

The Effect of Linguistic Landscape on Palestinians Language Attitudes towards Hebrew in the West Bank

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ABSTRACT

This paper reports on an investigation of Palestinians' language attitudes towards Hebrew in the West Bank and the effect that linguistic landscape has on these attitudes. Questionnaires were handed to 121 participants. They were divided into two groups: a control group consisting of 65 young Palestinians living in A Area where Hebrew is absent from the linguistic landscape, and an experimental group consisting of 56 young Palestinians living in Huwwara, a Palestinian village classified as B/C Area where Hebrew is present in the linguistic landscape. It was found that Palestinians living in A Area have negative attitudes towards Hebrew in general as they associate it with the Israeli occupation. On the other hand, residents of Huwwara reported neutral feelings towards Hebrew suggesting that they have developed a sense of tolerance towards it due to its presence on road and shop signs without necessarily knowing the language.

1. INTRODUCTION

Arabic and Modern Hebrew are two Semitic languages that have been in contact since the nineteenth century, when the Jewish immigration to the Ottoman Palestine took place. Since then, drastic changes have occurred involving the area's demography and political borders ending in the occupation of the West Bank and Gaza by the Israeli forces in 1967. As a result, Israeli settlements were built on the lands of occupied Palestinian territories. According Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics, the number of Israeli settlers in West Bank reached 636,452 by the end of 2016, including East Jerusalem (PCBS 2017)

In 1995, Oslo II accord was signed between PLO (Palestine Liberation Organization) and Israel. This agreement resulted in dividing the West Bank into three areas, namely A, B, and C. A Area is administered by the Palestinian Authority with full control over security and civil affairs, and it includes the major Palestinian cities with their surrounding areas. B Area is administered by both the Palestinian Authority, which has control over civil affairs, and Israel, which has control over security in the area. C Area is fully administered by Israel, which has control over both security and civil affairs, and it constitutes around 63% of the lands of the West Bank. Israelis are completely restricted from entering A Area, occasionally restricted from travelling

through B Area, and allowed to travel without restrictions in C Area (b'tselem 2004).

Arabic is the sole official language of Palestine, and English comes second in terms of status (Amara 2003); English is taught in schools as a foreign language for 12 years, and it is used in Higher Education Institutions as the medium of instruction in many majors. Hebrew, on the other hand, does not enjoy the same status; it is not taught in schools, and it does not have any official status in Palestine. However, many Palestinians learn Hebrew due to its economic privilege; around 117,600 Palestinians from the West Bank work in Israel according to International Labour Organization (ILO 2018).

In the West Bank, there is a clear presence of written Hebrew in some Palestinian towns and villages located on main streets in B/C Areas e.g. Huwwara town; all road signs are written in Hebrew, Arabic, and English. These towns often serve as bridges that connect Israelis to their settlements since they are located on main streets administered by Israel. In addition, some shop owners in these towns choose to put Hebrew and Arabic side by side on their shop signs without necessarily knowing Hebrew. In A Area, however, Hebrew can hardly be found on any road or shop sign since it is administered by the Palestinian Authority.

This paper aims at studying the effect of linguistic landscape (LL) on Palestinians' language attitudes towards Hebrew in the West Bank. It also aims at investigating Palestinians attitudes towards teaching and learning Hebrew. Hypothetically, people living in areas where Hebrew is present will show more positive attitudes towards Hebrew than people living in A Area where there is hardly any presence of Hebrew.

Language Attitudes towards Hebrew.

Language attitudes is a term used in sociolinguistics which refers to the "feelings people have about their own language or other languages" Crystal 2008 (p. 266). These attitudes could be positive or negative. There is little research on Palestinians' attitudes towards foreign languages. In the West Bank, it was found that young Palestinians have positive attitudes towards English as they think of it as an important language that offers more job opportunities (Khalil & Sanber 1987). Attitudes towards Hebrew, on the other hand, are found to be negative. In a study carried out in Bethlehem City-West Bank, Spolsky et al (1998) found that Palestinians have negative attitudes towards Hebrew despite their awareness of its economic privilege. However, this study is over 20 years old, and new attitudes towards Hebrew may have emerged.

The potential negative attitudes of Palestinians towards Hebrew may arise from the fact that Hebrew is associated with the "oppressor" who occupied their land. In Jordan, which is located to the east of the West Bank and, Al-Haq (1999) found that Jordanian undergraduates' lack of appreciation of Hebrew is associated with the negative images of Israeli practices in the occupied Palestinian territories. This suggests that Hebrew is strongly associated with the Israeli occupation according to Jordanians.

Linguistic Landscape in the West Bank

Linguistic landscape (LL) refers to "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" demonstrate Landry and Bourhis (1997:23). In other words, linguistic landscape refers to the written language on public road signs, names of streets, advertising billboards, and commercial shop signs. Shohamy and Gorter (2009) point out that these signs often have a functional purpose, that is, to inform people. At other

times, there are symbolic meanings behind signs like reflecting language policies and ideologies in a given area. According to Gorter (2008) and Pavlenko (2009), linguistic landscape can be analyzed based on a number of criteria including the number of languages on signs, the order of languages, and font size.

As mentioned before, the West Bank is geographically divided into three areas. Between these areas physical barriers, which are usually manifested in internal Israeli checkpoints, are installed. According to The Israeli Information Center for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories (b'teslem 2017), there were 98 fixed Israeli checkpoints by the end of 2017, 58 of them are internal checkpoints located within the borders of the West Bank. At these checkpoints, red signs written in Hebrew, Arabic, and English that warn Israelis from entering A Area are installed. In some parts of the West Bank, this sign alone functions as the barrier between A Area and other areas. Therefore, there is a noticeable change in the linguistic landscape between the areas located before this particular sign and areas located after it. Figure 1 shows a sign in the West-Bank that warns Israelis from entering A Area.

These physical barriers are not the only thing that indicates the entry of one area and the exit of another. Another salient indicator is the change in linguistic landscape. In A Area, public signs such as road signs and street names are written in two languages only: Arabic, the sole official language of Palestine, and English, the foreign language that comes first in terms of status. Regarding private signs, it is up to the shop owner to put the languages they want on their shop signs. Still, these private signs are mostly written in Arabic only or in both Arabic and English. Figure 2 shows a road sign in Ramallah City (A Area).

Some Palestinian villages and towns are classified as B/C Area in which Israelis are granted the freedom of movement. These towns are often located on main streets. The linguistic landscape in these areas is quite different from A Area; public road signs are written in three languages: Hebrew, Arabic, and English, and Hebrew is placed on the top despite the fact that these towns are fully inhabited by Palestinians. The order of languages on road signs in these areas is the same

as in Israel and East Jerusalem. By doing this, Israel applies its language policy in some areas in the West Bank which it has control over; "Placing Hebrew on top demonstrates the Israeli rule and dominance of Hebrew", demonstrates Gorter (2013: 5). However, people seem to have no problem with Hebrew being on public signs. In fact, some shop owners in these areas willingly add a Hebrew translation of their shop's name and services, especially car mechanics, car parts shops, and sanitary ware. The reason is that, as mentioned before, the streets in these areas function as bridges that connect the Israeli settlers to their settlements. Therefore, the residents have taken an economic advantage of the situation since prices and services in these areas are cheaper for Israelis. Figure 3 shows a road sign in Huwwara town (B/C) Area.

Huwwara is a Palestinian town in which Hebrew is known to be present on road and shop signs. It is located in the north of West Bank on the only main street that connects the cities in the north and the cities in the south. The main street is also used by Israeli settlers as it connects the Israeli settlements in the area. Therefore, Huwwara has a vital position, and it has become an economic center in the area for both Palestinians and Israelis, which resulted in adding Hebrew to commercial signs in the town. Thirty-eight percent of Huwwara's lands are defined as B Area whereas the remaining sixty-two percent are defined as C Area. According to Palestine Central Bureau of Statistics (PCBS), Huwwara's population reached 6,659 by the end of 2017. Figure 4 shows a shop sign in Huwwara town (B/C Area).

The questions that arise here are: how do Palestinians feel about Hebrew? And does living in an area where Hebrew writings are clearly visible changes the attitudes towards it despite not knowing the language itself? In short, does linguistic landscape affect language attitudes towards Hebrew?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1 Material

Questionnaires consisting of three parts were handed to participants. The first part asks participants to fill in their age, gender, place of residence, and the languages they speak. The reason behind asking about the languages they speak is to exclude participants who report knowing Hebrew from the study since knowing a language may affect the

attitudes towards it. The second part asks participants to identify a variety of languages, including Hebrew, to see if participants can identify the Hebrew writings even without knowing Hebrew. The third part consists of 18 Likert-scale items (1= strongly disagree, 5 = strongly agree). These items are divided into three parts: the first part aims at investigating if the participants are aware of Hebrew being around on road and shop signs. The second part aims at studying the participants' attitudes and empathy towards Hebrew. The third part aims at studying participants' attitudes towards learning and teaching Hebrew.

3.2 Participants

130 Palestinians from the West Bank participated in this study (65 females and 65 males). The participants were divided into two groups based on their place of residence which they reported in the first part of the questionnaire: a control group (group 1) who are residents of A Area where Hebrew is absent from the linguistic landscape (N = 65), and an experimental group (group 2) who are residents of Huwwara town where Hebrew is present in the linguistic landscape (N = 56). Nine participants were excluded from the study for the following reasons: three provided two answers to a single item, two left some items unanswered, two reported that they know Hebrew, and two left the second section of the questionnaire unanswered. Table 1 shows the number of participants and their mean age in both groups.

3.3 Procedure

Questionnaires were handed randomly to people in both areas. However, the researcher took age into consideration and decided to include young people, aged between 18 and 39. The researcher let the participants answer the questionnaires by themselves and did not attempt to explain any question. After a short period, the researcher collected the questionnaires. The data were analyzed using SPSS software, and an Independent t-test was carried out for each item in the third part of the questionnaire.

4. RESULTS

Before getting into data analysis, a reliability test Cronbach Alpha was conducted to measure the internal consistency of the 18-item questionnaire. It was found that there is an adequate reliability of the questionnaire ($\alpha = .76$).

3.1 Awareness of the Linguistic Landscape

This part aims at investigating if participants are aware of the presence of Hebrew on road and shop signs. Furthermore, it aims at investigating participants' ability to recognize Hebrew writings even without knowing the language itself. Table 2 shows Palestinians' awareness of the presence of Hebrew on road and shop signs.

It was found that both groups are aware of the languages displayed on road and shop signs where they live. In general, Palestinians living in A Area reported they do not notice Hebrew on road signs ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1.1$) and shop signs ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 0.8$) compared to Palestinians living in Huwwara who reported noticing Hebrew on road signs ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 0.9$) and shop signs ($M = 4$, $SD = 0.9$). The difference between the two groups was significant ($t(119) = -8.3$; $p < .001$ for the first item and $t(119) = -12$; $p < .001$ for the second item. In addition, it was found that both groups recognize Hebrew writings, and the difference between both groups was not significant.

3.2 Attitudes towards Hebrew

This part aims at investigating Palestinians' general attitudes and empathy towards Hebrew. In addition, it aims at investigating the effect of linguistic landscape on these attitudes. Table 3 shows Palestinians language attitudes and empathy towards Hebrew

It was found Palestinians in general have negative attitudes towards Hebrew. Still, the attitudes of the residents of Huwwara were more positive than the attitudes of those living in A Area. Both groups agree that Hebrew is associated with occupation but have neutral feelings about being associated with violence. No significant difference between the two groups was found. Moreover, both groups agree that Hebrew is neither a beautiful nor a culturally rich language. However, the difference between the two groups was significant. Palestinians living in Huwwara showed more positive attitudes towards Hebrew in terms of being beautiful ($M = 2.9$, $SD = 1$) than Palestinians living in A Area ($M = 2.3$, $SD = 1.2$), and the difference was significant ($t(119) = -3$, $p = .003$). In addition, Palestinians living in Huwwara showed more positive attitudes towards Hebrew in terms of being a culturally rich language ($M = 2.6$, $SD = 1$) than Palestinians living in A Area ($M = 2.2$, $SD = .9$),

and the difference was significant ($t(119) = -2.1$, $p = .03$).

Regarding Palestinians' attitudes towards putting Hebrew on road and shop signs the difference between both groups was significant. While Palestinians living in A Area clearly agree that it is unacceptable to put Hebrew on road signs ($M = 1.9$, $SD = 1$) and shop signs ($M = 1.8$, $SD = .9$), Palestinians living in Huwwara have somewhat neutral feelings towards putting Hebrew on road signs ($M = 3.3$, $SD = 1$) and shop signs ($M = 3.1$, $SD = 1$). The difference between the two groups was significant for road signs ($t(119) = -7.2$, $p < .001$) as well as for shop signs ($t(119) = -6.8$, $p < .001$).

3.3 Attitudes towards learning and teaching Hebrew

This part aims at investigating Palestinians' attitudes towards learning Hebrew and teaching it in schools as a subject. In addition, it aims at investigating the participants' beliefs about the benefits they get from learning Hebrew. Table 4 shows Palestinians' attitudes towards learning Hebrew and teaching it in schools.

In general, it was found that Palestinians think that Hebrew is easy to learn. However, Palestinians living in Huwwara ($M = 4.1$, $SD = .8$) showed more agreement with this statement than Palestinians living in A Area ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .8$). The difference between the two groups was significant ($t(119) = -3.5$, $p = .001$).

When it comes to teaching Hebrew in schools, both groups agree that Hebrew should be taught as a subject in Palestinian schools. Again, Palestinians living in Huwwara ($M = 4.3$, $SD = 1$) showed more agreement with this statement than Palestinians living in A Area ($M = 3.8$, $SD = .8$), and the difference was significant ($t(119) = -2.3$, $p = .02$). On the other hand, both groups strongly disagree with the statement that English should be replaced with Hebrew, and no difference between the two groups was found. They also disagree that learning Hebrew will elevate their social status and give them more prestige with no significant difference between the two groups. Moreover, both groups neither agree nor disagree that learning Hebrew is important for the economy of their cities and towns. In addition, they neither agree nor disagree that learning Hebrew will provide them

with more job opportunities where they live. On the other hand, Palestinians living in A Area somewhat agree that learning Hebrew will open more job opportunities for them in Israel ($M = 3.6$, $SD = .9$), and Palestinians living in Huwwara even showed more agreement ($M = 4.2$, $SD = 1.1$). The difference was significant ($t(119) = -2.2$, $p < .03$). Finally, both groups neither agree nor disagree that Islam encourages learning Hebrew.

4. DISCUSSION

The participants' responses in the first part demonstrate that Palestinians in the West Bank are aware of the languages present on road and shop signs around them; Palestinians living in Huwwara reported that they notice Hebrew on road and shop signs in their town, while most people living in A Area reported the opposite. However, Palestinians living in A Area had higher score for road signs than shop signs. The reason is that A Areas in the West Bank are like islands surrounded by an ocean of C Area. Therefore, anyone travelling from one A Area to another A Area is most likely to cross C Area where Hebrew is found on road signs (B'teslem 2004). Therefore, participants from A Area who reported noticing Hebrew on road signs have most likely noticed it while crossing C Area. In addition, both groups reported that it is easy to distinguish Hebrew writings. The reason is that Hebrew is found everywhere in Palestinians' daily life; in addition to road and shop signs, Hebrew is found on Palestinians' identity document, various Israeli products, bills and coins...etc.

Regarding the second part, which investigates Palestinians' attitudes towards Hebrew, it was found that Palestinians in general still have negative attitudes towards Hebrew because they believe that Hebrew is associated with the Israeli occupation. However, it was found that Palestinians living in Huwwara where Hebrew is present in the linguistic landscape have more positive attitudes towards Hebrew than Palestinians living in A Area where Hebrew is absent. This suggests that when a language is present where people can see on a daily basis like road and shop signs, it makes them develop a sense of tolerance towards that language despite not knowing it and despite having negative attitudes towards it. This sense of tolerance towards Hebrew has not been developed in A Area because, although Hebrew is present in places other than road and shop

signs such as Palestinians IDs and Israeli products, people in these areas do not see Hebrew writings on a daily basis; they do not have to take a look at their IDs or products' ingredients regularly. On the other hand, people living in Huwwara do not have a choice but to look around while walking or travelling, and therefore, they unintentionally see Hebrew writings, which resulted in developing positive attitudes towards Hebrew.

In the third part, it was found that Palestinians in the West Bank have positive attitudes towards learning Hebrew. It was found that Palestinians think of Hebrew as a language that is easy to learn. This is due to the similarities in vocabulary between Arabic, the native language of Palestinians, and Hebrew since both are Semitic languages. In addition, most Palestinians in the West Bank showed a willingness to learn Hebrew. Still, people living in Huwwara where Hebrew is present showed more agreement with these statements than people living in A Area. This suggests that when a language is around on a daily basis, although written, people perceive it as easier to learn and show more willingness to learn it than when the language is absent from their surroundings.

5. CONCLUSION

This study investigated Palestinians' language attitudes towards Hebrew in the West Bank and the effect of linguistic landscape on these attitudes. It also investigated Palestinians' attitudes towards teaching and learning Hebrew. It was found that Palestinians still have negative attitudes towards Hebrew because they still associate it with the Israeli occupation and view it as "the language of the oppressor". Moreover, it was found that there is a significant effect of linguistic landscape on Palestinians' attitudes towards Hebrew; people living where Hebrew is present on road and shop signs developed a sense of tolerance towards Hebrew. These findings suggest that when a given foreign language is written on signs where people can see on a daily bases, their attitudes towards it become more positive even without knowing the language itself.

Regarding teaching Hebrew in schools, Palestinians in the West Bank agree that Hebrew should be taught in schools. However, they clearly disagree that it should be replaced with English. This suggests that Palestinians' attitudes towards English are more

positive than their attitudes towards Hebrew and that Hebrew is not as important as English.

Regarding the social and economic advantages of learning Hebrew, Palestinians in the West bank believe that Hebrew will not give them prestige nor it will elevate their social status. They also believe that learning Hebrew will open more job opportunities for them in Israel. However, they are neutral when it comes to the advantage that learning Hebrew has on the economy of their cities and towns. It is assumed that people living in Huwwara will show more agreement with the statement that learning Hebrew will have benefits on the economy of the town since, as mentioned before, some shop owners put Hebrew on shop signs to attract Israeli settlers. However, there was no significant difference between people living in Huwwara and people living in A Area. This is because not everyone in Huwwara is benefited from learning Hebrew like car mechanics. If questionnaires were handed to car mechanics and other shop owners separately, there would be a significant difference.

Finally, some Palestinians believe that Islam encourages learning Hebrew while others do not believe so; the fact is that Islam does not encourage learning Hebrew in particular, but it encourages learning languages in general, as Prophet Mohammad said "Whoever learns a people's language shall be safe from their plots". Some people infer from this *hadith* that Islam encourages learning Hebrew while others took the statement in the questionnaire literally and thought that Islam does not explicitly ask people to learn Hebrew. Therefore, there might be a religious motive behind wanting to learn Hebrew. This study investigated one factor that affects Palestinians' language attitudes towards Hebrew, that is, linguistic landscape. However, there are other possible factors that may affect Palestinians' language attitudes towards Hebrew that were not investigated in this paper such as age, gender, academic achievement, and political affiliation. Therefore, this paper recommends conducting other studies that investigate the effect of these factors on attitudes towards Hebrew. In addition, since the questionnaires were randomly handed to participants, this paper also recommends conducting further studies in which questionnaires are handed to shop owners to see if

they report an economic benefit of putting Hebrew on their shop signs.

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TABLES AND FIGURES:



Figure 1. A sign in the West-Bank that warns Israelis from entering A Area



Figure 2. A road sign in Ramallah City (A Area)



Figure 3. A road sign in Huwwara town (B/C Area).



Figure 4. A shop sign in Huwwara town (B/C Area)

Table 1. Number of participants and their mean age in both groups.

Huwwara		A Area	
N	Mean Age	N	Mean Age
56	25.4	65	22.2

Table 2. Palestinians' awareness of the presence of Hebrew on road and shop signs.

Language awareness	Group 1		Group 2		t	p
Item	M	SD	M	SD		
1. I notice Hebrew writings on road signs in city/town.	2.6	1.1	4.3	.9	-8.3	< .001
2. I notice Hebrew writings on shop signs (including car mechanics) in my city/ town.	1.9	.8	4	.9	-12	< .001
3. It is easy to recognize Hebrew writings without even knowing Hebrew.	4.4	.9	4.6	.7	-1.5	.13

Table 3. Palestinians language attitudes and empathy towards Hebrew

Empathy	Group 1		Group 2		t	p
Item	M	SD	M	SD		
4. Hebrew is mainly associated with occupation.	3.8	1.2	3.4	1.2	1.5	.13
5. Hebrew is associated with violence.	3	1.2	2.6	1	1.9	.08
6. Hebrew is a beautiful language.	2.3	1	2.9	1.2	-3	.003
7. Hebrew is culturally rich language.	2.2	.9	2.6	1	-2.1	.03
8. It is acceptable to put Hebrew writings on road signs inside my city/town.	1.9	1	3.3	1	-7.2	< .001
9. It is acceptable to put Hebrew writings on shop signs inside my city/town.	1.8	.9	3.1	1	-6.8	< .001

Table 4. Palestinians attitudes towards learning Hebrew and teaching it in schools.

Teaching and learning Hebrew	Group 1		Group 2		t	p
	M	SD	M	SD		
10. It is easy to learn Hebrew.	3.6	.8	4.1	.8	-3.5	.001
11. I would like to learn Hebrew in future.	3.6	1.2	4.2	.9	-3.5	.003
12. Hebrew should be taught in Palestinian schools in addition to English.	3.8	1.2	4.3	1	-2.3	.02
13. Hebrew should be taught in Palestinian schools instead of English.	1.7	.9	1.8	.9	-0.5	.60
14. Learning Hebrew is important for my town's/city's economy.	3.1	1	3.4	1.1	-1.6	.10
15. Learning Hebrew will open more job opportunities for me to work in my city/town.	2.7	1.2	2.9	1.1	-1.2	.20
16. Learning Hebrew will open more job opportunities for me to work in Israel.	3.6	.9	4.1	1.1	-2.2	<.03
17. Learning Hebrew will elevate my social status and give me more prestige in my city/town.	2	1	2.4	1.1	-1.5	.12
18. Islam encourages learning Hebrew.	3.2	1.2	3.6	1.8	-1.9	.06