



EXPLORING LANGUAGE BEYOND THE CLASSROOM: A JOURNEY FROM THE STREETS TO SCHOOL

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The linguistic landscape refers to the visible signs, symbols, and languages that surround us in public spaces. These signs provide a wealth of information not only about communication but also about the cultural and social dynamics of a community. Exploring this environment can be a powerful tool for teaching students about language diversity and the role of signs in communication. Existing literature highlights the pedagogical value of incorporating LL into classroom practices to enhance students' multilingual awareness (Sayer, 2010), foster literacy development (Rowland, 2013), and support foreign language acquisition (Malinowski et al., 2020). Engaging with the LL allows students to observe and reflect on the diversity of languages and cultures in their own surroundings, turning everyday environments into meaningful learning experiences. The objective of this activity is to foster students' awareness of the languages and dialects in their local community as well as to reflect on the functions of signs in the landscape. By observing and reflecting on their surroundings, students engage with the concepts of language, cultures and meaning. The activity presented below was conducted with Grades 2 and 3 of the International School of Rimini (Italy), with students aged 7-8 years, but it can be adapted for younger and older students. This activity encourages students to value and explore the multilingual environment around them, fostering curiosity and respect for linguistic diversity.

Procedures

1. Preparation (in-class discussion)

Teachers begin the activity by initiating a class discussion through questions such as “What is a sign?”, “Where do we see signs with words around us?”, “What languages have you seen on signs?”, “Why do we use/need signs?”, “Why do some signs not have language on them?”. Teachers show a few examples of street signs, shop signs, or posters in multiple languages to spark their interest. These examples are used to introduce the term “linguistic landscape” and explain its importance in reflecting the cultural and linguistic diversity of a community. Finally, teachers ask, “What signs do we see in or around our school?”. Learners are encouraged to recall where signs are located inside and around the school, thus introducing the next phase of the activity.

2. Linguistic landscape walk

Organise a short field trip in the neighbourhood as a class. Start at the school’s entrance and gradually explore nearby streets. During the walk, teachers motivate students to notice and point out signs, posters, or graffiti they see and allow students to take photos of signs they find. Furthermore, as homework, teachers ask learners to take pictures of signs they see on their way to and from school. As an alternative with older students, pairs or small groups of students might independently explore a section of town and take pictures or sketch out the signs they see.

3. Reflection (back in the classroom)

Back in class, teachers can display the collected photos on a screen and initiate a discussion using prompts such as: “Can we recognize the languages in these photos?”, “How many different languages did we find?”, “What kinds of signs did we find?”, and “Which signs included multiple languages?”. In addition, with the teachers’ support, students might explore and identify the different linguistic systems that were visible during the *Linguistic Landscape walk*. Furthermore, teachers can encourage students to categorize the signs by purpose, language, or value, or to rank them based on criteria such as the funniest, the most serious, or the most useful. If the linguistic landscape is mostly monolingual (which may be the case in less urban areas), the activity can still be meaningful by shifting the focus from linguistic diversity to other aspects of signage. For instance, students can analyse the different functions of signs, their design and effectiveness, or the ways in which visual elements (such as symbols and colours) contribute to communication. Alternatively, the discussion can explore whether and where additional languages might be useful in their context, encouraging reflections on the potential role of multilingual signage in different communities.

4. The schoolscape

Teachers divide the students into small groups and provide them with the printed photos they took during the trip, as well as printouts of the different writing systems they identified during the classroom discussion. Each group selects a few photos and attaches them to a display in the school hallway to represent the city's linguistic landscape. Additionally, each group works on one of the identified writing systems and creates a small poster showing the writing system and the question, "Can you guess the writing system?" The answer and a brief explanation, written by the students, can be hidden under flaps, turning the poster into a guessing game for anyone passing by. Once completed, the poster will be displayed in the school hallway. This transforms the activity from exploring the linguistic landscape into enhancing the schoolscape, inviting other students and teachers to engage with the project and learn about languages. As an alternative, especially if the linguistic landscape walk did not allow students to spot different writing systems, students can be asked to annotate the selected signs, create a foldable quiz for user interaction in the hallway, or add captions when a sign did not include one.



Image 1

Example of the representation of the city's linguistic landscape in the school hallway.

Source: Teacher from International School of Rimini, where the activity was conducted.

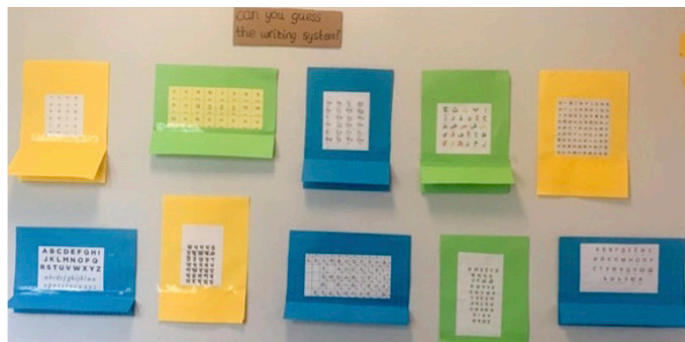


Image 2

Example of the writing systems guessing game in the school hallway.

Source: Teacher from International School of Rimini, where the activity was conducted.

References

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