

Public Legacies: Spanish-English (in)authenticity in the linguistic landscape of Pilsen, Chicago

Kate Lyons (*University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*)
Itxaso Rodríguez-Ordóñez (*University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign*)

Recent studies of Linguistic Landscapes (LL) employ the geographic linguistic architecture of ‘place’ – an under-examined notion of ‘context’ – to substantiate theoretical claims of multilingual language dynamics (cf. Shahomy et al. 2010), enabling an analysis of public multilingualism that captures the relationship between visible, stationary examples of language and larger linguistic issues operating on sociocultural and socioeconomic levels. LL research has focused on ethno-political struggles between languages (i.e. the Basque Country, Cenoz&Gorter, 2006), and on territories where revitalization efforts have resulted in institutionalization or local symbolization of minority languages (i.e. Wales, Coupland, 2012). However, displays of bilingualism in regions with a large influx of immigration and diasporic settlement have not been thoroughly studied. These ‘new spaces’ of linguistic contact and interaction deserve special attention, as study of the complex interplay between super- and sub-ordinate languages provides an opportunity to deepen our understanding of Linguistic Landscapes not only as public displays of language, but of heritage, authenticity and dialogue.

To enhance our understanding of discursive and localized ideologies in a diasporic setting, this study examines displays of Spanish and English in Pilsen, a predominantly Hispanic neighborhood located in southwest Chicago. Data come from public signs (N = 400) displayed on the neighborhood’s main streets (18th Street, Ashland Avenue and Cermak Road) and are categorized according to orientation east or westbound of Ashland Avenue and by use of language (English only, predominantly English, Equal English and Spanish, predominantly Spanish and Spanish only). Adopting Coupland’s adaptation (2012) of Goffman’s theory of frames (1974), we propose four frames (Alternative Authenticity; Established Community Authenticity; Familial Authenticity and Migrant Authenticity) to characterize Pilsen’s unique LL. In addition to Coupland’s frame-theoretic analysis, we propose an additional scalar component (situating signs along a scale of authenticity that have been quantitatively measured through a multinomial logistic regression in R) to enrich our description of the relationships between frames and the variety of language use observed in this LL.

Quantitative and qualitative results show that there is a scalar relationship between frame and language: the more Alternative Authenticity a sign portrays, more English is used, whereas Spanish-only signs are mainly used for Migrant Authenticity. The use of mixing Spanish and English fluctuates between Established Community Authenticity and Familial Authenticity (Figure 1). Although all frames were equally distributed in all the main streets (Figure 2), the proportions of language use were different (Figure 3). We argue that the static use of frames and dialogic relationship between languages and location are strongly linked to the social dynamics of specific areas of Pilsen, a variation that cannot be captured through traditional (categorical) methods of LL research.

In its investigation of Pilsen’s LL, this study characterizes salient frames operating in this bilingual urban context, and situates the use of language in this space through the theoretical implementation of a scale of authenticity: revealing the complex (and at times, competing) strategies of communicating and commodifying localized heritage and integrated identity in a contemporary American city.

References

- Cenoz, J., & Gorter, D. (2006). Linguistic Landscape and Minority Languages. *International Journal of Bilingualism* 3 (1): 67-80.
- Coupland, N. (2012). Bilingualism on display: the framing of Welsh and English in Welsh public spaces. *Language in Society* 41: 1-27.
- Goffman, E. (1974). *Frame analysis: An essay on the organization of experience*. London: Harper and Row.
- Shohamy, E., Ben-Rafael, E, & Barni, M. (2010). *Linguistic Landscape in the City*. Bristol: Multilingual Matters.