

Linguistic Landscaping and Materials Development: A Tool for Teaching English Language

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Abstract

Original Research Article

This paper explores the pedagogical potential of linguistic landscaping (LL) as a tool for English language teaching through the use of authentic materials, specifically cellular company advertisements. Conducted as a case study with undergraduate students in Shillong, India, the research examined whether commercial billboards and video ads could enhance language acquisition, particularly in vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and speaking skills. Over ten days, students engaged with real-world advertising content through interactive tasks such as vocabulary building, descriptive speaking, sentence construction, and contextual grammar exercises. The findings indicate that LL-based materials foster learner motivation, bridge the gap between classroom content and real-life communication, and support the principles of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT). The study concludes that LL can effectively supplement traditional teaching methods, offering a dynamic and contextually relevant approach to language education. The positive feedback from students further reinforces the need for integrating authentic, localized content into curriculum design.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscaping (LL), English Language Teaching (ELT), Authentic Materials, Cellular Advertisements, Vocabulary Acquisition, Speaking Skills.

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1. INTRODUCTION

The study of any kind of signs, symbols, and written words in public areas is termed as linguistic landscaping (LL). According to Landry and Bourhis, Linguistic Landscaping is "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. The linguistic landscape of a territory can serve two basic functions: an information function and a symbolic function" (1997).

Signs and symbols are used to convey messages for both public and private use. Signs are also used to show topographical information, direction and warning signs. Public signs are also signs which convey commercial meaning for example for marketing and advertisements, their purpose is to advertise their business and give information about new products that their business has launched. (Backhaus, 2007, p5)

2. Research Questions

- Can cellular company advertising billboards used to teach English language?

- Can cellular company video advertisements be an aid to teach English language?
- Can spoken skills be improved with the help of cellular company advertisements?
- Can these advertisements be used as authentic materials for teaching language in the classroom?

3. METHODOLOGY

In-order to test the above-mentioned research question a case study was conducted with the 1st year students of BA English and B. Com of ICFAI University Shillong. The sample students' age ranged from 18-21 and they belonged to various cultural backgrounds. Although most of the students were from north-east India but there was one student from Bhutan. The number of students who participated in the study was twenty. The study was conducted for 10 days, 2 hours each day.

Teaching materials were designed with the help of the authentic advertisements of billboards and videos of cellular companies.

4. Data Source

The data was collected from both primary as well as a secondary source. The primary source was the language competency outcome from conducting the study with the students and the secondary source was from the previous research works done by using authentic materials in a language classroom, linguistic landscaping and materials development.

5. Materials development and using Authentic materials

In a classroom, one may come across a mismatch between what is actually taught in class and what is required for communication in real-life situations. "Authentic materials help Students bridge the gap between the classroom and the outside world". (Calpro,1:2007) This mismatch may help learners in their academic pursuits, but leaves them with poor communication skills in real life. Learners are not aware of the fact that authentic materials can be used to improve their speaking skills, since no English teacher has introduced it in class. Hence, keeping this problem in mind, the researcher proposes the introduction of Authentic Materials, so as to bridge the gap and facilitate teaching/learning, and specially focus on developing speaking skills. This paper is a critical study of the researcher's understanding and experiences of using Authentic Materials for the purpose of improving learner's speaking skills.

Teenage learners have specific interests and needs. The introduction of authentic materials can be an effort in reaching out to the learner's needs and interests. Nunan (1999) defines authentic materials as spoken or written language data that has been produced in the course of real-time conversation, and not specifically written for purpose of language teaching. Students at this age are drawn to use English unconsciously; with the help of multimedia, learners hear, talk, write and communicate in this language. According to Brinton (1991), use of authentic materials and media can reinforce for students the direct relationship between the language classroom and the outside world.

Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) originated from the changes in the British Situational Language Teaching approach since late 1960s (Richards & Rodgers, 2001). Communication is the bridge between knowledge and understanding, and the skills required to communicate is confidence, accuracy and structure. Richards and Rodgers (2001) have reviewed many works on CLT and described its several distinguishing features. As 'Communicative Competence' is the desired goal in CLT, meaning is paramount (Finocchiaro & Brumfit, 1983, cited by Richards and Rodgers, 2001).

In order to communicate, one needs to believe in oneself and leave the fear of making errors. A teacher should be aware of the student's fears and lack of confidence, and should be able to motivate the learners

to fight the fear. 'Motivation is, without question, the most complex and challenging issue facing teachers today.' (Scheidecker and Freeman 1999:116) H. Douglas Brown points out that a cognitive view of motivation includes factors such as the need for exploration, activity, stimulation, new knowledge, and ego enhancement (Brown 2000: 160-166). The teacher can inspire students and motivate them with the help of authentic material to achieve the desired level of communication skills.

6. Linguistic Landscaping

Landry & Bourhis (1997) define linguistic landscape as the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. Specifically, the notion refers to:

"The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration" (p.25).

Gorter (2006, p.2) holds that linguistic landscape research is concerned with 'the use of language in its written form in public sphere'. In the same token, Ben-Rafael *et al.*, (2006, p.14) define the linguistic landscape as referring to 'any sign announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location'.

Reh (2004, p.38) emphasized that the study of linguistic landscape 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'. Ben-Rafael *et al* (2006) underscore that 'LL analysis allows us to point out patterns representing different ways in which people, groups, associations, institutions and government agencies cope with the game of symbols within a complex reality' (p.27).

Tulp (1978) examined the languages of commercial billboards in Brussels. The purpose was to demonstrate how language usage patterns on these signs have been contributing to the city's Frenchification. He assumed that the visibility of a language in a public space is vital for its perceived ethnolinguistic vitality. Tulp focused on three large billboards in and around Brussels. The areas selected included major tram, metro, and bus routes. The findings show that French dominates the linguistic landscape.

7. Functions of Linguistic Landscapes

LL has 2 functions: informative and symbolic; informative function indicates the border of the territory of linguistic group. It shows that a specific language or languages for communication or to sell products. On the other hand, the symbolic function refers to the value and status of the languages as perceived by the members of a

language group in comparison to other languages (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, Cenoz & Gorter, 2009, p.56).

Some state and regional authorities have included in their language policy rules about the languages to be used on signage. Regulations related to LL go side by side with a language policy for the use of languages in education, the media, social and economic life or other domains. The use of different languages in the sign also reflects the power, status and economic importance of the different languages. Cenoz & Gorter (2006) found that a relatively strong language policy in the case of Basque had a measurable effect on the LL as compared to Frisian where no such effect was found. In Botswana, there is no such regulation. One therefore sees such languages as English, Setswana and Chinese on the billboards, shops, restaurants in Gaborone.

The use of English around the world is a mark of globalization defined in economic terms of markets, production and consumption. By using English businesses aim at increasing their sales and thus its presence is motivated by economic reasons. The use of English also raises the issue of identity and power and thus can have consequences for the balance between the different languages in multilingual situations (Pennycook, 1993; Philipson, 2003). The omnipresence of English in LL is one of the most obvious markers of the process of globalization.

The basic premise of LL analysis is that visual language use in public spaces represents observable manifestations of circulating ideas about multilingualism (Shohamy, 2006, p.110). The LL constitutes the very scene made of streets, corners, circuses, parks, buildings where society's public life takes place. As such this carries crucial socio-symbolic importance as it actually identifies and thus serves as the emblem of societies, communities, and regions (Hult 2009, p.90).

To Hult (2009) the basic premise of LL analysis is that visual language use in the public spaces represents observable manifestations of circulating ideas about multilingualism (Shohamy 2006, p.110). For Ben-Rafael et al. 2006, p.8), the LL constitutes the very scene - made of streets, corners, circuses, parks, buildings – where society's public life takes place. This serves as the emblem of societies, communities, and regions.

The presence or absence of languages in public space communicates symbolic messages about the importance, power, significance and relevance of certain languages or the relevance of others (Shohamy 2006,

p.110). In this way, circulating sociopolitical discourse about multilingualism is concretely observable.

LL analysis is concerned with how a specific public space is symbolically constructed "by a large variety of factors such as public institutions, associations, firms, individuals, that stem from most diverse strata and milieus" (Ben-Rafael 2006, p.8). It may be interesting to focus on what takes place behind the scenes in the construction of billboards.

8. CASE STUDY

In order to test the above-mentioned research questions a case study was conducted consisting of one teacher (researcher) and 20 students of B.A. English Honours and B.Com. The study consisted of testing four lesson plans made by the teacher (researcher), using the different cellular company billboards and banners in and around the city of Shillong. There are around five major telecom companies in India as well as in Shillong, they are:

- i. Airtel
- ii. Aircel
- iii. Vodafone
- iv. BSNL (Bharat Sanchar Nigam Limited)
- v. Idea
- vi. Jio

For the purpose of the study the researcher went around the city to find cellular company banners and took pictures of them. Although there are number of Cellular company banners across the city, the researcher had to be very careful in choosing the appropriate banners that could be used in the process of teaching English to the students. The teacher for the purpose of the study chose 11 banners that would be appropriately used to frame English language teaching materials. The study was conducted for ten consecutive days and 2 hours each day at the premises of ICFAI University.

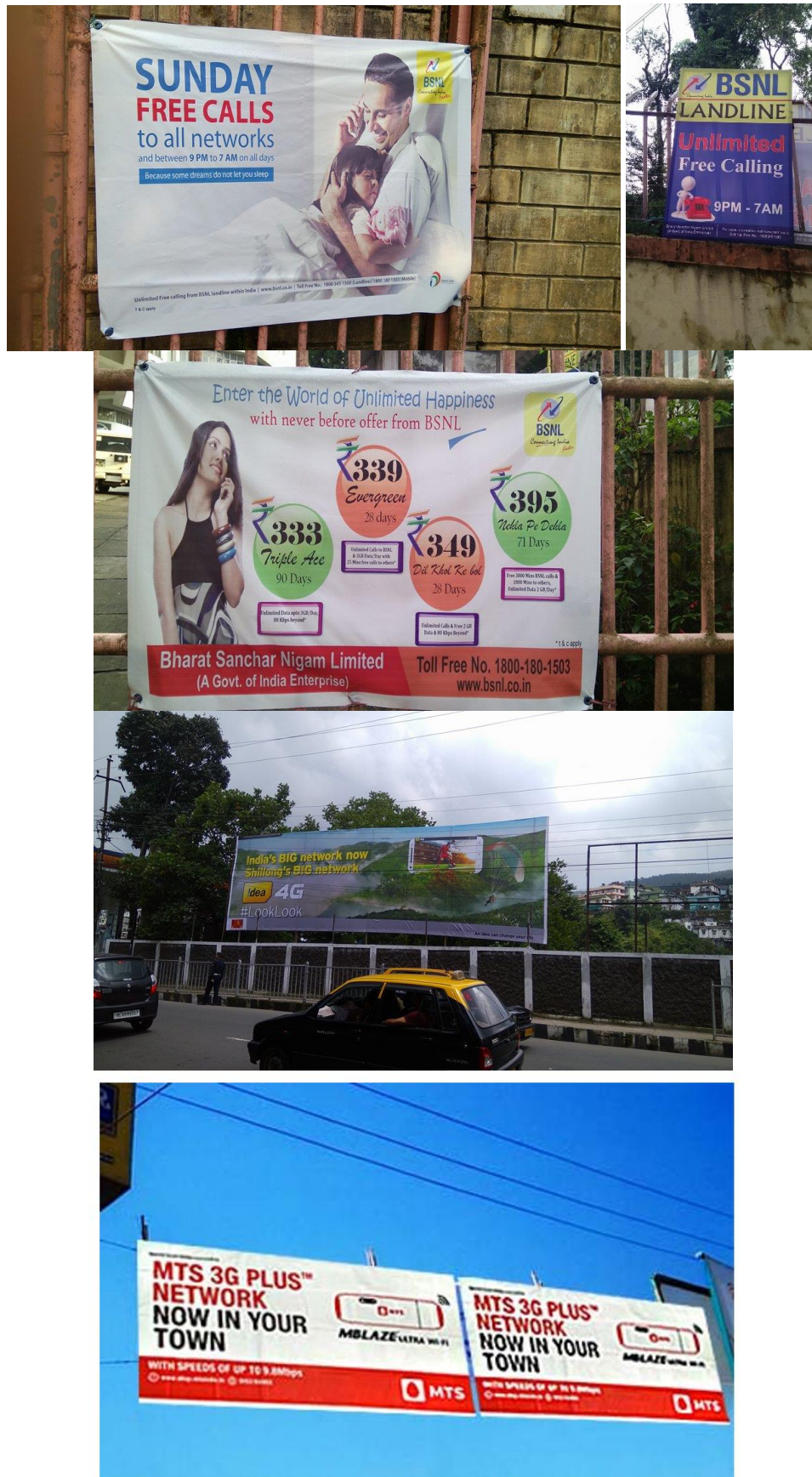
Day 1, 2 and 3

Day one started with a brief introduction to the study and the purpose of the study. Students were asked to state the cellular company they use and why? After which the students started to argue in good spirit which telecom company is the best. This was used as an ice-breaking session where the students would be free to speak, listen and to learn things related to the topic. By now the students would be aware that the lesson would be related to phones, or cellular companies etc.

In the first class the teacher displayed all the pictures of various telecom companies.

Aircel







After showing this picture students would be asked to identify words which are unfamiliar to them. The teacher now makes a list of difficult words to teach meaning, vocabulary and pronunciation. The teacher makes a list of the words that she would like to teach and introduces the word, the meaning of the word, the correct pronunciation of the word and their forms, e.g. if the word is used as a noun, adjective, and identify the tense etc. This exercise would help the students to identify new vocabulary, learning their meaning, their different usages and forms and also their pronunciation. This exercise continues to day 2 and 3

Day 4 and 5

On the fourth day of the teaching and research, students were asked to look at the pictures and asked to describe in few word what do they see. For this activity students were placed in pairs and given one picture to describe. The teacher gave the students five minutes to discuss the picture among them and then describe it to the class. This activity is helpful in making students learn how to use words which describe things and to freely express their ideas, thoughts and feelings related to the banners.

Day 6 and 7

In these two days the trainer focused on teaching adjectives and making sentences using these adjectives. The trainer shows the pictures of the banners to the students by either showing a slide-show on a screen or by give printed pictures to them. The students now try to identify the adjectives in the pictures. If the students have not been introduced to adjectives then the trainer could teaching the use of adjectives by using words from the banners/pictures. Once the students are familiar with the use and form of adjectives then they would identify the adjectives and use them in sentences. This activity helped the students to use the adjectives and make sentences with them, they also learned the meaning of each adjectives and how to use it correctly in a sentence.

Day 8 and 9

Day 8 and 9 was a class dedicated to making sentences with the use of phrases from the banners/advertisements. Students on these days would learn how to identify phrases in the advertisements and would use these phrases to make complete sentences. Some of the phrases which were used are:

- a) The joy of a little extra...
- b) Sail through our network...
- c) Simply irresistible...
- d) India's big network now...
- e) Connecting India...
- f) Enter the world of unlimited happiness...
- g) Now upload albums...

This activity would help the learners to identify phrases and making complete sentences with it. Students were also asked to act out or say the sentences out loud for the entire class to listen and when the students made errors while speaking then the teacher corrected their error.

Day 10

One the last day the teacher the teacher recalled from the previous classes that the students were making errors with articles, *a*, *an* and *the*. First the teacher introduced the articles to the class, then she asked the students to identify the different article in the advertisements and what were they used with. Since, there weren't much usage of articles the teacher decided to pick words with which articles could be used. In this way students learned how to use articles and when to use it.

9. CONCLUSION

Linguistic Landscaping is undoubtedly a major tool to solve various issues relating to using authentic materials and materials development in a English language teaching classroom. Much of it is yet to be explored and more needs to be studied and analysed from diverse points of views. Using linguistic landscaping in a language classroom could be beneficial to both the teacher as well as the students. Through this paper,

attempt was made at understanding the feasibility of using LL in an English language classroom in the form of authentic material. The feedback from students and the outcome/result of using these materials in the classroom for teaching different forms of grammar, vocabulary and sentence constructions have been 80% positive. Hence, the research questions are proved and answered correctly.

10. RECOMMENDATION

Based on the study conducted, it is, therefore, suggested that Schools and colleges should use more authentic materials from the different linguistic landscaping that are available to them. Teachers have abundant resources available to them; they should make some effort to explore and use these readymade materials to teach language and make classrooms interactive and interesting.

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