

Visual Multilingualism in China's International Cities: A Language Policy Perspective

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The research on linguistic landscape (LL), namely the written language displayed in public space, has become a thriving strand of inquiry in sociolinguistics to scrutinize and interpret societal multilingualism in urban contexts. In this paper, language policy issues concerning visual multilingualism in the top-down LL of international cities in China are investigated to reveal the official language ideologies under the influence of globalization. Language ideology constitutes the deeply held attitudes and assumptions about what has been believed to be an appropriate language choice or practice in a community or a context of communication (Spolsky, 2009). As Krzyżanowski and Wodak (2011:168) state, language policies as the sum of decisions about and practices related to language are “always inherent representations of different language ideologies”. In this study, three first-tier and second-tier cities in Eastern China (Shanghai, Hangzhou and Ningbo) were chosen as research sites for LL analysis. Located in the Yangtze River Delta area, one of the most open and economically affluent urban agglomeration in China, these cities are representatives of the modern metropolises in this region. With a view to build up a putative international language environment, the city authorities have implemented policies to emplace Chinese-English bilingual signage in public space. In the sphere of administrative jurisdiction (Lo Bianco, 2010), innumerable language standards, decrees, guidelines or notices are mandated and language correction campaigns are launched to regulate and standardize the language (particularly English) uses in the LL. Code frequency analysis of the public signs collected in the central district of each city shows that the intensity of bilingual signs is high: over 40% of the public signs display Chinese and English, with Chinese as preferred code and English as secondary code. The findings suggest that LL has been mediated for image construction and visual multilingualism has become the *de facto* policy in international cities. The language ideologies that emerge in the visual multilingualism policies and practices include, among many others, the internationalization as Englishization ideology, standard language policy, and linguistic purism ideology. It is argued that valorising English lettering in the LL of international cities brings to light the state's keen anticipation for international recognition and integration in the official ideologies, yet the symbolic efforts merely create a marketing-driven “fake multilingualism” (Kelly-Holmes, 2005), which may have far-reaching implications for the language ecologies of the country.

References

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