A Study of the Peripheral Linguistic Landscape in Coastal Developed Areas in China: A case study of Ningbo

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Abstract: The previous studies of linguistic landscapes seldom distinguish the atypical or peripheral linguistic landscapes from the typical ones; however, the atypical or peripheral linguistic landscapes (PLL) remain an inadequate investigation. The article examines the classification of PLLs and their characteristics by sorting out various signages in the developed coastal areas of China by a case study of Ningbo, aiming at interpreting the significance of PLLs in a developed economy form in China. The fieldwork shows a widespread distribution of various representations of the PLL, i.e., slogans on the external wall, mobile car body advertising, graffiti, electronic projection, clothing and accessory logos, audio broadcasting, menu, labels and stickers, posters, etc.. It argues that the characteristics of the PLLs exhibit a trend toward diversified representations of language typologies, multilingual signs and artificially constructed symbols, and intricated integration modes of them. It can be assumed that the occurrence of the PLL as a supplement to the typical linguistic landscape in the coastal developed areas is also to meet the needs of international exchanges and the personalized aesthetic judgement of the young, with a prevalence of Chinese characters in the PLL.

1. Introduction

Linguistic landscape remains a heated topic in social linguistics and language policy and planning in recent decades. It refers to the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region[1]. As is known that the object of the linguistic landscape research focuses on the multilingual uses of such typical signs as street signs, billboards, shop signs, street names, place names, building names and public signs [1][2]. However, it is also noticeable that the fieldwork of linguistic landscapes in the developed areas of eastern China demonstrates that, apart from the typical linguistic landscape (henceforth TLL), there are also some non-mainstream or atypical linguistic landscapes in the form of mobile car body advertising, building external wall slogan, graffiti, leaflet, slogan, and so on, characterized by changing or mobile information carriers or communication ways, flows or irregularities in the public spaces with temporality, mobility and non-fixed styles, which is defined as the peripheral linguistic landscape (henceforth PLL)[2].

The previous studies of linguistic landscapes focus mainly on the TLLs, e.g., its theoretical foundations [3], analysis framework [4][5] and case study [6] etc. but seldom examine the PLL [1]. In recent decades, the peripheral signs are receiving increasing attention [2]. In fact, apart from the TLL, some other forms of linguistic landscapes, which were seldom occurred and noticed before, are now widespread in the main business regions of developed cities in eastern China, e.g., electronic shop signs and large billboards. Meanwhile, the electronic shop signs and the large billboard are also widely concerned owning to their universality instead of marginality in the public places. In other cases, for instance, such non-static transgressed and moving signs as advertisements on mobile vehicles, temporary public sign set up by local governments, graffiti, posters, labels and radio assisted by other languages, language codes, and/or pictures, are more and more popular in the public places, including the edge of urban spaces.

The corpus shows that the PLL is often represented by an unlimited form, which can be various signs with entities, voice broadcast without entity, and network interface. No restriction is for the carrier material; thus, it can be on the wall, clothing accessories, body skin, mobile body advertising, etc., with evident characteristics of temporary appearances, otherwise the permanent existence of a brand somewhere in the public places. Thus, the PLLs also constitute an indivisible topic of the linguistic landscape study, which invites being further examined.

The real space is diverse, fluid and constantly changing, thus it is not advisable to limit the space to solid and static language signs in the traditional linguistic landscape[7]. However, some questions about the PLL remain unsolved, e.g., what is the trend toward diversified representations of the language typology, multilingual signages and their integration modes in the PLLs, and how different the PLL is from the TLL in coastal cities in China?

The article classifies the PLL and probes into its characteristics from the perspective of language typology, signages and integration modes by a case study of Ningbo, aiming at interpreting the significance of the existential PLLs.

2. Corpus and Methods

The corpus data was collected by fieldwork in the main business areas in Ningbo, such as Tianyi Square, Wanda Plaza, In-City Shopping Mall, the Southern CBS and Heyi International Shopping Mall, etc., with 368 photos in total.

The raw corpus of the atypical linguistic landscapes were photographed with Huawei m30 mobile phone, and the classification of the PLL were manually labelled in folders.

3. Classifications of the PLL in Coastal Developed Areas in China: A Case Study

The survey shows that in the developed coastal cities in China, the PLL is multifarious in signages and artificially constructed symbols, multimodality and cultural transmission methods, represented by slogans, car body advertising, graffiti, electronic projection, clothing/accessory logos and slogans, audio broadcasting, menu, labels and stickers, and posters etc..

3.1. Slogans on the External Walls of Buildings

As one of the most common PLLs, the slogan on the external wall of buildings mainly focus on the site slogans, appearing on the temporary external wall of buildings under-construction. Most slogans are to remind passers-by of security or to promote positive thoughts, with a short but powerful sentence or in pairs. It can be seen that these slogans are set up for danger warning or official ideological publicity.

3.2. Mobile Vehicle Body Advertising

Mobile vehicle body advertising is commonly seen in urban areas. Bus is a case in point. Thanks to its huge body convenient for advertising, it shuttles to expand the scope of advertising. Various advertisements publicize commodities and civilizations in various colours, irregular signages and fonts to attract public attentions. Unlike other cities, however, the PLL in Ningbo is more inclined to local business and cultural elements.

3.3. Graffiti

Graffiti is the most transgressed PPL, and it scarcely merges on the streets for it may damage the unified urban planning. Most of the graffiti occur in the cultural streets of specific sites, such as the Drum Tower street, where graffiti is allowed to remain as a cultural feature. It also occurs in fashion shops, highlighting the individuality of the store to attract young consumers.

However, this decoration is often painted in a unique way with a variety of language signs and artificial symbols to convey avant-garde ideas. As a mirror of values, personal or social, its form is often determined by shop keeper's aesthetic judgement first and needs of interest foremost. In recent years, due to the standardization of the urban management, graffiti can rarely be seen

outdoors, but still survives on the wall indoors to mark the uniqueness of the store products and attract young customers. In general, it is evident that graffiti is the preferred language of fashion widely accepted by young people.

3.4. Electronic Projection

The electronic projection originally used as an image projection evolves with the development of technology, nowadays it is used as a device to advertise by projecting trademarks or eye-catching store reminders on the ground. It often occurs at night, but in metro stores it also appear in the daytime to advertise. The novel technology is widely used on food culture streets, especially those with underway shops difficult to be spotted by passers-by. It is usually of circular patterns of store directions, security reminder, discount information and store logos.

3.5. Clothing and Accessory Logos and Slogans

The clothing and accessory logos and slogans form part of the PLL. Young people prefer T-shirts with cultural logos and slogans for peculiarity, e.g., "I LOVE MONEY", with a personal value orientation reflected by embroidery, the logo or slogan usually is located on the front, the back, pant legs, canvas bags, and hats, striving to be noticed. Interestingly, the printed t-shirt remains a prominent form of communication in the contemporary linguistic landscape [8], but on which the slogans often emerge grammatical errors or word order chaos to highlight the rebellious personalities. The order of noun phrase is a case in point [3]. The logos and slogans are prone to be personalized with uniqueness, thus human body becomes a part of the PLL by constructing the social meaning as well [8].

3.6. Audio Broadcasting

A very special PLL is audio broadcasting, also known as the linguistic soundscape. Apart from daily communication, speech broadcasting in urban areas, audio broadcasting for commercial use mainly often occurs in shopping buildings and commercial squares, of which the initiators are usually businesses and store managers, with a speaker or a mobile broadcaster standing in line to advertise for product promotion or notification. The scope of it is limited, but there are more temporary or repetitive contents. It is noticeable that the voice broadcasting is not bilingual but monolingual.

3.7. Menu

The case study shows that the menu in hotel is also a highly mobile PLL. To better attract customers, hotels elaborate menu outside in the form of signs, or distribute them to passers-by in the form of leaflets. It is no longer static but carried away as the receivers move. Static vertical menus and movable promotional menus are common in commercial areas. The integration of business and food makes the promotional menu popular among merchants. On the one hand, it expands the scope of promotions; on the other, it enables consumers to browse dishes more intuitively and thus enhances popularity.

3.8. Labels and Stickers

Labels and stickers are usually small-sized, formed by fragments with a small influence scope difficult to be noticed. Therefore, they often appear in public spaces in the form of combination and agglomeration to attract attentions. It is also a part of the subculture of individualized proposition or recognition. Many businesses, especially glass door stores are prone to employing labels and stickers to compose product introductions, business hour notice, and personalized advertisements.

3.9. Posters

Posters are one of the classical representations of PLLs in urban spaces. However, posters with local characteristics are difficult to be spotted in public streets, owning to the illegality of small advertisements. Thus, it often occurs indoors, e.g., movie posters full of nostalgia, and enrich the variety of linguistic landscapes. Besides, there are also some other forms, such as newspapers,

tattoo, sculpture, cross-stitch, wallpaper, decorative paintings, handbooks, leaflets, vertical signs etc. in the business area, but with a small-sized samples.

4. Characteristics of PLLs in Eastern Coastal Developed Areas

The PLLs in various forms exhibit a diversified characteristic from four aspects: language typology, language signs and symbols and their integration modes.

4.1. Language Typological Characteristics in the PLL

First of all, Monolingualism is most frequently used and followed by bilingualism and multilingualism. Additionally, Japanese, Korean, Spanish, French, Russian, German and other languages also emerge in the PLL. Monolingualism in Chinese and English appear most frequently, while other languages do not often come along and occur less. The most common integration of bilingual symbols is Chinese and English, Chinese and Japanese, and Chinese and Korean. More importantly, the number of multilingual languages is rarely more than three.

Secondly, the most frequently used language type in the PLL is the Chinese language, supplemented by English, and sometimes by other languages according to the user's needs. The Chinese language as the mother tongue is the predominant variety in public and social life, and English is the most important foreign language due to its associated symbolic and cultural capital[9]. The corpus shows that the range of different languages is relatively narrow, and most non-Chinese language appear in the exotic-themed restaurants, e.g., with Japanese sushi as the selling point the restaurant will use the menu of the Japanese language to highlight the characteristics. Besides, only a few language types in the PLL is represented by European languages, e.g., German on imported items from Europe, and oil painting crayon advertising in particular.

The language typological characteristics prove that with the increasingly internationalized market, more foreign languages are accepted and employed in the PLL to satisfy the aesthetic judgement of China's businesses and intercultural exchange.

4.2. Characteristics of Language Signs and Symbols in the PLL

Language signs hereby is defined as the symbol inserts that occur in the PLL. While interpreting the PLL, it is necessary to take into account the symbols that are meaningful or meaningless in various languages. The most frequently used language signs are graphic symbols, currency symbols, metric symbols, and punctuation symbols. The objects of these language signs are mainly graffiti, clothing, decorative paintings, and posters etc.. It is evident that language signs play an important role in expressing specialized semiotic meanings by means of their referential function, associative function and metaphorized function.

To begin with, the referential function is the basic function of language signs employed in the PLL, referring to a specific entity. For example, "$" refers to money, snake sign refers to sinister and danger, and red heart sign refers to love and affection. Additionally, the symbols present a wide range of subjects or entities, even the relatively fixed symbols of currency and measurement are not singly-used.

Second, the language signs and artificially constructed symbols in the PLL also enable readers to make reasonable associations with. Generally speaking, the association is a reflexion brought by the accumulation of life experiences. For instance, "Tiger" or the image of highly abstracted constellation could possibly appear on clothes and accessories, with each letter painted with stripes and colours of the tiger skin so that readers can quickly associate it with the image of Tiger, thus the product. Undoubtedly, it is experiential association people accumulate in life that work. When the associative function occurs, language signs and symbols are composed of representative parts of the associative entities.

Third, the metaphorized function often triggers the relationship between the metaphorized entity or the referent in itself owning to the insertion of signs and symbols which generally modify the referent as the metaphor body. For instance, two newly grown leaves are drawn on the letter of the word "young", participating in the metaphorical expression of language signs and symbols. The leaf

is an allegorical body annotating the subject "young", which means "as young as a newly born bud", in connection with the name of the restaurant, "青又餐厅(qīng yòu cān tīng, Young Again Restaurant)".

By means of the referent, associative and metaphorized accesses, the signs and artificially constructed symbols are enormously employed in the form of prevalent Chinese and other languages, even the integration of various languages in the PLL in the coastal developed areas.

4.3. Characteristics of the Integration Mode

The fieldwork exhibits two different integration modes represented by language typology and language signs. The first mode is shaped by three integration modes, i.e., Chinese and other languages, Chinese only and other languages only. The second mode is popular in the Internet culture, where young people like to use artificially constructed symbols to express their mood or personality. For example, in "I❤U", the symbol of ❤ is a replacement of the word "Love". The fisrt integration mode is widely distributed in the PLL and the second integration mode is most commonly seen in product introduction, exotic hotels in the local and graffiti.

More interestingly, the two-mode-integrated signs and symbols are also found in some imported products, exotic services in the local and foreign trade products. It is assumed that the PLL represented by these products is determined by the city's increasing internationalization, economic and cultural exchanges.

In a word, it can be assumed that the occurrence of the PLL in the coastal developed areas is also to meet the needs of the developed economy, whatever the language typology, language signs and symbols, and the integration modes of them are employed in public spaces.

5. Conclusions

For urban management, the PLL is also a manifestation of urban civilization construction represented by international exchanges and channels to indicate egoism and individuality of non-mainstream linguistic landscapes. The article examines the classification of PLLs and their characteristics by sorting out various signages in the developed coastal areas of China by a case study of Ningbo. The analysis shows a widespread distribution of various representations of the PLL, i.e., slogans on the external wall, mobile car body advertising, graffiti, electronic projection, clothing and accessory logos, audio broadcasting, menu, labels and stickers, vertical sign, posters, etc.. It argues that the characteristics of the PLLs exhibit a trend toward diversified representations of language typologies, multilingual signs and artificially constructed symbols, and intricated integration modes of them. It can be assumed that the occurrence of the PLL as a supplement to the typical linguistic landscape in the coastal developed areas is also to meet the needs of international exchanges and the personalized aesthetic judgement of the young, with a prevalence of Chinese characters in the PLL. However, the hypothesis of the small-sized corpus-based study needs to be further explored, and the underling restriction mechanism behind the correlation between the PLL and the local economy still calls for more corpus evidences.

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