LANGUAGE POLITICS IN RESPECT OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

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ABSTRACT
Language politics regulates the use, the status and the prestige of language in a country. In multilingual or multiethnic societies the status of minority language is determined by the authorities. Whether a minority language receives functions and rights in a community is not only reflected in the laws or the scope of use of language, for instance media, schools, legislation, but it is also present in the linguistic landscape of a given place, that is whether minority languages appear in public signage, for instance, settlement names or informative signs. The language politics is reflected in linguistic landscape, however, it is not only the minority language display on public signage that is a manifestation of language politics, but any foreign language signage, which, for instance serves to promote tourism. In the present paper I demonstrate the manifestation of local language policy in the linguistic landscape of Hódmezővásárhely by examining the foreign language appearance in public signage in order to see whether they represent any minority presence or they serve to promote tourism in the town.

Keywords: linguistic landscape, language politics, foreign languages, minority languages, tourism

INTRODUCTION

Language politics regulates the use of languages within a country. It determines whether a language or a variety of a language is recognized as official, is given a status, can appear in streets be taught at schools (NÁDOR, 2002).
The three major types of language planning are the status planning, corpus planning and acquisition planning (COOPER,1989). Status planning is the deliberate effort to regulate the functions of language(s) within the community (COOPER,1989). Government can in form of signage, can be used in media or in formal conversations or whether it can decide on the official language(s) of the country or can declare the language as legally appropriate. With an example from the Hungarian 'neighborhood', the influence of legal regulation in everyday language use can be well demonstrated when the use of Hungarian was so restricted that even in doctor-patient relationship it was prohibited (NÁDOR, 2002). Corpus planning determines the forms used in language whether something is accepted as appropriate or inappropriate. The corpus form, however often serves non-linguistic goals (COOPER, 1989), for instance the use of non-discriminative language forms. Acquisition planning refers to the dissemination of the language, whether it can be taught at schools, or popularized in any way (e.g. English language libraries abroad maintained by the British Council) (COOPER,1989)
Language policy is different from language politics (LABRIE, 2000) that it refers to the decisions made my authorized bodies, while the term 'language politics' refers to a wider scale of decision making (NÁDOR, 2002).

Language political decisions can be made by any authorized body: governments, local authorities, companies, schools, but those can also be brought by private individuals (Ben Yehuda) (COOPER, 1989).

The term 'linguistic landscape' was introduced by LANDRY AND BOURHIS (1997) and they defined it as the term for linguistic phenomena that signs the public spaces, including street signs, the names of places, streets, buildings and institutions. In the present paper I examine the relationship between language politics and linguistic landscape and I intend to demonstrate that the linguistic landscape can reflect the language politic decisions of both the authorities and the endeavors of minority groups.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

To examine the representation of language policy in linguistic landscape in Hódmezővásárhely, I looked up data about the number and composition of minority groups in the town from the database of the town. I also investigated the sources of tourism and the composition of the foreign tourists. I mapped the linguistic landscape of the town, using LEEMAN'S AND MODAN'S (2009) method I focused on one area and registered all signs in every street. I chose the town center which is most likely to be visited by tourist, but also included the neighboring streets as it is unavoidable for tourist to use them to approach the center. I selected the type of signs to examine: based on the distinction of LANDRY AND BOURHIS (1997), I only included informative signs, leaving out symbolic signs such as shop names as their primary reason is not to transmit information but to live up to the global fashion of foreign language use (PILLER, 2003; SHOHAMY, 2006). By taking digital pictures of the public signage in the city I examined if any minority language policy is present in the linguistic landscape and how language policy decisions promote tourism. To get a wider perspective I also examined some examples of the manifestation of language policy in public signage from other countries on the basis of books about language politics by SPOLSKY (2006), COOPER (1989), KONTRA (2010) and internet sources. (http://www.vajma.info/cikk/vajdasag/14611/).

RESULTS

The appearance of a language in public signage in streets is a result of a conscious decision-making from the part of the authority that has the power to regulate the language use in public signage. With the terms of Ben-Rafael (2004) it is a top-down procedure. Disposing more than one language in public signs is not always only the issue of multilingual settlements. It can also be appear in monolingual areas (or in towns where foreign-language minority speakers do not form a community with linguistic demands), but the appearance of one or several foreign languages is a touristic need. In both cases, authorities make the necessary decisions whether other languages would appear or would be omitted in signage. These decisions can be local or regional, or national, depending on the nature of the need for foreign language display. In case of the use of minority language use in public signage, the decision can be made on national level, as for instance it was done in Slovakia with the regulation of the Hungarian language use (NÁDOR, 2002).

However, the visibility of minority presence is not the exclusive scope of the manifestation of language politics in linguistic landscape: the importance of language political decisions in making a location attractive to tourists is well presented in the example of the Welsh city of Swansea where the disposal of English road signs were made mandatory next to the Welsh ones "to attract people of all nationalities". (South Wales Evening Post, March 3, 2000). It can be seen, therefore that the endeavors of a town to attract foreigners is reflected in its linguistic landscape. Moreover, it is also suggested by this example that English language is the most obvious choice for this purpose.

In the regulations it is not only the presence of a foreign language but its layout is an important information-carrier (GORTER ET. AL, 2006). The layout of the signage refers to the order of languages, letter size and font all that can make increase or decrease the status of a language (SCOLLON ET. AL, 2003).

Some international example for the influence of language policy on the linguistic landscape

In Slovakia, for instance, where there is a significant Hungarian-speaking minority in the regions near the border, the regulations for Hungarian language to appear on public signage only make it possible in towns where the registered Hungarian speakers constitute at least the 20% of the population (NÁDOR, 2002).

In another neighboring country, Serbia, an endeavor to make linguistic landscape reflect the ethnic composition of the community is visible in the regulation of the ombudsman. Besides the Serbian language on public road signs directing to places of touristic significance, English had been already displayed for touristic reasons. However, the ombudsman that made it compulsory to display Hungarian and Croatian languages as they are official languages of the region of Szabadka. Moreover, in the regulation not only the presence of the minority languages, but also the layout was a subject of regulation: same size and font had to be used for the two languages. This example also highlights the importance of information a layout can transmit. Though, as BACKHAUS (2007) asserts, English is considered as language understood most widely. Due to the local language policy, official minority languages should also be displayed.

Another example for language policy in linguistic landscape is the case of Quebec in Canada. Quebec has a bilingual population of French-speaking majority and English-speaking minority. According to the regulations, all signs must be written in French and English language can appear on signage only in the second position. Not only is the presence of the minority language is regulated but also its layout. It can appear on the second position and in smaller fonts in each case (SPOLSKY, 2006).

Minority presence in Hódmezővásárhely

In Hódmezővásárhely the population is about 48.000, and the minority language groups are very scarce. According to the 2001 census data, 98% of the population is Hungarian, 1% gypsy and 1% other, mainly Slovakian and German, but are inhabitants of Chinese, Bulgarian mother tongues, however, all signage I examined in the area (from street signs, warning notices and prohibitions, informative signs) lack any minority languages.

It seems that the town entirely lacks any signage containing languages other than Hungarian or world languages.

Representation of language policy in the linguistic landscape from tourism perspective

Hódmezővásárhely attracts foreign tourist from several countries who arrive for various purposes: as the town situated close to both Serbia and Romania, Serbian and Romanian visitors regularly arrive in town to enjoy its thermal water or shopping facilities. Healthcare services also attract a great number of health tourists as private dentistry offers their service to British citizens in an organized form (packages of dental care, accommodation and shutter or even cultural programs are included). As the Agricultural Faculty of the University of Szeged is located in town, visitors (teachers and students) from partner universities of numerous countries arrive in town almost all year round: Turkish, Polish, Serbian, Romanian, New Zealander, Estonian, English partners attend conferences, expos or spend their Erasmus exchange program in town. Volunteer teachers from different organizations (e.g. Global Volunteers) come to teach English in primary and grammar schools from English-speaking countries, primarily from the United States, but also from Canada or the United Kingdom spending 2-6 weeks or a semester on the site. Exchange students from the Netherlands also generally spend a week-long period in the town and as Gingko Sas Hotel has all the facilities for conference tourism the town is an attractive destination for foreigners in any time of the year. It can be asserted that the town is becoming a more and more favored destination for health, wellness and holiday tourist respectively.

The informative signs that can be found in the streets contain the directive signs, parking meters, opening hours. In the town directive signs are placed showing the location of sights, facilities, and services in monolingual Hungarian language. A few meters behind the Hungarian directive signs the English equivalent can be found in the majority of the cases. At the time of the data collection there were 25 Hungarian signs and 15 English language signs, however, the disposal of English signs were visibly in process. The layout shows difference: font is the same but in case of English they have black and red color, while Hungarian signage is blue and white. In some signage either the English or the Hungarian signage gives more information by displaying more directions than its other language equivalent. Though the English language does not appear on the very same sign, but a few meters behind. Still, based on BACKHAUS (2007) this display of signs also counts as bilingual signage as the use of separate signs for each language with the same information are also regarded as bilingual signs. From the information provided, Hungarian language directions were in majority, therefore it seems to be more dominant than English language information. Though the layout is different due to the color of the letters and background, it might serve to facilitate the distinction between the two language signage even for the first glance.

Other informative signs: use of parking meter with the cost, rules of parking and the fine to be paid along with the use of the meter – though would be highly important to be understood for foreigners – contain exclusively Hungarian language. Opening hours are also written in monolingual Hungarian.

Along the High Street (*Andrássy Street*) of Hódmezővásárhely further bilingual signs can be found, though there is only one with informative content: '*Jegyző-Notary*'. As other informative signs appeared several '*For sale*' notes (4 signages) on homes beside the

Hungarian counterpart. However, as there is a little likelihood that tourists would buy homes in country they visit, a reason for the English language on this type of signage may be to create a cosmopolitan atmosphere (PILLER, 2003).

Other signage that locates streets and places of interest and importance (museums, restaurants, schools, swimming pool, sports center) on one board, however are written only in monolingual Hungarian.

As a result, the influence of the local or the national language politics is always present in the linguistic landscape.

CONCLUSIONS

Language political decisions are undoubtedly reflected in the linguistic landscape of any location let them refer to the minority presence or the promotion of tourism.   In Hódmezővásárhely, there is no minority language politics represented in the linguistic landscape. It can be assumed that there are no powerful minority endeavors in the town that would demand the public display of their language.

However, with the relatively recent and increasing disposal of bilingual signage of the directions and location of sights and institutions it can be asserted that there is an increasing endeavor to make the town attractive to foreign tourists for different nationalities. As it could be seen from the example of Swansea, the display of English language can be the most effective language choice for this purpose especially in case of road signs where space is scarce. It can also be concluded that the town has not yet finished the efforts to be more tourist-friendly in linguistic terms, as numerous signage (e.g. parking meter, opening hours) are not yet displayed in foreign languages.

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