Teaching Linguistic Landscape to Future English Teachers Supported by the Moodle Application

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Abstract

Teaching linguistic landscape classes is a very dynamic process because the linguistic landscape (LL) itself has a very dynamic character stemming in its nature. The LL is quite a new enormously and dynamically developing anthropocentric multidisciplinary field of linguistic science with a plethora of interdisciplinary overlaps in geosemiotics, geopolitics and history, sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics, culturology and arts, multimodal cultural linguistics as well as cultural semiotics, architecture and many others. However, the having the solid foundations of systemic linguistics is crucial in the master's program of teaching and translation/interpreting of English language and culture at Matej Bel University (MBU), Faculty of Arts, Dep. of English and American Studies in Banská Bystrica, Slovakia. The pandemic situation has led to a shift in teaching to the online space, even at universities looking for suitable distance learning tools. The Slovak MBU was ready for the second wave. The training took place through the MS Teams and Moodle applications. The aim of our paper is to introduce the Moodle application in teaching linguistic landscape classes focused on theoretical and research direction, evaluating the advantages and disadvantages to which the participants were exposed. However, the multidiciplinarity of the LL is a suitable springboard for teaching English as a foreign language to future English language teachers as well as supporting discipline in the education of intercultural communication and the promotion of soft skills, not to mention the cross-cutting themes of active civil society in the presentation of regional culture and history in secondary schools. *This work was supported by the Slovak Research and Development Agency under the contract no. APVV-18-0115 and Erasmus+ 2020-1-BE02-KA226-SCH-083039.*

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1 Introduction

Students of the master's degree should be given the opportunity to get to know the beauty of empirical research and the feeling of adventure from learning about language, culture, history, etc. own village directly in the field. Emotional involvement strengthens the inner motivation to explore, research, learn more using one's own creative methods and procedures [1]. The beauty of getting to know and discovering one's own roots with a connection to the study program of teaching academic subjects or translation and interpreting is an investment in their personal, intellectual and professional equipment. As bachelor's degree graduates, they have a solid foundation in systems linguistics, enabling them to draw their attention to superstructure interdisciplinary contexts, which are also part of their daily lives. The aim of the paper is to describe the experiment of including the topic of the linguistic landscape in the academic subject in the master's program.

2 Linguistic landscape

During the recent thirty years, research attention in linguistics has been paid to the linguistic landscape (hereinafter referred to as LL). It is an anthropocentrically oriented interdisciplinary oriented scientific field using the procedures of researching systems linguistics, sociolinguistics, pragmalinguistics, multimodal semiotics, history, geopolitics, etc. Country (or landscape) is becoming a central concept of research. It is a view of the landscape through signs and symbols that people have intentionally created and which they are constantly surrounded by for various reasons. Context, situationality, time and space play a significant role in this. The basic LL unit is considered to be the sign, resp. multimodal sign [2]. The first LL studies have been carried abroad for several decades - overseas, Asia and Europe. Among the first areas studied were Toronto, Tokyo, New York, Munich. In Slovakia, continuous and systematic multidisciplinary research of the LL has been taking place

since 2019 in Bratislava, Banská Bystrica, Komárno (and incl. others), within the particular projects. The aim is to comprehensively map the linguistic landscape of selected cities from synchronous and diachronic point of view from the beginning of the 20th century to the present and to analyze using quantitative-qualitative analysis for the purpose of their subsequent comparison. One of the sub-objectives is therefore the creation of sub-databases, the data of which will then be stored in one central database, the corpus data of which will be freely available.

In order to obtain objective and real data, it is necessary to map a total of 4,000 meters of the selected LL in each urban area that is the subject of the survey. It is necessary to capture the area and then systematically process it in order to insert it into the created database in order to create an extensive corpus of the language landscape. The creation of the database is conditioned by the search for such a formal standardized structure, which would allow the capture of annotations according to the monitored criteria with the ability to evaluate data in terms of quantitative-qualitative analysis and subsequent comparison with other language countries in other countries [3].

For objective reasons, it is not always possible to involve students in a specific project, e.g. simply because the research is not limited to the teaching part of the semester (resp. the term), but also takes place during holidays, holidays, during the holiday period, during the exam period, etc. During the teaching part, however, it is possible to convey methods and findings to students and stimulate a deeper interest in the issue.

2.1 How and why to teach the Linguistic Landscape

We experimentally included the issue of LL in the selective academic course of the master's study within the *English Lexicological seminar* and later on invented a single cource named the *Linguistic Landscape*. We pursued several intentions. We wanted to increase awareness and interest in the environment in which students move every day. We also intented to achieve that the graduates of the course, even under the influence of this study-empirical experience, further spread the ideas of positive civic activism and interest in their environment. We worked with the thesis that stimulating interest in the known environment (in this case about LL) leads to care, and thus to the active protection of the known environment, e.g. also through appropriate teaching materials and the introduction of a new academic subject focused on LL, in which students will notice the use of multimodal characters and their connection with architecture and other components of the urban environment. At the same time, attention was paid to such phenomena as the typology of multimodal characters, mono- / bi- / tri- and multilingualism, the function of the language in LL, the use of English as a lingua franca, etc. Our perception of LL-y is based on Bauko's definition, in which he does not explicitly use the term LL, but speaks of a proprietary-semiotic image of the landscape consisting of proper nouns of various kinds found on such multimodal (mostly linguistic) signs, such as labels, posters, buildings, tombstones, plaques, etc. and also extralinguistic signs, such as ´photographs, statues, emblems, drawings, etc. which point to their own names´ [4]. Our aim is to lead students to autonomy, independence, openness, interest in public affairs and creativity, as well as the ability to argue and justify their attitudes in relation to their immediate surroundings. The result of the academic effort will be a student community that:

1. is able to identify, collect, sort, classify, analyze, synthesize, explain and interpret (i.e. process and evaluate) the obtained raw research material,
2. is subsequently able to independently find and connect connections and further work creatively with them and draw conclusions from them,
3. is able to apply the acquired knowledge and research skills in further creative student work as well as professional practice in the future,
4. is able to present its findings, opinions and attitudes autonomously [2].

The mentioned academic skills were presented by the students in the form of a final semester presentation of their independent student research in a well-known urban environment focused on a selected specific area of the issue, e.g. for the use of English as a lingua franca in a language country, the ratio of non / official inscriptions, etc.

2.2 Pros and cons of the LL academic course

The entire academic course is available to students online in Moodle application (https://lms.umb.sk/course/view.php?id=5249&notifyeditingon=1), where they can find the organization of the course, information sheet of the course, the structure of seminars depending on the time allowance and study schedule (thirteen-week semester) as well as a brief syllabus of the course with

an emphasis on the LL of the selected area, research methods and methods of processing the obtained data, basics of scientific work in field practice (method of data collection), LL with regard to the use of English as the language of the lingua franca, LL with an emphasis on the depiction of men and women in public space, etc. Emphasis is placed on acquainting students with the latest trends in the dynamics of language research and the involvement of students in these research activities, e.g. through the examination of LL within their creative activity in the design of the final (bachelor's or master's) thesis.

The academic course is multilingual, resp. trilingual, because the language required to complete the course is the English B2-C1 level as well as the Slovak language and occasionally the Czech language with regard to the diversity of recommended literature and other sources suitable for study. This requirement is viewed positively as well as negatively by students. It depends on their command of required languages.

The whole course had to be taken online which suggest the internet accessibility as well as a PC and the fact that technology can be broken any time (e.g. signal may be gone or weak).

The total time of workload of the student during the semester is 90 hours, of which 13 hours include combined study (seminars and consultations) and 26 hours homework, self-study and preparation for the final presentation is allocated 51 hours of preparation. Continuous assessment consists of active participation in seminars during the teaching part of the semester (0 - 20 points), home preparation for seminars (0 - 20 points) and the final student presentation at the end of the semester (0 - 60 points). In the context of the credit study, credits will then be awarded in the final assessment to the learner who has obtained a minimum of 65 out of a maximum of 100 points for meeting the specified conditions [2]. In total, active participation of each student (whether present online or in person) as well as emotional involvement is expected.

3 Conclusion

Completing the specific course has helped students realize that public space is a lasting value worthy of perception, assessment and protection. For prospective teachers, the course was a beneficial opportunity to apply their academic skills and knowledge, acquired during the course, in pedagogical practice. For students of translation and interpreting, the course was a contribution to the future profession of translator / interpreter in the form of language skills and multimodal semiotics. The added value is the students' awareness of many new interdisciplinary scientific areas acquired during the new academic course. Last but not least, students gained a new perspective on the familiar but unexplored urban environment from different viewpoints [3].

We proceeded from the assumption that after a deeper knowledge of their environment, they would acquire a different, warmer, relationship with it, which would be transformed into their interest in public affairs. Students will care about the environment they have learned, in which they move and which they understand thanks to the findings from the study of its synchronous-diachronic sociolinguistic, pragmalinguistic, geosemiotic and geopolitical, historical-cultural, etc. background.

In general, it can be concluded that teaching and learning the LL has more advantages for students than disadvantages, regardless whether the process occurs online or in person face-to-face.

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