

The Linguistic Landscape in Rural Areas: The Basque Country as a Case Study

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This study examines the linguistic landscape (LL) (Landry & Bourhis, 1997) of a small town in the north of the Basque Country (Ondarroa, Bizkaia) with the aim to illustrate the complex relation between language, identity, politics and the power relations that are created in these contexts. The multilingual LL has been studied both in cities (e.g., Aiestaran, Cenoz & Gorter, 2010) and rural areas (e.g., Daveluy & Ferguson, 2009; Kotze & Du Plessis, 2010), but not many studies have analyzed the presence of the involved languages in an area where actually the language typically considered as the minority language is the most spoken language of a town. Therefore, this research aims to contribute to this gap by analyzing the LL of Ondarroa (Bizkaia): a town of almost 8.590 inhabitants where in 2016, around the 80% was Basque speaker, while in the rest of Bizkaia (the province where the aforementioned municipality belongs to) the percentage of Basque speakers was of 27,6% (Eustat, 2016).

The present investigation discovers the divergent presence of each language in this LL to analyze whether it is a predominantly monolingual or multilingual LL and the way in which multilingualism is displayed by intertwining quantitative and qualitative methods. Photos of each sign in the principal shopping street (similar to e.g., Aiestaran et al., 2010; Ben Rafael, Shohamy, Amara & Trumper-Hetch, 2006) were taken in 2019 and each sign is considered as a single unit of analysis (63 pictures from 15 shops) to get a more robust understanding of the LL. In addition, other qualitative perspectives are taken into consideration for the analysis: top-down or bottom-up signs (Ben Rafael et al., 2006) and the way in which each language is presented in the signs (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009). The results show that contrary to the situation of Basque in other LL (e.g., in Donostia by Cenoz & Gorter, 2006), this is the language with the biggest presence in the LL of the analyzed area; although this particular LL could be considered as highly, but not predominantly, bilingual due to the presence of bilingual signs but not due to Spanish monolingual signs.

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