

# World Englishes and linguistic landscapes

KINGSLEY BOLTON

**ABSTRACT:** The growing intrusion and use of English in the public spaces of the world's cities alongside national languages and local languages has received increasing attention over the last fifteen years or so. The study of English and other languages in urban public signage has drawn the attention of anthropologists, cultural theorists, and various scholars in sociolinguistics, many of whom have contributed to a body of research on the topic of 'linguistic landscapes'. Such work is of direct relevance to world Englishes, as the scope of WE is obviously not simply related to the analysis of particular 'varieties of English', but much more besides. Today, the linguistic worlds of young people in particular are becoming increasingly diverse, and the linguistic landscapes of individuals are not simply defined through physical space, but also through electronic space, global travel, media awareness and usage, popular culture, as well as the virtual space of the Internet.

In the last twenty years or so, the world has become aware of globalization as a cultural, economic, and political force. Most obviously, in many parts of the world, this has been evidenced by an increasing 'Americanization' of popular culture, consumer goods, and preferred lifestyles. In certain parts of the world, including many European societies, the impact of Hollywood and US consumer goods of desire, all part and parcel of 'America's irresistible empire', was felt in the decades after World War II, either unadulterated or in a vernacularized, translated form (De Grazia 2005). Elsewhere, as in many parts of Asia, the means of production and distribution closely associated with US consumerism took longer to arrive, or were filtered through the US's close Asian allies of Japan and Korea, so that by the final decade of the twentieth century, late capitalist modernity often took on the appearance of an East Asian creation.

Today, the international business executive or tourist may not even notice the linguistic patterning of the built environment, place names, restaurants, road signage, street names, or shops in those destinations they visit. Through globalization, we now inhabit a familiar universe in most destinations throughout the world, with 7-Eleven stores, Coca-Cola, Kentucky Fried Chicken, Pizza Hut, and Starbucks available from London to Beijing, and most places in between. Added to which, and perhaps more tellingly, in many cities around the world, we also have the vernacular equivalents of such brands, with local versions of McDonald's, and copy-culture Starbuck clones, wherever *caffè latte* culture has established a foothold. Through globalization, the world has become more connected, more consumerist, increasingly corporatized, and, often, increasingly mundane. A taxi ride through an Asian city, typically involves the view of all-too-familiar billboards passing by the window, with the familiar brands of global corporations reminding you of the futility of escaping their reach. In some settings, however, the use of English signage may surprise and amuse in unexpected ways. For example, a false-nail shop in Guangzhou uses the English name 'Nail & Nail', but side-by-side in its signage with the two Chinese characters 袅袅, whose pronunciation in Putonghua *niǎo niǎo* resonates with the English, and the meaning of which may be glossed as 'elegant, elegant'.

The intrusion and use of English in the public spaces of the world's cities alongside national languages and local languages has received increasing attention over the last fifteen years or so. In an early study, Ross (1997) describes a walk through a Milanese suburb, with such facilities as a hairdresser's called Smart Set, a pub called the Wonder Bar, a clothes shop named Noblemen, and a car park called Wind Parking Garage. McArthur (2000) notes that in an ad hoc survey of street signage in Uppsala, Sweden and Zurich, Switzerland, some 45 per cent of Uppsala signs and 58 per cent of Zurich signs used some English, sometimes in bi- and multi-lingual signage. In the Swedish example, the signs varied between Swedish-only; English-only; Turkish/Arabic; Swedish and English; Swedish and French; Swedish and Turkish/Arabic; English and French; English and Italian; French and Italian; French, Swedish and English; Italian, Swedish and Turkish/Arabic; Italian, Spanish, English; Chinese, English, Swedish, French; Turkish/Arabic, English, French, Swedish; and Swedish, French, English, Italian. Other studies of

English in the signage of Expanding Circle cities include Schlick 2002 (Klagenfurt, Austria; Udine, Italy; and Ljubljana, Slovenia), MacGregor 2003 (Tokyo), and Dimova 2007 (Macedonia). In these studies, the use of English language signage is variously explained in terms of ‘prestige, style and modernity’ (Ross), ‘creativity’ (MacArthur 2000), ‘an extension of Japanese’ (MacGregor 2003), ‘western consumerism’ (Dimova 2007), and ‘prestige and wealth’ (Dimova 2007).

At a somewhat different level, the study of English and other languages in urban public signage has drawn the attention of anthropologists, cultural theorists, and scholars in sociolinguistics, many of whom have contributed to a body of research on the topic of ‘linguistic landscapes’. Influential texts in this growing field now include such work as Landry and Bourhis’ (1997) early essay on ‘Linguistic landscape and ethnolinguistic vitality’, as well as such books as Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) *Discourses in Place: Language in the Material World*; Gorter’s (2006a) *Linguistic Landscape: A New Approach to Multilingualism*; Backhaus’ (2007) *Linguistic Landscapes: A Comparative Study of Urban Multilingualism in Tokyo*; Shohamy and Gorter’s (2009) *Linguistic Landscape: Expanding the Scenery*; and Shohamy, Ben-Rafael and Barni’s (2010) *Linguistic Landscape in the City*.

The scope of such work varies greatly. Scollon and Scollon’s (2003) volume is thematically ordered, but takes many examples from Hong Kong. Gorter’s (2006a) edited volume includes contributions on Israel, Bangkok, Tokyo, Friesland, and the Basque Country. Backhaus (2007) focuses solely on Tokyo, while Shohamy and Gorter (2009) is an edited collection with case studies and discussions from Belarus, Canada, the Czech Republic, Ethiopia, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Japan, the Netherlands, Slovakia, Sweden, Taiwan, and the US. Similarly, Shohamy et al.’s (2010) volume brings together a number of diverse articles dealing with such contexts as France, Hong Kong, Italy, Ireland, Israel, South Korea, Japan, South Africa, Spain, the Ukraine, and the US. While a number of discussions in the literature have noted that the topic of linguistic landscapes may have wider implications for the study of multilingualism, sociolinguistics, and language planning, the essential focus of most published work hitherto has been with the material form of language in public display and public places in the shape of ‘[t]he language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names: place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings’ (Landry and Bourhis 1997: 25).

Nevertheless, as noted by Jaworski and Thurlow, the study of linguistic landscapes has the potential to inform our understanding of a range of intellectual issues above and beyond the mere analysis of linguistic form. Thus, they argue that such studies have much to say about issues relating to demographic and institutional power, ethnic and racial relations, linguistic vitality, and language ideologies, noting that, even within contemporary geography, space is now seen as a discursive as well as physical formation (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010a). In their volume, they are crucially concerned to expand and extend the notion of linguistic landscapes to include coverage of such other ‘semiotic landscapes’ as computer mediated communication, media discourse on Latino immigration in the US, tourist advertising, and national war monuments. In the introduction to their volume, they emphasize that they are concerned to move beyond the perceived limitations of the term ‘linguistic landscape’, and ‘to emphasize the way written discourse interacts with other discursive modalities: visual images, nonverbal communication, architecture and the built environment’, where ‘semiotic landscape’ refers to “any (public) space with visible inscription made through deliberate human intervention and meaning making” (Jaworski and Thurlow 2010b: 2).

The relevance of this body of scholarship on linguistic landscapes to the study of world Englishes is direct at a number of levels. First, as noted above, the increased use of English in public spaces worldwide may be seen as the instantiation of processes related to economic and cultural globalization (as well as ‘glocalization’). Second, there are direct connections with the socio-historical development of the world, as we know it. Graddol (2006) has argued insightfully that, in its current historical stage of late capitalism or post-modernity, the world is becoming increasingly multilingual as previously established

nation-state institutions of language control and language planning have been undermined by the global flows of information, media, people, and technology. In similar vein, Gorter (2006b: 88) comments that:

In a thorough sense of the word, our world at the beginning of the 21st century is a multilingual one. The idea of monolingualism by country – one state, one language – has become obsolete and has been overtaken by a complicated interplay of many languages. Truly monolingual countries were always an exception, but globalisation with its ensuing migration flows, spread of cultural products, and high speed communication has led to more multilingualism instead of less. [. . .] The process of ‘glocalisation’ in the international arena leads to new expressions of cultural mix in music, food and clothing, but also in languages. Innumerable language contact situations cause a high incidence of multiple forms of bilingualism.

Given this, the study of linguistic landscapes may help us to understand the rapidly changing urban landscapes, and the increasingly multilingual worlds, in which we live or we experience through travel. In this symposium on ‘World Englishes and Linguistic Landscapes’, four case studies of linguistic and semiotic landscapes are presented. The first of these from Jackie Jia Lou deals with the bilingual English-Chinese landscape of Chinatown in Washington DC; the second, from Luanga Kasanga, deals with English, French and other languages in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the third, from C. Bruce Lawrence, deals with public signage in South Korea; and the fourth, from Robert Troyer, focuses on English on Thai Internet sites.

Perhaps the broader implication of linguistic/semiotic landscapes is to point towards new directions in world Englishes research. As noted in discussions by Bolton (2005), Graddol (2006), and Saraceni (2010), the scope of world Englishes is not simply limited to the discussion of the linguistic features of particular ‘varieties of English’ in their geographical spread. Indeed, some of the most exciting areas of current research in the field are those dealing with the slippery linguistic spaces between and within particular speech communities, where the use of English is juxtaposed with other international, national, regional, and local languages. In a number of contexts globally, the dividing lines between Outer Circle and Expanding Circle contexts have become blurred for a variety of social and historical reasons. Today, the linguistic experiences of young people in particular are becoming increasingly diverse, and, in this context, their linguistic worlds are not simply defined through physical space, but also through electronic space, educational travel and migration, global travel, media awareness and usage, popular culture, and the virtual space of the Internet.

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