

The language lessons around us: Undergraduate English pedagogy and linguistic landscape research

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ABSTRACT: This narrative article analyses three Korean undergraduate students' experiences conducting a linguistic landscape research project. Linguistic landscape research, the study of publicly displayed language such as billboards and other signs, is a relatively new area of scholarly interest. However, there has been only limited study of using linguistic landscape as pedagogy. This analysis found that, for these students, participating in this project led to a greater awareness of the complex and contradictory relationships between languages, and aided their development as language learners. However, the study also found that the different perspectives of these three students and their Canadian instructor shaped how they viewed these multilingual signs, creating both tension and opportunities for learning.¹

KEYWORDS: Linguistic landscape, place-based semiotics, English language learners, Korea

INTRODUCTION

The modern urban dweller is surrounded by vast amounts of publicly displayed written language including commercial advertisements, government warnings and notices, hand-scrawled graffiti, advertising flyers littering the road, and more. These texts, existing in particular places and times, are often referred to as the *linguistic landscape* within a growing field of study of the same name. Although other scholars may use the term linguistic landscape to refer to a general linguistic context (see Reagan, 2002), within this article the term linguistic landscape follows the definition given by Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 25) in their seminal paper often cited in linguistic landscape research:

The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings combines to form the linguistic landscape of a given territory, region, or urban agglomeration.

Although scholars prior to Landry and Bourhis explored issues of publicly displayed signs and text, Landry and Bourhis's article was the beginning of, and has become a touchstone for, a more intense academic focus on issues surrounding publicly displayed written language.

Most linguistic landscape scholarship uses photographs of public signs as data to understand the multilingual and multiliterate sociolinguistic ecology of cities

¹ This research was generously supported by the 2013 Research Fund of Hankuk University of Foreign Studies.

(Spolsky 2009, p. 32). Within this branch of linguistic landscape studies, scholars have explored issues related to multilingualism and language contact (Backhaus, 2007), the validity of particular sociolinguistic models within a particular linguistic landscape (Lawrence, 2012), changes in the linguistic landscape over time (Pavlenko 2010), symbolic power and the representativeness of the linguistic landscape relative to the languages present in the community (Ben-Rafael, Shohamy, Amara and Trumper-Hecht, 2006), minority languages and language policy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2006; Gorter, Marten & van Mensel, 2012), the symbolic role of English in a English language learning context (Huebner 2006, Lawrence, 2012; Van Vlack, 2011) and more. Likewise some linguistic landscape studies have generally explored the sociolinguistic ecology of cities such as Tokyo (Backhaus; 2007), Seoul (Lawrence, 2012; Van Vlack, 2011), Bangkok (Huebner, 2006), and others have explored linguistic landscapes online (Ivkovic & Lotherington, 2009) and even the linguistic landscape within individual spaces such as a laboratory (Hanauer, 2009).

While much linguistic landscape research has focused primarily on analysing collections of digitally photographed signs, and relationships between language policy and particular linguistic landscapes (see Backhaus, 2007; Ben-Rafael et al. 2006; Landry & Bourhis, 1997), other researchers have focused on people's relationships with linguistic landscapes, examining issues related to the creation of signs, the perception of signs, and the experience of being in a particular linguistic landscape. Malinowski's (2009) study, for example, analysed Korean American business owners' understandings and perceptions of the multilingual commercial signs that were part of their commercial enterprises and the larger neighbourhood. Further, Hanauer's (2009) research on laboratory literacy practices, involving the linguistic landscape of notices and white-boards within a laboratory "situates LL² within the context of academic literacy and as such may exemplify a broadening range of research questions to which LL research is applicable" (p. 287). His study highlights that linguistic landscapes of particular places can be intimately involved with literacy practices, which suggests that elements of the linguistic landscapes can be brought more directly into language pedagogy.

Other scholars have been more directly focused on the potential for linguistic landscapes to be involved in language teaching. Cenoz and Gorter (2008), Rowland (2012), Sayer (2010), and Thornbury (2012) have discussed how creating opportunities for students to study their own linguistic landscapes could easily serve pedagogical purposes; however, only Rowland has studied these activities in practice. Therefore, there is a need for more detailed accounts of linguistic landscapes being used as a form of pedagogy in practice.

This article describes the experiences of three Korean undergraduate students majoring in English interpretation and translation who undertook a directed linguistic landscape project as part of their coursework. These students' experiences are represented, alongside the experiences of their instructor, through a detailed narrative, exposing both the development of these students and their meandering frustration that occurred as well. Further, narrative analysis of these experiences examines what

² LL refers to linguist landscape and is used by several authors referenced in this article, although not by the authors of this article.

conceptual development occurred as a result of doing linguistic landscape research, and further discusses the difficulties and unexpected conclusions these students made.

The article is divided into four sections. First, this article reviews previous linguistic landscape research and pedagogy focusing on the claims of these researchers. Second, this article discusses narrative research as a methodology, the specific methods employed, and why narrative research is uniquely suited for exploring chaotic classroom practices that do not always follow a linear path. The third section is the narrative of the experiences of these students and their instructor doing linguistic landscape research as a pedagogical activity. This is then followed by a discussion and conclusion highlighting how this study supports and complicates claims made regarding the benefits of having students engage in linguistic landscape research.

EXPLORING THE LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AS A PEDAGOGICAL ACTIVITY

While linguistic landscape research has continued to map and explore how languages are displayed throughout the world, some scholars have begun to discuss how to use linguistic landscapes and linguistic landscape research as pedagogy (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Rowland, 2012, Sayer, 2010; Thornbury, 2012). Thornbury, in his popular blog, outlines for a more general readership the potential of making linguistic landscapes part of a language-learning curriculum. He advocates asking learners to engage in a simplified analysis of the languages used in the local linguistic landscape, stating that this “is not beyond the reach of English language learners” (Thornbury, 2012). Thornbury’s short discussion examining linguistic landscapes for pedagogical benefits shows the relatively widening circulation of this idea; however, his lack of examples indicates the need for more research that delves into students’ experiences of doing these projects and the difficulties and success that arise when they do.

Thornbury’s very short introduction draws primarily on Sayer’s (2010) article on using linguistic landscapes as a pedagogical resource. Sayer outlines his primary reason for focusing on linguistic landscapes:

As an EFL teacher, I often struggle to find ways to connect the content of my language lessons in the classroom to the real world students encounter outside the classroom. We know that exposure and practice are two essential elements for L2 acquisition; however, in most EFL settings throughout the world, students’ opportunities for exposure and practice beyond the classroom walls are limited. (p. 143)

Connecting students with English and English language learning in EFL contexts is a challenge and an important potential use of linguistic landscapes. Additionally, Sayer believes these types of projects can lead to learners developing an understanding of their own sociolinguistic worlds, allowing students to develop understandings of language use, appropriateness, and the larger sociolinguistic ecology surrounding them. Sayer investigates these learning possibilities by asking: “Why do people in Oaxaca use English in public places?” (Sayer, 2010, p. 145) and conducting a small linguistic landscape study himself, arguing that students can easily follow his example. Advocating that students can examine their own linguistic landscapes as

“language detectives” (Sayer, 2010, p. 144), Sayer demonstrates the possibilities for learning that come from a simple linguistic landscape project. However, his article did not involve any student participants or any student analysis of linguistic landscapes, creating a further need for detailed studies of students’ experiences investigating linguistic landscapes.

While Sayer discussed only two major benefits of using linguistic landscape research as a pedagogical resource, Cenoz and Gorter (2008), in an earlier and more theoretical exploration of linguistic landscapes and pedagogy, discussed the possible benefits of exploring the linguistic landscape, describing five possible areas of learning: incidental learning; pragmatic competence; multimodal literacy skills; multicompetence; and the symbolic and emotional power of language. However, as in Sayer’s article, Cenoz and Gorter did not explore this concept in practice.

Rowland (2012), seeking to evaluate the claims of Cenoz and Gorter (2008) and Sayer (2010), completed a research project in which 27 university students in Japan conducted a linguistic landscape study as part of an English writing class. Following Sayer’s project, Rowland asked these students to explore the question: “How and why is English used on signs in Japan?” (Rowland, 2012, p. 4). These students then began collecting photos, but then struggled to categorise them as Sayer easily did in his example project. Rowland, in the interest of avoiding steering his students towards any particular views, devised a rubric of questions that helped guide these students past their initial confusion and feelings of being overwhelmed. The students then continued their project, eventually producing written reports that became data for Rowland’s analysis. Rowland concluded that linguistic landscape research done by learners can, at least potentially, lead to development in the five areas outlined by Cenoz and Gorter, and can also aid in developing critical literacy skills stating:

Overall, the six claims summarised from the literature were corroborated to different degrees in the students’ reports. This study then generally supports the contention that language learners in EFL contexts can benefit in various, important ways from pedagogical interaction with their local LLs. (p. 10)

Rowland’s article offers limited confirmation that students can benefit from conducting linguistic landscape research in the ways Cenoz and Gorter (2008) as well as Sayer (2010) considered. While a vitally important study of this pedagogy in practice, his article offered limited insight into students’ experiences of doing linguistic landscape research, what questions students want to ask about the linguistic landscapes that surround them, and the confusion that flows from students’ struggles to understand their own linguistic landscapes. Further, Rowland’s method to aid students’ efforts to categorise their linguistic landscape may have shaped much of how they approached their project, with Rowland writing:

The author also acknowledges that the list of questions provided as a categorisation aid to the students may have narrowed the students’ perspectives of the LL by focusing them on particular aspects of public signage. A different set of questions may have produced different reports and opinions from the class. (p. 10)

While the guidance Rowland provided was valuable, it limited examination of student ideas about linguistic landscape questions and interests. A greater focus on the confusion of students, the meandering paths they attempted to take, and their

initial ideas about their own sociolinguistic ecology would be valuable for understanding the pedagogical possibilities of these activities, by highlighting the causes of such confusion and students' initial interests in examining the textual world around them. Additionally, a more open project, allowing students to ask their own linguistic landscape questions and pursue them as they see fit, may reveal previously unknown benefits, not discussed by Cenoz and Gorter (2008), Sayer (2010), or Rowland (2012).

Therefore, this article specifically asks: What is the experience of doing linguistic landscape research for these students? What conceptual develop occurred alongside doing this project? What do students say about what they learned? and What difficulties did they encounter in doing this project?

THE BASIS OF NARRATIVE RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

While the previous studies discussing linguistic landscapes as a pedagogical resource avoided issues of research methodology by remaining entirely theoretical (Cenoz & Gorter 2008; Sayer, 2010) or focusing on a relatively simple textual analysis of students' produced texts (Rowland, 2012), the questions this article poses demand a more involved discussion of research methodology. Questions about experience and meaning can be explored through methodologies such as phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994) or ethnography (Fetterman, 2010), but for research that emerges from classroom practices as those practices happen, the tradition of narrative methodologies in educational research (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000; Clandinin, 2007; Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002a; Phillion, 2002) may be the most suitable as it allows both student and instructor stories to form both the data and elements of the analysis of the data. Further, narrative methods are open to developing research projects as they happen, in class, in the midst of teaching activities that were never planned as part of any research project (see Boldt {1996} as an example). Ultimately, narrative research reorients the researcher's view towards the unfolding of events interwoven with the cascading meanings that accumulate around these events, and then attempts to theoretically examine the stories at the centre of any study.

In order to explore these students' experiences and the conceptual development that flowed from these experiences this article embraces a narrative research methodology that weaves both the stories of three students and their instructor working on this student project together with analysis of how this project shaped these students' development as language learners. This narrative methodology embraces a subjective and limited view of the knowledge it produces. This knowledge, often generated by teacher-researchers about their own classroom practices, can contribute greatly towards curriculum development and theoretical discussions regarding education. Narrative research relies upon the idea that narrative, or simply story, is a powerful way of discovering and communicating knowledge about pedagogy, student development, and education (Lyons & LaBoskey, 2002b; Silin, 2003).

Whereas research methodologies that embrace a more scientific or positivistic position usually require researchers to maintain a careful and distanced objectivity to their research, narrative research methodologies create the possibility for more nuanced and profound creation of knowledge between those who know each other

well. In narrative research, an intimate relationship between researchers and participants, as in Boldt's (2006a, 2006b, 2009) narrative studies of her own son, are viewed as means through which previously unseen or unexamined aspects of some learning can be explored, and through which "theory making" can be done. In this study the position of Michael Chesnut as both classroom instructor and researcher allows for a more nuanced and richer narrative to be told. Further, Jenna Schulte and Vivian Lee, working as instructors within the same department, were able to observe project development and bring alternative understandings to this research. Their relationships with these students allowed for alternative understandings of how these students progressed during this project.

As narrative research is rooted in subjective and personal ways of knowing and generating knowledge, alternative means, differing from those in positivistic methods, are required to ensure the results of narrative research are valid (Polkinghorne, 2007). In this study both the researchers and participants built validity by collectively reviewing the collected data, discussing the participants' understandings and interpretations of doing the project, and asking students if any important aspects of their experiences were not being represented or discussed. Further, as many discussions and all interviews were conducted in English, both students and researchers discussed how this might have limited the discussion and the conveying of narratives. Additionally, alternative interpretations or theories that could plausibly be developed were discussed in order to ensure that other worthwhile interpretations of these narratives were not ignored. Ultimately, the narrative research methodology employed in this study builds validity through the rhetorical strength of the narratives and interpretation conveyed, as well as a willingness to explore alternative understandings.

Narrative research is very often singly authored and commonly adopts the first person "I" to highlight the role of the author in the story of the research. Use of third person can create a distant or scientific voice, a danger in narrative research as this can reify the views of the researcher, presenting them as incontestable and existing outside of the researcher's perspective. However, as this study is co-authored, with each author having a different role in the research, the use of first person has been abandoned. The authors have tried to guard against creating an authoritative voice by highlighting the subjective and limited nature of this research, as well as consulting with the participants to ensure that their understandings are being represented.

A NARRATIVE ACCOUNT OF THESE STUDENTS' LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE PROJECT

The linguistic landscape student project that is the basis of this study began in "Introduction to Intercultural Studies", a course offered by the undergraduate English Interpretation and Translation Department at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies, which covered academic fields as diverse as cultural physiology, cultural studies, and intercultural communication. In this course, taught by Michael Chesnut, students are required to complete a final project with one option being a small linguistic landscape study. Although most students pursued other projects, Hyunju³ elected to pursue a

³ Pseudonyms are used for the students in this course in order to preserve confidentiality.

linguistic landscape study, collecting data in several different areas of Seoul, and then quantitatively examining two areas of Seoul in terms of languages present in the signs and general messages of the signs. This quantitative exploration led her to designate two different sign categories: “explicit messages”, where the words in the sign explicitly give information to the reader related to the purpose of the sign, such as “pizza” on a sign for a pizza restaurant, or “implicit messages”, where the words in the sign are related only tangentially, such as the word “heart” on a sign for a cafe. Drawing upon commonplace understandings of Seoul, Hyunju ultimately concluded that in the area which is more frequented by an older population, there were more explicit signs, usually written in Korean, detailing what was being sold or giving a definite message. However, in the area frequented by younger people, the signs were more figurative, often containing no explicit information about what was being advertised or sold. Hyunju completed this assignment with relatively little assistance from Michael, creating the categories of implicit messages and explicit messages herself and directing her study with little guidance.

Following the completion of this class, the College of English at Hankuk University of Foreign Studies began preparing for their annual undergraduate academic conference, in which teams of students give presentations on original research as well as publish their findings in the conference proceedings. After being contacted by Michael, Hyunju volunteered to expand her original project in order to enter the academic conference. Two other students, Ahyoung and Minji, from “Introduction to Intercultural Studies” volunteered as well. As this project began, the authors chose to study what these students learned by doing this project, and, after gaining the consent of these three students to participate in this research, began observing team meetings and keeping notes while also providing limited guidance for this project.

The initial meeting with the three students and Michael revolved around brainstorming what aspects of the local linguistic landscape these students wanted to study and which areas of Seoul they wanted to examine. Initially, the students had some difficulty choosing what to study, and struggled with articulating any plan to pursue a larger linguistic landscape research program. Michael, while offering some limited examples from previously published linguistic landscape studies, did not suggest any initial research questions, with the conversation being governed by the students and moving between English and Korean. This initial discussion ended with students planning on collecting photographs as data from different areas of Seoul, bringing them together during the next meeting, and then deciding what aspects of the linguistic landscape of Seoul to study.

These students and Michael returned the following week with photographs of the areas they visited and discussed different ways they could approach their linguistic landscape research project. Hyunju explains her main activities collecting data at this point in the study:

I take, took part of the visible part of sign languages. So I focused on the language itself that you can see on the sign, on the signs. So I took three places and visited those places, took photos there and collected the photos and tried to find some, some rules there. And why this place shows this kind of language this much and why this place doesn't show this places languages. So, hmm, I tried to find the tendency that can be found in the signs.

Hyunju primarily focused on the distribution of different languages in Jongno, Gangnam, and Cheongdam, three neighbourhoods in Seoul. Ahyoung and Minji reported that they had struggled to find any interesting signs and felt rather confused about how they should proceed with their part of the research project. Additionally, Michael brought printed photographs of the multicultural neighbourhood Itaewon, an area adjacent to a very large American military base and popular among foreign residents of Seoul, containing many multilingual signs and seen as generally different from most places in Korea by most Koreans – essentially a foreign place within Korean space (Kim, 2004). Together, they discussed the different signs on display in these photos, moving between different sets of photos. Discussion focused on the signs from Itaewon including: the use of Russian in a less than 20-metre-long street; the use of the word “Halal”; the different transliterations of “shirt” in one clothing shop; and the multilingual street signs warning residents not to deposit trash in unauthorised areas. All three students were unfamiliar with the word “Halal” and the discussion revolved around how different groups of speakers perceive linguistic landscapes in different ways. The discussion of the Russian language signs centred around how this language is present in only a small area and the significance of this cluster of signs, and how some languages appear to be used far more frequently in some areas of Itaewon than others. This led to the idea of asking some international students from Russia and elsewhere to come in and discuss how they understand these signs through some simple focus group activities as one possible part of the research project.

All three students and Michael were interested in this approach to studying Itaewon’s linguistic landscape; however, the discussion moved on to other topics. The students then examined the sign for a tailor’s shop-front and noticed the the Korean transliteration of “shirts” used an older transliteration to spell the English word “shirts” in Hangeul script, the common form of writing Korean, speculating that this tailor may be frequented by older Korean customers and foreign residents. The discussion then continued onto government signs written in Korean, English and Arabic prohibiting the dumping of garbage (see Figure 1), and this led to a discussion of top-down signs produced by governments and institutional authorities and bottom-up signs produced by residents and others. All three students were surprised and interested in Korean government signs containing Arabic, and discussion centred on the reason for this and its importance to the study. However, the meeting ended with the focus of this project still undecided.



Figure 1. Government sign

The following meeting, Hyunju was absent and the remaining two students, Ahyoung and Minji, in a somewhat confessional moment, discussed their difficulty in seeing anything interesting in Seoul's linguistic landscape, their confusion over the topic generally, and their concern that linguistic landscape research may not be an interesting topic for the student audience at the academic conference. As a result of this discussion, these two students and Michael decided to walk around campus examining local signs for interesting examples of signs, ideas and inspiration. Stopping in front of the a small shop called "Chef Yang's Dokboki House" (see Figure 2) which sells Korean style spicy rice cakes, Michael discussed the mix of languages present in the sign while the students asked questions regarding language and discussed the use of Korean and English in the sign. Before leaving, these students took photographs of the more interesting signs present including the Chef Yang sign.



Figure 2. Chef Yang

The following meeting the three students decided to choose a major focus for this research, since the deadline for the students' conference was approaching. The students had a variety of data from many parts of Seoul, but were still unsure how to focus or organise their study. Without one particular exciting idea, the students decided to combine several different approaches to examining linguistic landscapes which would allow for two students to present on two separate aspects of Seoul's linguistic landscape each, and one student to give the introduction and conclusion. For the first section they focused on the quantitative difference between two different areas of Seoul, Jongno and Gangnam, and for the second the discursive construction of Chef Yang's Dokboki House as well as the on-campus copy shop "Copy Nara"⁴.

⁴ 카피나라 (Copy Nara) as printed on the original sign with 카피 being a transliteration of "copy" and 나라 (Nara) being the Korean word for country, nation or state.

When considering the organisation of the speech, the students decided to borrow the metaphor of an iceberg to help explain their different approaches: the quantitative differences being a more surface-level introduction to linguistic landscape and the discursive construction being a deeper look at the meaning of individual signs. These students then wrote the respective sections of their final paper and the accompanying presentation. The students finally completed both the presentation materials and the conference paper, as part of the undergraduate student academic conference. The students appeared well prepared during their presentation and received praise from conference judges and audience members. However, the students seemed dismayed that they were placed in the bottom half of the rankings of the presentations, and overall were disappointed with the results of the conference. The student team conjectured about the low rank, wondering if the topic had been interesting enough for the conference, if their focus was understood, and if the data appeared to be academically sound.

Following the academic conference, Ahyoung and Minji were interviewed by Jenna Schulte and Vivian Lee in English about their experiences doing this linguistic landscape research project. Hyunju was interviewed individually by Vivian Lee in English later due to a scheduling conflict. These interviews were then transcribed. Michael also wrote a brief narrative of his experiences and understandings of guiding these students through their project.

A NARRATIVE ANALYSIS OF THESE LEARNERS' DEVELOPMENT

In narrative research it is only possible to craft interpretations of events, meaning that this study can only reasonably interpret how doing this linguistic landscape study led to language development and greater multilingual and transcultural communicative abilities for Hyunju, Ahyoung and Minji. Further, it is only possible to broadly speculate on how other students would experience a similar project. This is a more limited form of knowledge than claimed by other more scientific approaches to educational research; however, as there is only limited research into students' experiences of doing linguistic landscape projects, this study should further illuminate this relatively unexplored area of scholarship. Finally, there is a further danger in narrative research: narratives can seemingly demand characters and story flow into sympathetic and understandable forms such as beginning, middle and end. Narrative research and analysis must strive to highlight the ambiguity and confusion that exists in classroom practices and not unthinkingly move towards a seemingly successful and satisfying story that nevertheless fails to convey the more uncomfortable and significant aspects of these experiences (Boldt, 1996).

This analysis highlights how these three students moved from indifference towards the linguistic landscape surrounding them to a more active interest in the texts they see everywhere, how they became more aware of how a speaker's identity can shape understandings of communication or texts, and how they developed a greater understanding of how communication and texts can shift in meaning across different places.

At the most fundamental level this research project led these three students to reconsider how they use language and how language is used around them. Hyunju discussed her experience with this project broadly:

Vivian: Could you tell us what you learned by doing this project?

Hyunju: Ah, for preparing this project me and my teammates and professor really talked a lot, discussed a lot. And by doing so I can, for the first time, I realise that even it's the same language but have different functions and the same, even with the same language, ah audiences can take it differently by their different culture or backgrounds. So, ah, I told it to professor before that it was kind of Newton's apple. For the first time I realized that very routine things that comes to me very differently and freshly.

Vivian: So you mean it gave you a fresh perspective?

Hyunju: Yeah, yeah. So these days I walk down the street and watch signs and it's not like before. I think oh that must be for what audiences and how Koreans will take this and how foreigners take this. Like start thinking like that.

There are several important elements within this excerpt. Interestingly, Hyunju hints that following this project she now understands that the same language, text or word can be understood by multiple speakers, but interpreted differently based upon the speakers' background including culture, linguistic experiences, how they came to learn the languages encountered, and more. In essence, following her experiences with this project, Hyunju now considers how a speaker's identity can shape communication, and this seems to be a substantial change from her earlier views, according to her own words. Although Hyunju's example of examining how signs are viewed by Koreans or, alternatively, foreigners may be a rather limited view of how linguistic landscapes can be understood in Korea, it represents a substantial shift for her. She hints that it was both her study on the linguistic landscape of Seoul and her discussions with teammates and Michael that led to her reconceptualising the importance of identity in communication. The importance of these discussions with Michael, where different perspectives emerged from examining the same sign or text, highlight the potential for issues of identity to shape linguistic landscape projects and are further discussed in Teaching Implications and Reflections.

Within the previous excerpt is the implication that, prior to this project, Hyunju rarely or almost never focused on the multilingual signs that surrounded her as objects of study. Minji, discussing a similar question, described a similar experience:

Minji: Oh, to be honest there are a lot of things that we learned from this research. Like, for example, ah it is like, it might be useful in the first place to say like, we learned what we didn't actually care in the past. Like our perspective has changed thanks to this research, like ah we walk around on the street without thinking about what is the sign says. Like what Chef Dokboki⁵ means? We don't care actually, right? But through this research we found some interesting patterns that are hidden actually. Not, they've, it's not as though don't exist at all but they do exist in the first place so then...yeah there might be some interesting result and so, ah, there are actually some economical, historical and social backgrounds that have affected the way those signs are defined.

⁵ Referring to picture 2.

Minji here outlines how she previously was unaware of or ignored the multitude of languages that surrounded her in Seoul and elsewhere in Korea but how through this research she began examining the signs she sees, speculating on the various reasons: economic, social and historical, that may have given rise to any particular sign. For these students, participating in this project may have increased the incidental learning, or “learning without the intent to do so” (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008, p. 272), that takes place via the linguistic landscape. Importantly, Minji, like Hyunju, repeatedly highlighted that prior to participating in this linguistic landscape project she did not notice the myriad of English and Korean signs that surround her. This may be unsurprising, as most people typically do not notice the publically displayed language around them unless it somehow challenges the ideological or discursive basis of language use in that place. However, it is perhaps more surprising that Hyunju and her classmates typically do not notice the myriad uses of English within the linguistic landscape surrounding them, despite choosing to major in English.

A limited number of studies have highlighted that perceptions of linguistic landscapes are profoundly influenced by the ideologies surrounding languages and the identities of those who traverse those landscapes (Aiestaran, Cenoz & Gorter, 2010; Trumper-Hect, 2010). It may be that for Hyunju, Minji and others, the uses of English and Korean are composed of such normalising discourses that the interweaving of English, Korean and sometimes other languages has been made unremarkable. During this project, it was only in the discussions of signs in Itaewon, a place where large numbers of migrants have created a linguistic landscape drawing upon discourses often not present in the rest of Korea (Kim, 2004), that Hyunju, Minji and Ahyoung found signs and texts that initially surprised them. It may be that ideologies of English in Korea⁶ and the specific roles English⁷ and Korean occupy in Seoul’s linguistic landscape render the multilingual linguistic landscape of Seoul relatively unimportant for many learners of English.

All three students who participated in this study said they became more interested in the linguistic landscape surrounding them after completing their project. However, only limited claims can be made about these students’ long-term interest in their surrounding linguistic landscapes. The observations and interviews were collected during and immediately following these students’ work on this linguistic landscape project. Therefore, Hyunju, Minji and Ahyoung may very well continue wandering about Seoul, occasionally asking themselves questions about the publicly displayed language they see or they may have simply returned to eliding the multiple languages circulating around them. Hyunju, in her interview, which took place after Minji and Ahyoung’s, hints that she continued to examine language in public signs:

So me and my friends visited Itaewon one week ago and most of the signs there were written in foreign languages and they were for foreigners not Koreans mostly, so that was kind of very different with the foreign signs in Gangnam that is mostly for Koreans.

It is beyond this study to explore to what degree these students continue examining the public languages around them; however, these students are more aware, following this project, of the possibilities of examining the languages they see around them.

⁶ For a discussion of ideologies of English in Korea, see Park (2009).

⁷ For a discussion of the role of English in the Korean linguistic landscape, see Lawrence (2012).

This is important, as this project may have led these students to continue to develop diverse language skills as they continue to examine the language and texts that surround them. Unfortunately, this is rather speculative and only further research can give greater insight into how students continue to learn after completing linguistic landscape projects.

For Hyunju, Ahyoung and Minji, this linguistic landscape research project was also an opportunity to develop greater insight into language, some of which can be applied to their chosen major of English interpretation and translation.

Jenna: So the next question is actually, how did the project change the way that you look at language. And of course that's how you were just talking a little bit but if you have anything else you'd like to say about a perspective shift or a difference in language, that would be great.

Ahyoung : Like I wrote and said in my presentation, I began to think that all...words have some kind of image and certain diverse meanings and there do not exist like perfect synonyms and stuff like that. There are all registers and there is and there are always exists the reason why that word has emerged and uh...and...like she said we brought up that there are also some history or hidden backgrounds of using that words in diverse cultures. For example it [*chef*] is just, it just means, um, just cook in American, in America, but we hear the word chef but in Korea it is kind of um very prestigious cook that only works for high-quality food or work for great hotels or something like that. So um, whenever, so from since then, whenever I try to translate or interpret something, some words, I just do not try to translate into just into Korean that I know but think about the correct register or correct image or meaning of the words and then just try to make and explain the words into the perfect form as possible.

Ahyoung discussed how doing this study gave her greater insight into the multiple discursively constructed meanings that circulate around words and texts in both English and Korean, that words hold multiple complex levels of meaning, and that meaning is dependent to some degree on a speaker or speaker's identity. Importantly, Ahyoung is also now considering the meaning of English words in Korea, their multiple meanings and origins, and how these words shift in meaning as they are used across boundaries. She now considers place as an element that shapes the meaning of words like “chef”, something she appears to have not considered before. Cenoz and Gorter consider the possibilities of using linguistic landscapes to build students' awareness of the figurative power of language, and Rowland states that, “the students displayed an aptitude for analysing the unwritten, symbolic meanings and associations attached to written texts in the LL” (2012, p. 8). This paper adds further evidence to Rowland's finding that studying one's own linguistic landscape can further develop symbolic and figurative understandings of language.

TEACHING IMPLICATIONS AND REFLECTIONS

Undergraduate linguistic landscape projects may be a powerful tool in the language classroom, allowing students to consider how people use language within local settings and independently develop meaningful understandings of language use in particular places. It may prove even more powerful, when students are more open to freely explore the publicly displayed languages around them in student-led projects,

enabling them to interact with their environment as well as investigating and discussing how language is used (Sayer, 2010, p. 144). However, using linguistic landscape research as a tool in the classroom is not without difficulty or complicating issues, as this article highlights. The primary issues that shaped the pedagogical possibilities for these three students were: the difficulty of pursuing open ended research questions; the lack of linguistic landscape literature written in a form accessible to undergraduate students, especially students struggling to develop their English academic literacy skills; and finally, the complications and opportunities that arise from having an instructor with a different language background and point of view from the students. This study explores both the origins of these complicating elements and productive ways to address these complications.

One major difficulty for all students in this project was the open-ended nature of this particular linguistic landscape research. Ahyoung explained her initial confusion with this project:

For me the most difficult thing was just doing this project, I mean starting this project because at the very first time I was, I was just got lost. I was, I just have just literally no idea what this project is about and what I have to find and what I have to understand and in what way do I have to understand this sign so. At the very first time professor told me pointing one sign, for example 7-11 or any sign he asked me, "What do you think when you see that sign?" then I was just not able to answer it, because I didn't know in what way do I have to think at the very first time. The most important thing was, for me, I thought the most important thing doing certain project knowing the way that I have to follow. I think that this project was the most difficult experience for me to find out the way to do um research and also, this was not an ordinary project that I have done right now.

As this is a relatively new area of interest, students may not have been exposed to the basic concepts regarding linguistic landscapes and may not be aware of linguistic diversity within their own environment. Students may feel uncertain of project goals, benefits, and concepts even after they are introduced. Unfortunately, this problem appears to be exacerbated by a lack of introductory research and reference materials related to linguistic landscapes. When limited in their outside source information, students may feel overly reliant on the supervising instructor for information and confirmation that ideas are correct.

Ultimately, linguistic landscape research, while focusing on publicly displayed language, can be pursued in widely varying approaches and scales and this caused confusion and difficulty for these three students. However, this also allowed these students to ultimately explore issues they found interesting, and independently design their own approaches to this research, gaining both experience and knowledge from that experience. Given Ahyoung's comments, this research project may have benefitted from greater guidance from Michael, at least in the initial stages. However, this must be compared to the experience of Hyunju who, with almost no support, successfully completed her small, initial, linguistic landscape study. Different students, regardless of language abilities, may be capable of undertaking widely different linguistic landscape projects. This may add considerable complications to using linguistic landscapes in the language classroom.

Further, it is unclear to what degree Ahyoung's confusion stemmed from Michael's instructional failures, a trivial issue for this paper, or from the more theoretically significant challenge of overcoming naturalised discourses, that render the linguistic landscape unimportant, ordinary and trivial. The issue of student perceptions of their linguistic landscape is an area worthy of further research. For teachers employing linguistic landscape projects for pedagogical purposes, the challenge may be providing adequate guidance for those student-researchers who need it, while ensuring enough freedom for original ideas and approaches.

Beyond the difficulty of pursuing open-ended research questions, these three students struggled to read, understand and use the limited scholarly texts available concerning linguistic landscape research. While scholars like Backhaus have made efforts towards reviewing linguistic landscape studies (2007), and this material was shared with these students, much of this material was difficult and frustrating for these students. Hyunju concisely stated her frustration with this situation:

First, there's not many books or many essays, documents so first, so for the first time me and my teammates didn't know what to do, because there is nothing we can study or read. And all we can get information was Professor Chesnut, but there's a language barrier between us, so it was a bit hard.

Hyunju highlights the perceived limitations with the available literature and the further difficulty communicating with Michael Chesnut, who also may have failed to adequately familiarise these students with much of the available linguistic landscape research. Hyunju's statement, along with similar sentiments expressed by Ahyoung and Minji, show the need for instructors to present important literature in a manner accessible to students still developing academic literacies. Beyond the difficulties and complications caused by open-ended research and a lack of accessible literature, students struggled with the noticeably different perspectives on language they and Michael Chesnut held. Hyunju explicitly mentions this as an important issue in this research:

Hyunju : The way we see and the way professor see is different because we have different language backgrounds, even with the same sign, we have different opinions so but we have to just one project so it was kind of hard for me for the first time.

Vivian: Can you give some examples?

Hyunju : Ah, the professor once told me that the sign around HUFs there was "daktor" and professor asked us that why does store sell chicken but its name is "daktor"? I thought that "dak" means chicken in Korean words and "tor" is a place, so chicken place. For me, so why this kind of things?

Here Hyunju discussed the gap she felt between her perspective and the perspective of her instructor, Michael. In examining the "daktor" sign, Hyunju guessed that Michael Chesnut, a second language learner of Korean, may have found the sign intriguing, while for her it was trivial or derivative. Although Hyunju said that working with this alternative perspective was hard for her, the differing perspectives she and Michael held is one of the elements that led her to understand that identity can profoundly shape the meanings different speakers take from signs and texts, despite a shared understanding of the languages displayed in a sign. Although it is somewhat unclear what kind of differences Hyunju is referencing in this excerpt, she

at other times referenced the importance of considering the culture and background of readers of texts. Ahyoung, much like Hyunju, discussed the difficulties originating from her instructor's different linguistic and cultural background:

Ahyoung: This was not an ordinary project that I have done right now. It was not about finding out a, um, wrong thing about of certain texts or just simply analysing certain texts with an enormous amount of data or stuff like that, but rather I have to search from the very first part and um because he was foreigner I had to think, um in the presentation I had to say a Korean view because the students in HUFs were almost all Koreans, but in that way he could not help me, help us. Because he was just foreigner, so he had no idea of thinking in Korean way.

Minji: not at all...yeah...

Ahyoung: So I had to think about that but most importantly. I had nowhere to ask because it is simply, it had to be my own analysis. So, so I think everything was difficult for me.

Ahyoung, while discussing several issues, highlights how, because her instructor, Michael, did not share her perspective and the perspective of her future audience for her presentation, she felt responsible for considering how a Korean audience would respond to this linguistic landscape research and did not feel she had an knowledgeable scholar she could ask for advice. While the experience of feeling a distinctive lack of understanding from their instructor may have been frustrating for these students, this experience may have been an important opportunity for them to develop as both language-learners and intercultural communicators. The difference in perspective may have contributed to these students developing a new understanding of how different groups and individuals can both obviously and subtly understand language in different ways. For students majoring in English, and especially those interested in interpretation and translation, a more nuanced understanding of how different readers and listeners can experience and understand language is incredibly valuable.

In the future, instructors may want to consider explicitly engaging with different learners' and instructors' backgrounds, while studying linguistic landscapes to purposefully develop these sensitivities. These students offered one intriguing idea that unfortunately was not pursued in this project. They originally considered asking several of their international student friends and classmates to look at and discuss some of the signs they saw in order to gather more views on the significance of these signs. Other instructors pursuing classroom projects involving linguistic landscape research may want to pursue this strategy with their students. Finally, even when only monolingual English signs are discussed, perspectives can be quite different. According to Sayer, "as English becomes increasingly globalised, it also acquires new, local meanings as people in those contexts take it up, learn it, and begin to use it on their own (whether global or local) purposes" (2010, p. 151). It may be possible to explore conflicting understandings of monolingual English signs as the Englishes being displayed may not be read in the same way by those with different experiences with English or Englishes.

However, there is an additional problematic element of this study that should be addressed. All three students, to varying degrees, developed a greater sense of how identity can shape communication and interpretation of texts, a positive and

productive understanding that should aid their ability to communicate across language and cultures. However, there is a danger that Hyunju, Ahyoung and Minji overemphasised the importance of the subject positions of “Korean” and “foreigner” in these considerations, reifying a dichotomous construction of insider and outsider. Although at other points they discussed how other factors such as age, experience, class and more can shape the reading of texts and signs, other statements suggested they conceptualised a stark divide between how Koreans and others view signs, possibly overemphasising this single cultural binary and limiting potential cross-cultural communication. Teachers interested in using linguistic landscape projects as a form of pedagogy should be cautious of accidentally leading students to conceptualise identities or culture as impossible-to-cross boundaries, or overemphasising cultural and linguistic differences. The potential of linguistic landscape research as pedagogy that allows for students to develop intercultural communicative skills must also be weighed against the possibility that students may develop understandings that instructors find less productive or even problematic.

There are a variety of other limitations in this study. The three students who participated in the linguistic landscape research project were interviewed only once after completing their linguistic landscape research project. While the information gathered from them was useful in understanding their overall perception of the project, it would be more useful to interview students throughout the research project to document their changing views and perceptions regarding linguistic landscape research, as well as to document when and to what degree shifts in their ideas about language occurred. Further examination into the process and additional pre-project and post-project interviews would help generate further information about the benefits of linguistic landscape projects, and allow educators to examine more in-depth the effects of this educational practice. Finally, this form of limited narrative research is incapable of producing knowledge that directly links teaching practices with results across contexts, but the hope of both these students and researchers is that this study will lead to greater pedagogical opportunities for students studying English and other languages.

CONCLUSION

This study sheds light on how conducting a linguistic landscape research project influenced three Korean undergraduate students majoring in English interpretation and translation. Further, the discussion of the teaching implications of this study should aid any instructors or scholars interested in creating a program where students conduct linguistic landscape research in order to develop their language abilities and communicative skills. Overall, working with linguistic landscape research, for these students, appeared to have multiple benefits. Participants reported greater understanding of language and communication, specifically when considering how culture and language shape language perception, and increased awareness of how different people view different aspects of language. Additionally, this project allowed students the opportunity for field research and a chance to interpret research findings as well as writing and presenting their results. This study shows how for some students conducting a linguistic landscape research project can be a powerful tool for learner development.

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Manuscript received: August 11, 2013
 Revision received: September 15, 2013
 Accepted: October 11, 2013