
TEACHERS' FORUM

Fostering Symbolic Competence by Integrating Linguistic Landscapes into the Chinese L2 Curriculum

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To help language learners navigate the complexities of communication in today's multilingual world, Kramersch (2009) calls for the development of *symbolic competence*, a capacity that extends beyond linguistic accuracy and fluency. Symbolic competence enables learners to critically examine how language reflects and reinforces social hierarchies, ideologies, and cultural norms. It also empowers them to negotiate meaning across languages and cultures, while reflecting on how language shapes both their own identities and those of others.

Linguistic Landscapes (LL), the visual and textual representations of language in public spaces, offer a practical and powerful means of fostering symbolic competence. Building on this theoretical foundation, this report presents a classroom project that integrates LL into the Chinese L2 curriculum. It outlines the project's design and implementation, showcases examples of student analyses, and evaluates learning outcomes. The report demonstrates how incorporating LL into language instruction can bridge classroom learning with real-world contexts, equipping students to engage critically and meaningfully with linguistic and cultural diversity.

For language learners, symbolic competence can open up multiple perspectives on historical and social realities and appropriately prepare them for today's multilingual world. (Kramersch, 2009, p. 201)

INTRODUCTION

World language education continues to evolve in response to shifting global contexts and the growing emphasis on cultivating multilingual global citizens. According to Kramersch (2009), multilingual individuals are distinguished by their "growing symbolic competence." This competence includes the ability to understand the symbolic value of language and the cultural memories embedded in different symbolic systems; to leverage the diversity of multiple languages to reframe events, create alternatives, and position oneself between languages; and to critically examine the cultural and ideological assumptions underlying communication (pp. 200–201). Symbolic competence goes beyond efficient information exchange and measurable communication outcomes. Instead, it emphasizes "understanding the practice of meaning-making itself," and includes a reflexive dimension that draws on subjective, aesthetic, historical, and ideological perspectives (Kramersch, 2011, p. 355).

In language education, developing symbolic competence as highlighted by Vinall (2016) involves raising learners' awareness of its role in enhancing their communicative, analytical, and interpretative skills. This awareness enables learners to understand, respond to,

and shape interactional contexts. In situations that are “socially, politically, economically, and historically situated and imbued with ideological meanings that have real material consequences,” symbolic competence empowers learners “to create new meanings and to decide when and how to act on this potential” (p. 5). In this context, it is essential for multilingual teaching practitioners who are “aware of the complexity and relationality of languages and their differential symbolic power” (Kramsch & Zhang, 2018, p. 215), to identify such contexts and design pedagogies that foster symbolic competence.

Inspired by the 7th Linguistic Landscape (LL) Workshop held at the University of California, Berkeley in 2015 and by the growing application of LL studies in language education, I sought to use LL as a tool to connect classroom language learning with real-world contexts. This approach aims to guide and support learners in developing language awareness and to encourage their active engagement with symbolic action in a multilingual world, ultimately fostering symbolic competence.

LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE IN LANGUAGE EDUCATION

Landry and Bourhis (1997) defined Linguistic Landscape (LL) as “the visibility and salience of languages on public and commercial signs in a given territory,” highlighting its role in conveying the relative power and status of different linguistic communities (p. 23). This concept provides a framework for examining sociolinguistic hierarchies and the interplay between language and societal structures. Researchers examine various aspects of LL, including sign quantity, types (e.g., private vs. governmental), locations, visual features, and how they interact.

The educational value of LL has been widely recognized. Cenoz and Gorter (2008) highlight its potential as a source of authentic input, noting benefits such as incidental learning, the development of pragmatic competence, multimodal literacy, multicompetence and an exploration of the symbolic and affective power of language (pp. 272–282). Similarly, Shohamy and Waksman (2009) regard LL as a powerful educational tool that supports both language learning and linguistic activism, providing a context for understanding how meanings are constructed and manipulated (p. 326).

Language educators have proposed and implemented a range of approaches to integrate LL into classrooms. Sayer (2010), for example, introduced a sociolinguistic model that used LL as an authentic resource in his EFL classroom in Oaxaca, Mexico. This approach enabled students to examine the social meanings of English in their community and fostered a deeper understanding of the societal functions of language. In a different context, Hewitt-Bradshaw (2014) advocated for LL integration in Caribbean Creole language environments, where Creole is the vernacular and English is the formal medium of instruction. Her pedagogy consists of three interconnected levels: text (lexical, semantic, grammatical choices, and authorial intent), discursive practice (text production and dissemination), and social practice (historical and cultural backgrounds tied to lived experiences). This approach promotes language awareness, critical literacy, and pragmatic competence (pp. 165–167). Similarly, Rowland (2013) enacted teaching with LL in yet another context, an EFL writing course in Japan. He engaged students with English signs from their local environment. His structured process involved introduction, photo documentation, and seven lessons. The approach encouraged students to reflect on and analyze public language use while enhancing their writing through description and analysis.

Together, these examples of LL in language education illustrate diverse pedagogical strategies and goals. Because LL involves the manipulation, negotiation, and contestation of

meaning across multiple levels, incorporating it into language curricula offers a powerful opportunity. It allows learners to engage with their lived linguistic environments while deepening their understanding of multilingual societies through the lens of symbolic competence. Inspired by Malinowski's (2016) seminar "Reading the Multilingual City," the project presented in this paper, "Closely Reading Our Multilingual Community," was designed to pursue these educational goals.

INTEGRATING LL INTO THE CHINESE L2 CURRICULUM

The LL project took place during the sixth semester of a Chinese L2 course for non-heritage learners at the University of California, Berkeley. The students came from diverse academic majors and had completed five semesters (375 class hours) of Chinese study or its equivalent.¹ The five example excerpts are drawn from a class of 19 students.

Grounded in a multiliteracies framework, which emphasizes the interpretation and production of meaning across different modes of communication, the course engaged students with a variety of texts that reflect the signifying practices of Chinese society. While continuing to develop their linguistic skills, students were encouraged to critically reflect on meaning-making from multiple perspectives. The LL project invited students to engage with the "living texts" of their surroundings, or multilingual and multimodal signage in public spaces. This experience fostered symbolic competence by enabling them to interpret meaning-making practices and reframe or create alternative realities through symbolic systems. The following report is organized into four sections:

1. Situating the project
2. Exploring, analyzing, and writing (including student work examples)
3. Sharing discoveries and interpretations
4. Evaluating learning outcomes

Situating the Project

The project began with an orientation aimed at cultivating a multilingual mindset among students. They were asked to examine the displayed sign (Figure 1), construct meaning through a set of guiding questions (see English translations below), and respond in Chinese.

- What languages are represented on the sign? What do they suggest about the surrounding community?
- How is Chinese represented? Is it written in traditional or simplified Chinese characters, or in Pinyin? What factors might have influenced these choices?
- How do different languages interact with one another? What meanings emerge from this interaction?
- What is the relative status of each language? How is this status reflected in the sign?
- What cultural histories and social realities are revealed through the content and design of the sign?

¹ According to the Foreign Service Institute's classification of language difficulty for English speakers aiming to reach Professional Working Proficiency, Chinese is categorized as a Category V language, requiring approximately 2,200 class hours. In contrast, French or Spanish—Category I languages—typically require around 600 hours.

- Who might have created the sign? What purposes does it aim to serve?
- Are there any additional insights or observations that deepen your understanding of the sign's significance?

Figure 1

Sign Used to Orient Students to LL



These questions align with Kramsch's (2011) framework on the symbolic dimensions of language use within cultural, social, and historical contexts, namely, "what words say and what they reveal about the mind," "what words do and what they reveal about human intentions," and "what words index and what they reveal about social identities, individual and collective memories, emotions and aspirations" (p. 357).

This negotiable, co-constructive meaning-making activity guided students to explore the concept of LL and to analyze the various aspects of the sign, including the historical and cultural identities reflected in its different languages, as well as the social realities revealed through their interaction. This initial modeling phase played a crucial role in shaping students' approach to the project, laying a foundation for their subsequent exploration and progress. As a follow-up, students were required to read two short texts, "What are Linguistic Landscapes?" (Williams & Greene, 2014, online) and "Signs in context: multilingual and multimodal texts in semiotic space" (Zabrodskaia & Milani, 2014). These readings provided essential background knowledge on LL. Additionally, Landry and Bourhis's (1997) article was made available for further reference.

In the second half of the subsequent class session, students discussed the readings and brainstormed examples of LLs that they had observed. After this discussion, the project assignment was introduced. Students were instructed to examine an environment within their context, photograph examples of LLs featuring Chinese and other languages, select one photograph, and explore its language use with reference to (but not limited to) the above guiding questions. They were then asked to write an initial analysis of approximately 500–600 Chinese characters. Once the project requirements were clearly understood, students began the process of exploration, analysis, and writing.

Exploring, Analyzing, and Writing

Throughout the process of exploring, analyzing, and writing, students worked independently, while I maintained regular communication to monitor their progress, respond to questions, and provide constructive feedback.

Students analyzed a diverse range of multilingual signage encountered in their surroundings and daily activities, such as shop signs, street signs, warnings, notices, advertisements, banners, menus, and posters. Most students focused on a single sign, as required by the assignment, though a few chose to analyze multiple signs found along the same street. In their analyses, students examined both the surface features and deeper symbolic layers of language use. They interpreted the meanings conveyed by different language forms, recognized the cultural memories embedded in various symbolic systems, and articulated their insights through writing in Chinese. This structured process not only guided students through observation and critical inquiry but also encouraged them to express complex ideas in the target language.

The following examples, drawn from a class of 19 students and shared with their permission, showcase individual work on selected signs and represent five different analytical approaches. Each example includes the student's photograph of the sign, along with a key segment of their analysis and interpretation, presented in both Chinese and English translation.

Hardware Store Sign

Nick² had walked past the hardware store in Excerpt 1 several times a week, but it was the LL project that prompted him to examine it more closely.

Excerpt 1

Nick's Reflection



这是一家五金店。邻区的店大多是比较新的，而这家五金店则是很旧的，也是唯一的有中国特色的店。店牌上有两种语言：中文和英文。中文叫“东方五金”，英文的翻译是“Eastern Supplies”。由于这两个名字的大小差不多一样，并

This is a hardware store. Most stores in the neighboring area are relatively new, but this hardware store is quite old and is the only one with distinct Chinese characteristics. The store sign features two languages: Chinese and English. The Chinese name is “东方五金” (Eastern Hardware), and the English translation is “Eastern Supplies.” Since the two names are roughly the same size and arranged side by side, I feel that the owner of this hardware store places equal importance on both Chinese and English cultures. The owner may have written the Chinese name to highlight that this is a hardware store with Chinese characteristics, or

² All names are pseudonyms.

列排着，以至于我觉得这家五金店的店主对中文和英文化都很重视。店主可能为了告诉大家这是有中国特色的五金店而写中文的名字，也可能知道一个中文的名字与伯克利的中国人产生共鸣。

虽然英文翻译是不错的，但是最好的是“Eastern Hardware”，因为“supplies”太笼统了。中文“五金”有两个意思：第一个是英文的“Hardware”，第二个源自于中国传统文化的五种金属：金银铜铁锡。由此可见，这个中文词语比英文翻译直观得多，更能吸引懂中国文化的人。

perhaps to resonate with the Chinese community in Berkeley.

Although the English translation is not bad, “Eastern Hardware” would be a better choice because “supplies” is too broad. The Chinese term “五金” has two meanings: the first is “hardware” in English, and the second comes from traditional Chinese culture, referring to five types of metals: gold, silver, copper, iron, and tin. This shows that the Chinese term is much more intuitive than its English translation and is more effective in attracting people familiar with Chinese culture.

Nick derived symbolic meaning from the interplay between the English name “Eastern Supplies” and the Chinese name “东方五金.” He interpreted the parallel arrangement and equal sizing of the two names as reflecting the owner’s awareness of the sociocultural equality and the inclusiveness of the Chinese name in addressing the cultural realities in the community. Additionally, Nick delved into the Chinese etymology and explored the cultural significance associated with the term “五金,” which refers to five metals. Comparing the meanings conveyed by each term, Nick argued that the English term “supplies” is “too broad,” whereas the Chinese term “五金” (five metals), deeply rooted in cultural tradition, is “much more intuitive,” as it directly references a traditional product category familiar within Chinese cultural and commercial contexts. As a solution, he proposed an alternative English translation: “Eastern Hardware.” This choice reflects not just semantic precision but also a culturally informed understanding of how language represents local identity and commerce.

Jewelry Shop Sign

Adam was drawn to a shop in Chinatown (Excerpt 2), its storefront adorned with numerous Asian languages.

Adam not only examined the relative status of linguistic signs in different Asian languages, as reflected in their display, positioning, and font sizes, but also linked these features to the historical presence of various communities in Chinatown over time. This connection highlights his awareness of the historical context embedded in the shop sign’s design.

Adam also observed that the wording in each language served a symbolic purpose specific to its cultural audience. For instance, the Cambodian text highlights a cherished national symbol, functioning as a cultural marker that resonates with Cambodian identity, while the Teochew pronunciation specifically appeals to Teochew speakers. Ultimately, Adam supported the use of multiple languages on storefronts, recognizing both their symbolic power and practical value—an insight that reflects his developing symbolic competence in interpreting how language operates across cultural and commercial dimensions.

Excerpt 2

Adam's Reflection

店面的上部和橱窗上有四种语言，其中是汉语、英语、越南语和柬埔寨语。中文是用繁体汉字，因为华侨就用繁体字。虽然每种语言有相似的意思，但是也不完全一样。中文汉字“金华”是名字，“珠宝金行”是卖黄金和珠宝的商店，翻译成英文是 jewelry shop。“金”(Jinhua) 的潮州话发音是“Kim Hoa”，很可能表明店主是潮州人，因为它的字体跟汉字一样大。下面的柬埔寨语“ហង់មេស អង្គរ”(hang meas Angkor) 字体很小，意思是“金点吴哥”，而越南语“Tiệm Vàng”意思是“金店”，字体也很小，而且放在橱窗上。当初奥克兰的中国城仅仅有中国移民，但是后来也有从亚洲别国来的居民，店主为了吸引不同类型的客户而采用了几种语言。

有人说使用多种语言使事情变得太复杂，但是我不同意，因为店主以公关营销的手法来提高客户数量。这对一些客户有吸引力，因为不同的语言与不同的客户产生共鸣。比方说，柬埔寨语强调“吴哥窟”，是柬埔寨人最珍贵的象征；看到潮州语“Kim Hoa”可以吸引潮州人。

The upper part of the storefront and the shop window display text in four languages: Chinese, English, Vietnamese, and Cambodian. The Chinese is written in traditional characters because overseas Chinese typically use traditional script. While the meanings across the languages are similar, they are not entirely identical. The Chinese characters “金华” (“Jinhua” in Mandarin) represent the shop’s name, while “珠宝金行” indicates a gold and jewelry shop, translated into English as “jewelry shop.” The characters “金华” are pronounced “Kim Hoa” in the Teochew dialect of Chinese, likely suggesting that the owner is of Teochew origin, as the size of the Teochew script matches that of the Chinese characters. The Cambodian script below, “ហង់មេស អង្គរ” (hang meas Angkor), is written in a smaller font and translates to “gold shop Angkor.” Similarly, the Vietnamese script “Tiệm Vàng,” meaning “gold shop,” is also written in a small font and placed on the shop window. Originally, Oakland’s Chinatown was home exclusively to Chinese immigrants, but it has since grown to include residents from other Asian countries. To attract a diverse range of customers, the store owner incorporates multiple languages.

Some argue that using multiple languages makes things overly complicated, but I disagree. The store owner’s multilingual approach is a strategic marketing decision to broaden the customer base. This strategy appeals to different groups by resonating with their cultural and linguistic backgrounds. For instance, the Cambodian text emphasizes “Angkor,” a treasured national symbol, while the presence of “Kim Hoa” might attract Teochew speakers.

Restaurant Sign

Cheng Wei struggled with the diversity of Chinese sound representations displayed on the sign of a Chinese restaurant (Excerpt 3).

Excerpt 3

Cheng Wei's Reflection



在餐馆标牌上一共有两种语言。第一个是英语“Sun Hong Kong Restaurant”，第二个是中文汉字“新香港酒家” (New Hong Kong Restaurant)。从普通话的念法来看，Sun 的发音跟“新” (Xin) 不一样。看样子，这家餐馆挺老的。很久以前，很多广东人来美国以后创办了餐馆。当时开办的餐馆到现在还是用广东话。我查了“新”字在粤语的读法，发现 Sun 是粤语的发音。除此之外，学校附近的中餐馆都用广东话。我还是不明白既然中国那么出名了，为什么餐馆还不用标准的普通话拼音来改写他们的标牌。对于学中文的外国人来说，粤语拼音让我们纠结。

There are two languages on the restaurant sign. The first is in English: “Sun Hong Kong Restaurant,” and the second is in Chinese characters: “新香港酒家” (New Hong Kong Restaurant). Based on Mandarin pronunciation, the character “新” (*Xin* ‘new’) does not sound like “Sun.” It seems this restaurant is quite old. A long time ago, many Cantonese people came to the United States and started restaurants. The restaurants they opened back then still use Cantonese today. I looked up the Cantonese pronunciation of the character “新” and found that “Sun” corresponds to the Cantonese pronunciation.

Moreover, the Chinese restaurants near the school all use Cantonese pronunciation. I still don’t understand why, even though China is now so prominent, these restaurants haven’t updated their signs to use standard Mandarin pinyin. For foreigners learning Chinese, Cantonese romanization can be quite confusing.

Noticing the difference in the pronunciation of the character “新” (*Xin*, meaning ‘new’) between Mandarin and Cantonese, Cheng Wei attributed this linguistic variation to the historical context of early Cantonese-Chinese immigrants, who often opened restaurants and named them using Cantonese. These Cantonese-pronounced names have been preserved to this day. The use of “Sun” carries a significant cultural identity rooted in this history.

However, Cheng Wei also critiqued the continued use of Cantonese naming conventions in some restaurants, raising questions about the tension between preserving tradition and aligning with modern linguistic norms. His critique was further informed by the challenges foreigners face when learning Mandarin, shedding light on the complexities of language, identity, and accessibility within Chinese subcultures. Cheng Wei’s analysis demonstrates symbolic competence by connecting linguistic form to cultural identity,

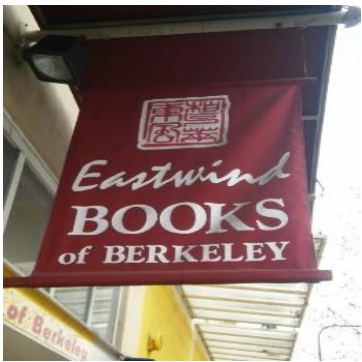
historical migration patterns, and the broader social implications of language learning, accessibility, and standardization.

Bookstore Sign

Patrick became curious about the artistic symbol above the English text on a bookstore sign. He asked the store manager about its meaning and discovered that it was written in seal script—a traditional style of Chinese calligraphy widely used during the latter half of the 1st millennium BC.

Excerpt 4

Patrick's Reflection



除了中文篆书“东风书店”以外，还有英语“Eastwind Books of Berkeley”。中文在上，英文在下，对店主来说，它们的位置显示出不同的重要性。“东风书店”这个店名用的是篆书文字，因此比较重要，表示古老的文化没有消失。篆书在古代是一种通用文字，现在除了书法艺术以外，印章中还常常用篆书。从店名可以看出这家书店的身份。篆书文字就是专门给看懂中文文化的人欣赏的。

“东风”，意思是从东边来的风，我们可以想象是“带日的风”。英文句子的主要作用就是向顾客传达店里有什么东西。但是，英文字 Eastwind 像中文的草书，表示“东风”。这就可以表示中国文化在美国的影响，但是也可以表示想去中国的人可以先去这个书店。

In addition to the Chinese seal script “东风书店” (Dongfeng Bookstore), there is also the English name “Eastwind Books of Berkeley.” The Chinese text is placed above, and the English below, which, to the store owner, reflects their differing levels of importance. The name “东风书店” is written in seal script, signifying its greater importance and symbolizing that ancient culture has not disappeared. Seal script, once a common writing style in ancient times, is now primarily used in calligraphy and seals. The store’s identity is evident from its name, with the seal script specifically intended for those who understand and appreciate Chinese culture.

“东风” translates to “east wind,” evoking the image of “a wind carrying the sun from the east.” The primary role of the English text is to inform customers about the store’s offerings. However, the English word “Eastwind,” written in a style resembling the wavy-Chinese script, symbolizes the “east wind.” This design reflects the influence of Chinese culture in the United States and subtly suggests that those interested in visiting China might begin their journey at this bookstore.

Patrick interpreted the relative importance of Chinese as being higher than English to the store owner, based on the positioning of the languages on the sign. He then examined the

meaning embedded in the store’s seal-scripted Chinese name. Noting that this calligraphic style was commonly used in ancient China, Patrick interpreted its use as being “intended for those who understand and appreciate Chinese culture.” Patrick envisioned “东风” (East Wind) as “a wind carrying the sun from the east,” and viewed the cursive English “Eastwind,” with its wavy-like styling, as a reflection of Chinese cultural influence in the United States.

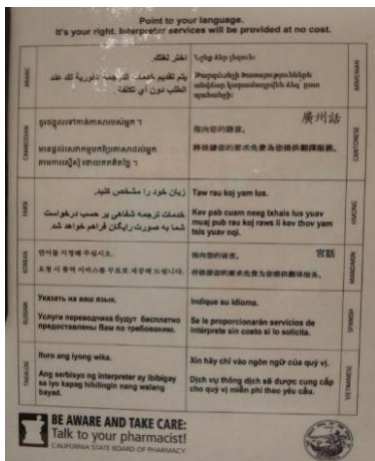
In his reflection, he elaborated: “I presented a broader multicultural, transhistorical, and non-Chinese-specific meaning as particularly relevant—namely, that an East Wind helps carry people toward the West and, for some, may be associated with the apparent movement of the sun across the sky. ... Interpreting the reason for the choice of the ‘wavy-Chinese’ style for some of the English characters was highly subjective. I believe it might actually be a typographic adaptation of the Chinese running script.” From these historical and subjective perspectives, Patrick interpreted the sign as symbolizing the journey of Chinese immigrants from East to West and the integration of Chinese and Western cultures. His analysis showcases symbolic competence through his ability to connect visual design, cultural memory, and transnational identity.

Notice at the Pharmacy

Carmen examined a notice posted outside a pharmacy that announced the provision of assistance for those who cannot speak English.

Excerpt 5

Carmen’s Reflection



这个布告就在药店的外面，告诉商店的客人如果不会说英语的话，药店会安排翻译。除了英文以外，还有十二个语言。有两个细节引起了我的注意。关于中文，用的是“官话”，而不是“普通话”或者“中文”。我不懂“官话”，所以研究了一下。“官话”也是“普通话”的意思，但是在清朝时用的说法。既然

This notice is displayed outside the pharmacy, informing customers that if they cannot speak English, the pharmacy will arrange for an interpreter. In addition to English, twelve other languages are offered. Two details caught my attention. Regarding Chinese, the term “官话” (Guanhua) is used instead of “普通话” (Putonghua) or “国语” (Guoyu). I was unfamiliar with the term “官话,” so I looked into it. “官话” also means “Mandarin,” but it was a term used during the Qing Dynasty. Since this term is no longer used by Chinese speakers today, why is it still being used in the U.S.?

Moreover, at the top of this paper, there is an English sentence that says, “It’s your right. Interpreter services will be provided at no cost.” However, this sentence has not been translated.

现在中国人不用这个说法，为什么美国人还用呢？

另外，这张纸最上面有一句英语是 “It’s your right. Interpreter services will be provided at no cost”，但是这句话没有被翻译。没有翻译 “It’s your right” 的后果是什么？有没有翻译非常重要，但是翻译的质量也很重要。语言就是平等性的一个方面。

What are the consequences of not translating “It’s your right”? Whether it is translated is very important, but the quality of the translation is equally crucial. Language is an aspect of equality.

In her analysis, Carmen identified two critical issues concerning language use in translation: the quality of translation and the lack of translation. Through her research, she uncovered that the term “官话” (official speech) reflects an ancient usage dating back to the period of 1368–1912. Her rhetorical question, “Why is it still being used in the U.S.?” expressed her criticism and frustration with the nation’s neglect of immigrant cultures, despite its foundation as a country built by immigrants.

In addition to critiquing outdated terminology, Carmen also addressed the absence of translation of the powerful phrase “your right,” which represents a core American value. Her follow-up rhetorical question, “What are the consequences of not translating ‘It’s your right?’” highlighted her opposition to this oversight, stressing the importance of making such vital concepts accessible in multiple languages.

Importantly, Carmen transformed her critique into action when she revisited the pharmacy to voice her concerns and received a positive response from the store. Reflecting on this experience, she wrote, “It gets much more serious when people’s basic rights are in play, and as someone who is rapidly becoming bilingual, I have a responsibility to use my language skills to make positive change.” The LL project not only heightened Carmen’s political and ideological awareness of translation’s critical role but also inspired her to embrace her social responsibilities as a multilingual advocate. Her presentation ignited a class discussion about the social justice dimensions embedded in language use. Carmen’s work powerfully demonstrates symbolic competence through the intersection of critical inquiry, historical research, civic engagement, and identity transformation.

Sharing Discoveries and Interpretations

The sharing process consisted of two stages: sharing with the instructor and sharing with classmates. In the first stage, students submitted their initial written analyses to me. I reviewed these submissions and provided comments on language use, pointed out textual features in the photographs that may have been overlooked, and guided students to explore meanings rooted in specific historical and cultural contexts. Students then submitted revised versions of their analyses based on this feedback.

After refining their work based on individual feedback, students moved on to a second stage of sharing and dialogue with classmates. Prior to presenting, students uploaded their focal signs and key findings to Google Slides, allowing their classmates to preview the work. Each presentation was followed by comments and questions from classmates, fostering a dynamic and interactive learning environment. Presenters responded to peer questions and often engaged in brief discussions, helping to surface new layers of meaning not previously considered. This exchange of perspectives further supported students’ development of

symbolic competence by exposing them to diverse interpretations shaped by different cultural and linguistic experiences. Many students noted that they gained valuable insights not only from conducting their own projects but also from engaging with their peers' work.

Evaluating Learning Outcomes

The evaluation of students' learning outcomes for this project was multifaceted. In addition to traditional assessments of linguistic mastery in writing and presenting, qualitative evaluation methods were emphasized to align with the project's broader goals. This included reviewing students' initial and revised written analyses in Chinese to assess how they demonstrated symbolic competence—specifically, their abilities to understand the symbolic value of language and the cultural memories tied to different symbolic systems; leveraged linguistic diversity to reframe events, create alternatives, and position themselves between languages; and critically examined the cultural and ideological assumptions underlying communication (see the introduction section above).

Further insights into students' learning came from their reflections on the LL project experience. To guide these reflections, students responded to the following questions:

- What research method did you employ to analyze your LL sign?
- What challenges did you face, and how did you overcome them?
- What did you learn from carrying out the LL project?
- What new thoughts or ideas emerged?

To encourage deeper self-expression while accommodating varying levels of Chinese proficiency, students completed their reflections in English. These served as valuable supplements to their written analyses in Chinese.

Students reported experiencing significant transformation through the LL project. Many described a shift from passively accepting multilingual spaces to actively questioning and analyzing the relationships between languages. They began to explore the symbolic dimensions of language use and came to recognize how linguistic complexity and interconnectedness reflect the historical, sociocultural, political, and ideological contexts of communities. Students also critically examined the predominance of English-only signs in multilingual societies and questioned their implications for social inclusiveness.

Across several semesters, students initially expressed anxiety about conducting a real-world project, particularly due to concerns over their Chinese proficiency. However, with structured support, including orientation, regular guidance, and detailed feedback, the project consistently fostered students' symbolic competence and increased their confidence in navigating multilingual realities.

CONCLUSION

In a multilingual society, LL offers a valuable opportunity for world language education. Seemingly static multilingual signs provide a dynamic portrayal of how cultural and historical diversity coexist within a society and encourage discussion as to whether they can do so harmoniously, inclusively, and with justice and equality. Integrating LL into language curricula with a focus on fostering symbolic competence enables learners to explore their immediate multilingual environments through the symbolic dimensions of language use. It also empowers

them to exercise symbolic power, adopt meaningful subject positions between languages, and actively shape their social realities.

The impact of this approach is not only evident in the outcomes documented in this report but also in its lasting influence. One day near the end of this spring semester, I noticed several students gathered around a large bulletin board outside the classroom. Curious, I approached them. One student explained, “we’re discussing the multilingual signs from the LL perspective.” This moment exemplifies how symbolic competence can reshape learners’ perceptions of their everyday environments.

With thoughtful adaptation to suit different pedagogical contexts, LL projects can be implemented across languages and proficiency levels. Such initiatives not only deepen language learning but also prepare learners to navigate and participate meaningfully in our increasingly interconnected, multilingual world.

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