

The Construction of Public Space through Language

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Abstract

Among countries have all had an impact on how language is regarded. When considering the linguistic landscape in the modern time of scientific-linguistic studies, multilingualism, various discursive acts, sociolinguistic frames and affordances all complicate the process of viewing and placing it. In small-scale research of Odiongan, a municipality of Tablas Island, a rapidly rising administrative and commercial centre in Romblon, visual analyses of discourses, as indicated by the linguistic landscape, were done. In addition, the study summarizes some of the studies that have dealt with the linguistic landscape. It also outlines the theoretical framework that was employed in the current investigation and presents the question that this study seeks to solve. Among the organizations that have been selected as the study's specific resources are a community-governmental office, which represents a government body, a state university, which represents the educational sector, and a church, which represents a religious entity. The public signs chosen to reflect the linguistic landscape practiced in these societal components were also chosen to represent the linguistic landscape practiced in each of the institutions studied.

1. INTRODUCTION

Linguistic landscape refers to the representation of different linguistic usages in public spaces (Gorter, 2006). It is also the current means of reconstructing language users' cultural, socio-political, semiotic and ethno-linguistic backgrounds to codify further agency, readership, status and power (Coupland & Garrett, 2010; Tufi & Blackwood, 2010). The most cited definition of linguistic landscape comes from the seminal work of Landry and Bourhis (1997). According to them, the linguistic landscape is:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs on government buildings combine to form the the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 25).

After the initial proposal of Landry and Bourhis, and because of the globalized world and interwoven relationships of the different sectors from different nations, studies on the linguistic landscape have been the focus of many fields, including language studies (i.e., sociolinguistics, multilingualism), sociology, education and language planning (Gorter, 2013). Some of the

investigations on linguistic landscape include those conducted in the Arctic region (Pietikäinen et al., 2011), the South African town of Khayelitsha (Stroud & Mpendukana, 2009), Korea (Lawrence, 2012), the Valencian community in Spain (Lado, 2011), Chinatown in Washington (Leeman & Modan, 2009), another Chinatown in Philadelphia (Leung & Wu, 2012) and in world cities like Tokyo (Backhaus, 2005, 2006, 2007) and Vancouver and Toronto (Noro, 2006). Other platforms of linguistic usage have also been contextualized to be the setting of studies about the said subject. Troyer (2012) dealt with the linguistic landscape in a virtual dimension (specifically, the English language in Thai virtual spaces), while Mautner (2012) studied the linguistic landscape of directive signs which are also relevant to lawful acts. The publication *International Journal on Multilingualism* provided an issue in 2006 for the relative studies on the linguistic landscape, suggesting that the said topic has attracted attention. Because of the growing interest in the linguistic landscape, competing ideas have also been brought about the approach, methodological considerations, frameworks and terminologies on the said subject (Gorter, 2013).

Coupland and Garrett (2010), for example, specified that dichotomies like major/minor languages, informational/symbolic (see Landry & Bourhis, 1997), and top-down/bottom-up approaches (however, cf. Ben-Rafael et al., 2006) are not sufficient to define, (de)limit and contextualize the entire possibilities brought by linguistic landscape to the scientific approaches to language studies. Furthermore, Gorter (2013) also mentions that the linguistic landscape may be complicated by the emerging technological advances that the world experiences. He also points out that because of contact phenomena that language agencies afford, coupled with globalization, the linguistic landscape may become both a challenge and an opportunity to reveal the actual frames involved in language construction, (re)presentation and agentive manifestation.

2. THE DIFFERENT WORLD-VIEWS ON LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE: A BRIEF SURVEY

Landry and Bourhis (1997) explored the linguistic landscape which is further heightened by the explorative approach through test and experiments with French-Canadian minorities. In their seminal output, Landry and Bourhis emphasized that linguistic landscape may be considered to be an independent factor acting and representing the ethnolinguistic population of a minority in Canada. They also point that the presence of language in a particular in-group association makes it possible for language users to use, promote and empower their identities, solidify relationships and preserve their linguistic determinations. The informative and symbolic representations of the linguistic landscape are also reflective of the various and competing vitality that a certain group affords, and these factors may even enhance the means of enhancing the practice of language planning policies.

On the other hand, English has been regarded as the *lingua franca* of many culturally-divergent communities in S'Arenal in Mallorca, Germany (Bruyèl-Olmedo & Juan-Garau, 2009). The identified recurring (even alarming) errors of English in public spaces, according to Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau, are not a hindrance to the international understanding that people from various multilingual communities in the world co-operate. Further, the authors have also pointed out that the linguistic landscape, while featuring erroneous constructions, is the current platform that satisfies readers' appreciation, agencies and experiences. Despite the cited importance of the linguistic landscape in drawing international understanding and cooperation, it can also be a cite of language conflicts (Pavlenko, 2009).

The linguistic landscape is mediated by cultural diversities and historical fragmentation (Pavlenko, 2009). The investigation of Pavlenko features the language competition, erasure and legitimacies in a Post-Soviet era. She posits that the linguistic landscape is not only a representation of language policies but, more importantly, the present arena that locates the sociolinguistic changes that occur in a particular place. According to Pavlenko, the Post-Soviet

time has also included the instrumentalities of nation-building efforts, globalized economies, and ideological perspectives of different language agencies, all of which are represented through linguistic landscapes. Commercial values are also put forth in many linguistic landscapes, including those in Germany (Papen, 2012).

Drawing the findings from Prenzlauer Berg in Berlin, Papen (2012) concludes that linguistic landscape is the direct representation of commodification of spaces whereby these public spaces, through the usage of available linguistic resources, are considered to be an opportunity to influence the growing numbers of tourists coming to Berlin thus, the commerciality of a particular community is invented and reinforced. Papen also mentions that the linguistic landscape becomes a tool for the residents who go against the commercial acts where their village comes in. Qassem et al. (2021) indicated a lack of translation quality and inefficient use of translation techniques when translating tourist texts into English and Arabic. Therefore, it can be argued that the linguistic landscape is not only a representative of language policies and practices and socio-cultural and historical movements but also the place of ideological and political disputes.

2.1. Research Question:

How do the major social components in second-class municipalities display its identity in public space?

3. METHODOLOGY

3.1. The framework of the Study

The present investigation follows the framework of Ben-Rafael et al. (2006). Ben-Rafael et al. studied the linguistic landscape of mixed Israeli cities and those in East Jerusalem. They have found that the linguistic repertoires of the language users, not their possible linguistic agencies and representativeness, are the true embodiments of language constitutiveness represented through the linguistic landscape. Not only are the linguistic landscapes in Israel evident in the ethnolinguistic diversity adhered by its population, but more essentially, the linguistic landscape is the instrument for constructing the symbolic images of different and non-hegemonic groups of individuals.

In adapting the theoretical approach of Ben-Rafael, et al., the present study also observes the quantification of linguistic landscape in public/private entities. This investigation also distinguishes between top-down and bottom-up fashion in studying the linguistic landscape. According to Ben-Rafael et al., top-down linguistic landscape refers to the public signs constructed by the authorities, like announcements, public names, and street signs. Bottom-up LL, on the other hand, is the construction of public signs issued by “individual social actors” (p. 14) like shop signs and commercial advertisements.

Lastly, the current study aims to discover the linguistic resources utilized in public spheres, further represented by three major social components—school, government and religious section.

3.2. Research Design

The study devises a quantitative-qualitative approach to the study of the linguistic landscape. Gorter (2013) reviews the previous and current approaches to investigations of linguistic landscape and found that most of these studies are quantified through frequencies of different languages used in public spaces. Concurrently, the qualitative approach becomes fundamental in enhancing the explanatory background of linguistic landscapes. However,

Gorter also identifies that few recent studies have dealt with an explorative approach to linguistic landscape, such that researchers have asked passers-by about their perception of the importance, representativeness and implicative power of linguistic landscape in their everyday lives.

In the present small-scale study, I investigated the linguistic landscape of Odiongan, one of the Municipalities on Tablas Island and one of the progressing governmental and commercial centres in Romblon. The said municipality is chosen to be the research site to support the conclusion of Wang et al. (2014) that globalization needs not only to be seen from the central areas of the world but rather, the peripheral indexical of the globalized village may also be the resourceful arena where conclusions about globally-relevant language change can be made. Odiongan is not one of the major municipalities in Romblon or even in Region IV-B; however, I believe its linguistic representativeness may be evidential support to the growing issues on linguistic landscape and urban multilingualism.

The three institutions chosen to be the specific resources of the study are the community-governmental office of Barangay Liwayway (for government body), Romblon State University-Main Campus (state university representing the education sector) and the Parish of St. Vincent Ferrer (for a religious entity). Moreover, only ten (10) public signs per institution were chosen as the representatives of the linguistic landscape practised in these societal components, totalling 30 public signs (however, because of space constraints, not all photographed public signs will be used for the analysis).

4. RESULTS, DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Language becomes a diversified community resource. The linguistic landscapes in the site of the present investigation reveal that language is not only an educational tool or a powerful literacy symbol; rather, the presence of language in public sign signifies that different agency of language has different instrumentalities in determining their linguistic needs and affordances. Table 1 represents the quantified linguistic landscape of the current study's research site based on the authoritative constitution—that is, the top-down and bottom-up identification.

Table 1: Top-down and bottom-up linguistic landscape in Odiongan, Romblon

Social component	Approach		Total
	Top-down	Bottom-up	
Church	9	1	10
School	10	0	10
Government	10	0	10

Based on table 1, all linguistic landscapes constructed in a religious body, school and governmental institution in the municipality of Odiongan are hierarchically authoritative (with one exemption from the church)—that is, those agents make public signs with the legitimized power. The power relations of the providers and consumers of language, specifically those displayed in the public arena, represent the sociolinguistic identity of the language users and members of a specific social group (Huebner, 2006). The power relationships of the people of Odiongan are also manifested through the linguistic landscape promoted by the authorities in claiming their command, while its consumers and readers utilize the available linguistic landscape to solidify their membership in the community.



Figure 1: The Completion of Project

As the first figure suggests, the church, as the mediating body of the religious sector in the said municipalities, qualifies its power to rule the possible completion of a certain project. The first figure is also reflective of the cultural heritage of the site. The imposition of such a poster indicates the religiosity of the place’s people and how they recognize the church's power. People of the said municipality are mostly Catholics. Thus, their attendance in Sunday masses implicates their adherence to church rules. Further, religious heritage is represented whereby people preserve the conservative attachment of their community through religious practices. Macalister (2010, 2012) calls the preservation of language practices through social instruments the silent movement of linguistic fluidity, and according to him, this is further evident in linguistic landscapes.

The school and government agencies both comprise the top-down approach to constructing the linguistic landscape. These societal bodies imply that the full authority in constructing linguistic and social roles emanated from those who hold power and control over the large groups of the community. This also implies that school, as the supposed source of knowledge, becomes a candidate for educators to represent their control over language resources and users. Or, it can also be implied that because the study includes a primary education-providing institution, signs made by students (thus, classified as bottom-up) may be scarce. On the other hand, the government also posits its solidifying authority through the public signs it displays. The available and publicly-displayed signs in the site of the study depict the social constructions in Odiongan and the Philippines at large, whereby governmental agencies are the ones who remind the public about the activities of the community and its other engagements. This further implies the role of the government—that is, amalgamator of the diversified members of the community. The said role of the government is also practised through the linguistic landscape through which their announcements invite heterogeneous community members. Figures 2 and 3 are samples of linguistic landscape in school and government, respectively.



Fig. 2: Reminder from the School

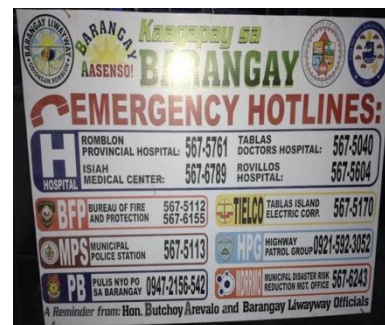


Fig. 3: A Barangay Bulletin board

Table 2: The distribution of languages in the linguistic landscape in Odiongan, Romblon

Social component	Language				Total
	English only	Filipino only	English and Filipino only	English with another language or Filipino with another language	
Church	3	2	4	1	10
School	5	4	1	0	10
Government	2	4	4	0	10

Total	10	10	9	1	30
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The second table shows the distribution of language used in the different agencies of the society. As can be seen, the distribution of English-only and Filipino-only in the available resources is fair, with the first mostly recurring in schools while the second is equally represented in school and government. Further language distribution (s) analyses are categorized based on the societal institutions.

A. Church

The Parish of St. Vincent Ferrer in the municipality of Odiongan poses various language distribution, with the English-Filipino mix being the most prevalent. The presence of English-Filipino bilingualism in the linguistic landscape found in churches may be attributed to the services that this sector serves—that is, church reach needs to reach almost all of the community’s people with their singular beliefs. And to serve most of the community members, mixing of language may be very useful so that understanding of the members can be attainable. It can also be argued that even if linguistic landscapes are silent, they also code-switch, and this can also be attributed to the nature of the community’s language resources that the church needs to address; further, the church needs to communicate to the people based on their immediate linguistic foundations.

On the other hand, it is surprising to find that the church displays the public sign among the three sectors, which shows the emergence of the English language. This sign is also initially categorized as bottom-up because it is not from the church authorities but represents a business promoted by an individual entity. The emergence of this specific landscape can be attributed to the church's power. Because the church is a common place to visit on specific days, the business poster may attract possible clients. On the other hand, the language usage mix in this ad may be implicative of the nature of the service it offers—a dental clinic and a spa. Figures 4 and 5 show the distribution of language in church.

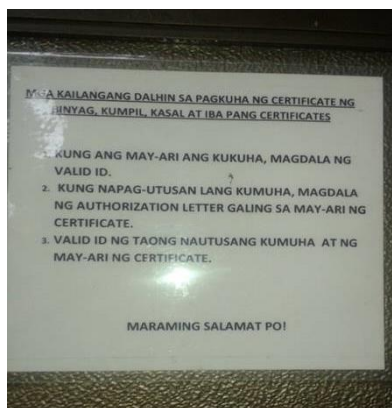


Fig. 4: A Bilingual Church Reminder



Fig. 5: An Advertisement in Church Premises

B. School

Among the ten public signs photographed from Romblon State University-Main Campus, I found that five are monolingually-English, four are in Filipino only while the other one constitutes an English-Filipino mix. The dominance of English in schools in the Philippines may be attributed to the prestige that English represents in the country’s educational system and to its larger social processes—that is, it is the language that draws educational purposes into unitary fashion and purpose. Bruyèl-Olmedo and Juan-Garau (2009) emphasized that through linguistic landscape, outsiders can notice the significance that a community holds towards a language. Ben-Rafael and his colleagues (2006) found that in Israeli communities, despite with Hebrew as its putative dominant language, English is utilized for an international

understanding. In this study, I found that state university considers English not only as an end of communication but more importantly, as a vehicle for effective comprehension. Figure 6 shows a poster in which is purely in English.



Figure 6: A Monolingual Poster in School

Figure 6 not only entails the school's language usage but also represents the social issue concerning the school. Littering has become one of the alarming issues in Philippine educational institutions. This specific linguistic landscape also captures the semiotic responsibility of the linguistic landscape, i.e., to address the problem of the society and offer possible solutions. Burenhult and Levinson (2008) also posit that language and landscape collaborate to present the cognitive-ontological possibilities emanating from language use. On the other hand, figure 7 reflects a monolingually-Filipino poster about a reminder from the school administration. This poster contradicts the first assumption that only English affords comprehension to a larger population.

Moreover, the presence of a single language in a specific poster is attributable to the genre it represents. Figure 7 is instructional; thus, if this was printed using English as its only medium, students may have a harder time understanding the message of the poster. It can also be argued that because of the emerging practice of multilingual pedagogy in basic education in the Philippines, future linguistic landscapes may present multilingual posters, advertisements or reminders in schools.

C. Government

Compared with the distribution of English in church and school, the governmental arm of the site of the study has the least number of public sign with an English-only usage. The scarcity of English-only poster in the said area may possibly because of the purported aims of the barangay—to reach all of its constituents. Since the barangay may constitute a population that is accessible through Filipino, most of the publicly-displayed signs are written or textually represented in Filipino. As Landry and Bourhis (1997) and Noro (2006) point, language in the linguistic landscape is informational. It serves to inform the public and even the unconcerned readers to understand the message of the signs. Another reason that can be raised is the nationalistic value embodied by this governmental agency. Because the national government

promotes nationalism via language, its lower entities (i.e., barangay) may empower the use of the country's national language.

Moreover, other signs found in the barangay with English-Filipino mixing are attributable to the projects of the government—that is, the name of the project like “Ecological Solid Waste Management Act” is not translatable to Filipino; thus, combining this term with Filipino reminder would be the optimal option to reach the audience it serves.

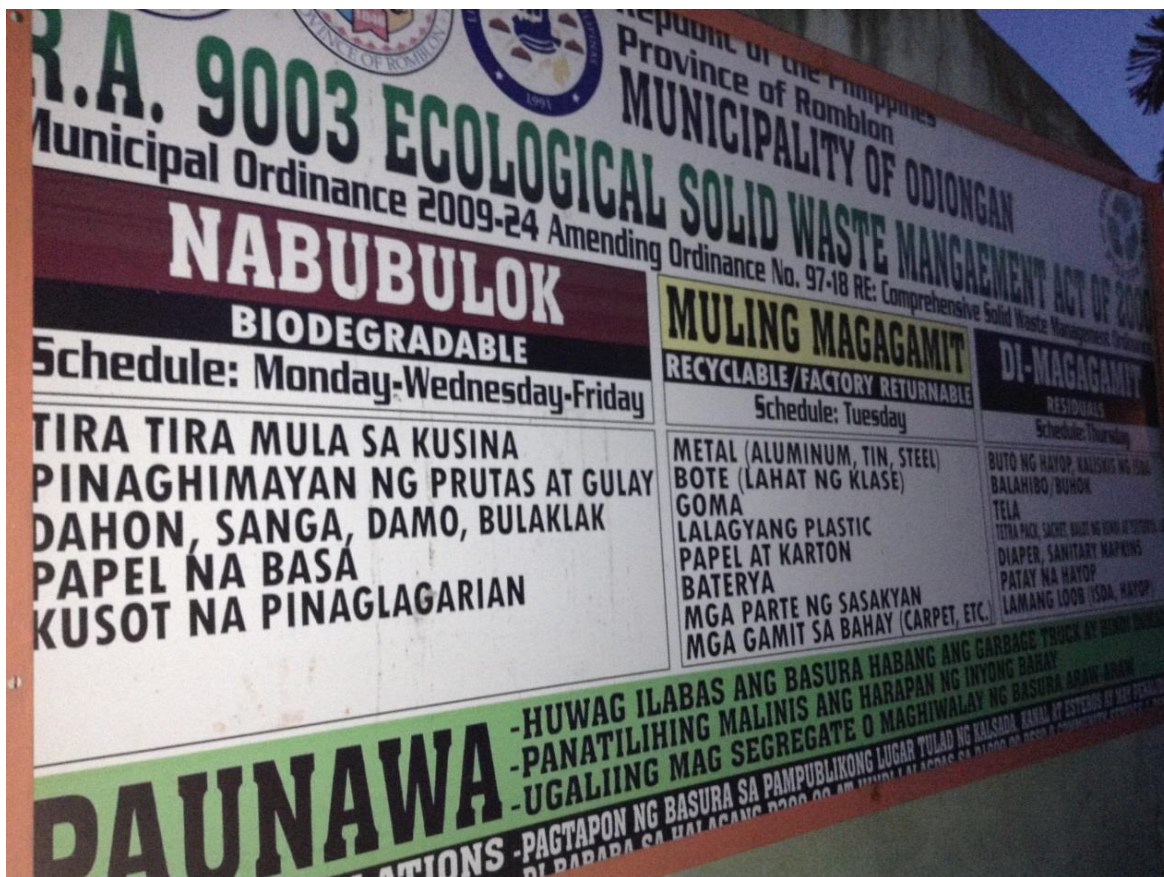


Figure 8: A Filipino Poster in front of the Barangay Hall

In addition to the analyses mentioned above about the photographed linguistic landscapes available in the public domains of Romblon, the present study also purports to introduce the *reactive power* of the institutions and individuals who create, consume and deliver linguistic landscapes. The exemplification and photographed linguistic landscapes accorded with the proposed notion of reactive power in linguistic landscapes are further detailed in the succeeding section.

3.3. The Reactive Power in Linguistic Landscapes

Shohamy (2006) contends that linguistic landscapes or other forms of public utility of language (i.e., brand names of different commodities and TV advertisements, among others) become the “representation of symbolic reality” and “constitute a power resource in itself” (p. 124). Not only do linguistic landscapes serve as the resource of power implementation and symbolism of the dominance of selected groups over the minor ones, but more essentially, public space is considered a sphere for sociolinguistic mechanisms.



Figure 9: A reminder for the community of Odiongan

In figure 9, the sociological mechanism involved or discussed by the creator of this public signage is the authorial foundation of its maker relative to those who see and eventually consume it. Moreover, the people of Odiongan may have considered this public sign a reminder that they must adhere to community policies—i.e., maintaining the community as a place of cleanliness. Thus, this simple reminder from the community leaders of Odiongan serves as the platform for the social relations of its leaders and members. Shohamy (2006) also identifies that those linguistic landscapes not only determine the authoritative power of certain institutions but also serve as the realistic and foundational aspect of sociological (and sociolinguistic) relationships between the dominant and subordinate groups. It can also be noticed from this figure the linguistic creativity that language users have and how they utilize the linguistic landscape to perform this language artistry. The poster's last line— GO: Green Odiongan—specifies this creativity in language usage. Not only do powerful institutions make use of the public space to discuss social concerns (community cleanliness) and implicitly identify social relationships (authority vs the community members), but they also delineate how language can be an effective mechanism to reflect linguistic properties and the social purposes they intend to deliver. This public reminder is evidently shown in the usage of the word *green* which connotes cleanliness, and *Odiongan*, which points to the place's name, and the combination of the two results in a directive and manipulative word of GO.

Reactive relationships among language consumers may also appear in health-related reminders. Figure 10 embodies this functionality.

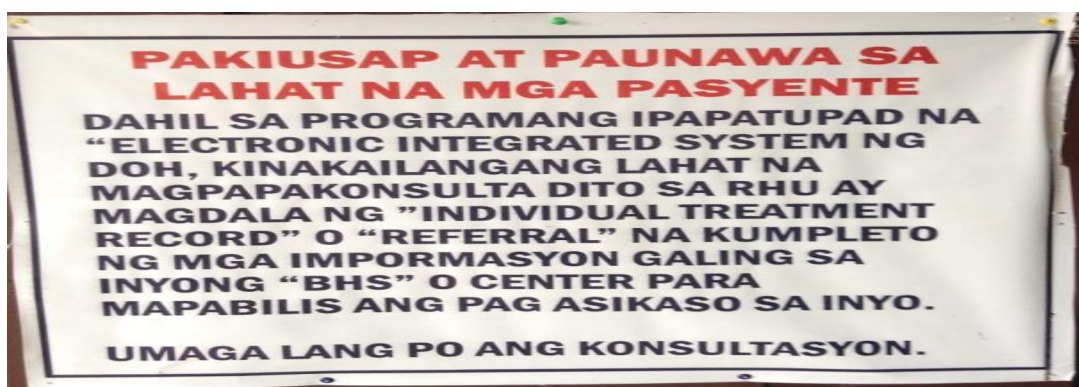


Figure 10: Reminder for hospital patients

Another reactive mechanism elaborated in the linguistic landscapes of Odiongan is represented in this reminder posted in a health clinic. It can be implied that the institution which made this reminder may have experienced difficulty in processing health services to the concerned citizens of Odiongan. Thus, to facilitate the processes rendered by the respective office, its managers may have wanted the clients to follow directions. In addition, the first line of the poster explains that the higher authorities guide further actions of the Odiongan health service office, thus, showing that (socio)linguistic processes are greatly influenced by the hierarchies of social bodies (i.e., the power relations of social actors; Spolsky, 1998). The first line explicitly tells the community members that the current step of their health institution only follows the reminders of higher authorities which can be reactive in its basic operationalizations—the health office can be more lenient in serving the public, thus, disregarding the policies of a national institution. However, such possible action was absent—the Odiongan health office followed the directives of the Department of Health instead of measuring more effectual and beneficial processes for its citizens.

Mechanics of writing also deliver linguistic functions. Although the present small-scale study does not relate to semiosis, the tenth figure also reflects an important aspect of writing in serving the more elaborative function of the linguistic landscape. The use of quotation marks also points to a reactive purpose—that is, they identify the special terms and orders that linguistic landscapes have about the perception and consumption of the public. First, the quotation marks have a semiotic use—i.e., to highlight the terms and phrases that may constitute a very relevant object to the construction of (socio) linguistic and sociological relationships. For example, the phrase Electronic Integrated System in quotation marks may have implied that this order from the national office needs to be considered and greatly known by the public. On the other hand, it can be noticed that this phrase only contains open quotation marks, and the exclusion of the closing punctuation also determines the reactive dominance of its creator—that is, he/she may not have completed the remark, but its highlighted function might have presumptively understood by those who see, consume and adhere to it.

Secondly, the featured tenth picture shows a bilingual reminder. Bilingualism in a certain place indicates the reactive proceduralizations in public spheres. While it can be assumed that stating the reminder in full Filipino (or even the language specific to Romblomanons) can be easily understood by its citizens, its presence may also hinder the complete deliverance of the message of the linguistic landscape, which is further embodied by the terms only and comprehensively available in English. This situatedness is reactive in the sense that it determines the functions of public reminders through the mixture of linguistic codes, whether the combination of such codes or the use of a sole resource may facilitate or delay the comprehension of its users. Furthermore, including acronyms (i.e., BHS) is another reactive performance in the photographed linguistic landscape. This linguistic act becomes reactive and even unwarranted as it discusses a sociological process that the larger public may not easily understand due to the incompletely defined and explained terminology.

5. CONCLUSIONS

This study on the linguistic landscape was conducted in a district of an urban municipal government in the Philippines on a small scale, and the findings revealed that publicly-displayed signs symbolize the opportunities for learning provided by the linguistic landscape. Among these affordances are the agency of a place, its representation, reading, and cultural semiosis of a place, its residents, and their language resources.

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