Linguistic Landscape and Symbolic construction of Multilingual Literacies: Between Creativity and Communication

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	Understanding communication within expanding public spaces creates the need for the interpretation of changing connections of written texts and linguistic knowledge prominent in an environment. Studies on public space language are referred to as linguistic landscape studies (LL). This study demonstrates a link between language, culture and social practices within an environment and shows how visual designs, pictures and signs transcend information for effective communication. Multilingual literacies on the other hand help in the description of the many forms of language interaction and analysis of the different domains of language use. This study thus, aims at exploring the presence of visible texts of written languages on public spaces such as billboards, road and navigation signs, shop signage's campaign posters, graffiti and general adverts within the selected environment. This research centers on the theoretical notions of Landry and Bourhis (1997) on: "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" and Gorter (2006) who sees LL as opening a "new approach to multilingualism". The data is collected through fieldwork, interview, participant observation and snapshots. This study argues that since linguistic landscape studies have expanded the roles and functions of creative designs, pictures and languages in different settings, language should not be the sole strategy for analyzing expressions or ideas rather linguistic landscape should also be adopted because it interprets processes, expressions and social realities in multilingual environments. This study recommends systematic description of linguistic artifacts of given environments as a means of enhancing multilingual literacy.

Introduction

The processes of Communication, creativity and literacy have been diversified in many ways in recent times. Literacy which has been traditionally associated with reading and writing has changed beyond these associative levels. The present-day nature of literacy has become multidimensional. Thus, it has given rise to many new concepts thereby shelving itself from the known traditional identity. Creativity in this study encompasses a wide-range multi-dimensional and significant aspect of communication. The essence of communication in public spaces concerns the creation of awareness which may require attitude modification. This often induces positive change in the lives of people, especially in a country such as Nigeria which is marked by both individual and societal multilingualism. (see Njemanze, 2010 / 2014).

Multilingualism has the ability to transcend all barriers and bring about a unifying force even in the 'face' of diversity. There is an emphasis on equity and single common citizenship in multilingual Communication which creates interrelationship between culture, language, plural identity attachments and community relationship. This has enhanced multilingual literacy in Nigerian environments. (see Njemanze, 2014).

Creativity in linguistics or linguistic creativity involves not only the description of visible signs and symbols but also the systematic description of linguistic profiles of public spaces. Languages and signs indicate direction to a place, or call attention to something, just as advertisement signs do. They also appear in commercial contexts such as marketing and advertising, where they draw attention to a business or product (Backhaus, 2007, p.5). Reh (2004, p.38) emphasize that the study of linguistic landscape (hereafter LL) or public space language enables conclusions to be drawn regarding, among other factors, the social layering of the community, the relative status of the various societal segments, and the dominant cultural ideals. Public space languages and signs in urban spaces, thus, present information, directions, warnings, etc. within given environments.

The Theory
Although linguistic landscape has been analyzed differently, it also interprets the rapid expansion in pictorial communication and highlights the extent linguistic landscape reflects the language, culture and social practices within the city. This research centers on, the theoretical notions of Landry and Bourhis (1997) on: "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" and Gorter (2006) who sees LL as opening a "new approach to multilingualism". (Shohamy 2006, Ben-Rafael et al. 2006, p.8), opine that the LL constitute scenes such as streets, corners, circuses, parks, buildings and other places where society's public life takes place.

According to Hult (2009) the key issue in LL lies on the analysis that visual designs and languages used in the public spaces represent observable manifestations of circulating ideas about creativity and communication. Also, scholars such as Huebner (2006), Cenoz (2006), Leeman and Modan (2010) Ben Rafael et al (2006) see it as, 'environmental print', 'decorum of public life', 'words on the wall/, street' and more. These descriptions have helped authors of Linguistic Landscape generally to bring out the power relations in linguistic creativity and status of the different languages in the description of the visual designs and communication strategies in the city under study. This study includes but not limited to written signs outside the homes, streets, shops, school signs and posters, within the capital city of Imo state, Nigeria.

Objective of the study
Based on the emergence of multicultural literacies in public space language, this research identified the objectives of this study to include:

1. Evaluating how linguistic creativity aids effective communication within selected public spaces in Nigeria
2. Exploring critically the roles of visual designs and symbols within the public space.
3. Interpreting the many forms of language interaction in professional and non-professional settings.
4. Comparing the visibility of English and other languages on the texts of the public spaces under study.

Rationale of the study
Linguistic landscape studies can be used as an adequate tool for explorative fieldwork, because it is practical oriented, it deals with visible pictures and language which will be interpreted by the researcher. It will also serve as a process of unraveling the different value orientations, beliefs, and attitude of language users towards communication and language practices. This study will thus be a useful material for researchers and linguists in Nigeria and beyond.

Linguistic Picture of Nigeria
Nigeria has been classified as the largest country in West Africa (Central Intelligence Agency, 2008). It is situated in the Western part of Africa. It has three major ethnic groups namely Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba. There are also the minority ethnic groups which include Delta state, River state and Cross River state. This population made the number of indigenous languages spoken in Nigeria to be estimated between 420 and 500,Bamgbose (1992), Heine

and Nurse (2000), with the number of ethnic groups ranging from 250 to 300. The multilingual setting in Nigeria is such that most of the languages have different identifiable dialects. For instance, Yoruba, a language spoken mostly in the Southwestern part of Nigeria, has the following named varieties as some of its dialects: Ijesa dialect, Ijebu dialect, Oyo dialect, Egba dialect, Osun dialect, and Ekiti dialect. Also, Igbo which is another Nigerian language has its own dialects like, Owerri dialect, Onitsha dialect, Nsukka dialect, Afikpo dialect and many other dialects. Nigeria has a high multilingual and multi-ethnic setting with diverse cultures. Among these ancestral languages, the only three recognized as indigenous national or major languages are Hausa, Igbo and Yoruba (Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria 1979).

The multilingual setting that characterizes Nigeria at the Federal level where four languages are recognized (i.e. English, Hausa, Igbo, Yoruba) also applies in many states and local government areas (LGA's) of the country. For instance, apart from English, other languages recognized in Adamawa State in Nigeria are Hausa and Fulfulde. Kari (2002) noted that in some LGAs in Nigeria, there are as many as four different languages being recognized. In Nigeria, the majority of speakers of minor languages endeavor to learn one of the major languages (sometimes in addition to English), especially the one that is dominant where they reside. Many of those who have one of the three major languages as their native language also acquire English, Nigerian Pidgin or another language of the country. The vast majority of Nigerians are bilinguals (Akindele and Adegbite, 2005). Given the linguistic frame in Nigeria, most people grew up speaking more than one indigenous language. This has further diversified the styles of communication in Nigeria, hence, the expansion of multilingual literacy.

Communication, Language and Creativity in multilingual Nation

Communication speeds up growth and advancement among the people in a Community. Hence, the desired change can only take place through the provision of adequate information so that the people are persuaded, through sound reasoning to change towards certain direction. To achieve this process of social influence which may induce attitude change, there is need for compliance, identification and internalization.

Compliance to an attitude change will be observed so long as the initiator is present at the environment.
- Identification in attitude change is sustained all through the time of cordial relationship between the initiator and the practitioner. Internalization of an opinion change depends on the community. Thus, the language of communication is inseparable from the culture of the people within any environment. It therefore, requires that attention be given to the significance of creativity in public space language.
- Language can also be used to open a channel of communication and establish contact with others. An example is 'Hello' over telephone ; or do you follow me? This is often referred to as physic role or contact function of language.
- Language can be used to direct the activities of other people or influence their behavior. In that case the language is performing a directive role.
- Language serves a performative role when an utterance leads to sudden changes in the real world ; for instance, the condemnation of a criminal in a law court.
Language has been known to perform many different communicative functions. Language can perform the following roles thus making it possible for man to lead satisfying life.
- Informational role: when information is freely given and promoted in any society or corporate system, understanding is made easy and natural coexistence becomes possible. In all, these stands out is that language performs communicative roles in societies.

It is also believed that speakers do not change the language system, even though the system may change by itself over time. This is an indication that language is not within the reach of the individual who can never create nor modify it by himself". This is another interpretation of linguistic creativity.

The multi-dimensional scope of linguistic creativity creates a clear distinction between some aspects of language that is not always explicitly made. The first is language as a product, i.e. a social fact and cultural object as it is described in dictionaries and grammars, and as it is represented in the existing texts and literature of a particular language and language as a process or as an activity, both as external interpersonal acts of communication between human beings, i.e. a communicative process, and as one of the elements on the basis of which internal thought, or ideation, is possible, and which reflects cognitive processes, i.e. what is called the ideational functioning of language. This is an indication that linguistic creativity is indeed active and attested in all human linguistic activity.

Linguistic creativity is an essential trait of human beings, such that it expresses ideas that are unavailable in the standardized repertory of meanings and it is always within an individual language domain. The needs of the present age demand that her citizens are culturally sensitive and focused in order to have a better orientation towards the future. Multilingual literacy, thus, emphasizes that every individual's language, irrespective of the race, ethnic groups/class, gender and more, should be treated with equal value. This mentality encourages the expression of the diverse cultures by the various groups in the society.

The author informs that language enables man to conceptualize, depict and even portray the complexities and nature of his environment and also serves as a major instrument for its exploration. The issue of public space language in a multilingual literacy is therefore discussed below.

Linguistic Landscape and Multilingual Literacy in Nigeria

Literacy has been described as a moving target, continually changing its meaning depending on what society expects literate individuals to do (Leu & Kinzer2000). Its meaning has moved from being able to read and write to include authoring texts, responding to and critiquing text, and making sense of complex designs that include a myriad of more sophisticated images, icon and hyperlinks.

The aim of literacy learning has also moved from helping learners understand their own environment and participate in it to include helping learners understand the entire world-how it is connected, the implications of the connections and their roles and responsibilities in it. Literacy learning, therefore, continues across the life span and proficiency levels along a continuum denote how well adults use information to function in society and the economy (UNESCO 2008). Differences in levels of literacy matter both economically and socially. Literacy affects the quality of communication.

In a multilingual nation such as Nigeria where the other languages have not been able to thrive towards national and international statutes, the English language becomes more relevant in communicating these feelings and activities. It is the English language that the individuals use to solve most of their communication problems. He must read textbooks, signs, notices and receive instructions through this language.

Literacy also enlightens and empowers the mind. It thus, has the capacity to eradicate poverty and promote learning. (see Njemanze 2014). Literacy can also help people:

- Improve communication skills and have greater access to knowledge
- Understand the diversity and complexity of the world
- Build the self-confidence and self-esteem needed to make decisions in information saturated world
- Carryon daily transaction, learning, leisure and contact across time and distance
- Use new technologies and to evolving skills and understandings that are necessary for life in the 21st century
- Learn new languages and take on new responsibilities
- Make plans and document

Hence, the use of visual materials in public spaces, allows the individual to think, determine his expectations and action in an environment. This impression brings to the fore the analysis of the pictures presented below.


PIX 1: This is an advert for a supermarket. It presents most of the things you will buy from the place using pictures. The person looking for where to go shopping does not need to go far based on the items on the pictures.

PIX 2: Shows a bridal shop. This advert is unique because while it has wedding pictures, some of the letters are written in the native language. Even if someone does not understand some of the writings, based on ethnic differences, the pictures still convey the messages.

PIX 3: Shows an advert for a non profit organization managed medical facility.
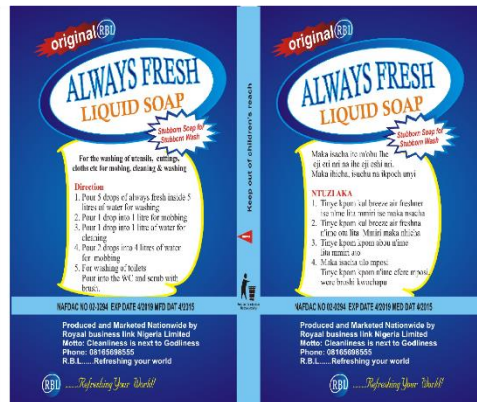
Pictures above have cultural content on them thereby representing Hult's (2009) expression that the **key issue** in LL lies on the analysis that visual designs and languages used in the public spaces represent observable manifestations of circulating ideas about creativity and communication.

Generally, all advert in these pictures above are used in the university environment

The pictures in this section have similar explanation of Hult (2009) LL uses visual designs and languages in public spaces to represent observable manifestations of ideas and communication. The picture with the judiciary logo tells someone that he/she is within a court premises which demands calmness. They are considered professional and specialized adverts because they show and maintain professional instructions.

These adverts represent religious settings and anyone visiting is expected to go by the rules of worship centers.
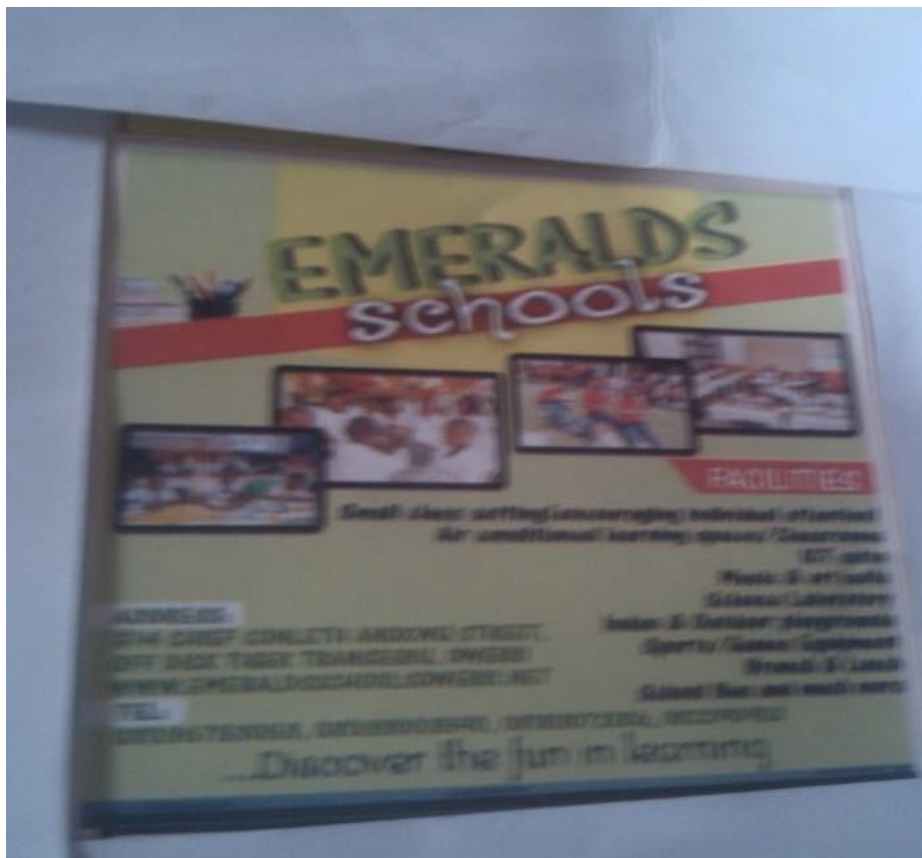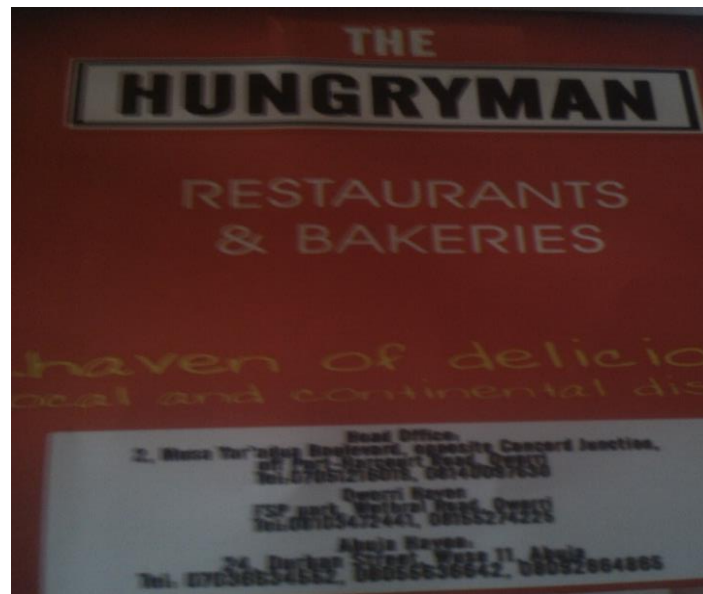
Above are signs for schools and learning centers.

These pictures showcase Landry and Bourhis (1997) interpretation of linguistic landscape as dependent on: "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region". The school's banners are created for awareness and information meant for the public.

Linguistic landscape in these pictorial communication highlights the extent linguistic landscape reflects the language, culture and social practices within the city. These communications have ethnic components which expresses the theoretical notions on: "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs …in places such as streets, corners, circuses, parks, buildings and other places where public life take place.

Pictures as symbolic Constructions in Multilingual Literacies: the Evidences

These pictures are used in this research to depict symbolic constructions for multilingual communication and literacies within the environment. This is an attempt to simplify interaction between the educated and those without formal education: 'those who have minimal education and can read few letters. However, most English advertising texts used in Nigeria are written using the models used in monolingual communities. The Nigerian situation is such that English language is the only link between the various ethnic groups and the texts that are in

use are not designed to meet the linguistic needs of all language groups in Nigeria but written for all Nigerians even at all school levels. Multilingual communication cannot be limited rather, it keeps expanding through pictorial interpretation. Hence, making communication better.

Creativity in multilingual literacies has thus, been an essential trait of human expressions and ideas that are unavailable in the standardized repository of meanings but are situated within the domains of an individual language. The needs of the present age demand that her citizens are culturally informed, sensitive and focused, with a better orientation towards the future. Multilingual communication, thus, emphasizes that every individual's language, irrespective of any affiliation should be treated with equal value. Hence the boost on linguistic landscape usage in multilingual literacies.

Discussion
According to Hult (2009:90), the data collection in a linguistic landscape study is based on taking photographs. The research adopted an impressionistic stance to determine which photograph to snap and creative designs to use for analysis. Only salient data in visible sites were collected. The researcher took prominent photographs, observed and interviewed residents to elicit information about pictures in the city with the help of residents and leader(s) of secured places within the environment. Since linguistic landscape analysis relies on photography and visual analysis, the data collected is analyzed using the qualitative method of data analysis. A total of 25 pictures of public spaces were collected and examined. The researcher's personal observations informed the categorization of the pictures; thus, the pictures were classified as follows:

- Picture 1 – General adverts on public spaces (6 pictures)
- Picture 2-- Institutional adverts and Instructions (5 pictures)
- Picture 3-- Professional and Specialized adverts (2 pictures)
- Picture 4 – Religious adverts   (3 pictures)
- Picture 5 – School adverts and Notices   (4 pictures)
- Picture 6 – Hotel and Eateries adverts   (5 pictures)

The researcher also interviewed 12 shop/business owners, two from each category of the categorization in the designated areas in Owerri. In all, the participants were Imo State indigenes and some individuals from other states in Nigeria who reside in the state.

The Analysis
The findings of this research can be summarized as follows;
- Impact of linguistic creativity on effective communication
- Roles of creative languages, visual designs and symbols in public spaces
- Interpretation of forms of language interaction in specified spaces
- Presence of English and other languages on the texts of public spaces.

The impact of linguistic creativity on effective communication in public spaces was prominent on the twenty-five pictures captured in this study. Each was symbolic and communicates a message, while displaying robust creative tendencies of the business, the owner or the intention behind the display.

Analyzing the roles of creative languages, visual designs and symbols in public spaces, brings to the fore; informative roles on pictures of the court, the library and the church, where you are expected to maintain an attitude within that environment. (See pictures 3 and 4). Again, there is the inducement of visual intelligence and identity formation which help the person to choose where to enter at any time. (See pictures 1- 6). Examples from the adverts on picture 6:5 (Ibari Ogwa) create impacts on an individual's behavior, in such a manner that he/she considers his finances, the type of food to be served, the class of people to meet there, the time he will spend and more, before he goes to such an entertainment joint in Owerri.

An interpretation on the forms of language interaction in specified spaces is prominent on all the pictures collected in this study. However, the pictures in picture 2 was taken in an institution of higher learning and had such adverts as students club (kegites club), whose language is usually made up of coinages. This form of language can only be used in an academic setting. Also, the inscription in front of the library indicates "NOISELESSNESS" such picture can only be in a reading setting. Similarly, institutional adverts have no restricted area; hence they advertise even on trees, as seen on the photographs. The religious pictures on picture 4 show language interaction within holy environments too.

The presence of English and other languages on the texts of public spaces was seen on almost all the pictures taken. This is suggestive of the nation's multilingual status which does not discriminate on the use of other languages such as Nigerian Pidgin, indigenous languages, borrowed languages and even coinages in the nation's public environments to enhance communication.

Finally, in the course of this research some shop owners were interviewed, and they assert that the use of English language in signs was a strategy to attract customers since some residents do not understand Igbo language but English.

Conclusion

This study has shown that public space language is creative; it enhances communication and is dominated by adverts on English and other languages. This is similar to the situation in other African countries today. However, this does not mean that Nigerians, especially the Igbo's, speak English more than the local language, rather public space language in the city is moving towards global multilingualism; in English, Nigerian Pidgin, Indigenous languages, Borrowed languages and Coinages. Also, public signs in more professional sectors tend to use more English signs than the local ones such as the pictures displayed on picture 3. (Professional and specialized adverts).

As stated earlier, these descriptions have helped authors of Linguistic Landscape research, to bring out the power relations in linguistic creativity using the different languages in visual designs to enhance communication strategies. This study concludes and recommends that since linguistic landscape studies have expanded the roles and functions of creative designs, pictures and languages in different settings, systematic description of linguistic artifacts of given environments should also be adopted as a means of interpreting processes, expressions and social realities in multilingual environments. This will also enhance multilingual literacy.

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