Abstract. This paper invites language instructors to consider the potentials of applying the real language in contact into learning. Specifically, it looks into the use of language(s) in the linguistic landscapes of our towns and cities and the possibility of providing students with the opportunity to link the real language usage and their classroom activities. Instructors can either bring in the real data to class by capturing the language usage in still photo or video format, or employ the fieldwork method for the students to explore the linguistic landscapes themselves. Data contained in the linguistic landscapes are very rich and can be utilized in different facets of language teaching such as vocabulary enrichment, language accuracy in the form of error correction and linguistic creativity. For more advanced learners, the data can be adapted in teaching high order thinking skills such as inferencing, and policy related matters such as language maintenance, language policy and language evolution. This kind of approach is more meaningful and real to students, and can complement the classroom activities.

Keywords: language in contact, linguistic landscapes, language learning.

Introduction. As language educators, our aim in teaching is to engage our students to acquire language meaningfully so that they will be able to negotiate meaning and get their messages through. However, the contexts of learning available for our students are mainly limited to the classroom. It is always a challenge to connect the contents of classroom lessons to the real world outside the classroom. This raises a question – does teaching and learning through task-based classroom activities satisfy the students’ needs or what they encounter beyond the classroom? The authors believe that putting real learning situations in teaching can bring big opportunities for the students to improve as exposure is one of the essential elements for the second language acquisition. In this paper, the authors invite language instructors to consider the potentials of bringing the real language in contact into learning. Specifically, it discusses the pedagogical potentials of the linguistic landscapes (LL, henceforth) surrounding us, i.e. the language used in public, for language learning. Data from LL are not only available and abundantly free, but are rich and authentic resources for language learning.

Literature Review. The concept of LL relates to the use of language in its written form in the public sphere, and is visible to all in that particular area (Gorter, 2006). Landry and Bourhis (1997) define the term LL by detailing it as ‘the language of public road signs, advertising boards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings’ (p.25). Others have expanded this early concept by encompassing other possible discourse in the public domain such as advertisement flyers, advertisement on moving vehicles and tourist maps. The significance of LL in multicultural and linguistically diverse communities as a result of globalisation has contributed towards the growing interest in this topic. This is because LL ‘constitutes of the scene (...) where society’s public life takes place’ (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006, p.8). Although LL has often been taken for granted, it must be realised that LL does not occur in a vacuum. Laundry and Bourhis (1997) suggest that it serves informational and symbolic functions in a particular area. The initial informational function of LL can be traced to the original work in the language-planning field. For instance, in Belgium, LL acted as ‘a distinctive marker of the geographical territory inhabited by a given language community’ (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p.25). LL was then used to mark the geographical boundaries inhabited by the Dutch-speaking and French-speaking communities. With this function, LL can inform the public about the ‘linguistic characteristics, territorial limits, and language boundaries of the region they have entered’ (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p.25). In the same vein, the presence of diverse languages in a territory can indicate the sociolinguistic composition in the area. With this information, the public will be able to know what language can be used for communication or giving and obtaining services within the area.

Apart from indexing the geographical boundary, LL can also serve as a symbol of social positioning and power relationships (Gorter, 2006). The presence or absence of a certain group’s language in the LL of a certain area can indicate the societal attitudes towards the language (as well as its speakers), and mark the ethnonlinguistic vitality of the group inhibiting that area. For example, Shohamy’s (2006) study on LL in Israel, indicates that when Hebrew, Arabic and English are used, it symbolises the recognition of Arabs or Arab speakers in the areas. Conversely, when only Hebrew is used, it suggests that the Arabs may be overlooked. As a result of globalisation, recent studies on LL has shown that LL now is serving more of symbolic function rather than the informational one. For example, Scollon and Scollon (2003) suggest that the presence of foreign languages in the LL in a certain area, particularly English, may indicate ‘foreign tastes, fashions or associations between other products or types of businesses and English-
speaking culture’ (p. 1998) rather than marking the geographical boundary. Along the same line, Ben Rafael et al. (2006) and Cenoz and Gorter (2006) also put forward that the inclusion of English in the LL may be due to the perceptions towards the language being more modern and prestigious compared to the local languages. Globalisation has also resulted in the composition of LL become more dynamic and constantly evolve. Researchers have also considered the ‘LL-actors’ in understanding the construction of LL. This is because LL is not constructed in a vacuum. LL-actors ‘concretely participate in the shaping of LL by ordering from others or building by themselves LL elements according to preferential tendencies, deliberate choices or policies’ (Ben Rafael et al., 2006, p. 27). These LL-actors may include businesses that put up the businesses, business people who design, produce and sell, private people who put up signs to make announcements, authorities and passers-by (Edelman and Gorter, 2010).

There have also been growing interest on exploring the potentials of LL to develop learners’ language acquisition and language learning especially in multilingual communities. This is because the rich social context of LL offers educators or instructors vast opportunities to create meaningful experiences for learners and for the learners themselves to connect classroom learning and the real world. Engagement with the diverse discourse in LL enables learners to understand the language use in the society. It allows learners to understand the history and culture in which language is a part. They can also develop awareness of the role that different languages or dialects play in the social communication network of their community (Sayer, 2010). In addition, connecting themselves with the real world experience can develop learners’ critical thinking skills as they also learn to critically analyse information from diverse sources.

**Pedagogical Potentials of Linguistic Landscapes in Language Learning.** The study of the linguistic landcsapes has received a considerable attention from various domains especially in the socio-economic field and policy planning. However, little attention has been drawn from the LL in the field of education, particularly language learning in Malaysia. The discourse of LL can be a rich source of real language use as at least two different language systems operate inside and outside school in this country. Instructors, nevertheless, tend to forget this authentic resource and only focus on practice within the limited classroom walls. Thus, how can we use LL as a learning resource?

The discourse from LL can be pedagogically exploited in numerous ways. Instructors can either bring in the real data to class by capturing the language usage in still photo or video format, or employ the fieldwork method for the students to explore the linguistic landscapes themselves. Instructors, then, can decide on the aspects of language teaching and learning (based on the curricula) that can utilise the data from LL. The following examples illustrate the pedagogical potentials of LL surrounding us.

**Vocabulary Enrichment.** One of the greatest obstacles in language production for second language learners is limited vocabulary. A wide vocabulary helps learners understand what they read or listen, as well as to write and speak well. It is quite impossible for instructors to cover vocabulary items that learners need to use or understand within the limited teaching hours in class. Learners’ reading habits and vocabulary learning strategies such as using dictionary, games and personal word bank can help to enrich vocabulary. However, instructors can revamp this method of teaching vocabulary into a more interesting and meaningful one by teaching vocabulary in various contexts outside the classroom. Instructors may set a mini project for the learners to explore the rich vocabulary around them. In groups, learners may choose a topic that could be an interest to them, or the instructors may set the topics stipulated in the syllabus. Learners can explore the vocabulary associated with the topic in the various contexts in the linguistic landscapes. For example, if they are exploring words associated with food, they can collect data from restaurant shop signs, menus, brochures, recipes and bill board advertisements. Figure 1 below shows some examples of words associated with food in terms of the service provided by the restaurants, i.e ‘take away’, ‘dine in’ or ‘home delivery’.

![Types of Restaurant Services](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com)

**Figure 1: Types of Restaurant Services**

Figure 2 contains vocabulary that informs the way food is prepared. Students may find this interesting and will be extrinsically motivated as this (the manner of food preparation) relates to daily life. The vocabulary can also enrich their cultural understanding through learning how people from different countries or cultures prepare their food.

Focusing on topics may also give the learners a sense of direction in learning vocabulary. Students may learn new words for types of restaurants if they encounter shop signs like ‘pizzeria’, ‘tea room’, ‘diner’ and ‘bistro’ (Figure 3).

![Different Names for Restaurants](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com)

**Figure 3: Different Names for Restaurants**

![Food on the Menu](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com)

**Figure 4: Food on the Menu**

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**References:**

Along the same line, words on the menu can also motivate learners to know more. They will be intrigued on what will be served if they order anything from the menu. For a more structured lesson, instructors can ask the learners to group the words they find in the menu (for example in Figure 4) into different categories of meal, i.e breakfast, lunch or dinner. For more advanced learners, instructors may want to delve into higher level of vocabulary found in the LL such as figurative language, phrasal verbs and word coinage. Students may want to follow this up as they will be interested to find what a restaurant offers when the signs read ‘bottomless cup’, ‘soup of the day’, ‘farm to table’ and ‘Sunday Lunch’. Figure 5 shows some examples of this.

![Figure 5: Restaurant Offers](http://pixelpointgraphics.com) ![Figure 5: Restaurant Offers](https://images-na.ssl-images-amazon.com)

**Figure 5: Restaurant Offers**

**Language Accuracy.** Teaching grammar rules can be challenging. The rote learning method may be effective. However, learners from the Gens Y, X and Z may find it out-of-date and meaningless as it is out of context. They may not be able to apply the rules outside the classroom context. Data from LL can be utilized in teaching grammar items such as spelling, parts of speech and word order. With careful planning, the teaching and learning process can be fun, interactive and meaningful. Learners may be able to see the language (in)accuracies around them.

For example, instructors can bring in some samples of signboards containing spelling errors and ask the students to identify the errors and correct them. They may introduce the activities with interactive and interesting names like ‘Spot the Error’, ‘Where is the Error?’ or ‘Correct Me, Please!’.

![Figure 6: Spelling Mistakes in English Signboards](https://i.pinimg.com) ![Figure 7: Grammatical Mistakes in English Signboards](https://img.buzzfeed.com)

**Figure 6: Spelling Mistakes in English Signboards**

**Figure 7: Grammatical Mistakes in English Signboards**

Figures 6 and 7 above show spelling and grammatical mistakes found in public sign boards. Instructors may ask the learners to work in groups, or individually if they are better language learners. They may be given worksheet containing error and correction columns. For more advanced level, instructors may approach the lesson with real data collection session where learners themselves collect data from the signboards in the area and bring the data to class for discussion. From this exercise, instructors may be able to assess the learners’ metalinguistic awareness based on their ability to identify, describe, explain and correct the errors.

**Linguistic Creativity.** For more advanced learners, instructors should exploit their linguistic knowledge and bring it to a higher level so as to produce better users of the language. Instead of relying on examples from books and be confined to limited resources, instructors can bring in real samples from LL surrounding them.

Figure 8 below shows some examples of linguistic creativity in shop signs. Instructors may show the pictures in class and discuss why the phrases used are considered as creative. Learners, then, may be asked to create their own shops and give creative names to the shops. They may also present their creation to class and invite further discussion from their counterparts. This exercise will be able to integrate all the skills in language learning, that is, writing, listening, speaking and reading.

![Figure 8: Linguistic Creativity in Signboards](http://www.auntyacid.com) ![Figure 8: Linguistic Creativity in Signboards](https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com)

**Figure 8: Linguistic Creativity in Signboards**

**Figure 11: Language Style in Signboards**

**Language Evolvement.** Language evolves in time through globalization and modernization. Depending solely on examples from textbooks will not be able to capture the current trend in language use. Instructors can set interesting field work for the learners to find language varieties used in banners, notices, shop signs and flyers that contain language evolvement. Based on the data collected, learners can identify the language use into different varieties such as teen/youth language, net-lingo or hybrid language like the ones shown in Figure 11.
Another activity that can be carried out in class includes discussion on the choice of the varieties and the factors that may influence the choice. In addition, instructors may set a project that requires the students to plan a business which includes naming the business and designing the banner/shop signs. They will need to present it to the rest of the class and get peer feedback in terms of choice, language accuracy and creativity.

**Inferencing Skills.** LL can also be utilized to nurture learners’ high order thinking skills. They can be taught the skills of inferencing. For example, instructors can bring photos of shop signs to class and ask inferential questions that are related to the signs to the students. For example, from Figure 9 below, instructors can ask the students what kind of product(s) they expect the shops to sell and justify their choice of answer. This will require both the students’ metalinguistic skills and background knowledge on the data.

![Figure 9: Products Advertised in Signboards](https://i.pinimg.com)

![Figure 10: Language Choice and Preference in Signboards](https://encrypted-tbn0.gstatic.com)

**Language Choice & Preference.** Data from LL can also be used in teaching the sociological aspects of language for students majoring in language or language teaching. For example, data in Figure 10 can be utilized for topics on people’s language choice and preference and the underlying reasons for the choice. Instructors may use worksheet to identify the types of language used in the signs, i.e unilingual, bilingual or multilingual. Instructors may also initiate discussion on the reasons of the language use relating to locality, products, people and customers. Further discussions can be drawn from these real data as other sub-topics can be included such as language maintenance, social identity and language policy.

**Conclusion.** This paper has presented some examples on how instructors can widen learners’ opportunities to ‘taste’ the real language use in contact through LL around us. The limited contexts for language learning in the classroom for our students may limit their opportunities to apply the skills learned in the real life experience. Instructors can help students to connect the contents of classroom lessons to the real world outside by bringing in real life content into classroom learning. The discourse from LL is rich and authentic for language learning. Instructors may want to consider the pedagogical potentials of linguistic landscapes as the data are free and abundantly available and can expose learners to real language use which cannot be captured by textbooks or prescribed learning materials in the classroom.

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