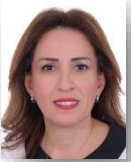# Linguistic Landscape in Lebanon

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ABSTRACT:

This article, which falls within the sociolinguistic framework, presents the linguistic landscape in Lebanon and studies the language practices that characterize the social and ethnic landscape of the country through the highlighting, presence and role of languages displayed within the Lebanese society: in cities (urban area) and villages (rural area), that is to say the neighborhoods of religious and ethnic communities, while describing this multilingual situation in the linguistic landscape of the country.

KEY WORDS: linguistic landscape, sociolinguistics in Lebanon, display and education in Lebanon, rural multilingualism, linguistic impact of ethnic minorities.

Reason which necessitated the writing of the article

A doctoral student at the University of Bordeaux, I am currently writing my dissertation, a doctoral thesis on the use of second languages in Lebanon, with a particular focus on the school system. Lebanon is a truly linguistically confused country, particularly evident through public and private schools where multiple languages coexist given the diversity of religious and ethnic communities in Lebanon. This linguistic diversity is not limited to public spaces but also extends to family environments, where several languages are often spoken simultaneously. This complex situation directly affects learners' second language learning, affecting language skills in a multilingual environment. This article is directly part of my thesis research and explores how this linguistic reality affects the learning dynamic in Lebanon.

I. INTRODUCTION

The description of the composition of the Lebanese population is strange. It is made up of 18 religious or/and ethnic communities where each of them is religiously and/or politically attached to the outside world, hence a reason to perceive Lebanon as a multilingual society. This heritage that the child carries from his environment has a direct impact on his linguistic background even before starting his school career. In turn, the Private School in Lebanon is explicitly attached to religious and ethnic communities (by virtue of the law of the Constitution), hence its influence by the culture and orientation of each sect. Furthermore, the language that parents speak with children is the first language they learn: the mother tongue. This is the first connection with parents, their family environment and the culture of the community. It is the language they use first to learn about the world around them(*L'importance de La Langue Maternelle Brochure à Destination Des Parents*, n.d.).

The distribution and overlap of these communities affect linguistic and cultural interactions and can create confusion in the intended meaning.

The pronunciation of Arabic words is not the same in each ethnic community. For example, in Armenian grammar there is neither masculine nor feminine, unlike in Arabic grammar. Let us add that the dialect of the Arabic language changes from one region to another until it becomes difficult to understand the intended meaning of the dialogue. which forces the advertiser to write the poster in another language.

Linguistic diversity makes Lebanon a multilingual country, among other things. Although Arabic is the mother tongue (for the majority) of Lebanon, English and French are also used interchangeably, making their use complex. The

complexity of using these languages also lies in their application. For example, in a given communication interaction, the use of Arabic, English and French can be demonstrated. This can pose difficulties for some when trying to keep up with the understanding of the languages used. From a cognitive load perspective, having to switch from one language to another, the mental effort used can cause cognitive overload (Moussa-Inaty et al., 2012) also adding additional difficulties. At the same time, the multilingual display in Lebanese society, makes the practice of languages and especially the process of learning languages a more complicated process for some. In addition, it seems difficult to speak of a mother tongue in Lebanon knowing that the Lebanese of any community masters his own mother tongue (with different dialects), the spoken Arabic language and / or the literary language (age of his schooling from 6 to 12 years: primary cycle) and at least one foreign language (in particular French and / or English or another European language given the immigration to more developed countries). Thus, the Lebanese has at least three languages but what is common with the others is mainly the spoken Arabic language. This situation is almost unique in the world. especially since the presentation of languages on the billboards reflects the languages applied in the social environment, which sometimes differ from the language learned in the school environment.

These displays indicate the political influence on the use of languages in Lebanon, and this through the naming of avenues after politicians (for example, during the French mandate: Avenue Général De Gaul, rue Clemenceau and rue Gouraud), or streets that bear the names of Arab politicians (example: Rue du roi Hussein, rue Omar Ben Abdel Aziz).

II. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE SYSTEM

This study examines the reflection of the sociolinguistic situation of the country and consequently its impact on the teaching / learning of any language seen from the change of the language between the regions on the linguistic choice while examining the displays on the stores, street nomenclature and billboards. **The study of literature survey** is presented in section III, **Methodology** is explained in section IV, section V covers the **experimental results of the study**, and section VI discusses **the future study and Conclusion**.

III. IMPORTANCE OF THE RESEARCH

The Lebanese society is characterized by a multiplicity and variety of languages that make Lebanon a multilingual country rich in cultural heritage. This linguistic situation is not only rich, but it is also very complex due to, on the one hand, the symbiotic relationship between these languages, for example between French, Arabic and English, and on the other hand due to the different reactions of the Lebanese towards these languages. From the point of view of cognitive load, having to switch from one language to another, the mental effort used can cause cognitive overload (Moussa-Inaty et al., 2012) also adding additional difficulties. This complex situation presents both strengths and weaknesses for each of the 18 religious and ethnic communities.

The reason for this obstacle lies in the non-existence of a single mother tongue. This mother tongue has effects on the role of the identity of individuals and consequently on social behaviour, that is to say, the vision of the person in relation to his morals in his community and culture.

Among the strengths, we can cite the advantages:

The use of the mother tongue "connects your children to your family. It also provides a connection to your important cultural traditions, and to your friends and neighbours who speak the same language.

- It is the first way to truly translate the meaning of the world and to facilitate the child's understanding of the essence of his environment"

- Language and thought thus go hand in hand and the support of the adult in this sense allows the child to learn to think and to speak. Learning the language has a considerable effect on the child's cognitive development, on the awakening of his sensitivity and on his academic success. "(*Développement Du Langage Oral : L'importance de La Langue Maternelle*, 2014)

Among the weak points, we can mention the disadvantages:

- The mother tongue "is very fragile and can be lost very easily until the age of 12, especially when the school creates a huge gap between the child's identity and the school. The child is alienated and must put aside his identity to integrate.

- Limited communication: If a person only speaks his mother tongue, he may have difficulty communicating with people who speak different languages. This can create barriers to social and business interactions for the child and limit opportunities for collaboration and teamwork." ("La Langue Maternelle Dans l'instruction Des Enfants," n.d.)

In this context, it seems to us that in Lebanon we are facing a complex and even problematic situation when teaching/learning a foreign language like French in Lebanese schools for children in a heterogeneous class of the preschool cycle aged 3 to 6 years. . "(*Développement Du Langage Oral : L'importance de La Langue Maternelle*, 2014)

Definition of linguistic landscape

The definition of the linguistic landscape according to Laundry and Bourhis (1997), cited in « An Analysis of the Spanish-Language Landscape and Hispanic Identity in Hazleton, Pennsylvania (USA) » is : "The language of public road signs, advertising billboards, street names, place names, commercial shop signs, and public signs on government buildings" (Laundry & Bourhis cited Spier, 2020)

Problematic

In this research we choose as prototype, the learners of the large section of the Preschool School (GS: large section) based on the reason that a first sensitive period, between 2 and 4 years, corresponding to the phase of rapid development of language, seems to be determining and implies to be particularly attentive to language interactions. The end of the sensitive periods of language acquisition is at the latest around 9 years. (Zorman, n.d.)

One of the basic concepts of cognitive psychology is cognitive perception. Perception is the cognitive activity by which human beings become aware of their environment, that is, by which they receive and interpret the information (give meaning to the information) that surrounds them. Cognitive perception includes, in addition to the five senses (which are hearing, sight, smell, taste and touch), the way in which we process information. While perception refers to the means of obtaining information from our environment. Cognition describes these processes such as memorization, learning, problem solving and orientation.

In addition, the GS learner is not in a closed space. He is in a heterogeneous class with other learners from different communities, each of whom has a particular language background and culture. Let us add that he is also surrounded, during school activities, by other learners and teachers from the school where he still receives information that has other interpretations (meanings) for him according to his culture. In the street, he also notices the displays on the stores, the nomenclature of the streets and the billboards where the writings and numbers are noted by languages, sometimes strange and some of them have no meaning for him (have no interpretations). This linguistic diversity is reflected in the rural displays of Lebanese society where each community leaves a linguistic trace. It can be noted that, outside his home, the child is surrounded by information coming from his family, his class, the school and the extracurricular society.
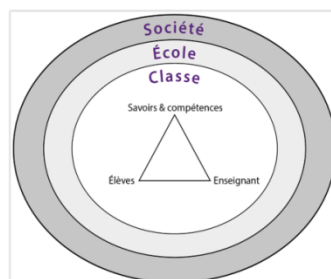

Fig1.(*Identifier, Mobiliser et Surmonter Les Obstacles Liés à l'apprentissage.*, 2020)

Thus, we can formulate, for this research, the problem as follows:

"This chaos in mental activities, which are perception, attention (knowledge of one's environment) by which the learner receives and interprets the information that surrounds him, memorization and language (the use of his knowledge) may cause the GS learner a language disruption in learning (other than his mother tongue) a surplus which is for example literary Arabic and / or French in preschool"

In this context, it seems to us that in Lebanon we are considering a complex and even problematic situation when teaching / learning a foreign language such as French in the Lebanese school for children in a heterogeneous class of the preschool cycle aged 3 to 6 years.

IV. Nature, limits and methodology of the research

IV.1. Nature of the research

Since the problem is not clearly defined or understood where the variables are not well defined, it is better to choose the exploratory design as the paradigm of this study in order to understand the problem and its context. The exploratory paradigm is a useful tool to address research problems that have not been previously studied in the past. This research design is also called interpretive research and helps in answering questions such as "what", "where" and "how". A key characteristic of the exploratory research design is that it is unstructured and therefore very flexible in nature.
This research design is also called interpretive research and helps in answering questions such as "what", "where" and "how". A key characteristic of exploratory research design is that it is unstructured and hence very flexible in nature.
Here are some characteristics of exploratory research:
 • Provides a basis for further research.
• Is used to investigate problems that are not fully defined.
• Is the very first form of research in the research process and therefore takes place before descriptive research.
• Is unstructured in nature.
• Usually involves the use of qualitative research.
("Recherche Exploratoire, Descriptive et Causale," 2022)
The exploratory phase is similar to the verification activity. Exploratory processes include interpreting pre-inventive forms, examining the contexts and potential functions of the forms, testing hypotheses, and investigating boundaries.
The methodology chosen is research which can be qualitative observation. This type of research consists of observing a person or a group of people and drawing conclusions from their reaction to certain parameters. In this type of research, there is no direct interaction with the subject.("Recherche Exploratoire : Types et Caractéristiques," n.d.)

IV.2 Research limit

Regarding the limitation of this research, we choose to study the social context relating to learners in the large GS section of a preschool school without taking into account what happens within the class or at the school itself. In other words, we want to study from the point of view of cognitive perception the effects of displays on stores, nomenclature, streets and billboards. Namely, the learner in the GS class must be able to read a simple text in literary Arabic and in a foreign language (simple sentence formed by: subject, verb and complement). In addition, he can write the numbers from 1 to 20 (in Indo-Arabic numeration and / or with Indian numerals).

IV.3. Research methodology

The linguistic landscape, aims to measure the importance and place of all display languages. This importance indicates the place and status of the displayed languages in society.
As the paradigm is exploratory the methodology will be as follows:
- Cognitive perception of photos,
- Analysis of a questionnaire. (Google form)

IV.3.1. Cognitive perception of photos

GS learners (26 children from different communities) are exposed to a set of photos grouped into three subsets
   a) The first subset is formed of photos designating street nomenclatures such as For example: "RUE CLEMENCEAU" and "King HUSSEIN STR"

The linguistic landscape of this subset shows the socio-political relationship with the Arab world as well as with the Western world.

V. EXPERIMENTAL RESULTS

Fig.2 Nomenclature of two streets in Beirut by Rania El Hallal

The questions asked in the context of this subset are:
• The question asked to the learners was: "in which language were these nomenclatures written?"
The majority of the answers were: in Arabic.
Interpretation of the answer: In my opinion, the reason that led the learners to adopt it is that the position of the Arabic writing was at the top of the display and the first line.
• What is the first Arabic letter written on the 2nd photo: ش.
• What does this letter mean? No answer!
• Looking at the 1st photo, what is the first Arabic word written on the sharpening? ‹شارع
• Repetition of the question "What does this letter ش mean? No rest.
Interpretation: The word Clemenceau has no meaning for these learners at this age on the one hand and on the other hand the replacement of a word by its initial represents an abstraction. In addition, the word ‹شارع is a word from literary Arabic. However, the most used word is طريق because it is the intersection of the spoken language (mother tongue) and the literary language. The word طريق is broader than the other word as in French: the path includes the word street knowing that we can say "the path of happiness".
• The last question was: in what language is the word "STREET" or "SRT" written? No answer.
Interpretation: In my opinion, these words have no meaning for these learners especially the abbreviation "SRT"

• What does this arrow represent in the 2nd photo? No answer.
Interpretation: In my opinion, the arrow represents a symbolic function that the GS learner does not have the logical ability to read a symbol that replaces words.
   b)   The second subset is formed by photos designating displays on store fronts. such as For example:

Fig 3: *These photos represent the Armenian language displayed in Bourj Hammoud, a northern suburb of Beirut that is inhabited, in majority, by the Armenian community knowing that it is a minority in Lebanon.*
Before discussing this example of the second subset of photos, it is necessary to specify the role of the languages used in this linguistic landscape.
The three languages used in the linguistic landscape of a place (the facade of a store) are: literary Arabic, French, Armenian.
- Convey information to the public of the Armenian community.

- Indicate the value and status of the Armenian language used.
- Reveal the passage to another territory.
- Inform about the economic value of a language in bilingual and even trilingual contexts. For example, the presence of a foreign language on a poster indicates the prestige and economic value power attributed to this language.

English, for example, is present in different linguistic landscapes around the world, which demonstrates the linguistic power of this language.(Messaoudi & Khiri, 2019)

We were surprised to hear a child say with all his pride "it is our Armenian language". When asked to read this sentence in his language, his answer was "I do not know how to read"

For the other children in the class, the scriptures cited in Arabic or French do not make sense. The reason for this observation is that, following the teacher's explanation, the expression "For sale", but "he has nothing to sell" replies a learner. Thus these learners envisage a cognitive overload.

Interpretation: for them, we sell the items that are on the shelves of the store but not the store as a building.

In fact, this display meets all the advertising conditions required on the one hand and on the other hand a community can use several languages on the display even if these languages are not understood by all the people in this community. The population values these posters because they demonstrate the linguistic richness of the community.

Our observation was on the close relationship between the mother tongue and the identity of a community. The recognition of the letters of the Armenian alphabet was enough to show its adherence to its community.

c) The third subset is formed by photos designating billboards such as for example:

Fig.4: *these photos represent displays in Arabic and Turkish on a school in Kwachra, Akkar, in the North of Lebanon "where the Turkish ethnic community lives in three villages close to each other, by Rania El Hallal.*

This school gives courses in three languages Arabic, English and Turkish.

N.B: there are schools in Beirut where courses are given in Arabic and Syriac or others in addition to a foreign language.

This linguistic landscape clearly shows this diversity following the existence of a community and ethnic diversity. Which demonstrates the non-existence of a single mother tongue (at least majority) of the entire Lebanese population. The immediate consequence of this situation is the disruption in the understanding of Arabic (at least) and moreover of the foreign language taught.

IV.3.2. Questionnaire analyses (google form)

To present the languages displayed in some regions and following the definition of the linguistic landscape and its role in the languages used, as well as the economic value of a displayed language, before moving on to the presentation of the linguistic landscape in Lebanon, we administered a questionnaire to 93 people (Google form) in order to specify the link between the languages displayed in the street in Lebanon and those applied in the family environment.
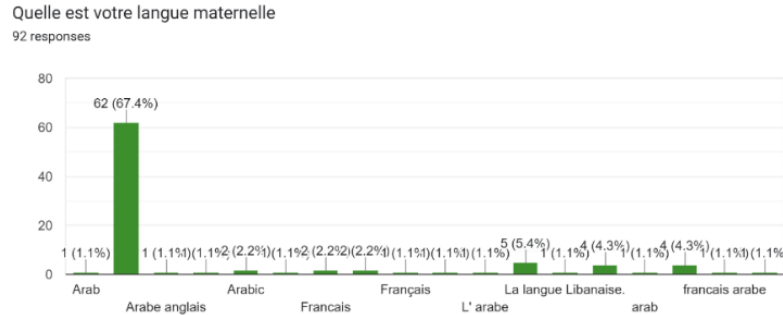
One of the questions was:
- What is your mother tong?

Fig 5. Graph showing the mother tong of the 92 family

The responses show that the mother tongue for the majority is Arabic

The other question was:

- Do you encourage your children to use several languages in the same sentence?
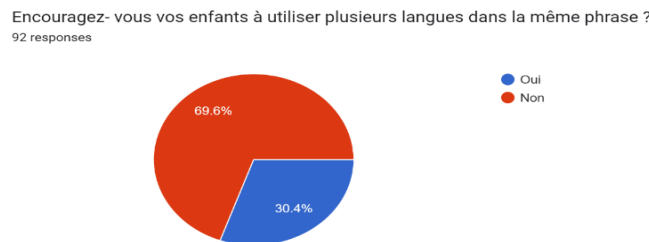

Fig 6 . Graph showing percentage of parents encouraging their children to use several languages in the same sentence.

This question shows that the majority of people speak at least two languages with their children at home. This means that the mother tongue comes first, this language could be Arabic or one of the languages of the minority communities.

A literature exploration on the subject of the complexity of the linguistic situation and the relations between languages in Lebanon, especially foreign languages and their use in the educational field, reveals that this subject has attracted great interest among linguists and sociologists. Although the strengthening and predominance of English in Lebanon is beginning to eliminate French as well as other minority languages such as Armenian, Italian, Kurdish and Syriac throughout the country, the French language continues to play an important role.

V. CONCLUSION

In the context of the study of the linguistic landscape, and by analysing the use of the minority language, Cenoz and Gorter (2009) rely on two concepts to specify the economic value associated with this language: its use value and its non-use value.

a) In a linguistic landscape, linguistic diversity can indicate the use value of the displayed language. This value can be: "direct" when the interlocutor easily understands the displayed message.

"Indirect" when, for example, a message displayed in English in an Asian country attracts English-speaking tourists, but remains misunderstood by the majority of the regional community which is the linguistic group of the region.

b) Non-use values are divided into two types: existence values and heritage values.

The heritage value gives an idea of the future of the language. However, the existence of a minority language on a sign indicates that this minority language group desires and anticipates the use of its language by future generations. While the existence value shows the valorisation of linguistic diversity by the population. A population, for example, can use several languages on its public displays even if these languages are not all understood. The population values these posters because they demonstrate the linguistic richness of the community, which makes it proud of itself.(Cenoz & Gorter, 2009)

The linguistic landscape therefore indicates the economic value of a language even if its use value is indirect (Cormier, 2015). For example, Kwachra in Akkar, North Lebanon, where we notice the Turkish language and even the Turkish flag displayed everywhere in the region, which indicates the economic and political value of Turkey in this region.

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