Reading diachrony in Linguistic Landscape synchrony: Spanish in Lausanne

Spanish is currently the third «main language» (the best mastered language)\(^1\) amongst the foreign languages spoken in Lausanne (it has that status for 6.9% of citizens), after Portuguese (8.3%) and English (7.7%) and above Italian (6.4%) and German (5.2%). At a national level, these figures are only exceeded in Geneva (nearly 10%).\(^2\) These data reflect the vitality that the Spanish-speaking community has had in French-speaking Switzerland since the first of the economic migratory movements towards this country – in which a considerable number of Spaniards took part – started back in the 1960s.

This research work examines a group of signs in Spanish produced by the Spanish-speaking community in the French-speaking city of Lausanne. The aim sought with the present study consists in placing those signs at their specific production time and using them to access the history of the Spanish-speaking immigrant community, which has been settled for over half a century in this city. The methodology used combines the identification of signs in Spanish across Lausanne’s public space and their photographic documentation, the material analysis of these signs, seeking to find evidence of their chronology, and the historical contextualization of the signs via ethnographic research, from written information sources but also, and above all, by means of interviews with individuals related to the signs. In short, our purpose is to carry out a historical reading of the linguistic landscape (LL) so that the various signs allow us to discover the social dynamics of the communities by which they are produced.

My observation of Lausanne’s LL began in the summer of 2013. I have been documenting the LL in Spanish since then, but the most significant part of the empirical work undertaken in the context of this research was performed in the autumn of 2014 with the students enrolled in my master degree’s course «Linguistic landscapes in the Hispanic world». I subsequently continued the exploration until the autumn of 2016.

Observing the LL from that historical point of view enabled us to converge with the line of analysis strongly recommended by Jan Blommaert (cf. for example his volume of 2013) and already suggested by authors such as Bernard Spolsky in his well-known paper published in 2009 – where he focused on the road signs in Jerusalem before and after the Six-Day War – or Lola Pons Rodríguez (2012) with the meticulous analyses of old signs and the change in LL that she offers us in her monograph *El paisaje lingüístico de Sevilla*.

References


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\(^1\) About this concept used in its surveys, the federal statistics office (OFS) points out the following: «Il s’agit de la langue la mieux maîtrisée, réponses multiples dans le cas de bilinguisme» (cf. <http://www.scris.vd.ch/Data_Dir/ElementsDir/5658/36/F/Portrait_de_Lausanne_2015.pdf>).

\(^2\) These OFS data correspond to 2012 and were published in the report *Lausanne déchiffrée. Courrier statistique, 10\(^{e}\) année, n° 2, décembre 2014* (<http://www.scris.vd.ch/Data_Dir/ElementsDir/7997/1/F/LD2_2014.pdf>).