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Acquiring English through Linguistic Landscape: The Case of Undergraduate Students in Khulna Metropolis

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Abstract: This study investigates the potential of linguistic landscapes (LLs) as a tool for English language acquisition among tertiary-level students in Khulna, Bangladesh. LLs refer to the visible language elements in public spaces, such as shop signs, billboards, and advertisements. The research explores how the exposure to LLs can enhance students' vocabulary, grammar, pronunciation, and intercultural competence. To conduct this research, quantitative approach along with survey method have been followed. In case of survey, a questionnaire has been used as an instrument. The sample comprises 25 students from tertiary level which has been determined based on purposive sampling. The findings demonstrate that LLs play a significant role in language learning. Students frequently interact with LLs, gaining exposure to new vocabulary and grammatical structures. This exposure motivates them to use these elements in their academic and non-academic writing. Additionally, LLs can foster cultural understanding by familiarizing students with foreign words and customs. The study also emphasizes the value of LLs as a supplementary resource in language teaching. By incorporating LLs into teaching activities, educators can create engaging and effective learning experiences. The study concludes by advocating for the recognition and utilization of LLs to improve language learning in Bangladesh and beyond.

Keywords: Linguistic landscapes, English, students, language, acquisition

Introduction

Bangladesh, a multilingual nation with a rich linguistic tapestry, provides a unique opportunity for language learners. The country's diverse linguistic landscape, characterized by the coexistence of multiple languages, offers a rich and authentic environment for foreign language acquisition. This article delves into the potential of linguistic landscapes as a powerful tool for language learning, especially English, in Bangladesh. Linguistic Landscape, henceforth LL, is the visible language elements in public spaces. It investigates how language and language signs and symbols are displayed and used in the given environments. It reveals the power dynamics, cultural identities and social relations in a community. It can be used as a tool to acquire any foreign language by examining the signs, advertisements, billboards, placards, and wall paintings. The intricate interplay between language and environment has long been recognized as a significant factor in language acquisition. Linguistic landscapes, the visual display of language in public spaces, offer a rich and authentic context for language learning. Khan (2023) opines "using a linguistic landscape can indeed foster critical thinking skills by promoting metalinguistic awareness of linguistic diversity and encouraging ethics of respect towards multilingualism" (p. 1082). By examining the linguistic landscape of Khulna metropolis in Bangladesh and analyzing its impact on language learning, this

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research aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how language environments can shape language acquisition process. However, the main objectives of this study were to explain the role of Linguistic Landscape in acquiring English and investigate the process of getting acquainted with foreign culture through Linguistic Landscape.

Theoretical Framework

This study is conducted based on Piaget's Constructive Learning Theory (1970) with the support of Theory of Multimodality by Kress and van Leeuwen (2001). The first one emphasizes that learning is a dynamic process in which any learner shapes the meaning of knowledge through collaborative conversation in active nature with the help of their partners. Situations enriched with information and continuous collaboration among partners are indispensable conditions for students to complete the construction of the knowledge they have learned. Constructivist learning theory argues that psychological development of any learner is an outcome of the interaction between the subject and the object. The process of learning any foreign language, here the one is English, through linguistic landscape is also a kind of interaction between the language learners and the learning materials like billboards, shop names or signboards (Huang & Wang, 2007). Besides, Jean Piaget believes that the essence of intelligence is adaptation. In addition, learning English through linguistic landscape means student's cognitive structure adapts to the external language stimulus (Li et al, 2020). Constructivist learning theory has been a commonplace tendency to influence the study of foreign language learning and acquisition. It provides us with a new perspective to examine foreign language learning, which triggered the change of the concept of foreign language learning and learning mode, learning conditions, teacher training and so on (Huang & Wang, 2007). Simultaneously, the latter one, Theory of Multimodality, refers to the study of different modes of meaning making. Forming meaning is not restricted only to the sentences; rather it depends on the different factors such as font size, color, logo, para-linguistic aspects, context of the sentences (Geenen, 2013). Different factors can provide different meanings depending on the places or context of text or utterances. Such factors along with sentences can deliver distinct meaning to the audience (Bezemer et al. 2012).

Review of Related Studies

Linguistic Landscape is the graphical presentation of language and linguistic terminologies, like neologism or any existing vocabulary in public spaces like billboards, shop boards, street names, and dress designs, and signboards. "Linguistic landscape refers to the combination of various language signs such as road signs, street signs, etc. in the real environment of the city" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23).

Application of Metacognition in Language Acquisition

In recent times, LL has been popular among the researchers of sociolinguistics and semantics as it has started to show its influence on language learning. In LL, a learner acquires any language through metacognition. Metacognition is a "cognition about cognitive phenomena'' (Flavell, 1979, p. 906). This enables learners to be aware of their knowledge, control it while learning, and regulate it as required (Adıgüzel & Orhan, 2017). So, it can be seen as a chronology of sequences that enables a language learner to monitor their ongoing cognitive activities in order to have control over their self-learning process. Learning a language is a continuous process and it cannot occur only in an institutionalized setting, rather a learner can acquire a language by utilizing his/ her cognition capability outside the classrooms as s/he can take full control over his/her emotion, cultural shock, and thus s/he can assimilate the linguistic input with cultural congruence. In the context of Bangladesh, many foreign language learners, especially English language learners, find it difficult to cope up with foreign cultures inside the classrooms. LL makes it easy for them to acquire the same language as they can filter their linguistic input. Many researchers, notably Da Silva, Bezemer, and Li, have shown that metacognitive process improves learning by directing students' thoughts and

assist them in choosing an appropriate course of action while they consider a language problem, make a choice, or strive to comprehend a condition or text (Öz, 2005, as cited in Ebrahimi & Chowdhury, 2024, p.20).

Role of LL in Acquisition of a Foreign Language

Researchers have examined the benefits of employing LL as an educational tool in EFL contexts. Rowland (2013) recommends, "pedagogical LL projects can be valuable to EFL students in a variety of ways, particularly in the development of students' symbolic competence and literacy skills in a multi literacies sense" (p. 494). In his study, students were engaged in a project in order to collect and analyze English texts used on signs in Japan. Huebner (2016) has shown that English covers a large portion in LL as signs or chunks expressed through this language can activate global and local values. Reyes and Patricia (2008) asserted that words in the environment could promote early writing and reading. Moreover, linguistic landscape plays a significant role in the study of "reading" especially from which students can acquire some reading skills and useful vocabulary. Similarly, Shang and Xie (2020) tried to explore the attitudes of Chinese teachers towards the pedagogical values of English LLs in Eastern China's city and school premises. They claimed that EFL teachers admitted that LLs could play a vital role in teaching and learning any foreign language, especially English, in Chinese context. Although many studies have been conducted on the relationship between linguistic landscape and language learning and acquisition so far, in the context of Bangladesh, it is yet to be introduced. In this regard, this research attempts to conduct an in-depth analysis of linguistic landscape as a tool to acquire English among tertiary level students in Khulna city.

Methodology

By nature, it is an explanatory research as it investigates the way how the target population acquires a foreign language like English by utilizing linguistic landscape around them. The approach is quantitative as an empirical study has been conducted to understand the relationship between the responses of the target population and the frequency of exposure to the linguistic landscape. Survey method has been followed to collect data from the population.

Our target population was the tertiary level students in Khulna metropolis for the convenience of the researchers. We chose Northern University of Business and Technology Khulna as our study area due to the accessibility. We used purposive sampling as we think the target population has more expertise and more exposure to linguistic landscape than the others. All of the students are from sophomore and senior batches. We set a standard of current CGPA i.e. 3.25 or above for selecting the students. In this sampling technique, we got 15 sophomores and 10 seniors which comprise 29% and 26% of the total students consecutively of the aforementioned batches. The table incorporated below shows the ratios of target population against the total number of students in the selected batches.

Table 1. Batch-wise sample size and population ratio

Batch(es)	Sample Size	Total Population	Ratio
Sophomore	15	51	29.412
Seniors	10	39	25.641

We have collected data through a questionnaire survey. The questionnaire comprises 12 close-ended questions which we have formulated following a 5-point Likert scale on the basis of their opinion frequency. For analyzing the data, we have used Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) v. 23. A synchronization has been maintained with the hypothesis while analyzing the data. For graphical presentation we have used MS Word and MS Excel.

The respondents have willingly taken part to the survey. Therefore, no violation of privacy has been occurred during the process of data sorting nor analysis. Both of us remained transparent while analyzing the collected data and findings.

Analysis and Presentation of Data

Figure 1 shows that 64% respondents always check the names of the shops before their visit there while 20% respondents frequently check the shop names. In addition, 60% respondents have opined that shop names affect the motive of their purchase significantly while 16% think that shop names have visible influence on their purchase though 16% of the respondents have been disagreed with the statement.

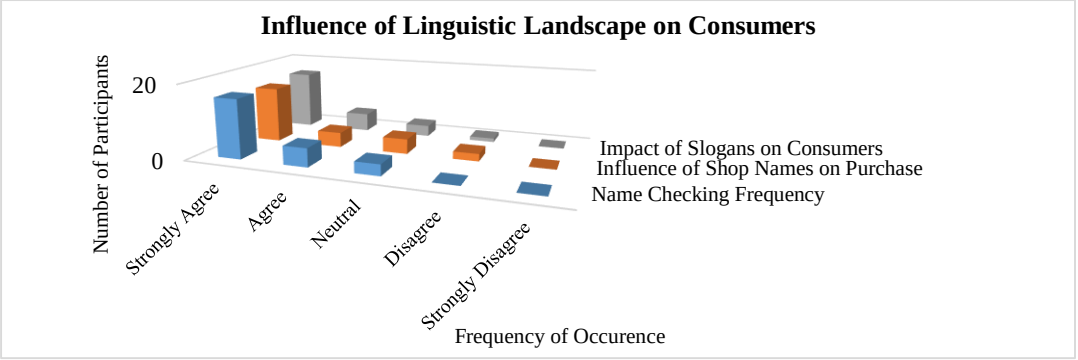


Figure 1. Influence of Linguistic Landscape on Consumers

Nearly, 84% respondents have expressed that attractive slogans of the brands have impacts on consumers which means that they are highly motivated by linguistic landscape to control their consumer behavior.

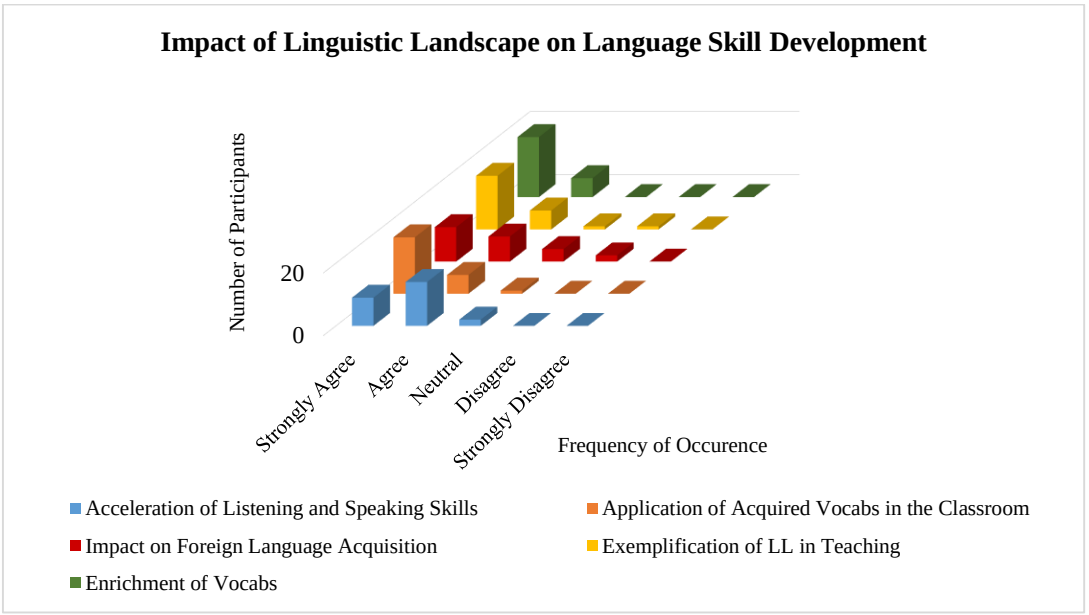


Figure 2. Impact of Linguistic Landscape on Language Skill Development

Figure 2 shows the responses of the participants regarding the influence of linguistic landscape on developing language skills through 5 clustered columns as it comprises of 5 questions sequencing from question 4 to question 8 of the questionnaire. Here it is clear, 92% of the respondents think that billboards and shop boards accelerated their listening and speaking skills while 76% think that brand names and mottos have an impact on the acquisition of a foreign language.

Furthermore, 96% of the respondents have opined that they frequently use their lexical knowledge gained through linguistic landscape in their classroom setting.

Similarly, 92% of the participants have said that linguistic landscape has enriched their vocabulary in English. In addition, 96% of them have revealed that their teachers exemplify linguistic landscapes in teaching language and linguistics in the classrooms. From the above analysis, it is clear that linguistic landscape has tremendous impact on the students of tertiary level in Khulna metropolis as it accelerates their linguistic skills in English.

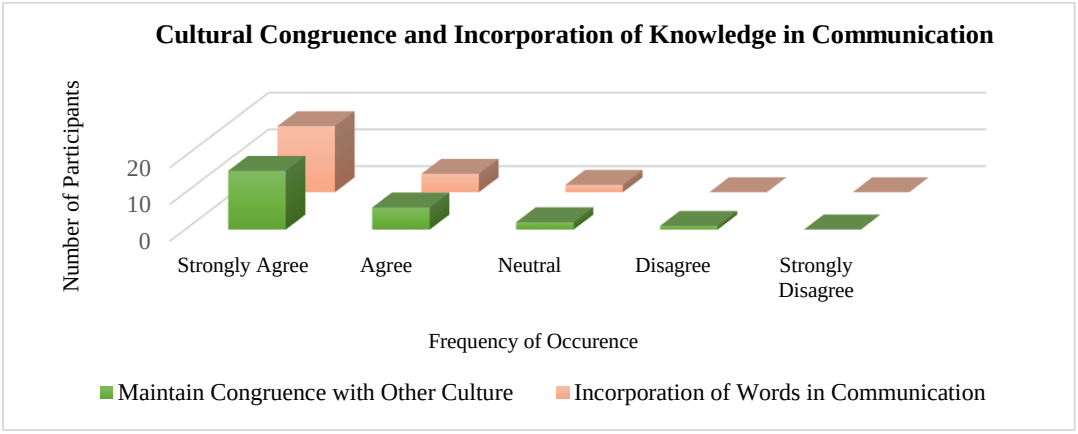


Figure 3. Cultural Congruence and Incorporation of Knowledge in Communication

In figure 3, the contribution of linguistic landscape in cultural congruence along with the frequency of word incorporation through linguistic landscape gets revealed. From the clusters, it is clear that 88% of the respondents think that linguistic landscape helps them maintain cultural congruence as it introduces the participants with new words and cultural terms. Again, 92% respondents have opined that they frequently incorporate words learnt through linguistic landscape in their non-academic and academic writings.

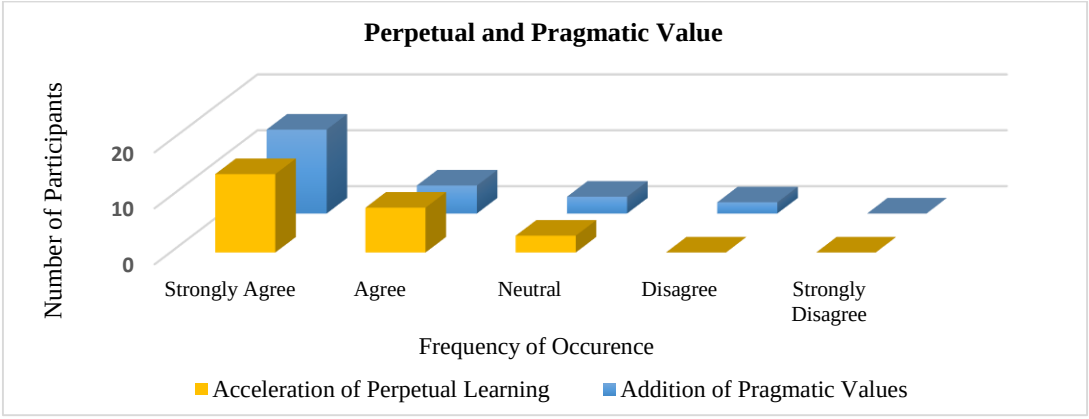


Figure 4. Perpetual and Pragmatic Value

The bars in figure 4 reveal the perpetual and pragmatic value of linguistic landscape in learning process. It can be seen that 88% of the participants think that linguistic landscape has accelerated their perpetual learning. On the other hand, 80% of them have revealed that linguistic landscape has added pragmatic value in learning English in their speech communities which indicates that linguistic landscape can serve an important role in learning a language through our sensory perceptions and it can impact our learning of any new language through adding contextual values.

Findings and Discussion

From the data analysis it is clear that linguistic landscape plays a significant role in acquiring English among the undergraduate students of Khulna metropolis. A mean score of 4.32 highlights that almost every participant checks the shop names before their entrance in it which is a clear indication of frequent exposure to linguistic landscape. Again, a large portion of the participants opine that shop names affect their motivation of purchase and brand mottos have dramatic impact on them. Here the mean score is respectively 4.00 and 4.28. Form the above findings, it is evident that the undergraduate students of Khulna metropolis always have a significant interaction with linguistic landscape. And, it is a major source of their acquisition of English from their surroundings.

After that, from the second cluster shown in figure 2, it is transparent that linguistic landscape can increase the rate of language proficiency among the undergraduate students. It can accelerate their oral and writing skills in both mother tongue and in foreign languages. Here, the reasons behind the phenomenon are, regular exposure to the lexical deviations of different languages, motives to use newly learnt words and phrases inside the classrooms, appreciation by the teachers and their regular exemplifications of linguistic landscape inside the classes. Constructivist learning theory also argues that psychological development of any learner is an outcome of the interaction between the subject and the object. The process of learning any foreign language, here the one is English, through linguistic landscape is also a kind of interaction between the language learners and the learning materials like billboards, shop names or signboards (Huang & Wang, 2007).

In addition to the above reasons, most of the participants think linguistic landscape can help them maintain congruity with other cultures, mean score is 4.41, which is a sign of getting acquainted with foreign cultures most often. So, it can be said that the participants are being familiar frequently with new words as they are regularly being exposed to new cultural trends and customs through linguistic landscape. Similarity can be found in the opinion of Da Silva (2018). He explains that LLs can be utilized as authentic teaching resources to instruct not only English but also other subjects such as economics, social issues, and politics. Specifically, LLs can help students improve their skills by providing a context in which they can link in-class lessons to the real language used in their surroundings.

Furthermore, they have added that linguistic landscape has accelerated their perpetual learning capability which means that the learners are acquiring English not only by their conscious selves but also subconsciously by their sensory organs. At the same time, the participants opined that linguistic landscape can add pragmatic values to their learning of a foreign language, here the value of mean is 4.32. According to sociocultural theories, learning is a social activity that occurs as a consequence of the interaction between the learner and the environment (Fahim & Haghani, 2012). This theory synchronizes with the findings of the study.

While analyzing the collected data we have got the value of Cronbach's alpha 0.908 which is a clear indication that the data are reliable and the participants have provided us with some major factors of considering linguistic landscape as an effective way to acquire a foreign language.

To sum up, it is clear that linguistic landscape is a catalyst for acquiring any foreign language as it can expose the learners to such a set of data which is highly beneficial for them to get enough support in case of lexicon and contexts. Again the tertiary level students can easily cope up with perpetual learning system through linguistic landscape due to their maturity and having sufficient schema regarding the cultures.

Conclusion

In conclusion, this study underpins the significant role of linguistic landscapes in facilitating foreign language acquisition, particularly English, among tertiary-level students in Khulna Metropolis, Bangladesh. The diverse linguistic landscape of the city provides a rich and authentic environment for language learners to interact with language in its natural context. By examining shop names, brand mottos, and other public signage, students can enhance their vocabulary,

grammar, and pronunciation skills. Furthermore, exposure to linguistic landscapes can foster cultural understanding and intercultural competence. The findings of this research suggest that linguistic landscapes can serve as a valuable supplementary tool to traditional classroom instruction. By incorporating linguistic landscapes into language learning activities, educators can create more engaging and effective learning experiences. As such, it is imperative to recognize and harness the potential of linguistic landscapes to enhance language education in Bangladesh and beyond.

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