

Linguistic landscape of İstanbul: insights from prospective language teachers' explorative fieldwork on urban multilingualism

Growing understanding of multilingualism as a social reality necessitates revealing approaches to language education which are sensitive to students' linguistic repertoires. In her comprehensive discussion of multilingual turn in language education, Meier (2017: 135) addresses the re-conceptualisation of language as “an integrated, crosslingual, dynamic and multimodal semiotic system” in the field, and invites teachers, teacher educators and researchers to engage in joint reflection with learners, colleagues and other participants to explore, unveil and revise the prevailing assumptions on language and language learning to allow space for the emergence of multilingual pedagogies. Driven by this motive, the present paper aims to question how linguistic landscape research as a pedagogical tool might offer insight to the ways prospective language teachers experience, conceptualize and develop an awareness of urban multilingualism. The paper reports the findings attained from the qualitative content analysis of a linguistic landscape research conducted by 72 senior pre-service English language teachers as part of their explorative fieldwork in an Applied Linguistics course in the fall term of 2017-2018 academic year at the ELT Department of a state university in İstanbul, Turkey. The qualitative data comprises the written reports of the participants who observed and documented the signs which represent different languages in the public spaces of İstanbul. The participants' written reflective work, based on their research, involves three components: 1. autobiographic information on their linguistic repertoire 2. multimodal analysis and discussion of the salient aspects of the data they collected 3. reflection on the pedagogical implications of urban multilingualism. As an additional data collection tool, focus group interviews are utilized to gain further insight to the student teachers' views on the multilingual ecology of Istanbul and implications for language education. While focusing on Linguistic Landscape Research (e.g. Bolton 2012; King and Carson, eds. 2016; Shohamy 2006), the study is driven by two complementary views; first, linguistic ethnography, as Alastair, Morgan and Kubota discuss, should go beyond “demolinguistic mapping of variety” (Blommaert 2013: ix), to involve a deeper understanding of how signs gain meaning in relation to the socio-cultural and spatial contexts they are placed in, and secondly, in alignment with the view that “public space is not neutral but a negotiated and contested arena” (Gorter 2013: 197) linguistic landscape research especially in urban multilingual settings needs to give insight to the way inhabitants of these public spaces respond to these signs. Following this thread, the study investigates how prospective English

language teachers, as social agents, utilize multimodal literacy skills, treasure their lived experiences of languages to construct their own understandings of urban multilingualism, and bring forth fresh perspectives on plurilingual educational practices.

Key Words: linguistic landscape research, urban multilingualism, pre-service language teacher education, multimodal literacy skills, language awareness

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QUESTION 1:

How can we work with and help to reconceptualise teachers' and principals beliefs and perceptions regarding meaningful plurilingual practices?