



The linguistic landscape of protest in Brazil: the 2016 coup in perspective

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Studies on linguistic landscapes, understood as "the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory or region" (Landry & Bourhis, 1997, p. 23), have been getting the attention of language scholars in different parts of the world. As explained by Shohamy and Gorter (2009, p. 1), language is not only spoken or heard, "it is also represented and displayed; at times for functional reasons, at others for symbolic purposes". Landry and Bourhis (1997, p. 23) state that "the linguistic landscape may serve important informational and symbolic functions as a marker of the relative power and status of the linguistic communities inhabiting the territory". Such is the case of the ephemeral linguistic landscapes which emerge from manifestations of protests which occur in defined territories and display different linguistic territories.

The manifestation of protest, according to Pereira (2014, p. 69), "takes place somewhere, an urban space in which the participant moves, not in any way, but according to laws that order the circulation". This kind of manifestation produces a protest landscape which represents social relations and highlights some aspects of a historical period, but it also conceals part of reality.

For the development of our study, we observed some street protests for and against the coup in Belo Horizonte (Minas Gerais, Brazil) and collected data from Google about the protests that occurred before and during the 2016 coup throughout the country. We focused on images that were taken from street protests and answered eight research questions. The first four questions were taken from Shohamy and Gorter (2009). They are:

1. What messages are being delivered to passers-by? In a protest manifestation, passers-by are usually seen as part of the protest, given that they are inserted in the same territory. Protesters call their attention to either their disagreement with the coup or their approval of it. The hidden message to passers-by is: "Do not dare to disagree; otherwise, you will not be safe". We have observed that when someone cries out against the protester's position or exhibits any written message which runs in the opposite direction of the protest, the reaction of the protesters is verbally aggressive and physical aggression may occur.

2. Which types of language (s) are created in the public space? Our study revealed that the semiotic landscape of protest consists of the meaning produced by the territory itself, the participants, and the multimodal messages they produce. The Brazilian

linguistic landscape of protest emerges in different genres and can be found on paper, walls, billboards, skin, fabric, t-shirts, and so on. We also discovered that different spaces afford different protest experiences and that social class division produces different linguistic landscapes.

3. How do images, colors, and all other representations interact? Territory, understood as the product of social relations, interacts with other representations. In Belo Horizonte, Brazil, we identified two opposed cyclical territories. Rui Barbosa Square, best known as Station Square (see fig. 1), represents the workers and their opposition to the coups and the government, while Liberty Square (see fig. 2), despite being eventually occupied by opponents of government and coups, represents the elite which supports the most recent Presidential coup. Those ephemeral territories are formed by the participants and their ideologies, clothes, posters, banners, masks, t-shirts, songs, and collective cries. Each territory is also represented by predominant colors: the red at Station Square and the green and yellow at Liberty Square.



Fig. 1 Station Square in Belo Horizonte



Fig. 2 Liberty Square in Belo Horizonte

4. How do readers and passers-by interpret the linguistic landscape? In our study, readers and passers-by are considered as peripheral participants, and they signal their positive or negative interpretation of the protest landscape by means of cries, gestures, flags, and written messages, as well as by banging pans as in figure 3.



Fig. 3 peripheral participant for impeachment

5. What indirect and subtle messages can be found on protest signs? Some protest signs say much more than what can be literally read. One example is that in Fig. 4, where the letter “o” is replaced by Globo symbol as a way to denounce its support for the coup.



Fig. 4 Protest against the coup during the World Cup.

6. What do linguistic landscapes add to the understanding of the Brazilian sociopolitical reality? 7. What do they refract? The study of semiotic landscapes shows how the demonstrations develop in ephemeral territories and point to the opposing ideologies that constitute the Brazilian sociopolitical reality. However, they also refract the underlying interests of the protest organizers.

8. To what extent can we speak of Linguistic Territories instead of Linguistic Landscapes, since there have been demonstrations from different groups in different spatialities? The study of the linguistic landscape demonstrates that the language of protest can and should be studied in an interdisciplinary manner and that the

combination of geography and linguistic studies broaden our understanding of society and its members. Each person within the whole of a protest landscape is unique, but he or she is also seen as representing the territory that emerges from the interaction between the signs that make up each landscape.

Conclusion

We also discovered that different spaces afford different protest experiences and that social class division produces different linguistic landscapes. We conclude that the study of linguistic landscapes can contribute to education as a means through which to learn more about the society we live in.

References

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