

PREFACE TO THE EDITION

It is with great pleasure that we present the latest issue of the **International Journal of Linguistics Language and Literature (IJLLL)**. This issue brings together a diverse collection of original scholarly works that illuminate the dynamic relationships between language, literature, cognition, media, and society. The contributions reflect the journal's commitment to fostering interdisciplinary inquiry and advancing critical perspectives on the evolving role of linguistic and literary studies in addressing contemporary intellectual and cultural challenges.

The opening article, *Acquired Tongues: Language Acquisition and the Bilingual Literary Imagination*, offers an innovative dialogue between psycholinguistics and literary criticism by examining how the timing and neurobiology of bilingual language acquisition shape translingual literary expression. By distinguishing the creative trajectories of early and late bilingualism, the study enriches our understanding of multilingual literary aesthetics and provides a compelling framework for interpreting linguistic creativity.

The issue then turns to one of the defining challenges of the digital age through *Language, Disinformation, and the Rhetoric of Post-Truth Politics*. This thought-provoking study investigates how political communication has evolved beyond conventional misinformation into sophisticated rhetorical strategies that manipulate perception, emotion, and public discourse. Its emphasis on rhetorical literacy offers valuable insights into strengthening democratic engagement in an era of rapidly expanding digital communication.

Expanding the scope of literary and cultural analysis, *Tony Soprano: Exploring Mental Health through a Mafia Boss* examines one of television's most iconic anti-heroes to explore themes of psychological vulnerability, trauma, masculinity, and identity. The article highlights the capacity of popular media to engage audiences with complex psychological realities while contributing to broader conversations in literary and cultural studies.

Environmental humanities receive significant attention in *Narrating the Anthropocene: Scale, Agency, and Form in Climate Fiction*. Through an insightful exploration of climate fiction, the article demonstrates how contemporary literature reimagines narrative form to address planetary-scale ecological crises. By investigating narrative agency and the aesthetics of environmental storytelling, the study underscores literature's evolving role in representing the complexities of the Anthropocene.

The concluding contribution, *Linguistic Landscapes of the Digital and Urban City*, revisits the influential field of linguistic landscape studies by examining the transition from physical multilingual spaces to digitally mediated environments. The article proposes important methodological distinctions between urban and digital landscapes, offering fresh perspectives on language visibility, public communication, and semiotic practices in increasingly algorithm-driven societies.

Collectively, the articles in this issue demonstrate the remarkable breadth and vitality of contemporary linguistic and literary scholarship. They reveal how language and literature continue to evolve alongside technological innovation, social transformation, cognitive inquiry, and global environmental change. By integrating insights from linguistics, literary criticism, psychology, media studies, and cultural theory, these contributions advance meaningful scholarly conversations that transcend disciplinary boundaries.

We extend our sincere appreciation to all authors for their valuable research contributions, the reviewers for their thoughtful and rigorous evaluations, and the Editorial Board for their unwavering commitment to maintaining the highest standards of academic excellence. We also thank our readers for their continued support of the International Journal of Linguistics Language and Literature (IJLLL). We hope this issue inspires further research, critical dialogue, and interdisciplinary collaboration within the vibrant fields of linguistics, language, and literary studies.

Dr Mahesh Kumar Dey
Chief editor

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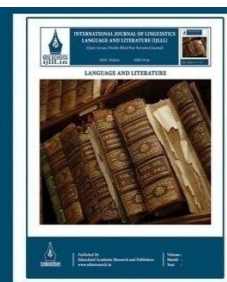
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Acquired Tongues: Language Acquisition and the Bilingual Literary Imagination

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Abstract

This essay argues that the neurobiology and timing of bilingual language acquisition leave a discernible formal signature on translingual literature. Drawing psycholinguistics and literary criticism into dialogue, it contends that the maturational asymmetry between early and late bilingualism, the difference between an entrenched, automatic first system and an effortfully monitored later one, corresponds to two distinct translingual poetics. Writers who acquired their languages within the plastic window of childhood tend toward a poetics of plenitude: an exuberant code-meshing that treats English and the vernacular as one continuous repertoire. Writers who acquire a literary language in adulthood tend toward a poetics of estrangement, marked by restraint, literalism, and metalinguistic self-consciousness. Building on recent accounts of the neurobiological, cognitive, and social differences between childhood and adult learning, and on scholarship analyzing code-switching in South Asian Anglophone writing, the essay reframes the established categories of translingual practice and the translingual imagination as acquisition-sensitive. It proposes that literary form remembers the conditions under which language was learned, and that critical-period research offers literary studies a principled vocabulary for distinguishing kinds of multilingual creativity rather than collapsing them into a single celebratory figure of hybridity.

Keywords:- Translingualism, Bilingualism, Language Acquisition, Critical Period, Code-Switching, Code-Meshing, South Asian Anglophone Literature, Diaspora Writing, Translingual Imagination

Introduction

Literary criticism has grown comfortable with the figure of the bilingual writer as a cosmopolitan virtuoso, a border-crosser whose hybrid idiom resists the tidy nationalism of monolingual canons. Yet the celebratory vocabulary that surrounds translingual authorship tends to flatten an important distinction: not all bilingual writers acquired their languages in the same way, at the same time, or under the same neurological conditions, and these differences are not incidental to their art. A novelist who absorbed English and a South Asian vernacular simultaneously in early childhood does not stand in the same relation to language as a mature novelist who deliberately apprentices herself to a foreign tongue in her forties. To treat both as undifferentiated instances of "hybridity" is to ignore what the psycholinguistics of

acquisition has been telling us for half a century: that the timing of language learning reshapes the brain, the felt texture of fluency, and the writer's relationship to the resources of expression.

This essay proposes that the science of language acquisition and the criticism of translingual literature have more to say to one another than either field has acknowledged. Specifically, it argues that the maturational asymmetry between early and late bilingualism leaves a formal signature on the literary page. The argument unfolds in stages. It first reviews the temporal architecture of acquisition (the critical period, neuroplasticity, and the cognitive and social factors that distinguish childhood from adult learning), drawing on P. M. Chitra's comprehensive synthesis of that research. It then reframes the dominant theories of translingualism, Suresh Canagarajah's translingual practice and Steven Kellman's translingual imagination, as categories that become sharper when read through acquisition. Finally, it tests the resulting hypothesis against three South Asian or South Asian-descended writers, Salman Rushdie, Arundhati Roy, and Jhumpa Lahiri, whose divergent acquisitional histories, I contend, produce two recognizably different translingual styles: a poetics of plenitude and a poetics of estrangement.

The Temporal Architecture of Acquisition

The premise that the age at which a language is learned matters profoundly has its modern origin in Eric Lenneberg's claim that the capacity for effortless, native-like acquisition is bound to a maturational window closing around puberty (Lenneberg). The critical period hypothesis, in its strong form, holds that the neural substrate for language is maximally plastic in early childhood and that the lateralization and consolidation of the brain after puberty render native attainment increasingly improbable. Subsequent research has tempered the absolutism of this account, since the window is now better described as a gradient of declining plasticity than as a slamming door, but the core empirical observation has proved durable. As Chitra documents in her synthesis of the neurobiological, cognitive, and social differences between childhood and adult learning, early acquisition recruits implicit, procedural memory systems that encode grammar automatically, whereas later acquisition leans on explicit, declarative learning that remains effortful and metalinguistically conscious (Chitra 98). The child does not study a language; the child grows it. The adult, by contrast, builds a second system atop an entrenched first one, monitoring its output with a vigilance the native speaker never needs.

This asymmetry is not merely quantitative, a matter of more or less proficiency. It is qualitative, a difference in the kind of knowledge the speaker possesses. Chitra emphasizes that childhood and adult acquisition differ along neurobiological, cognitive, and social axes simultaneously, and that these dimensions interact rather than operate in isolation (Chitra 100). Neurologically, the young brain's synaptic exuberance permits the parallel installation of two phonological and grammatical systems without the interference that besets the adult; cognitively, the adult's mature analytic faculties offer compensatory strategies (rule learning, conscious comparison, mnemonic scaffolding) that the child neither needs nor uses; socially, the contexts of childhood immersion and adult instruction differ in motivation, affect, and the stakes of error. Stephen Krashen's influential distinction between subconscious "acquisition" and conscious "learning," and his hypothesis of an affective filter that can impede uptake when anxiety is high, belongs to the same intellectual lineage: it formalizes the intuition that the adult learner labors under a metalinguistic and emotional burden from which the native child is largely free (Krashen). The adult, in Krashen's terms, can amass conscious knowledge about a language (its rules, its exceptions, its registers) without that knowledge ever fully descending into the spontaneous fluency that acquisition supplies; the result is a permanent, low-level monitoring of one's own output that the native speaker simply does not perform.

It is worth stressing that the modern consensus has softened Lenneberg's strong claim into a more nuanced picture, and that this softening, far from weakening the present argument,

strengthens it. The relevant difference between early and late bilingualism is not that adults cannot learn languages, for manifestly they can, sometimes to extraordinary levels, but that they learn them differently, recruiting different memory systems and arriving at a different phenomenology of fluency. Chitra's contribution is precisely to resist a reductive, single-cause story in favor of a multidimensional one, in which neurobiological plasticity, cognitive maturation, and social context jointly shape the outcome (Chitra 97). For a theory of literary style, this multidimensionality is essential: it means that the mark of acquisition on a writer's prose will be not a single feature but a constellation: rhythm, lexical confidence, syntactic risk, and the felt distance between the writer and the word.

What does this architecture have to do with literature? The answer becomes visible only when we recall, with Lev Vygotsky, that language is not merely a medium of communication but the very instrument of thought, the means by which inner speech organizes consciousness (Vygotsky). If, as Vygotsky argued, word and concept develop together through social interaction, then the language acquired in the formative years is not one tool among many but the scaffolding of the writer's earliest cognition. The early bilingual thinks in an interwoven system from the outset; the late bilingual grafts a new branch onto a thought-structure already grown in another tongue. The literary consequences of this difference, namely what it feels like to compose, what can be taken for granted and what must be wrested into being, are the subject of the readings that follow. The point to register here is that acquisition is not a neutral preliminary to literary art but a condition that shapes the writer's available relation to words.

From Competence to Practice: Translingualism Reframed

If acquisition science describes how speakers come to possess languages, translingualism theory describes what multilingual speakers and writers do with them. Suresh Canagarajah's foundational account displaces the monolingual assumption that languages are discrete, bounded codes that one either masters or fails to master. In its place he proposes translingual practice: the premise that multilingual speakers possess an integrated repertoire from which they draw strategically, negotiating difference and asserting agency rather than switching between sealed systems (Canagarajah). For Canagarajah, the competent translingual is not someone who has perfectly internalized two grammars but someone skilled in the social labor of alignment, accommodation, and creative recombination. Li Wei's theory of translanguaging extends this insight, arguing that the boundaries between named languages are themselves ideological constructs and that the multilingual mind operates within a single, undifferentiated meaning-making capacity (Wei). In educational terms, Ofelia García and Li Wei describe translanguaging as the deployment of a unitary linguistic repertoire without regard to the socially imposed labels of "English" or "Bengali" (García and Wei).

These frameworks are indispensable, but they tend to bracket the question of acquisition. By treating the multilingual repertoire as a flat resource available for negotiation, translingualism risks implying that all repertoires are constituted alike, that the integration Canagarajah celebrates is achieved by the same means whether one learned both languages at three or one of them at forty. The neurobiological evidence suggests otherwise. An integrated repertoire built through simultaneous childhood acquisition is integrated at the level of automatic processing; an integrated repertoire assembled through adult learning is integrated through conscious effort and remains, at the phenomenological level, a coordination of distinguishable systems. Both can produce translingual writing, but the writing they produce need not look the same. This is where Rakhi Ramachandran's analysis becomes valuable. Examining South Asian Anglophone literature, Ramachandran shows that code-switching in these texts is not a lapse from standard English but a deliberate aesthetic and political strategy through which writers inscribe vernacular identity into the colonial language (Ramachandran 71). Her account of code-switching as purposeful literary technique invites the further question

this essay pursues: whether the manner of switching is conditioned by how the switcher acquired the languages in play.

Ramachandran observes that South Asian writers mesh English with vernacular lexicon, syntax, and rhythm to claim ownership of a language inherited through empire, converting an imposed medium into an instrument of cultural assertion (Ramachandran 72). This is precisely the "translingual practice" Canagarajah theorizes, realized on the literary page. But Ramachandran's examples are drawn predominantly from writers for whom English coexisted with Indian languages from childhood, writers whose bilingualism is the early, simultaneous kind. The exuberance she describes, I will argue, is characteristic of that acquisitional history. It is not the only translingual aesthetic available, and it is not the one a late bilingual is likely to produce. To see why, we must turn to the writer who has most explicitly theorized the difference: Steven Kellman.

The Translingual Imagination and the Question of Belatedness

Kellman's study of authors who write in more than one language, or in a language not their first, supplies a taxonomy that acquisition science can deepen. He distinguishes between ambilinguals, who write authoritatively in more than one language, and monolingual translinguals, who write in a single language that is nonetheless not their native one (Kellman). The distinction is, at bottom, an acquisitional one, though Kellman frames it in terms of literary output rather than developmental history. The ambilingual's facility across languages typically reflects an early, deep, plural acquisition; the monolingual translingual's chosen estrangement, that is, writing in an adopted tongue, reflects the belatedness of an adult arrival. Kellman's central insight, that writing in a non-native language can be an act of liberation as much as of constraint, a deliberate shedding of the mother tongue's automatisms, is most fully realized precisely by those who came to their literary language late.

The phenomenology of belated acquisition is what gives the monolingual translingual's work its peculiar charge. Because the adult learner's second language never becomes wholly transparent, never sinks fully beneath the threshold of attention into the automaticity Chitra associates with early procedural encoding, every word retains a slight resistance, a residue of the effort by which it was acquired (Chitra 102). For most language users this resistance is a deficit. For the writer it can be a resource. The defamiliarizing friction that the native speaker has long since lost, the capacity to feel a common word as strange, to weigh it as an object rather than reach through it to its referent, is restored to the adult learner by the very incompleteness of acquisition. Here the neurobiology of late learning and the literary value of estrangement converge. What the critical-period literature registers as the adult's failure to attain native automaticity, the translingual imagination can convert into a heightened, deliberate, almost sculptural relation to words.

This convergence yields the hypothesis that organizes the remainder of this essay. If early, simultaneous bilingualism produces an integrated repertoire processed automatically, it should tend to generate a translingual poetics of plenitude: a confident, maximal code-meshing in which the vernacular floods into English without apology, because for such a writer there was never a firm border to cross. If late, sequential bilingualism produces a coordinated repertoire processed with conscious effort, it should tend to generate a translingual poetics of estrangement: a restrained, exacting style alert to the materiality of each acquired word. These are tendencies, not laws; individual writers complicate them. But as heuristics grounded in acquisition science, they let us read translingual form as a trace of acquisitional history. I test them against Rushdie and Roy on one side and Lahiri on the other.

Code-Meshing of Plenitude: Rushdie, Roy, and the Early Bilingual

Salman Rushdie's prose is the paradigmatic literature of the early bilingual repertoire.

Raised in a Bombay household in which English and Urdu and the polyglot babel of the city coexisted from infancy, Rushdie writes an English that has never known a sealed border with the vernacular. *Midnight's Children* does not so much insert Hindustani words into English sentences as dissolve the distinction between them, generating a "chutnified" idiom in which the rhythms of Indian speech, the interjections, the reduplications, the headlong run-on syntax of oral storytelling, become constitutive of the English itself (Rushdie, *Midnight's Children*). This is code-meshing in the fullest sense Ramachandran describes, with vernacular and colonial language fused into a single expressive instrument rather than alternated between (Ramachandran 71). The exuberance is possible because, for the writer of this acquisitional history, English is not a foreign acquisition to be handled with care but a native possession to be played with at will. The plenitude of the style is the literary expression of an integrated, automatic repertoire.

Rushdie's own reflections make the connection between displacement and language explicit without reducing it to lament. In *Imaginary Homelands* he famously redefines the migrant condition through the etymology of translation: "The word 'translation' comes, etymologically, from the Latin for 'bearing across.' Having been borne across the world, we are translated men" (Rushdie, *Imaginary Homelands* 17). The pun is only available to a writer for whom both the Latinate resources of literary English and the lived experience of South Asian migration are equally near to hand. Notably, Rushdie does not present his English as a burden imposed from without but as territory to be repossessed and remade, the very gesture of ownership that Braj Kachru theorized when he argued that non-native Englishes are legitimate, creative, nativized varieties rather than deficient imitations of a metropolitan standard (Kachru). Rushdie's chutnification is the literary apotheosis of Kachru's "Indianization" of English: a confident appropriation that presupposes the writer's full, early citizenship in the language.

Arundhati Roy's *The God of Small Things* offers a subtler but equally instructive case. Roy too is an early bilingual, and her novel's most striking formal feature, its rendering of a child's apprehension of language, depends on an intimacy with the acquisitional process itself. The twins Estha and Rahel experience English as a thing to be turned over, reversed, capitalized, read backwards, played with; the prose mimes the child's delight in the materiality of words precisely because its author retains unmediated access to the structures of early acquisition (Roy). Where the adult learner must work to recover the strangeness of a familiar word, Roy reaches it from the inside, by ventriloquizing the child who is still acquiring. Her neologisms, her idiosyncratic capitalizations, her fracturing and recombining of standard syntax constitute a code-meshing not primarily between English and Malayalam but between adult standard English and the half-formed, exuberantly rule-bending English of the acquiring child. This is plenitude of a different register from Rushdie's, but it springs from the same source: a writer for whom the early-acquired language is so fully owned that it can be dismantled and rebuilt without anxiety. Both writers exemplify the social dimension Chitra identifies, in which early immersion instills an affective ease with the language that conscious adult learning rarely matches (Chitra 104). That ease is audible in the sheer velocity of their prose, in the willingness to coin, compound, and contort without the hesitation that betrays a borrowed instrument. The early bilingual does not pause to ask whether a construction is permissible, because the construction arrives already sanctioned by a grammar internalized before the faculty of doubt matured. Their syntactic risk-taking is the obverse of the late learner's caution: where Lahiri weighs, Rushdie and Roy plunge, and the plunge is licensed by the automaticity that early acquisition alone confers. The freedom to break a rule presupposes the unconscious possession of it, and that unconscious possession is the gift, and the limit, of the critical period.

Code-Meshing of Estrangement: Lahiri and the Adult Convert's Idiom

Jhumpa Lahiri presents the instructive opposite. Lahiri grew up bilingual in Bengali and English, but the language that produced her late, transformative work is one she acquired deliberately in adulthood: Italian, taken up in her forties and made the medium of *In Other Words*, a memoir composed in Italian and rendered into English by Ann Goldstein because Lahiri refused to translate herself (Lahiri). The book is, among other things, a sustained meditation on adult language acquisition as both ordeal and emancipation, and its style enacts the poetics of estrangement that the neurobiology of late learning predicts. Lahiri's Italian prose is spare, exact, almost austere, the antithesis of Rushdie's flood. It proceeds by short declaratives, by careful, even tentative, placement of each word, by a metalinguistic self-awareness that never lets the reader forget that the writer is operating in an acquired medium. Where the early bilingual takes the language for granted, Lahiri foregrounds the labor of possession.

This austerity is not a failure of artistry; it is the artistic harnessing of the very resistance that Chitra's account attributes to adult acquisition. Because Lahiri's Italian was learned explicitly, through conscious study rather than implicit absorption, it never achieves the frictionless automaticity of a first language, and Lahiri turns that friction into a principle of style (Chitra 99). She has written movingly of the freedom that incompleteness confers, of how writing in a language she has not fully mastered liberates her from the burden of expectation that attended her English. This is precisely Kellman's monolingual translingual: the writer who chooses an adopted tongue as an act of self-refashioning, shedding the automatisms of the native language in order to recover a deliberate, weighed relation to words (Kellman). Her decision not to translate her own Italian back into English, ceding that task to Goldstein, is itself a refusal to let the early-acquired language reassert its dominion; the gap she preserves between herself and English is the structural counterpart of the gap that adult acquisition preserves between her and Italian.

The texture of estrangement is visible even at the level of the sentence. Where Rushdie's clauses proliferate and braid, Lahiri's stand apart, each one tested and set down with the care of someone who cannot rely on the language to carry her unawares. The very limitations of a smaller acquired vocabulary impose a discipline that reads, on the page, as a style: simplicity becomes a virtue because complexity is not freely available. This is the paradox at the heart of the late bilingual's art: constraint, the neurological residue of effortful acquisition, is reconceived as form. The affective filter Krashen describes, ordinarily an obstacle to fluency, is here transmuted into an aesthetic of deliberateness (Krashen). Lahiri does not overcome the foreignness of her medium; she writes from within it, making the condition of the perpetual learner into a literary stance. The estrangement is doubled. Lahiri estranges herself from her native English by writing in Italian, and the Italian itself remains productively estranging because it is, neurologically, a guest in a mind shaped by other languages.

The contrast with Rushdie clarifies the stakes of the acquisitional argument. Both writers are translingual in Canagarajah's sense, negotiating across languages and asserting agency through that negotiation (Canagarajah). Both might be gathered, in a coarse criticism, under the single banner of diasporic hybridity. But their translingual practices are formally opposite, and the opposition tracks the difference in how they acquired their literary languages. Rushdie's plenitude is the signature of an integrated, automatic, early repertoire; Lahiri's estrangement is the signature of a coordinated, effortful, late one. The translingualism of plenitude meshes codes by fusing them; the translingualism of estrangement meshes codes by holding them in deliberate tension, each word kept slightly at arm's length. To read these as two points on a single spectrum of hybridity is to miss the developmental logic that

distinguishes them, a logic that acquisition science, and Chitra's synthesis in particular, makes legible.

Acquisition as Literary Memory: Toward an Original Position

The readings above support a claim that neither psycholinguistics nor literary criticism has fully articulated on its own: literary form remembers the conditions under which language was acquired. This is the original critical position this essay advances. Translingual style is not simply a function of an author's politics, their diasporic positioning, or their theoretical sophistication, though all of these matter. It is also, and more deeply, a function of the developmental history by which the writer came to possess the languages they mesh. The neurobiological distinction between implicit early acquisition and explicit late learning, the distinction Chitra anatomizes across its neural, cognitive, and social dimensions, reappears, transposed, as a distinction between two translingual poetics (Chitra 101). Form is acquisition's afterlife.

Reframing translingualism this way has consequences for how we read. It cautions against the homogenizing impulse that treats every code-meshed text as a uniform gesture of resistance. Ramachandran rightly insists that code-switching in South Asian writing is purposive rather than accidental, an assertion of identity through the colonial language (Ramachandran 73); the present argument adds that the purpose is realized through different formal means depending on whether the writer's bilingualism is early or late, simultaneous or sequential. It also enriches Kellman's taxonomy by grounding his literary categories, ambilingual and monolingual translingual, in the developmental science that explains why those categories exist (Kellman). And it extends Canagarajah's translingual practice by insisting that the "repertoire" from which the practitioner draws is not a flat inventory but a structured deposit of acquisitional history, integrated or coordinated according to when its languages were learned (Canagarajah). Even the translanguaging tradition's claim that named languages are ideological fictions can be reconciled with this view: the unitary repertoire that García and Wei describe is real at the level of meaning-making, yet its internal processing architecture still bears the maturational imprint of acquisition (García and Wei; Wei).

There is a final, Vygotskian dimension to the claim. If language is the instrument through which thought is socially constituted, then the language acquired in childhood furnishes the original scaffolding of the writer's cognition, while a language acquired in adulthood is built upon, and partly against, that prior structure (Vygotsky). The early bilingual's plenitude expresses a cognition whose very foundations are plural; the late bilingual's estrangement expresses a cognition reaching toward a structure it did not grow from within. The translingual imagination, in short, is not one faculty but at least two, distinguished by the developmental moment at which its languages entered the mind. Critical-period science gives literary studies a principled vocabulary for honoring that difference rather than dissolving it into an undifferentiated celebration of the hybrid.

Conclusion

The bilingual literary imagination has too often been theorized as though the timing of language acquisition were irrelevant to it, as though the writer who grew two languages in childhood and the writer who apprenticed herself to a third in middle age were doing fundamentally the same thing under different flags. This essay has argued the contrary. The neurobiology and timing of acquisition, as synthesized in Chitra's account of the differences between childhood and adult learning, leave a formal signature on translingual literature, distinguishing a poetics of plenitude from a poetics of estrangement. Rushdie's chutnified abundance and Roy's child-grammar exuberance arise from early, integrated, automatic repertoires; Lahiri's austere, deliberate, metalinguistically vigilant Italian arises from a late,

coordinated, effortful one. Read through Ramachandran's account of purposive code-switching, Canagarajah's translingual practice, and Kellman's translingual imagination, these styles emerge not as variants of a single hybridity but as the literary afterlives of distinct developmental histories.

To say that form remembers acquisition is not to reduce literature to neurology. It is to recover a dimension of translingual creativity that the celebratory rhetoric of hybridity has obscured, and to give criticism a more exact instrument for describing what bilingual writers actually do with the languages they hold. The reward of bringing psycholinguistics and literary studies into conversation is not the colonization of one field by the other but a mutual sharpening: acquisition science gains a demonstration that the consequences of critical-period effects extend into the highest reaches of verbal art, and literary studies gains a principled account of why the translingual imagination speaks in more than one voice. The writer who was borne across the world, in Rushdie's phrase, carries the manner of that bearing in the very grain of the prose, and learning to read that grain is learning to read acquisition itself.

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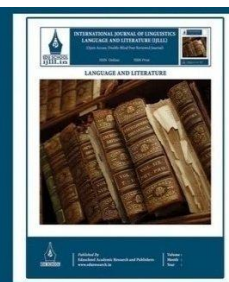
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Language, Disinformation, and the Rhetoric of Post-Truth Politics

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Abstract

This article advances a linguistic and rhetorical account of the so-called post-truth condition, named word of the year by a major dictionary in 2016. Against the prevailing framing of post-truth as a deficit of facts to be remedied by correction, it argues that the condition is better understood as a crisis of the rhetorical commons: a migration of political language away from persuasion toward the strategic manufacture of doubt and affect. Synthesizing philosophical work on indifference to truth, the cognitive theory of framing and conceptual metaphor, critical discourse analysis, and longstanding claims about debased political language, the article isolates a recurring rhetorical architecture in which form displaces reference. It then examines how repetition exploits the illusory-truth effect, how emotional saturation substitutes for evidentiary adjudication, and how computational propaganda, bots, and astroturfing industrialize these mechanisms at scale. The central claim is that post-truth speech differs categorically from the ordinary political lie: where the liar still honors the authority of truth by concealing it, post-truth discourse erodes the audience's very appetite for adjudication. The article concludes that media literacy must be reconceived as rhetorical literacy, teaching citizens to read frames rather than merely verify facts, if democratic discourse is to be repaired.

Keywords:- Post-Truth, Disinformation, Critical Discourse Analysis, Framing, Conceptual Metaphor, Computational Propaganda, Populist Rhetoric, Media Literacy

Introduction

When Oxford Dictionaries selected post-truth as its word of the year for 2016, it defined the term as "relating to or denoting circumstances in which objective facts are less influential in shaping public opinion than appeals to emotion and personal belief," noting that usage had risen roughly two thousand percent over the preceding year amid the British referendum on European Union membership and the United States presidential campaign. The lexicographers had registered something more consequential than a fashionable coinage. The prefix is telling: post-truth does not name a world without truth so much as one in which truth has been displaced from its former office, demoted from arbiter to optional accessory. The condition it describes is not primarily epistemological but rhetorical. What has changed is less what citizens are able

to know than how political language solicits their assent, and the locus of that change lies in the structures of discourse itself.

This article argues that the post-truth moment is best understood not as a sudden scarcity of facts but as a transformation in the relationship between language and referential accountability. The dominant public response, embodied in the proliferation of fact-checking desks, has assumed that the problem is informational and that the remedy is correction. Yet the persistence of disinformation in the face of relentless correction suggests that the diagnosis is incomplete. Drawing together the philosophy of truthfulness, cognitive linguistics, critical discourse analysis, and the empirical study of computational propaganda, I contend that post-truth politics operates by privileging rhetorical form over propositional reference. Its characteristic moves, framing, repetition, and emotional saturation, are designed not to win an argument about a particular fact but to dissolve the shared procedures by which facts are collectively adjudicated. The lie, paradoxically, pays homage to truth; post-truth speech withdraws that homage. Understanding the linguistic mechanics of this withdrawal is the precondition for any serious defense of democratic discourse.

Naming the Condition: Post-Truth Beyond the Lie

The philosophical groundwork for distinguishing post-truth discourse from ordinary mendacity was laid, well before the term entered common use, by Harry Frankfurt. In his slender treatise *On Bullshit*, Frankfurt draws a now-famous contrast between the liar and the figure he names the bullshitter. The liar, he observes, remains oriented to the truth, for he must know it in order to lead his audience away from it; deception of this kind "presupposes a certain awareness of the truth itself." The bullshitter, by contrast, is indifferent to whether his statements are true or false, attentive only to their effect. It is for this reason that Frankfurt concludes "bullshit is a greater enemy of the truth than lies are" (Frankfurt 61). The distinction is indispensable for naming the post-truth condition with precision. The political actor who circulates a claim about crowd sizes or migration statistics, untroubled by its falsity and undeterred by its refutation, is not engaged in lying in the classical sense. He is performing a sovereignty over reality in which the truth-value of an utterance has become beside the point.

Lee McIntyre's *Post-Truth*, the most influential book-length treatment of the phenomenon, develops this insight into a political thesis. McIntyre traces the condition through science denial, cognitive bias, and the postmodern academy to the contemporary ecosystem of partisan media, and arrives at a definition that resonates with Frankfurt's: post-truth, he argues, is fundamentally an "assertion of ideological supremacy" by which its practitioners compel belief "regardless of the evidence" (McIntyre 13). The decisive word is supremacy. Post-truth discourse is less a claim about the world than a claim about who has the power to define it. To insist on a falsehood in the teeth of overwhelming counter-evidence is to demonstrate that loyalty to the tribe outranks fidelity to the facts, and to dare one's opponents to object. The falsehood functions as a loyalty test rather than a description.

Hannah Arendt anticipated the political stakes of this reorientation decades earlier. In "Truth and Politics," first published in *The New Yorker* in 1967 and collected in *Between Past and Future*, she warned that the organized, systematic lying of modern politics aims not merely to deceive about particular matters but to destroy the very faculty by which citizens distinguish the true from the false. The consistent substitution of falsehood for factual truth, she argued, does not lead audiences to accept the lie as true; rather, it destroys the sense by which people take their bearings in a shared reality. The deliberate manufacture of cynicism, the erosion of the public's confidence that any shared account of reality is attainable, is the political achievement that post-truth rhetoric seeks. It is in this sense that the prefix is exact: the condition arrives after the question of truth has ceased to organize the contest, leaving only the question of power.

Framing and the Architecture of Political Reality

If post-truth rhetoric is to displace reference, it requires linguistic instruments capable of doing so, and the most powerful of these is the frame. George Lakoff's cognitive theory of framing, elaborated across *Moral Politics* and the widely circulated handbook *Don't Think of an Elephant!*, holds that political language activates pre-existing conceptual structures, mental scaffolds that determine what counts as common sense before any argument is joined. Lakoff's signature demonstration is deceptively simple: the instruction not to think of an elephant is impossible to obey, because the word evokes the frame regardless of the negation attached to it. The political consequence is that to argue against an opponent's terms in the opponent's vocabulary is to reinforce the very frame one wishes to defeat. When a speaker repeatedly couples taxation with the language of relief, he installs a frame in which taxes are an affliction and their reduction a rescue, and the opposing party, by adopting the same vocabulary to defend taxation, ratifies its premise.

The deeper mechanism, in Lakoff's account, is conceptual metaphor. Abstract political domains are understood through concrete source domains, and the choice of metaphor silently structures judgment. To speak of a nation as a household governed by a strict father, or alternatively as one nurtured by caregivers, is to import an entire moral system under the cover of an apparently neutral description. Lakoff argues in *Moral Politics* that the durable coherence of conservative and progressive worldviews derives precisely from such competing family metaphors, operating largely beneath conscious awareness. For the analysis of post-truth politics, the significance of this claim is that frames do their work prior to, and independently of, the truth or falsity of any particular assertion. A frame cannot be fact-checked, because it is not a proposition; it is the grid through which propositions acquire meaning. The post-truth communicator who controls the frame has already shaped the audience's reception of the facts before the facts arrive.

This linguistic insight finds its critical counterpart in the work of Teun van Dijk, a founder of critical discourse studies. In *Discourse and Power*, van Dijk theorizes the way dominant groups reproduce their authority through control over public discourse, managing what he calls the "mental models" through which audiences interpret events. Power, on this account, operates not chiefly through coercion but through the management of context, access, and definition: those who control the platforms and the vocabulary of public deliberation control the cognitive resources with which citizens make sense of the world. Framing, in van Dijk's hands, is not a rhetorical embellishment but an instrument of social domination, and the manipulation he analyzes consists precisely in the production of mental models that serve the interests of the powerful while presenting themselves as the neutral common sense of the community.

Critical Discourse Analysis and the Grammar of Populist Fear

The populist rhetoric that has flourished in the post-truth moment exhibits a recognizable discursive grammar, and no scholar has anatomized it more thoroughly than Ruth Wodak. In *The Politics of Fear*, Wodak traces the trajectory of right-wing populist parties from the margins to the center of European politics and identifies the linguistic strategies by which they normalize what was once unsayable. Central among these is the construction of a homogeneous people menaced by threatening outsiders, an opposition between an authentic us and a dangerous them that organizes the populist worldview. The threat may be migrants, elites, foreign powers, or the media, but the syntactic structure is constant: a beleaguered national body requires protection from contamination, and the populist leader presents himself as its sole authentic defender. Fear is not an incidental tone but the load-bearing affect of the entire construction.

Wodak's most unsettling observation concerns the management of transgression. Right-wing populist actors, she argues, deliberately violate norms of acceptable speech and then exploit the ensuing scandal, alternating provocation with denial, apology, and reframing in a choreography she terms the "discourse-historical" cycle of calculated ambivalence. A xenophobic statement is floated; when challenged, it is recast as a joke, a misunderstanding, or an act of courageous truth-telling against a censorious establishment. Each cycle shifts the boundary of the sayable a little further, and the provocation itself generates the media attention that the strategy requires. What Wodak names the "arrogance of ignorance," the populist's defiant celebration of common feeling over expert knowledge, completes the structure: appeals to the authentic wisdom of ordinary people are weaponized against the institutions, scientific, journalistic, juridical, whose authority depends on procedures of verification that post-truth politics seeks to discredit.

Van Dijk's analysis of the discursive reproduction of prejudice supplies the micro-level complement to Wodak's account. He documents how the "ideological square," the systematic emphasis of in-group virtues and out-group vices alongside the suppression of in-group faults and out-group merits, structures political talk about immigration and minorities at the level of pronouns, presuppositions, and rhetorical concession. The familiar disclaimer, "I am not a racist, but," exemplifies the pattern: a positive self-presentation guards the speaker's face while licensing the negative characterization of the other that follows. These are not aberrations of an otherwise rational discourse; they are its constitutive techniques. Critical discourse analysis thus reveals that the post-truth politics of fear is built from concrete, describable linguistic resources, and that its persuasive force survives the refutation of any particular factual claim because it never depended on facts in the first place.

Orwell's Long Shadow: Debased Language and the Preemption of Thought

No account of language and political deception can dispense with George Orwell, whose two great interventions remain startlingly pertinent. In the essay "Politics and the English Language," published in *Horizon* in 1946, Orwell advances the thesis that the corruption of language and the corruption of politics are reciprocally entangled. Vague, stale, and mechanical prose, he argues, is not merely an aesthetic failing but an instrument of evasion: "political language," in his memorable formulation, "is designed to make lies sound truthful and murder respectable, and to give an appearance of solidity to pure wind." Orwell's particular target is the euphemism, the abstraction that severs a word from the concrete reality it names so that atrocities may be contemplated without being pictured. When the bombardment of villages is rendered as pacification, the speaker has not lied about a fact but dissolved the listener's capacity to grasp it. This is the post-truth maneuver in embryo: the displacement of reference by a verbal form that forecloses thought.

Orwell's deeper and more radical claim, dramatized in *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, is that language conditions the very possibility of cognition. The invented language of Newspeak is engineered to shrink the range of expressible thought by eliminating the words in which dissent might be conceived; its purpose, as the novel's appendix explains, is to make heretical thought "literally unthinkable" by destroying the vocabulary required to formulate it. Alongside Newspeak stands doublethink, the disciplined capacity to hold contradictory beliefs simultaneously and to accept whichever the Party currently demands, and the slogans, war is peace, freedom is slavery, that weld opposites together until contradiction ceases to register as such. Orwell grasped that the most effective censorship is not the suppression of statements but the impoverishment of the conceptual resources with which citizens might frame them. The contemporary resonance is direct. When a leader brands unwelcome reporting as fake news, the phrase does not merely dispute a story; it installs a frame, in precisely Lakoff's sense, that

preemptively discredits an entire institution of verification, supplying audiences with a single portable word that renders inconvenient evidence unthinkable in advance.

It would be a mistake, however, to read Orwell as merely a prophet of totalitarian censorship, for the post-truth condition realizes his insight under conditions he did not foresee. Where Newspeak imagined a scarcity of words imposed from above, the contemporary information environment produces an overwhelming abundance of them, and the effect Orwell described, the preemption of thought, is achieved not by deletion but by saturation. The citizen drowning in contradictory claims, exhausted by the labor of adjudication, arrives at the same incapacity to think clearly that Newspeak was designed to enforce. Orwell's enduring contribution is the recognition that the integrity of public reason is a function of the integrity of public language, and that an assault on the latter is necessarily an assault on the former.

The Mechanics of Doubt: Repetition, Emotion, and the Manufacture of Plausibility

If framing structures perception and debased language forecloses thought, repetition supplies the engine that drives a falsehood toward acceptance. The psychological foundation is the illusory-truth effect, first demonstrated experimentally by Lynn Hasher, David Goldstein, and Thomas Toppino, who found that subjects rated repeated statements as more probably true than novel ones regardless of their actual veracity, with validity judgments rising for repeated items across successive sessions (Hasher et al. 107). The mechanism is processing fluency: a claim encountered before is easier for the mind to process, and that ease is misattributed as a feeling of truth. The implication for political communication is profound and disquieting. A falsehood need not be argued; it need only be repeated, across enough channels and with sufficient frequency, until its very familiarity lends it the texture of established fact. Correction, which introduces the false claim anew in order to deny it, can paradoxically reinforce the fluency it seeks to dispel.

A clarification of terms is warranted here, for the public vocabulary of fake news obscures distinctions that matter for analysis. In their influential report for the Council of Europe, Claire Wardle and Hossein Derakhshan propose a tripartite framework of information disorder that separates misinformation, false content shared without intent to harm, from disinformation, falsehood deliberately fabricated and circulated to deceive or injure, and from malinformation, genuine information weaponized through selective release or decontextualization. The taxonomy is valuable precisely because it foregrounds intent and circulation rather than mere falsity, and in doing so it confirms the argument advanced here. The blunt phrase fake news collapses these categories and, worse, has itself been captured as a frame, repurposed by the very actors who traffic in disinformation to discredit legitimate journalism. The post-truth predicament is thus not reducible to the presence of false statements in the information stream; it concerns the strategic intentions that animate their production and the social dynamics that govern their spread.

This insight has been operationalized as a deliberate strategy of statecraft. The RAND Corporation analysts Christopher Paul and Miriam Matthews, studying contemporary Russian disinformation, named its distinctive technique the "firehose of falsehood": a model characterized by high volume, multiple channels, rapidity, and a frank disregard for both objective reality and internal consistency. The firehose does not seek to construct a coherent counter-narrative that might be rationally contested. It seeks instead to flood the information environment with so many contradictory claims that audiences, unable to sort signal from noise, retreat into resignation or fall back on partisan loyalty. The strategy is a precise inversion of the classical ideal of persuasion: its goal is not to convince but to overwhelm, not to establish a truth but to make the establishment of any truth seem hopeless. Here Arendt's prophecy is

fulfilled by design, for the manufacture of generalized doubt, not the propagation of a particular lie, is the objective.

The affective dimension completes the mechanism. Post-truth rhetoric privileges emotional resonance over evidentiary warrant, and the empirical study of online information circulation suggests why this is so effective. In a landmark analysis of the diffusion of news on social media, Soroush Vosoughi, Deb Roy, and Sinan Aral found that false stories spread "significantly farther, faster, deeper, and more broadly than the truth" across every category they examined, and that falsehood was markedly more novel and more likely to elicit responses of surprise and disgust (Vosoughi et al. 1146). The architecture of the platforms, which rewards engagement, thus structurally privileges content engineered to provoke. Falsehood, unconstrained by the dull obligations of accuracy, can be tailored for maximal emotional impact in a way that truth, tethered to what actually occurred, cannot. The post-truth communicator who appeals to fear, grievance, and indignation is not merely indulging a rhetorical preference; he is exploiting the measurable dynamics of an information ecosystem that amplifies affect over accuracy.

Computational Propaganda: Automating the Rhetoric of the Crowd

The mechanisms described thus far, framing, repetition, emotional provocation, acquire vastly greater force when industrialized through digital automation. In the volume *Computational Propaganda*, Samuel Woolley and Philip Howard define their subject as the use of algorithms, automation, and human curation to distribute misleading information across social media networks, and their country case studies document its deployment in democracies and authoritarian states alike. The decisive innovation is the manufacture of artificial consensus. Where the older propaganda of the mass-media age broadcast a message from an identifiable center, computational propaganda simulates the spontaneous agreement of the crowd, exploiting the deep human disposition to take widespread belief as evidence of truth. The rhetorical appeal at work is the ancient *argumentum ad populum*, the appeal to popularity, now generated synthetically and at scale.

Two techniques deserve particular emphasis for their linguistic significance. The first is the political bot, an automated account that masquerades as a human participant in order to amplify particular messages, inflate the apparent support for a position, and harass or drown out opposing voices. By manufacturing the impression that a view is widely and passionately held, networks of bots manipulate the perception of social proof that ordinarily guides individuals uncertain of where the public stands. The second is astroturfing, the orchestration of ostensibly grassroots expression by concealed sponsors, whose very name marks it as counterfeit grassroots sentiment. Both techniques are fundamentally rhetorical: they do not argue but perform, staging a spectacle of consensus designed to be persuasive precisely because it appears to issue from ordinary citizens rather than from interested parties. The illusory-truth effect operates here at the level of the social as well as the cognitive, for a claim repeated by a thousand seemingly independent voices acquires a credibility that no single source could confer.

The convergence of these capacities with the psychological mechanisms described earlier produces a propaganda apparatus of remarkable efficiency. Automation supplies the volume that the firehose model requires; algorithmic curation directs emotionally provocative content toward the audiences most susceptible to it; bot networks manufacture the repetition that breeds illusory truth and the false consensus that recruits social proof. Tellingly, the system requires no master narrative and no commitment to consistency, only the sustained production of doubt, division, and affect. This is the technological realization of the post-truth condition: a discourse machine optimized not for persuasion toward shared belief but for the erosion of the shared epistemic ground on which democratic deliberation depends. What Orwell imagined

as a centralized ministry has been distributed across networks, automated, and rendered deniable.

Toward Rhetorical Literacy: Repairing the Democratic Commons

The conventional response to this predicament, the expansion of fact-checking and the promotion of media literacy understood as the verification of claims, is necessary but, on the analysis advanced here, insufficient. If the post-truth condition were merely a deficit of accurate information, correction would suffice. But the foregoing has argued that the condition is rhetorical rather than informational: it operates through frames that fact-checking cannot touch, through repetition that correction may inadvertently reinforce, through emotional appeals indifferent to evidence, and through manufactured consensus that mimics the very signals of credibility on which citizens rely. The research of Gordon Pennycook and David Rand on the psychology of fake news points toward the difficulty and the opportunity alike: they find that susceptibility to misinformation owes less to deliberate partisan reasoning than to inattention and a failure to engage in careful, reflective thinking, and that even minimal prompts to consider accuracy can measurably improve the quality of what people believe and share (Pennycook and Rand 388). The problem is partly one of cognitive habit, and habits can be cultivated.

What is required, I argue, is a reconception of media literacy as rhetorical literacy. To check a fact is to evaluate a proposition after it has been received; to read a frame is to apprehend the structure that shapes reception before the proposition arrives. A rhetorically literate citizen asks not only whether a claim is true but what metaphor organizes it, whose interests its frame serves, what emotions it is engineered to arouse, and whether the consensus it invokes is genuine or manufactured. This is, in effect, the analytic competence that critical discourse analysis has developed as a scholarly method, translated into a civic capacity. Lakoff's account of framing, Wodak's anatomy of populist strategy, van Dijk's analysis of discursive domination, and Orwell's vigilance toward euphemism furnish not merely descriptions of the disease but the curriculum of its prevention. To teach citizens to recognize the strict-father metaphor at work in an appeal, to identify the us-and-them grammar of a fear-based narrative, or to notice when a transgression is being deployed to shift the boundary of the sayable is to equip them with defenses that no quantity of after-the-fact correction can supply.

Such a program faces real limits, and intellectual honesty requires acknowledging them. Rhetorical literacy cannot by itself counteract the structural incentives of platforms engineered for engagement, nor the asymmetry between the labor of producing falsehood and the labor of refuting it, nor the deliberate exhaustion that the firehose strategy seeks to induce. These demand institutional and regulatory responses beyond the scope of any individual competence. Yet the cultivation of a public capable of reading the rhetorical mechanics of its own manipulation is a precondition for those responses rather than an alternative to them, for democratic remedies depend upon a citizenry able to recognize that it is being manipulated. The defense of the democratic commons begins with the refusal to mistake the management of frames for the disclosure of facts, and with the restoration of language to its proper office as an instrument of shared accountability rather than of its dissolution.

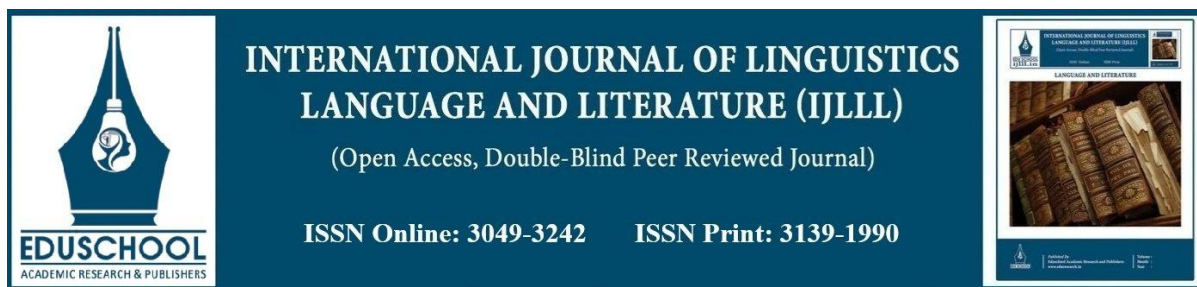
Conclusion

The post-truth condition named by lexicographers in 2016 is not, this article has contended, a sudden eclipse of facts by feelings, but a transformation in the relationship between political language and referential accountability. Its rhetoric privileges form over reference: the frame that structures perception before evidence arrives, the repetition that breeds the felt familiarity of truth, the emotional saturation that outpaces accuracy in the

marketplace of attention, and the manufactured consensus that counterfeits the signals of credibility. What unites these techniques, and what distinguishes post-truth speech from the ordinary political lie, is their target. The liar, as Frankfurt and Arendt both understood, still honors the authority of truth by troubling to conceal it; post-truth discourse withdraws that homage, aiming not at the propagation of a particular falsehood but at the erosion of the audience's appetite for adjudication itself. Orwell glimpsed the endpoint, the preemption of thought through the corruption of language, and the computational propaganda of the present has industrialized it. If the analysis offered here is sound, then the repair of democratic discourse will not be accomplished by correction alone. It will require a citizenry literate in the rhetoric of its own deception, capable of reading the frames that govern what it is permitted to think, and willing to insist that language answer once more to the world it claims to describe.

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Tony Soprano: Exploring Mental Health through a Mafia Boss

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Abstract

The Sopranos (1999-2007) is often hailed as one of the most influential television shows of all time. This review paper puts the protagonist of the series, Tony Soprano under a cultural and psychological lens. By placing a violent mafia boss inside a vulnerable place of psychiatric therapy, the show explored relevant modern themes such as depression, loneliness, family trauma, toxic masculinity, therapy, violence, and the malaise of urban life. By dissecting the mental science of Tony Soprano, this study explains how the concept of the “Anti-hero” was revolutionized for the modern cinematic medium by the drama. This review paper concludes that Tony Soprano is a sophisticated, reliable, and relatable frame of reference to understand how popular media could explore darker dimensions of human psychology.

Keywords:- Mental Health, Character Analysis, Television Drama, Anti-Hero, Family Trauma, Therapy, The Sopranos.

Introduction

From its inception in the earlier 20th century, the concept of “mental health” had been a key focus in the field of academic research and clinical sciences (Gautam et al. S231). Revolutionary figures in western countries such as Sigmund Freud, Carl Rogers, B.F Skinners were all pioneers in the field of psychology, shaping the modern understanding of the human mind, mental wellbeing, cognitive behaviors, and spiritual sustenance in an ever-changing world. Even Indian academicians such as Dr. Girindrasekhar Bose, Dr. Narendra Nath Sen Gupta, Dr. M. Sarada Menon, contributed to the development of psychoanalysis, psychology, and psychiatry. However, for a long time, the ordinary people faced hurdles in comprehending the depths of mental health (World Health Organization). This is because discussions on psychology, were limited to an academic scope meandering on the technicalities and academic terminologies reserved only for research studies, and educational institutions.

Cinema and television are effective mediums to explore unconventional themes. Being a visual medium, they have a powerful influence in portraying complex themes and ideas through frames, characters, dialogues, and sound design. Yet mainstream media culture was dominated by blockbuster franchises, popcorn flicks, sitcoms, family entertainment, and action

dramas. These shows and movies never treated mental health seriously. Rather, they were solely designed to offer comfort, and excitement a respite or an escape for the audience from their daily ordinary lives. Sitcoms like *Friends*, *The Fresh Prince of Bel Air*, *Seinfeld*, and even dramas such as *Miami Vice*, *The Equalizer* were all popular because they were safe, commercial, and pleasant rides, filled with likable characters, humor, and straightforward narratives. Undermining the cultural impact or significance of these shows would be wrong. These shows are all pinnacles in their scope of modern storytelling.

In this context, it was David Chase's *Sopranos* that marked a major turning point. The series took a familiar world of crime, and transformed it into a deep psychological study. Instead of presenting its protagonist, Tony Soprano, as a usual ruthless mafia boss, David Chase paints him as a middle-aged man suffering from panic attacks and depression (*The Sopranos*). This bold creative choice continued to surprise audiences, as it doesn't show what a mafia boss does. Rather, it answers why he is the way he is.

Tony Soprano became one of television's most unforgettable characters because he combined two extremely opposite identities. He was a violent criminal involved in organized crime and extortion, a man who ordered murders, betrayed people, cheated on his wife, and relentlessly pursued power. However, at the same time, he was also a loving father, a husband, an emotionally broken human being. This contradiction revolutionized the "Anti-hero" character archetype for television, and made the concept of mental health accessible to the common man. It highlighted the existence of psychological suffering inside even the people who are powerful, immoral and deeply flawed.

The "Anti—Hero"

The pilot episode of the television drama *The Sopranos* premiered on HBO on January 10th 1999 ("Pilot"). The episode introduces us to one of the greatest tv protagonists of all time; the mafia boss Tony Soprano powerfully portrayed by the late James Gandolfini. The sheer brilliance of the drama is conveyed to the audience in the introduction itself. Creator David Chase doesn't show Tony Soprano in a high-octane shootout, a glamorized murder, a heroic entrance, or a romanticized mafia image. Instead, he is shown as a depressed middle-aged man who suffers from panic attacks, seeking therapy from the psychiatrist Dr Jennifer Melfi.

This contradiction, this subversion from the usual "Mafia" trope is what defines Tony Soprano, and the series as a whole. Characters from the gangster genre were all stylish, powerful, dangerous and almost mythical mafia figures. Tony Montana from *Scarface*, Michael Corleone from *The Godfather*, Henry Hill from *Goodfellas*, or even Ace from *Casino* are all iconic examples of this. Even though they were all violent and morally corrupt. But their presentation through the language of money, power, ambition and tragedy were what made them likable for the audience. Tony Soprano is different from all of these characters.

Throughout the series, we see the ruthless activities he does as the Don of New Jersey. He is a ruthless man fueled by vengeance, hate, selfishness, and the ultimate quest for power. He lies, cheats, manipulates. He exploits weaker people. He destroys the people around him for pride, money and revenge. He indulges in countless extramarital affairs. He kills without guilt ("Tony Soprano: Dark Psychology"). Without hesitation, all of his actions can be labeled as unforgivable.

But the writing humanizes him in such a way that, no matter how many ethical barriers or moral lines he crosses, the audience continues to be fascinated by him and roots for him. Because the show forces the audience to experience an unnerving contradiction; Tony Soprano is an evil person. But he is also recognizably human. This contradiction redefined the concept of the "Anti-hero".

An anti-hero, is a central protagonist in a story who lacks traditional heroic qualities like courage, nobility, or moral righteousness. Instead of adhering to strict ethics, these anti-

heroes are characters who often rely on deceit, manipulation and violence, even though their actions ultimately lead to a sympathetic or generally good outcome. However, ultimately, the audience remains attached to these morally grey characters because they are written and portrayed with psychological depth and moral complexity.

The Sopranos did not invent the anti-hero. Rather, it redefined anti-hero for modern television and cinema. Franklin Saint from *Snowfall*, the manipulative Walter White from *Breaking Bad*, or Don Draper from *Mad Men*—these are all characters that followed the blueprint of Tony Soprano: a psychologically layered, morally corrupt, and emotionally broken character, that is too irresistible to ignore (Martin 4–5).

Crime and Therapy

The traditional mafioso stories are all driven by crime, betrayal, loyalty, violence, ambition, action, and romance. The Sopranos has all these elements. But with one additional layer, it becomes more powerful than all gangster stories that came before it. That layer is introspection.

The therapy sessions of Tony Soprano and Dr Jennifer Melfi was the psychological spine of the Sopranos. It provided Tony Soprano to slow down, introspect and analyse his actions and himself. We see the cruel, intimidating, and violent Don of New Jersey in him everywhere else in his life. But it is in Dr Melfi's brightly lit therapy room, where we can identify the true layers of Tony Soprano; the emotionally broken man, wounded by past family trauma (Gabbard 7).

This is one of the major reasons The Sopranos made the concept of mental health much more accessible to the common man. Instead of explaining relevant themes such as depression and trauma through clinical terminologies, the show simplifies them through dramatic dialogue. The audience watch as Tony Soprano reveal his inner self, his personal demons, his psychological suffering. They see him talk about his poor upbringing, panic attacks, loneliness, his moral qualms about his dangerous life of crime, his cruel acts of violence, and his cries for help.

Yet does Tony Soprano evolve? The answer to this question is shown to the audience through these therapy sessions, and this is the core message of this series. Therapy is a medium to acknowledge the worst parts of ourselves and move on, acting as a path for redemption. But Tony Soprano isn't redeemed by the end of the show. He is far worse than he was at the beginning of the pilot episode.

Through therapy, he overcomes his frequent issue of panic attacks. But he also becomes more self-aware. He grasps medical terminologies, learns the language of trauma, and uses it to excuse and justify his evil behaviour (Mariani 10).

This statement is the series' innate complexity. The Sopranos asks the audience to confront a mature treatment of mental health, asking us to understand a morally dark person, but not to forgive him. This aspect of therapy delivers complex themes through a lived experience, helping the audience to grasp these concepts in a much more simple manner.

Family Trauma

The audience wouldn't have understood the complexities of Tony Soprano without knowing his tragic upbringings. The most important way the writers humanizes him, is by portraying him as a flawed man shaped by past family trauma. His mother, Livia Soprano is a cold, emotionally cruel, pessimistic, and manipulative woman who could only bring misery on her son. These traits are further accelerated by her diagnosis of borderline personality disorder and narcissistic personality disorder (Gabbard 72).

Growing up under this toxic woman, leads to Tony Soprano being wounded by the one person who was supposed to love him. Even when he is an adult, he cannot simply remain

without wanting his mother's approval. This unresolved conflict is a major catalyst for the mental health issues Tony Soprano experiences throughout his life.

While his mother essentially becomes emotionally detached to him, his father, Johnny Boy, introduces him to the world of crime. Tony Soprano learns from his gangster father that power is earned through deceit, manipulation, extortion and intimidation. He sees that violence is normalized in his household and the world around him. From both his parents, he learns two destructive lessons: Love is earned through manipulation, and respect is secured through violence. This leads him to the tragic descent he undergoes as a person in his adult life (Mariani 6)

The Sopranos proved that familial upbringing and nurturing played a vital role in the shaping of an individual's personality. It showed the audience how even a powerful person like Tony Soprano could fall from grace due to childhood trauma, and dysfunctional parenting. More than anything, the family drama aspect connected with viewers who had to live through similar toxic experiences seen in the show.

Conclusion

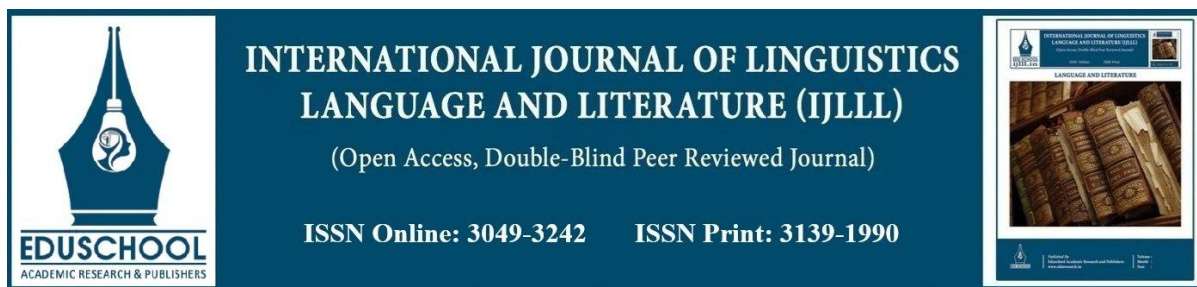
Tony Soprano is one of the most influential and compelling characters of television history because he changed the audience's perspective on both crime and mental health. With his character study, *The Sopranos* turned out, not as a usual gangster story, but as a study of the human mind.

Tony Soprano is not a traditional hero. He is not a moustache twirling villain either. Rather, he is an emotionally broken, endlessly suffering character, caught between the worst of both worlds. By placing a mafia boss inside a psychiatrist's office, creator David Chase highlighted themes of mental health in a simple, accessible manner to the mainstream audiences.

Ultimately, Tony Soprano is portrayed, not as a glorified figure to be admired, but as a crucial warning. He is a fictional representation of a state of human life—a dark void that is left behind when trauma is unresolved, when pain turns to anger, and when therapy is misused for doing evil. In exploring Tony Soprano's character, *The Sopranos* did more than redefine television. It became a classic case study on how well popular media can speak about complex themes, mental health, morality, darkness hidden in ordinary human life.

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Narrating the Anthropocene: Scale, Agency, and Form in Climate Fiction

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Abstract

This essay argues that climate fiction's distinctive achievement lies not in its capacity to make environmental catastrophe visible but in its formal reorganization around the very impossibility of doing so. Building on now-familiar diagnoses of a crisis of the literary imagination, the theory of hyperobjects, the collapse of human and natural history into a single timeline, and the concept of slow violence, the discussion identifies the genre's central problem as one of scalar disjuncture: the incommensurability between human-sized narration and planetary-scale process. Rather than resolving this disjuncture by abandoning realism for myth or science fiction, the most ambitious climate novels turn the gap itself into form. Through readings of six representative contemporary works, the essay traces three formal strategies by which fiction redistributes narrative agency away from the bounded individual protagonist toward nonhuman, collective, and distributed actants. Climate fiction, it concludes, contributes less a content than a poetics: a way of writing the Anthropocene as the structuring absence around which narrative must reassemble itself. Its realism is not betrayed but mutated, expanded to register forces that exceed the frame of the bourgeois life.

Keywords:- Climate Fiction, Anthropocene, Ecocriticism, Hyperobjects, Narrative Scale, Slow Violence, Nonhuman Agency, Realism, Environmental Humanities

Introduction

The Anthropocene names a paradox that literature is peculiarly ill-equipped to narrate. To say that humanity has become a geological force, as Dipesh Chakrabarty argues in his influential theses on the climate of history, is to assert an agency so collective, so diffuse across centuries and continents, that it dissolves precisely the unit through which the modern novel has organized meaning: the individual life, lived at human scale, in a recognizable place and a measurable span of time. The crisis of climate is therefore also, and inescapably, a crisis of form. When Amitav Ghosh observes that the climate emergency is "also a crisis of culture, and thus of the imagination," he is registering a failure that is at once aesthetic and epistemological (Ghosh, *Great Derangement* 9). The forces that now determine the fate of the species are not available to the senses; they unfold on timescales that mock the rhythms of plot; they implicate

everyone and no one. How does a genre devoted to the texture of particular experience represent a phenomenon defined by its escape from particularity?

Climate fiction, or "cli-fi," is the name now attached to the body of contemporary writing that has taken up this challenge. The label is loose, gathering literary realism, speculative dystopia, the New Weird, and the documentary epic under a single thematic umbrella. This essay's wager is that the genre's importance is misunderstood when it is measured by its referential success, by how vividly it depicts melting ice or future drought. Cli-fi's genuine contribution is formal. Its most searching works do not overcome the representational impasse that Ghosh diagnoses; they make that impasse legible, building narrative architectures around the gap between the human scale at which stories are told and the planetary scale at which the Anthropocene operates. I call this organizing principle a poetics of scalar disjuncture. Where Ghosh implies that serious fiction has failed the climate, I argue that the most interesting response has not been a retreat from the novel but a mutation of it: a redistribution of narrative agency away from the bounded protagonist toward nonhuman, collective, and distributed actants. The following sections trace this argument through the theoretical problem of scale, Ghosh's diagnosis and its limits, and three formal strategies by which contemporary fiction reconstitutes itself around the catastrophe it cannot directly show.

The Problem of Scale: Hyperobjects and the Human-Sized Story

The first obstacle the Anthropocene poses to narrative is one of magnitude. Timothy Morton's concept of the hyperobject captures the difficulty with unusual precision. Hyperobjects are entities "massively distributed in time and space relative to humans": global warming, the biosphere, the sum of all plutonium are things so vast that we never encounter them directly but only ever apprehend their local manifestations (Morton 1). A heat wave is not climate change; it is a sample of a process whose true dimensions exceed perception. For Morton, hyperobjects are "viscous," adhering to everything we do, and "nonlocal," such that their effects appear in places remote from any visible cause. The consequence for representation is severe. If the object itself can never be brought into the frame, then any narrative that attempts to depict it can only ever gesture toward a totality it cannot contain. The hyperobject is, by definition, that which withdraws from the scene of its own representation.

Chakrabarty sharpens the temporal dimension of this problem. His argument that anthropogenic climate change collapses the long-assumed distinction between human history and natural history carries a destabilizing corollary: the protagonist of climate is not any person or even any nation but the species, "humanity" as a geological agent, a category that cannot be the subject of experience and therefore cannot, in the conventional sense, be the subject of a story (Chakrabarty). One cannot narrate the species from within; there is no vantage, no consciousness, adequate to it. Rob Nixon adds a decisive insight about tempo. Environmental catastrophe is rarely the spectacular event that narrative craves; it is rather what he calls "slow violence," "a violence that occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all" (Nixon 2). Slow violence resists storytelling because it lacks the explosive, image-ready moment around which dramatic form coheres. Its victims are dispersed, its agents abstracted, its timeline measured in decades.

Taken together, Morton, Chakrabarty, and Nixon describe a single predicament from three angles: spatial vastness, agential dispersal, and temporal attrition. Each names a way in which the Anthropocene exceeds the dimensions of the human-sized story. Yet ecocriticism has long insisted that the literary imagination is not merely a passive victim of this mismatch but an active instrument for renegotiating it. Lawrence Buell's account of environmental criticism distinguishes a first wave preoccupied with the preservation of nature and place from a second wave attentive to environmental justice and the entanglement of the natural with the social

(Buell). Ursula Heise pushes the spatial argument further still, contending that an ethics adequate to the planet requires what she terms "eco-cosmopolitanism," an imaginative reach beyond the localism of place toward a "sense of planet" capable of grasping global ecological interdependence (Heise 10). Greg Garrard, surveying the tropes through which environmental writing has historically worked, identifies apocalypse as the master trope of ecological rhetoric, a frame that lends urgency but also risks the numbing fatalism and deferred catastrophe that drain political agency (Garrard). These critical positions converge on a productive tension. The challenge is not simply to depict the planet but to find forms that hold local experience and planetary process in the same frame without collapsing one into the other, precisely the disjuncture that cli-fi must learn to inhabit.

Ghosh's Great Derangement and the Crisis of Realism

No single text has shaped the critical conversation around climate fiction more decisively than Amitav Ghosh's *The Great Derangement*. Its central provocation is a literary-historical claim: that the modern novel, and particularly the tradition of bourgeois realism, is constitutively incapable of representing climate change. Ghosh argues that the novel achieved its characteristic effects by banishing the improbable, by domesticating event into the smooth regularity of ordinary middle-class existence (Ghosh, *Great Derangement*). The "serious" novel learned to distrust coincidence, catastrophe, and the uncanny, relegating them to genres deemed minor: gothic, fantasy, and science fiction. But climate change is nothing if not improbable in this sense: it confronts us with freakish weather, with the sudden irruption of nonhuman force into human affairs, with events that the calibrated probabilities of realist fiction were designed to exclude. The result, Ghosh contends, is a derangement: a culture whose dominant narrative form cannot think the very crisis that most threatens it. That climate fiction has been shunted into the speculative ghetto is, on this reading, a symptom of the disease.

Ghosh's diagnosis is indispensable, but it is also partial, and its limits are instructive. The claim that realism per se is incapable of registering catastrophe rests on a narrowed conception of the realist tradition, one that downplays the long lineage of novels concerned with famine, plague, war, and ecological ruin. Adam Trexler's survey of several hundred Anthropocene novels demonstrates that fiction has in fact been metabolizing climate for decades, and that the work of representation has proceeded less by abandoning the novel than by stretching its conventions, reorganizing setting, plot, and character to accommodate forces that older fiction left in the background (Trexler). Trexler's archive suggests that Ghosh's diagnosis is in danger of becoming self-fulfilling: by defining the problem as the failure of realism, it risks overlooking the formal experiments through which realism has been adapting all along. The more compelling question is not whether the novel can represent climate but how it must change to do so.

Ghosh's own fiction supplies a revealing answer. *Gun Island*, published three years after *The Great Derangement*, reads as a deliberate test of his theoretical claims. The novel follows Deen, a Brooklyn-based dealer in rare books, whose pursuit of a Bengali legend draws him from the drowning Sundarbans to a Venice imperiled by acqua alta, along routes traced by climate refugees and by species migrating in response to a warming world. Ghosh's method here is precisely the rehabilitation of the improbable that his criticism called for. Uncanny coincidence, prophetic myth, and the eruption of the nonhuman (spiders, snakes, dolphins, wildfire) are not embarrassments to be explained away but the very grammar through which the planetary is made narratable. The novel also enacts a translingual poetics that links etymology to ecological memory: the migration of words across Bengali, Arabic, Italian, and English mirrors the migration of peoples and species, so that language itself becomes a record of connection across borders. This attention to code-switching and linguistic crossing in South Asian Anglophone writing has been read as a structural rather than merely decorative feature

(Ramachandran). Gun Island thus performs the mutation that this essay describes: realism does not collapse but expands, admitting myth and coincidence as instruments for registering a hyperobject that cannot be seen whole (Ghosh, Gun Island). Whether the novel fully succeeds is debatable; its coincidences can feel programmatic, and critics have noted that the machinery of correspondence sometimes strains credulity in the very way Ghosh's criticism warns against. Yet the strain is itself diagnostic. It registers the difficulty of the task, the impossibility of binding a planetary process to a single human itinerary without a measure of artifice, and refuses to disguise that difficulty as polished verisimilitude. As a demonstration that the gap between human and planetary scale can be made into form rather than merely lamented, the novel is exemplary precisely where it is most visibly contrived.

Redistributing Agency: The Nonhuman Protagonist

If the species cannot be a protagonist, one response is to dethrone the protagonist altogether. The most formally radical strand of climate fiction reorganizes narrative attention away from the individuated human consciousness and toward nonhuman agents, distributing the work of agency across a wider field of actants. Richard Powers's *The Overstory* is the signal example. The novel opens with a series of self-contained human histories, each linked to a particular tree, before binding them into a larger pattern. Yet its formal ambition lies in the way it subordinates these human stories to the slower, larger temporality of the forest. Trees, in Powers's rendering, communicate, remember, and act on timescales that dwarf the human; the novel's structure, rooted in sections titled "Roots," "Trunk," "Crown," and "Seeds," mimes arboreal rather than biographical form. Human characters are repeatedly shown to be minor, belated participants in a story whose true protagonist is the forest itself (Powers). *The Overstory* enacts what one might call a deliberate demotion of the human: it uses the realist apparatus of character to stage the inadequacy of character, leading the reader from individual lives toward a perception of distributed, vegetal agency that no single consciousness can hold. The novel's recurrent insistence that the most important events occur on timescales invisible to the human eye, such as the centuries-long life of a chestnut or the slow chemical conversation among roots, amounts to a sustained argument against the anthropocentrism of conventional plot. Even its tragic activist storylines, in which characters sacrifice everything to halt logging, are framed less as heroic individual destinies than as fleeting expressions of a longer ecological will. Here the redistribution of agency is not a theme the novel discusses but the principle that organizes its form.

Jeff VanderMeer's *Annihilation* pursues the same end through opposite means. Where Powers expands the realist novel, VanderMeer estranges it. The first volume of the Southern Reach trilogy sends a nameless expedition, identified only by function (the biologist, the psychologist, the surveyor), into "Area X," a zone in which an unspecified ecological force has rendered the landscape unreadable, contaminating language, identity, and perception. The novel belongs to what has been called the New Weird, and its weirdness is doing precise conceptual work. Area X is a hyperobject given fictional body: a presence that withdraws from every attempt to know it, that turns the instruments of science (measurement, classification, the survey) back on themselves as so much futile mapping. The biologist's narration is a record of comprehension failing in real time. Tellingly, the nonhuman in *Annihilation* is not anthropomorphized into a communicable agent, as Powers's trees risk being; it remains radically other, an agency without intention that nonetheless transforms everything it touches. The novel thereby dramatizes Morton's point that the hyperobject can be registered only through its effects, never grasped as an object. By refusing the consolations of explanation, VanderMeer makes the unreadability of the planetary the structuring principle of his form (VanderMeer). The horror of *Annihilation* is epistemological: it is the horror of a world that exceeds the human capacity to narrate it, and the novel's achievement is to make that excess

felt. Even the prose enacts this withdrawal, as the biologist's clipped, professional idiom dissolves under the pressure of phenomena her vocabulary cannot hold; the language that should master the environment is instead colonized by it. Area X does not threaten the characters so much as unmake the categories through which they would render their experience legible, and the reader is left, like the biologist, with a documentation of incomprehension rather than a revelation.

The two novels mark the poles of a single strategy. Powers extends mimetic realism until it can accommodate the agency of the forest; VanderMeer ruptures realism until its failure becomes the content. Both refuse the premise that a climate-adequate fiction must center a human subject. In doing so they confirm that the genre's formal frontier lies in the redistribution of agency, in writing narratives whose true actants are nonhuman processes, and whose human figures are decentered witnesses to forces they neither command nor comprehend. This is the deepest sense in which cli-fi answers Chakrabarty: unable to narrate the species directly, it narrates the human as one agent among many, embedded in and exceeded by the larger systems it has set in motion.

Temporality, Affect, and the Texture of Slow Violence

The redistribution of agency addresses the problem of scale in space; the problem of scale in time demands a different formal response. Nixon's slow violence is, above all, a crisis of tempo: how does narrative confer significance on a catastrophe that has no climactic moment, that arrives not as event but as gradual erosion? Two novels at opposite ends of the affective spectrum illustrate the available strategies. Barbara Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior* keeps faith with domestic realism, while Octavia Butler's *Parable of the Sower* opts for the projective, diaristic mode of the near-future dystopia. Read together, they reveal how cli-fi calibrates affect and time to make slow violence perceptible without falsifying it into spectacle.

Flight Behavior stages the encounter between local experience and planetary process with deliberate modesty. Dellarobia Turnbow, a discontented young woman on a struggling Appalachian farm, discovers a valley filled with monarch butterflies whose migration has been catastrophically disrupted by climate change. The novel's power lies in its refusal to leave the human scale: climate is apprehended entirely through the frictions of class, faith, marriage, and rural economy that structure Dellarobia's world. The disrupted migration is beautiful before it is legible as disaster, and the scientist who arrives to study it must contend with a community for whom global warming is an abstraction, a coastal preoccupation, or an affront to faith. Kingsolver's realism thus dramatizes exactly the perceptual gap that Morton theorizes: the hyperobject manifests locally, as an uncanny beauty, while its true dimensions remain invisible to those most immediately affected. The novel's achievement is to render the epistemology of denial from the inside, to show how slow violence is metabolized by ordinary life into something other than violence (Kingsolver). Kingsolver is careful, moreover, to refuse the easy condescension of treating denial as mere ignorance; Dellarobia's skepticism is rooted in the material precarity of a life in which environmental abstraction is a luxury she cannot afford, and the novel locates the obstacle to ecological perception not in stupidity but in the structure of economic vulnerability. Its limitation is the obverse of its strength: bounded by the farm and the season, it can gesture toward the planetary only through the consciousness of characters who cannot themselves perceive it. Yet that very boundedness is a formal choice with critical force, insisting that the planetary becomes real to most people only as it deforms the local textures of work, weather, and belief.

Parable of the Sower confronts the temporal problem by leaping across it. Butler's novel, published in 1993 and set in a 2020s California disintegrating under ecological collapse, economic ruin, and social violence, takes the form of the journal of Lauren Olamina, a young woman afflicted with "hyperempathy" and possessed of a homemade faith, Earthseed, whose

first principle is that "God is Change." The diaristic form is itself a response to slow violence: it accumulates catastrophe incrementally, entry by entry, so that the reader experiences collapse not as a single event but as a grinding, normalized condition, the very attritional quality Nixon describes. Butler refuses the spectacular apocalypse in favor of a managed decline in which water is unaffordable, walled enclaves crumble, and the displaced walk north along the highways. The novel's prescience has made it a touchstone of contemporary cli-fi, but its formal innovation matters more than its accuracy. By embedding catastrophe in the texture of daily survival and binding it to a theology of perpetual change, *Parable* converts the unrepresentable slowness of ecological collapse into a livable, narratable duration (Butler). Earthseed's insistence that change is the only constant is, among other things, an aesthetic proposition: a way of giving narrative shape to a future defined by instability. Where *Kingsolver* holds the present steady and lets climate intrude at its edges, Butler dissolves the stable present altogether, narrating from within the long emergency. Both, however, locate their authority in affect, in dread, grief, and a hard-won, unsentimental hope, because affect is the register in which slow violence first becomes perceptible to those living through it.

Form Against the Future: Documentary Maximalism and Collective Agency

The strategies surveyed so far (the nonhuman protagonist, the recalibration of affective tempo) largely address the problem of representing catastrophe. A final, more recent strand of climate fiction takes up a harder problem: how to narrate not the disaster but the collective response to it, the political and infrastructural labor of mitigation, which is even more resistant to conventional plotting because its agent is no individual but the dispersed apparatus of governments, markets, and movements. Kim Stanley Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future* is the most ambitious attempt to meet this challenge, and its formal solution is instructive. The novel abandons the unified protagonist almost entirely in favor of a sprawling, polyphonic, documentary maximalism. Across more than a hundred short chapters it interleaves the relatively conventional storylines of Mary Murphy, head of a UN body charged with advocating for future generations, and Frank May, a traumatized survivor of a lethal Indian heat wave, with eyewitness testimonies, meeting minutes, economic explainers, and even riddles narrated from the point of view of a carbon atom, a market, or the sun.

This heterogeneity is not a flaw but the point. Robinson's wager is that the collective agency required to address climate change cannot be represented through any single consciousness, and so the novel disperses narration across the system itself (Robinson). The procedural detail (carbon coins, central bank policy, geoengineering, the legal architecture of the Paris Agreement) performs a kind of realism of institutions, granting the abstractions of climate governance the textural specificity that realism once reserved for domestic interiors. In Garrard's terms, the novel works deliberately against the apocalyptic trope, refusing the seductions of collapse in favor of a difficult, incremental, and frankly utopian account of how catastrophe might be averted (Garrard). Where *Annihilation* makes the hyperobject's unreadability into horror, *Ministry* makes the hyperobject's susceptibility to collective action into a kind of hope, a hope that is procedural rather than redemptive. Its risk is the inverse of the slow-violence novel's: in its determination to narrate the system, it can subordinate character to exposition, the human story to the policy brief. Yet this is arguably the necessary cost of its experiment. Heise's call for a "sense of planet," an imaginative reach adequate to global interdependence, finds in Robinson's polyphony its most thoroughgoing formal realization (Heise). *The Ministry for the Future* demonstrates that the redistribution of narrative agency can extend even to the machinery of governance, and that the planetary can be narrated not only as threat but as a field of collective action. In this respect the novel completes a trajectory the other texts only partly traverse. Powers and VanderMeer decenter the human in favor of nonhuman process; *Kingsolver* and Butler dilate and compress time to make attrition

perceptible; Robinson takes the further step of imagining that the dispersed agency of institutions might itself be narrated, and might act. That his solution sacrifices intimacy for scope is the genre's recurring trade-off in its starkest form. The fragments that compose the book (the eyewitness account, the explainer, the riddle from a nonhuman perspective) do not cohere into a single story so much as they model the impossibility of one, substituting a montage of partial vantages for the totalizing view no narrator could occupy. The reader is asked to synthesize what the form refuses to unify, and that labor of synthesis is precisely the cognitive work the Anthropocene demands of its publics.

Conclusion

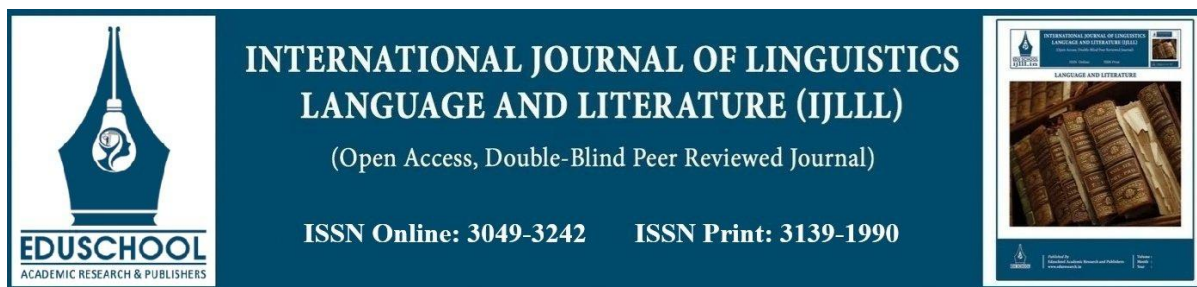
The works examined here, Ghosh's *Gun Island*, Powers's *The Overstory*, VanderMeer's *Annihilation*, Kingsolver's *Flight Behavior*, Butler's *Parable of the Sower*, and Robinson's *The Ministry for the Future*, are formally heterogeneous to the point of seeming to share little beyond a subject. They span realism and the New Weird, the domestic and the documentary, the elegiac and the utopian. What unites them is not a content but a problem: the scalar disjuncture between the human size of narrative and the planetary size of the Anthropocene. And what makes them significant is that none resolves this disjuncture by pretending to close it. Each instead builds its form around the gap: demoting the human protagonist before the agency of the forest, estranging realism until its failure becomes legible, accumulating slow catastrophe in the texture of a diary, or dispersing narration across an entire political system. The Anthropocene appears in these novels not as an object successfully depicted but as the structuring absence around which narrative must reassemble itself.

This reframing qualifies Ghosh's influential pessimism. The crisis he diagnoses is real, but it is a crisis that the most ambitious climate fiction has converted into a generative formal constraint rather than a sentence of failure. Realism is not abandoned but mutated, expanded to register forces that exceed the frame of the bourgeois life; the improbable is rehabilitated; agency is redistributed beyond the human. The genre's contribution to the environmental humanities is therefore best understood as a poetics, a repertoire of strategies for inhabiting the incommensurability of scales rather than wishing it away. If, as Trexler suggests, the novel has become an essential instrument for making climate tangible, it has done so not by shrinking the planet to human dimensions but by enlarging the novel until it can hold the human and the planetary in the same uneasy frame (Trexler). The measure of climate fiction is not whether it shows us the hyperobject, which it cannot, but whether it teaches us to read the world as one. In learning to narrate the Anthropocene as the limit of narration, cli-fi performs the more difficult and more necessary work: it changes the form of attention itself. That reorientation of attention, from the bounded self to the entangled system, from the spectacular event to the attritional process, from the human protagonist to the more-than-human field, may prove the genre's most durable legacy, long after particular predictions have been confirmed or surpassed by the climate it sought to imagine.

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Linguistic Landscapes of the Digital and Urban City

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Abstract

Linguistic landscape (LL) study began as an inquiry into how public multilingual signage indexes ethnolinguistic vitality, institutional power, and the symbolic ordering of urban space. Over three decades it has absorbed a semiotic and multimodal turn that reframed the sign as emplaced material action rather than denotational text, and it has begun to migrate into digital environments variously called the virtual landscape, the linguistic netscape, or the geotagged feed. This article reviews that trajectory and advances a critical argument about what happens to the category of "landscape" once it is detached from physical co-presence. Drawing on the foundational research into ethnolinguistic vitality, the geosemiotics of situated meaning, and recent studies of geotagged social media, it contends that the digital does not simply expand the scenery but dissolves the two assumptions on which LL analysis rested: emplacement, the claim that a sign means partly through where it physically is, and publicness, the claim that a sign addresses a co-present, undifferentiated viewership sharing one visual field. Digital signage is mobile, algorithmically curated, and individuated, so no two observers occupy the same landscape. The article proposes that scholars retain the urban LL as a bounded material object while treating its digital counterpart as a regime of circulation, and it identifies the methodological consequences of that distinction.

Keywords:- Linguistic Landscape, Geosemiotics, Multilingualism, Digital Landscape, Virtual Linguistic Landscape, Multimodality, Urban Space, Ethnolinguistic Vitality

Introduction

The signs that crowd a city street have long been treated as more than wayfinding. A shopfront in two scripts, a municipal notice in the dominant language alone, a hand-lettered protest banner, a backlit corporate logo: each inscribes a claim about who belongs in a place, whose language counts as official, and whose presence is merely tolerated. The study of linguistic landscape (LL) was founded on the recognition that this visible language constitutes a legible record of social relations, and that the relative salience of competing codes on public display can be read as an index of power, prestige, and group vitality. From an initial concern with the quantitative balance of languages on signage, the field has grown into a richly interdisciplinary enterprise that draws on semiotics, geography, anthropology, and discourse

analysis to interpret how meaning is made in and through the material organization of public space.

This article pursues two aims. The first is synthetic: to trace the conceptual development of LL study from its origins in ethnolinguistic vitality research, through the semiotic and multimodal turn, into its contemporary engagement with urban multilingualism, commodification, and globalization. The second aim is critical and original. As LL research extends into digital environments, social media streams, geotagged photographs, app interfaces, and QR-mediated signage, it has tended to assume that the move online is a matter of expanding an existing scenery onto new surfaces. This article argues instead that digitization places the founding metaphor under genuine strain. A landscape, in the sense the field inherited, is a stable visual field surveyed by co-present observers; the digital sign is mobile, personalized, and algorithmically sorted, so the very conditions that made "landscape" analytically coherent no longer obtain. What is required is not an enlargement of the category but a reckoning with its limits.

From Vitality to Place: The Foundations of Linguistic Landscape Study

The term entered sociolinguistics through Landry and Bourhis, who defined the linguistic landscape as "the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" and argued that the aggregate of these items "serves to inform" and to "symbolize" the relative status of language communities within a given territory (Landry and Bourhis 25). Their central move was to distinguish an informational function, the simple conveyance of which language one needs to operate in a space, from a symbolic function, the affective and identitarian message that the presence or absence of one's language on public display communicates to its speakers. On this account the landscape is a constituent of ethnolinguistic vitality rather than a mere reflection of it: seeing one's language in the public sphere reinforces its perceived value and, reciprocally, its erasure signals marginalization. This founding insight tethered the study of signage to questions of language policy, minority rights, and intergroup relations from the outset.

Early empirical work consolidated the field around the survey of bounded urban areas. Backhaus, analyzing some 2,444 signs across twenty-eight survey areas in Tokyo, developed an analytic apparatus distinguishing official from non-official signage and demonstrated that the languages chosen by the state and those chosen by private actors followed divergent logics, with foreign codes increasingly visible on commercial signs over time (Backhaus). Ben-Rafael and colleagues, comparing Hebrew, Arabic, and English across Israeli and East Jerusalem locales, showed that the linguistic landscape operates as a "symbolic construction of the public space" in which different actors, public institutions, private entrepreneurs, and minority communities, inscribe competing structuration principles onto the same urban surface (Ben-Rafael et al. 10). Cenoz and Gorter, surveying minority-language streets in Friesland and the Basque Country, made the comparative method explicit and documented the gap between official bilingual policy and the multilingual reality of commercial display (Cenoz and Gorter). Across these studies the unit of analysis, the determination of what counts as a single sign, and the demarcation of the survey area remained live methodological problems, but the underlying object was stable: a finite set of fixed inscriptions occupying measurable positions in a walkable terrain.

The distinction between top-down and bottom-up signage, between the inscriptions authored by the state and its institutions and those authored by private commercial and individual actors, became the organizing axis of this early work, and it carried a theoretical assumption worth making explicit. To classify a sign by its source is to assume that authorship is recoverable from the artifact itself, that a municipal nameplate and a shopkeeper's notice

declare their provenance through their form and emplacement. This assumption held reasonably well on the street, where the materiality of a sign, its fixity, its sanctioned or unsanctioned position, its durability, indexed the authority behind it. The salience hierarchies that researchers computed, counting which language occupied the largest type, the topmost position, or the greatest number of tokens, were legible precisely because every observer confronted the same arrangement of marks in the same place. The validity of the entire enterprise rested, in other words, on the quiet premise that the sign is a stable public object whose authorship and prominence are inscribed in its physical form. Each of these premises, as later sections will show, becomes problematic the moment signage is mediated by a screen, and it is worth registering that the foundational methodology was tailored with great precision to a material world it took for granted.

The Semiotic and Multimodal Turn

The quantitative survey model, productive as it was, treated signs largely as carriers of denotational language, counting codes rather than interpreting how they signify in situ. A second generation of scholarship reframed the sign as situated social action. The most consequential contribution was the geosemiotics of Scollon and Scollon, who argued that the meaning of any public text depends constitutively on its emplacement, its position in the material world (Scollon and Scollon). A stop sign means "stop" only at the intersection; relocated to a gallery wall it becomes an art object; printed in a textbook it becomes an example. Meaning, on this view, is not transported intact by the sign but is produced in the indexical relation between the sign and the physical, social, and historical site it occupies. Geosemiotics thereby made place not a backdrop to language but a component of its meaning, a claim that would prove decisive for everything that followed, and, as will be argued below, the precise claim that digitization most directly unsettles.

The force of the geosemiotic claim is easiest to grasp through the threefold distinction Scollon and Scollon draw among the systems that organize discourse in place. The interaction order governs the arrangement of bodies and conduct around a sign; visual semiotics governs the internal composition of the sign itself, its layout, modality, and color; and place semiotics governs the indexical relation between the sign and its physical site (Scollon and Scollon). A "No Entry" notice signifies through the convergence of all three: the way pedestrians comport themselves before it, the iconography of its design, and the doorway it is bolted to. Strip away the doorway and the comportment, and the design alone underdetermines the meaning. This is a strong thesis about the insufficiency of the linguistic and even the visual sign considered apart from emplacement, and it reoriented the field away from cataloguing what signs say toward analyzing how their situated material presence acts upon those who move among them.

The edited volumes that defined the field's maturity extended this reorientation. Gorter's collection reframed LL as "a new approach to multilingualism," foregrounding the visual dimension of multilingual contact (Gorter). Shohamy and Gorter's subsequent volume explicitly set out to "expand the scenery," widening the object from written language to the full multimodal repertoire of public space, including images, layout, color, and material form (Shohamy and Gorter). Within that collection Pennycook's analysis of graffiti reconceived signage as a "transgressive" semiotic practice, attending to the unauthorized, the mobile, and the contested rather than to fixed official text, and asking why some signs are granted legitimacy while others are criminalized (Pennycook 302). Jaworski and Thurlow's notion of the semiotic landscape generalized the field's ambit still further, theorizing "the interplay between language, visual discourse, and the spatial practices and dimensions of culture" under conditions of intensified globalization and mediatization (Jaworski and Thurlow). The cumulative effect was to dissolve any clean boundary between linguistic and visual signification and to position the landscape as a multimodal accomplishment.

The City as Text: Multilingualism, Commodification, and Gentrification

If the semiotic turn established how signs mean, a parallel body of work established what urban signage records about the political economy of the contemporary city. Blommaert's ethnography of a single superdiverse neighborhood in Antwerp treated its signs as "chronicles of complexity," historical layerings in which successive waves of migration, commerce, and regulation remain legible as a stratigraphy of the street (Blommaert). The landscape, in this reading, is diachronic as much as synchronic: a faded sign in one language beneath a fresh one in another narrates demographic succession more reliably than census categories. Pennycook and Otsuji's account of metrolingualism complemented this by showing how the everyday multilingualism of markets, kitchens, and worksites exceeds the tidy categories of named languages, emerging instead from the practical activities and spatial repertoires of urban workers (Pennycook and Otsuji). The city, on these accounts, is not a container in which languages happen to coexist but a generative space in which linguistic resources are continually recombined.

Globalization inscribes itself in the urban landscape most visibly through the asymmetric spread of English, whose presence on commercial signage frequently exceeds any local population of English speakers and functions instead as an index of modernity, cosmopolitanism, and aspirational consumption. Backhaus observed this in Tokyo, where English clustered on slogans, brand names, and titles while the substantive informational load remained Japanese (Backhaus); Cenoz and Gorter documented the parallel encroachment of English onto minority-language streets in Europe, where it competes with both the state language and the regional one (Cenoz and Gorter). What such patterns record is not bilingual communication in any ordinary sense but the circulation of a global semiotic resource that carries connotational value irrespective of comprehension. Jaworski and Thurlow's framing of the semiotic landscape under conditions of mediatization captures this well: the globalized sign increasingly addresses a generalized consumer rather than a located interlocutor, and its multilingualism is calibrated to the symbolic economy of the brand rather than to the linguistic competence of any neighborhood (Jaworski and Thurlow). The urban landscape thus already contained, before any digital mediation, signs whose addressees were imagined and translocal rather than co-present and local, a tension the digital will only amplify.

The commodification of language sharpened this picture by foregrounding the market logic that increasingly governs urban display. Leeman and Modan, in a contextualized study of Washington's Chinatown, demonstrated that Chinese script on the area's signage had become detached from any Chinese-speaking community and functioned instead as a marketable aesthetic, a "decorative" ethnic ornament affixed by national chains to satisfy a development-board commodification of place (Leeman and Modan 332). Their argument is consequential because it severs the assumed link between the visibility of a code and the vitality of its speakers: a language can be highly salient in the landscape precisely because it has been emptied of communicative function and recast as branding. Gentrification and tourism intensify this dynamic, converting heritage scripts into instruments of real-estate value and urban spectacle. The mechanism is legible in the stratigraphy Blommaert reads from Antwerp's signage, where the arrival of new commercial actors overwrites older inscriptions and the neighborhood's textual surface is continually rewritten to address a changing, and frequently wealthier, imagined clientele (Blommaert). Tourism adds a further audience whose linguistic competence the signage need not actually serve: heritage scripts and curated multilingualism are deployed to authenticate a district as picturesque, legible to the visitor as atmosphere rather than as information. In such settings the landscape performs locality for non-locals, and the languages on display index a marketable identity rather than a living speech community. The implication for LL theory is that the symbolic function identified by Landry and Bourhis (25)

cannot be read off frequency alone; it requires the contextualized, ethnographically informed interpretation that the field's later methodology came to demand, attending to who commissioned a sign, for whom, and within what regime of value.

The Digital Turn: From Netscape to Geotagged Feed

The migration of LL study into digital space proceeded along several distinct paths, and conflating them has obscured what is genuinely new. The earliest move simply relocated the object: Ivkovic and Lotherington proposed the "virtual linguistic landscape," analyzing multilingual practice across websites and Web 2.0 platforms and arguing that cyberspace constitutes a "linguistic cyberecology" amenable to the same questions of code presence and language hierarchy that animated street-level research (Ivkovic and Lotherington 17). Troyer's study of Thai online newspapers coined the complementary "linguistic netscape," extending the spatial metaphor to the architecture of the web page and tracking how English colonizes particular zones of multilingual sites (Troyer). In these accounts the digital is treated as a new surface onto which the established analytic of code distribution can be projected more or less intact.

These first-path studies are valuable, but their governing analogy quietly does a great deal of work. To speak of a "netscape" or a "virtual landscape" is to assume that the page or the platform is a terrain one traverses much as one walks a street, and that the distribution of codes across its zones can be mapped as one maps signage across a district. The analogy holds for the relatively static, editorially controlled web that Ivkovic and Lotherington and Troyer examined, where a newspaper's masthead, navigation bar, and advertising slots occupy stable positions analogous to the official and commercial registers of the street (Ivkovic and Lotherington; Troyer). It holds far less well for the dynamically composed, personalized environments that have since become dominant, where no two retrievals of the same address yield the same arrangement of language. The spatial metaphor that made the netscape tractable was borrowed from precisely the emplaced, public terrain whose properties later platforms abandon, and the term's intuitive appeal has tended to conceal rather than expose that abandonment.

A second path is more consequential because it links the digital and the urban rather than substituting one for the other. Hiippala and colleagues analyzed roughly 120,000 geotagged Instagram posts from a single square in Helsinki, reconstructing what they term the linguistic landscape of social media content tethered to a physical site (Hiippala et al. 290). Here the digital does not replace the street; it becomes a parallel inscription of the same location, authored not by municipalities or shopkeepers but by tourists and residents whose captions, hashtags, and language choices accrete around a coordinate. QR-mediated signage and app interfaces compress the two regimes still further: a physical placard now frequently functions as a portal, its material text minimal, its meaning completed only when a personal device retrieves content that is dynamic, language-selectable, and invisible to any passer-by who does not scan it. The sign on the wall has become, in part, an index pointing offsite. This is no longer the netscape as a separate web-bound terrain, nor the street as a self-sufficient visual field, but a hybrid in which the material and the digital co-constitute a single, unevenly accessible semiotic environment.

What "Landscape" Cannot Hold: A Critical Reconceptualization

The argument of this article is that these developments expose the limits of the founding metaphor. "Landscape" is not a neutral term; it imports a specific phenomenology drawn from painting and geography in which a viewer surveys, from a position, a bounded and stable visual field that is, in principle, the same for any other viewer who occupies the same standpoint. The urban LL satisfied this phenomenology almost perfectly: signs are fixed, public, and co-

present, and two people standing on the same corner see the same array. Geosemiotics formalized the corollary that emplacement is constitutive of meaning (Scollon and Scollon). The digital sign violates both conditions at once. It is mobile rather than emplaced, traveling with the device and the feed rather than residing at a coordinate; and it is individuated rather than public, since algorithmic curation ensures that the stream of signage delivered to one observer differs systematically from that delivered to another. There is, strictly, no shared field to survey. The geotagged feed studied by Hiippala and colleagues is not a landscape that anyone beholds in common but an aggregate that only the analyst, working retrospectively across thousands of private screens, can assemble (Hiippala et al.).

It is worth being precise about why this is more than a quantitative increase in the number of surfaces a researcher must survey. The history sketched above shows that LL theory progressively loosened several of its founding commitments without ever abandoning the two that the digital now severs. The semiotic turn relaxed the assumption that the relevant material was strictly linguistic, admitting image, layout, and material form; the commodification literature relaxed the assumption that a code's salience tracked its speakers' vitality, admitting language emptied of communicative function; the work on globalization relaxed the assumption that signs address a local interlocutor, admitting the translocal consumer. Through all of these revisions, emplacement and publicness survived intact, because each successive object, however multimodal, commodified, or globally oriented, remained a fixed mark in a place seen by all who passed. The digital is the first development to touch these last two commitments directly, and that is what distinguishes it from a mere expansion of scope. To treat the geotagged feed as one more surface to be added to the survey is to miss that it withdraws the ground on which surveying itself was intelligible.

Two consequences follow. First, the symbolic function theorized by Landry and Bourhis is transformed rather than preserved. On the street, the visibility of a language is a public fact: its presence or absence is witnessed by the whole passing community and carries its symbolic charge precisely because it is seen by all (Landry and Bourhis 25). In a personalized feed, visibility is conditional and segmented; a language may be highly present for users whose profiles attract it and wholly absent for others, so the very publicness that made signage a measure of vitality is fractured. Second, the commodification dynamic that Leeman and Modan identified is radicalized, because the digital sign can be targeted, A/B tested, and varied in real time, displaying one code to a tourist and another to a resident from the same physical placard (Leeman and Modan). The landscape ceases to be a record and becomes a transaction. This article therefore proposes that scholars stop treating the digital as an extension of the landscape and instead recognize a categorical split: the urban LL remains a landscape, a bounded, co-present, material field, while its digital counterpart is better theorized as a regime of circulation, in which signs move, mutate, and address differentiated publics. Vandenbroucke's attention to the multiple "TimeSpace scales" at which urban signage operates already gestures toward this mobility (Vandenbroucke); the digital simply makes scale-jumping the normal condition rather than the exception. The point is not to abandon the term but to mark precisely where its phenomenological warranty expires.

Methodological Challenges of the Online Landscape

This reconceptualization carries concrete methodological stakes, several of which the field has begun to confront. The survey method that served the street, walking a defined area and photographing every sign, presumes a finite, stable, and observer-independent population of signs. None of these conditions holds online. The relevant population is effectively unbounded and constantly refreshed; what a researcher captures is a sample of a stream rather than a census of a terrain, and the sample is shaped by the same algorithmic logics it seeks to study. Hiippala and colleagues address this by working with platform data at scale and applying

computational classification, but they are candid that geotagging is selective, that platforms grant and withdraw data access unpredictably, and that language identification at scale is error-prone (Hiippala et al.). The methodological innovations catalogued by Gorter, from improved georeferencing to large image corpora, expand what is tractable without resolving the deeper problem that the analyst's assembled dataset corresponds to no single observer's experience (Gorter; Shohamy and Gorter).

Three challenges deserve particular emphasis. The first is the unit of analysis. Offline, the sign, however contested its boundaries, is a discrete material object; online, the analogous unit, a post, a thread, an interface state, an ephemeral story, may exist for hours and be composed dynamically, so its identity as a countable item is unstable. The second is ethics and access: street signage is uncontroversially public, but social media content occupies a contested zone between public and private, and the platforms that mediate it impose terms of service and shifting data regimes that constrain reproducible research. The third is the loss of co-presence as a validity check. Geosemiotic interpretation depended on the analyst standing where the sign stands and reading its emplacement directly (Scollon and Scollon); the digital analyst cannot occupy the position of the individuated user, whose feed is unreproducible, and must instead infer the landscape from traces. A fourth, subtler challenge concerns scale and representativeness. The computational methods that make large image and text corpora tractable invite a return to the aggregate counting of codes that defined the field's first generation, but the aggregate now conceals a heterogeneity it once revealed. A frequency table of languages across a hundred thousand posts reports the analyst's synthesis, not any community's shared visual experience, and to present it as the linguistic landscape of a place risks reinstating the very equation of salience with vitality that the contextualized turn was at pains to complicate (Leeman and Modan). The corrective is not to abandon scale but to pair it with attention to who actually receives which signs, recognizing that the distribution a corpus exhibits may be experienced by no one in particular. These are not technical inconveniences to be engineered away but symptoms of the categorial shift this article has described. A research program adequate to digital signage will need to be ethnographic about reception as well as production, following users rather than surveying spaces, and honest that what it reconstructs is a circulation it can sample but never wholly behold.

Conclusion

Linguistic landscape study has traveled a considerable distance from its origins in the measurement of code distribution on public signs. It began by establishing that visible language indexes the vitality and relative power of language communities, matured through a semiotic turn that made emplacement constitutive of meaning, and deepened through ethnographic and critical work that read the urban landscape as a chronicle of migration, a market in commodified ethnicity, and a terrain of gentrification and tourism. Its extension into digital space is the natural next horizon, and the early scholarship on virtual landscapes, netscapes, and geotagged feeds has demonstrated that the field's questions about hierarchy, visibility, and value remain urgent online. This article has argued, however, that the move online is not merely additive. The digital sign is mobile where the urban sign is emplaced, and individuated where the urban sign is public, so it forfeits the two properties on which the metaphor of landscape, and the geosemiotic theory built upon it, depended. The honest conclusion is that there are now two objects, not one: the urban linguistic landscape, a bounded and co-present material field, and a digital regime of circulating, personalized, algorithmically curated signage that resembles a feed more than a scene. Holding the two apart, rather than dissolving the first into a capacious second, will let the field carry its hard-won theoretical apparatus forward while remaining precise about where that apparatus stops applying. The landscape, once digitized, is no longer a view that anyone shares; recognizing this is the condition for studying it well.

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