

Linguistic Landscape: A Study of Signage at Public Museum in Cardiff

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Abstract

This work investigates the bilingual linguistic landscape as represented in St Fagans, the national history museum in Cardiff, Wales, UK. Being a history museum it covers knowledge of Welsh history and culture where objects of historical, artistic, and cultural importance are kept for public exhibition. The linguistic landscape (LL) in St Fagans offers the viewers a look into the cultural diversity, the preservation and co-existence of two languages, English and Welsh, over time. Besides focussing on the symbolic functions through linguistic code preference, the study also aims at exploring how the LL contributes to the discursive construction of the museum identity and the collective identity of the people whose history it seeks to represent inhabit it. Moreover, the study sheds light on the relationships between linguistic landscape and the sociolinguistic context of Wales. The study recommends an investigation into the bi/multilingual landscape of Pakistan to help reveal the diverse ethnolinguistic make-up of the country.

Introduction

The study of Linguistic Landscape (LL) is the study of written text in a specific sociolinguistic context. Falling in the fields of sociolinguistics and applied linguistics, the study of linguistic landscape is part of semiotics, that is, the study of signs and their meanings. According to Landry and Bourhis (1997), linguistic landscape of an area refers to ‘the language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings’ (p. 25) serving “an informational and a symbolic function” (p. 25). The linguistic landscape of a region can be interpreted in several ways. It enhances our understanding of the cultural and (socio) linguistic complexity and diversity of a region. It demonstrates and highlights the spread of English either as a ‘powerful’ language, or as a source of information for international visitors where English is not a native language. Moreover, LL may be indicative of the state’s policy of language planning in that the presence or lack of presence of a particular language in public spaces can tell us about the state’s role in promoting or not promoting that language.

Public signs are likely to be ideologically motivated. Language ideologies, according to Milroy (2004), are “thoroughly naturalized sets of beliefs about language

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intersubjectively held by members of speech communities” (p. 162). One sort of language ideology is the standard language ideology which simply means that one language or a dialect of it is better than the other. Looking at a language in an ideological context means that public signs are likely to be laden with cultural content and values. As such a language is not only a source of communication but is indexical of the user’s social status, class, gender, ethnicity, emotions, relationships of solidarity, domination and subordination. People are judged and categorized on their use of language resulting in hierarchical relationship between the users. In this regard, Kress’ (1993) remarks are very pertinent: ‘All signs are subject to critical reading, for no sign is innocent’ (p. 174). Following Kress’ remarks it appears relevant to establish that as long as there is sign, there is meaning, and meaning always has to be searched out. This study will critically investigate the public signs put up in St Fagans National Museum of History to understand the country’s official policy of bilingualism as represented in the linguistic landscape of the museum. In addition to that, the study will explore and reveal the socio-culturally driven ideological meanings of the signs displayed in the museum and the power relations manifested through these signs.

Sociolinguistic profile of Wales/Linguistic landscape in bilingual Wales

Today’s Wales is a bilingual society with bilingualism as an established feature (Collins 2000, p. 23). Wales achieved this bilingual status after the awakening of nationalist feelings. A series of political and social measures led to the enactment of laws across Wales, making Welsh a co-equal national language alongside English. All these efforts saw their climax in the development of Welsh Language Board in 1988. The Welsh National Assembly has formulated clear official policies to encourage the development and spread of a bilingual society. The revival of Welsh has been an integral part of cultural nationalism in Wales and can be evidenced from Plaid Cymru’s (Welsh national party) early concerns with the restoration of Welsh as a national language. Bilingual LL in Wales is the direct result of country’s official policy. The ideological basis of the public signage can be seen in the *A Guide to Bilingual Design* (2001) which sets out prescriptive measures right from regulating the typeface to the textual placement and the layout.

Cardiff being the capital city of Wales attracts people from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds with English serving as a language of wider communication in the city. Being a capital of an officially bilingual country, Cardiff presents and represents bilingual LL to serve informational and symbolic functions. The present study investigates the linguistic landscape in St. Fagan which is national history museum in Cardiff. The LL in the museum is part of the conscious and consolidated language planning efforts. *Iaith Pawb*, the planning document of the Welsh Language Board, sets Welsh at par with English in general and in the linguistic landscape in particular in the following words:

'...We want Wales to be a truly bilingual...and where the presence of the two languages is a visible and audible source of pride and strength to us all' (cited in Coupland 2010, p. 85).

The above passage is ideologically driven. The Welsh bilingual identity is at the root of this ideology and the emphasis is especially placed on saliency, 'visibility' and 'audibility' of both the languages. This also reflects the official declaration of bilingual equivalence, as the Welsh language act of 1993 requires the public sector to treat Welsh and English 'on an equal basis'. This 'equivalent' treatment of Welsh has clearly brought the language out from the quagmire of stigma into which it had once fallen to its now one of the two bilingual choices available to the residents of Wales. The promotion of Welsh in the linguistic landscape demonstrates and is a vital part of the official policy of Wales as a bilingual country.

Public signs can be 'top-down' i.e. produced and approved by official authorities or 'bottom-up' i.e., non-official signs usually developed by individuals or groups. Coupland (2010), however, reasons that all public signs come from 'above' in so far what people usually display as linguistic landscape is shaped by the dominant language ideologies. In other words, the official language policy may be reflected in both official and non-official signs.

Literature Review

The study of the linguistic landscape as a sub-field of sociolinguistic and applied linguistic has drawn considerable attention from researchers in different parts of the world over the past two decades. Starting with Landry and Bourhis's (1997) seminal work, linguists have analyzed the signs in public spaces to understand language use in a particular sociolinguistic context. One of the often-quoted works in the area is by Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) in which they analyzed the linguistic landscape of 8 Israeli cities including the disputed town of East Jerusalem. Their analysis focused on the appearance and presence of three major languages, that is, Hebrew (the official language of Israel), Arabic (the second official language), and English on public and private signs. The patterns of linguistic landscape varied in different areas according to the community inhabiting a particular geographical region. Hebrew and English signs dominated the Jewish communities, Arabic and Hebrew dominated the Israeli-Palestinian communities, and Arabic and English dominated the East Jerusalem. Ben Rafael et.al concluded that the visibility of a particular language on street signs varies from town to town, demonstrating the demographic make-up/complexion of a particular area.

Huebner (2006) reports on the linguistic landscape (i.e. street signs) in Bangkok, the capital of Thailand. His analysis reveals that Bangkok is a multilingual city with English having a marked visibility and saliency on the street signs. Also, English is shown to be heavily influencing Thai language resulting in the Thai variety of English.

According to Huebner, a shift from Chinese to English as a language of communication in the city is taking place. Cenoz and Gorter (2006) investigated the linguistic landscape in two regions of two European countries: Friesland in the Netherlands, and the Basque Country in Spain. They analyzed the use of minority language and the state language i.e. Basque versus Spanish, Frisian versus Dutch, as well as English as a global language as part of linguistic landscape in the two countries. Cenoz and Gorter reason that both minority languages are waging a war of survival as they are threatened by the state languages in their respective countries. However, while Basque finds a greater presence in the linguistic landscape of the city due to the official policy, Frisian is only nominally present. In both contexts, however, the use of English on street signs is remarkable.

Backhaus (2006) analysed the multilingual linguistic landscape of Tokyo, Japan. Focussing his attention on the official and non-official signs, he found that the signs were different with regard to text and its arrangement on the signs. While the official signs were Japanese-only and were indicative of power relations in the Japanese society, the non-official signs showed greater presence of English expressing solidarity with the foreigners.

Manan, David, Dumanig and Naqeebullah (2015) investigated the linguistic landscape of Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Studying both government and private multilingual signs they reason that the linguistic landscape of the city is indicative of its multidimensional sociopolitical, economic and ethnolinguistic life. Four languages, that is, Malay, English, Mandarin, and Tamil constitute public signs to various degrees. The LL of Kuala Lumpur underscores the official policy of projecting and promoting Bahasa Melayu, the official language of Malaysia. The use of the national language is mandatory on all signboards and the official policy spells out the detail about its appearance on the signs. English, however, also occupies a prominent place on the signboards which throws light on the city being a tourist resort and also signals the international and westernized outlook of the city. The appearance of Mandarin and Tamil on public signs, on the other hand, although less as compared to English and Malay, signifies group solidarity in a multilingual society such as Malaysia. The study reveals that despite the strict official policy of preferring the national language over other languages, the private signboards are more inclusive of the various linguistic, ethnic and religious identities of the multiracial Malaysian society.

The above account shows that public signs in a multilingual community can be indicative of power relationship in a society. In other words, the presence or absence of a language on a public sign can be revealing in terms of the status of a language and its speakers in a society. The present study explores the bilingual linguistic landscape of a national history museum in Wales in order to understand the complex coexistence of the two languages in a bilingual society and how this landscape is representative of the social and linguistic ideology of the country.

Methodology

A total of 8 photographs of bilingual signs were examined in the national history museum of Wales. The photographs were taken with a digital camera. These signs are put up and approved by the museum's administration to mark various places in the museum and to add to the museum's symbolic construction. Although this study is limited to 8 photographs, they indicate a general pattern of LL in the museum. One half of the signs (i.e. 1, 2, 3 and 4) represents various international commercial organizations, while the other half (i.e. 5, 6, 7 and 8) falls under the government control. Although figures 1, 2, 3 and 4 represent private and commercial signs and as such fall outside the control of the government, they are in line with the government policy of official bilingualism in that they prioritize and favour Welsh in terms of arrangement, sequencing and placement on the signs.



Figure 1



Figure 2



Figure 3



Figure 4

The selection of the St Fagans national museum of history as a study site was motivated by the fact that the museum is the centre of the ethno-cultural diversity and co-existence of languages over time.

Each photograph was a unit of analysis in its own right. The aim is to show how semiotic choices realize the discourse of language ideology and official bilingualism. Each sign was analyzed with respect to the appearance, positioning and ordering of the text and, the colour and font size of language used on the sign.

Data Analysis

A very interesting case of bilingual landscape can be noted in figure 1 where the linguistic and typological resources of both the languages are creatively exploited. Welsh being VSO language takes the classifier noun before the head noun (Coupland 2010, p. 92). In the phrase ‘Siop Gawalia Stores’, the head noun ‘Gawalia’ is preceded and followed by the Welsh and English classifier noun, respectively. The Welsh phrase ‘diodydd oer’ is followed by its English translation ‘ice cold drinks’. Figures 2, 3, and 4 show the same pattern, that is, Welsh comes first. The English text appears as mere translation of the Welsh language.

Closely related to the use of language is the choice of colour in these pictures. The use of the red is particularly obvious in figures 2, 3 and 4. The ideological and symbolic meanings of the red can be easily traced in the red design of these signs. Figure 2 shows a picture of the cash-machine and is painted all red. Figure 3 offers an interesting case in terms of text-colour combination. The Welsh text has a red background and comes above and before the English text which is a translation of its Welsh version. The English text starts with blue as a background and moves towards the red. Figure 4 is the image of a dustbin with a red-painted plate. The text is in white and yellow with the Coca Cola logo appearing at the top. The red colour of these signs is the realization of the ideological red as the symbolic colour of Wales. Red is the colour of dragon on the Welsh national flag and is crucial to Welsh identity. The assimilation of the ideologically-loaded features like the red colour and the priority of Welsh over English (in terms of placement of the text) show the ‘glocalization’ policy of an international commercial organization such as Coca Cola. Following the slogan of ‘think globally, act locally’, these organizations appeal to the locals to sell their global products. This implies that code preferences and designs in the linguistic landscape are not arbitrary but are the product of a well thought-out bilingual presentation of Wales and are indexical of the broader social and official attitudes towards Welsh and English.

Figures 5, 6, 7 and 8 are pictures of official signs and fall directly under the governmental control. Figure 5 presents the poem of a Welsh national poet Gwyn Thomas. In addition to the title and the theme of the poem which are thoroughly nationalistic, the poem also refers to and is overtly suggestive of identity markers in the museum, and as such is a clear marker of the Welsh identity of the place. Perhaps the

poem is a way of orienting visitors to the symbolic significance of what they will see at St. Fagans. Figure 6 which shows the names and scripts of different world languages, and figure 7 which shows the billboard indicating direction show the priority of Welsh over English. The map in figure 8 shows the name of the museum in both Welsh and English. There is an attempt on part of the designer (s) of the sign to strike a balance in terms of placement and ordering of the text. Neither Welsh nor English appears to be prioritized in terms of ordering on the sign. However, Welsh is prioritized in another way. As opposed to English, Welsh is written in bold font giving it prominence and emphasis.



Figure 5



Figure 6



Figure 7



Figure 8

All these signs (official and commercial) are bilingual following the principles of parallel text bilingualism like equality, equivalence, choice and code integrity (Coupland 2010, p. 87). A close analysis, however, reveals the ideological crypto-types or the hidden meaningful patterns. Whether a text is placed vertically or horizontally on the sign, Welsh occupies the first place reflecting its 'givenness' or familiarity. It further reinforces its being favoured or natural. The appearance of Welsh above English indicates its being the ideal element of the message (Kress and Leeuwen 1996, p. 186). In

most of the signs, the text in English seems to be a word-by-word translation of the Welsh. The effect of English being the translation of Welsh is corroborated by the fact that all items are evenly spaced in both texts with almost one to one correspondence. By relegating English to the second place, the Welshness of the museum has been clearly marked and highlighted.

The public-private difference is overridden by the fact that the pattern of arrangement and distribution of the languages is the same on all signs: both official and commercial signs prioritize Welsh. All these signs are in line with the political and institutional influences, and are quite consistent in displaying coherent patterns in the design of the signs.

The analysis presented above sheds light on the power relations between the Welsh-speaking and English-speaking groups/communities. Welsh can be seen as more assertive and dominant in the LL in St. Fagans, courtesy the Welsh government's legislation to own Welsh as one of the two official languages of the country. It is also a reminder of the fact that Wales is on the way of socio-political independence from the colonial legacy of the English.

From a sociolinguistic point of view the LL in St. Fagans is quite intriguing and cannot be taken as representative of linguistic make-up and spread in Cardiff. Linguistic landscape in Cardiff generally displays English-first pattern, reflecting the socially and demographically anglicized nature of Cardiff being the capital city. Signs in St Fagans, on the other hand, reflect the reverse of this general pattern. The contrast in the linguistic behaviour of Cardiff city and the Wales national museum may be due to the fact that the museum is under the control of the Welsh governmental and functions a flag-bearer for the Welsh ethnolinguistic identity.

To the monolingual English-speakers, the linguistic landscape in St. Fagans clearly tells about the presence and influence of Welsh language, indicating the co-equal status of Welsh and English. For bilingual Welsh speakers it serves a source of ethnolinguistic pride and identity and thus a source of in-group pride and solidarity. It goes well beyond just serving an informational function: it is a symbolic construction of their 'Welshness'.

Conclusion

This study analyzed linguistic landscape in St. Fagans, a national history museum of Wales, UK. The analysis underscored the prestige that Welsh language now enjoys in relation to English in Wales in general and Cardiff in particular as a consequence of the official bilingualism of the country. The LL of the museum reminds tourists of the bilingual nature of Wales inhabited by two communities of which Cardiff is the capital. Although almost all Welsh people speak English, it serves as a lingua franca for speakers of different languages in Wales and is also indicative of English colonial legacy. Welsh,

on the other hand, is indicative of the rising sense of Welshness and serves a symbolic and solidarity function. In a St Fagans, Welsh, mainly due to the bilingual official policy, has been raised to the status of being the 'given'. The LL of the museum and of Cardiff city is part of preservation, revival and revitalization of the Welsh language. The bilingual language policy of Wales of which the LL is a direct manifestation has resulted not only in slowing down the language loss but has also led to the renewed interest in the Welsh people to use their language.

Recommendations

Although Pakistan is not an officially multilingual country, English and Urdu are commonly used in daily life as well as in the media. While Urdu is the 'national' language of Pakistan, English is its 'official' language. The two languages have been in competition for power and influence and there has always been a debate over the relative status and importance of Urdu and English in the corridors of power such as media, Parliament, and Judiciary. A number of 'regional' languages also add to the complex and diverse ethnolinguistic make-up of the country. What is important to investigate from sociolinguistic perspective, however, is the use and appearance of Urdu and English or any other 'regional' language in public spaces. Such a research will reveal a lot about the nature, functions and status of these languages in a complex, multi-ethnic and multi-lingual society of Pakistan.

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