THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE OF TWO HISPANIC NEIGHBORHOODS IN WASHINGTON D.C.

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Abstract

The *linguistic landscape* (LL) of two neighborhoods in Washington D.C. is analyzed under the theoretical framework developed by Spolsky (2004) in order to investigate how the *Hispanic* populations living in these areas use English and Spanish in the public space. Spolsky's model has three components: *language beliefs*, *language practices*, and *language management*. The LL of these neighborhoods is analyzed through the language practices component in close relationship to language beliefs and language management. Three types of linguistic objects (English-only, Spanish-only, and bilingual signs), both public and private, are analyzed to gain a deeper insight into these communities' use of these languages in the U.S. capital.

Keywords: *Hispanics, linguistic landscape, language beliefs, language practices, language management*

1.   Introduction

Hispanics are the fastest growing ethnic minority in the District of Columbia (D.C.), as shown by the 2000 census, and therefore, Spanish is widely used; not only do these peoples interact with close family and friends in Spanish but also use it for their daily activities. The neighborhoods where they live are flooded with signs written in Spanish as well as stores and services where Spanish is the main language used. As for the rest of the city, the influence of Spanish is very strong almost everywhere, since Latinos hold jobs all over town. As a matter of fact, most Washingtonians encounter some form of Spanish in their daily activities. [1]

The issue here is no different from other American states traditionally known to have a large population of Hispanics such as California, Texas or Florida: what is the role of federal and local government toward these peoples? Should they be encouraged to maintain and cultivate their Spanish? Or should the system just ease their transition into English, not providing for their Spanish? These educational decisions are very relevant in the long term, since they determine the community's language practices and shape the community's attitudes toward both languages.

Language educational policies (LEPs) are not the only decisions politicians make that have an influence on citizens: what languages should be used to translate official documents? What languages should be used at official acts? Or what languages should be displayed on public signs? These are but examples of language policies that also have a very important effect on the population because they are mechanisms through which those in power expand and reinstate their own language ideology (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999; Spolski 2004). Spolski (2004) has distinguished between the three components of the language policy of certain

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[1] *Hispanics* and *Latinos* are used interchangeable all throughout this study.

speech community: language practices, language beliefs or ideology, and language management.

The present study utilizes this paradigm to investigate the linguistic landscape (i.e. linguistic objects in the public space) in two *barrios* in Washington D.C. and gain a deeper insight into this community's language practices.

2.   Language Policy

2.1 Language Policy in the U.S.: Historical Background

Language policy has been part of the policy making of many governments long before linguists or political scientists begun its study. Weinstein (1980) attributed the coinage of the term *language planning* to Einar Haugen in 1966. Ever since this scholar coined the term, which in many instances is equated with the term *language policy* and with the term *language management,* there have been a myriad of studies on language policy related to language issues everywhere in the world. Lambert (1995) provided six partly interrelated, though separate, domains as focus for language policy or planning: the *official status* issue, the *setting the norms* issue, the issue of *language hegemony*, the issue of *formal education*, the issue of *language use* and *instruction*, and, finally, the *language management* and *planning*. These are the areas on which most studies on language policy have focused in the past forty years in their investigation of local and national language planning and management.

Several of these studies have focused on the U. S. language policy (see, for instance McGroarty 1997). Given the leading and global role that this country has in so many matters, its study is very relevant. Historically, the U. S. has coped with the existence of different cultures and peoples from its very beginning. It is well documented that German, French, and Spanish played a very important role in Pennsylvania, Louisiana, California and New Mexico at different points in history. German was even considered as the language that this new nation should speak. In fact, bilingualism and multilingualism in the U. S. were common in the past. It was during periods of national discontent and lack of confidence when xenophobic and restrictive policies took hold in North American society (Del Valle 2003).

According to the 2000 census, the present is the time with most immigration since the 1930's. Latino immigrants can be found everywhere in the country, not only in places such as New York, California, and Florida, but also in most big cities. Even small towns in the Midwest and the South of the U.S. are being targeted by groups of Hispanics in search of a new and better life. In many cases, these smaller towns are not coping well with this immigration flow that has meant drastic changes in their rather static societies. This has led to a rise in language-restrictive legislation (since 1981, 22 states have passed English-only laws) and the flowering of the debate between those supporting heritage language maintenance and English-only supporters.

As Del Valle (2003) argued, the debate and interest about minority languages has rarely been higher. On the one hand, English-only supporters aim at an amendment of the U.S. Constitution making English the official language. However, mainly due to the strength of the 14th amendment already in place, which guarantees the rights and privileges of the U.S.

citizens, they have not been able to succeed at a federal level. English-only supporters have therefore focused their attention on the individual states with much success until now. If two thirds of the states adopt English-only laws, the issue could be pushed as an amendment of the federal constitution. On the other hand, supporters of minority rights push at different levels for the adoption of laws and regulations that allow for minority language speakers to cultivate and maintain their own language. Obviously, the Spanish language and Hispanic immigrants are the focus of many of these struggles, given that they are the first and fastest growing minority in the U. S. today.

It is important to mention here the Bilingual Education Act (BEA) of 1968, which was an initiative of senators and congressmen from the states with large Spanish speaking populations and a continuation of the civil rights movements working towards improving the situation of U.S. Blacks. Ambivalence and conflict surrounding the BEA was clear from the very beginning: originally created to teach English to non-English speaking kids from other cultural backgrounds and as an effort to fight discrimination, it was sometimes used to maintain and cultivate heritage languages. It is this last interpretation of the act that fostered the public campaign that attacked the BEA thirty years later (Spolsky 2004).

When the BEA expired, and perhaps to avoid double interpretations, the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) was passed at a federal level. This act makes clear that it is English is the only language that every student must master in order to be schooled and go through the different educational stages. Furthermore, also to avoid misinterpretations of any kind, the former Office of Bilingual Education and Minority Languages Affairs was replaced by the Office of English Language, Acquisition, Language Enhancement, and Academic achievement for Limited-English-Proficient Students, now renamed the Office of English Language Acquisition (Spolsky 2004).

With the passing of the NCLB, however, it seems apparent that policy makers at the federal level are trying to impose English as the only language, leaving aside a whole array of languages that are present in everyday life, the most important of which could be said to be Spanish. Even if the U. S. has no explicit *official* language at the federal level, which in theory allows for the existence and use of different languages, many states have taken steps, both explicitly and implicitly, to secure the leading role of English. As early as 1980, Torres (1980) claimed that policymakers were being successful in designating English as the only legitimate language in this country.

As in many other places in the world, language issues in the U. S. are a complex matter. The constitutional framework creates a general co-existence and some conflict between the multiple levels of governance (McGroarty 1997). Concerning language, there seems to be a conflict between the federal constitution and its 14th amendment, which grants citizens individual rights, and the individual states language policies that are increasingly shifting towards the regulation of only English. In other words, this conflict results in language practices that are not monolingual and a language ideology that emphasizes English as the only language in which one can succeed in the American society.

2.2 Language Policy: Theoretical Background for the Present Study

To analyze the results and consequences of this situation in Washington D.C., the model of language policy developed in Spolski (2004) is employed in this paper. This author proposed a model of language policy that attempted to account for the many interrelated factors that make language policy "a complex and unified whole, with necessary interdependence between its parts and the different languages and languages practices it is intended to modify or maintain" (Spolsky & Shohamy 1999: 64). This model includes three basic components of the language policy of a given community: one ideological level, termed *language beliefs*, and a language level with two dimensions, *language practices* and *language management*.

There is a scholarly tradition that links language and ideology for different fields of research (for a review, see Woolard & Schieffelin 1994). In the context of Spolky's model, *language beliefs* refer to the community's beliefs about language and language use: "The sets of beliefs about appropriate language practices, sometimes forming a consensual ideology, assigning values and prestige to various aspects of the language varieties used in it" (Spolsky 2004: 14). This term has a key role in the model, since it both derives from and influences language practices. Language management is defined as "efforts to manipulate the language situation" (Spolsky 2004: 8). These can take place at different levels: national government, local or regional agencies and groups, or even individuals. Finally, language practices are defined as "the sum of the sound, word and grammatical choices that an individual speaker makes, sometimes consciously and sometimes less consciously, that makes up the conventional unmarked pattern of a variety of language" (Spolsky 2004: 9).

Spolsky considers LL as part of public practice. In the case of the Canadian city of Montreal, he argued that behind the change in the LL of the city, "there was a determined and explicit policy change, a set of managed and planned interventions supported and enforced by law and implemented by a government agency" (Spolsky 2004: 5). Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara, and Trumper-Hecht (2006) refer to LL as to "objects that mark the public space" (p. 1). These authors investigated the patterns of LL in various Israeli cities to find differing linguistic patterns in each of these areas, reflecting the heterogeneity of that society.

These three components allow room for various analyses to account for different situations. For instance, in cases when no explicit written language management laws can be found, the study of the nature of the language policy has to be derived from language practices or from language beliefs. However, the existence of explicit, written language policy does not guarantee its effect on language practices, which could also be explained and analyzed through this model. Furthermore, these components could also be used to analyze possible inconsistencies between *declared* and *de facto* policies as well as the mechanisms (such as language laws, tests, language in the public space, etc.) through which language policies influence and are influenced by language ideology and language practices.

In a similar fashion, this framework would be a valuable tool to investigate what Ben-Rafael et *al.* (2006) discussed in terms of flows. One flow originates from official and public bodies of various sorts "that produce signs and LL texts to designate agencies or diffuse information directly depending on those bodies" (Ben-Rafael, 2008: 49). The second flow is generally born at the public level and "generates signs that address the population on behalf of what they offer" (Ben-Rafael 2008: 49). The former is characterized as top-down whereas the latter is considered to be a bottom-up flow. Top-down LL items can be related to different levels of authority, like the ones we find in the U.S. (federal vs. state) or areas of competence

(administrative or political). Bottom-up objects are commercial or advertising signs put in the public space by most diverse actors (individuals or large corporations) (Ben-Rafael et *al.* 2006). Depending on the context, how this top-down flow is managed is some times indicative of covert languages policies (Shohamy 2006) that aim at reinstating the state's ideology.

It is therefore very relevant to analyze the LL of a certain community for at least two reasons: on the one hand, it can show conflicting situations between the public signs coming from the federal or state government and those coming from local authorities and individuals. On the other, this LL can give us a gauge by which to measure how much and for what purposes a certain language is being used.

3.   The Latino community in D.C.

The official website of the District of Columbia (http://ola.dc.gov/ola/site/default.asp) is a very valuable source of information regarding the social, racial, and economic make up of the capital city of the United States. It states that 30.78% of the population is White, 60.01% African American, 0.30% Native American, 2.66% Asian, 0.06% Pacific Islander, 3.84% from other races, and 2.35% from two or more races. 7.86% of the population are Hispanic or Latino of any race.

According to official census figures in 2000, of the District's 572,059 residents, 44,953 (8.9 %) are Latino, although due to census undercount the figure is closer to 13 %. Latinos in the District demonstrated a 56% growth rate from 1990 to 2000, making them the fastest growing ethnic minority in the District. By the year 2010, the District will have an estimated 70,000 Latino residents. As a whole, the population size of children in the District decreased between 1990 and 2000 by 3%, while the population of Latino children grew by 66%.

This website shows that Latinos concentrate in wards 1 and 4, with marginal increases in wards 5 and 6, and declines in wards 2 and 8. Almost half (46.3 %) of D.C. Latinos live in ward 1 neighborhoods. Much of D.C.'s Latino population growth is due to immigration rather than fertility. Latino population growth from 1970 to 2000 reflects the newcomer characteristics of the population, including the concentration of Latinos in certain neighborhoods, high proportion in productive and reproductive age groups, unstable sex ratios, linguistic isolation, and extended family structures.

Figure 1: D.C. Wards
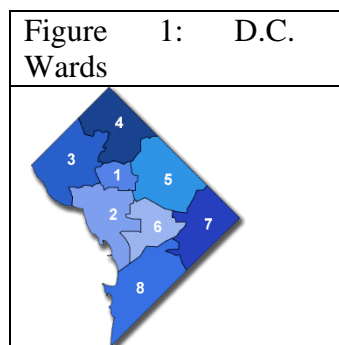
The size of Latino households and Latino families is greater than the average for the District. The 1990 and 2000 Censuses identified two types of households (family households and non-family households) and three types of families (married couple families, families of male-headed households, and families of female-headed households). There were 20,068 Latino households in 2000, of which 70% were family households and 30% were non-family households.

Finally, according to the District's official website, over one-third of D.C. Latinos identified their country of origin as being in Central America and the vast majority from El Salvador. This pattern is in stark contrast to the rest of the Latino population in the U.S., which is mainly of Mexican, Puerto Rican or Cuban heritage. Estimates of the proportion of the immigrant community that is undocumented range from 5% to 15%. The overall median age for D.C. Latinos is 28.3 years, for Latino males 27.9 years and Latino females 28.8 years.

4.   The Linguistic Landscape of two *barrios* in Washington D.C.

Two Hispanic neighborhoods were selected for this investigation: Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant. Both *barrios* are located in the Northwest quadrant of Washington D.C. (ward 1) and were chosen because, historically, they are considered to be Latino neighborhoods and a great number of Latinos live there nowadays. These two areas are rich in linguistic signs; for ease of analysis, these signs have been categorized into English-only signs, bilingual signs, and Spanish-only signs.

4.1 English-only signs

There are plenty of signs in English when you walk around these areas, top-down signs that come from the District's institutional authority. These are the same signs that can be found all around the District; by using English they reflect certain language ideology (i.e. English is the only valid language to be used in official signs).
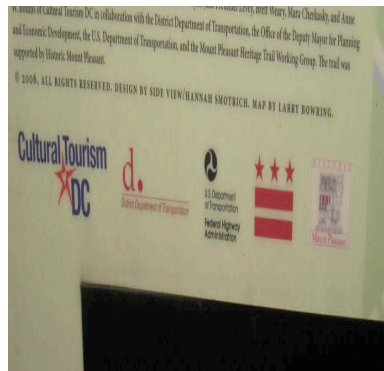
Picture 1

Picture 2

Picture 3

Picture 4

Pictures 1-3 clearly illustrate this point. These signs are written in English, they do not take into account Hispanics that populate this area. District authorities take for granted that English is the only language that D.C. residents understand and therefore they use it as the language

for these signs. Signs in pictures 1-2 are parking signs and signs that announce that you are entering Mount Pleasant. Also a sign by the Government of the District of Columbia that states by whom certain block has been adopted. The sign on picture 3 is more interesting; this is a *Heritage Trail* sign. A sign that tells the story of this historic neighborhood and outlines its boundaries. District and federal authorities (see picture 4) sponsor this *Heritage Trail* series of signs that can be found in the historic areas of the city. As illustrated in the pictures, their language of choice is English even if they acknowledge the following (this excerpt can be read in the text of the sign shown in picture 3): "By the 1970s Mount Pleasant and Adams Morgan were recognized as the heart of the Latino immigrant community".

4.2 Bilingual signs

Picture 5.

Picture 6

Picture 7

Picture 8

Picture 9   Picture 10

Pictures 5-10 illustrate two types of signs: signs that come from the local government and local associations (pictures 5, 9, 10) and signs from private business (pictures 6, 7, 8). The signs above show both languages working at different levels. Unlike District and Federal authorities, local authorities address the population living in this area both in English and Spanish. These authorities stand much closer to the Latino population, as they interact with them on a daily basis, and realize the importance of placing Spanish in local signs. It is in this sense that these signs reflect a bottom-up tendency. It would make little sense to have a library in the area of Mt. Pleasant that could not be reached by the Latino population (picture 5), since the users of that library will be mainly Latinos.

The library represents a special case where conflicting tendencies seem to be at work. On a posting board in the library (see picture 11), along with postings in Spanish aimed at the Latino readers (sign in Spanish typed by library staff members), we can find official documents both in English (*Position Vacancy Announcement*) and Spanish (*La Declaración de la Asociación de las Bibliotecas)*. This Spanish document makes public the rules by which the American Library Association abides. In it, we can read the six major rules that make the public libraries that belong to this association an open and democratic space in which culture and knowledge are fostered. It comes as no surprise therefore that in this space Spanish is given this prominent official role; both top-down documents in both languages give them the same official status.

Bottom-up and top-down tendencies can therefore be seen on the same announcement board in this small public library. In this micro entity, the prominence and supremacy of English ("English-only top-down") is being contested by local library managers who are in touch with the local Hispanic residents ("Spanish top-down").

Picture 11
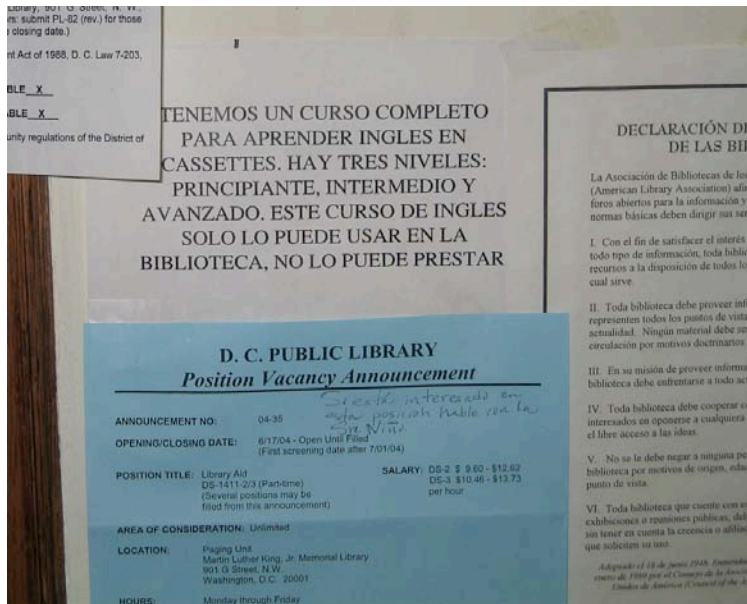
Pictures 9-10 show a sign that reads: "Mount Pleasant in the city a village". These signs are sponsored by Mount Pleasant Main Street and Mount Pleasant Business Association and can be seen hung on lampposts all around the neighborhood. As the local government, these associations realize the importance and relevance of using both English and Spanish in any public signage in this area. Finally, large private business (pictures 6, 7, 8) display their signs in both languages because they know first hand what the population of this area is composed of and their language needs. Needless to say, since they are profit-driven, they want to reach as many customers as possible and they realize that their clientele is going to be mostly Latino in these areas.

4.3 Spanish-only signs

As in the above section, among the signs written only in Spanish we cannot find signs coming emanating from the District or Federal authorities. In this section, we find signs that come from small or large business either local or otherwise. In this manner, pictures 12, 13, and 17 display signs from small local business, pictures 14 and 16 present signs from larger business and picture 15 shows the booth for a newspaper written in Spanish.

Picture 12

Se Necesita Una Muchacha Para Trabajar Tiempo Completo Que Hable Ingles !

Picture 13

Bienvenidos á El Gavilan Grocery en Washington DC

Picture 14

Una fiesta de mocha solo para ti.

McCafé iced mocha

Picture 15

Washington Hispanic

¡Gratis! aquí todos los viernes

Picture 16

Picture 17

In thse pictures we can see how Spanish-only signs take over and overtly address only the Hispanic population. All these public signs pay no attention to the English speaking population, which is a very telling indicator of the importance of Spanish and the people who speak it in the area. Smaller and larger businesses use Spanish in their signs emphasizing the importance of the Hispanic community and their language. *MacDonalds* (picture 14) or *Modelo* (picture 16) beer clearly go for Spanish in this area and leave aside the use of English. The use of Spanish by these large successful businesses surely derives from an in-depth investigation of the market in this area, which clearly points to the importance of Spanish here. Picture 15 further supports this point: the existence of a newspaper (*The Washington Hispanic*) for the Latino community announced and written in Spanish only.

Picture 17 displays a picture of a sign by small local business that directly addresses the Salvadorans, Hondurans, and Guatemalans corroborating what has been said above about the origins of the Hispanic population in D.C. This business specifically caters to Latinos in the area in need of services to send part of their paychecks back to their families in their countries of origin. Like in pictures 12-13, it is clear that these businesses originate in their own community and their use of only Spanish is an indicator of the importance of this language in this area; they cater to their own and they do it unequivocally in Spanish. Picture 12 is also a very indicative example: the sign translates into "female that speaks English is needed to work full time". It is taken for granted that whoever applies for the job is going to be Spanish speaking, but they need someone who also speaks English. This sign therefore makes it clear that Spanish works as the first language in this area in many aspects: not only is this sign written in Spanish addressing the Spanish speaking population, but also implies that English is needed as a surplus.

Above, I have shown examples of linguistic signs in two Latino areas in Washington D.C. Three different types of signs (English-only, bilingual, and Spanish-only), different strategies and interests that show different tendencies: 1) Top-down in English, coming from

District authorities, obviously, reflecting an ideology of supremacy of English. 2) Top-down in Spanish, coming from local authorities. It remains to be seen, however, if this document is a translation of the official English document. If this were the case, Spanish would still be given official status. 3) Bottom-up in Spanish coming from local authorities and local businesses that have a greater contact with the Latino population.

In general, we see conflicting interests that affect *de facto language policy* in these areas: the District authorities (top-down) and local businesses and authorities (bottom-up). From their different perspectives, they assign different roles to the languages involved impacting life on the streets in different ways. The former suggests, even imposes at a subconscious level, the supremacy of English. The latter uses Spanish, along with English or alone, for pragmatic purposes catering to the Latino residents of the areas.

5. Conclusion

The present paper has used the theoretical model put forth by Spolsky (2004) to investigate the LL of two Latino neighborhoods in the capital of the U.S. This model establishes a difference between language practices, language beliefs, and language management. The LL is considered as language practices that come from the federal and local governments or from businesses and residents of the area. According to this theoretical framework, these practices reflect certain ideologies and, in most cases, originate from deliberate acts from language managers.

Needless to say, there are sites more interesting than others to investigate the reproduction of ideologies by social practices (Romaine 2002). Adams Morgan and Mount Pleasant in Washington D.C. are very significant places because they are embedded in the context of the U.S. nation's capital. As has been discussed above, although the U.S. has no declared language policy, there exist nevertheless *de facto* policies at work and these sites are very appropriate places to gain a deeper insight into the conflicts between them.

Given that language ideology is where language behavior and social systems interact (King 2000), the analysis of the LL in these sites has revealed two main ideological forces; one that only uses English regardless of any social or practical issues, and one that is bilingual in nature adapting to the actual context. In the absence of a declared language policy, this "de facto" District policy imposes the use of English, in line with English-only movements. It does it through several mechanisms, such as the English-only public signs. Not only does this policy have immediate consequences to the Latino community who is impregnated with this ideology of the English language supremacy but also affects the society at large that shuns away from becoming bilingual and culturally richer (Zentella 1988). Furthermore, as Torres-Rivera et *al.* (2008) have argued, this type of behavior could potentially oppress and discriminate against the Spanish speaking population. On the contrary, it has been shown how language practices in these Latino areas evidence the importance of Spanish. LL analyses have made clear that Spanish is very much alive and there is a real need for it. Local administrative authorities, in closer contact with the community, have understood that need and have addressed it to some degree using this language for official signs around these neighborhoods.

As described above, the language history of the U.S. is complex; the present situation is not simple either. As a result of different factors, there has been a late push for adopting English as an official language, mainly through English-only groups and organizations. With no success so far at the federal level, this English-only push seems to be winning ground through covert policies (Shohamy 2006) that emphasize the significance and importance of English. Most scholars would agree that explicitly adopting English as an official language in the U.S. would without a doubt have fatal consequences on the other languages spoken in this society and cause them to disappear along with their cultural baggage. As King (2000) put it, modifying language behaviors implies unraveling long-standing underlying ideological stances, therefore, resistance by some of the parts involved is likely to be found as it is the case in the U.S.

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