

Linguistic Landscape Surveys as a Pedagogy: Reflection and Suggestions

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Abstract: In recent years, scholars mainly explored issues of language policy, multilingualism and sociolinguistic ecology of a certain region or city via the linguistic landscape approach, the research focus had been centered on the phenomenon of LL. Few scholars examined the potentials of involving linguistic landscape in language teaching. This paper offers a critical reflection of the previous studies that engaged linguistic landscape projects as a pedagogy, conducted by Sayer(2010), Rowland(2012) and Chesnut et al.(2013) and Shang (2014) respectively, analyzes their values and downsides, and also outlines detailed suggestions for further applications of LL as a resource for learning English as a foreign language.

1. Introduction

Since Landry & Bourhis's (1997) seminal work on linguistic landscapes, hereinafter referred to as LL, the first decade in the 21st century saw the popularity of LL studies in the various forms, e.g. surveying and building a public LL corpus to investigate the relevant official language policies, or the sociolinguistic phenomenon (Gorter, 2006) ; mapping the language ecology by Spolsky (2009). Since then, the academia has conducted multi-dimensional surveys on linguistic landscapes of various regions and cities, expanding from the original case-type LL research on individual regions to global multi-regional multi-dimensional surveys. Such as Li (2011) studied the Beijing road commercial pedestrian street in Guangzhou, which is a diachronic LL analysis, Lawrence (2012) probed into the role of English in the south Korean LL; Wang (2013) conducted the LL case on the landscape in Beijing Wangfujing commercial district; Amer & Obeidat (2014) investigated the LL in Jordan aqaba shops; Moriarty (2014) focused on the ideological conflicts in Irish tourist town Dingle as reflected in the landscape landscapes. This kind of research on LL seems to have sprung up in large numbers in recent years. Ever since 1997, the international symposium on "linguistic landscape" has been held five times, and more than a dozen papers have been published on the subject of "LL", together with more than 100 journal papers and PhD dissertation (Shang 2014:214). However, it is worth noting that there is still insufficient attention being paid to using the linguistic data of the LL as language input, or integrating the LL methodologies into foreign language teaching, which are the central interest of this paper.

2. Potentials of using LL studies as pedagogy

The idea that the corpus of LL studies can facilitate language teaching and learning was first proposed by Cenoz & Gorter (2008), yet only in theoretical terms. They argued that LL could benefit language learning in two aspects: Utilizing the LL corpus as a source of language input, involving the students to engage in personalized LL studies. When linguistic landscape is used as a pedagogical resource there are mainly five potential benefits, it enhances students' incidental learning ability, pragmatic competence, multimodal literacy skills, multicompetence and understanding the symbolic and emotional power of language. However, Cenoz & Gorter did not validate the above ideas in actual teaching practice, At the same time, compared with the abundant papers on LL as a research method of multilingualism, only a few scholars, such as Sayer (2010), Rowland (2012) and Chesnut et al. (2013), have applied LL-based teaching in recent years. There are still deficiencies in these studies, and a large number of follow-up studies are yet to be

completed.

3. Previous Pedagogical Attempts involving LL

Sayer (2010) pointed out the limitations of LL in teaching from the perspective of practical teaching. He believed that SLA theory emphasized the centrality of language contact and language practice, but for EFL students who regard English as a foreign language learning, there is a lack of conditions outside the classroom to achieve the above two points. For example, assigning homework for students to make a survey report of the local LL can only reflect the social language situation of the students' area, and it does not necessarily help foreign language learning. However, Sayer agrees that such LL assignments will still enhance students' understanding of language use, appropriateness and sociolinguistic ecology. Sayer's Linguistic Landscape Survey focuses on one question: "Why do Oaxaca residents use English in public places?" (Sayer, 2010:145) He did a small LL survey and then showed students how to be a language detective, to examine the LL data they collected. Sayer's research demonstrates the potential benefits of LL homework for language learning, but unfortunately he only focused on the LL data collected by students, yet leaving out the learning experience of students in the process of completing the homework, further, he did not analyze the LL data with students afterwards.

The attempts made by Rowland (2012) are similar to that of Sayer (2010), but more practical problems emerged. Rowland enlisted 27 undergraduate students in Japanese colleges and universities and he assigned to them a survey of LL in his English writing class. The research questions given to his students are: "Why do we use English on signs in Japan? How is English used?" Unlike those in Sayer's study, Rowland's students encountered a lot of confusions after collecting LL data for analysis. In order to keep the experiment going, Rowland designed a series of guiding questions for the students to help them complete their assignments smoothly. Finally, Rowland concluded that his research support the views of Cenoz & Gorter (2008) and Sayer (2010) that students can still benefit from the pedagogical interactions with the local linguistic landscapes even if English is being used there as a foreign language (Rowland 2012:10). However, similar to Sayer's study (2010), Rowland's research (2012) has some drawbacks, one is the potential drawbacks of setting guidance for students, which may limit the direction of students' research and stifle their own interest in learning; and Rowland focused only on LL data collected by students, ignoring the confusions, difficulties and interests of students when they are collecting the data. Rowland's study falls short on the investigation of the students' experiences in the process of learning.

Chesnut et al.(2013) has different research perspectives and methods from those of Sayer(2010) and Rowland(2012). He was not as concerned as the previous studies with the conclusions of the LL homework completed by the students, less so in analyzing the students' homework. He adopted the case study method to study the students' learning experiences as reflected in students's self-reports. His research object is native Korean students from his class of "introduction to cross-cultural research", they are undergraduate students from the translation department, Hankuk University of Foreign Studies (HUFS). The LL survey is the final assignment of this course. He conducted regular interviews with three voluntary students took part in the LL assignments, discuss with them about their learning experiences during the survey. The method of case study employed by Chesnut et al, incorporating the LL corpora for teaching is a beneficial attempt, they finally summarized the LL homework has several benefits: LL assignments can help students deepen the understanding of language and communication, especially the culture that shapes language cognition, it can also help to enhance the students awareness of different language perspectives possessed by different people, in addition , the process of data analysis, information sorting and writing, can help improve the students' ability in English reading and writing.

Chesnut admitted three major problems in his research: research scope is too broad, a lack of references and difficulties in teacher-student interaction. First of all, open research questions tend to make students confused and unable to formulate a specific research question. Secondly, although the research on LL has arisen in the last decade, and the relevant literature is still not rich. Besides,

students are limited by their English reading proficiency, and there are not many resources for references. Finally, a large number of interventions from the teacher's point of view can interfere with students' own judgment. In addition, it should be noted that the research of Chesnut et al has some deficiencies: 1. There are few interviews, only one pre-assignment interview for teacher-student communication, and no post-assignment interview for students, let alone discussing with the students about what they learned and how they felt after conducting the linguistic landscape survey and analysis. 2. The survey area is narrow, the students' project is limited to Seoul, South Korea, and does not involve the LL of other regions.

4. Discussion: Methodology and Research Questions

We can see that some previous studies on using LL as pedagogy are limited to the theoretical level and only focused on the theoretical potentials of the LL corpus for teaching (Cenoz & Gorter 2008), and others focused on assigning students with LL surveys and conducting textual analysis of the assignments (Sayer 2010 and Rowland 2012), the survey and research on the use of LL as an educational resource in the western academic circle is restricted in terms of depth. This paper recommends the method of qualitative case study, or educational narrative research in particular as a plausible solution. Although differ from the quantitative method mainly used in LL research, it has several advantages: 1) The teachers and students in the study can collect data, and at the same time, analyze them together (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002); 2) Narrative research allows teachers to adjust and improve the research direction and research questions in real time during the research process, so as to achieve the effect that preset quantitative research cannot; 3) The multi-dimensionality and depth of case study can better reveal the practical problems in the application of LL teaching approach among Chinese students, and more effectively explore lessons that are conducive to the development of teaching and students, thus promoting the innovation and development of classroom teaching and curriculum.

Preliminary research questions can include: 1) What is the experience of these students in conducting LL surveys? 2) After conducting the LL survey, in addition to the LL data, what are the gains in terms of language learning? 3) How do students evaluate what they have learned? 4) What difficulties did students encounter when doing the homework, and how did they solve them? 5) What is the bilingual LL situation like in your area? How is Chinese and English used?

5. Suggestions for standardized LL survey: theory, sampling and categorization

On the basis of previous studies, this paper believes that the survey areas for students to conduct LL survey work should be dispersed, and the LL data obtained should be diversified, which is more conducive to expanding students' horizons and enhancing their pragmatic awareness. Due to the nature of decentralized investigation, it is necessary to standardize the survey data of different students in order to make them comparable. The normalization can be started from three aspects: the theoretical framework of LL research, corpus collection area and classification. The lack of theoretical framework was once the greatest difficulty for the students of Chesnut et al. (2013), while the theoretical framework of place semiotics of Scollon & Scollon (2003) was quite thorough for qualitative analysis. In order to illustrate this theory and its practice more vividly, it is necessary to refer to the original data of previous papers with pictures and texts. Another way to strengthen students' awareness in LL research is the SPEAKING model of Heubner(2009). SPEAKING communication model is a perspective of ethnography of communication, which consists of initials of eight elements, namely setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms and genre. In order to steer students from greater confusion, the Scollon & Scollon place semiotics framework and SPEAKING framework overlap each other, but the latter adds more elements of participants than the former, namely speaker, listener, inscriber and reader, and so on.

The second guarantee of standardization is the area and type of data collection. Due to the popularity of smart phones, it is very convenient to take photo accounts of the LL data, and there is no need to purchase extra digital cameras. It is easy to take photos of various signs in the real

environment and complete the field work of corpus collection. However, it is not realistic or necessary to collect all linguistic landscape corpus of a city. This article suggests that corpus collection should focus on outdoor signs in the mall, because of the purpose of LL research is to study multilingualism, language policy, language contact and sociolinguistic ecology, and the malls and commercial districts tend to satisfy the requirements for linguistic diversity and heterogeneity, the "coding scheme" in Scollon & Scollon (2003) and the "order" in Heubner's (2009) SPEAKING system are all aimed at multilingual LL, so this paper recommends sampling be limited to the type of the outdoor bilingual signage on commercial streets.

The third aspect of standardized LL data categorization is to employ the commonly used binary classification, which distinguishes the official signs, or the top-down signs and the unofficial sign, or the bottom-up signs. The former is usually set up by local or central authorities. Therefore, the sign language represents the government's intentions and regulations, this type mainly include establishment signs, road signs and traffic signs. The latter, set up by private entities or enterprises, has the function of spreading business information, with more complicated types, such as store names, billboards, posters and small flyers, and even bus posters and taxi LED displays moving on the roads. According to the proposition of Sebba(2007), the LL data should include not only static signs and posters, but also mobile public language materials, such as flyers, car body advertisements, etc. On a commercial street, advertisements on vehicles could be an important part of the LL in this area, even bilingual Ad text on a T-shirt worn by a salesman is valid data.

6. Conclusion and Suggestions

This paper reviews and examines the studies by Sayer (2010), Rowland (2012) and Chesnut et al. (2013), we believe that using linguistic landscape survey as a pedagogy has three potential benefits: it helps foster students incidental learning ability, improve the students' Chinese/English bilingual pragmatic competence as used in public places, train the students' language awareness and improve their language proficiency as in detecting language errors and making corrections.

This paper proposes the following suggestions as regard to using LL assignment as a resource for English learning: 1. the theoretical frameworks should be based on Scollon & Scollon's place semiotics and Heubner's SPEAKING model; 2. The survey area should focus on bilingual signs in the main business districts of international cities; 3. The corpus should include both "static" LL signage and "transitory" LL landscape, rather than being limited to conventional signage; 4. The categorization scheme should adopt the official/commercial binary system. This paper expects that the next step is to carry out a case study to investigate students' experience, difficulties and gains in the process of conducting a linguistic landscape survey. On the basis of this, a large-scale survey on LL should be carried out among students, and the quantitative research on their learning experience and achievements will be more conducive to the development of using LL in teaching, providing another valuable approach for students to learn foreign languages.

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