in each language entering into numerous standard and modern functions in so many domains – banking and commerce dictionaries, administrative and legal glossaries, dictionary for technical and engineering applications, medical and alternative medicine glossary, sports and entertainment dictionaries, etc. are commonly used tools that these languages must have.

Special-Purpose Translators: Softwares and other technical help for special purpose translators are a great help for highly multilingual countries like India where one needs to see and act on an official and administrative document or one that is required for trade and commerce promotion by receiving the text in a language other than the one used and understood at the center (i.e. Hindi and English) but being able to access the content of the document by “reading” it in a kind of “translated” form. Auto-content generation, sentential parsing and simplification technique, or a language accession device are

such devices that could come under this kind of landscaping effort.

Creative Communication and Copy-writing Services: One of the biggest challenges of modern-day functions of newly standardized language is its possible use in writing punch lines for advertisements, or in designing either printed or electronic ads. Use of a language as a cartoon or comic art media is another challenge which some languages in India have faced very well as is evident from their creative communicative use in original. There was a time when Hindi ads were a translation of something that was already done in English. The power of market where this programs in this language fetch very high ad rating on television and radio or as a language of public spaces like hoardings, generation of creative ads in Hindi has taken off. Imagine all this is to be done as the state policy has changed in favor of a particular language, as it happened in sudden dismemberment of East Pakistan and emergence of Bangladesh with Bangla as the national and official language.

Learner-specific Grammatical fragment designing: Lastly, creating learner-specific materials in newly developed languages may be of great importance in large nation-states where speakers of one community constantly take up jobs in another speech community. High degree of bilingualism and mobility that we witness in many developing countries with civil society and democratic set up require such situation driven teaching materials. Specialized groups require very limited competence in another language which would also come under this kind of activity. These are not full fledged grammatical descriptions but only highlighting special aspects of communicative skills in specialized contexts.

LL ADDING A STORAGE SYSTEM TO LANGUAGE FRAME

We often forget that language is both 'within' those who speak it, and 'without' – lying as a social entity outside the speakers. Although it could not be compared with other material objects that one could naturally see, touch, and feel, and also materially possess, it is like a 'frame' that we constantly refer to – a frame that binds diverse speakers together and defines their intellectual territory as well as determines the parameters of their thought. Could one undertake an organized action that would add or alter this frame? Our contention is that LL could achieve precisely this end in the following manner:

Create Word Bank: Notice that this is not to be confused with creation of lexicons about which we have already discussed in the earlier section. But this would refer to discovering those possibilities and adding on to them by which we create words, compounds, calque new expressions, loan translate entities, make seemingly impossible conjoinings, and above all, create newer avenues or formatives which could prove to be quite productive by constructing derivatives. This last thing is often done by borrowing formative affixes, as *-wala* from Hindi-Urdu into Bengali where it is quite productive now.

Terminological banks or Term creation activity: Coining of technical terms is often a personalized action that depends on a

set of people(or experts) manning a committee or a commission who may not look into the spread of the concept or the original term across numerous disciplines. However, LL-specialists will take a global view and go into the etymology and sociology of a given original term and explore its place in our knowledge systems. The two easy options – one pertaining to borrowing of the original term with or without slight modifications, and the other referring to an existing word in the target speech which would otherwise cover only a part of the semantics of the term in the source language or knowledge system – may both have to be abandoned, if need be. But that is possible only if terminological banks have a battery of strategies at its arsenal to be charged when required. *Creating* (from nothing), *identifying* (from among possible formations), *borrowing* (from contiguous as well as donor science-technology or politico-administrative traditions), and *exploring* (from dialectal and sociolectal traditions or from now obscure traditions) terminological strategies are the responsibilities of an LL team.

Textbook profile enhancement and Testing Services Development: In the modern times, textbooks have undergone dramatic changes in all developed societies. Written books have been supplanted or supplemented with e-books, CD-based materials, or internet-based materials besides the traditional 'audio-visual' supplementary materials additions. Even testing and evaluations have been graded and individualized so as to create unique and yet comparable tests for each examinee. Besides, the concept of tele-tutoring of only audio as well as audio-video varieties, electronic and distance education driven study centers, and professional counseling services - all have one thing in common. They all enhance the profile of the traditional textbook designing activity. Development of national-level or international testing systems for language proficiency are needed badly in countries like India with varied level of competence, where performing in a given language may be an important criterion for certain kinds of job profiles.

Encyclopediacs, or Knowledge building activities: It is a common knowledge that each language acts also as a store-house of the knowledge system (or even several knowledge systems – depending on contacts the community had had with external forces). Such systems are liable to have strong points as well as gaps – in terms of modern advancements – and a team of LL specialists could engineer steps to level these gaps by enhancing its sources as well as through generating and expanding the conventional encyclopedia-like storage systems that might have been created by its indigeneous tradition.

Corpora Enhancement on multiple platforms and for multiple applications: An LL-specialist today will add on to the electronic corpora that a given language may have so that all language softwares and application systems could be built on top of them on whichever platform one may like to use. That also means convertibility of the corpora to all other major systems of data entry and arrangement, including transcription and coding systems.

Add-ons in Database Management System: All academics, governments, large business establishments and financial institutions nowadays require an efficient language information

system and retrieval. Generating utilities such as ‘word finders’, ‘paradigm generators’ or ‘synonyms searches’, etc go a long way in helping the users of a given language.

Enhanced Network accessors on multilingual platforms: Availability of web-based dynamic and interactive transcription system which could act as multilingual connectors and provide us with additional knowledge resources would be an important developmental activity of an LL-team. This is not something for which anybody will immediately pay for or commission. But providing such solutions to developing languages will go a long way in ensuring and firmly establishing a democratic set up in the web, by removing the anglophone domination.

Creation of Language-sensitive Search engine: It is important to create engines that allow a non-European language to access and search data according to the writing system the given language may be used to. Currently, although there are a good number of Indian languages sites, extracting information through any available standard engines would require the search among Indian languages record to be performed from ‘A’ through ‘Z’, and not begin from the vocalic symbols so typical of our languages. A lot of distortions and mismatches could be avoided this way.

LL ADDING ‘LINKAGES’

Links with social landscapes: LL would establish different kinds of linkages that could fluctuate between contiguous and discontinuous, or even immobile as well as diasporic groups within the concerned speech community. If social landscaping is done, it is likely that the reforms would reach our neighboring speech communities as well as different segments of our population that may otherwise lie scattered.

Links with Distant languages: After all, all Linguistic landscaping would affect first and foremost all contiguous or genealogically related speech communities. Establishing interlingual links may be one of the aims of an LL action plan.

Relates to visual and virtual landscapes and Links up to Complex Network of Multi-databases: Once a community undergoes an LL treatment, a tradition may so evolve as to not clutter or dirty public spaces by difficult to process or ‘not-in-good-taste’ language ads. And once the body contour of a language is changed, the consequences are of long-term effect benefit. Apart from the visual language landscape, one would surely benefit by becoming a part of a large complex network of

communities and polities which would have its own influences and repercussions – not often predictable.

Adds up to large info storages – static or dynamic: The net result of a language-centric LL activity is an increase of its information storage in terms of books as well as virtual storage. Creation of specialist manpower is also an action that can be planned and executed. Generation of a certain number of foreign language teachers could be steps that are taken to create or enhance an interactive and dynamic storage pattern of a community.

IN CONCLUSION: LL AND OUR CULTURAL LANDSCAPE

Notice that LL could be undertaken only with reference to our Cultural landscape – the art, craft, calligraphy, rituals, beliefs, practices, etc. already existing in our community and its contiguous landscape. Nevertheless, having done that, it also brings about cultural changes. Whether it is introduction to Indi-pop (numerous exponents), or Bhangra music being combined with rap, or even bringing the world of ghazals of Urdu language and culture to the singing tradition of Bengali (as Nazrul did), such changes are often brought about even in our cultural landscapes. Each such change ultimately affect the language(s), too, as there would be a direct demand on the language to be able to perform in this new setting. Since culture is a set of accepted and expected behaviours - a shared set of actions and reactions, the influence of such changes become wide-spread in no time. Language being the principal tool of the way cultural expressions are made, it makes us look at the world from within a social structure. We know that even though language is governed by a ‘structure’ – itself derivable from language, a culture or a language associated with it does begin and end at this structure itself. They both are deeply routed in and aptly colored by their ‘landscapes’.

‘Linguistic Landscaping’, thus, refers to the culture, the geospace, the people, the structure, or all of them in a complex manner. The special about linguistic landscaping is the ‘Cyclicity’ that is exhibited by it, which is best exemplified with the following diagrams:

To conclude, landscaping of our languages will allow them to be put in what the anthropologist Ray Oldenburg called the "third place" - neither home nor work, but the "great, good place" where people meet in daily life to interact socially and relax. It also allows a speech community to grow from the ‘mother tongue’ label to a ‘language’ label – moving from private space to the public space, as it were.