

# The Discourse Communication Function of Urban Linguistic Landscape

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## ABSTRACT

Linguistic landscape is a linguistic symbol for disseminating information in public spaces and an important aspect of language services. This article mainly discusses the discourse communication characteristics and functions of the urban language landscape from the three dimensions of its practical value, visual effects and symbol communication characteristics. The discourse dissemination of language landscape is a multi-party interactive discourse dissemination process, which has information function, symbol function, economic function, cultural function and beautification function. At the same time, various functions cooperate with each other to jointly construct the meaning of the fortified discourse, and each code has different functions highlighted by the difference in pragmatic value.

**Keywords:** *linguistic landscape, discourse communication function, language service*

## I. INTRODUCTION

With the continuous deepening of Chinese internationalization, increasing modernization and the development of foreign language education, the language landscape as an important manifestation of language policies has also changed accordingly. For example, the design styles of language signs tend to be diverse and unique, the use of language codes is diversified, and people's awareness of language service has also increased significantly. This article mainly discusses the discourse communication function of urban language landscape through the presentation form of language signs and multi-modal performance characteristics.

## II. LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AND ITS DISCOURSE COMMUNICATION CHARACTERISTICS

### A. Linguistic landscape

"Linguistic landscape" mainly focuses on the problem of language presentation in public spaces. It can not only examine the language practice of a region in the real environment, such as language selection, language use characteristics and rules, but also explore the language policy, language power, language vitality, language ecology and

other issues behind the multilingual phenomenon. In 1997, Canadian scholar Landry & Bourhis first defined this concept: the linguistic landscape of a specific area, region or city group composed of public signage such as road signs, billboards, street names, place names, shop signs and government buildings, and proposed its information function and symbolic function. [1] The research scope of linguistic landscape includes not only language signs in the general sense, that is, official and semi-official public signs, private and shop language signs, but also mobile and non-fixed leaflets, tickets, advertising pages, brochures,[2] posters, banners, slogans, electronic display screens, etc., which have been extended from public spaces to indoor places and virtual spaces. The core background "public space" refers to any space in the community or society that is not private property, such as streets, parks or public institutions [3]. It can be said that the multi-modality of the linguistic landscape is an important symbol of modern cities, including fixed and mobile, as well as official and private language signs; its focus is becoming more and more diversified, from the ontology research of the language code presentation characteristics of the signs and the language code translation to the multilingual power status, language policy and language practice, national language vitality, spatial dimensions, language teaching, etc.; its research methods are embodied in corpus collection, classification, processing and analysis.

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### *B. Discourse communication characteristics of linguistic landscape*

Language communication is the behavior or activity that people use language symbols to convey meaning to objects in different time and space to realize information sharing, meaning expression and understanding. [4] Language is an important tool used by people to communicate ideas, express feelings, and convey various information, and linguistic landscape is the written expression of language in public spaces. Linguistic landscape is the language symbol of information dissemination in public space, and it is a dynamic discourse process of multi-party interaction. Its dissemination is a coding process that the designer abides by certain social conventions, transforms the communication intention and meaning into language symbols, transmits the information to the audience through relatively fixed media, and then the audience decodes the language symbols or multimodal combination forms in the signs.

Generally speaking, the construction of spatial discourse of linguistic landscape includes at least five elements: context, designer, media, convention and audience. The meaning it expresses is multifaceted, that is, the surface meaning and deep meaning embodied by signs. When designing a sign, the designer should abide by the language policy, consider the composition of the picture, text, color and other elements of the sign itself, and combine the sign with people, the ecological environment and cultural mode, reflecting the multiple functions of the linguistic landscape. In addition, multimodal discourse is a phenomenon of "communication through language, image, sound, action and other means and symbolic resources using auditory, visual, tactile and other senses." [5] The linguistic landscape is an important representation that highlights the multi-modal discourse in public spaces, and is the main tool for designers and readers to communicate in the spatial network. Its multimodal features are mainly manifested in the text, color, graphics/pictures, sign shape and dynamic image, sound and other communication symbols; readers often understand the meaning conveyed by the expressor through language and non-language symbols.

### **III. DISCOURSE COMMUNICATION FUNCTION OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE**

From the perspective of practical value, visual effect and symbol communication characteristics of linguistic landscape, the functions of linguistic landscape include not only information function and symbol function, but also economic function, cultural function and beautification function. Among them, information function is the most basic and dominant function of linguistic landscape,

while the latter is recessive function. They are not only the goal pursued by the designer in the process of preset language selection and multimodal combination, but also the embodiment of the function and value of the sign.

#### *A. Information function*

The information function of linguistic landscape means that linguistic landscape has the function of transmitting information. From a macro perspective, the linguistic landscape can present two aspects of information. One is that language signs can reflect the status of language usage in a region. Generally speaking, the national common language plays an important role in the urban linguistic landscape, and there are also Chinese Pinyin, foreign language and other codes; the national lingua franca and biliteracy in minority scripts are the main language code forms for dissemination of linguistic landscape in ethnic minority communities. The second is to reflect the status of cultural development, such as the common name of Chinese cultural signs (garden, shop, pavilion, workshop, etc.), language code fonts (normal script, official script, running script, etc.), signs still exist, and wooden signs and patterns with national cultural characteristics appear widely in signs; the influence of international culture is becoming more and more significant. English language codes are often used in signs such as scenic spots, banks, hotels, printed matter, publicity, and shops, and the names of signs are highlighted in language selection. Third, it reflects the situation of commercial development. For example, some shop designers have strong brand awareness, pay more attention to logo design, and use special English trademarks, that is, the English translation of Chinese clothing brands or trademarks (GIRDEAR, CHIU SHUI, etc.).

From the micro level of the information function embodied in the sign itself, the designer of the language sign realizes the economic value of the language sign in the limited space through the communication of the code symbols. Generally speaking, the information function of each language code is different. The national common language is the main language code for the audience to obtain the sign information. Other language codes mainly play a complementary role in the information in the sign. Some are the overall translation of the national common language, some are partial translation, and some are supplementary explanation. At the same time, due to differences in individual audience factors, the information function of each language code will also change. For monolingual audiences, the national common language is still the most important language code, and the information function of other language codes is weakened; for foreign tourists visiting

here, English is an important language code for obtaining information, while the information functions of other language codes are relatively weak.

#### *B. Symbolic function*

The symbolic function of linguistic landscape means that the explicit information of the linguistic landscape has the function of implicit regional culture, language power and other status. First of all, the linguistic landscape is an important cultural symbol. From the perspective of the number of language code choices for signs, it can generally present obvious regional cultural characteristics. For example, the linguistic landscape of the public space in the minority inhabited areas mainly uses the national common characters and the dual characters of the minority characters. From the visual point of view, it clearly symbolizes the regional characteristics of a certain minority culture. Secondly, compared with other codes, most codes on public signs have stronger language vitality and dominant position, showing higher value and status. In addition, from the perspective of the pragmatic effects of the linguistic landscape, audiences who read language signs have different understandings of the information conveyed by the signs due to different factors such as age, ethnicity, education, and identity. For example, in the linguistic landscape where bilanguage is the main language code presentation form, for audiences who are not familiar with minority languages, they generally obtain effective information through the national common language, while relatively little attention is paid to the meaning of other language codes; At this time, the symbolic function of these codes, which play an important auxiliary function, is greater than its informational function.

#### *C. Economic function*

The economic function of linguistic landscape means that language signs are regarded as "trademarks" and act on social and economic activities, and they can produce certain economic benefits after exerting their economic effects. Language is closely related to economy. Languages, regardless of size or generality, can serve the economic interests of users. [6] It can be said that language has economic attributes, and when it acts on economic activities, it will show economic functions. In addition to the attributes of language resources, the code symbols in the linguistic landscape are also an economic resource. After being combined with patterns, colors and other multi-modalities, the designer acts on economic activities to form a unique "trademark", directly or indirectly playing a certain economic function. There are various types of signs in the linguistic landscape. In addition to official signs for

public services and some corporate signs, signs such as shops, clothing, hotels, etc. in general private signs participate in economic activities, and their economic resource attributes are more obvious than other signs. American economist Ja-cob Marschak revealed that language has economic characteristics such as value, utility, cost, and benefit. [7] Language signs also have these characteristics. For example, the economic cost of language signs includes the input of manpower, time, technology, property and other factors. Designers need to spend time and money on sign design, language editing, material selection and so on. The economic utility of language signage refers to how to use multi-modal combination to achieve the expected economic benefits and the degree of satisfaction it feels, so that the ideographic function and communication method of the symbol have an impact on the audience's ideology and guide them to make corresponding economic contribution behavior, which produces economic benefits. Whether it is a commercial district in a city or on both sides of a street in a town, as long as it is a shop or farmhouse with characteristics of economic activity, its signs can also participate in all aspects of economic activities while transmitting information, and can generate hidden economic value. From the point of view of the characteristics of signs alone, generally uniquely designed, beautiful and harmonious signs are more attractive, and the economic effects of other host and guest factors such as the quality and service of the products operated by shops cannot be ignored.

#### *D. Cultural function*

The cultural function of linguistic landscape means that language signs have the function of spreading social culture. Language is an important carrier and manifestation of culture, and linguistic landscape is one of the most intuitive ways to present culture. Due to the differences in national culture and geographical environment, the culture reflected in the public space of each region will be different. The first is to reflect the national culture from the name of the sign and the frequency of use of the code. In addition to the national common language and the use of Tibetan, which can clearly reflect Chinese traditional culture, signs are often named after the Han cultural characteristics "Pavilion, Hang, Guan, Shop" and other common names; signs named after the cultural characteristics of ethnic minorities are also very common, such as "Gengpan Tailor Shop, Phuntsok Yangdan Hotel" signs reflect the Tibetan name culture. The second is to reflect the regional culture from the extensive use of the material, naming and code of the sign. For example, "Lingcheng Optical Shop, Hezhou Restaurant" can reflect a certain regional culture, "Lingcheng" is another name for cooperation city, which means a place where

antelopes appear; "Hezhou" is another name for Linxia City, which is adjacent to Gannan Tibetan Autonomous Prefecture. It can be said that language signs can not only convey information, but also reflect the unique local social culture. The third is to reflect foreign culture from foreign language codes, naming of signs and the use of chain brand patterns. With the development of internationalization, in the language landscape, such as bank and power grid signs, scenic spots signs, unit publicity signs and signs, shop signs, English codes are commonly used.

#### *E. Beautification function*

The beautification function of linguistic landscape refers to the function of linguistic landscape that can beautify public space. Aesthetics is the basic element of the realization of this function, that is, the font size, color, placement, etc. of each language code are required to be harmonious and beautiful. It is a functional element with a subjective color, [8] is an effective means to attract audiences and has a hidden economic function. Linguistic landscape can not only realize its practical function, but also beautify the space, present the city image and meet the growing aesthetic needs of the audience. The creator usually considers the factors such as code selection, language editing and multimodal effective combination of pattern, color, code layout, etc. Among language signs, the signs of official and business units are generally simple and generous, with stable and single colors, and a fixed order of language codes; private shops pay more attention to sign design, highlight its uniqueness, and pursue the economic value generated by signs, etc. Therefore, these signs contain rich content, bright colors, different font sizes, and more diverse presentation forms. Aesthetic needs are the psychological needs that give people a sense of beauty or comfort. However, people's aesthetic needs are also different due to factors such as regions, ethnicities, cultural literacy, and personality characteristics. Therefore, there is no definite standard for "beauty" or "aesthetics", but the linguistic landscape still needs to consider the harmonious collocation of multimodality to produce a good visual effect or leave a good impression on the audience, and give people a pleasing sensory joy.

#### **IV. CONCLUSION**

Paying attention to the features of discourse construction and communication function of linguistic landscape in public space is an important aspect of language policy implementation, language management and language ecology. It can truly reflect the linguistic function, linguistic vitality, linguistic power of different languages and their linguistic competition, language harmony and other

ecological relations. In the process of dissemination in public space, multiple language codes such as national common script and minority languages play important information, symbolic, economic, cultural and beautifying functions. In addition, various functions cooperate with each other to jointly construct the meaning of the fortified discourse, and each code has different functions highlighted by the difference in pragmatic value. Studying the discourse communication function of the linguistic landscape is conducive to in-depth exploration of the interactive relationship among the five elements of public space discourse construction, the context, the designer, the medium, the protocol, and the audience. It is of great value for promoting national language planning and regional language services.

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