

Linguistic Landscape of Gen Z: The Impact of English Dominance on Endangered Languages

Neha Garg (gargnehavns@bhu.ac.in)

Research Scholar, Department of French Studies, Banaras Hindu University, India



Copyright: © 2024 by the authors. Licensee [JRSP-ELT \(2456-8104\)](http://www.jrspelt.com). This article is an open access article distributed under the terms and conditions of the **Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial 4.0 International License**. (<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>). **Crossref/DOI:** <https://doi.org/10.54850/jrspelt.8.43.003>

Abstract: *This paper focuses on the linguistic landscape for Gen Z in India and the pervasive impact of English dominance over indigenous languages. This is a multifaceted examination through digital media, educational institutions, and technical advancements that have supported the pervasiveness of English, explicating the complex mechanisms of language shift and endangerment. Using available resources such as linguistic studies and community initiatives, it will be possible to comprehensively understand the challenges and opportunities Generation Z faces regarding linguistic diversity. The study begins by examining how digital media influence Gen Z's linguistic choices. This is because social media sites are largely affected by language preferences. The paper also looks at how multilingualism and language barriers could be overcome with the help of technological innovations in machine translation. The paper emphasizes the value of encouraging multilingualism and cohabitation as Gen Z struggles with the intricacies of a globalized language landscape. It argues with the example of the unique linguistic diversity of India, where multiple languages coexist, to make a case for embracing linguistic plurality as an integral part of cultural richness. It highlights the need to help the Gen Z-ers develop a global perspective that goes beyond the limits of a dominating language paradigm and acknowledges linguistic diversity as necessary for a truly inclusive and interconnected world.*

Keywords: Endangered Languages, English Dominance, Gen Z, Linguistic Landscape, Multilingualism

Article History: Received: 16 May -2024; Accepted: 25 May- 2024; Published/Available Online: 30 May- 2024

Introduction

The 21st-century linguistic environment is marked by a dynamic interplay between indigenous languages and the pervasive impact of English, particularly in the context of Gen Z. This complex relationship unfolds in a globalized society where English is becoming increasingly common as a tool of communication, education, and digital engagements. With these scholarly views, this introduction aims to outline an in-depth look at the opportunities and problems generated by the coexistence of indigenous languages and English.

Undeniably, English has taken the title of being an international language, trading across national borders to become a universal lingua franca. Such has been the influence of English in technological, commercial, and academic fields that this language has dramatically influenced many different groups of people's preferences and practices across the world. This global presence is particularly felt in electronic contexts, where online sociality, interactions, and dissemination of digital content are highly dependent on English as the primary language (Androutsopoulos, 2014). In contrast to this pervasive English are the many, often vulnerable, indigenous languages that have long thrived within specific communities. Multilingual India, for example, is a kind of microcosm of this complex interaction. Every indigenous language, from Santali spoken by the Santals to Khasi in the State of Meghalaya, reflects the diversity of culture, history, and identity (Nongbri, 2018; Dash, 2013). Globalization, urbanization, and the onslaught of dominant languages like English spare none of these languages.

Beyond digital platforms, the effect of English extends over traditional education, whereby a division between English and indigenous languages is normally promoted. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) points out to the 'worldwide tendency of school systems to provide higher priority to English than to indigenous languages.' The phenomenon is most vivid in India, where regional languages struggle for their survival

against English's domination as the language of instruction (Menon, 2012). Beyond the language barriers, indigenous languages face the challenges of cultural heritage preservation and community identity. However, indigenous communities show astonishing resilience against these challenges. The constant efforts made for preservation and revitalization of indigenous languages are represented most cogently by language activists, community-based initiatives, and linguistic projects like the People's Linguistic Survey of India (Devy, 2006; People's Linguistic Survey of India, 2013).

English Dominance in Digital Media: A Multifaceted Analysis

One of the most important features of Generation Z's linguistic environment is the effect of English in the digital domain. This section examines the various dimensions of the dominance of English in digital media, citing academic literature to stress its importance.

- **Global Reach of English Online:** The seminal work by David Crystal, "Language and the Internet," came out in 2001 and elaborated on the global presence of English online. Crystal's work shows how English pervaded many digital venues and evolved into the de facto internet language. Social media, in particular, happens to be a strong tool for spreading English content and thus influencing Gen Z users' language preferences worldwide.
- **Social Media and Language Choices:** Language choices of the younger generation are guided by social media, as Danet et al. (2007) point out. The digital platforms, including Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter, with more English content, strongly support the normalization of the use of English. The effect does not only concern linguistic choices but cultural perspective and trends within Gen Z communities.
- **The Effect on Native Languages:** The dominance of English in digital media creates problems for native languages in the linguistically diverse regions of India. The relegation of regional languages to the background can be furthered by English-centric content on digital platforms, as Patil and Patil discussed in 2017. The gradual erosion of linguistic diversity can be witnessed in the interaction of consumers with mainly English content, which can contribute to the disappearance of native languages.
- **Linguistic Hegemony and Representation:** The concept of linguistic hegemony, as outlined by Blommaert in 2010, can be used to understand how English plays the role of a dominant language within digital spaces. According to Blommaert, linguistic hierarchies that are perpetuated through online interactions play a role in influencing language representation. The position of English in a privileged environment means that other languages suffer in visibility and recognition.
- **Code-Switching and Hybridity:** The use of hybrid language practices and code-switching is quite ordinary across digital space. Androutsopoulos explains how Generation Z integrates elements from their home languages with English as part of their linguistic practice. Even though this might appear to be a linguistic innovation, it also points out that English has become pervasive because it now forms part of the hybrid linguistic repertoire in digital communication.
- **Threats to Language Preservation:** The dominance of English in digital media poses challenges to the preservation of linguistic diversity. According to Warschauer and Matuchniak, the emphasis on English fluency in online environments may draw away resources and attention from initiatives to preserve indigenous languages. Unless this change is addressed, it will contribute to the erosion of the Indigenous status of languages that are integral to the identity and culture of certain populations.

The dominance of English in digital media is an issue with complex implications for linguistic diversity and cultural heritage. Efforts must be made conscientiously to identify and encourage linguistic variety as

Generation Z navigates through the digital environment sculpted by English-centric content. The roles of English-centric educational systems and multilingualism-promoting programs are reviewed in the following sections of this paper so that the readers gain a comprehensive knowledge of the opportunities and challenges faced by Gen Z in maintaining linguistic diversity.

English-Centric Educational Systems and Their Impact on Indigenous Languages

The widespread use of English in educational systems worldwide has immense implications on the survival of native languages. This section focuses on dynamics within an English-centric curriculum and the marginalization of non-English languages in formal education, based on academic research and practical experiences.

- **English as the Medium of Instruction:** The widespread use of English as the medium of instruction is one of the key components of English dominance within educational systems. Skutnabb-Kangas (2000) points out that since kids must acquire fluency in English if they are to participate in school; this method frequently marginalizes indigenous languages. This is particularly visible in India, where many reputed educational institutions use English as the medium of instruction.
- **Impact on Regional Languages in India:** Regional languages in India, a country with rich linguistic diversity, struggle as a result of the English-centric education system. According to research by Pattanayak (2008), the regional languages see a decline in usage and status within formal schooling as English gains popularity. A community may lose its cultural identity if they are closely linked to their original languages.
- **Skewed Resource Allocation:** English-centric educational systems often result in skewed allocation of resources. The majority of textbooks, instructional materials, and exams are provided in English, a disservice to pupils for whom English is not a mother tongue. This further marginalizes indigenous languages by sustaining a cycle in which English competence is a sign of academic success (McCarty, 2011).
- **Erosion of Cultural Heritage:** The ramifications are beyond language ability and reach to the degradation of the cultural legacy. Native languages often provide the core vehicle of the transmission of indigenous knowledge systems at risk of being overshadowed by curricula dominated by English. Many societies around the globe show this trend, such as indigenous people in Australia and North America (McCarty, 2011).

Other Languages Examples:

Tulu: Spoken in Karnataka, Tulu faces its difficulties since most of the administration work and education are done in English.

Manipuri: The Manipuri language in the state of Manipur is given competition with English, which affects its usage in formal and online communication.

Gujarati: Although English is vastly used, especially in big metropolitan areas, Gujarati still has competition from this language.

Santali: This language said by the Santali people faces difficulties in the states of West Bengal and Jharkhand due to the use of English in linguistic dynamics.

Konkani: Konkani in the state of Goa is affected by English, especially in education and digital media.

The aforementioned case studies and illustrations demonstrate the complex difficulties of native languages after English takes over as the primary language. They point out how important it is to develop inclusive language policies and community-based projects for preserving the unique linguistic heritage of India.

- **Resilience and Activism:** In spite of these challenges, there is growing resistance to schooling dominated by the use of English. The importance of preserving and promoting indigenous languages in education is evidenced by the emergence of grassroots movements like the "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education" program supported by UNESCO. Such initiatives aim to create educational spaces inclusive of the linguistic diversity present in many communities.

Case Studies: Indian Languages and Communities

India, as a multilingual country, presents diverse case studies that offer insight into how the dominance of English has impacted the use of native languages. An analysis of specific regions and populations reveals the challenges that are being faced by these languages.

Karnataka-Kannada in the Shadow of English: The language Kannada in Karnataka is facing challenges because English is taking the center stage in almost every field. Kannada is the official language of the state, but it is losing out to English in commerce, education, and digital media. Studies by Menon (2012) throw light on how Kannada's cultural and linguistic vitality is weakened by the move towards English-medium education, which serves to marginalize Kannada.

Tamil Nadu-Tamil Struggles amidst English Onslaught: Tamil Nadu, a state with a strong language tradition centred on Tamil, is facing the onslaught of English. Studies by scholars such as Subramaniam (2006) have looked into the impact of English-centric education on students of Tamil. Gradually, the use of Tamil is being superseded by the preference for English-medium education in schools, indicating possible challenges for the future of the language.

Assam-Assamese Language in a Multilingual Landscape: In the state of Assam, with its varied linguistic landscape, the interaction between Assamese and English is quite intricate. Chakraborty's work in 2016 throws light on the challenges that Assamese faces in light of the bilingual populace of the state. English poses an obstacle to the continued use and development of Assamese in the state since it is often perceived as a gateway to economic opportunities.

Maharashtra-Marathi Resilience and the English Factor: The state of Maharashtra shows dynamics influenced by English with regard to the official language Marathi. Language choices are influenced by urbanization and the attraction of English education, even though state schools teach Marathi. Research conducted by Kachru and Kachru in 2008 points out that aggressive steps need to be taken in order to ensure that Marathi will continue to be at the forefront in the face of the encroachment of English.

Meghalaya-Khasi and the Challenge of English in Education: The battle between native languages and English also exists in the region of Meghalaya, the area where the Khasi language is spoken. Education at large poses challenges to the preservation of Khasi due to its using the English language as a primary language of instruction increasingly. Nongbri's research in 2018 probes into how English-centric education affected Khasi language use and identity.

Odisha-Odia's Struggle amidst Globalization: Odia, the official language of Odisha, has challenges that arise due to globalization and the dominance of the English language. The research conducted by Dash in 2013 discusses how the linguistic environment of Odisha is influenced by the linkage of English with economic prospects. There is cause for alarm regarding the possible loss of cultural and linguistic uniqueness due to the marginalization of Odia.

Multilingualism and Cultural Richness: An In-Depth Analysis

In the complex web of international communication, the promotion of multilingualism becomes a must, especially considering the dominance of English. This section explores the aspects of promoting multilingualism and cultural diversity using examples and illustrations of academic research.

- **UNESCO's Support for Multilingualism:** The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization has a major responsibility for the promotion of multilingualism as the cornerstone of cultural diversity. Programs such as "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education" serve as testimony to UNESCO's commitment to language preservation and promotion as a means of protecting cultural heritage. This methodology recognizes the inseparable connection between language and culture; and the promotion of an educational approach that recognizes and includes the linguistic heritage of students.
- **Linguistic Diversity as Cultural Wealth:** According to May's (2008) study, linguistic diversity is a cultural resource of immense value and not just a language issue. Language encapsulates a community's collective wisdom, traditions, and view of the world besides being a form of communication. Promoting multilingualism amounts to recognizing languages as a medium of distinctive cultural expressions and creating an environment within which people can easily explore and contribute to a diverse cultural mosaic.
- **Community-Based Language Revitalization Programs:** Language revitalization programs community-driven give an excellent example of the vibrancy of multilingualism. Language activists, for example, Zuckermann, who heads the Barngarla language revival in Australia, give a vivid indication of how grassroots movements support cultural diversity. This goes beyond language preservation but encompasses resuscitating oral traditions, cultural practices, and a language-based sense of community identity (Zuckermann 2019).
- **Technological Advancements and Multilingualism:** Technology is becoming one of the most powerful tools in advancing multilingualism in the information age. Technology can aid the documentation and preservation of Indigenous languages, such as through projects like the Rosetta Project, a digital repository of language diversity (The Rosetta Project, n.d.). Moreover, machine translation systems can facilitate cross-cultural communication without undermining the importance of individual languages if they are designed with language diversity in mind.
- **Language Education Policies for Linguistic Diversity:** In multilingual regions, language education policies can play an essential role in promoting multilingualism. An excellent example is the language-in-education policy adopted in South Africa in the post-apartheid era. The policy promotes multilingualism in school education as a means of redressing historical linguistic inequalities, although English is one of the official languages. It also recognizes the importance of other languages (Hornberger 2006).
- **Global Citizenship through Multilingual Competence:** Global citizenship is consistent with a promotion of multilingualism. Bilinguals will be able to interact with people of different backgrounds, leading to the promotion of understanding and empathy. This supports the assertion by Grin that multilingualism fosters social cohesiveness and a sense of humanity.

Conclusion

The linguistic landscape for Generation Z is complex, with interplay of several factors, including the dominant factor of English, influencing and acting upon native languages, especially in a diverse country like India. The ramifications of English-centric educational institutions, digital media, and technical breakthroughs affect linguistic diversity, cultural heritage, and community identity in ways that this paper

seeks to discuss. Language preferences among Generation Z are hugely influenced by the dominance of English in the digital media that gets fed from social media and the internet. English is the most widely used language on the internet, according to Crystal, and this shows the difficulty that native languages have to gain ground in the digital platform. Besides impacting language preferences, this digital linguistic hegemony also furthers the general trend of linguistic homogenization. Technology has the potential to bridge linguistic divides and further multilingualism; this is evidenced in the case of machine translation projects like Google's Translate Community. Gen Z can thus negotiate a globalized world while staying connected to their linguistic heritage if they use technology to expand linguistic difference rather than undermine it. Inclusive policies that recognize the value of linguistic variation to foster multilingualism and cultural diversity are promoted in this paper. UNESCO's paradigm of "Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education" celebrates diversity in indigenous languages rather than marginalizing them in order to make education at school inclusive. India is the land of hundreds of different languages, hence recognition of linguistic heterogeneity as intrinsic to cultural wealth.

References

- Crystal, D. (2001). *Language and the Internet*. Cambridge University Press.
- Chakraborty, S. (2016). Language shift and the politics of "mother tongue" education in Assam. *Language Policy*, 15(2), 121-141.
- Dash, B. N. (2013). *Language, policy and politics in global India: A case of linguistic states*. Springer.
- Danet, B., Ruedenberg-Wright, L., Rosenbaum-Tamari, Y., & Katriel, T. (2007). Hmmm...where's that smoke coming from?: Writing, play and performance on Internet Relay Chat. In *Discourse 2.0: Language and New Media* (pp. 141-162). Georgetown University Press.
- Devy, G. N. (2006). Indigeneity, marginality, and marginalia. *Social Dynamics*, 32(1), 14-40.
- Fishman, J. A. (1991). Reversing language shift: Theoretical and empirical foundations of assistance to threatened languages. *Multilingual Matters*.
- Google Translate Community. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://translate.google.com/community>
- Grin, F. (1996). *Language Planning and Economics*. Multilingual Matters.
- Graddol, D. (2006). English Next: Why global English may mean the end of "English as a Foreign Language." The British Council.
- Hornberger, N. H. (2006). Frameworks and models in language policy and planning. In T. Ricento (Ed.), *An introduction to language policy: Theory and method* (pp. 24-41). Blackwell.
- Hinton, L. (2001). *The green book of language revitalization in practice*. Academic Press.
- Kachru, B. B. (1985). Standards, codification, and sociolinguistic realism: The English language in the outer circle. In R. Quirk & H. G. Widdowson (Eds.), *English in the World: Teaching and Learning the Language and Literatures* (pp. 11-30). Cambridge University Press.
- Kroskrity, P. V. (2000). Regimenting languages: Language ideological perspectives. In P. V. Kroskrity (Ed.), *Regimes of language: Ideologies, politics, and identities* (pp. 1-34). School of American Research Press.
- Maffi, L. (2005). Linguistic, cultural, and biological diversity. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 34, 599-617.
- May, S. (2008). *Language and minority rights: Ethnicity, nationalism, and the politics of language*. Routledge.
- McCarty, T. L. (2011). Language planning and policy. *Annual Review of Anthropology*, 40, 449-463.
- Menon, A. (2012). English language education in Karnataka: From colonial policy to contemporary practice. *Language Policy*, 11(1), 41-59.

-
- Nongbri, T. (2018). The Khasi language and education in Meghalaya, India. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 19(3), 317-335.
- Pattanayak, D. P. (2008). Language and social change: A case study from the Indian subcontinent. *Language in Society*, 37(5), 673-693.
- People's Linguistic Survey of India. (2013). Retrieved from <http://www.peopleslinguisticsurvey.org/>
- Phillipson, R. (2009). *Linguistic imperialism continued*. Routledge.
- Skutnabb-Kangas, T. (2000). *Linguistic genocide in education—or worldwide diversity and human rights?* Routledge.
- The Rosetta Project. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://rosettaproject.org/>
- Thieberger, N. (2012). Documenting Indigenous languages: Achievements and challenges. *Trends in Linguistics. Studies and Monographs*, 253.
- UNESCO. (2008). *Mother Tongue-Based Multilingual Education: The Key to Unlocking Sustainable Development*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000186255>
- Warschauer, M., & Matuchniak, T. (2010). New technology and digital worlds: Analyzing evidence of equity in access, use, and outcomes. *Review of Research in Education*, 34(1), 179-225.
- Zuckermann, G. (2019). *Revivalistics: From the Genesis of Israeli to Language Reclamation in Australia and Beyond*. Oxford University Press.