LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE AS A
LANGUAGE LEARNING AND LITERACY RESOURCE
IN CARIBBEAN CREOLE CONTEXTS[1]

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Linguistic landscape (LL) refers to multimodal texts displayed in public places and spaces. It encompasses the range of language use in a speech community. This paper applies aspects of the concept of LL to Caribbean Creole language environments, and discusses a range of texts that can inform teacher classroom pedagogy and the design of teaching resources in language and literacy education. More specifically, the paper explores how public, out-of-school texts can be utilized in school settings to develop students' critical language awareness and increase their communicative competence. It is suggested that increased use of images from the environment in language and literacy instruction has the potential to make the process of language learning more motivating and appealing to Caribbean students.

Introduction

Language use is pervasive in public spaces inside and outside of school settings. It generates texts that are conspicuous on public signage and materials in the environment. These are collectively labelled *linguistic landscape* (LL) in the literature (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008; Gorter, 2013; Shohamy & Gorter, 2009; Spolsky, 2009). Especially in culturally diverse societies, such texts are multi-modal, multi-lingual, and increasingly being researched and analysed to reveal information about the communities and societies in which they are found. Second language and foreign language researchers are also exploring the opportunities afforded by LL to develop learners' language acquisition and language learning (Sayer, 2010). Although verbal texts can also be categorized as elements of LL (Shohamy & Waksman, 2009), this paper focuses on written and graphic texts in the Caribbean LL, and explores their potential to develop the critical literacy and language awareness of language learners in a region where a variety of Creole language is the

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vernacular of the majority of speakers and Standard English is the official language of instruction (LOI).

There is a strong argument for the use of LL as an educational tool in multi-lingual and multi-dialectal contexts (Shohamy & Waksman, 2009). Such an argument is especially pertinent in English-speaking Caribbean language environments where two different language systems operate inside and outside of schools. The fact that the majority of students entering schools speak a Creole language while the official language of instruction is English has created challenges. This is primarily because students' achievement in school depends on their level of competence in the LOI. Continuing public expressions of concerns about levels of literacy in English of secondary school graduates suggest a need to develop language teaching methodologies that promote the acquisition of English, without minimizing the importance of students' first language. This is an important consideration in a situation in which negative and ambivalent attitudes to Creoles still persist despite increasing validation (Bryan, 2010). The need for more effective teaching methodologies is addressed in official documents such as language arts syllabi and statements on language and language policy in some Caribbean countries (Jamaica. Ministry of Education, Youth and Culture, 2001; Robertson, 2010; Trinidad and Tobago. Ministry of Education, 1999). The existence of written and visual texts in Creole, English, or a mixture of the two varieties in students' communities is an underutilized resource in literacy classrooms, and teachers often do not capitalize on the opportunity to use students' language to promote their literacy development in the target language. In addition, students are often not conscious of the linguistic differences between Creole and English (Craig, 2006).

In the Caribbean, limited attention has been paid to publicly displayed texts as sources for language learning and teaching. The use of public texts places literacy in a broader social context, and connects learning in school to learners' homes and community. In order to explore the potential role that LL can play in a Caribbean educational context, this paper addresses the main question: *How can signs, images, and objects in the Caribbean LL be used as teaching resources in literacy classrooms in Caribbean Creole environments*?

Language as Landscape

LL is found everywhere and includes language used in a community—the heard and spoken word, as well as the represented and displayed (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009). Thus it comprises texts in different modes and media, including print, electronic, audio-visual, and graphic. Posters,

signs, advertisements, notices, and local songs such as the lyrics of reggae and calypso are examples of LL. Some of these have long been categorized as environmental print (Goodman, 1986), but electronic media have transformed the language use landscape so dramatically that paper-based texts now share space with the products of digitalization afforded by new technologies. Discourse in language and literacy has to take account of these developments. Hence, increasingly, reference is made in the literature to new literacies or multiple literacies (Cope & Kalantzis, 2000; Lankshear & Knobel, 2011; Mills, 2011).

Advanced technologies have not only opened up new channels to communicate but have also expanded the semiotic codes through which meaning is conveyed. Such technologies generate new forms of textual production using computer and other electronic devices in real and virtual spaces. The position of the National Council of Teachers of English (NCTE) on literacy reflects this expanded view of literacy which is socio-cultural in orientation:

> Literacy has always been a collection of cultural and communicative practices shared among members of particular groups. As society and technology change, so does literacy. Because technology has increased the intensity and complexity of literate environments, the twenty-first century demands that a literate person possess a wide range of abilities and competencies, many literacies. These literacies – from reading online newspapers to participating in virtual classrooms – are multiple, dynamic, and malleable. (NCTE, 2008)

LL generally reflects language in use that is multi-modal. Text is produced through different modes: written/printed, pictorial/visual, aural/oral, gestural. LL can also be multi-lingual or multi-dialectal. Especially in linguistically contested regions such as the Caribbean, the use of one language instead of another is significant and open to linguistic and socio-linguistic analysis. The texts of LL are also multi-functional and represent varied speech acts in diverse social contexts. Some inform, but many are emotive and interactional (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008).

Benefits of Using Linguistic Landscape

Multi-genre, multi-modal texts that exist in public spaces hold much potential to propel language and literacy development. The use of LL as a resource in teaching recognizes the social context of language learning and language use, and offers educators many opportunities to create

meaningful experiences for learners. Some of the benefits of using social and historical texts occurring in the environment are discussed below.

LL as an educational tool engages students in authentic literacy activities that extend beyond the classroom and school walls, and thereby links learners' life in school to their community existence. Such an engagement with community-specific texts encourages students to understand their literacy development in a broader social context—a potentially enabling process for students whose first language is often not valued in schools, and not visible in the school texts that they use. In addition, the use of environmental print and signage in classrooms has the potential to increase the effectiveness of programmes aimed at improving literacy levels on a nationwide scale. Too often, such programmes do not address the needs of all students because resources and materials are usually textbook-based and foreign to learners' language, background, culture, and experience.

Since the landscape contains diverse texts in different formats, a study of the linguistic aspects of their surroundings gives students an opportunity to develop their knowledge of genre, and the appropriateness of language use in social domains of activity. Depending on the nature of the classroom projects that are used, teachers obtain opportunities to foster a culture of inquiry and innovation in teaching contexts where indigenous languages compete with global languages such as English.

Language is closely tied to culture and functions as a symbol of national identity (Curtin, 2009). Many texts in the landscape are identity texts, which provide indigenous sources of knowledge about self and community, and thus provide educators with opportunities to engage students in ways that allow them to read, understand, and analyse community texts, and, further, to question such texts in more socially responsive ways. In this sense, LL can be viewed as language in use that represents individual, collective, and national identities. Through the study of the language landscape that surrounds them, students learn to understand their history and culture, of which their indigenous language is a part.

Additionally, when LL is used as a teaching resource, students develop awareness of the role that different languages or dialects play in the social communication network of their community (Sayer, 2010). A more significant role for LL in language arts curricula provides educators with an opportunity to indigenize resources for language and literacy teaching and learning. Students also learn to critically analyse information from diverse sources. This skill is especially crucial in the 21st century when information is shared and consumed by global communities on the Internet and other electronic media (Mills, 2011).

Language in the Caribbean Landscape

The Caribbean language context is not a homogeneous one since territories have different histories of immigration and colonialism that have influenced the demographic make-up of nation states, and thus the languages or dialects that are used for communication. In the English-speaking Caribbean, the official language is English. However, in some territories such as St. Lucia, the vernacular is not an English-related Creole, but a French-lexicon Creole or *patois*. Whether English or French based, Creole vernacular languages serve many communicative needs in the Caribbean societies where they are found. A full discussion of the language situation in the Caribbean is found in Roberts (1998), Craig (2006), and Simmons-McDonald (2004). The historical context is important because it establishes that the societies of the Caribbean are post-colonial, having been subjected to years of exploitation by Britain, France, Spain, Portugal, and the Netherlands, and explains the negative status of vernacular languages. These languages and dialects that serve as means of communication are testimony to the dynamic language processes that took place since the time of slavery and migration, indentureship, and emancipation. The mixture of West African, European, Indian, and other languages has resulted in a complex language situation that makes generalizations about language forms and language use difficult. Even unitary states like Trinidad and Tobago exhibit stark differences in the language varieties in use in the two islands.

With respect to the relationship between the Creole and its European counterpart from which a Creole draws much of its vocabulary, the European standard variety is usually considered the superior, more correct language. Thus, in many territories, Standard English is the official language and the language of education. It enjoys a higher status and is the preferred variety in formal situations. Any English-related Creole language existing alongside the Standard variety is still largely considered inferior and judged by many as lacking grammatical structure and a "broken" version of English. Historically, then, a Creole language was forged out of a communicative need in social, political, geographic, and demographic conditions that were unique to specific speech communities. This partly explains the variation in Caribbean Creoles and need for caution in making generalizations about form, structure, function, and attitudes across territories.

In her analysis and discussion of language teaching and learning in Caribbean Creole contexts, Bryan (2010) explored the concept of language as an arena, at different spatial levels: situational or physical,

social and cultural (p. ix). She expanded the arena to advance the notion of language as performance and display, and, finally, the competitive, contested nature of language in the arena where, in the post-colonial setting of Caribbean states, English as the official language competes with Creole languages, the natural cultural expression of identity of Caribbean people. This suggests that the language of the land plays a crucial role in the lives and identity of Caribbean people, even though attitudes to Creole may vary from one community to the next and in the same community over time. Because many Caribbean Creoles have no standardized orthographic writing system, the belief persists in some quarters that they are not real languages. Close examination of the LL would reveal to students the extent to which Creole is an integral part of Caribbean being and affirm that it is a valid language.

Language Awareness and Linguistic Landscape

Language awareness refers to the consciousness about language form, structure, and function. Such consciousness is particularly important in language learning situations in which languages in a speech community are historically related to each other, though they may be unequal in status. As a principle for language teaching and learning, the concept has evolved over time to now include different dimensions of language consciousness: linguistic, sociolinguistic, and stylistic (Bryan, 2010). In the socio-linguistic environment of the Caribbean, which is characterized by an overlap in the language varieties in use, Craig (2006) argues for the development of Caribbean students' awareness of the differences between their first language, Creole, and English. The process would involve a pedagogical focus on differences in vocabulary and grammatical structures of the two language systems, as well as attention to the role of each variety in society. Students' language and literacy learning would also be aided when they are able to differentiate between their Creole and English, and when they can identify instances of code-mixing and code-switching—two natural linguistic processes in multi-lingual and multi-dialectal situations.

Language teaching pedagogy that promotes language awareness enables educators to "expand beyond school languages, recognize minority languages and raise awareness of language diversity" (Dagenais, Moore, Sabatier, Lamarre, & Armand, 2009, p. 258). The process also allows students to develop a more positive attitude to the value of their vernacular by making its usefulness for important communicative functions more visible to them. Additionally, if a critical language awareness approach is adopted, students develop competence

in reading to uncover the ideologies inherent in texts they encounter in their landscape. They are then better able to identify whose interest those texts promote and, importantly, whose interests are excluded.

Collecting and Analysing
Caribbean Linguistic Landscape Data

As in other geographic regions, LL can be found in both rural and urban spaces throughout the Caribbean. Data are everywhere in the environment, in concrete and virtual spaces; on walls and billboards; newspapers and flyers; and on clothing (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. T-shirt with Jamaican Creole.

Diverse approaches and methodologies can be utilized to collect and analyse such data in different disciplines (Shohamy & Gorter, 2009)**.** Rogers and Schaenen (2013), for example, show how critical discourse analysis (CDA) is useful to execute careful, systematic analysis of public texts and unearth the underlying power relations and ideologies embedded in such texts. According to Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), CDA includes techniques for analysis at three levels of discourse organization: *text, discursive practices*, and *social practices*. Critical analysis of text allows the systematic unpacking of lexical, semantic, grammatical structure of *text* to determine how the text portrays social facts as natural/unnatural, normal/abnormal, include/exclude positions. Analysis of *discursive practices* maps the production, distribution, and consumption practices involved in the circulation of texts, while analysis of *social practices* involves mapping the possible conditions that make particular ideas or lived experiences seem powerful and pervasive for a given social group at a given period of time (Kamberelis & Dimitriadis, 2005, p. 120).

Critical discourse analysis is not the only approach that can be adopted to analyse LL. Systemic-functional linguistic theory explains language use and variation in terms of the communicative choices language users make to achieve different functions (Halliday, 1978). The theory advances that texts are produced in a social context, and different structures and processes in the social system produce different texts. An important aspect of systemic-functional theory seeks to uncover how the textual patterns and cohesive devices work to unify the parts of a text to make it coherent. Applied to LL, analysis from this theoretical framework would investigate the ways in which the variety of language or register is appropriate to a particular social situation. A *register* links a particular oral, written, or visual text to its context, and is itself a creation of the conditions or events that occur in that specific context. For example, the text in Figure 1 uses Jamaican Creole on a T-shirt and is assertive in its statement of identity. The power and possibility of its simplicity can easily be overlooked, yet it presents an opportunity for students to be asked to collect, identify, translate, and discuss the suitability of language use in this specific context. In an integrated curriculum, students in visual arts classrooms improve their ability to design and reproduce this writing genre in an authentic, functional display of language use.

The three levels posited by Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005) can also be applied to Figure 2, which depicts a mural on a wall in an urban community in Jamaica. The wall conveys the text of a message from an organization, "Mountain View United Council," that "We choose peace," and "We support community policing." This option is offered as "The way to peace." A graphic image depicting three individuals reinforces the written text: a policeman, a member of the Rastafarian movement, and another individual. All three are male; the police officer is positioned in the middle, touching the other two men who are shaking hands.

Figure 2. Mountain View United mural in Jamaica.

At the level of *text,* classroom discussion and analysis can focus on the lexical and semantic choices and their implications. For example, the idea of choosing "peace" is offered as a more acceptable position than the alternative—a lack of peace or war. Choosing "peace" is "The way," and the stance that the Council supports. The text is structured to begin on a note of "peace" and end on a similar note, giving agency to "we." The suggestion of inclusion and togetherness is also implied, and further supported by the image of the three men touching each other in solidarity. The text "sells" an idea and depends on the targeted audience to buy into the proposition. This is not an uncommon media strategy to persuade readers to uncritically accept the message of a text; however, it is important for teachers to guide students' critical reading to consider the intention of the creator of the text.

Grammatical features of the language also help to achieve the writer's goal. The language of the text is largely conventional English, not Jamaican Creole. The choice of English to communicate the message in a context where crime in an urban space is a concern is also significant and open to interrogation. If this sample of LL is used in a literacy classroom, having discussed the context in which the text occurs in the community and the target audience, the teacher and students can usefully explore questions such as the following: *What language would you expect the text to be written in*? *Why*? *Do you think the language used in the text would affect the impact/effectiveness of the message*? Students can then be engaged in a range of literacy activities and cross-curricular activities centred on the mural. For example, students' creative responses can

include a translation of the text, a debate on the effectiveness of the use of Creole or Standard English, and letters to the Mountain View United Council commenting on the reasons why the text is effective (commendation) or ineffective (critical).

The language of the mural in Figure 2 is different from that on a billboard erected along a highway in Trinidad (Figure 3). The first uses English whilst the second uses Creole. Apart from the informative and persuasive function that the two instances of LL serve, they perform a symbolic function as well. Landry and Bourhis (1997) suggested that when one variety of language is selected for use over another language, the use of one variety and absence of another influence the value and status that members of a speech community attribute to the language varieties operating in their environment. This suggests that choice of language in public signage is strategic and deserves further investigation. In classrooms, the study of the language of signs and images in their environment, such as those in Figures 1 and 2, provides students with opportunities to investigate and understand language choice.

Figure 3. Billboard along a highway in Trinidad.

An analysis of *discursive practice* would focus on who produced the text, how this text is being circulated, and who is the intended audience. In Figure 2, readers are led to conclude that the text originates from the Mountain View United Council, who chose the medium of printed and graphic text on a community wall to proclaim its message. To whom the term *we* refers in the text is subject to debate. Does the term include the actual members of the Council, the individuals in the accompanying

image, or all members of the community? Is it coercive in intent? This is another linguistic level at which the landscape functions, and a topic that students at different levels of the school system can critically address.

The artefacts in Figures 1 and 2 represent different discursive practices in the same society. The text on the T-shirt can be mass-produced and distributed on a scale that would be impossible for the message on the mural to replicate. As language teaching resources, students get opportunities to explore the different ways in which texts are produced, distributed, and consumed. These are connected to the purpose of the text, the target audience, and the mode. Classroom activities that involve comparison and contrast of authentic texts would extend the language range and communicative competence of students. Such activities would be accompanied by focal questions on the discursive features of the selected texts and elicitation of the ways in which they are similar and different, as well as analysis of appropriateness and effectiveness. Additional benefits include the development of students' ability to select effective or appropriate ways to market their own messages when they wish to communicate in the wider society; or even to criticize the ways in which messages are marketed in their communities. For example, students can debate the probable effectiveness of the text on the mural in their community.

An application of the concept of social practice, as suggested in Kamberelis and Dimitriadis (2005), would examine the conditions that made the specific ideas or lived experiences reflected in the text important for the social group in that specific community, at that period of time. This is the historical perspective. The photograph was taken in 2013, but the mural might have been in existence a long time before that. The reference to "peace" and "policing" suggests that the text was created in response to the incidence of crime affecting the community at the time. The idea of "community policing" is commonly introduced as a strategy to combat increasing levels of criminal activity by bringing different groups together in the community to aid officers in law enforcement. The gendered lens through which the message is delivered might also be significant in mapping the conditions that gave rise to this signage in the Jamaican landscape. How can the absence of a female individual be explained? Is the intended audience only, or primarily, young males? Is ethnicity a factor? Ethnographic investigation would perhaps yield more information to inform analysis, or students who live in the community would be more likely to give greater insight into the "story."

Classroom activities such as those discussed above teach students that language use is not neutral but negotiated and contested. If diverse text

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types that shape public sphere are used to achieve these outcomes, students get an opportunity to develop pragmatic competence; that is, the ability to use appropriate forms of language in context. Pragmatic competence is considered an important feature of second language acquisition and a component of communicative competence (Cenoz & Gorter, 2008). Students also learn that phonological differences between languages result in public signage with incorrect spelling (Figure 4). This provides a rich source for linguistic exploration and discussion in classrooms. In Figure 4, the spelling of the English word *stand* reflects the phonological process of the reduction of a final consonant cluster that is typical of the oral speech of speakers of many English-related Creoles. The sign thus reflects a sound difference between English and Creole that teachers can use to raise students awareness of this linguistic feature. Students are then able to identify and analyse other instances that they observe in their community. Such a language teaching focus is already accommodated in syllabi such as that for Communication Studies in the Caribbean Advanced Proficiency Examinations (CAPE) administered by the Caribbean Examinations Council (CXC). The sign in the clothing store (Figure 5) offers other possibilities for use as a teaching resource if teachers facilitate student discussion at different levels of linguistic analysis. Some students may not be aware that *platted* is used where the writer intended to use the word *pleated*. Such exploration of the LL also provides the opportunity for teachers to address the incorrect notion that students may have that every incorrect use of English is an instance of Creole. This belief in some quarters is partly responsible for persistence of negative attitudes to Creole and a characterization of the language system as "bad English"

Figure 4. Sign on a transport shelter in Trinidad.

Figure 5. Sign in a clothing store in Trinidad.

Apart from the use of static, printed texts, LL as classroom resources includes the kinds of digital texts that students consume and produce when they use the Internet, social media, and other electronic media. In those spaces, students engage with new forms of textual production and re-production. This forms the basis for new classroom pedagogy that responds to the digital and multi-modal environment marked by global networking. In this environment, there are blurred lines between reality and illusion, truth and fiction, and dynamic use of different varieties of language: sometimes English, sometimes Creole, many times a mixing of the two. Effective language teaching, however, takes learners beyond language as form to an appreciation of how meaning is communicated, and how texts are connected, sometimes with only a title and a picture. The image of the boat in Figure 6 exemplifies this.

Figure 6. Photo-shopped image circulated on the internet.

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In Figure 6, the context of the photo-shopped image is critical for meaning-making and understanding the use of language. The image appeared on the Internet in the middle of an election campaign in Trinidad and Tobago in 2013 when one candidate claimed, on a political platform, that a boat with Indians from Calcutta was waiting to sail to Tobago if the predominantly Afro-dominated party lost the Tobago House of Assembly elections. The image of the "Calcutta Express" is real to the extent that it exists as a picture of a ferry, but it does not represent an actual ship; it was created using the photograph of an actual ferry—the *Tobago Express*—in the intensity of the political event. Both images are artefacts of the landscape, but can both be considered "real" in the same way? Classroom instruction that engages students in discussion of such texts develops their critical literacy. The process allows students to examine and discuss inter-textual links among different texts that treat with similar issues in different ways, thereby raising their awareness and knowledge of different genres. More importantly, students understand how language is used in complex ways, across diverse contexts, and for different purposes. For example, the issue of racial tensions in a multi-cultural society was introduced on a political platform, taken up in the photo as a ship—the Calcutta Express—and also appeared in the daily newspapers (see Figure 7). The modes employed and the motives of the creators of the texts might have been different. How the texts were interpreted by different groups in the society might also have varied. Situations such as these provide valuable teaching opportunities for educators and learning opportunities for students in disciplines across the school curriculum.

Figure 7. Headline from the *Newsday* newspaper.

Social relationships and attitudes are thus reflected in the language found in public spaces (Byram, 2012). LL adds to an understanding of language, society, and people, and, when used in classroom pedagogy, has the potential to develop students' language competence and critical thinking skills. This includes the perceived relationship between events and objects. In this last instance, LL can be used to promote critical evaluation of texts and highlight forces that divide and privilege groups in society.

Future Research

An extensive and diverse LL is freely available for use in language and literacy instruction in the Caribbean as educational resources, and its use in language and literacy instruction at every level of the education system is a worthwhile area of teacher action research. The process would require educators to design, use, and research the impact of the use of LL on the development of students' language competence and their attitude to language, since language attitude affects language learning. Apart from the development of teaching resources using visual and printed signage, extensive use of spoken text is also useful. For example, taped advertisements, talk shows, and speeches offer rich opportunities for contrastive exploration of language in use. Other possible areas of research include studies of the ways in which readers interpret and understand the multi-lingual, multi-dialectal, and multi-modal LL in their environment.

Conclusion

From early in their lives, children are continually bombarded with information from a multiplicity of sources. This makes the use of the landscape around them ideal educational tools to develop their literacy. If educators use such texts to integrate content in the school curriculum, students might find literacy resources more motivating and engaging, since LL reflects authentic language use in diverse ways that are familiar to students. The fact that texts in landscape are visible does not mean that students always see them, pay attention to them, read them, or understand how they work. Language teaching methodologies that target students' language awareness can make students conscious of linguistic features of their landscape that they may have previously taken for granted. An important part of the process is a pedagogical approach that allows students to recognize public space as an arena in which different players, such as advertisers, politicians, and businessmen, exercise

influence in ways that are often hidden or covert. LL is therefore useful to develop students' critical literacy as well as their pragmatic competence, so that they are able to use language in appropriate contexts while recognizing the ways in which the landscape seeks to influence them. Finally, incorporating LL of Caribbean societies in the process of education provides diverse opportunities to link language and culture, and indigenize educational resources to motivate and extend student learning.

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