Exploring Status Quo and College Students' Feedback on Linguistic Landscapes in Xi'an With SPEAKING Model

Meiyi Liu[1, a]

[1]School of Foreign Studies, Chang'an University, Xi'an, Shaanxi, 710016, China

[a]MayLiumeiyi@hotmail.com

Abstract

This paper aims to explore the status quo of urban language landscape, combined with SPEAKING model, which analyzed 643 language landscapes in Xi'an by method of quality and quantity, using the questionnaire survey for 60 college students' attitudes to the existing language landscape, and put forward targeted countermeasures and suggestions from different dimensions, then improve the local city language logo. Study shows that Xi'an's preference code is Chinese. In addition, English appeared frequently in the language signs. Then there are mistakes hidden in the linguistic landscapes. Students suggested government to optimize the language policy, make information diverse, let signs correspond to districts' styles, set more bilingual signs and reduce English-only signs. It is valuable to improve local linguistic landscapes for creating an open and inclusive image in Xi'an.

Keywords

Linguistic Landscape; Xi'an City; SPEAKING Model.

1. Introduction:

With the development of the tide of globalization, the economic, political, cultural and other exchanges between China and other countries in the world are becoming more and more frequent. More and more international friends choose to enter China for tourism, temporarily live or move to China, and the demand of public places for the logo landscape with English and Chinese comparison is gradually increasing. Xi'an, as a new first-tier city and a famous historical city, has great potential for cultural exchange, and the optimization of urban language landscape plays a constructive role in the construction of an international city.

However, in the implementation process of the policy of English Translation and Writing Standards in the Public Service Field, there are still problems such as grammar errors, format errors, and Chinglish, which makes some signs unable to provide foreign friends with functional orientation, service orientation, standard orientation and other information to foreign friends, resulting in unnecessary misunderstanding and confusion. In addition, the dispute between the proportion of Chinese signs and English signs in the language landscape has always been a controversial issue. Based on this, this paper studies the language landscape of Xi 'an, based on the relevant theories of previous scholars, through the method of field investigation and questionnaire, and analyzes the urban language landscape of Xi' an, explores the effective path to improve the urban English language landscape, and promotes the image construction of Xi'an as an international metropolis.

2. Literature Review

Since the 1960s and 1970s, the international study of linguistic landscape has gradually emerged. Scholar Xue Zihao once divided its development process into three stages:

germination period, development period, and rapid development period. [1] In the embryonic period before 1997, scholar Rosenbaum et al. studied the use of signs in Jerusalem and proposed the view that the linguistic landscape in the region is multilingual under the influence of local official language policies. [2] In 1997, Landry&Bourhis wrote Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality: an empirical study. It is widely regarded as the foundation work of this research, and its definition of "language landscape" promotes the progress of research in this field, and such research has entered the development period. [3] Since 2008, it is considered to be a period of rapid development of this research, and more and more scholars focus on the research of theories related to linguistic landscape.

Different from foreign studies, the study of language landscape started late in China. By July 2023, the theme was set as "language landscape" on CNKI, with a total of 934 academic journals and papers, and 141 related journals and papers were selected. According to the published data of relevant papers, most of the relevant "language landscape" papers in China were published after 2012, and the number of relevant papers published before 2012 was small, with a total of 7. Since 2014, the number of papers published has increased year by year, and the research level is mostly distributed in the field of applied research.

The comparison shows that the domestic related research started slightly later than that in foreign countries, and the research mainly focuses on the application aspect, while the foreign theoretical research is more perfect than that in China. Focusing on domestic research, China's language landscape research has not formed a theoretical system, lack of translated works and monographs and other theoretical research to summarize and improve, and lack of field investigation data, so the relevant theoretical research is lack of systematic, innovation and depth.

3. Research Design

This study collects language signs from Xi'an Metro Line 2 and three business districts along the line including City-on, SAGA and SKP and investigated college students attitude toward these signs in order to discuss whether the current linguistic landscapes give full play to its function on the basis of respecting to both local and foreign cultures. The concrete research questions are set gradually: Firstly, what is the character of the current landscape signs? Secondly, what is college students' opinion of setting Chinese-English bilingual signs? Finally, how to choose the codes befittingly and reduce inaccuracy words appearing on the signs?

To address the specific research questions, this study uses theory of SPEAKING model proposed by Hymes as the main analysis method. [4] SPEAKING model could be dismantled into eight aspects which is setting and scene, participants, ends, act sequence, key, instrumentalities, norms and genre. These are first considered as the main elements of speech, however, Huebner indicates that this model could also be used in the analysis of linguistic landscape. [5] Considering the pertinence of the research, this study mainly discusses about the ends of language signs, the act sequence of different languages appearing on a same sign, the norms of code choices and the participants' feedback.

Two kinds of research methods are used in this study which were field investigation and questionnaire survey. The method of photography mainly collects the language signs in Xi'an metro line 2 and three business districts by taking photos. Deleting the repetitive signs, there are 643 samples in total. At the same time, 60 questionnaires are random released to college students in Xi'an.

4. Results and Discussion

This study collects 643 language signs from Xi'an metro line 2, the metro which crossed the city, and 3 business districts along the line.

4.1. Ends: Function of Language Signs

Depending on the theory of Spolsky&Cooper, these language signs are divided according to their ends which is the basic function of the signs including guiding, warning, commercial loge and advertisement, introduction, service facility, cultural slogan and so on. [6] In addition, the Table 1 below could show more details.

Table 1. The amount of each ends of language signs

	Count	Percentage	Examples
Guiding	60	9.33%	TO CHANGNINGGONG "往常宁宫"
Warning	125	19.44%	No Pets Allowed "禁止携带宠物"
Commercial loge and advertisement	410	63.76%	"美食广场"Food Plaza
Introduction	14	2.18%	"使用方法" Instruction
Service facility	26	4.04%	Ticket Office "票务中心"
Cultural slogan	8	1.24%	"为城市加速 让生活精彩" Stimulate Vitality Of The City And Civil Life

The details shows that 63.76% of samples are commercial loge and advertisements which occupy a large part of language signs. Then the warning signs and guiding signs account for a large proportion.

4.2. Act Sequence:

Act sequence is identified as the order and the form in which speech acts occur. To analyze the language signs' order and forms, this study stepwise divided the signs and analyzed them in 3 kinds of aspects.

4.2.1. The Choice of code:

This study divides the signs into two groups: monolingual signs, bilingual signs and multilingual signs. Table 2 could show the details.

Table 2. The usage of signs in different languages

	Guiding	Warning	Commercial loge and advertisement	Introduction	Service facility	Culture slogan	Tatal	Percentage
Monolingual	5	0	195	0	0	1	201	31.26%
Bilingual	55	125	211	14	26	7	438	68.12%
Multilingual	0	0	4	0	0	0	4	0.62%
Sum			643					

According to Table 2, it is visible that monolingual signs occupies 31.26%, bilingual signs occupies 68.12% of language signs and multilingual signs occupied 0.62%, which reveals that the multilingual character is not remarkable. Among the bilingual signs, commercial loges and advertisements , warning signs and guiding signs are the majority of it. And the multilingual signs are rarely appears in the commercial loges and advertisements.

4.2.2. The Language Collocation:

Spolsky&Cooper outline the three elements when the setters choose codes: 1) Signwriter's skill: write in the language you know; 2) Persumed reader: write in the language that the readers could understand; 3) Symbolic value: write in your own language or in a language with which you wish to be identified. [6] The choice of code could reflect the setters' racial group. [7] Landry&Bourhis indicates that the choice of code ties to ethnolinguistic vitality. Analyzing visibility and salience of linguistic landscapes can infer the status of local ethnic language. [3]

Table 3. The code preference of bilingual signs

	Guiding	Warning	Commercial loge and advertisement	Introduction	Service facility	Culture slogan	Total
Chinese-only	3	0	67	0	0	0	70
English-only	0	3	126	0	1	1	131
Chinese+English	52	122	213	14	25	7	433
Chinese+English+Others	0	0	4	0	0	0	4
Sum				638			

Table 3 indicates that the language signs which include Chinese codes still occupies 78.84% which reveals the strong vitality of local language. The monolingual signs gathered in the group of commercial loge and advertisement. Vertical comparisons shows that most of guiding and warning signs are bilingual signs. According to the official document, Guidelines For the Use of English In Public Service Areas, this is the response to the call of policy which demands public service information be written in Chinese and English. Comparing with the other kinds of signs, commercial loges and advertisements have more kinds of language collocations. It corresponds Backhaus' finding that the bottom-up signs (set by individuals and enterprises) have more kinds than top-down signs (set by government).[8]

4.2.3. The Code preference:

Shang Guowen mentioned the theory of preference which divided the arrangement types into 3 kinds: 1) In the surrounded arrangement types, the preponderant code is centrally located; 2) In the transversal arrangement types, the preponderant code is on the top; 3) In the vertical arrangement types, the preponderant code is on the left. [7]

Table 4. The preferred arrangement types of codes

Arrangement types	Preferred condition	Code preference	Amount	Percentage	
Surrounded	Central code	Chinese	1	0.23%	0.68%
		English	1	0.23%	
		Korean	1	0.23%	
Transversal	Above code	Chinese	339	77.05%	80.45%
		English	15	3.41%	
Vertical	Left code	Chinese	18	4.09%	18.86%
		English	64	14.55%	
		Japanese	1	0.23%	
Sum		440		100%	100%

According to the Table 4, Chinese preferred signs occupied 81.36% of all the signs and English occupied 18.18%. Chinese is still the preponderant code in the language signs in this area.

4.3. Norms: The Rule of Communication

Most of the language signs, such as guiding signs, warning signs and service facility signs, must correspond to the demand of local language policies. On the basis of Guidelines for the use of English in public service areas, the errors in the samples could be divided into three groups: spelling errors, format errors and grammatical errors. Table 5 could show the details of them.

Table 5. Errors in the samples

	Amount	Percentage	Examples
Spelling	5	0.78%	Please Hold the Handrall "请握住扶手带"
Format	8	1.24%	Strictly prohibit Run in "严禁跑入"
Grammatical	2	0.31%	Please correct using escalators, improper use of danger. "请正确使用自动扶梯，不当使用有危险发生"
Sum	15	2.33%	-

There is 2.33% of languages contain errors - most of which are format errors. It could explain that the norms of language sign are still the emphasis of making language signs.

4.4. Participants: The Feedback

After collecting questionnaires which were sent to 60 college students, this study gathered these students' attitude to the linguistic landscapes and their suggestion for improving language signs.

The question "which language collocation do you mainly pay attention to" shows that 60% of students would focus on the bilingual signs which consist of Chinese and English. In addition, 51.67% of them would pay attention to Chinese only signs and 26.67% pay attention to English only signs. (Figure 1)
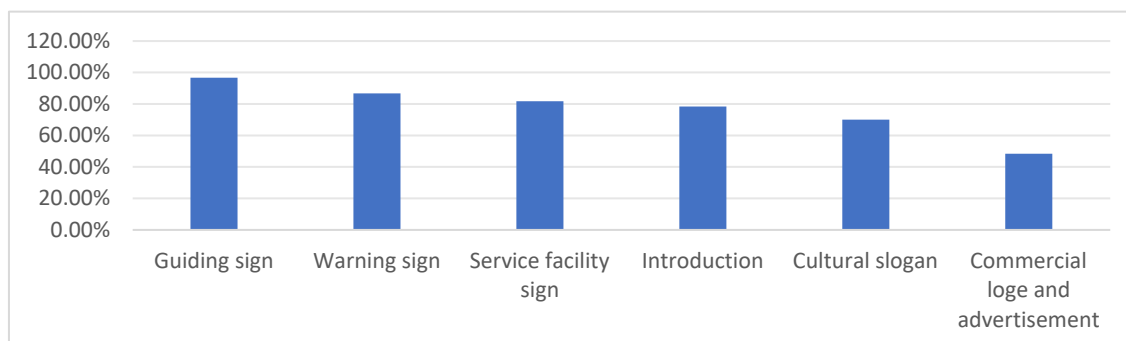

Figure 1. Which language collocation do you mainly pay attention to?

While being asked "which kind of bilingual language signs do you mainly pay attention to", 73.33% of them chose guiding signs, 56.67% chose commercial loges and advertisements and 51.63% chose service facility signs. (Figure 2)
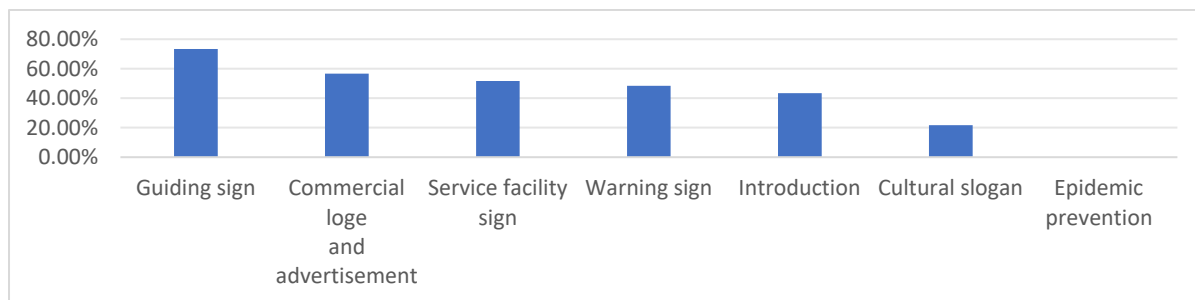
Figure 2. Which kind of bilingual language signs do you mainly pay attention to?

Then in the next step, the students were asked "which kind of language signs should include both Chinese and English". From the data, it is clear that most of students indicated that guiding signs, warning signs, service facility signs, introductions and culture slogans should be bilingual signs. (Figure 3)
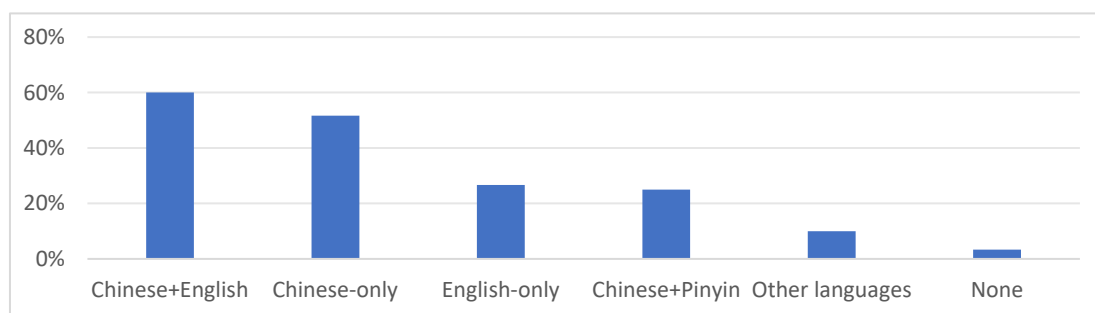
Figure 3. Which kind of language signs should include both Chinese and English?

What's more, 48.33% students partially agreed that comparing with Chinese monolingual signs, the Chinese-English bilingual signs could promote information better, while 41.67% of students total agree with this opinion. While being asked about "what's the effect of English codes in Chinese-English bilingual signs", 88.33% of students consider them as signs to make the city more international. Moreover, a large amount of students indicated that these signs could promote information, optimize the appearance of the city and help citizens learn English. (Figure 4)
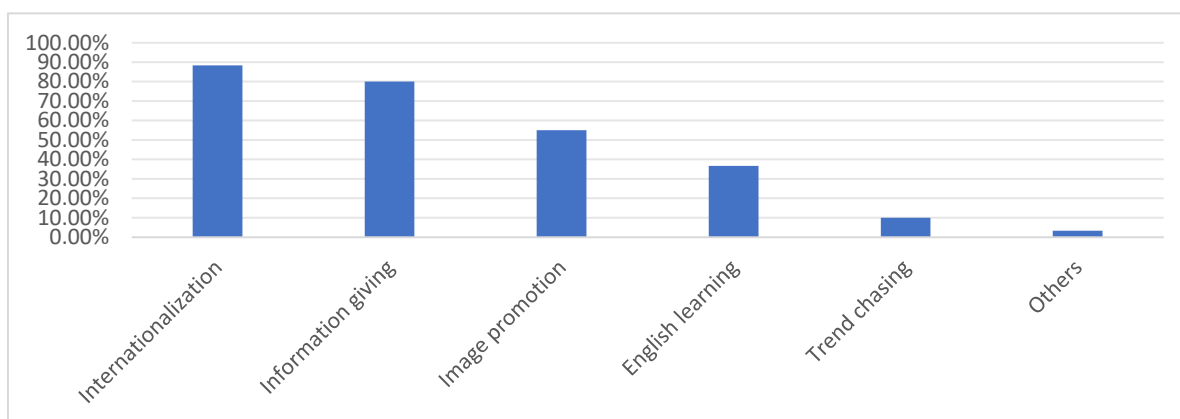
Figure 4. What's the effect of English codes in Chinese-English bilingual signs?

Finally, what's college students' suggest for improving local linguistic landscapes? Table 10 shows the main deficiencies existing in the language signs which is the inaccuracy and lack of

texts, the lack of bilingual signs and the poor standardization. According to the result, 90% of students thought that it is necessary to set bilingual signs and 5% of students mentioned that the poor standardization mainly because of the weakness of language policies, the grammatical errors and the lack of emotional descriptions. As a result, students' suggestion was mainly mentioned in the field of improving the standardization of signs, providing more information, making the language signs fit to the block's image and using multilingual signs.
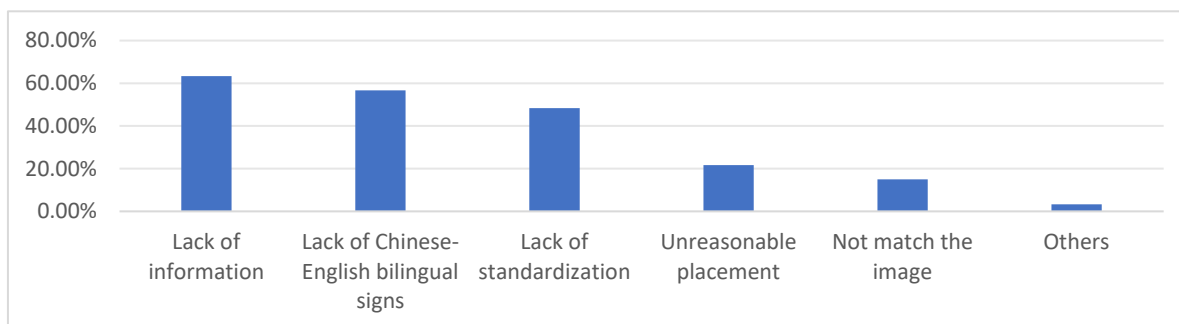
Figure 5. What do you think are the shortcomings of the current language signs?

5. Conclusion

Linguistic landscape could reflect many characters of language usage in an area. Firstly, guiding signs, warning signs, commercial loges and advertisements is the majority of local language signs. Secondly, as Chinese only and Chinese-English signs occupied a large proportion of language signs, the high visibility and salience of Chinese could be seen clearly, which shows the ethnolinguistic vitality of Chinese. Thirdly, the increase of usage of English language signs revealed the rapid spread of English around the world. According students' attitudes to English signs, the symbolic function of English has been realized which means English could not only create a more international image of city, but also infer a brand's spirit of modern, successful and fashion which has a large probability of leading to linguistic imperialism. Balancing the proportion of Chinese and English codes should be considered rationally. Finally, this study could still find the errors in current language signs.

There are four suggestions to optimize language landscapes. First, the government should strengthen audits and fill up the loopholes in the language policy. Second, the information in the signs should be more diversity. Third, the linguistic landscapes should correspond to the districts. For example, the guiding signs in the restaurant could have the similar style with the restaurant's theme. Four, bilingual guiding signs, warning signs, introductions and service facility signs should be set frequently in order to be understood better by foreigners. English-only signs should be reduced to avoid linguistic imperialism.

In summary, there is a long way for Xi'an to work on the perfection of linguistic landscape construction and creating a image of international metropolis.

References

[1] Xue, Z. (2021). A Study on the Linguistic Landscape of Fuzhou City from the Perspective of Cross-Cultural Adapt of International Students: Taking Dongjiekou and Cangshan Wanda for Example. Thesis of Fujian Normal University, 112.

[2] Rosenbaum, Y., Nadel, E., Cooper, R.L.& J. Fishman. (1997). English on Keren Kayemet Street. In: J. A. Fishman, R. L. Cooper & A.W. Conrad. (Eds.), The Spread of English. Rowley, MA: Newbury House. 179 – 196.

[3] Landry, R., Bourhis, R.Y. (1997). Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality: An Empirical Study. Lang. Soc. Psychol., 16: 23 - 49.

[4] Hymes, D. (1072). Models of the interaction of language and social life. In: J. Gumperz & D. Hymes (Eds.). Directions in Sociolinguistics: The Ethnography of Communication. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 35 - 71.

[5] Huebner, T. (2009). A framework for the linguistic analysis of linguistic landscapes. In: E. Shohamy & D. Gorte. (Eds.) Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery. London: Routledge, 270 - 283.

[6] Spolsky, B., Cooper, R.L. (1991). The Languages of Jerusalem. Clarendon, Oxford.

[7] Shang, G., Zhao, S. (2014). Perspective, Theory and Method of Language Landscape Research. Foreign Language Teaching and Research, 46(02):214-223+320.

[8] Backhaus, P. (2007). Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo. Clevedon: Multilingual Matters, 59.