Linguistics and Education xxx (2017) xxx–xxx

Contents lists available at ScienceDirect

Linguistics and Education

journal homepage: www.elsevier.com/locate/linged

Linguistic landscapes and trends in the study of schoolscapes☆

Durk Gorter[a,b,*]

[a] Ikerbasque, Basque Foundation for Science, Spain
[b] University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU, Spain

ARTICLE INFO

Article history:
Received 26 July 2017
Received in revised form
28 September 2017
Accepted 5 October 2017
Available online xxx

Keywords:
Linguistic landscape
Schoolscape
Education
Multilingualism
Public space
Language learning

ABSTRACT

This closing article puts the articles of the special issue in the wider perspective of the burgeoning field of linguistic landscape studies. It provides a summary of several earlier studies. More in particular the article focuses on contributions based on research in educational settings or schoolscapes in general. It continues with studies of environmental print as learning materials, the use of linguistic landscape materials for the study of English as a foreign language as well as the ways in which students and teachers have participated in research projects of the linguistic landscape inside and outside of the classroom. In the reflections about the use of linguistic landscapes for learning it is shown that the articles in the Special Issue take the investigation further, among others by focusing on multilingualism and multimodality. The studies demonstrate its potential for studies of schoolscapes as well as pedagogical tools, but also for critical reflection and awareness raising.

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1. Introduction

In the Editorial of this special issue the editors point out that Brown (2012) introduced the term íschoolscapeí when she studied images and artefacts in the foyers and classrooms of the schools of the Võru community in Estonia. Brown found the schoolscapes represent ideologies and identities about the local minority language. Her approach fits in with the wider field of linguistic landscape studies and in this article I will provide insights into some trends that emerge from recent publications about linguist landscapes, but only those that emphasize the dimensions of education and learning. For general overviews of linguistic landscapes studies the reader is, among others, referred to Gorter (2013) and Van Mensel, Vandenbroucke, and Blackwood (2016). This final article places the studies included in the special issue in an emerging context of linguistic landscape studies about language learning and education.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) are frequently given credit for introducing the term ílinguistic landscapeí, although that can be disputed (Gorter (in press)). Those authors actually proposed two definitions of the concept. First, the linguistic landscape refers to "*the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs*". The second definition tries to capture the concept as a whole and has been widely quoted:

☆ Contribution to the Special Issue for Linguistic and Education on "Studying the visual and material dimensions of education and learning", edited by P. Laihonen and T.P. Szabó

* Correspondence to: Faculty of Education, Philosophy & Anthropology University of the Basque Country, UPV/EHU 70 Avenida Tolosa, 20018 Donostia-San Sebastián, Gipuzkoa, Spain.
E-mail address: d.gorter@ikerbasque.org

http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.10.001
0898-5898/

'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: 25).

This definition is basically a short list of six common types of signs, but variation in signage is of course much wider. For example, they do not mention posters, Morris columns, sidewalk sandwich boards or more recent inventions such as flat-panel displays, interactive touch screens, or scrolling banners (see Gorter, 2013). Moreover, the signs listed in the definition are static inscriptions, whereas among others Sebba (2010) has suggested that linguistic landscapes studies can also include moving signs, such as protest banners, advertisements on buses, etc. Other researchers have proposed to expand the scope beyond the written texts displayed on signs and to include spoken words and how people interact with the signs (Shohamy & Waksman 2009: 313–314). A promising direction in linguistic landscape studies are investigations of semi-public institutional contexts, such as government buildings, museums, hospitals and including educational settings.

The aim of the various research publications under this umbrella term is well expressed in the scope of *Linguistic Landscape: an international journal* (established in 2015) when it refers to the "*attempts to understand the motives, uses, ideologies, language varieties and contestations of multiple forms of 'languages' as they are displayed in public spaces*". Linguistic landscape studies have developed in important ways since the publication in 2006 of a special issue of the *International Journal of Multilingualism* (Gorter, ed., 2006) and the first full-length monograph *"Linguistic Landscapes: a comparative study of urban multilingualism in Tokyo"* (Backhaus, 2006). According to Van Mensel et al. (2016) those two publications marked the beginning of a surge in publications that give shape to a specialized research field of linguistic landscape studies. The interest in linguistic landscapes has caught on rapidly and the field has expanded in different directions (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). The number of publications about linguistic landscapes across the globe has increased steeply. In his exhaustive overview Backhaus (2007) listed only 30 linguistic landscape studies, but ten years later the specialized on-line bibliography already contains close to 600 publications in English (see: www.zotero.org/groups/linguistic_landscape_bibliography). The field has a common focus on the investigation of languages on display in the public space and various publications are related to an educational setting.

The work of Landry and Bourhis (1997) was useful to draw attention to the relevance of how languages are used on public signs. Their data-collection actually took place in an educational context because the authors analyzed questionnaires answered by a group of some 2000 Francophone secondary education students in Canada. Starting from the framework of subjective ethnolinguistic vitality, questions were asked about the perception of the linguistic landscape. The findings indicated that the linguistic landscape emerges as an independent factor that is strongly related to subjective vitality scores. The authors concluded that the linguistic landscape "*may constitute the most salient marker of perceived in-group versus out-group vitality*" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997: 45).

A way forward for linguistic landscape research was pointed out by Shohamy and Waksman (2009: 326) who suggested that education as an institution offers opportunities to act as "*as a powerful tool for . . . meaningful language learning*". Their example is the *Haapala* in Tel Aviv, Israel, a monument they treat as a linguistic landscape site and as a resource for learning about cultural and historical meaning. They proposed in general to treat the domain of education more in-depth because there are so many issues that can be studied about signage, especially when more languages are taught and used. As they argue, investigations of educational linguistic landscapes can lead to understanding of what happens inside schools and be relevant for education research.

The focus of most linguistic landscape studies is on public space, but data were also collected in educational settings and some authors want to point out how signage can have a pedagogical or language learning application. In this contribution I will briefly discuss such linguistic landscape studies and I will distinguish between different types of publications. First, studies which look into the linguistic landscape inside physical educational settings, i.e. schoolscapes. Second, there are publications about linguistic landscapes and environmental print. Third, a section on linguistic landscapes related to English as a foreign language (EFL), followed by some studies where university students and teachers become involved in investigating the linguistic landscape. Next some studies where students are the source of data about linguistic landscapes. Finally, a concluding section with some reflections on the usefulness of schoolscapes and educational applications in future studies. These short characterizations of some trends are intended to provide further background to the articles included in the current special issue.

2. Schoolscapes: linguistic landscape inside educational settings

As said in the Introduction, Brown (2012) applied the term ïschoolscapesí to her study of the regional language Võru, spoken in an area in the south of Estonia. She investigated signage inside schools, based on anthropological fieldwork and she looked into the re-emergence of the Võru language. She included in her research language related signs inside the classrooms but also in the entrance, foyer, and corridors as well as in a school museum and in the curriculum. Local communities were largely invisible in formal education due to the long absence of the regional language from Kindergarten and primary schools. Based on the explanations of teachers and administrators, Brown identified íenriching national cultureí and íuse as an historical artefactí as the two main functions for the regional language. In the school space delicate negotiations over the reintroduction of the Võru language take place. In the current special issue Brown revisits about ten years later the same community and the schools from her earlier study. In her diachronic perspective she can address issues of enduring norms, changing practices and pedagogical opportunities. She finds a gradual shift towards more use of the regional language, mainly in the pre-primary stage, supported by language organizations and school leaders, which are more likely to be enduring when the changes in the schoolscape remain part of a recognizable and coherent image of the school. Brown (this issue) concludes that "diachronic schoolscape research establishes a promising pathway for future inquiry".

In a study in the Basque Country we examined the linguistic landscapes inside primary and secondary schools (Gorter & Cenoz, 2015a). We did not involve teachers or students, but we studied the school signage similar to how we studied the linguistic landscape in public space (Aiestaran, Cenoz, & Gorter, 2010). In the linguistic landscape languages are used in different ways and they convey different meanings. Inside educational settings linguistic landscapes have characteristics that are different from public space. For example, the degrees of monolingualism and multilingualism are not the same. Further, the production of signs is often less professional because many signs are made by the students. Signs produced by the students have a specific character, different from signs produced by authorities or other external sign makers. Our analysis also revealed different communicative intentions of the signs in the schools. We identified various functions related to the teaching of both subject content and language learning, the development of

Please cite this article in press as: Gorter, D. Linguistic landscapes and trends in the study of schoolscapes. *Linguistics and Education* (2017), http://dx.doi.org/10.1016/j.linged.2017.10.001