

# Landscaping in Maraland: A Case Study of Siaha Town in Mizoram

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**Abstract**—*The cogitation of Linguistic Landscaping (LL) proffers a vignette juncture of concrete textual décor of a meticulous time and space. LL alludes to the culture, the geo-space, the people, the structure, or all of them in a multifaceted posture. The current paper will delved into the languages displayed in the public signage, the degree of discernible and language use in the official and non-official signs and the tenor of agglomeration of English as a global discourse in Siaha. The significant complementary nature of Indian multilingualism tenders substantial contingency for the contemplation of LL research in India in general and North-East India in particular. The spatial co-existence of different languages and linguistic varieties suggest that LL must be understood in reference to our own cultural landscape. LL approach has broadened the scope of understanding societal multilingualism in a relatively new and innovative outlook. Indeed, LL has become the hottest trend contrivance for exploring language use in the public space.*

**Keywords:** *Linguistic Landscaping, Multilingualism, Siaha, English, Official and Non-official signs.*

## Introduction

Languages engulf our daily existence in their physical silhouette and abstract representations. Their textual decor is being inscribed in an array of milieu in the urban, semi-urban and local environment in Mizoram. Linguistic Landscaping is a spatial testament of the actual use of language in the public domain. It visualized a comprehensive and authentic information source in the public sphere. Globalization has redefined elsewhere to next door, a world of multi-ethnic and multi-cultural village. LL approach has broadened the scope of understanding societal multilingualism in a relatively new and innovative outlook. It stemmed from a relatively large “number of publications, of individual papers, and of special colloquia at conference” (Gorter, 2006). LL has ideologically incarcerated the field of research in the present linguistic studies as a young heuristic discipline. The cogitation of LL has seasoned as a field of appeal and cooperation in applied linguistics, sociology, sociolinguistics, semiotics, social psychology, cognitive science, cultural geography and several other disciplines. No doubt, it has become the hottest innovative contrivance for exploring the salient visibility of

textual décor in the public signage. The recent explosive nature of LL transpires as an upshot of migration augmenting linguistic diversity in numerous cities across the globe, multilingual nature of advertisement as a outcome of deep multilingualism in society, emergence of new form of multilingualism and the launch of digital photography abridging the analysis of language on signs. Today, LL bestowed composite geo-space, the people, and social studies in North-East India in general and Mizoram in particular.

## An overview of Linguistic Landscaping

Linguistic Landscaping refers to all the linguistic objects which mark the public space. It proffers a vignette juncture of concrete textual décor of a meticulous time and space. LL alludes to the culture, the geo-space, the people, the structure, or all of them in a multifaceted posture. Grbavac (2012) defines LL as “a picture of linguistic signs in the public space in a city”. LL may be loosely synchronized with related concepts as linguistic markets, linguistic mosaic, language ecology, cityscape, words on the walls, environment print and so on. The inherent urban settings procure the high density of linguistic diversity. Therefore, Gorter (2006) have aptly advocated a more befitting idiom ‘*multilingual cityscape*’.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) definition of the perception of LL more often than not have been quoted and excerpted by almost all canvassers as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs”. More accurately:

“The language of public road signs, advertisement 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” (1997:25)

## A brief historical opus of LL in India and North-East India

The chronicle of LL inquest can be traced back to 1970s. Landry and Bourhis (1997) are widely acknowledged with coining and defining the term LL. Since the publication of

Landry and Bourhis seminal paper in 1997, research into LL has been enjoying a budding curiosity in sociolinguistics. Itagi and Singh (2002) published a book entitled 'Linguistic Landscaping in India, with particular reference to the new States' first of its kind in India. The first initial work on LL in North-East India was conducted by Lalhmingmawia (2015) and Lalhmingmawia and Singh (2016) with special reference to Aizawl, the capital city of Mizoram. The study illustrated the popular of English overshadowing Mizo, the lingua franca of Mizoram. The choice of English as a preferred code create in-group/out-group boundary depicting symbolic power relations among societal groups residing in Aizawl city. The first LL study in Shillong, Meghalaya was accomplished by Gordon and Singh (2016, 65-78). Gordon and Singh (2016, 76-77) demonstrated English as a language of prestige, an icon of education and its dominance as a symbolic power perceived in trade and commerce, governance and other domains. Swuli and Singh (2016, 6) carried out linguistic research on Thahekhu village located in Dimapur Sardar of Dimapur district, Nagaland. LL of Thahekhu also showcased the global stimulus of English as a 'non-foreign' language.

### Objectives

The main endeavor of the present paper is to explore, compare and set facets of multilingualism and multiculturalism as mirrored and replicated in LL of Siaha, Mizoram.

1. To identify the languages displayed in Siaha, Mizoram.
2. To study the degree of visibility and use of languages in the official and non-official signs in Siaha, Mizoram.
3. To examine the agglomeration of English language as an international language in Siaha, Mizoram.

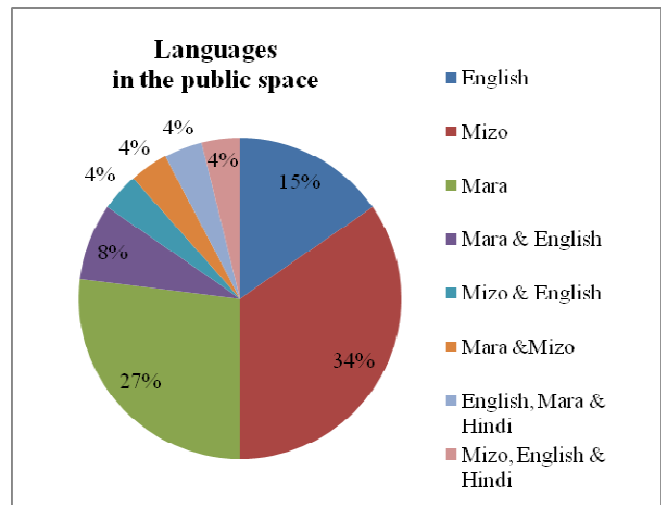
### Methodology

The paper depends on photography meticulously recording defined societal spaces and visual analysis based on linguistic fieldwork methodology to mapping and measuring linguistic objects marking the public space in Siaha town. The corpus of the paper was garnered from Siaha town. Siaha, the third largest town in Mizoram is the administrative capital of Siaha district. The majority of the inhabitants are Mara community. Mara language is used for intra-communication whereas the popular Mizo and English are used for inter-communication. As per report released by Census of 2011, the town has a population of 25,110 of which 12,741 are males whereas 12,369 are females. A total of 25 pictures were considered for the paper. One or more picture of similar text or sign or combination of signs was taken on a couple of occasions. A sign was considered to be "any piece of written text within a spatially definable frame" (Backhaus, 2006). Moreover, a single picture was considered as a single unit of analysis.

### Analysis

A total of four languages were ascertained from the study area: Mara, Mizo, English and Hindi.

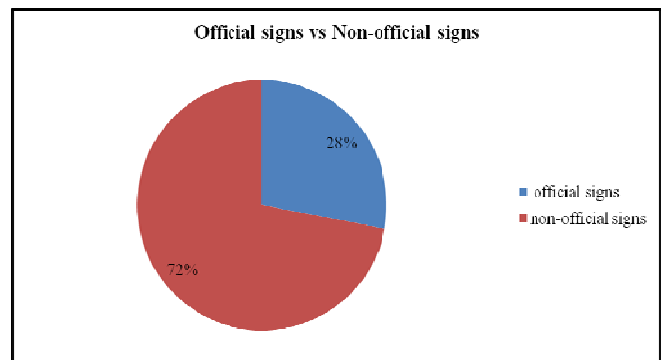
Pie diagram 1 highlighted the strong presence of monolingual Mara (27 percent) and Mizo (34 percent) in the public space of Siaha. English language (15 percent) enjoys an advantageous position as a global discourse both as informational and symbolic markers of a specific geo-space. Monolingual signs (64 percent) preoccupied the construction of Siaha public signage. Bilingual Signs (25 percent) and multilingual signs glimpsed handsome representation in the textual décor of language display. Coulmas (2009) emanates the principality of LL as "...[writing on open display] is a genie let out of bottle".



Pie diagram 1. *Languages in the public space*

### Official versus Non-official signs

One of a key variable in LL research is the distinction between official versus non-official signs as given by Peter Backhaus (2005). All signs set up by the government organizations were considered as official signs (picture 1) whereas the remaining signs were considered as non-official signs (picture 2). Non-official signs (72 percent) have better exposure than the official signs (28 percent). The quantitative outcomes of both the official and non-official signs are graphically represented in Pie diagram 2.



Pie Diagram 2. *Official signs vs Non-official signs*



Picture 1. *An Official sign*



Picture 4. *Bilingual sign*



Picture 2. *Non-official sign*



Picture 5. *Multilingual sign*



Picture 3. *Monolingual sign*



Picture 5



Picture 6



Picture 7

### Findings and Discussion

The cogitation of Linguistic Landscaping (LL) proffers a vignette juncture of concrete textual décor of a meticulous time and space. It overtly portrayed the evidence of recurring multilingual practices in the LL of Siaha town in Mizoram with special reference to the conventional use of four languages: English, a global discourse, Mizo, an official language in the state of Mizoram, Hindi, one of the official languages of India and Mara, spoken by majority of the community living in Siaha town. English language scented an edifying stance as a global discourse both as informational and symbolic markers of a specific geo-space. Henceforth, one can prudently opine the universality of the growing agglomeration of English language in contemporary North-East India and Siaha in particular contemplating its budding application in both official and non-official domains. Mara, the lingua franca of the region reaffirms itself as a symbol of status, prestige and power in the multilingual reality of dominant versus non-dominant languages alongside English in the public space of Siaha. The beefy presence of Mizo language rummages through the spatial environment of Siaha. However, the popular Hindi language confirms minimal embodiment in the words on the wall. The spatial co-existence of different

languages and linguistic varieties insinuate a deep latent comprehension of LL to our own cultural ethos. The current paper thus, edifices the validity, expediency and practicality of LL trends and turns to the dynamics of multilingualism and multiculturalism in Siaha. Indeed, LL has become the hottest trend contrivance for exploring language use in the public space of Siaha. Far from aptness, LL as a young heuristic discipline in North-East India, tenders substantial contingency and a perfect hunting realm for ancillary research.

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