A Study of Linguistic Landscape of Hankou River Beach from Cultural Perspective

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Abstract: The Linguistic landscape, referring to language application in public spaces, generally serves to represent an image of urban language and create renowned scenic sites. As the deepening of globalization, more and more linguistic learners and researchers become interested in the study of linguistic landscape. Under the guidance of sociolinguistics theory——place semiotics, this paper aims to investigate the public signs of Hankou River Beach from three subsystems——code preference, inscription and emplacement respectively. Meanwhile, symbolic function and informational function will be analyzed in depth with cultural connotations. By field photographing, collected samples will be categorized into different groups and further analyzed from cultural perspective. In order to promote linguistic landscape and cross-cultural communication, this paper tends to put forward three feasible proposals in the end: combination of domestic culture and foreign culture for globalization; standardization and diversity of linguistic landscape; entailment of regional features of Wuhan city culture.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscape, Cultural Perspective, Place Semiotics, Hankou River Beach

1. Introduction

During the past few years, China's prosperity and growing global influence arouse the worldwide attention. For the rising number of overseas tourists, the linguistic landscape of these scenic spots, such as street names, signboards and other public signs in public spaces, plays a significant role, providing not only a guide for direction, but also a means of cultural transmission. Due to the reform and opening up, the linguistic landscape of Wuhan has undergone great changes. These changes not only reflect the social and economic development of Wuhan, but also reflect the interaction between linguistic landscape and the social, economic, cultural, historical and other factors.

This paper aims to analyze and study the linguistic landscape in this area under the guidance of place semiotics and two main functions of linguistics landscape, even put forward feasible proposals for boosting cultural exchanges in the end.

2. Theoretical Framework of Linguistic Landscape

2.1. The Definition of Linguistic Landscape

As the concept of linguistic landscape was first put forward by Landry & Bourhis in *Linguistic Landscape and Ethnolinguistic Vitality* in 1997[7], linguistic landscape is a field of study in sociolinguistics currently. It refers to "the application of written form of language visible in the public domain"[4]. In 2009, Ben-rafael redefined it as "symbolic construction of public space"[2]. From the perspective of social semiotics, linguistic landscape is defined as "the interaction between language, visual activity, spatial practice and cultural latitude, especially the construction of spatial discourse by using symbolic resources in the medium of text" by Jaworski & Thurlow[5]. Gorter (2006) regards linguistic landscape research as a new way to study multilingualism due to its novel and unique perspective and approach[3]. Spolsky （2009）believes that linguistic landscape research is a good way to investigate the linguistic ecology of a city society [1].

2.2. Place Semiotics

Scollon & Scollon (2003) published *Discourse in space*[8] and coined the term geosemiotics to describe how words express meaning in a specific context. In this book, geosemiotics is defined as " the study of social meaning of the material placement of signs in the world." Place semiotics is a subsystem of geosemiotics, which is a methodology for investigating linguistic sign systems in natural settings. Under it, code preference, inscription and emplacement are the major subsystems.

2.3. Symbolic and Informational Function

Landry and Bourhis (1997: 23-49) described the linguistic landscape in terms of two functions: informational function and symbolic function[7]. As the most basic function, informational function is the ability for the linguistic landscape to provide information about the geographic boundaries and composition of a language group, as well as the characteristics of the language used in that community. Symbolic functions means that linguistic landscape signs are symbolic because they can reflect language power, social identity and status. In other words, they reflect the value and status of language as perceived by its members.

3. Analyses of Linguistic Landscape of the Hankou River Beach from Cultural Perspective

3.1. In Terms of Place Semiotics

The linguistic corpus collected by the author in this research are from Hankou River Beach Park, and the linguistic landscape signs here are classified and its characteristics are summarized through field photo sampling. Altogether, the author has collected a total of 85 photo landscape samples covering the whole target area. According to the material and the function of the signs, those samples are mainly divided into the following categories. The language application on each type is shown in Table 1 and the proportion of language combinations is presented in Table 2.

Table 1: Categories of Hankou River Beach signs

Category	Chinese	English and Chinese	French or English	Chinese, English, French and Korean	Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean	Total
Engraved landscape stone	18	1	0	0	0	19
Shop names or office names	10	11	3	0	0	24
Public road signs	0	4	0	3	10	17
Introduction of landscape	6	19	0	0	0	25

Table 2: Proportion of language combinations of Hankou River Beach signs

Chinese	Chinese and English	French or English	Chinese, English, French and Korean	Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean	Total
40%	41.18%	3.53%	3.53%	11.76%	100%

From Table 1 and Table 2, there are Chinese, English, French, Japanese, and Korean five languages used in Hankou River Beach. And the main combination forms are monolingual Chinese, monolingual English, monolingual French, Chinese-English bilingual, Chinese-English-French-Korean qua-lingual, and Chinese-English-Japanese-Korean qua-lingual, among which the dominant one is Chinese-English bilingual, the second is monolingual Chinese, and the third is Chinese-English-Japanese-Korean qua-lingual.

According to the designer of signs, signs can be classifies into official ones and private ones. The following is the comparison between official signs and private signs in terms of language usage.

Table 3: The comparison of official and private signs

Category	Chinese	English and Chinese	French or English	Chinese, English, French and Korean	Chinese, English, Japanese and Korean	Total
Official signs	25/38.46%	27/41.54%	0/0%	3/4.62%	10/15.38%	65/100%
Private signs	8/40%	10/50%	2/10%	0/0%	0/0%	20/100%

As can be seen in Table 3, for both official signs and private signs, the dominant one is Chinese-English bilingual, which accounts respectively for 41.54% and 50%. What's more, similar to Lu Jikang and Yu Jinyan's research (2020：52-54)[9]. We also find that pure English or pure French only appear in private signs, while Chinese-English-Japanese-Korean qua-lingual only exist in official signs. In general, there is a huge difference existing in the language types applied in official signs and private signs, which manifest the different language purpose and awareness of the designers as well as the local level of international openness.

3.1.1. Code Preference

Code preference refers to the priority relationships between languages, usually reflected on bilingual signs or multilingual signs (Scollon & Scollon 2003: 19-23)[8].

As is shown in the Figure 1, Chinese is put at the top and even center of the text area of those signs, which is the most prominent positioning. From the left to the right, English is then the second priority code, followed by Japanese and Korean, which respectively reflect their social status in this language community.

Figure 1: Qua-lingual road sign

Therefore, it can be concluded that the language signs in Hankou River Beach are dominated by monolingual signs and bilingual signs such as Chinese monolingual and English-Chinese bilingual. English comes as the most widely popularized foreign language, followed by Korean and Japanese, while French signs are relatively so few that can even be ignored.

3.1.2. Inscription

Scollon & Scollon (2003: 19-23) held the viewpoint that inscription is the meaning system that is based on the physical materiality of language, which consists of fonts (letterform), materials, layering and state change[8]. Here, the thesis chooses one important element of them -- fonts to further the analysis of the collected photo samples, which mainly focuses on Chinese fonts. The result of this analysis can be seen in Table 4.

Table 4: The font usage of linguistic landscape

Font	Official signs	Private signs	Total	Proportion
Simplified Chinese	55	13	68	80%
Traditional Chinese character	10	5	15	17.65%
Others	0	2	2	2.35%

As can be seen in Table 4, simplified Chinese is the most commonest font used in those signs, which takes up about 80%, and the rest of the signs which have traditional Chinese character accounts for about 17.65%. What's more, compared with private signs, official signs are applied with more traditional Chinese character, manifesting the importance that government attached to the cultural aspect. Although most of the signs are written with simplified Chinese font, the application of traditional Chinese character can somehow show a sense of cultural heritage of Hankou River Beach, adding local characteristics into the linguistic landscape.

3.1.3. Emplacement

As for emplacement, it includes three forms, namely, decontextualized semiotics, transgressive

semiotics and situated semiotics [8]. Among the photo samples collected by the author, most of the signs belong to the type of situated semiotics, such as public road signs which are placed in a correct position to guide passers-by. Only one sample is found in consistence with decontextualized semiotics, that is KFC, one of the world's famous fast food chain store, whose brand name is unaffected in any context. Transgressive semiotics refers to, at most of the time, some signs like graffiti. In Hankou River Beach, such signs are barely to be seen, however, it is still an issue worthy of management attention.

3.2. In Terms of Linguistic Landscape Function

3.2.1. Symbolic Function

As for engraved stones, this kind of sign usually provides limited information with the names of some places from those landscape stones. However, another point worth mentioning is that about 95% of the language used in the stones is Chinese written in traditional native script with only one exception which is written in Chinese-English bilingual. To some extent, those stones fulfill the symbolic function, reflecting the status and power of Chinese. Furthermore, they enable visitors to experience a strong sense of Chinese cultural heritage of Wuhan. Based on this, it can be seen that linguistic landscape plays a key role in imparting local culture.

The similar aspect about shop signs and public signs we discovered is that, some of the English letters are merely used to decorate their shops or improve business image, thus attracting customer's eyeball. Through the analysis, it can be said that English enjoys a high prestige that can be seen from the above Table 1 and Table 2. Besides, Japanese and Korean are used in those signs too, showing the increasing popularity of these two languages around the world and their status in Chinese people's eye.

3.2.2. Informational Function

Differently, public road signs and introduction signs of landscape can be the typical examples of informational landscape signs. By the road signs, we can see that not only Chinese and English are applied here, other languages such as Japanese, Korean and French are also used, which shows that this area has a multilingual society with Chinese and English as its dominant languages. Further illustrations of this function come from those landscape introduction signs that provide various information and general knowledge to the visitor.

4. Proposals for Further Cultural Communication

4.1. Combination of Domestic and Foreign Cultures for Globalization

Situated in Asia's cultural center, China is also the epitome of global culture. Consequently, it is crucial to successfully blend both domestic and foreign cultures. In order to achieve this, we can further investigate the cultural backgrounds of the foreign visitors to China so as to identify the similarities and differences of foreign culture with Chinese culture. Furthermore, to fully satisfy the needs of visitors, relevant department needs to take into account and combine the landscape, ecology, sports, education, business, and leisure, enabling Hankou River Beach to become an internationalized park.

4.2. Promotion of the Standardization and diversity of Linguistic Landscape

It is discovered from the collected photo samples that there are still problems with non-standard foreign language usage such as Chinese Pinyin. To fully realize the potential of linguistic landscape, language accuracy should be assured. Additionally, more languages can be thought of as applicable to contribute the diversity of linguistic landscape. Foreign tourists are becoming regular to see as globalization progresses. To provide them a greater feeling of experience, we can employ the appropriate national language on public signs based on pertinent visitor statistics. Lastly, many foreigners are interested in learning Mandarin as a second language as a result of China's rising international status. It is crucial to have a unified standard for the use of Chinese on public signs in order to establish a credible worldwide image as well.

4.3. Entailment of the Regional Features of Wuhan City Culture

Located in the middle of China, Wuhan serves as a thoroughfare for nine provinces, fusing the north and south's cultural traditions. The dock culture has always been unique to Wuhan due to its location to

the Yangtze River. Thus, for the sake of highlighting local features, linguistic landscape should reflect the distinctive cultures, such as Chu culture, Wuhan dock, and Yellow Crane Tower, ect. As a representative hot scenic spot of Wuhan city, the linguistic landscape of Hankou River Beach should permeate the Wuhan regional features into language employment.

5. Conclusion

To sum up, from this study, a fresh point is drew that linguistic landscape plays an important role in strengthening cultural communication. To deepen the research in linguistic landscape, synchronic and diachronic study methods are preferred to be conducted. Different local linguistic landscapes should be analyzed with social, historical and cultural factors, even the true requirements of both natives and foreigners concerned should be considered.

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