

Linguistic Landscape as a Tool for Promoting Sales: A Study of Three Selected Markets in Ibadan, South West Nigeria

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Received 25 August 2016; accepted 10 November 2016
Published online 26 December 2016

Abstract

This work discusses the roles of Linguistic Landscape in promoting sales. This sociolinguistic phenomenon has been deployed knowingly or unknowingly as a marketing strategy. Marketers most especially use this tool to attract customers to buy their products. The thrust of this work is to examine how linguistic landscape is used to promote sales of goods and services. Data for this work were collected from sign posts and the billboards in the three selected markets within Ibadan metropolis (Bodija, Alesinloye and Dugbe). Fifty sign posts and fifty billboards were used for the data. People were also interviewed to know their reaction to this marketing strategy. The work reveals that people react positively to this marketing strategy because it attracts people's attention to the products. However, not all those that were interviewed reacted positively to it. Some claimed that it is often ambiguous and makes it difficult for them to understand. This work also reveals that the use of linguistic landscape as a marketing strategy belongs to bottom-up classification. We also discovered that in an attempt to use this phenomenon as a marketing strategy, both the official and the dominant languages in the studied areas were used.

Key words: Linguistic landscape; Sales promotion; Advertising; Market

Ayantayo, J. S. (2016). Linguistic Landscape as a Tool for Promoting Sales: A Study of Three Selected Markets in Ibadan, South West Nigeria. *Studies in Literature and Language*, 13(6), 27-32. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/sll/article/view/6824>
DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/6824>

INTRODUCTION

The use of language can take two different forms, the written and the oral form. Both forms can be used to inform, direct, entertain and so on. The oral form is said to be temporal while the written form is permanent. This feature gives the written form some advantages in the public domain. Language is used in the public domain via the inscription on the wall, sign posts, billboards and so on. This is technically known as Linguistic Landscape (LL). This sociolinguistic phenomenon is being used in the society for several purposes, among which are; directing, informing, warning and advertising. Following (Backhaus, 2007, p.5), public signs also appear in commercial contexts in the form of marketing and advertisement, where their function is to draw attention to a business or product. In this work therefore, we want to examine how this phenomenon is being manipulated to advertise products and services.

It is imperative to note that the role of stylistic cannot be jettisoned in this kind of discussion. Stylistic has to do with style of writing. In stylistic a phenomenon called foregrounding is studied where certain elements are foregrounded to make them look attractive. Foregrounding simply means to make certain elements in a text prominent so as to attract attention. Any aspect of a text that is foregrounded is made conspicuous to attract the reader's attention. This is employed in Linguistic Landscape to advertise. However, our concern in this work is not directed at stylistics analysis.

Billboards and signposts give information such as the direction and distance to a nearby town, typically found along the roads. Inscriptions and pictures are mostly drawn on them to disseminate information. Billboard advertisement is the use of signs along roadways to advertise a wide range of products and services. In general, the signs used in these roadside advertisement campaigns must be of a certain size in order to be truly referred to as a billboard and must be large enough for a

driver or passenger in a vehicle to be able to clearly read the lettering while navigating the vehicle along the road. Billboards are usually larger and lucrative than signposts.

1. PREVIOUS WORKS ON LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

According to Landry and Bourhis (1997) cited by Akindele (2011), linguistic landscape is the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region. Specifically, the notion refers to:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, placenames, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combine to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration. (p.25)

Linguistic Landscape (LL) includes all the inscriptions used in the public domain together with the pictures to disseminate information.

Gorter (2006, p.2) opines that linguistic landscape research is concerned with “the use of language in its written form in the public sphere”. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006, p.14) also sees linguistic landscape as referring to “any sign announcement located outside or inside a public institution or a private business in a given geographical location”.

Rey (2004, p.38) emphasized that “the study of linguistic landscape enables conclusions to be drawn regarding, among other factors, the social layering of the community, the relative status of the various societal segments, and the dominant cultural ideals”. Ben-Rafael et al. (2006) underscored that “LL analysis allows us to point out patterns representing different ways in which people, groups, associations, institutions and government agencies cope with the game of symbols within a complex reality” (p.27).

Tulp (1978) cited in Akindele (2011) examines the languages of commercial billboards in Brussels. The purpose was to demonstrate how language usage patterns on these signs have been contributing to the city’s Frenchification. He assumed that the visibility of a language in a public space is vital for its perceived ethnolinguistic vitality. Tulp (1978) focuses on three large billboards in and around Brussels. The areas selected included major tram, metro, and bus routes. The findings show that French dominates the linguistic landscape.

Akindele (2011) focuses on Linguistic Landscapes as Public Communication. The aim of his study was to show that LL can provide valuable insight into the linguistic situation of Gaborone Botswana, including common patterns of language use, official language policies, prevalent language attitudes, and the long-term consequences of language contact, among others. The data for his research were collected from specific public domains such as street signs, advertising signs, building names, warning notices and prohibitions, billboards, shop

signs, informative signs (directions, hours of opening), etc. in Gaborone. His study reveals that the linguistic landscape of Gaborone has shown that the city is moving towards multilingualism in English, Setswana and Chinese as a result of economic globalisation. The study shows that English dominates the landscape as it is in the case of other Anglo African countries today. Akindele (2011) concludes that this does not suggest that the nation speaks English more than the local language, Setswana. The study also suggests the influx of Chinese language and culture.

The focus of the present work is on how this phenomenon (Linguistic Landscape) is being used to promote sales of products and services which is entirely different from the previous works and therefore aim to bridge an academic gap of how LL is used to promote sales.

2. CLASSIFICATION OF LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE

According to Akindele (2011), Ben-Raphael et al. (2006), Shohamy, Ben-Rafael, and Bami (2010) identified between two classification of Linguistic Landscape (LL). The top-down and bottom-up signage; top-down LL items include those issued by national and public bureaucracies and include public sites, public announcements and street names. For example; NO Parking, No Loitering, Keep Moving etc.. Bottom-up items on the other hand include those issued by individuals’ social actor such as shop owners and companies, including names of shops, business, signs and personal announcements. The present work falls under this category because they are being used by individual to aid sales of their products and services.

Linguistic landscape can be used to determine the linguistic situation of a speech community. This includes the common pattern of language usage, official language, language policy and prevalent language. This work reveals the dominant power of English language in the studied areas. English dominates the Linguistic Landscape situation of the studied area. This indicates that English language is a language that almost everybody speaks or struggle to speak because of its prestigious role in Nigeria society. Yoruba language followed English. This is not surprising since Ibadan is a Yoruba speaking language. The percentage of Yoruba on the LL is relatively low compare to English. These are the two languages found on the LL of the studied areas.

3. ON THE NOTION OF SALES PROMOTION

By promoting sales, we mean what the sellers/ marketers do to create awareness about his/her products/services

which will eventually make people to patronize him/her. This is technically known as advertisement. According to Dunn (1995), advertising and promotion refer to activities undertaken to increase sales or enhance the image of a product or business. Barroso and Llobet (2011) opine that advertising is a primary tool for firms to affect the performance of their products, especially in markets for consumer goods such as cars, computers, cell phones, and digital cameras. Such markets are characterized by the continuous turnover of multiple relatively close substitute products. Therefore, advertising becomes crucial in making consumers aware of the existence and characteristics of new products.

In this work, our focus shall be on how LL is used to advertise products and services. Advertising is the paid presentation of goods or services through the media for the purpose of encouraging consumer patronage. The media refers to include television, radio, magazines, newspapers, billboards, sign posts, websites etc.. Here, our concern is on the billboards and signposts. **The Purpose of Advertising includes; attracting** attention, to inform customers and to increase sales. As we shall soon show, all these are what linguistic landscape is used to carry out.

Following (Olateju, 2006, p.102 cited in Akinbode, 2012), Advertisements provide people with information on the availability of particular products, the place of purchase, the nature of the products, etc.. The aims of advertising goods include the following; to make business and product name familiar, this is mostly done to new products; to create good will and build a favourable impression for products in the general public. This is carried out where there is competition. To prompt potential customers to purchase or use goods and services; to create brand/service image; to display the available products/services to the general public; to show the quality of the goods and services. All these shall be analysed using data from LL of three selected markets in Ibadan.

Table 1
The Frequency of the Role of LL in Promoting Sales

S/N	Role of LL in promoting sales	No of occurrence
1	Those that make name of product/services familiar	8
2	Those that prompt potential customers to purchase	15
3	Those that are used to catch attention of people	16
4	Those that are used to create awareness of brand/service image	9
5	Those that are used to display available products	38
6	Those that are used to showcase the qualities of products/services	14
7	Total	100

6. DISCUSSION

This will be presented in the following table to make our analysis more explicit.

4. METHODOLOGY

The data for this study was drawn from signposts and billboards in three selected markets (Bodija, Dugbe and Alesinloye markets) within Ibadan metropolis. Data was drawn from fifty signposts and fifty billboards for this research. They were collected at different locations within the markets. The choice of those markets is premised on their popularity and status in the state.

Basically, the data were collected through participant-observation method. This allows the researcher to document and take pictures of most of the signposts and the billboards for proper elucidation. The words used were written down while the pictures were taken alongside. Unscheduled oral interview was also conducted with most of the authors of LL to know the motive behind the use of certain words. Passers-by were also interviewed to know their opinion on the use of certain words together with the pictures and symbols as the case may be. This research work is a qualitative survey. Participant observation, interview and purposive sampling technique were deployed to elicit data.

5. DATA PRESENTATION AND ANALYSIS

In the data gathered, we identified six (6) roles of Linguistic Landscape in promoting sales. They are; making name of product/services familiar, prompt potential customers to purchase, catch the attention of people, creating awareness of brand/service image, display available products, showcase the qualities of products/services. Out of 100 data, those that make name of product/services familiar has 8 representation, those that prompt potential customers to purchase has 15 data, those that are used to catch attention of people has 16 data, those that are used to create awareness of brand/service image has 9, those that are used to display available products are 38 and those that are used to showcase the qualities of products/services has 14. This can be represented in the table below.

Table 2
Roles of LL and the Inscription Written on Them

S/N	Roles	Inscriptions
1	Those that are used to make the brand name of the product familiar	Jonac machants limited Sales of laptop: desktops, ipads, galaxy, accessories, office equipment, photographic materials; Chrimac games Dealer in all Electronic Games such AS: P S P, PS, MP3/4/5, GAME BOY, PS. Memory Card, IPOD, DVD, COMBY ETC; Emmacy Computronic Engineering Specialist in Plasma, LCD, LED, Computer & LCD Monitor and also Sales & Repair; HK LINKS & INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY Now close to you, fast & reliable: We are registered & trusted for phones unlocking & flash, blackberry, Nokia, china, HTC, LG etc.
2	Those that are used to prompt the potential customers to purchase goods and patronize services	Share your apple story ...and be a star I love this drink; Honey Foods: African and Continental Dishes Somatech Computers Limited; NairaBET: The home of Sports betting; Introducing Black Larger Dark Flavour: A Taste apart (trophy) Quality You Can Trust... for baker's progress separation & large FORMAT Print; Jumag... think events, think jumag Events decoration, events planning, beads cakes etc. Baby Edibles: all at affordable price Lifeline Preparatory School.
3	Those that are used to catching the attention of prospective customers	Funktional Clothing: NUMRAJ International: your one stop shop & the right place for all quality assorted Islamic materials (WHOLESALES & RETAILS); A Lot can happen over a Glass of Veleta ...Sheer delight, Stepping out exclusive Shoes, bags, shirts, suits, ties, camisoles... offer you can't beat!; Welcome To Trans Amusement Park Wonderful Wonderland; THY GRACE: 15% DISCOUNT PAYLESS OUTFIT: Wholesale & retail: shoes, bags, ladies, & gents outfits.
4	Those that are used to create the brand image	MALTA GUINNESS: Goodness, Energy, Vitality; YODAVIC TRAVELS & TOURS LTD: Ticket & online reservation, visa processing, students, visiting business & tourist visa; choose the network with quality options: Etisalat now you're talking; AMENESS GROUP CO. A CONGLOMERATE OF: AMENESS AGRO LTD, AMEN SEEDS LTD ABRAHAM INVESTMENT, AMENS AGRIBIZ ENT, MIRACLE FARMS LTD AGROCHEMICALS, GRIC EQUIPMENT, EXOTIC SEEDS, VET-DRUGS, RESEARCH MATERIALS, SCIENTIFIC SUPPLIERS, PEST CONTROL FUMIGATION/CONSULTANCY SERVICES; CALYPSO: the spirit of fun; VIJU: the healthy family's choice; Golden penny Noodles (a promise of quality) ...the taste of adventure.
5	Used to know the available products and services in stock	SHEPHERD ANIMAL HEALTH TECHNOLOGIST: Animal Clinic ANIMAL HEALTH, VACCINATION, FARM INPUT, CONSULTANCY SERVICES; VERTEX MEDIAL LTD: Occupational Health & Safety Services, Publishing; RESTAURANT & CANTEEN We Serve : AFRICAN DISHES, CONTINENTAL DISHES AND VARIETY OF SNACKS: EAT AND TAKE AWAY; JUST ACCESSORIES (Yeye oge) Beading & wire materials, jewelries, mixing of fabrics (dry lace, polished cotton, chiffon) TAILORING MATERIALS, BRIDAL ACCESSORIES etc.; LOFTZO signatures : beads, bouquets, bridal accessories, tools and materials; IKE OLUWA provision stores (whole sale & retail): Provisions, food items, pure vegetable oil, drinks, varieties; XEPTION BOUTIQUE: LADIES WEAR; SHOES, MATERNITY WEARS, BAGS, MEN'S WEAR, CHILDREN WEARS; ABIMCO INT'L RESOURCES LTD: Hard ware & software sales of computers & accessories, installation, system networking etc.
6	Those that are used to present the qualities and values of a particular product to the public	Comrade Andy We light up your world Beddings, interiors, lightening, curtains; Have you been looking for reliable place to book for your occasional cakes, catering accessories & training DELUXE CAKE SHOP IS the right place to be; STEEL SOLUTIONS & COMPANY (NIG LIMITED) ... the metal workers; SIGMA PENSIONS Together Forever; BUY GOTV AND ALL Matches of Confederations Cup LIVE; ZARTECH ... your natural choice; ATS OPTICAL COMPANY: we care for your sight; ONGA: mama's helping hand great meals guaranteed; LONY'S... your doorstep short shop Men/Women designers sleeve shirts; PEARLS BEAUTYcommitted to making you look your best!; MAA TUNS: Wine & Spirits ...where wine unites people; CITADEL ORACLE CONCEPT LTD: Partnership that works...

Data under **those that are used to make the brand name of the product familiar** are used to make the potential customers realize the availability of such brand and create awareness about the available brand. On those billboards and signposts brand names are listed and the pictures of such brand are drawn alongside. This affords the customer to see and admire such products. This strategy can lead the potential customer into purchase of such product. These do not only itemize what is in stock

but also the brand names are itemized. This will enable customers to know the brand names of the product they want to buy. According to the author of the LL, it affords the people that are passing through that areas to see what they are selling that cannot be displayed outside. The LL is useful here because it enables the prospective customers to see the brands name and be familiar with them since they are written boldly with pictures where they could be seen.

LL also assists in **prompting the potential customers to purchase goods and patronize services** through the use of words and drawing of the products. This strategy makes the products appealing to the potential buyers. It prompts even those that may not ordinarily want to buy to eventually patronize them. With the choice of the words and design of the pictures, customers may be moved to buy such product. The choice of words and the permanency of the words on the billboards and signposts make this possible. According to the author of the LL and some of the passers-by interviewed, since the essence of the inscriptions is not only to ensure that people see the products but also to ensure that they patronize the product, they should ensure they use words and pictures that will capture the attentions of their prospective customers. These inscriptions are used for the purpose of moving their sales forward. This is achieved through this sociolinguistic phenomenon. Most of the inscriptions are foregrounded to attract customers

Consumers may not want to buy some goods but through the use of captivating words, consumers may be convinced to buy such products. Linguistic landscape has been so useful in this aspect to **catch the attention of prospective customers**. The use of words and the pictures are helpful to catch the attention of the passers-by into buying a particular product. This has been made possible through the use of words and the artistic work on the signposts and the billboards used in advertising goods. Those words are pregnant in meaning together with the pictures and therefore useful to catch the attention of the people.

New and existing products always need to be presented to the public in order to make people buy the product. This is an awareness strategy by the producers. This can be done by **creating the brand image** of that particular product through drawing of the brand with inscriptions. This may not be fascinating using other media like radio and television. Although advert cannot turn bad products into good but it can create a good impressions about goods and change the behaviours of prospective customers about the products. This can be achieved through the use of LL.

In the examples, words are accompanied with pictures to show the real product image. Words used are chosen to create a better image for the product. This is used to distinguish these products from other competing products in the society.

One of the advantages of advert on the LL is the opportunity to **know the available products and services** in stock. The producer or marketer used this to invite the customers to the shop. This affords the customers the opportunity to know which outlet to go and which is not at a particular time. The available products and services are itemized on the Signposts and Billboards for people to see. Although not all the

available products may be itemized on the LL because of the limited space, however, the available space is usually utilized to display the available products. This gives the producer or sellers the opportunity to really present the available product and catch the attention and interest of the potential buyers.

With the products itemized, the public will be able to see and make a choice. As explained by one of the respondents (author of the LL), that they have to do it, so that the people will know what they are selling; so far they can read the message on the inscription). Another customer said “I was able to know which shop I will enter when I saw what is on their signpost”.

One of the major aims of advertisement is to be able to present the **qualities and values of a particular product** to the public in order to convince them and change their behaviour towards such product. It also makes it possible for the consumers to know the qualities in comparison to other existing products. LL also helps in carrying out this aim. Qualities and values of products are expressed on the signposts and billboards for people to see and possibly patronize the product/service.

The powerful tools used here are language with the pictures. Some customers claimed that most of the inscriptions are deceptive. They claim that most of the things they drew and wrote on their signposts are not the real things in their shop. The users however claim that it is a marketing strategy and that most of the time what is in their stock are better than what is on the signposts.

7. UNIQUE ADVANTAGES OF LL IN PROMOTING SALES

7.1 Permanency

LL belongs to the written form of language. This gives it the permanency advantage. The inscriptions remain for long and this afford almost everybody in the community and even beyond to see what is available. Unlike the oral media which will last for short seconds, the advert on the LL stays for long. One of the respondent said “I saw it yesterday, even before yesterday, today and I will still see it tomorrow that is why I know they still exist. It is always there and it has nowhere to go”. This makes the product indelible in the mind of the people.

7.2 Cheap

Compare to other means of advert like radio and television, the LL is relatively cheap. One inscription can serve for a period of five or more years without new payment like the electronic media. “For me it is cheaper than all the so called television and radio and people will see it always compare to radio that if you are not listening at that time that is the end” said by one of the shop owner.

7.3 Gives Direction

The inscriptions mostly point to the direction of the shops or factory where the product or service is being produced. This therefore gives the potential customer the direction to the place he/she can get the product without stress. Both customers and the shop owners agree with this point. They claim that it shows them the direction to where the product is being sold or produced.

7.4 Economy of Words

In the use of linguistic landscape to advertise products/services, there is limited space on billboards and signposts the users must be economical in the use of words and at the same time pass necessary message. This is achieved using LL. The aim of the advertisement must be achieved with the small space therefore their user must choose meaningful words.

7.5 Style

The style used in writing also attracts people. The inscriptions are foregrounded to attract people. The colours, use of capital letters, lettering and other stylistic strategies help the users to achieve their advertising motives.

8. DISADVANTAGES

Just like a coin that has two sides, as this phenomenon has advantages, it also has disadvantages too. It is however suffice to say that the advantages out weight the disadvantages.

8.1 Ambiguity

Some of the respondents claimed that most of the inscriptions are too short for people to understand what they mean. Some may have more than one interpretation. Only the writer can vividly interpret what he/she meant.

8.2 Low Coverage

Since the signposts and the billboards are immobile, they are limited to those that are living in the area or those that passes through the area. The numbers of the people that will see it is limited compare to other media.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, we have been able to establish that in addition to the linguistic functions that others have found in the past, linguistic landscape also has economic value. The role of stylistic cannot be neglected in the successful use of Linguistic Landscape to advertise products. We identify six (6) roles of LL to sales and five advantages. The work also identified some disadvantages. However, we want to encourage the use of LL in promoting sales as its advantages outweigh the disadvantages. We also recommend that other linguistic aspect of LL be studied by linguists such as style of writings, the grammar of the writings and even the pragmatics aspects.

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