A Review of the Perspectives of Linguistic Landscape Research

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Abstract

In recent years, linguistic landscape research has gradually become a hot spot in the field of sociolinguistics. Since 2013, the number of journal publications has steadily increased year by year, and there have been certain break-throughs in theoretical innovation in domestic research. This paper reviews the previous literature, summarizes and sorts out several perspectives of linguistic landscape research which include sociological, communicative ethnological and language policy, in order to have a better understanding of linguistic landscape, and to provide a reference for subsequent research.

Subject Areas

Linguistics

Keywords

Linguistic Landscape, Sociology, Communicative Ethnology, Language Policy

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscape refers to the style and appearance of language and its characters that appear in life, especially in the public. As an emerging research field, it has experienced more than 20 years of development since 1997, and has made remarkable achievements. A large number of theoretical and empirical studies have gradually attracted the attention of scholars. Especially under the background of globalization, the study of multilingual linguistic landscape has become one of the focuses in this field. To be precise, English has suddenly become content that cannot be ignored in the field of linguistic landscape research. This is mainly due to the fact that English is not only the main driving force for promoting global political and economic development, but also for promoting cross-cultural communication between different countries and regions.

In addition, linguistic landscape not only conveys information or unique symbolic meaning publicly, but also records the result of the combined influence of multiple factors such as politics, economy, culture and social life. For example, researches about linguistic landscape mainly focus on developed regions in Europe, such as the United Kingdom, Germany, Spain, as well as the United States, Canada, and Russia. There is much literature about the linguistic landscape in the Middle East with obvious language conflicts, such as Israel and its adjacent areas. The study of the linguistic landscape of these regions is not only related to the development of globalization, but also influenced by many factors such as the local economy, culture, religion and national identity. In general, the perspectives of linguistic landscape research are becoming more and more abundant.

It can be seen that under the background of globalization, the research on the linguistic landscape of big cities as the main research object has achieved considerable results, and the diverse meanings behind these have also been fully interpreted and understood. Linguistic landscape research has gradually extended in both breadth and depth.

2. Definition of Linguistic Landscape

Linguistic landscape is one of the hot topics in sociolinguistic research in recent years, and it has received more and more attention. Landry & Bourhis (1997) [1] defines linguistic landscape as "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." In other words, linguistic landscape is concerned as language in the form of text in public areas. This definition has been widely cited, and in fact has been recognized by most scholars. At the same time, the two functions of linguistic landscape are summarized, namely, the information function and the symbolic function. The information function means that the linguistic landscape exists as a unique mark in various public places, which aims to describe the difference between the local language group and other languages, and clearly inform the local language characteristics, regional boundaries, and language boundaries. In short, the diversity presented by the linguistic landscape can clearly reflect the diversity of local languages and cultures. Symbolic function means that if a person's language appears in a private or government sign, it can reinforce his sense of superiority as a speaker of that language, especially for other speakers of the same social environment. The symbolic function of linguistic landscapes is particularly important when exploring national identity. For example, the presence of a language will trigger positive social identity for the language group, and at the same time symbolize the power and vitality of their language.

After the study of linguistic landscape regained the attention of many scholars in 1997, this research field has gradually achieved fruitful results. In 2008, the first International Conference on Linguistic Landscapes was held at Tel Aviv

University in Israel. Scholars from all over the world participated in the conference. The International Journal of Linguistic Landscapes (*Linguistic Landscape: An International Journal*) was officially launched in 2015, which signified that linguistic landscapes, as a new and popular research field, had received more and more attention.

In essence, linguistic landscape is also the study of written language, but the research environment is very different. Therefore, researches of linguistic landscape are classified under the discipline of sociolinguistics. If carefully distinguished, it begins with language planning, that is, language policy and its planning. However, the study of linguistic landscape is by no means limited to the field of sociolinguistic research; its development also involves many different disciplines, and has also attracted the attention of scholars from different fields, such as geography, education, sociology, political science, society semiotics, architecture, literature, applied linguistics and economics, etc.

Figure 1 and Figure 2 are examples of linguistic landscape.

3. Different Perspectives of Linguistic Landscape Research

There are many perspectives in linguistic landscape research, and they are often linked to different disciplines. Most researchers focus more on code switching and code combination of linguistic landscape, but this paper concerns the perspectives of sociology, communicative ethnology, and language policy. This section will review and organize the main previous research results and the latest research trends from theses perspectives of researches.

3.1. The Sociological Perspective of Linguistic Landscape

Researchers pay more attention to the phenomenon of multilingualism in the linguistic landscape, and explore the power and identification behind it. As an international metropolis, Tokyo, Japan has not shown a variety of languages in terms of language usage from previous studies. However, with the deepening of globalization, language usage has gradually changed in some specific aspects, such as the field of linguistic landscape. Backhaus (2006) [2] conducted a survey on the linguistic landscape of Tokyo by distinguishing the official and the unofficial, and found that in both the official and unofficial linguistic landscapes, the proportion of English surpassed that of Japanese. Backhaus tried to include a variety of different places, such as commercial areas, residential areas and so on. He collected a total of 2321 multilingual signs at 25 sites, accounting for 19.6% of the total number of signs in these areas. Among these multilingual signs, English
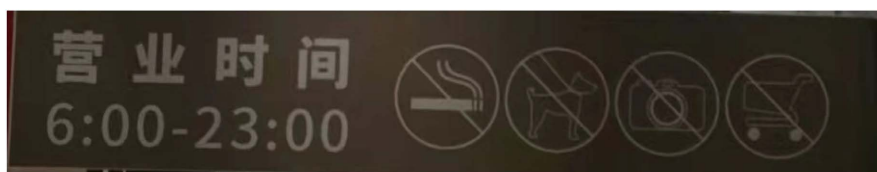
Figure 1. Example 1.

Figure 2. Example 2.

is the most prominent as a foreign language, with 97.6% of the multilingual signs appearing in English. Nearly three-quarters of these multilingual signs belong to the unofficial linguistic landscape. This shows the degree of internationalization and how open Tokyo is to the outside world. Nevertheless, the status of the Japanese is still guaranteed, fully reflecting the power relation behind it. Ben-Rafael, E. and Ben-Rafeal, M. (2015) [3] also inspired by globalization, investigated the linguistic landscapes of Brussels, Berlin and parts of Tel Aviv in the framework of linguistic landscapes, and they proposed BCN (Big Commercial Names), which fully takes into account the impact of globalization. In addition, in the linguistic landscape of Brussels, as a bilingual city (French and Frisian), the status of French is significantly higher than that of Frisian, and the English linguistic landscape and BCN appear frequently in the central area of the city, even surpassing that of Frisian. The same is true in most parts of Berlin, where BCN and English have clear superiority in the linguistic landscape. And in Tel Aviv, even in the center of the city, Hebrew maintains a distinct advantage alongside the BCN and English. From this, we can understand that under the influence of globalization, the BCN is indeed very eye-catching and it has become a focus that cannot be ignored in the study of linguistic landscape. Shang and Zhao (2016) [4] conducted a classification survey of English monolingual, bilingual and multilingual on the linguistic landscape of Singapore to explore the combination form of store names. It turns out that most of the store names are composed of unique name and common name. However, the tabular data of this article only provides the proportion of English linguistic landscapes, while it analyzes the frequency of occurrence of Chinese linguistic landscapes. The two authors compared the frequency of monolingual, bilingual and multilingual in the bottom-up English linguistic landscape, and the linguistic landscape without English is not considered. By doing so, many other social phenomena and issues that are worth investigating may be missed. In addition, Ben-Rafael (2009) [5] tried to summarize the construction principles of linguistic landscape analysis based on the perspective of sociological development, and further improved it in Ben-Rafael (2015) [3], integrating both sufficient rationality and self-prominence into subjective viewpoints. The latest linguistic landscape construction principles include three specific criteria: Subjectivity, collective identity, and power relation. In a word, the principles of linguistic landscape construction formed from a sociological perspective are not only widely used in linguistic landscape research abroad, but also become an important cornerstone of the development of linguistic landscapes.

3.2. The Communicative Ethnological Perspective of Linguistic Landscape

Participant observation is the foundation of ethnology. Communicative ethnology focuses on commonality and individuality, and emphasizes understanding and obtaining data of a language group in a specific cultural background from communicative behavior, so the communication of participants is particularly important. Hymes (1972) [6] summarizes the "SPEAKING" model of human communication, and Huebner (2009) [7] believes that analytical research on linguistic landscapes can also be carried out by using this model, and summarizes SPEAKING into eight factors referring to setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequences, key, instrumentalities, norm and regulations, genre. Trumper-Hecht (2010) [8] divided the linguistic landscape research and analysis into three major spaces, namely the conceived space, the physical space and the living space. He analyzes the linguistic landscape of Israel by regarding Arabs and Jews as passers-by, adding the experimental dimension into the physical dimension and the political dimension. The dimensions correspond to physical space, conceived space and living space. Among them, the living space refers experimental dimension, and the residents become the direct audience, providing new ideas for the study of linguistic landscape. Therefore, the living space is a space for residents to deepen the study of the linguistic landscape, and it also underscores the importance of the participants' observation and communication.

Linguistic landscape studies that incorporate participants' observation and interaction have emerged in recent years. Scholars such as Aiestaran and Cenoz (2010) [9] studied the linguistic landscape of the San Sebastian from the perspective of passers-by. They surveyed residents of the two major ethnic groups living in the city to find out their impressions and perceptions of the local linguistic landscape, and which kind they prefer. In China, Shang (2021) [10] investigated the needs of local residents to study the multilingual landscape in eastern China, in order to explore residents' views and attitudes towards it. Han & Wu (2020) [11] took Guangzhou's urban linguistic landscape as an example to study local language policies and passers-by's impressions and evaluations.

3.3. The Language Policy Perspective of Linguistic Landscape

Language policy includes both narrow and broad perspectives. In a narrow sense, it refers to specific language policies, which are used to regulate the use of language in specific countries and regions, and represent the views of the ruling class. In a broad sense, language policy refers to a field of disciplinary research. Most of the linguistic landscape studies in this section are related to the language policy of a country or region. Shohamy (2006) [12] pointed out that linguistic landscape, like language education policy and language testing, is the manifestation and mechanism of language policy realization. In general, the content of language policy includes not only the planning and designation of official languages, but also the guidance of minority languages. Ferguson and Sidorova

(2018) [13] collected corpus from the linguistic landscape as an entry point, and found that only in the top-down official linguistic landscape, Yakut and Russian have similar usage frequencies, and Russian still takes precedence in other linguistic landscapes. The study shows that even language policies protect minority languages, the specific usage will not be completely changed, which indicates that actual language usage is affected by a combination of factors. Politics and economics are the main reasons. In China, Nie Peng and Munai Reha (2017) [14] conducted a survey on the linguistic landscape of Xichang, the capital of Liangshan Yi Autonomous Prefecture. The results show that although Yi is not the dominant language in the sign, the linguistic landscape of Yi in the old city is of relatively high status compared to other languages. The linguistic landscape has a higher degree of recognition. Therefore, linguistic landscape is a partial manifestation of language policy. Rather than studying linguistic landscape from the perspective of language policy, it is better to say that linguistic landscape has brought new ways and perspectives to language policy research.

3.4. Other Perspectives of Linguistic Landscape

Some scholars have conducted research on the linguistic ontology involved in the linguistic landscape. For example, Huebner (2006) [7] [15] explored the influence of English on Thai in terms of syntax and vocabulary in the linguistic landscape of Bangkok. The multimodal discourse analysis research proposed by Kress and Theo van Leeuwen (1996) [16] on the basis of social semiotics promoted the emergence of visual semiotics. Therefore, sociosemiotics and multimodality are also the research perspectives of linguistic landscape, and a large number of research results have emerged. Tian and Zhang (2014) [17] investigated the translation language of bilingual public signs on Xueyuan Road in Beijing from the perspective of translation studies. In addition, Shang Guowen (2017) [18] proposed that linguistic landscape can be used as an educational tool and language input source in the process of language teaching and acquisition, and suggested that language teachers can design multi-level linguistic landscape teaching activities, so that learners can understand while acquiring language. Scholars such as Mu Yage (2019) [19], Kong Youjing (2018) [20], Qin Tong (2019) [21] applied the linguistic landscape of a specific place in China to classroom teaching, and explored the influence of linguistic landscape in foreign countries through interviews, questionnaires and other methods. The role played in Chinese teaching stimulates international students' interest in learning Chinese.

4. Conclusion

By sorting and analyzing previous studies, it can be found that in recent years, linguistic landscape research has made great progress in both quantity and quality, and the research field has become increasingly diversified, but there are still some shortcomings. First, domestic research mostly borrows from existing for-

eign theories, which lacks innovation and chooses a single theoretical framework. Many studies have little theoretical support, and the analytical framework is arbitrary. Second, most of the studies use quantitative analysis methods while interviews and questionnaires are rarely used. Many studies still stay on the simple description of the data results, pay little attention to the interpretation and analysis of the data, and do not find the meaning behind the linguistic landscape. Last but not least, in terms of research content, most studies are based on synchronicity, and there are few diachronic studies. Most studies only focus on written symbols but do not involve the analysis of multimodal symbols such as images and sounds. Most of the research objects are limited to signage, and linguistic landscapes such as electronic displays, advertisements, banners, and graffiti are not involved. More attention is paid to the big cities, and little research focuses on underdeveloped areas such as villages and towns. The virtual linguistic landscape has not received much attention from scholars. Studies about virtual linguistic landscape are rare and not systematic, so we can pay more attention to them and try to find new results. It can be seen that there is still a lot of blank and research potential in linguistic landscape research, and there are many atypical linguistic landscapes and those with Chinese characteristics deserve the attention from scholars.

Conflicts of Interest

The author declares no conflicts of interest.

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Appendix (Abstract and Keywords in Chinese)

语言景观研究视角综述

摘要：近年来，语言景观研究逐渐成为社会语言学领域的热点。自 2013 年以来，期刊发文量逐年稳步上升，国内研究的理论创新有一定突破。本文回顾已有文献，总结梳理出语言景观研究的几个视角，分别为社会学视角、交际民族学视角、语言政策视角等，以求对语言景观相关研究有更加全面的了解，并为后续研究提供参考。

关键词：语言景观，社会学，交际民族学，语言政策