

## **THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF THE CENTER OF SANTA ROSA, CALIFORNIA**

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### **ABSTRACT - The linguistic landscape of the center of Santa Rosa, California**

26. 4% of the population of Santa Rosa is speak Spanish as their native language. Therefore the appearance of this minority language in public signage is very important, both for better understanding and for the recognition of the language minority group, especially in the city center where most services essential for daily life are located. The study of the linguistic landscape of the city center reveals the relation of dominant and minority languages: Spanish language gains recognition in most public signage, but it is placed in second position while the dominance of English language is reinforced even by the visual arrangement of the signs.

**Keywords:** linguistic landscape, minority language, bilingualism, public signs, Hispanics

## **INTRODUCTION**

The United States is a multilingual society where Spanish is the most the most widely-spoken minority language. According to the records of the census in 2002, the number of Hispanic population is 37.4 million that is the 13.3% of the entire population of the USA making it the country with 5th largest Spanish-speaking population (ARDILA, 2005). The term 'Hispanic' or 'Latino' in linguistic studies is used for those people whose native language is Spanish. Generally, it is observed that in cities where there is a significant number of Hispanic population those parts of the city which are inhabited by Spanish speakers have Spanish signage in the streets and in the shops and services respectively and the Spanish language is also present—in different degree—in other parts of the city (YANGUAS, 2009). The Spanish-speaking people use their native language in everyday life and especially the first generation immigrants often have difficulty in understanding and speaking English. For this reason, the appearance of Spanish language in public signage is a necessity as only this way can all Spanish language speakers can understand the information on display in public spaces. Another importance of the appearance of Spanish in streets is that it reflects how much the linguistic rights of the language minority group are realized in the community where they live. The city is the environment where the languages meet and their roles become obvious (BARNI ET AL., 2010).

In my study I examine the linguistic landscape of the center of Santa Rosa, Sonoma County, California, USA. According to the data of July 2009 the total population is 157.4868 with 41.619 Hispanics that constitutes the 26.4% of the entire population. My aim is study how the central area takes the Spanish speaking population into consideration from the language point of view that is how common it is to display the Spanish language in public signage, what content is written in two languages and how they are visualized. I chose the city as the proportion of the Spanish speaking population reaches the 26% and

the city center is the area where most of the services and infrastructure can be found, therefore it is the most likely to be visited by minority language speakers as well.

In the study of the linguistic landscape there are several factors to be considered in order to assess the role of minority language in the society: first of all, whether the minority language is present in public signage besides the dominant language. If it is present, its position and visual display—whether it is first or second or is written with the same size and types of letters—is also to be considered as these visual representations reflect the language ideology, the status of a minority language in the society (SHOHAMY, 2006). Furthermore, Landry and Bourhis distinguished two major functions of public signs: informative and symbolic functions (SPOLSKY, 2009). In my study I also use these concepts in order to gain more information about the message of public signs.

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

To study the linguistic landscape of a given territory I used similar method that Griffin (GRIFFIN, 2004) did. I defined the scope of the town that I intended to examine with the help of the city map. I used the digital photos taken by Dawn Dolan: I examined the photos and with their help I could draw the linguistic landscape of the center: I studied the number of monolingual and bilingual signs, the type of information they contain and the written format they have and related the Spanish language content to the English one. Though Dawn Dolan has taken numerous photographs of different parts of the city center in order that I would be able to draw the conclusions precisely, I am able to demonstrate only a few relevant pictures in my study. Therefore I have chosen photos that well characterize the linguistic landscape of the city and grouped them in monolingual English, bilingual and monolingual Spanish categories to provide a clear description.

## **RESULTS**

### **Monolingual English signs**

The sign in *Figure 1.* gives information about the parking regulations in monolingual English disregarding the understanding of the Spanish speaking population. Similarly, the sign in *Figure 2.* is about a regulation, particularly it is a prohibition regarding skateboarding, cycling, loitering etc. and informing about prosecution. The informative function of both signs is that they provide information about prohibitions and their symbolic function is that they address the English speaking population. Both signs are official and according to the categorization of Spolsky and Cooper they are categorized as ‘prohibitions’ (SPOLSKY, 2009). The information they provide is relevant and important in order to observe the rules as otherwise violators can face legal charges.



**Figure 1 and 2: Parking Regulation and Official Prohibition**

Source: <http://www.flickr.com/photos/ohsknapp/3700638830/> and Dawn Dolan

### Bilingual signs

The sign of *Figure 3*. advertises an on-site mortgage specialist while the sign in *Figure 4*. warns to dispose only garbage in the container and the sign in *Figure 5*. indicates to wait until the call. In all three signs it can be seen that the first language (above) is always English and the second (below) is the Spanish. As opposed to the monolingual English signs, the importance of Spanish language is already recognized here.



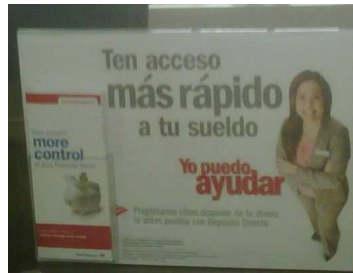
**Figure 3, 4 and 5: Advertisement, Restriction and Regulation in a Bank**

Source: Dawn Dolan

In the case of *Figure 3*. the information it contains is a business service. In order to gain more profit it is important to address the large number of Spanish speaking population in the mother tongue (YANGUAS, 2009). Furthermore, in case of the official signs in *Figure 4*. and 5. the authorities also take the Spanish speaking population into consideration and in order to keep the orders they apply Spanish language in the signage. In all three cases, the information is exactly the same in both languages with English in the first and Spanish in the second place suggesting the dominance of English language. However, in case of *Figure 4*. the red letters give some emphasis to the Spanish writing.

### **Monolingual Spanish signs**

The sign in *Figure 6*. advertises a bank service by which the customer can get to his salary quicker. As there are a large number of Spanish speakers in Santa Rosa, the bank recognizes the necessity of Spanish advertisement, most supposedly because they are more likely to become clients if they are addressed in their native language in a fully monolingual Spanish advertisement instead of a bilingual one. Here, only the take-away brochures are in English, the advertisement itself is in Spanish only.



**Figure 6: Bank Advertisement**

Source: Dawn Dolan

The advertisement in *Figure 6*, therefore, has informative and symbolic functions, too. It provides valuable information about a banking service, besides gives full right to Spanish language being the only one used in the advert and indicating that the bank addresses directly the Spanish speaking population.

### **CONCLUSIONS**

Based on the signs I have examined it can be concluded that in the center of Santa Rosa, where the Hispanics constitute the  $\frac{1}{4}$  part of the population, the minority language appears in numerous signs in public spaces. However, the dominance of English language is obvious from the public signage: there are monolingual English signs with relevant information disregarding Spanish speakers and on the bilingual signs English is visualized as the dominant language. Bilingual signs can be found mainly in public institutions where the appearance of Spanish speakers is likely and their understanding is necessary. Monolingual Spanish signs appeal mainly in advertisements where advertisers recognize the necessity of the use of Spanish language in order to provide a full understanding in a larger scope of possible clients and attract more customers from minority language groups, too (SPOLSKY, 2009).

The signs on display have both informative and symbolic functions. As far as information is concerned they have the same content written, but the symbolic function suggests the dominance of English language. However, the use of Spanish language itself has symbolic function: it does not only serve the better understanding for the hispanic population but it also recognizes the linguistic rights of Spanish language, therefore contributes to and re-enforces the ethnical identity of Hispanic people that is highly important in a multicultural society.

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