

The De-Facto status of the implementation of the official languages policy in police stations of Sri Lanka

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The police in any given country are the guardian of the law and trust who is vested with the responsibility of maintaining public peace. Thus, they are expected to deal with the public more often than any another government official in their day today duties. The communication between the concerned parties and the police personnel is of pivotal importance in this regard – as such meditations are always interrelated with the factors pertaining to offences, law, and justice. Thus the need to be accountable, transparency is essentially woven in the language that is being used to converse with the concerned parties. Sri Lanka as a multi-lingual state declared its bilingual official languages status in its 13th amendment to the constitution granting the equal parity for both Sinhala and Tamil languages after many contentious struggles over the years. Today, the state intuitions thus abide to offer their service to the public in the respective official languages – especially in the bilingual zones designated by the government taking into account the demographic census. It is in this light the current study concentrates on the implementation of the official languages policy in the Sri Lankan Police stations which play a crucial role in the process of the reconciliation in the post-war Sri Lanka. The study takes into account the linguistic landscape of Sri Lanka where the police stations are randomly selected out of the cluster sample of 72 bilingual divisional secretariats of the country (41 Gazetted & 31 recommended to be gazetted based upon the 20% of minority or more living in the respective divisional secretariats). The data for the study was obtained through the primary unprocessed data accumulated by the Official Languages Commission of Sri Lanka through official language physical audits that include onsite observations. The findings reveal that the implementation of the official languages policy in Sri Lankan Police Stations in the designated linguistic landscape (bilingual divisional secretariats) is ineffective in terms of the visibility and ambience and service delivery to the public due to the reasons stemming out from the lack of awareness/disregard of the official language policy and the related circulars, dearth of the police officers competent in the other official language, lack of in-station facilities to comply with the policy and the absence of a proper institutional mechanism to implement the official language policy.

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