The linguistic landscape as an additional source of input in second language acquisition

JASONE CENOZ AND DURK GORTER

Abstract

In this article we explore the role that the linguistic landscape, in the sense of all the written language in the public space, can have in second language acquisition (SLA). The linguistic landscape has symbolic and informative functions and it is multimodal, because it combines visual and printed texts, and multilingual, because it uses several languages. In this paper we look at its potential use as a source of input in SLA, in general, and in the acquisition of pragmatic competence, in particular. We also inquire into the role of the linguistic landscape in the acquisition of multimodal literacy skills and multicompetence. We conclude that the linguistic landscape is a learning context and can also be used for raising awareness in SLA.

1. Linguistic landscape as a field of study

Language is visible in the public domain in its textual mode as words which are displayed on shop windows, commercial signs, posters, official notices, traffic signs, etc. This “linguistic landscape” refers to all the language items that are visible in a specified part of the public space. The public space has not received much attention in specific research in second language acquisition (SLA). Although there were some earlier studies (e.g., Spolsky and Cooper 1991), research of the linguistic landscape as a theme in its own right is a relatively new development and the number of publications in this area has grown substantially over the last few years (see Backhaus 2006; Gorter 2006; Gorter and Cenoz 2007). More recently, an increasing number of researchers

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in applied linguistics and sociolinguistics have started to take a closer look at the languages used in urban print and are gradually expanding the scope of the studies (Shohamy and Gorter in press).

The definition of linguistic landscape given by Landry and Bourhis (1997: 25) is commonly quoted in the literature:

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.

The main concern of research on the linguistic landscape is with an analysis of the use of language in its written form in the public sphere. Language speaks to us from numerous signs in the public space. The highest density of signs is found in the main shopping streets and industrial areas where the average number of signs per stretching metre can be rather high. Road sides, in particular on motorways, can also have a great deal of signs. Cities are a showcase for the visual display of symbols and images. There is an abundance of signs in commercial areas and studies have mainly been done in urban contexts; therefore the term “multilingual cityscape” could be a technically better denomination. “Landscape”, of course, refers literally to a tract of land, but the concept also has the second meaning of its representation in a painting. This duality of direct referral and indirect representation is an important point in the study of linguistic landscapes. The language signs on the walls of the cities can be taken as the literal panorama a spectator will see when walking or driving along the street, but that same view also reflects the language situation in a city, region or country. The representation of the languages is of particular importance because it relates to issues of the relative power and status of the different languages in a specific sociolinguistic context.

In most cases the dominant language of a community is likely to be used more often in place names or commercial signs while other languages are not as common (see for example Ramamoorthy 2002; Xiao 1998). The presence or absence of languages “sends direct and indirect messages with regard to the centrality versus the marginality of certain languages in society” (Shohamy 2006: 110). At the same time, the signs can be a display of identity by certain language groups and the use of several languages in the linguistic landscape can contribute to its linguistic diversity. The use of languages in the linguistic landscape indexes issues of identity and cultural globalization, the growing presence of English and other foreign languages and informs us about the presence of immigrant groups or the revitalization of minority languages. Language does not stand on its own in the linguistic landscape, it is in contact with other modes of communication which are visual (pictures, icons, logos) and are in many cases symbolic.
Most research studies on the linguistic landscape are based on the analysis of digitized pictures which provide a method for studying an important aspect of the sociolinguistic ecology of a city (Spolsky in press). The descriptive approach to the linguistic landscape is an additional tool to measure the diversity of languages in a specific situation. As compared to other tools (surveys, censuses, interviews) which are product-oriented, the linguistic landscape has an added value because of the special impact it can have on the people who see the signs on the street. In particular, the linguistic landscape can affect the perception and attitudes people have about languages and influence the use of languages in society (Cenoz and Gorter in press). Interviews among shop-owners who are the authors of the signs can inform us about their intentions and why they are using specific languages in their signs and not others (Malinowski in press, Trumper-Hecht in press).

2. The availability of English and multilingualism

English is the most important language of wider communication in our world. It is the main language of science and technology and its spread is advancing in many countries and regions where English has not been traditionally used. English is also the main language of popular culture and globalisation as can be seen in advertising. Crystal (1997) calls the prominence of the “outdoor media” in virtually every town and city one of the most noticeable global manifestations of English language use. According to Ben-Rafael et al. (2006), English can better be called a “non-foreign language”. English has also been considered a threat to linguistic diversity because it takes predominance to the detriment of the use of other languages (Phillipson 1992). Some governments have taken steps to try to stop the use of English in the public space altogether. A well-known case is the so-called “Toubon-law” introduced in France in 1994, which insisted on the use of the French language in official government publications, advertisements, and other contexts in France. Another famous case is Quebec where the Charter of the French Language from 1977 (Bill 101), among several laws, provides regulations about almost every aspect of language use in public space (Backhaus in press).

The use of English in commercial signs could be interpreted as informational mainly aimed at foreign visitors but it is obvious that its increasing presence has a strong symbolic function for a non-English speaking local population. As Piller (2001, 2003) remarks, English is often used in commercial signs for its connotational values such as international orientation, future orientation, success, sophistication or fun orientation.

The growing presence of English in the linguistic landscape has been part of a number of studies conducted in different countries around the world: Israel
(Rosenbaum et al. 1977; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Japan (Backhaus 2007); Thailand (Huebner 2006); and various countries in Europe (Schlick 2003; Cenoz and Gorter 2006; Hult 2006; Edelman 2006; Griffin 2004; Barni 2006; and Gorter 2007). These studies indicate that the spread of English is clearly reflected in the linguistic landscape. However, the use of English does not necessarily imply that citizens understand English texts. Gerritsen et al (2000) reported that only a minority of the subjects in their study in The Netherlands was able to explain correctly the meaning of English utterances used on printed advertisements and television commercials in the Netherlands.

English and the official state language are not the only languages used in the linguistic landscape. At the beginning of the 21st century our world is multilingual in a thorough sense of the word. The idea of monolingualism by country – one state, one language – has become obsolete and has been overtaken by a complicated interplay of many languages. Truly monolingual countries were always an exception, but globalisation with its ensuing migration flows, spread of cultural products, and high speed communication has led to more multilingualism instead of less.

The diversity of languages displayed in the linguistic landscape does not stand on its own. Due to the influx of migrants and refugees from all over the world, Europe and other parts of the world have become increasingly multilingual. For example, most larger cities in Western Europe easily have over 50 different languages spoken as a mother tongue by their primary school populations (Extra and Yagmur 2004: 119). The most important immigrant languages include Arabic, Berber, Turkish, Kurdish, Hindi, Punjabi, and Chinese. The process of ‘glocalisation’ understood as the result of recontextualizing global cultural resources in local settings leads to new expressions of cultural mix in music, food and clothing and also in languages (Robertson 1996; Androustopoulos 2007).

At the same time, there is also a process of regionalization or localization going on. Emphasis is given to regional identities and to the revitalization of regional languages. The effects of these simultaneous processes can literally be seen in the streets of the towns of Ljouwert/Leeuwarden in Friesland and Donostia/San Sebastian in the Basque Country. In these regions a struggle for the survival of a minority language is taking place and, at the same time, English as a global language is becoming more influential. The linguistic landscape of these two cities includes texts in the national languages (Dutch and Spanish) but also in the minority languages (Frisian and Basque), in addition to languages of international communication (English, German, and French). There are substantial differences between Friesland and the Basque Country. Frisian can be seen only to a modest degree in the linguistic landscape as the official language policy does not include the linguistic landscape, except for place names and street names. In contrast, the promotion of the minority lan-
language in the linguistic landscape is an important part of language policy in the Basque Country to the point that Basque has obtained a substantial presence in the linguistic landscape, mainly side by side with Spanish, or in combination with English or other languages such as French, German or Italian (Cenoz and Gorter 2006). An example of the official policy in Basque and Spanish can be seen in Figure 1.

Figure 1 shows an official sign about shellfish and fish that was put there by the Basque Government Department of agriculture, fish and food. The sign is primarily aimed at a specific target group, amateur fishermen who are angling in the bay of San Sebastian. The sign is located directly at the water front. The sign has a long and detailed text in both Spanish and Basque with a literal translation of all the names of the different types of shellfish and fish, the closed season, the minimal sizes and the prohibited species. Its basic function is to provide information, but for a learner of Basque, who either is a fisherman or a passerby strolling along the esplanade, the text could also provide a learning opportunity. An advanced learner could check his/her knowledge of the fishnames and a beginner has a rather complete list of names in both languages. In the next sections we will go into the relationship between the linguistic landscape and second language acquisition.
3. The linguistic landscape and second language acquisition

In the previous sections we looked at the definition of the linguistic landscape and its main characteristics. In this section we are going to focus on the relationship between the linguistic landscape and second language acquisition. This relationship has hardly been explored but the development of studies on the linguistic landscape, on the one hand, and of second language acquisition as related to its social context, on the other, makes this link particularly interesting.

When focusing on the context where second language acquisition takes place, it is important to consider that the target language can be either a second or foreign language. According to Kramsch (2007: 4–5) a second language “... is a language other than the mother tongue learned in an environment in which that language is the dominant language or where the language is an international language of commerce and industry”. In contrast, a foreign language “... is a language that is learned in an instructional environment or during a temporary sojourn abroad as part of general education of for professional purposes”. This distinction is important because, with the exception of English, a foreign language is less likely to be found in the linguistic landscape than a second language. As we have already seen, the role of English is special and it can be regarded as a second rather than a foreign language in many contexts.

In order to explore the possible role of the linguistic landscape in second and foreign language acquisition we are going to approach this relationship from five different perspectives looking at input, pragmatic competence, literacy skills, multicompetence and affective and symbolic factors.

3.1. Linguistic landscape as input

The role of input in SLA has traditionally been recognized and it really acquired importance when Krashen (1985, 1994) formulated the “Input hypothesis”, a popular but nevertheless controversial hypothesis. Since then, the role of input in SLA has received more or less attention in different theoretical approaches to SLA (see Gass 2003; Gass and Mackey 2006 for a review). In the most recent account, the concepts of attention and noticing have contributed to our understanding of the mechanisms involved in the processing of second language input (Schmidt 1995) and subsequent research has confirmed that explicit knowledge plays a role in the perception of L2 forms (Ellis 2007). Some research has looked into the role of incidental learning in second language acquisition (see, for example, Hulstijn 2003). Incidental learning refers to learning without the intent to do so but can also refer to learning one stimulus while paying attention to a different stimulus. For example, in the case of extensive
reading the learner may acquire new vocabulary while the main focus of the activity may be to enjoy a story in a book. According to Hulstijn (2003: 365), retentional gains under genuine incidental learning are not high but they depend on different factors such as the frequency of occurrence of the stimulus, the presence or absence of a cue and the relevance of the stimulus (see also Ellis 2007).

When looking at the texts in the linguistic landscape as a possible source of input in SLA, learning is likely to be incidental learning because language learners are faced with texts in the public space but usually do not go along the streets with the idea of learning from these texts. This does not mean that learners are not aware of the linguistic landscape around them but there are probably important individual differences regarding the attention people pay to texts in public spaces. However, the important investments in the advertisement industry seem to indicate that having texts and visuals in the public space brings economic benefits. For example, as Richard Schaps explains a billboard in Times Square is worth $2.5 million a year and today there are 250 signs as compared to 35 in 1980 (Schaps 2007). These figures seem to imply that people do see the signs.

It is very difficult to isolate the effect of the linguistic landscape on language learning from the effect of other types of input but it is important to take into account that exposure to the L2 can take place in different ways outside the classroom and this is the case even more when English is the target language. The fact that this exposure is difficult to control does not mean that it has to be excluded as non-existent when analysing the complex process of SLA. Research on “study abroad” has shown that the contact with the target language community has a positive influence on the development of L2 proficiency, but this research also acknowledges the difficulties of controlling the amount of input learners are exposed to and the quantity and quality of the interactions that take place in the L2 (Dufon and Churchill 2006; Freed 2007). The linguistic landscape is also difficult to control and part of the “study abroad” experience although it is not usually taken into consideration.

When referring to the acquisition of literacy in formal contexts, Rogers (2007) considers that the emphasis on formal learning can lead to ignoring or even denying the role of informal learning. According to Papen (2005) processes of informal learning related to literacy are often unconscious or semiconscious. It is possible to conduct controlled laboratory experiments on the role of attention in SLA but it is a lot more difficult to evaluate the role of the linguistic landscape. Even if only those items of language the learner has paid attention to are processed and stored, it would be difficult to know which elements of the linguistic landscape draw the learner’s attention and how aware the learner is of paying attention to them. An attempt to find out about the importance of the linguistic landscape is to ask learners about their percep-
tion of its role in language acquisition, as done by Gorter and Cenoz (2004), who asked second language learners in the Netherlands and Spain whether they thought they learned from the linguistic landscape and they considered that reading signs on streets was useful but not as much as language classes, reading, listening to music or watching television.

When looking at the linguistic landscape as input for SLA acquisition it is interesting to see the type of input it provides. The linguistic landscape is authentic, contextualized input which is part of the social context. As we have already seen, a great part of the linguistic landscape is commercial advertising but the linguistic landscape also includes many other signs. It is authentic in the sense that it is not especially designed for teaching languages but for other purposes. The number of words and sentences used in the linguistic landscape is usually limited but there are some exceptions such as the "fishermen’s sign" discussed above that can include a good deal vocabulary. In general, the syntax is not elaborated and the linguistic landscape does not provide much input at the phonetic level although the situation may change in the future with new technology. When considering the different linguistic levels, the main interest of the linguistic landscape as a source of input is at the pragmatic level as we will see in the next section.

3.2. Linguistic landscape and pragmatic competence

The linguistic landscape can provide input for second language learners and it can be particularly interesting for the development of pragmatic competence. Texts written in the public space tend to include different speech acts and often use indirect language and metaphors. The linguistic landscape includes utterances which are sometimes full sentences but in many other cases they are just single words or groups of words that have a meaning as related to the context in which they are written. One of the characteristics of the linguistic landscape is that it is a type of literacy that is multimodal and multilingual. All these characteristics have implications for second language acquisition as we will see in the following sections.

As we have already said, the linguistic landscape is all around us and as Dagenais et al (in press) point out cities can be viewed as texts, as full of signs that "... must be deciphered, read and interpreted by citizens who participate in the consumption of the moving, literary spectacle of the metropolis." Second language learners can certainly be some of those citizens.

Pragmatic competence is one of the components of communicative competence and it is included as such in the most important models of communicative competence (Bachman 1990; Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell 1995). Second language learners need to acquire pragmatic competence along with all the
other components of communicative competence: linguistic competence, soci-olinguistic, discourse and strategic competence. Pragmatic competence refers to "the competence in conveying and understanding communicative intent, that is, matching actional intent with linguistic form based on the knowledge of an inventory of verbal schemata that carry illocutionary force (speech acts and speech act sets)" (Celce-Murcia, Dörnyei and Thurrell 1995: 17). Pragmatic competence can further be divided into pragmalinguistic and sociopragmatic competence. Pragmalinguistic competence refers to the linguistic elements used in the different languages to perform speech acts, whereas sociopragmatic or cultural competence is related to the link between action-relevant context factors and communicative action (Kasper 2001).

Research in interlanguage pragmatics has looked at the perception, production and acquisition of pragmatic competence by focusing mainly on speech acts. Results of research studies indicate that there are differences between native and non-native speakers and that variables such as length of residence, level of proficiency or learning environment can affect the perception and production of speech acts (see Alcón and Safont 2007 for a review). The acquisition of pragmatic competence is nowadays considered necessary in second language acquisition. Some researchers (for example Cenoz 2007) highlight the differences between second and foreign language acquisition because in foreign contexts learners have very limited opportunities to be exposed to authentic language use. The model of pragmatic competence offered in second language contexts by native speakers is only shown indirectly through teaching materials in foreign language contexts. Alcón and Safont (2007) review studies on textbooks to conclude that speech acts are not sufficiently represented in textbooks and that in many cases they do not represent authentic language use.

The linguistic landscape can increase the availability of input which is appropriate for the acquisition of pragmatic competence. The linguistic landscape includes texts with different functions. Many of the texts are commercial but as Kelly-Holmes (2005: 8) points out when referring to the language of advertising:

Language can, of course, have various functions and may be used for a wide variety of purposes: for example, to express feelings and emotions (the expressive function); to offer advice and recommendations or to persuade (the directive or vocative function); to inform, to report, to describe or to assert (the informational function); to create, maintain and finish contact between addressee and addressee, for example small talk (the interactional or phatic function); to communicate meaning through a code which could not otherwise be communicated (the poetic function).

As Huebner (in press) notices, elements of the linguistic landscape also have other functions. Street signs function to identify a place by name, placards in-
form the reader of the significance of the objects to which they are attached. Graffiti are examples of transgressive discourse and other signs give indications to regulate actions and movements. This diversity of functions and speech acts indicates that the linguistic landscape can provide appropriate input for the development of pragmatic competence. As an example we could just look at picture 2. In the picture we can see a vending machine in the city of San Sebastian.

The vending machine has some instructions in small letters in Spanish but a very clear text in Basque and Spanish: "Egarrí al zara? ¿Tienes sed?"; meaning 'Are you thirsty?' This vending machine is interesting for several reasons but from a pragmatic perspective we can see that the speech act performed is a request to the people who pass by so that they buy a drink. Following the CCSARP coding scheme (Blum-Kulka, House and Kasper 1989), the request could be classified as a mild hint. This hint is understood as a request to buy a drink because of the context in which it is placed. A learner of Basque or Spanish is faced with an indirect strategy for a request in an communicative
authentic context. The knowledge of Coca Cola as a brand name for drinks, and the knowledge of what a vending machine is make the utterances almost unnecessary for practical purposes. The inference that is needed when reading a mild hint makes the advertisement less aggressive, less direct, an example of what is called “soft sell” in studies on advertising (Short and Wenzhong 1997: 495).

Linguistic landscape can provide appropriate input for the development of pragmatic competence but, as Huebner (in press) comments, television commercials and other forms of advertising can also be good sources of input. This type of input will be much more necessary in the case of foreign language contexts where opportunities to find different speech acts in authentic contexts are more limited but it can also provide additional pragmatic input to learners in second language contexts. Pragmatic failure in intercultural communication is not easily recognizable by interlocutors who may judge the speaker as being impolite or uncooperative or attribute the pragmatic errors to the speaker’s personality and it is even common among advanced language learners (Cenoz 2007). The linguistic landscape opens the possibilities of having access to authentic input that can raise learners’ awareness about the realization of different speech acts.

3.3. Linguistic landscape and the acquisition of literacy skills

The linguistic landscape can be an important source of input in general and particularly of input for the development of pragmatic competence but, as written text, it is also linked to the development of second language literacy skills. Literacy studies have developed in very interesting ways in the last few years and reading a text is no longer regarded as a passive skill. As Moss (2003: 76) points out nowadays the focus is “upon the event itself, the socially structured moment when reading takes place ... it is the interactions between participants in the literacy event that will both establish and steer what the text will mean.” From a psycholinguistic perspective the process of reading has some key components such as word identification, parsing, syntactic-semantic representation, text representation and understanding (Tokowicz and Perfetti 2005). In literacy studies the focus is on literacy as social practice. A basic characteristic of this approach to literacy is multimodality.

The development of multimedia technology, communication channels and media has given way to multimodal literacy which is based on the affordances provided by gesture, sound, visuals and other semiotic symbols including language but not limited to language. For example, texts used in chatting or SMS messages include different colours, different types of fonts and icons next to the actual language. In many cases they are not linear because they include internet
links that the reader is supposed to check and then go back to the message. The traditional borders between speech and writing are also blurred. These changes have challenged traditional forms of narrative and changed literacy practices (Jewitt and Kress 2003; Magnan in press). In a multimodal approach to literacy, full communication is not possible through the means of language only. Semiotics, which focuses on the study of signs, is the relevant discipline. With a few exceptions (see, for example, Kellerman 2001), SLA studies have focused on language as the central and even the only form of communication to achieve communicative competence in the L2. However, as Goddard (2001) remarks, readers read verbal texts and accompanying images at the same time. Language does not carry all the meaning in a communicative situation and other modes have to be taken into consideration. As Leander and Lewis (2007) notice, literacy has always been multimodal but nowadays literacy practices rely on a more complex range of modalities.

Reading comprehension has traditionally been seen as the activity of processing the language that is written. Multimodal literacy pays attention to the text as a physical object, the characteristics of the material from which it is made, the images it has next to it and the space it occupies. According to Moss (2003: 85), when reading "the reader re-makes the text drawing on the possibilities each mode represents." Reading is a social act resulting from the combination of the meaning potential of the text, the meaning potential of the context and the resources the reader has. As Alvermann (2002: viii) points out performative, visual, oral and semiotic understandings are necessary for constructing and re-constructing print-and-non-print-based texts. Literacy cannot be considered a static skill but should be considered as multiple literacy practices that vary across cultures and contexts (Kress and Street 2006).

The linguistic landscape is multimodal because it combines visual and printed texts. The information in the linguistic landscape is on different types of material objects such as signs, billboards, stickers, posters, shop windows or vending machines. The characteristics of these materials in combination with the text and images displayed and the space where they are located provide different affordances that interact with the reader's resources in the process of re-making of the text. For example, when looking at picture 2, the reader can recognize a vending machine because of its shape or the material is made of, and also because of the Coca Cola logo and the bottle, which have some specific characteristics such as the shape or the red colour. The process of reading will include this recognition along with the printed text in Basque and Spanish. This text cannot be isolated from the colours, the logo, and the vending machine because all these elements are part of a multimodal reality. The linguistic landscape, along with other resources, can provide opportunities to acquire literacy skills in a second or foreign language by considering language as part of a semiotic system. Obviously, there are other possibilities to develop literacy
skills but the linguistic landscape provides an additional opportunity to experience non-linear multimodal texts in the public space.

3.4. **Linguistic landscape and multicompetence**

For a number of years researchers working on SLA and bilingualism have challenged the idea that multilinguals should be expected to achieve a native-speaker level of competence in all the dimensions of communicative competence in two or more languages (Cook 1992, 2005). As Edwards (1994) observes a perfectly balanced bilingual or multilingual is the exception rather than the norm. Most learners do not achieve native competence in a second or third language and in some cases teachers and learners feel this is an indication of failure in the language acquisition process. This feeling is derived from the fact that only native speakers’ norms are considered and not the needs that learners have and the way they are going to use the language. As an alternative, instead of regarding language competence of bilinguals and monolinguals as simply the sum of two or more monolingual competencies, it could be judged in conjunction with the users’ total linguistic repertoire. According to Cook (1992), who proposed the concept of “multicompetence”, second language users should not be viewed as imitation monolinguals in a second language; rather, they should be seen to possess unique forms of competence, or competencies, in their own right. Bilinguals and multilinguals can use languages in different ways because they can code-switch between languages and also because there is interaction between their competence in the different languages that form their linguistic repertoire.

The languages that bilingual and multilingual speakers use are not completely compartmentalized, but rather they influence each other. However, SLA has traditionally established hard boundaries between languages by focusing on different aspects of the development of the target language. It has focused on transfer from the L1 but has not paid enough attention to the influence of the L2 on the L1, or the interaction between the different languages acquired by the learner. Multilinguals have different degrees of competence in different languages because they use them for different purposes and they also use phenomena such as code-switching as a resource to communicate in a more efficient way (see Cook 2005).

Languages are not separated into isolated compartments in the linguistic landscape and, as we have already seen, one of its characteristics is multilingualism. The information provided in different languages is not necessarily the same. Reh (2004) considers the following possibilities: (1) “duplicating multilingual writing”, when all the information is presented in more than one language; (2) “fragmentary multilingualism”, when the whole information is
given only in one language but selected parts are given also in other languages, (3) "overlapping multilingual writing", when only part of its information is repeated in at least one more language but there is not a literal translation; and (4) "complementary multilingual writing", in which different information is given in the different languages.

Another distinction that is relevant for the study of the linguistic landscape is the one made by Vaish (2007) between traditionally "biliterate texts" and "hybrid texts". A biliterate text is written in or has symbolic evidence of two or more languages or cultures, whereas a hybrid text is a subset of biliterate texts with an aesthetic creative purpose that is popular in advertising. Hybrid texts very often mix languages and multilingualism is used as a resource. As Androutsopoulos (2007) points out, the decision to use one or more languages in advertising is the result of careful planning and the allocation of languages is strategic and related to aesthetic value, symbolic force and the effect on the audience. Language mixing in the linguistic landscape blurs the lines that separate languages and can provide the right type of input for multilingual speakers who can use different languages as a resource.

As we have already seen, the use of English is another characteristic of the linguistic landscape which is related to the general spread of English in general and particularly in the language of advertising (Kelly-Homes 2005). Androutsopoulos comments that English is associated with "novelty, modernity, internationalism, technological excellence, hedonism and fun" (2007: 221). Words, chunks, formulae, phrases and utterances are used in English in the linguistic landscape, particularly in the case of commercial signs. English is used along with other languages, visuals and icons and this multilingual and multimodal texts display soft boundaries between languages and between modes and can provide, along with other types of texts, input that is appropriate to develop multilingual competence and multimodal literacy skills.

Texts and images are combined in the linguistic landscape and are processed at the same time but languages are also combined and they can also be noticed and processed together. In a small scale study asking second language learners about the way they perceived multilingual signs in the linguistic landscape Cenoz and Gorter (in press b) found that most students reported that they read bilingual and multilingual signs in the different languages and not only in one language.

3.5. Linguistic landscape, symbolic and affective factors

Affective factors such as attitudes towards languages and language learning have been traditionally identified as factors influencing SLA (Gardner 1985) and the study of emotions in SLA and multilingualism has developed related to
neuroscience, social cognition and discourse studies (see, for example, Pavlenko 2006). As Javier (2007: 57) points out, individuals have different affective relationships with different languages. Languages are also tied to national and ethnic identities and can become symbolically linked to specific ethnolinguistic groups.

Landry and Bourhis (1997) distinguished the informative and the symbolic functions of language signs. Apart from providing information about the language spoken by a specific group, the use of a language in the linguistic landscape can affect the value and status that speakers have of different languages. The symbolic function that the visibility of a language has in the public space can have a special meaning in the case of minority language learners who can be motivated by the use of less spread languages. The symbolic and affective functions of language are also used in advertising. For example, we can see that in the vending machine in Figure 2, Basque is not necessary for communicative purposes because speakers of Basque also speak and read Spanish, but the decision to include the text in Basque can please speakers of Basque. The combination of informative and symbolic functions along with other aspects of the linguistic landscape can be seen in Figure 3.

This double billboard announces a sport center called Hydra in the city of San Sebastian (Basque Country, Spain). The billboard is multimodal because it has a combination of pictures, colours, icons and texts and it is multilingual because the texts are in three languages: Spanish, Basque and English. There is a mixture of different strategies when mixing the languages: fragmentary, overlapping and complementary (Reh 2004). Most of the information is in Spanish but on the left billboard “Centro Deportivo” [sports center] is also in Basque “Kiroldegia” and on the right billboard “Hydruk sasoian jarriko zaitu” [Hydra will get you fit] is in Basque but it is not an exact translation from Spanish.
All the information given in Basque is also in Spanish and speakers of Basque also speak Spanish so this information has a more symbolic and affective function. The intended effect seems to be that the advertisement becomes closer to speakers and learners of Basque. The use of languages in this billboard clearly reflects that language is related to affective and symbolic factors.

The use of English is limited to the left billboard but it is interesting to see that English is used in two different ways. First, we see “the active center”. This expression is not common and quite ambiguous for somebody who does not read the rest of the billboard because it is not clear what this type of center refers too. The reason for using English is not to add specific information; it rather has a symbolic function. As we have already seen English is associated with modernity and internationalism and this billboard is trying to associate these values to this particular sports club. The bottom part of the billboard in small print includes a very interesting mixture of English and Spanish that we can see just by looking at the first line “Spinning, sala de fitness, piscinas, padel, SPA (Circuitos: antiestrés, Pérdida de peso, puesta en forma) aerobic, step, body-pump, body-balance, cross-training, gimnasia de mantenimiento”. This list gives some of the activities in the center and includes English words to provide information. It is arguable that all the English words are really necessary in Spanish but they are giving some information which is not given in a different language. The role of English is more informative in this case.

From a pragmatic perspective the Spanish text on the right billboard is also very interesting:

_Hydra te pone … Te pongas como te pongas es el mejor momento para que en Hydra te pogamos en forma. Tenemos todo lo necesario para ponerte como quieras: en forma, en equilibrio, en marcha …_

‘Hydra excites you … Whatever you are up to, it is the best time for Hydra to get you fit. We have everything necessary to get you the way you want: fit, balanced, active …’

The text (and the picture next to it) is playing with indirect meanings of the verb “poner”, unfinished sentences to combine the idea of keeping fit with some excitement that can even be interpreted as having sexual connotations of arousal. This indirect language could be interesting as input for learners of Spanish and because of the collocations and the use of the subjunctive. This billboard shows some of the possibilities of the linguistic landscape as a resource in second language acquisition.
4. Conclusions

This article has explored the role that the linguistic landscape can have in SLA by looking at its potential use as a source of input, in general, and in the acquisition of pragmatic competence, in particular. The article has also analysed the linguistic landscape as multimodal and multilingual and its symbolic and informative functions.

Shohamy and Waksman (in press) observe that current positions towards language and literacy such as ecological linguistics and the concept of symbolic competence, support the characteristics of the linguistic landscape as an appropriate learning context. In fact, an ecological approach to language learning considers languages as a social activity completely related to the context (Kramsch 2002; Hornberger 2003; Van Lier 2002, 2004). As Van Lier (2002), points out language is part of semiotics and the context includes the physical, social and symbolic world. Kramsch (2006: 251) proposes that the competence needed nowadays is symbolic competence in a world where the input has become very complex:

Marketing techniques, newspeak, and political propaganda have modified meanings and blurred the genres: the Internet has diversified the modalities of meaning making. Today it is not sufficient for learners to know how to communicate meanings, they have to understand the practice of meaning making itself.

The use of the linguistic landscape in SLA offers an opportunity to analyse how meaning is constructed by using different modalities. The linguistic landscape can provide an excellent opportunity of authentic input for pragmatic development and can be used for the development of language awareness and linguistic diversity. For example Dagenais et al (in press) describe a project in which schoolchildren take pictures of the linguistic landscape and relate them to multilingualism and multiculturalism.

Apart from collecting pictures and analysing the linguistic landscape other possibilities are to raise second language students’ awareness of the linguistic landscape asking them to focus on languages. Internet has also made it possible to have access to the linguistic landscape virtually (e.g., www.flickr.com). The characteristics of the linguistic landscape and its increasing presence in urban areas all over the world make it necessary to focus on its role as an additional source of input for language learners.

It is important that research in SLA takes the linguistic landscape into account and there are different possibilities that can be explored as part of the research agenda. One possibility is to obtain more information about the perception of the linguistic landscape by conducting ethnographic research and using diaries, interviews or language learning narratives. This type of study can provide useful insights about the role of the linguistic landscape in SLA,
and at the same time information to conduct more specific controlled studies in second/foreign language classrooms.

In more controlled experiments, pictures of the linguistic landscape can be used as teaching material in order to test the specific effect of this type of input on the development of pragmatic competence as compared to other types of input. It could also be interesting to use the linguistic landscape when comparing the differences between using multimodal and multilingual texts in second language instruction as compared to traditional printed texts in a single language. The linguistic landscape can be included in studies of language attitudes and identity as related to SLA in different contexts.

University of the Basque Country
<jasone.cenoz@ehu.es>
<d.gorter@ikerbasque.org>

References


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