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FUNCTIONS OF ENGLISH IN LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF KATHMANDU, NEPAL

The article examines linguistic landscape of five districts in Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. The relevance of the research lies in the increased interest of linguists in studying the role of English in the context of societies where English has never been a native language. The article draws on the framework of the theory put forward by Kachru who suggested viewing the global use of English as concentric circles. Nepal is a multiethnic, multicultural and multilingual state whose official languages are Nepali and English, i.e., the country belongs to the outer circle of Kachru's model with English as a second language. The analysis of theoretical sources shows that English in Nepal has evolved into a specific variety, Nenglish. It may be argued that Nenglish, like some other variants of English in Asian and African countries, is likely to gain recognition as an independent variety.

The research focused on English as a language of Kathmandu's linguistic landscape has revealed that there is a noticeable difference between the usage of English in signs put up by state- and city-run organisations and commercial companies. Non-commercial organisations tend to create bilingual signs where the content of English and Nepali texts is identical. The primary function of such signs is factual: they name an organisation, deliver information and appeal both to the Nepalese and foreigners. Some of the signs are relational and are designed to connect with people. Commercial companies generate signs where only some elements are English. Here, information is only one of the functions. English in Nepal is associated with competence and high quality. Correspondingly, companies use English as means to enhance their image and advertise themselves as truly professional. Some businesses put up signs only in English, which establishes them as those that deal either with foreigners or with the Nepalese who have a good command of English.

Key words: *English, Nepal, linguistic landscape, advertising.*

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ФУНКЦІЇ АНГЛІЙСЬКОЇ МОВИ У ЛІНГВІСТИЧНОМУ ПЕЙЗАЖІ КАТМАНДУ (НЕПАЛ)

У статті досліджується лінгвістичний пейзаж п'яти районів столиці Непала, Катманду. Актуальність даної теми полягає в намаганнях сучасних лінгвістичних розвідок вивчати роль англійської мови в суспільствах, де англійська ніколи не була рідною мовою. Стаття ґрунтується на теорії Качру, в якій пропонується розглядати використання англійської мови в світі у вигляді концентричних кіл. Непал позиціонує себе як багатомовна, мультикультурна та багатомовна держава з двома офіційними мовами, непальською та англійською. Отже, за моделлю Качру, Непал належить до «зовнішнього кола», тобто до країн, де англійська є другою мовою. Аналіз теоретичних джерел свідчить про те, що англійська в Непалі розвинулася в окремий варіант, який отримав назву непальської англійської (Nenglish). Можна припустити, що непальська англійська, як деякі інші варіанти англійської в азіатських та африканських країнах, вірогідно будуть визнані окремими, незалежними варіантами англійської мови.

Дослідження англійської мови як мови лінгвістичного пейзажу Катманду виявило, що існує помітна відмінність у використанні англійської на вуличних знаках, встановлених державними (місцевими) органами влади та комерційними організаціями. Некомерційні організації зазвичай створюють двомовні тексти, в яких зміст повідомлення англійською та непальською є ідентичним. Первинна функція таких знаків є надання інформації. Такі вивіски називають організацію, надають факти та призначені як для непальців, так і для іноземців. Деякі з вуличних знаків призначені для ініціації чи підтримки контакту між владними структурами та людьми. Комерційні компанії, в свою чергу, створюють знаки, де лише деякі елементи написані англійською. У таких випадках, інформування є лише однією з функцій. Володіння англійською мовою в Непалі є ознакою освіченості, професіоналізму та високої якості. Відповідно, компанії використовують англійську як засіб покращити свій імідж та рекламувати себе як справжніх професіоналів. Деякі компанії створюють вивіски лише англійською, що позиціонує їх як установи, які працюють або лише з іноземцями, або з непальцями, які гарно володіють англійською мовою.

Ключові слова: англійська мова, Непал, лінгвістичний пейзаж, реклама.

Statement of the Problem. Starting from the 17th century when the influence of the British Empire began to expand all over the world, the English language has been steadily embracing new spheres and territories. A number of outstanding linguists of the 20th and 21st centuries have studied language policies in colonial and post-colonial countries, which raised the issue of variants of English and creole languages, pidgins, etc. These issues are both of linguistic and political/ideological nature: besides distinguishing Singlish (Singapore English), Hinglish (Indian

English), Spanglish (Spanish English), Chinglish (Chinese English) and elaborating on their phonetic, lexical and grammatical features, the scholars speculate on the status of these variants of English (see, for example, (Crystal, 1994; Graddol, 2007; Kachru, Smith, 1985; Quirk, 1985; Quirk, 1988). Post-colonial states tend to be multilingual: official languages co-exist with numerous local languages as well as with local variants of English such as such as Singlish, Manglish (Malaysian English), Niglish (Nigerian English) or Nenglish (Nepalese English)

that are used in everyday communication and have developed their own literature. Yet, in many post-colonial countries, language policies tend to maintain official bilingualism: there are two official languages, one of them is a local language and the other is (British) English. The research focuses on the usage of English in linguistic landscape of Kathmandu, the capital of Nepal.

Research review. The current study draws on several pillars. First of all, it is carried out within the framework of Kachru's concentric circles model of the English language (Kachru, 1983) that suggests viewing English as the native language of the 'inner-circle speakers' in the UK, the USA, Australia, etc., as a second language of the 'outer-circle' speakers (Nigeria, India, Singapore) and as a foreign language for the expanding-circle population (the Netherlands, China, Peru, etc.). This model was criticized by the President of the British Academy Quirk (1988). The viewpoints of the two prominent linguists were called 'liberation linguistics' and 'deficit linguistics' respectively and brought about the debates over the status and right of the post-colonial states to 'own' English, i.e., to claim their variant of English as rightful and assert that they are as entitled to enforce language norms on a par with the inner-circle states.

At present, 30 years after the debate, 'varieties of English' and 'a family of English languages' have become common terms. Edited by Kachru and Smith, the world-acclaimed scientific journal *World Englishes* publishes research of amazingly broad geographic scope ranging from Englishes in the Middle East, North Africa and Central Asia (World Englishes. Special Issue: World Englishes in the Middle East and North Africa, 2021; World Englishes. Special Issue: World Englishes in Central Asia, 2022) to Englishes of the Caribbean (World Englishes. Special issue: Englishes of the Caribbean, 2023); it also analyzes World Englishes in terms of various discourses (World Englishes. Special Issue: World Englishes and Digital Media, 2021) and language phenomena, e.g., discourse markers (World Englishes. Special issue: World Englishes and Discourse Markers, 2021) and translanguaging (World Englishes. Special issue: World Englishes and Translanguaging, 2020).

According to Giri, "the spread of English in Nepal across sectors and regions is rapid and systematic" to the extent that it "has, in recent times, reached the lower strata of the population in urban as well as rural areas" (Giri, 2014, p. 198).

Research analysis. Nepal is a multilingual, multicultural and multiracial country. Yadana (2014) claims that 125 ethnic and caste groups reside and

are officially recognized in Nepal (Yadana, 2014). According to the 2011 *National Population and Housing Census*, 123 languages are spoken in this country and ten language scripts are acknowledged (p.170-183). In the context of this ethnic and linguistic diversity, two languages, namely Nepali and English, have been made mandatory for organizations' paperwork (Gautam, 2022, p. 85). For example, Kathmandu University maintains all its official records and emails and students' credentials in English (Panday, 2020).

English is viewed as a language of prestige and higher social status and better job prospects. Shrestha argues, "90% of jobs in Nepal require a command of English", so "English is considered the knowledge in itself and a sole liberator from poverty" (Shrestha, 2017, p. 7). It is only natural that many schools' advertisements feature the phrase 'English as a medium of instruction' (Panday, 2020, p. 6). Having received this type of education, "young people, when communicating with their peers, prefer English words and phrases to identify themselves as modern, educated and cultivated" (Panday, 2020, p. 6). This trend is furthered by the migration of young Nepalese to the Middle Eastern countries. Their employment in these countries' markets has reshaped their attitude towards English and native languages of Nepal (Gautam, Poudel, 2022, p. 95–96).

It goes without saying that, spoken as a second language, English in Nepal has undergone changes and turned into Nenglish. Rai, a famous writer whose works feature Nepalese English, outlines, among others, the following characteristics of Nenglish: Nepali borrowings used to express local concepts; English suffixes attached to Nepalese words and Nepalese suffixes attached to English ones; transliteration of Nepali words into English and vice versa (Rai, 2006, p. 39). Thus, English in Nepal has transformed from the language of the elite to "everybody's language" (Giri, 2014, p. 204), which, according to some scholars, substantiates the status change of English in Nepal. Proponents of this idea go so far as to argue that "Nepal is not an EFL country: English serves either as a primary language or as an alternative language in most domains of life" (Giri, 2014, p. 205).

Recent studies of English in Nepal focus mainly on its functions in institutional settings (Gautam, Poudel, 2022), which is tightly bound with its sociolinguistic features (Giri, 2014; Panday, 2020; Shrestha, 2020). Language use in linguistic landscape is related to sociolinguistics as well as institutional discourse because street signs fall into the category of texts that are to comply with legislation and serve commercial

purpose. There are a number of publications that consider either linguistic landscape of urban Nepal in all its multilingualism (Kandel, 2019) or focus on the role English plays in street signs (Rai, 2018)

The purpose of the article. The objective of this article is to look into the usage of English in Linguistic Landscape of Nepal's capital, Kathmandu. This rather straightforward objective has turned out to be challenging because language usage in multilingual environment forms a continuum: transliteration and transcription lead to language phenomena that are difficult to classify, i.e., in the long run, it is difficult to separate one language from the other due to their merge. The material of the research comprises 57 photos of street signs taken in the southern districts of Kathmandu, namely Patan, Lalitpur, Sanepa, Jaukhel and Jamsikhel: 46 of the signs are put up by commercial organisations and 11 are made up by city authorities.

Main text. Like any capital, Kathmandu is the economic and educational centre of the country. It is the city of the oldest modern school in Nepal, the Durbar High School, and the oldest Tri-Chandra College. The largest, the oldest and the most distinguished university of Nepal, the Tribhuvan University, is also located in Nepal and so is the second largest one, Kathmandu University. In other words, the best schools and colleges of the country are found in Kathmandu or its neighbouring towns, which brings here thousands of school leavers from all over Nepal in the hope to continue their studies. Kathmandu also offers the best employment prospects since it is Nepal's major business centre that houses the Nepal Stock Exchange, the National Bank, the Chamber of Commerce as well as offices of numerous national and international organizations that besides locals, employ highly educated expats (Living in Nepal).

Combined with the global status and prestige of English, these economic and educational factors

create a favourable environment for English to enter even everyday vocabulary of the capital's citizens to the point when it starts feeling "natural to use the word like *soup, sweater, sweet, candy, ice-cream, shoes, paint, jeans, shirt, coat, boot, season, summer, winter, easy, small-size, charger, time, bag, school, college, parlour* and many more" (Rai, 2018, p. 47).

Researchers point out various functions played by English in Kathmandu's street signs. Rai (2018), for example, distinguishes such as fashion, 'coolness', brand signifier, economic/commercial commodity, flexible communicative resource. However, the functions may be reduced to the two main ones: informative and symbolic.

State-arranged signs on buildings of state-funded organizations mostly perform the informative function. In plain words, the content of these signs is the name of an organization. Yet, there may be more than that. Figure 1, for example, is a photo of a bilingual sign (Nepali and English) set up by the state on the historical and cultural site, Ganesh Temple. The function of the signs is informative: it introduces Nepalese as well as international tourists to the monument as well as delivers some further information on the occasions when Ganesh is addressed to by Hindu and Buddhists believers.

The state may also use signs so as to prescribe behaviour rules as it is the case with Figure 2: the bilingual sign warns visitors to refrain from climbing the statue.

Some English signs put up by the authorities perform a 'relational' function: they express good will, sincerity and openness to tourists. The location of the sign in Figure 3 (a construction seen by those drivers who leave the city) makes clear who its target



Fig. 1. Official sign on Ganesh Temple with the informative function

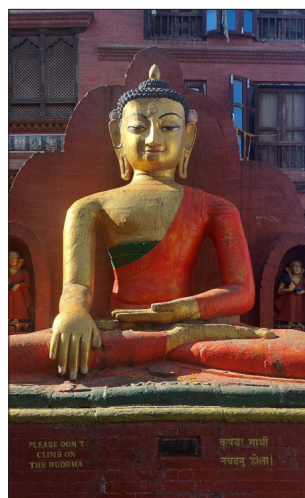


Fig. 2. Official sign with the prescriptive function

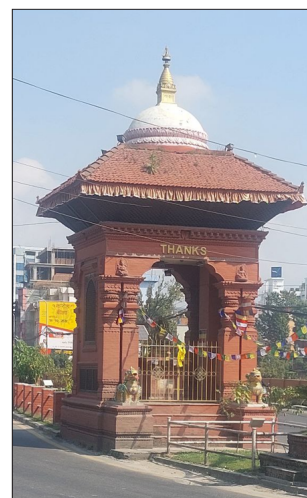


Fig. 3. Official sign with relational function

audience is, yet it is not quite clear what the city authorities thank for.

It is interesting to compare the Nepali courtesy for its own sake with politeness of Ukrainian signs. In Ukraine, one may often come across similar ‘relational’ signs, however, they tend to be specific about what arouses gratitude, e.g., ‘Дякуємо за чисте узбіччя’ (*Thank you for the clean roadside*), ‘Дякуємо за розуміння’ (*Thank you for understanding*) in Figure 4. One may assume that Ukrainian signs thank ‘in advance’, i.e., they contain a hint to people’s expected behaviour. As the second sign in Figure 4 suggests, a sign may contain several messages, each carrying out a function of its own. In this particular case, the main message of the sign informs of the customers’ dress code. Meanwhile, the first sentence ‘Увага!’ (*Attention!*) is aimed at attracting attention, the last sentence is relational: it is designed to mitigate the imposition.

The relational function is performed by the only English word ‘Welcome’ on ‘tuc-tucs’ (minibuses) in Figure 5. It is noteworthy, that other messages on ‘tuc-tucs’ are all in Nepali.

Here, ‘Welcome’ is addressed both to English-speaking tourists as well as local citizens because

this is the word familiar to anyone who has some basic knowledge of English, though according to Rai (2018, p. 46), people do not always know or understand what they really write in English on their signboards.

In commercial signs, informing and relational functions are only one of a few. Other, no less important functions of commercial signs are to attract attention and to enhance the company’s image. That is why English is chosen as one of the most effective means, since English in Nepal is perceived as a marker of ‘good quality’ (Rai, 2018, p. 46). This explains the commercial signs in Figure 6.

The target consumers here are primarily local citizens, so English occurs on these signboards only to inform them of the company’s name and to make a statement of the high qualification of their services, whereas the rest of the text (the informative part) is made accessible for any local and that is why it is written in Nepali.

The examples above are fundamentally different from those in Figure 7: here the entire text is in English because the target client is an expat or an educated and affluent Nepalese: for the former, English is used as a shared language, while for the latter, English plays the image-enhancing function.

It is worth mentioning the format and the type of media used for commercial signs in Figures 6 and 7. Since commercial signs combine the informative function with that of attracting attention and image-building, they tend to be multimodal: their message is delivered with the help of verbal elements as well as various visual means such as graphics, colours, logos and images (of products, etc.). The street signs may be permanent (billboards, signs fixed on walls, over the entrance of the organisation) or portable, i.e., they are taken out into the street to attract guests when the place is open and removed at the end of the working

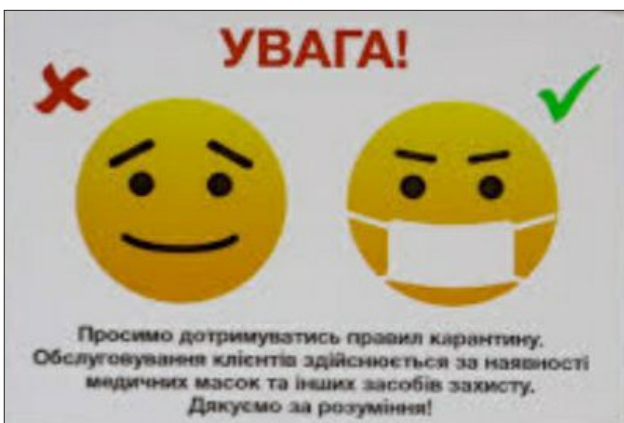


Fig. 4. Ukrainian official signs with (elements of) relational function



Fig. 5. The ‘tuc-tuc’ as part of Linguistic Landscape



Fig. 6. Signs with English components as image-building devices



Fig. 7. Only-English signboards for upmarket customers

day. Yet, Kathmandu features also quite exotic street signs from the point of view of their location, type and content. In Figure 8, there are seven street signs put up to inform of an eatery in two languages, Nepali and English. The two remarkable features of these signs are their self-made format (A4 sheets of paper with the hand-written text) with purely informative content focused on working hours and the location of the diner. Interestingly, that the location is explained both verbally (in the Imperative Mood: *take the alley... take a left...*) and graphically (with the map). It is also noteworthy that the location of the advertised diner is specified by using another, older and better known restaurant (*Ohh my chicken pizza hub*) as a landmark.

Conclusions. The sample of street signs collected Nepal’s capital, Kathmandu, and written in English or containing English reveals that such street signs are put up on state-run constructions. In this case,

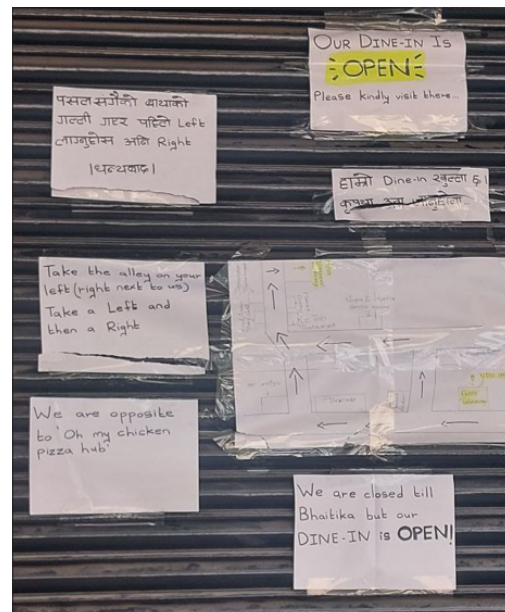


Fig. 8

the signs consist of identical texts in Nepali and English and perform the information function: they name the organization, inform of appropriate visitors' behaviour, or deliver factual information relevant for tourists. The city authorities may also use signs in order to establish cooperative relations with citizens and tourists and, in this case, signs carry out the relational function. Made up by commercial organisations, street signs may be mostly written in Nepali and contain only some English elements or be only in English. English in bilingual commercial signs is used to enhance the image of the company

and the quality of its product; monolingual English street signs appeal to foreigners (and in this case their function is conveying information) or to educated middle- and upper-class Nepalese to whom the language choice of a street sign is primarily an image-building technique. The study has also made a tentative attempt to analyse a street sign as multimodal text, yet a closer look at the correlation between the verbal and nonverbal components that include contextual features, e.g., location, interaction with other elements of linguistic landscape may be a subject-matter of further research.

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