

## LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND READING COMPREHENSION IN FOREIGN LANGUAGES TEACHING

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**Abstract:** The submitted paper deals with the linguistic landscape (in German: *sprachliche Landschaft*). We are interested in its didactical potential and the possibility of using in foreign languages teaching (especially in reading comprehension) in pregradual education of future foreign languages teachers and its implication into lessons at the primary and secondary degrees of education. Theoretical base is supplemented with the examples of teaching techniques for the work with linguistic landscape.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, foreign languages teaching, reading comprehension, practical examples

### 1 Introduction

Multimodality and multimediality are typical features of today's period. These features interfere in all aspects of human activities. Multidimensional communication became an obvious part of our life, and visual communication plays more and more important role. The importance of modus "image" grows as never before and plays a significant role when perceiving and reflecting facts and events around us. Visual reality is exposed to people not only primarily (by letters, words, different symbols or objects), but also secondarily, when visual interpretations of all types intermediate directly or indirectly the content.

There is an immense number of static and dynamic images around us. We perceive them, then we select our perceptions and consequently we process them on the base of our previous experience (of our own experience or mediated ones), knowledge and on the background of the influence of external factors of social and cultural contexts of our region. Transmigration is one of the characteristic phenomena of today's society, due to the opening of frontiers, free movements of individual people among the European Union states, migrant transfers etc. It is natural that there are many multiple forms of languages on information boards, institutions, shops or hotels in any country. Sometimes it is not obvious at the first sight what the origin of linguistic signs is.

### 2 Linguistic landscape

Before we pay attention to the function and use of linguistic landscape in foreign languages teaching and we present reflections and solutions of the contact of linguistic landscape when training reading comprehension, we discuss it as a phenomenon of (not only) nowadays, as well as professional paradigm, with which the research deals in several scientific areas.

Objects of the study of linguistic landscape, so-called linguistic landscape forum, are linguistic signs of public space of certain area, region, district or street, which inform about a producer, as well as a recipient of the sign (comp. Lauková/ Molnárová, 2020, p. 97). Through the linguistic landscape (LL), the language in public places extends general language use – it offers the language of migrants, expresses language authority and language policy of studied area, reflects the presence of several languages. LL becomes a point of intersection of social and cultural contexts and language policy context, because social, cultural, language, and political contexts, in which the sign originated, are highlighted, too. It follows from the above-mentioned that LL reflects social dynamics and society openness, and it is a source of symbolic appreciation of social

and ethnical diversity<sup>1</sup>. No sign originates without any incentive – titles, graffiti, boards are always more than just titles, graffiti or boards. The signs have their physical form: of sound, image or object in public space. They are static or mobile, written or symbolic, and present certain message to their recipients (Fig. 1, 2, 3, 4). Through the message of these signs, we approach the process of their creation, which has its sense and even overgrows the message itself (comp. Backhaus, 2007, pp. 4 – 11). The signs deepen and broaden knowledge of generally routine language use. This way they fulfill two basic functions: informative and symbolic.



Fig. 1



Fig. 2



Fig. 3

Fig. 4

#### 2.1 Historical excursion

The area of linguistic landscape (LL) is a new research area that offers impulses of visual interpretation of a language in the form of street signs, commercial shop signs, different institutes, billboards or posters, which can be multilingual. LL develops more dynamically in the context of multilingualism (Lauková/ Molnárová, 2020, p. 98).

In 1997 Landry and Bourhis defined a basic concept of LL in the following way: "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" (Landry / Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

The attention is aimed mainly at linguistic signs in public space. According to Ben-Rafael they are "any written signs found outside private homes, from road signs to names of streets, shops and schools" (Ben-Rafael/ Shohamy/ Barni, 2010, p. 14).

The LL research is focused on the occurrence and functions of different languages in a chosen urban location, and their quantitative and qualitative analysis. The question of languages selection, their perception and relations to other symbols, as well as other languages from the aspect of the relations of power and position of different language groups in a society, becomes important.

Research results were published in proceedings related to this topic (Gorter 2006, Shohamy/ Gorter 2009, Jaworski/ Thurlow 2010, Gorter/ Marten/ Van Mensel 2012, Marten/ Saagpack 2017, Badstübner-Kizik/ Janíková 2018). While the first proceeding discussed a new approach to multilingualism (Gorter, 2006), the following proceedings showed broad range

<sup>1</sup> ANDROUTSOPOULOS, Jannis: Linguistic landscapes: Visuelle Mehrsprachigkeitsforschung als Impuls an die Sprachpolitik. [online] Available at <<https://jannisandroustopoulos.files.wordpress.com/2011/05/j-a-2008-linguistic-landscapes.pdf>>. [cited on 2020.30.05]

(Shohamy/ Gorter, 2009, Marten/ Saagpak, 2017). Papers from the proceeding of the authors Jaworski and Thurlow (2010) were aimed at semiotic landscape and dealt with multimodal character of language. The proceeding of the authors Badstübner-Kizik and Janíková (2018) was focused on the perspectives of methodology of languages, culture and literature (2018).

From the first reflections on LL in the context of multilingualism (Landry/ Bourhis, 1997), the area of research of LL (which was initially concentrated on social and linguistic aspects) was extended by other disciplines and was studied in relation with the economics, political sciences and tourism in interdisciplinary studies (Marten/ Saagpak, 2017). Following the first quantitative research projects, quantitative as well as qualitative research methods were used. The stories behind the signs are studied; language practices of involved persons and ethnographic research strategies are used, too. Monographs and studies oriented on one place or part of a town are written (Saalem, 2017, Hyriaková<sup>2</sup>, Ferenčík<sup>3</sup>), using different methods to obtain and process. Comparative studies are created, too (Saleem, 2017, Marten/ Saagpak, 2017, Badstübner-Kizik/ Janíková, 2018).

### 3 Linguistic landscape in school context

The orientation on language and contextual knowledge and on the interaction between a recipient and a sign allow applying LL in teaching to larger extent. In the first phase, there is a written form of language in public places and spaces as notice boards, labels, posters etc. We must take into consideration that public space and its signs are moved into half-public space that is clearly bordered, e.g. school building, school area or canteen. Even a private space opens successively through the study of notifications, announcements, boards next to the entrance doors, on gates or fences of private area (comp. Ferenčík, 2014). Tattoos, postcards or skinscapes are the part of LL, too (comp. Kimpel 2008, Jaworski 2010). LL as an object of the study is, due to the social changes, more and more multimodal. It relates not only to language itself, but also to the variety of phenomena of public, semi-public or even private spaces. The question is to what extent the study of LL in private spaces (*linguistic homescape*) corresponds to LL definition and it opens possibilities for new discourses. Announcements at the stations or students' interactions in open or semi-open spaces (in classrooms at breaks, in a canteen etc.) are studied. They are studied also in virtual communication space of a computer (comp. Androutsopoulos 2008, Ferenčík 2013).

LL in a school context represents a relatively new way of research and offers new possibilities for working with linguistic signs:

1. Students can discover new forms and functions of language, besides their common space of school; they can think about them, observe them and pay them attention.
2. Analysis of linguistic signs has a positive effect on learning and it helps so-called "incidental learning".
3. LL offers possibilities of critical reflection and thorough critical analysis of function and form of a language, language register and/or language varieties. Students focus on reflection of different dimensions of standard linguistic signs (social, psychological, symbolic etc.). They learn to work critically with linguistic signs.
4. Students acquire knowledge of language multimodality and of its multimodal way of use.

Critical reflection of form and function of linguistic signs in public space brings significant methodological potential because it supports learners' individual linguistic awareness.

<sup>2</sup> Hyriaková, Kristína: Jazyk a mesto: angličtina v jazykovej krajine Paríža. 2012. online: <https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Olostiak4/subor/Hyriaková.pdf> [cited on 2020.30.05]

<sup>3</sup> Ferenčík, Milan: Jazyk v meste. Angličtina vo vizuálnej semiotike mestskej jazykovej krajiny. <https://www.pulib.sk/web/kniznica/elpub/dokument/Bocak4/subor/Ferencik.pdf> [cited on 2020.30.05.]

*Linguistic awareness* is a sum of ideas, experience and knowledge of a language, i.e. of its structure, elements and rules of use etc. It is an ability to distinguish what is correct and appropriate in a specific discourse and what is purposeless and incorrect. We distinguish social (or national) linguistic awareness, which is continuously formed in a certain language community. On its base individual members of the community form their own (individual) linguistic awareness. Individual linguistic awareness is affected by social linguistic awareness through the discourses in media or literature, as well as education process at schools and education in families etc. When creating individual linguistic awareness, the important role is played by individual abilities to accept, classify and use all information we receive passively (e.g. in a process of communication, when listening to discourse and reading) and actively, i.e. by studying. Due to good linguistic awareness, we are predominantly able to react and communicate appropriately<sup>4</sup>. In education discourse, LL is received as a medium in foreign languages teaching and a means to support linguistic awareness (comp. Janíková 2018, pp. 141 – 143) and obtain linguistic awareness diversity. As a practical example, the following task can be mentioned: Learners take photographs of all linguistic signs in their surroundings. Consequently, they interpret them, ask questions, appreciate different languages, and deduce their value, producers and receivers. Thus, their awareness for social function of language is increased and their own language identity is strengthened.

Advantages of the work with LL and its use as a pedagogical tool can be visible especially in these areas:

1. Support of critical reading abilities;
2. Improvement of pragmatic competence as one of communication linguistic competences;
3. Extension of possibilities to learn language outside the classroom;
4. Obtaining multimodal literary abilities;
5. Sensibilisation to language connotations;
6. Support of communication linguistic competences (language, sociolinguistic and pragmatic) and language skills (reading comprehension, speaking, writing).

LL offers mainly more focused perception of multilingualism, language diversity awareness, critical linguistic awareness and communication competence.

#### 3.1 Linguistic landscape in foreign languages teaching

The concept of LL has entered foreign languages teaching in recent years. It is related to the interdisciplinarity, which became a part of the characteristics of methodology of foreign languages as a confirmation of inevitable openness to other scientific disciplines (sociology, sociolinguistics, psychology, pedagogy etc.). This is how its specific areas are enriched and deepened with new knowledge and research of the mentioned scientific disciplines.

After the brief characteristics of LL (Chapter 1), its methodological potential is going to be discussed. Our attention is focused on the following questions:

1. How can be LL implemented into foreign language teaching?
2. How can LL help when training reading comprehension?

It is important to mention that language and contextual knowledge and experience of a recipient are very often necessary in LL in order to decode the stories behind the signs or define the relations among the languages and identify their geographical place. They are stories about historical, political and social milieu of certain space. Linguistic landscapes enter into interaction with a recipient and they think: What do I feel when I meet these languages? Am I able to decode their

<sup>4</sup> <https://jazykovaparadna.sme.sk/q/7501/#ixzz5yg1FaLul> [cited on 2020.30.05]

message? Do I want to be in this region or country? The question is how the concentration to language and contextual knowledge and experience behind the sign and concentration to interaction between a recipient and a sign can be used in foreign languages teaching.

Implementation of LL and methods for the work with LL (*linguistic landscaping*<sup>5</sup>) in pregradual education of future teachers of foreign languages and in school teaching creates a platform for systematic and continual work with the use of regional particularities. At schools, the work with LL supports strongly relations among subjects. It is the work with visual data, which are around us in real, as well as virtual world. General sensibilisation of learners to semiotic structure of the place where they live is supported by critical reflection of semiotic landscapes. A teacher can help learners to create their own visual linguistic landscape in a class or in a campus. This way dynamic and various creations originate.

*Project work* (foreign language in association with other subjects) is suitable for the work with LL for the following reasons: Learners become researchers and they feel like experts. They communicate, search for information, classify found signs according to the given criteria, discuss their meaning and draw conclusions. Stories behind the signs are more complex capture of several important aspects.

The second form of work with LL, *individual work*, is very specific and concentrates on the search for signs in the surroundings, e.g. at home, in a contact with family members or friends (*linguistic homescape*). It presupposes certain degree of autonomy in searching for linguistic signs and their classification and assessment. Learners feel happy about their own discovery, and their linguistic and ethnic awareness is supported.

### 3.2 Linguistic landscape and reading comprehension

When training reading comprehension, selected phenomena of LL can support development of this skill by connecting language and contextual learning with learner's knowledge and experience. It has a motivation effect on a learner and at the same time, it supports the development of individual linguistic awareness. The work with LL allows to change and train different reading styles (global reading, skimming, scanning and intensive reading) according to the aim of a task. When choosing the LL phenomena we can plan and implement complex tasks individually or like a project work.

We propose several areas of empiric research that are suitable for different levels of education:

1. Multilingualism on the menu;
2. Selection and order of languages on notice boards and on facades of houses, restaurants, shops, cafés, hotels;
3. Information in cafés, shops and other public places;
4. Information on stickers, posters, travel guides;
5. Linguistic and symbolic interpretation of graffiti in private and public places (Fig. 5).



Fig. 5

We propose the following steps: Firstly, separate obtained data into individual categories, then select 3 – 5 key signs and describe them. Secondly, try to explain the story behind each

sign. Consequently discuss potential of LL as a pedagogical medium.

Primary schools: The use of LL allows pupils to reflect languages used in the society (use and function of these languages and their value in public places).

The beginners can be sensibilised to LL and to multilingualism by searching for different forms of linguistic signs. They can write them down and try to guess the meaning of LL in their town, street or restaurant (Fig. 6, 7). Using the *sensibilisation* we achieve positive motivation and more sensitive perception of linguistic diversity, as well as of charm of individual languages.

The analysis of signs helps learners to perceive linguistic diversity of their surroundings. Thus, spontaneous connection to lifelong openness to multilingualism is created.



Fig. 6



Fig. 7

#### 3.2.1 Projects

In the following lines, we propose an example of the project work.

##### Project Tea

Several subjects can be implemented into the project: foreign languages, history, biology, civics. The project is carried out in the following steps:

1. Short theoretical input – definition of LL, discussion (How many languages are used on a tea box? What is their order? Which kind of typeface is used? Where is a product from?)
2. Division of tasks before data collection (visit of individual shops, cafés and tea rooms in a town, taking photographs etc.)
3. Data collection in a town: Learners decide about the places to search for information related to LL, e.g. in a tea room (how a tea room is labelled next to the entrance door, drink list, other notices/labels inside. In a shop: How many kinds of tea are there? From which countries? What does the packaging look like? How do they differ? At home: Which kinds of tea do they have at home? Who is their producer? What does the packaging look like?)
4. Data interpretation: Analysis and classification of tea according to the given criteria. Assessment of products.
5. In parallel with step 4: Selection of suitable photographic material. While taking photographs accept anonymity, voluntariness, necessity to inform about the activity in a given area (e.g. ask for a permission to take pictures in a shop etc.).
6. Presentation (class, school, town) and collective preparation of tea.

It is important to explain and discuss the chosen topic and to show photographic material of the environs to learners. Thus, the connection among linguistic signs and learners (recipients) is created. Photographical material is analysed and assessed. Teacher pays attention to linguistic and contextual knowledge of the learners. They observe the country of origin of tea and discuss the role of colours, symbols and pictograms. Based on the given categories, learners try to describe data and rank them into groups. The presentation can consist of posters, exhibition, video, photographs presentation, short lecture for a school or town, etc.

Project *Tea* can be carried out at primary schools in simpler version. At secondary schools, it can be conducted as interdisciplinary project and obtained data (from tea rooms,

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.goethe.de/ins/pl/de/spr/eng/1gl.html> [cited on 2020.30.05]

shops etc.) can be completed synchronously and diachronically with the information about tea origin.

During the project, learners train individual styles of reading, as well as other language skills. They also connect experiential learning to innovative learning. Their individual linguistic awareness is supported.

Another project, *Linguistic identity*, is focused on the deepening of reflection and discussion about multilingualism in a specific town or country or own learner's linguistic identity. The implementation contains the following steps:

1. Theoretical input – characteristics of LL, me and LL (personally important areas)
2. Data collection:
  - a) What signs and symbols of LL (which reflect our linguistic and cultural identity) are there in our country?
  - b) Taking photographs of signs of LL (15 – 20 totally).
 To increase learners' sensibility to visual data it is necessary to discuss also research and ethical aspects, e.g. voluntariness or anonymity.
3. Interpretation of obtained data. In this step, a learner individually classifies and assesses obtained LL.
4. Group work: Interaction and sign are in a centre – learners discuss their photographs and other gained material – at first in small groups and together they choose 3 – 5 of them. They interpret them orally and later in writing.
5. Presentation: Learner prepares a presentation in form of PowerPoint, short film, essay, photographs exhibition etc. The presentation is done at first orally, later in writing.

#### 4 Conclusion

The public space is continuously changing and it requires permanent adaptation from the pedagogical viewpoint. Study of LL is relatively new. It is typical for searching and constant changes in methodological approaches, widening the research area and what is important for us, turning attention to the sphere of school. Inherent interdisciplinarity, multimodality and multidimensionality of LL contribute notably to it.

LL works as a research area, as well as a method (linguistic landscaping). Although connection of LL with language teaching is logical and obvious, potential of this sphere was discovered only few years ago, when first studies dealing with the use of LL as a medium in school context. Methodological use of LL in foreign languages teaching is in its beginnings and is not verified enough. One of the reasons is a fact that the use of LL in teaching is a relatively new phenomenon (vgl. dazu Baur, 2015; Sayer, 2010). Another reason is that it has explorative character. Two aspects related to the methodological process of LL are discussed in this paper: linguistic and contextual knowledge and interaction between a recipient and a sign. In connection with the first aspect, learners are explorers who study stories behind the signs. The second important aspect is a communication between a recipient and a sign. It is well conducted through innovative learning, searching for and guessing the meaning of LL out of school, as well as project work (topics like gastronomy, housing, holidays etc.). Common discussions, creation of criteria for the signs classification and assessment of individual categories are crucial during the work with LL. Of course, teacher's personality plays an important role, mainly their involvement and ability to connect theory with practice, their ardour, and creation of positive ambience. Teacher must acquire necessary knowledge about LL, be creative and apply their theoretical knowledge in practice in order to make LL an efficient medium in foreign languages teaching. Cooperation of teachers of various subjects plays an important role in the use of LL potential.

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