



CRITICAL REVIEW ON LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

Kevin Jake M. Angyab
kevinjakeangyab@e.ubaguio.edu

In the 21st century, multilingualism emerges as a phenomenon that affects and challenges the circle of communication and information. Nordquist (2015) defined multilingualism as the knowledge and ability of a speaker to use and communicate in three or more languages. Given this dramatic prominence of multilingualism, attention to the fast-growing presence of signages were developed. These visual displays are seen as potential pieces of evidence of the linguistic, cultural, and contextual contexts of a certain city, region, or country. Eventually, numerous scholars suddenly become interested in studying multilingualism by studying its use and roles in sociolinguistic contexts.

Specifically, numerous scholars introduce one concrete and possible way to investigate the languages in context which is dubbed as linguistic landscapes (LL). As a new development, LL is gradually gaining a massive attention in various disciplines such as sociolinguistics, applied linguistics, psychology, among others. The study of linguistic landscape is not just concentrated on the explicit display of written language but also studies multi-modal, semiotic, visual, oral elements and others. Hence, scholarly attentions were brought to studying different signs and even to its other types that were brought by the technological developments.

Backhaus (2007) explained that LL is “a relatively young sociolinguistic subdiscipline for which few theoretical preliminaries have been developed so far” (p. 3). However, various labels have been proposed for LL such as “environmental print” (Huebner 2006), “the decorum of the public life” (Rafael et al. 2006), “multilingual cityscape” (Gorter, 2006), and “semiotic landscape” (Jaworski & Thurlow 2010).

One of the earliest LL definitions was provided by Landry and Bourhis (1997) who reasoned out that linguistic landscape includes, “The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.” Accordingly, LL of a territory can functionally serve as either informational or symbolic.

Based on various studies on linguistic landscapes, the concept is also labeled in various names. For instance, Gorter (2006) tags it as “multimodal landscape” to mean that the signs were situated in urban settings where the language is studied most often. On the other hand, Scollon and Scollon-Wong (2003) names it as “geosemiotics” to refer to the connotative meanings of signs and its relevance to the world. Accordingly, meanings can be generated by investigating the locale where the sign was placed and the manner as to how the sign was placed. Hence, it rationalizes that the meanings behind the public

signs are only revealed if these signs are situated under certain social and cultural contexts. It also goes to explain that as visual displays, the designs and layouts should be considered.

In light of further developments relevant to this interest, Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) believed that LL denotes the “linguistic objects that mark the public space”; Spolsky (2020) forwarded the term “linguistic cityscape” instead considering the urban settings; and Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) who proposed the word “semiotic landscape” to mean “the interaction of language, visual discourse, spatial practice and social changes brought about by the trend of globalization in public space with visible inscription made through explicit human interaction and meaning making.”

In the lens of LL studies, Scollon and Scollon-Wong (2003) further stresses that studying the language/s being used by the signs can reveal the community in which the language is used, that is, geopolitical associations. Moreover, the language/s inscribed on the signs can reveal the socio-cultural identities that may or may not be related to the place where they are located which is called as “sociocultural associations.”

It should be understood that in the context of linguistic landscapes, the languages used in different signs posted in public spheres should be scrutinized, and thus, should be visible to the people for information and awareness (Bourhis & Landry, 2002). This thought is congruent with the insights posited by other scholars who believe that: “rather than reflect[ing]

the vitality of their respective language communities and the extent of language use, the publicly displayed texts which make up the LL may provide evidence—to be understood in contexts—of power relationships between languages (or rather, the groups who ‘own’ those languages) and policies designed to manage and control just those relationships” (Sebba, 2010, p. 62).

Meanwhile, in as far as the signs are concerned, two classifications of signs are being forwarded. The first type of sign is called as the “top-down” signs or commonly known as the public signs. These signs contain official or institutional messages that were decreed by a community’s governmental or political actors which include ordinances, policies, and other public announcements. In contrast, the second type of sign is dubbed as “bottom-up” signs or commonly known as the private signs. Clearly, these visual displays are the made by commercial actors like businessmen to refer to enterprises like shops, cafes, market, and others.

In the course of linguistic landscape studies, it is presumed by scholars and theorists that the signs may either be monolingual or multilingual in nature. However, while pure monolingual signs were visible during the ancient times as explained by Gorter and Cenoz (2017), it is laborious to find this kind in the current time. The valid reason for this is the fact that nations instituted the English language as the world’s lingua franca or medium of international communication amidst the age of globalization and modernization. Over time, the global language flexibly and fluidly spread across the various parts of the

world and surprisingly, influenced the markets to name the products and services with international labels and slogans. Hence, the in-trend signs subject to the studies of linguistic landscapes are those that are multilingual in nature. As per the location or space of the signs, most scholarly studies in this field focuses on the urban settings and specifically on commercial establishments like shops, markets, and others that definitely install visual displays.

Whether fixed or mobile, analysis of public texts should consider the underlying contexts (Sebba, 2010, p. 73). As said by Pavlenko (2009), linguistics landscapes are analyzed based on the “frequency with which a language appears, the ordering of the language in a bilingual or multilingual context, the relationship between presumed translation equivalents, the prominence of a particular language such as order, size of the letter, color, locations, as well as the mobility of signs.”

Additionally, LL is generally understood to serve in various purposes which include either a description and analysis of the language situation in a certain country like the Sciriha and Vassall’s study on Malta in 2001 or for the presence and use of many languages in a larger territory like the study of Kreslins on the Baltic area in 2003. This explains that linguistic landscapes is perceived to be being driven by political and sociolinguistic motivations. In fact, Spolsky and Cooper (1991) asserted that linguistic landscapes are being utilized by political leaders and other high-profile personalities to instill power, that is, by controlling the languages used in the signs. Further, if not for political

pursuits, the same researchers attest that linguistic landscapes are being used by others to claim solidarity or identity, that is, perceiving the language in the signs as a statement of one's own identity. Apparently, the use of English is associated to prestige and power (Phillipson, 2003) and which becomes a more interesting LL study when studied under bilingual and multilingual circumstances.

Traditionally, linguistic landscape studies focus on bilingual or multilingual signs to “insights about multilingualism and language contact” (Backhaus, 2007, p. 1) within geographical spaces such as countries (Coupland, 2010; Macalister, 2010; Sloboda, 2009), cities (Barni et al., 2010) or neighborhoods (Papen, 2012), or a combination of the three.

This situation is aligned to the argument of Gorter (2008) that the language is around us, “displayed on shop windows, commercial signs, posters, official notices, traffic signs, among others.” He furthered the discussion by pointing out that LL has to do with sign coding scheme with concentrates on language appearance on the signs, placement of the signs, the sizes of scripts, number of languages on each sign, sequence of languages on bilingual or multilingual signs. This is synonymous to the Place Semiotics Theory that was pioneered by Scollon and Scollon (2003) which is covered in the succeeding discussions of this paper.

This conviction leads to the understanding that the linguistic elements may constitute as a sound basis for a systematic study in uncovering social

realities when taken as a whole within a given setting. Studies on linguistic landscapes become more interesting since we are in the age of modernity in which the continuous emergence of new institutions, commercial activities, professional identities, and demographic developments are noticeable.

Moreover, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) reasoned out that LL supports the understanding of sociolinguistic context because people rationalize the visual information they encounter. Further, the language being used in the signs impact the people's perception of the statuses of languages as well as their linguistic behavior. Thus, the LL influences the people's language use or language choice. Apart from this, Landry and Bourhis (1997) interpreted the quantity of signs may indicate the prominence of dominance of the languages in a community. In simplest words, it is possible that one can find out which language in the community is more dominant or prominent and which language is less dominant or prominent. Not only that, analyzing and interpreting the visual displays may also enlighten the people about the underlying reasons, factors, or impacts of such linguistic phenomenon or behavior. Connected to this, Fleitas (2003) explained that sometimes the meaning of linguistic landscape is extended to include the history of languages or our awareness of them. Specifically, linguistic landscapes can refer to the parts of the language and elements like vocabulary, as well as generally the words being used for communication.

Supported by ample literatures, the study of linguistic landscapes is more interesting in bilingual and multilingual settings which are prominent in urban settings like shops or markets. While the linguistic landscapes inform us about the sociolinguistic context and how the languages are being used in a community, they also clarify the official language policies instituted in a community and how they, in reality, are being reinforced or implemented. This realization also paves way to understanding that linguistic landscape studies can be concentrated to either the “top-down” or “bottom-up” signs, or both which great body of studies have shown. To reiterate, top-down signs are ‘government’ signs which reflect a specific language policy such as official signs for street names, road signs, names of establishments, names of streets, and others. Whereas, bottom-up signs are private signs such as the signs on shops, advertising, and private offices.

Recent studies have proven that top-down and bottom-up signs are different from each other. Pieces of evidence include the study Rafael, et al in 2006. One of the noticeable differences among these said signs is the use of English (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006). Supported by the idea of Landry and Bourhis (1997), it is presumed that bottom-up or the private signs are more diverse, and thus, more prescribed object for linguistic landscaping.

For instance, in business contexts which include the marketplace, the linguistic choices of the shop owners are being influenced by business types. In Turkey, Selvi (2016) reported that English language almost had no

occurrences among the various business types that include salons, restaurants, coffee shops, and electronic stores were more prone to the use of English'. Whereas, the global language has no traces on the stalls being used by commercial domains and even non-government organizations.

Meanwhile, Dimova (2007) revealed that shop signs in Macedonia manifested varying degrees of frequency on the use of English language on internet shops, bars, boutiques, restaurants, and barber shops, bakeries, and groceries. In the same study, no traces of the English language appeared in the shop signs of butchers and pharmacies (p. 21). In Pakistan, Manan et al. (2017) found that the entrepreneurs recognize 'the flexibility of the English language', which enables them to 'provide meaningful description to every modern technological product or service' (p. 661).

Clearly, global and local markets serve as sound locales in the investigation of language uses in commercial domains. Piller (2003) affirmed that English language is the most frequently-used language in advertising in non-English-speaking markets, apart from the community's local language. One of the potential reasons for this language use is the fact that the English language is perceived by the businessmen as instrumental in associating the products with a social stereotype of modernity, progress, and globalization. Moreover, Piller (2003) also revealed circumstances that the English language is frequently mixed with one or more local languages to combine features of globalization and localization. Another significant motive behind these

situations is that, the advertisers use particular languages in order to establish clients' comprehension of the contents, that is, clarity of the messages and senseful grasp of the emotions.

Meanwhile, the presence of English in LLs becomes a definite manifestation of a globalization and which was bannered by various studies. For example, the extensive use of the international language was manifested on the findings of Ben Rafael et al., (2006), Backhaus (2006), Huebner (2006), Cenoz & Gorter (2006), and among others. With the dominance of the English language on the signs, it only proves that its spread is somehow affected by LLs.

Apart from the English language, signs can also showcase multilinguistic nature, that is, through the use of different languages. In fact, the same conclusion is reported in two studies conducted in Asia specifically the studies of Huebner (2006), Backhaus (2006) who analyzed bilingual and multilingual signs, and Cenoz & Gorter (2006) who learned that Ljouwert-Leeuwarden were bilingual or multilingual areas.

Still relevant to the study on bilingual or multilingual signs, Cenoz and Gorter (2006) discovered that between the Frisian and Basque languages, the former is the first language in only 2%, while the latter is used in 28% of all cases. Considering the emergence of international communications, the use of the English language serves as almost the reverse.

Apart from the global scope, studying linguistic landscapes in our own setting such as the Philippines is undeniably a most-sought and look-forward-to study especially in the status quo. As a linguistically and culturally-diverse nation, Philippines has two official languages namely the Filipino (based on Tagalog) and the English languages which are used as the official media-of-instruction in schools. In addition, the country recognizes 14 major languages as mother tongues of Filipinos namely Tagalog, Cebuano, Ilocano, Hiligaynon/Ilonggo, Bikol, Waray, Kapampangan, Boholano, Pangasinense, Meranao, Maguindanao, Tausug, English, and Chinese (which encompasses the Hokkien dialect spoken by the Filipino-Chinese, putonghua, and other dialects) (Hau & Tinio, 2003). Further, many researchers such as Kaplan and Baldauf, Grimes and Grimes, McFarland, and Dutcher claim that there are between 120–168 languages spoken in the country (Dekker & Young, 2005, p. 182), while Ethnologue (n.d.) lists as many as 183 living languages in the Philippines. Generally, Philippines is known as a multilingual nation, that is, for the existence of several languages. Tupas and Martin (2007) noted that the multilingual nature of the country remains embedded in a complex web of political, sociocultural and economic ideologies.

While more and more Philippine-based linguistic landscape studies are being cultivated, ample guiding frameworks in the conduct of such study are also being introduced. Basically, one of the most common theory the guides

linguistic landscape studies is the Place Semiotic Theory which was founded by Scollon and Scollon in 2003.

Accordingly, the said theory posits the understanding that the importance of a particular language in the community can be gauged by investigating the position of the said language on the bilingual or multilingual sign. Moreover, the theory believes that richer understanding of the said language can be acquired by studying the characteristics of signs such as the typefaces, color of prints, and size of letters may contribute to the importance attached to a particular language.

To add, the Place Semiotic theory is aligned to the argument of Gorter (2008) that language is around us, “displayed on shop windows, commercial signs, posters, official notices, traffic signs, among others.” He furthered the discussion by pointing out that linguistic landscape has to do with sign coding scheme with concentrates on how languages appear on the signs, the location of the signs, the font sizes, number of languages used on each sign, order of languages on bilingual or multilingual signs.

In context, the theory does not simply focus on public signs but also investigates the various social actors from the perspective of social and cultural realities (Gorter, 2013; Shohamy, 2015). For instance, various cities across the world serve as fitting places for researchers in collecting, documenting, and classifying language use in urban public spaces. In addition, the use of languages on the signs aids in the understanding of each language in a certain

community (Siwinaa & Prasithrathsin, 2020). Further, the framework advocates studies angled to those who work and reside in bilingual and multilingual places and how they feel about them.

Another guiding framework is known as the Ethnolinguistic Vitality which was pioneered by Giles, et al in 1977. Accordingly, the framework explains a group's ability to preserve and protect their language and identity. In this cause, Ehala (2015) reasoned that the community or the people should continuously and intergenerationally transmit their linguistic and cultural practices, sustainable demography and active social organizations, social relationships, and commitment to its collective identity. In the words of Giles (1977), the vitality of the ethnolinguistic community is “as that which makes a group likely to behave as a distinctive and active collective entity in intergroup situations.”

Apart from the conceptualization of various theories like the Place Semiotic theory, it is also notable that significant basic and advanced methodologies in linguistic landscape studies are being introduced by existing scholarly investigations.

For instance, data collection and generation methods such as survey, mutual translation, and studying the direction of translation were once employed by Backhaus (2006); categorization of signs by Ben-Rafael, et al (2006); geospatial analysis and visualization method by Buchstaller and Alvanides (2017); multimodal analysis; glocal approach by Alomoush (2018);

coding scheme and semi-structured interviews by Sheng and Buchanan (2022); and others. Other notable studies on linguistic landscapes also employed quantitative designs (specifically frequency and percentage distribution), qualitative designs (specifically ethnographical method and visual, discourse, or textual analysis), and a combination of both designs, that is, mixed method. It is foreseen that in light of the continuous perpetuation of linguistic landscapes, wider array of theories, frameworks, and methodologies shall be conceived so that richer data shall be yielded.

REFERENCES:

- Alomoush, O. I. S. (2018). English in the linguistic landscape of a northern Jordanian city. *English Today*, 35(3), 35–41.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266078418000391>
- Barni, M., Ben-Rafael, E., & Shohamy, E. (2010). Linguistic landscape in the city. In *Multilingual Matters eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781847692993>
- Blackwood, R. (2010). Adam Jaworski and Crispin Thurlow (eds): Semiotic Landscapes: Language, Image, Space. *Language Policy*, 10(1), 77–79.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s10993-010-9177-0>
- Book Review: Backhaus, Peter (2007): Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters; 158 pages ISBN 9781853599460. (2015). *Advances in Language and Literary Studies*, 6(6). <https://doi.org/10.7575/aiac.all.v.6n.6p.209>
- Bourhis R.Y. and Landry, R., (2002) La loi 101 et l'aménagement du paysage linguistique du Québec. In: Bouchard, P. and Bourhis, R.Y. (Eds) (2002) L'aménagement Linguistique au Québec: 25 D'application de la Charte de la Langue Française, Publications du Québec, Québec, 107–132.
- Buchstaller, I., & Alvanides, S. (2017). Mapping the linguistic landscapes of the Marshall Islands. *Journal of Linguistic Geography*, 5(2), 67–85.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/jlg.2017.4>
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic landscape and minority languages. *International Journal of Multilingualism*, 3(1), 67–80.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14790710608668386>
- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2008). The linguistic landscape as an additional source of input in second language acquisition. *International Review of Applied*

- Linguistics in Language Teaching*, 46(3).
<https://doi.org/10.1515/iral.2008.012>
- Coupland, N., & Garrett, P., (2010). Linguistic landscapes, discursive frames and metacultural performance: The case of Welsh Patagonia. *International Journal of the Sociology of Language*, 205, 7-36.
- David, M. K., & Manan, S. A. (2016). Language ideology and the linguistic landscape. *Linguistics and the Human Sciences*, 11(1), 51–66.
<https://doi.org/10.1558/lhs.v11i1.20228>
- Dekker, D. E., & Young, C. (2005). Bridging the gap: the development of appropriate educational strategies for minority language communities in the Philippines. *Current Issues in Language Planning*, 6(2), 182–199.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14664200508668280>
- Dimova, S. (2007). English shop signs in Macedonia. *English Today*, 23(3–4), 18–24. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266078407003057>
- Ehala, M. (2015). Ethnolinguistic Vitality. *The International Encyclopedia of Language and Social Interaction*, 1–7.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/9781118611463.wbielsi046>
- Fleitas, J. (2003). The Power of Words: Examining the Linguistic Landscape of Pediatric Nursing. *The American Journal of Maternal Child Nursing*, 28(6), 384–388. <https://doi.org/10.1097/00005721-200311000-00011>
- Giles, H., Bourhis, R. Y., & Taylor, D. M. (1977). Towards a theory of language in ethnic group relations. In H. Giles (Ed.), *Language, ethnicity, and intergroup relations* (pp. 307– 348). London: Academic Press.
- Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic landscape : a new approach to multilingualism. In *Multilingual Matters eBooks*. <https://ci.nii.ac.jp/ncid/BA78891139>
- Gorter, D. (2013). Linguistic landscapes in a multilingual world. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 33, 190–212.
<https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190513000020>
- Gorter, D., & Cenoz, J. (2017). Linguistic landscape and multilingualism. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 233–245). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02240-6_27
- Huebner, T. (2006). Bangkok’s linguistic Landscapes: environmental print, codemixing and language change. In *Multilingual Matters eBooks* (pp. 31–51). <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599170-003>
- Kreslins, J. (2003). Linguistic landscapes in the baltic. *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 28(3–4), 165–174. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03468750310003659>
- Landry, R., & Bourhis, R. Y. (1997). Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality. *Journal of Language and Social Psychology*, 16(1), 23–49.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0261927x970161002>
- Macalister, J. (2010). Emerging voices or linguistic silence?: Examining a New Zealand linguistic landscape. *Multilingua*, 29(1), 55–75.
<https://doi.org/10.1515/mult.2010.003>
- Manan, S. A., David, M. K., Dumanig, F. P., & Channa, L. A. (2017). The glocalization of English in the Pakistan linguistic landscape. *World Englishes*, 36(4), 645–665. <https://doi.org/10.1111/weng.12213>
- Nordquist, R. (2019). Thinking about reading. *ThoughtCo*.
<http://grammar.about.com/od/rs/g/readingterm.htm>

- Papen, U. (2012). Commercial discourses, gentrification and citizens' protest: The linguistic landscape of Prenzlauer Berg, Berlin1. *Journal of Sociolinguistics*, 16(1), 56–80. <https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9841.2011.00518.x>
- Pavlenko, A. (2009). Language conflict in Post-Soviet linguistic landscapes. *Journal of Slavic Linguistics*, 17(1), 247–274. <https://doi.org/10.1353/jsl.0.0025>
- Phillipson, R. (2004). English-Only Europe? In *Routledge eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203696989>
- Piller, I. (2003). 10. ADVERTISING AS A SITE OF LANGUAGE CONTACT. *Annual Review of Applied Linguistics*, 23, 170–183. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0267190503000254>
- Rafael, E. B., Shohamy, E., Amara, M. H., & Hecht, N. T. (2006). Linguistic landscape as symbolic construction of the public space: the case of Israel. In *Multilingual Matters eBooks* (pp. 7–30). <https://doi.org/10.21832/9781853599170-002>
- Sciriha, L. and Vassallo, M. (2001) Malta: A Linguistic Landscape. Malta: University of Malta.
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. B. K. (2003a). Discourses in place. In *Routledge eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203422724>
- Scollon, R., & Scollon, S. B. K. (2003b). Discourses in place. In *Routledge eBooks*. <https://doi.org/10.4324/9780203422724>
- Sebba, M. (2010). Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo Peter Backhaus. *Writing Systems Research*, 2(1), 73–76. <https://doi.org/10.1093/wsr/wsp006>
- Selvi, A. F. (2016). English as the language of marketspeak. *English Today*, 32(4), 33–39. <https://doi.org/10.1017/s0266078416000286>
- Sheng, R., & Buchanan, J. (2022). Traditional Visual Language: A geographical semiotic analysis of indigenous linguistic landscape of ancient waterfront towns in China. *SAGE Open*, 12(1), 215824402110685. <https://doi.org/10.1177/21582440211068503>
- Shohamy, E. (2015). LL research as expanding language and language policy. *Linguistic Landscape*, 1(1–2), 152–171. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ll.1.1-2.09sho>
- Siwina, P., & Prasithrathsint, A. (2020). Multilingual Landscapes on Thailand's Borders. *Journal of Mekong Societies*, Vol. 16(No.1), 112–131. <https://so03.tci-thaijo.org/index.php/mekongjournal/article/download/240081/163799/827649>
- Spolsky, B. (2020). Linguistic landscape. *Linguistic Landscape*, 6(1), 2–15. <https://doi.org/10.1075/ll.00015.spo>
- Spolsky, B. and Cooper, R.L. (1991) *The Languages of Jerusalem*. Oxford: Clarendon Press
- Tupas, R., & Martin, I. P. (2016). Bilingual and Mother Tongue-Based multilingual education in the Philippines. In *Springer eBooks* (pp. 1–13). https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-02324-3_18-1