Identity Negotiation Among Minorities: Case of the Nepali Community and Their Linguistic Landscape in Darjeeling

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Abstract

Linguistic landscape (LL) is a display of written language in public spaces. Observation of existing research in LL reflects the minimum manifestation of the study of the interplay between LL and ethnic identity negotiation. Whereas in the Indian context, the realization of identity negotiation instrumentalizing LL of a geographical location is yet to be empirically mapped. In this context, Darjeeling, a multilingual and multicultural district as well as a tourist hotspot becomes a potential site for exploration of identity negotiation from the perspective of LL. The present paper tries to reconceptualize LL while reemphasizing the sociocultural significance of written language. Moreover, the paper empirically examines the part of LL as a linguistic tool in the process of identity negotiation among the Nepali speech community in Darjeeling.

Keywords: Identity, linguistic landscape, Darjeeling, Nepali community, negotiation

Introduction

We are surrounded by languages of different types where written language has become one among several tools for conveying some substances to those who can read it. It impacts the thought process of the patron. For instance, when a passer-by sees a poster written *danger* in front of a building it creates certain inner hesitation in the person who wants to go inside the building. The poster about *no smoking* in petrol pumps suggests us some kind of warning. A glimpse of the nameplate on the door while entering the room creates an unequivocal impression on the interlocutor. Language (written) not only influences cognitively but also holds domination in every society having a (written) tradition of language. It is to be mentioned that according to Shohamy and Gorter (2009), today language (written) has become an integral part of our physical environment. In this context, linguistic landscape (LL, henceforth) is the visual display of written language in public spaces.

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The concept of LL has a brief history while having a long past.

According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), one can trace the notion of LL first in the language planning of Belgium and Quebec. As a result, one can claim that the origin of the concept of LL is trussed in the Belgian case (Landry & Bourhis, 1997). Therefore, it is not an entirely new field of study at least outside India. Interestingly, few academicians produced sociolinguistic studies of language choice in multilingual contexts in the late 1970s (Blackwood et al., 2016, p.xvi).

Studies on the use of multilingualism and global English in advertising came to light in decades of the 1980s and 1990s (Troyer, 2016). Later on in the early 2000s, this emerging field of study was starting to consolidate around the term *Linguistic Landscape* (Blackwood et al., 2016). It must be stated that the publication of the book *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism (2006)* by Druk Gorter laid a stronger groundwork for LL studies.

Nonetheless, LL research is still in its embryonic stage in terms of growth and development in India despite the country being hugely multilingual and multicultural. Although it was not an empirical work one can consider the research conducted by Itagi and Singh (2002) as the initiation for the LL study in the Indian context. Additionally, there are only a few significant studies that have been conducted in India in the field of LL in recent years (see Singh & Chimirala, 2018; Begum & Sinha, 2018; Bharadwaj & Shukla, 2018; Singh & Sinha, 2019). Nonetheless, the state-wise coverage of such studies was found to be confined to very few Indian states such as Himachal Pradesh, Meghalaya, Maharashtra, Bihar, and Assam. While the research showing the interplay between LL and identity in the Indian context is still not even in the embryonic stage.

It is to be mentioned that a multilingual Indian state like West Bengal is home to several languages and ethnicities. Bengali, English, Hindi, Nepali, Santhali, Urdu, Kurukh, Munda, Gurumukhi, and Kamtapuri are some of the languages spoken in the state. Similarly, the Darjeeling district of West Bengal has the highest concentration of languages and cultures, making it a viable location for LL study. Nevertheless, Bengali is the dominant language in the state yet one cannot undermine the significance of minority languages such as Nepali, Hindi, Santhali, Sadari, and other tribal languages in day-to-day communication in public spaces as well as private spaces.

It is to be mentioned that the minority linguistic group especially those who are vulnerable in terms of their identity (in this study the Nepali community) utilizes LL as a tool (among many other tools) for identity negotiation. They manifest identity through LL of a particular territory reflecting and asserting their identities in the public spaces. The present paper delineates the process of identity negotiation among the Nepali community in the Darjeeling district of West Bengal while emphasizing the tenor in studying the LL of Darjeeling.

Conceptualizing Linguistic Landscape

Scholars have conceptualized LL varyingly. For instance, LL according to Cenoz and Gorter (2008), is written facts available in language signs of a specific area. Similarly, Lanza and Woldemariam (2009); Sloboda (2009) define LL as a site of production and reproduction of an

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ideology through linguistic artifacts. Whereas, as per Rafael and Shohamy (2006), LL can be defined as the linguistic objects marking the public space. Nonetheless, the most popular, as well as the widely cited definition, is given by Landry and Bourhis (1997, p.25) as 'the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on govt. buildings combine to form the LL of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration'. Gorter (2013) has included an electronic flat-panel display, Light Emitting Diode (LED) neon light, foam board, electronic message centers, digital signage, interactive touch screen, inflatable signage, and, scrolling banners under the purview of LL.

Blommaert (2013, p.ix) mentions that three linguists Alastair Pennycook, Brian Morgan, and Ryuko Kubota write that in recent years, linguistic landscape study has exploded due to a growing interest in urban multilingualism as well as a focus on language policy concerning public signs. The linguistic signs in public spaces can be categorized into two categories, private signs, and government signs.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) in their widely celebrated article included commercial signs on storefronts and business institutions such as retail stores and banks, commercial advertising on billboards, and advertising signs displayed in public transport and on private vehicles under the private signs. Insomuch as they have included public signs used by national, regional, or municipal governments in the domains of road signs, place names, street names, and inscriptions on government buildings such as ministries, hospitals, universities, metro stations, and public parks under the category of government signs. Notwithstanding, their classification of private and government signs suffers certain ambiguities. They have narrowed down the scope of private signs while solely emphasizing commercial signs. Private signs can be seen not only in commercial advertisements but also in different political propaganda such as demand for employment generation issues in the country and demand for reservation of quota in different domains to mention a few. Likewise, they have confined the government signs within the road signs, place names, and street names. Government signages may also contain advertisements on billboards, for instance, advertisements for family planning and maternal health. Hence, private signs refer to the signs that come from private domains such as private offices, shops, restaurants, associations, and institutions whereas government signs refer to the signs that come from government offices, institutions, and agencies. Both government and private signs comprise the LL of a geographical territory (Leclerc, 1989 cited in Landry & Bourhis 1997, p.27).

It is therefore to be mentioned that the domain (private or government) in which the signs are placed is not as important as from which part (private or government) they have been placed. It is noteworthy to mention that no scholars have classified linguistic signs of civil society in LL. In light of this, a key question is: Which category (private or government) best describes the linguistic signs from the part of civil society in LL? LL (including both private and government signs) of a particular geographical territory serves three functions; manifest, latent, and dysfunctional (see Merton, 1962, p.73-138). The manifest functions of LL are expected or intentional and apparent functions for which the institution, association, firm, or individual creates the signs. It includes territorial limit, language boundaries, language vitality, and language preferred, whereas latent functions of LL refer to

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unintentional or unexpected functions for which the signs are not created in public spaces. It includes the status of the linguistic group, the social identity of an ethnolinguistic group in the territory, and the power of a particular language or linguistic group.

Except for its two major functions, LL has a dysfunctional aspect as well. The dysfunction of LL is a kind of latent function that has a negative consequence. When the linguistic signs of LL would create some conflict and contestation between two or more linguistic groups dysfunction of LL becomes apparent. As a written language, LL of a geographical territory always communicates certain ideas to the public or wider society. Moreover, it can also be a means for a particular minority community for negotiating their ethnolinguistic identity in a multilingual society. The present paper empirically examines the identity negotiation process through LL among the Nepali community in Darjeeling.

Surveying Previous Research

So far as empirical research in the field of LL is concerned it has been observed that the primary focus of LL research has been limited to certain specific areas other than identity in general and particularly ethnolinguistic identity. The foci of LL research have been on linguistic vitality (see Barni & Bagna, 2010; Landry & Bourhis, 1997), the religious LL (see Coluzzi & Kitade, 2015), language visibility and power relation (see Begum & Sinha, 2018; Landry & Bourhis, 1997), differences between top-down and bottom-up signs (see Li, 2021); LL and language policy, language attitude (see Aiestaran et al., 2010; Begum & Sinha, 2018; Garvin, 2010; Raga, 2012; Wang, 2015), and LL of the landscape (see Kumar & Yunus, 2014).

Moreover, it was observed that the dichotomy of top-down and bottom-up signs has received more attention in LL research so far. As a result, it is noted that the connection between LL and ethnolinguistic identity has received the least attention in the previous research until the publication of the book namely *Negotiating and Contesting Identities in Linguistic Landscapes edited* by Blackwood et al. (2016). The book was the first collection of articles that explicitly focused on the issue of identities from the perspective of the LL, in a multilingual context. Even though the study of ethnolinguistic and cultural identities from the perspective of LL is still an under-researched area so far as the LL research field in the Indian context is concerned. In this context, Lanza and Woldemariam (2016, p. xvii) mention that the study of the LL of a particular territory inevitably involves the interweaving of language, culture, and identity. Consequently, more attention is needed to explore the identity negotiation process through LL where the linguistic tools act as expressions of communities facing identity crisis.

Methods and Data

The paper is based on previously researched literature as well as empirical data. Keywords such as identity, language, linguistic landscape, identity crisis, Nepali community, and linguistic identity among others have been useful for discerning articles on several academic platforms. Whereas to fetch the primary data, the researchers selected the location of the study based on the availability of the majority of people from the Nepali community in the Darjeeling district. The selection of the study area was done through the purposive sampling method based on the background

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understanding of the region from the research literature. Thus, Tindhury, Purba Karai Bari under *Champasari* Gram Panchayat, Darjeeling was selected as a location of the study.
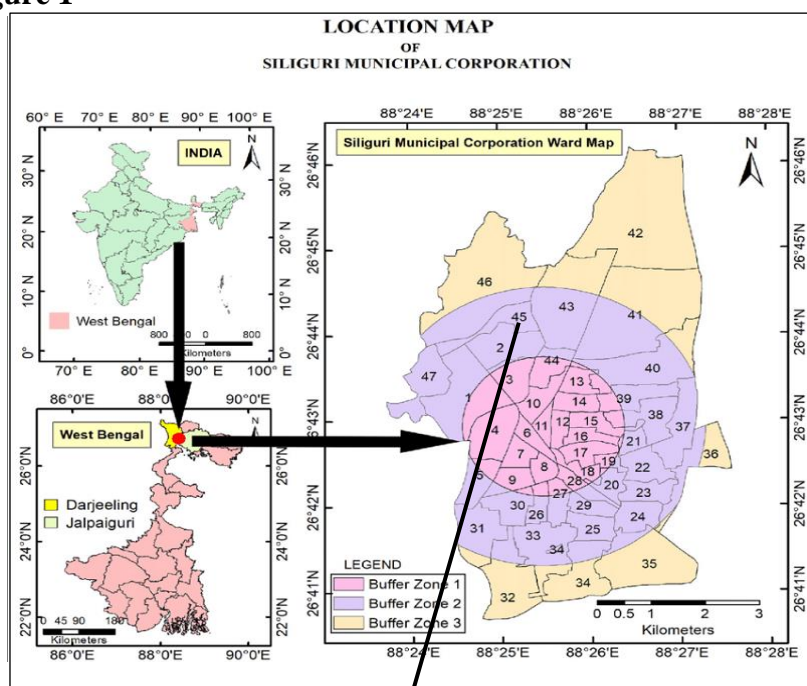
A total number of (available) 31 digital photographs (both bottom-up signs and top-down signs) were collected. Bottom-up signs comprising signs of the shops (owned by the members of the Nepali community) were purposively captured (all kinds of shops such as fast food and grocery to name a few) as the unit of analysis. The digital pictures of the top-down signs of the locality were also captured by the camera of a mobile phone (Vivo Y53, 8 megapixels). Furthermore, data were also collected through the unstructured interview method. The respondents of the study were the owners of the shops.

The qualitative interpretation of the data was accomplished from the subjective perspective of the community members for which the narratives (taken in their native language Nepali of which the authors have mentioned only the English version in this paper) of the respondents were collected.

Thus, it is to be mentioned that the present paper in the very first place presents language (the written) as a tool for excavating social realities. Then, it presents the complex relationship between identity and written language. Also, the paper contextualizes the LL of Darjeeling and its cruciality in the contemporary period presenting a case study of the Tindhury, Purba Karai Bari (urban agglomeration in Siliguri city) of the district followed by a conclusion. The primary argument of the paper has been in appropriating the LL of Darjeeling as a potential location for understanding the process of identity negotiation through the linguistic tool: LL. The authors have analyzed both the top-down and bottom-up signs prevailing in the linguistic landscape of the study area considering each establishment a unit of analysis.

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Map of the Study Area

Figure 1

Source: Adhikary, 2021

Tindhury Purba Karai Bari (study area)

Language and Meaning

We use language (a system of signs) to communicate with one another. Communication involves the expression of what we think about something. It is conceivable to go back to the ancient Greeks to trace the history of interest in languages. Notwithstanding the discourse of language among most philosophers was about the nature of language and its functions (Bahadoran-Baghbaderani & Zarei, 2018) until the beginning of the twentieth century. In this context, Baykent (2016) mentioned that language was a subject for discussion among philosophers if only it was necessary for pursuing epistemological or ontological questions. In simple words, language was taken for granted by philosophers (Bloomfield, 1984).

It was the *linguistic turn* in the early twentieth century led by Gottlob Frege and Bertrand Russell (Baykent, 2016) that proved to be the cornerstone in establishing language as a tool for understanding realities. The linguistic turn according to Slavkovsky and Kutas (2013), is a part of analytical philosophy. Analytical philosophy emerged from the effort of the scientific quest for philosophical interpretation of the world (Slavkovsky & Kutas, 2013). Put simply linguistic turn refers to the understanding the reality focusing on the language. It means that language was considered to be a tool for knowing realities. According to Baykent (2016), after the linguistic turn Language became the main area of philosophical study for its own sake. This particular turn for Rorty (1992) was responsible for the view that language could resolve the problem of philosophy. It is to be mentioned that in the history of philosophy, the role of language in knowledge production has

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been emerging since the historical period. However, it has become widespread only at the turn of the nineteenth and the early twentieth century. Thus, language has become a tool for arriving at the truth. In other words, "meaning is produced *within* language rather than reflected *by* language" (Baxter, 2016, p.36).

Yet the bias of logocentrism was found to be rampant among the great Western philosophers in favor of speech against written language. Later on, this bias influenced most linguists including the founder of linguistics, Ferdinand de Saussure (see Saussure, 1966). The influence according to Reed (1965) was conspicuous throughout the decades of the thirties to the fifties of the twentieth century. Saussure stressed spoken words instead of written texts (Ghosh, 2016) which according to Jacques Derrida is phonocentrism (see Derrida, 1998). Thus, spoken language was prioritized over written language (Mendie & Udofia, 2020) considering written signs merely the representation of spoken sounds (Coward, 1991; Reed, 1965). The linguist Saussure (1966) stated his viewpoint on written language, claiming that the only purpose of writing is to represent speech (Aaron & Joshi, 2006). Regarding logocentrism among linguists Reed (1965) mentions that several fresh pursuits among linguists (recording and analyzing unwritten language, comparative study of dialects of living languages, etc.) came together to make speech more popular than writing.

The dualism of speech and writing among linguists could be found based on a variety of reasons. Firstly, based on the origin of the traditions (speech and writing). Secondly, an underdeveloped writing system compared to available spoken dialects, and thirdly, based on the level of complexity in acquiring. However, Mendie and Udofia (2020) claimed that the priority is based on the ability of explicit meaning production. The audience is closer to the essence of the *meaning* in the case of speech (Mendie & Udofia, 2020). In other words, the sign of *presence* is present in speech. While a sign of *absence* is present in the written text. We speak (do not write) with someone face to face when they are with us.

Consequently, the speech version of the language has no issue of ambiguity as per the ideology of logocentrism. It produces an objective and universal meaning contrary to the written form of language. Therefore, meaning is singular, frozen, and has a structure. Written language is out of the purview of such objective meaning production according to the assumption of logocentrism (see Derrida, 1998). This kind of philosophical and methodological perspective was considered to be fashionable during the decade of the 1960s. This particular perspective came to be known as structuralism. Structuralism has conveyed a large current of logocentric thought that goes back to Plato's time (Mendie & Udofia, 2020). Derrida challenges the Western philosophical tradition by employing *deconstruction* and liberates the meaning (Yegen & Abukan, 2014) from the hegemony of the speech. Derrida strikes logocentrism denying the notion of the primacy of speech over writing.

In fact, as per Derrida (1998), writing not only symbols spoken words but also continually represents language. Moreover, the notion of homogeneity, singularity, stable, foundational, definitive nature of reality was no more entertained. Because there is no center, structure, or definite meaning. In this context, it is to be mentioned that text can be interpreted variously and produce different meanings. In this context of the dualism of speech and writing linguists from the Prague

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Circle according to Aaron and Joshi (2006), believe that spoken and written languages are distinct systems that should be treated equally, whereas, unlike linguists from the Prague Circle, Bloomfield (1984) does not consider writing a *language* instead for him written language is merely a way to capture speech.

Despite the demoted written language to a lower rank, not all modern scholars share the belief that written language exists only to embellish spoken language (Aaron & Joshi, 2006). In this context, rather it can be claimed that LL advocates the view that spoken and written languages are distinct representations of language. LL as already mentioned comprises written language in public spaces. Interaction and communication take place among people through LL of different kinds. LL is thus, based on the principle of social constructionism as Garcia (2015) mentions that the social world is shaped by conversation, conceived as patterns of joint activities similar to games. Now, after positioning the significance of (written) language for the production of genuine knowledge and presenting the cruciality of the written language the authors discuss the correspondence between language and identity in the following section.

Language and Identity

Identity is a complex multidimensional term to define explicitly. It has become a prominent buzzword among social scientists as well as laymen. Explaining the commonness of the word Coulmas (2019) says that today identity has become a household word. According to the *Australian National Dictionary Centre 2015,* the word identity was considered the word of the year (Coulmas, 2019). Identity is not something that one can possess rather it is something that one does (Jenkins, 2008, p. 5).

The word ***identity*** has a Latin root – *identitas*, from idem, meaning, 'the same' (Jenkins, 2008; Coulmas, 2019). Therefore, identity is all about sameness and difference (Coulmas, 2019). It is to be mentioned that in the context of identity, the question of who we are is crucial. Because, as per Llamas and Watt (2009, p.1-8), although the individual sense of self is an important element of identity, locating identity inside the mind discounts the social ground for it.

Smith (2016) argues that identity can be understood by posing two simple questions who we are? And how the world is related to us? Furthermore, several aspects of ourselves such as race, gender, class, occupation, sexual orientation, age, and language among others help us in understanding who we are (Kanno, 2003). Smith (2016) asserts that many more aspects make up one's identity. For Jenkins (2008) Identity is rooted in language to know who is/are who? Reinforcing the importance of language in the context of identity, Joseph (2014, p.19) contains that language manifests categories to which people affix themselves and indexes ways of their utterance, and conduct to cue their belonging. Language is both exclusive as well as inclusive.

Language as exclusive demarcates every speaker from all others and binds together the speakers of the same language to form a linguistic community. In this sense, one can claim that through language, identities are constructed (Baxter, 2016), the identity of a group of people speaking the same language i.e., ethnolinguistic identity. Advocating the cruciality of the linguistic dimension

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of cultural formation Kennedy (2019) advocates for the positive role of language in the construction of cultural identity by strengthening community connection, whereas, identifying the significance of language in identity construction, Peters (1999) argues that people develop a sense of community 'we feeling' through language as a form of communication.

Moreover, based on linguistic similarity scattered individuals come together to create real or imagined relationships among themselves (Chiang, 2010). It is observed that there is an explicit paradigm shift in understanding identity from an essentialist perspective to a non-essentialist perspective in contemporary identity discourse. Identity is not a fixed entity rather it is always in a state of flux. It is not all about being but a process of becoming. Jenkins (2008) has rightly pointed out that identity is sociocultural in its origin, somewhat negotiable, and flexible. The very nature of identity is fluid as a result it is subject to contestation. In other words, identity according to Norton (2000, p.25), is a "site of struggle". Similarly, there is no existence of a homogenous or unchanging form of language. Language is no longer a possession of a particular group or community rather it is circumstantial. Moreover, it is also a site of struggle as people construct their linguistic associations based on time and space. It is no longer appreciable to identify people based on what language they speak. Because perhaps they originally belong to a linguistic group but they project differently belonging to a particular linguistic group. It is common-sense knowledge to associate a person with a particular linguistic group or community (or particular territory sometimes outside the nation-state) based on the language he or she speaks.

However, commonsensical knowledge is not always lawful. For instance, a person can speak the Bengali language perfectly despite the fact the person is not originally from the Bengali linguistic community. Therefore, like identity, language is also constructed and not static. However, the construction is not free from negotiation. This negotiation process is eternal. People always engage in negotiation in terms of circumstances. Identity is a reciprocal process as it is not important what perception we have about who we are. But it is most important that what we want to project our identity is. Moreover, what others have a perception about who we are is most important in identity construction. Identity is constructed in an interaction respective of time and space between self (agent/agency) and other (society/structure). In the ongoing interaction between agency and structure, the process of negotiation occurs in which the agents utilize several tools including linguistic tools: LL. In this context, it is to be mentioned that linguistic landscape (LL) as a linguistic tool has its cruciality in the process of identity negotiation.

Contextualizing Darjeeling as a Field of LL Research: History and Biography

Darjeeling is a multicultural, multi-ethnic, and multilingual (Booth, 2009) landscape. Present-day Darjeeling was *Dorje-ling* (in the Lepcha language). It means 'Place of the Thunderbolt'. Lepcha people were indigenous to the territory (O'Malley, 1999). Historically the territory of Darjeeling was under the dominance of different power. Due to the political instability of this geographical territory, the territoriality of the collectives was not permanent rather it changed with the change of dominance. The region of Darjeeling was under the dominance of *Chogyal* (King) of Sikkim until 1788 (Pradhan, 2009). It is to be mentioned that from the year 1780 till 1816 the territory of Darjeeling was under the Gorkhas. During the Gorkha conquest the formation of Nepal was in progress. Consequently,

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Nepal was not Nepal then). Due to the treaty of Sugauli, 1815-16, the Gorkhas had to return Darjeeling to Sikkim as a result of the Anglo-Gorkha war (1814-1815). Hence, Darjeeling was under the dominance of Gorkhas for almost thirty-six years. As a result, ethnic groups (Tibeto-Burman language family) such as Rai, Limbu, Tamang, Gurung, Magar, Sunwar, and Thami to name a few, and Bahun (Brahmin), Chhetri (Kshatriya), Kami, Damai, and Sarki (Indo-Aryan family speakers) had already been sparsely settled in the territory with the local Lepchas of then Darjeeling. It is noteworthy to mention that such ethnic groups had distinct languages that differed from each other.

In the year 1835, the region became a part of British Indian domination (Sarkar, 2008) to become a sanatorium as well as to serve as a strategic hub for Europeans (O'Malley, 1999). Until the British acquired the region, it was under a dense forest (O'Malley, 1999, p.35). Contrary to the argument of O'Malley (1999), Pradhan (2010) claims that there was already an existence of distinct ethnic groups especially the *Kirati* tribes in the region who were driven out by the oppressive administration of the Chogyal of Sikkim in post-Sugauli treaty. This might be the reason why O'Malley (1999) found only a few people as the population of the region. Later on, when Darjeeling started growing tea successfully in 1848 (Griffiths, 1967) Kirati tribes such as Khambu, Sunwar, Mukhiya, Tamang, Yakkha, Limbu, and other related ethnolinguistic groups added more ethnolinguistic flavor (as tea plantation laborers) to the society in Darjeeling. In this context, it is also to be mentioned that between the years 1840 and 1860, almost twelve percent to fifteen percent of the total Kirati population of then Eastern Nepal existed in colonial Darjeeling (Pradhan, 2009, p.192). Consequently, the territory became culturally and linguistically more diversified. Later on, the heterogenous ethnolinguistic groups united as a culturally homogenous group in Darjeeling instrumentalizing a common language i.e., the Nepali language.

This internal homogeneity was a stipulation for surviving in the oppressive and difficult colonized environment of tea plantations. Nonetheless, the Sanskritisation process can be assumed to be a motivation among several tribal groups in doing away with their linguistic and cultural practices. But the collective solidarity was a more powerful force for them to protect their interest under an umbrella term of the Nepali community bounded by a common language and culture associated with the language. The speaker of the Nepali language culturally came to be known as (an umbrella term) the Nepali community in Darjeeling. Thus, linguistically and culturally distinct ethnolinguistic groups become integral elements of the culturally homogenous Nepali speech community.

In contemporary periods ethnolinguistic revivalism movement has been observed among the Nepali ethnic groups in Darjeeling. Each ethnic group is being encouraged to the usage of their original (forgotten) dialect, rituals, and customs under the banner of several ethnic associations. One can sense such ethnolinguistic and cultural revivalism as a bedrock for the demand for tribalism (see Chhetri, 2017; Sarkar, 2014; Shneiderman &Turin, 2006; Tamang, 2018) which can be a reason for inter-ethnolinguistic contestation in Darjeeling (Sarkar, 2014).

The contemporary state of affairs in Darjeeling as a multicultural and multilingual society may urge the emergence of a distinct linguistic landscape that needs a serious empirical investigation. Besides, currently, Darjeeling is an abode of several speech communities such as Nepali, Hindi,

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Bengali, Bihari, and Tibetan (Booth, 2009). It also witnesses the increasing domination of the global English language for being one of the most visited tourist spots in the country. Consequently, the dynamic LL of Darjeeling has been a distinguishing feature of the multilinguistic society in the district.

Besides time and again occurring identity movements among the Nepali community make Darjeeling a peculiar LL. One can easily observe the public spaces full of billboards, hoarding, graffiti, and mural appealing and asserting their ethnolinguistic identity.

Therefore, an empirical study of Darjeeling is imperative in the present context. An empirical case study of an urban agglomeration, namely *Tindhury Purba Karai Bari* of Siliguri under the Darjeeling district is presented in the following section showing how the ethnic communities assert ethnolinguistic identity through their LL.

Findings

Tindhury Purba Karai Bari, an urban agglomeration comes under the Darjeeling district in Siliguri city of North Bengal. Most of the population of the study area is from the Nepali community which was why the present researchers selected the study area. Of the total 31 signs in the study area, no single name was found written in the Nepali language using Devanagari script. Instead, almost all of the names were found written in the English alphabet if not in the English language. It is noteworthy to mention that all of the bottom-up signs were found written in the Nepali language using the Roman script or in mixed code of Nepali and English language using Roman script, whereas, top-down signs were found written in Nepali language using Devanagari script in the study area.

Figure 2: Name of the Shop Written in Nepali
Language/mixed code, using the Roman Script

The owner of the shop *Doko*[1] Café & Restaurant, Ram Chhetri (name changed), 32 years old a B. A graduate (see figure. 2) says:

> "I love my language (Nepali) very much. I thought of writing the name of the shop in the Nepali language (Devnagari script) because I know the language carries our culture and therefore if the language dies our culture also dies for sure. But this shop is for

[1] The term Doko refers to a hand-woven basket made of bamboo in in the Nepali language.

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people who come from different parts of Siliguri or North Bengal who may not understand the Nepali (written) language and I am a businessman. I had to compromise in this case. Therefore, I kept the name of my shop in Nepali language but using the roman script which on the one hand carries the essence of Nepali culture as well as business purpose on the other hand". (Source: Fieldwork, 18/08/2022, Tindhury Purba Karai Bari).

Figure 3: Top-down Sign Written in Nepali Language

Although every respondent was not educated as Chhetri, most of the respondents were having the same anecdote as Chhetri behind using English/roman script and not using the Nepali language particularly using Devanagari script in writing the name of their shop.

It can be depicted from the above narrative that economic reason has been the prime factor for them to abandon the Nepali language scripted in Devanagari for writing their shop names. It must be noted here that no single name of the shops was found written in Bengali despite the fact Bengali is a dominant language in West Bengal in general and North Bengal particularly. Merely one bottom-up sign was found written in Hindi language using the Roman script in the LL of the urban agglomeration. As already mentioned, that top-down signs were found written in Nepali language scripted in Devanagari (see figure 3). The major reason for this is that the Nepali language is also an official (second) language of West Bengal. However, in the same top-down sign besides the Nepali language, it was also found written the English alphabet signifying the short form of what was written in the Nepali language as G.T.A (Gorkhaland Territorial Administration) (see figure 3).

Figure 4: Sign Written in Hindi language using Roman scrip

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Kailash (name changed), a 35 years old owner of a restaurant (class 10th passed) says –

"Today the world is dominated by the English language. English is a must if one wants to do well in the future. No matter how fine we are in the Nepali language we cannot do much in the future. Almost everyone knows the English alphabet if not proper English. They understand English greater than the Nepali language or way of Nepali writing. It is not that I am rejecting the importance of our mother tongue. Only I am saying that the scope of the Nepali language is narrow. Therefore, we should accept the demand of the situation". (Source: Fieldwork, 18/08/2022, Tindhury Purba Karai Bari).

More than two respondents have the same narration regarding the scope of the Nepali language and its utilitarian value. The English language was given more importance over their mother tongue, and the dominant language (Bengali) which was quite surprising. It shows the increasing utilitarian value of the English language among Nepalis. Moreover, one specific trend was found among them in naming their shops signs. Most of them have kept the name of their shop reflecting the identity of their specific ethnic group, (see figure 5 and 6). As already mentioned above the ethnolinguistic revivalism motivates ethnic members in asserting their identity through signs in LL.

Figure 5: Shop Sign Reflecting ethnic (Thapa) Identity of the owner

Karma Thapa (name changed) 40 years old (literate) owner of a grill shop kept the name of the shop as *Thapa Grill Works*. He (sarcastically) interprets the reason behind keeping his shop name emphasising his ethnic identity as:

"In this place, almost everyone keeps the name of their shop reflecting their ethnic group such as Rai, Kulung, Thapa, et cetera. Then, why should not I? I also have my own ethnic identity as they have. Many of them have stopped celebrating *Dasain*[2] and *Tihar*[3] considering themselves not belonging to the Nepali community. However, I follow all

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[2] It is a festival among the Hindu Nepalis in India celebrated on the eve of Vijayadashami. During this festival, they take blessing of the elderly people of the family. It is also a kind of get-together of family members.

[3] A festival of light which is also known as Deepawali celebrated among Hindu Nepalis. It is celebrated for five days. On the last day of Tihar the sisters offer a respectful ritual to the brother and pray for their long lives for them. Also, the brothers promise sister for providing protection in their thick and thin periods. It is similar to Bhai Dooj.

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our festivals unlike them because we had been celebrating them since our great grandfathers". (Source: Fieldwork, (18/08/2022, Tindhury Purba Karai Bari).
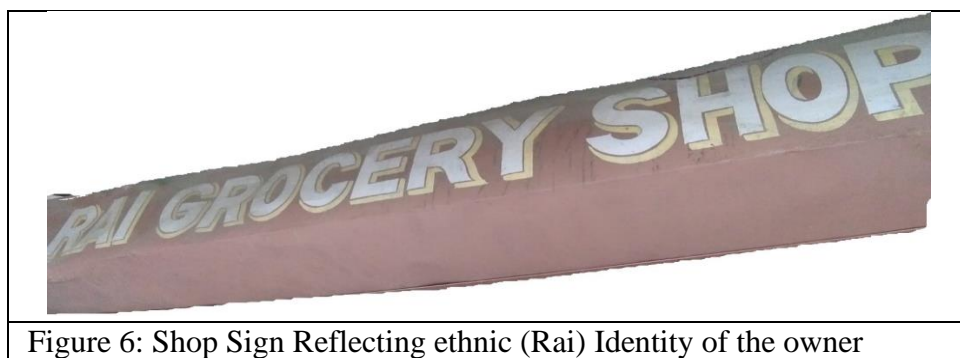

Figure 6: Shop Sign Reflecting ethnic (Rai) Identity of the owner

It is to be mentioned that the Nepali language is not visible in the LL of Tindhury neither because they have a negative attitude towards the language nor using the Nepali language in public space is a shame for them. It is because of the nature of the place and the purpose of the signs. Basically, Tindhury is a small domestic tourist spot. Therefore, making the tourists understand/ recognisable the name of the shop the usage of English or roman script (even if they use the concept of the Nepali language) is rampant. Nevertheless, they use the Nepali language in their day-to-day communication. In fact, the language is a lingua franca even among those people who emphasised their specific ethnic identity. In fact, except for a few exceptional cases, they are unknown to their ethnic (original) language.

It must be mentioned that during the field survey the researchers came across a program in the study area. The program was on the occasion of *Bhasha Diwas* (the day the Nepali language was included in the eighth schedule of the constitution). It was organised by the Nepalis to celebrate their Nepali *language day*. Interestingly during the program all of them irrespective of their original ethnicity such as Rai, Thapa, and Chhetri collectively celebrated the *Bhasha Diwas* enthusiastically. This shows a contestation in claiming their specific ethnic identities.

Discussion and Conclusion

The linguistic landscape is composed of written signs in public spaces. LL is more concerned with written language (signs). It is an emerging field of research in sociolinguistics. Nevertheless, the major focus of the research is other than identity in general. Moreover, so far as the LL research in the Indian context is concerned no research has been found dealing with the interplay between LL and identity negotiation despite its peculiarity of multicultural and multilingualism. Moreover, the Darjeeling district is characterized by its multi-ethnicity and resulting in multilinguistic features and dynamism of the LL of the region. The region can be termed a cultural museum of West Bengal for its diversified ethnolinguistic feature. Furthermore, Darjeeling is a growing urban agglomeration as well as a dynamic site of LL because of its inheritance movement for identity issues. In addition to this, it is a tourist spot for both domestic and international tourists. Therefore, the dynamism of its LL should be understood empirically. Identity negotiation through LL is one of the aspects of LL research. Although it has been established as a distinct research field, not before the present century,

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it is rapidly gaining relevance in contemporary urban studies. One of the reasons for its expanding scope is the phenomenon of mass migration and diaspora formation in urban areas. Multiethnicities, multilingualism, and multiculturalism have become some of the concurrent features of every urban area. Consequently, silent conflicts, contradictions, antagonism, and frictions have also become inherent to the urban lifestyle. As a result, the dominant ethnic, and linguistic groups play the *game of history* (distorted history) and socially stigmatize their existence to subordinate the minorities. The identities become confused for the minorities, once their history gets politicized. Consequently, the process of assertion, modification, manifestation, and reflection of identities takes place as a reaction to politicized history and social stigmatization. To establish their legitimization, the marginalized minority communities not only utilize the available authenticated history but also emphasize producing legitimate knowledge. Besides, they negotiate identity using linguistic tools such as LL. In this whole identity negotiation, social scientists are fascinated to understand the *process* of negotiation.

Darjeeling - both as an urban agglomeration and a district- as a multilingual, multicultural, and multi-ethnic region should be examined from the perspective of LL to understand the process of identity negotiation among the Nepali community.

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