TRACING LINGUISTIC THREADS: A LINGUISTIC LANDSCAPE STUDY OF ACADEMIC INSTITUTIONS IN JAPAN

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ABSTRACT

This study investigated the presence and usage of languages on the different signs within the Linguistic Landscape (LL) of academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan. A sequential explanatory quantitative-qualitative research design was employed to gather and analyze the data. It utilized three research instruments: a camera, an observation protocol, and the researcher as an instrument. Various data sets were incorporated to obtain meaningful findings, including photo analysis, registers, geographical information, content analysis, and discourse analysis. The study's findings revealed that the LL of academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan, predominantly features two languages: Japanese and English, with Japanese being dominant across various functions and intentions. Most signs are in monolingual Japanese, and none are in monolingual English. English texts were found as mere translations of Japanese texts. Additionally, it was observed that there were more top-down or government signs compared to bottom-up signs or private signs. These results shed light on the significance of language education, language planning, and policymaking in the prefecture. Understanding the use of language and types of signs in the LL provides valuable insights that can inform decisions aimed at promoting linguistic inclusivity and cultural diversity within educational spaces.

Keywords: Linguistic Landscapes (LL), Academic Institutions, Language Use, Top-Down Signs, Bottom-Up Signs, Implications To English Education.

I. INTRODUCTION

All over the world, signs are an integral part of the overall landscape of any given location, providing a window into a place's social, economic, cultural, historical, political, and religious background. The signs people encounter in public spaces are often loaded with cultural and political meanings, reflecting a territory's power dynamics, social hierarchies, and historical legacies.

Linguistic landscape (LL) is commonly delineated as the visible written signs found in various settings such as indoor markets, advertisements, shops, groceries, schools, churches, government offices, private companies, road signs, street names, moving buses, beaches, icons, images, logos, electronic displays, technology-based advertisements, and other similar platforms in a specified area (Gorter, 2013; Huebner, 2016; Van Mensel et al., 2016).

The LL, also known as the language landscape or semiotic landscape, serves as a tangible demonstration of the language context in a specific place (Blommaert, 2013). It comprises all the linguistic elements that signify the visible places and spaces (Ben-Rafael et al., 2006). This space enables individuals to observe the world as seen by a sociolinguist, who investigates how people use language differently based on various social identities or intentions (Sayer, 2010).

The LL surrounds people with diverse linguistic tokens, permeating various spaces they navigate daily. Enormous billboards, captivating shop signs, informative road signs, and even the colorful product labels adorning supermarket shelves collectively form the tapestry of linguistic information within the LL. This intricate web of multilingual stimuli weaves together cultural expressions, identities, and communication strategies, offering an insightful glimpse into the interplay between language, culture, and society in people's everyday lives.

Globalization has led to the emergence of LL as an increasingly discussed linguistic phenomenon. Scholars from various fields of linguistics are exploring the LL through different lenses, such as theory, methodology, and critical analysis. The burgeoning interest in practical linguistics has resulted in a surge of research projects and publications focusing on analyzing written scripts in urban places, particularly in bilingual and multilingual sites across the globe.
In Japan, the people and society have become more diverse and multicultural, with various linguistic exposures and cultural influences (Morita, 2004; Pearce, 2017; Takakuwa, 2014). This diversity is also displayed in the increasing number of foreign signs present in the country, indicating Japan's growing acceptance of foreign languages and cultures. This change is significant for historically known countries for their linguistic uniformity and homogeneity (Dong, 2009).

The idea of a global village has impacted traditional values and attitudes toward the future, altering the outlook and perspective of Japanese society. The effects of globalization on language and culture are evident in all aspects of life, as it demands comprehensive transformation. In order to facilitate internationalization, Japan should become more welcoming and embrace multicultural and multilingual possibilities.

The study of LL, which is intertwined with sociolinguistics, semiotics, pragmatics, and communication studies, is still a relatively new field. Notably, most of the investigations done in this area have been completed in large urban cities (Backhaus, 2007; Ben-Rafael & Ben-Rafael, 2015; Hult, 2008; Nikolaou, 2017), as well as in specific areas such as town centers, streets, or neighborhoods within cities (Gorter, 2013; Schlick, 2003). These are popular locations for various activities such as shopping, sightseeing, and eating. Only limited studies have focused on smaller local urban locations (Phillips, 2012; Pietikäinen, 2014).

The LL is not a static concept and cannot be fully understood in its current state. Researchers must delve deeper into various locations to gain a more comprehensive understanding, especially in academic institutions. Thus, conducting a new study that focuses on learning institutions in small urban areas of Japan and provides a thorough and more comprehensive examination of the LL from different angles is crucial.

Language is an integral part of a society's cultural identity and communication. The LL reflects the linguistic diversity and socio-cultural dynamics of a region. Japan, renowned for its rich history and contemporary prominence in the global academic sphere, serves as a captivating site for investigating the LL within its academic institutions.

LL has emerged as an increasingly popular field of research, offering unique insights into how languages interact and coexist in multilingual environments. The significance of studying LLs lies in their potential to unravel the intricacies of language use and power dynamics within a given context.

This study contributes to both academic and societal domains. Academically, it will enrich the field of sociolinguistics by expanding the knowledge base on LLs within academic settings. From a practical view, the findings of this research can foster intercultural understanding and language policy development in academic institutions. Understanding the prevalence and usage of different languages can guide school administrators in designing inclusive and multilingual environments, accommodating the linguistic needs of diverse student and faculty populations.

Overall, conducting an LL study of academic institutions in Japan offers a unique opportunity to delve into the intricate web of languages and cultures that thrive within these educational settings. By investigating the presence, usage, and types of signs, this study endeavors to provide valuable insights into the dynamics of language and culture within the Japanese academic landscape. Ultimately, it aims to promote cross-cultural awareness, intercultural dialogue, and effective language policies within educational institutions in Japan.

II. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study explored the prevalence and usage of different languages on signs across various academic settings in Kagawa, Japan, shedding light on the intricate interplay between language, culture, and education. It sought to provide a nuanced understanding of how language presence and use shaped the LL in this area.

Specifically, it sought to answer the following questions: (1) What languages are used in the LL? (2) What are the types of signs observed? (3) What implications to English language education can be drawn from the findings? Moreover, the study discussed and analyzed underlying notions, theories, frameworks, and paradigms in the LL, leveraging these perspectives to support, strengthen, and validate the empirical findings.

III. METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a sequential explanatory quantitative-qualitative research design to gather and analyze the data (Andrew & Halcomb, 2007; Creswell & Clark, 2017). In order to elaborate on this design, the quantitative
data is gathered and analyzed first, after which the qualitative data is collected to explain and provide context to the quantitative findings (Creswell, 2013). The mixed-method approach involves using numerical (quantitative) and textual (qualitative) data and analysis to offer supplementary information to the issue being examined (Green et al., 1989; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2007).

Initially, on-site observations involving systematic surveys were conducted across multiple academic institutions to document and photograph a broad range of signs. Furthermore, quantitative data were collected to determine the frequency and distribution of different languages on signs through basic statistical treatments such as frequency counts, simple percentages, and rankings, allowing for statistical comparison between sign types. These quantitative findings were then presented through figures in the results and discussion. Sequentially, qualitative analysis was employed to examine the signs' socio-cultural context and linguistic content. This approach involved interpreting the underlying meanings, intentions, and implications behind the utilization of specific languages on the signs, as well as the categorization of the types of signs.

**Research Environment**

The study was conducted in a metropolitan city in Kagawa, the smallest prefecture in Japan, which offered a captivating setting for investigating LLs. Located on the island of Shikoku, Kagawa is renowned for its picturesque landscapes, historical significance, and vibrant cultural heritage. The place hosted a variety of academic institutions, including preschool, primary, secondary, tertiary, and graduate schools, and other institutions providing informal education, such as cram schools, review schools, talent schools, technical and vocational schools, English conversation schools, and other similar institutions.

This description made the location ideal for exploring language use and types of signs in educational settings. Additionally, Kagawa's diverse population and cultural interactions presented a rich tapestry of languages reflected in its academic institutions' LL. Furthermore, Kagawa's accessibility and welcoming atmosphere facilitated the data collection smoothly and conveniently.

**Research Instrument**

The study utilized three research instruments: a camera, an observation protocol, and the researcher as the instrument to collect the data necessary for analyzing the findings.

To begin with, the researcher used a phone or a digital camera to capture photographs of the signs within the LL. The camera acted as essential equipment in gathering accurate visual information. Its sharp focus and ability to capture meticulous details can help the researcher to have holistic and accurate observations (Shirmohammadi & Ferrero, 2014). Photography thus becomes a valuable research tool, with supplementary methodologies that extend the researchers' perspectives if they make skilled and proper use of it (Winton, 2016).

This research also employed an observation protocol to accurately document, synthesize, categorize, and classify the signs. Studies involving observations need to develop a protocol for documenting necessary data, concentrating on realities, seeking for interpretations that help inform the main problem under investigation, and writing reflective and descriptive field notes on the observation protocol (Creswell, 2016).

In addition, the primary research instrument used to collect qualitative data was the researcher (Bahrami et al., 2016; Wa-Mbaleka, 2020; Xu & Storr, 2012). The researcher relied on his sensory organs to perceive the study objects, reflecting them in his consciousness and transforming them into representations that could be interpreted. The researcher's ability to observe even the most mundane details and contemplate the significance of observations in data gathering played a vital role. The researcher's competence in extracting data from the sources and interpreting meanings was critical to the success of this research endeavor.

In order to guarantee the dependability and credibility of the study instruments, the study employed triangulation and expert review to establish their validity and reliability. Triangulation in the study's context involved utilizing multiple data sources, methods, validators, and theories to the greatest extent feasible to provide corroborating evidence. Three experts validated all research instruments used and the analysis of the data gathered.

Moreover, other research tools were also utilized to assist the researcher in collecting data, including a logbook, map, laptop computer, desktop computer, and software applications. A Japanese-to-English translator or
The researcher employed, plan, and - - o obtain meaningful findings and achieve a deeper understanding of the complex and multi-age -low, 2010).

The actual data-gathering process encompassed on-site photography of the signs. Thorough and systematic on-site observations involving surveys were conducted across multiple academic institutions through strategic movements to document and capture a diverse array of signs meticulously.

After gathering the data, the photos of the signs that were taken were sorted based on the languages they contained and the types of signs, allowing for a more thorough categorization and analysis at a later stage. The invalid photos were removed using the three criteria that were established and discussed above.

Once all the necessary data-gathering procedures, including photography, observation, and on-site surveys, were completed, the data were ready for analysis and interpretation. The researcher tallied and tabulated the data presented in graphical forms in the results and discussion. This study ensured that valuable data collection, relevance to the research objectives, and compliance with ethical research standards were prioritized within the course of the study.

Data Analysis

In order to obtain meaningful findings and achieve a deeper understanding of the complex and multi-layered phenomena of language in the LL, the study incorporated various data sets, such as photo analysis, registers, geographical information, content analysis, and discourse analysis.

Specifically, basic statistical treatment was applied to the data using the simple percentage formula to determine the frequency and percentage of the languages used and the types of signs. The collected signs were also classified based on their categorization as top-down or bottom-up.

Scholars specializing in language and applied linguistics have extensively compared public and private signage (e.g., Backhaus, 2006; Ben-Rafael et al., 2006; Huebner, 2006; Jaworski, 2018; Jaworski & Thurlow, 2010). Public signs, including government-related signage, are considered top-down as they are created in compliance with government language policies. In contrast, private signs in commercial settings like shops and advertisements are bottom-up and reflect individual preferences. The data analysis was enriched by supporting and validating it with linguistic theories, frameworks, and theoretical paradigms and drawing implications for English language teaching and learning.

Ethical Considerations

The study rigorously addressed a range of ethical considerations to ensure its scholarly and ethical conduct while examining the language used and the types of signs found in the LL of academic institutions in Kagawa,
Japan. These ethical considerations encompassed honesty, legality, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy, objectivity, avoidance of conflict of interest, and respect for intellectual property, among other considerations. By adhering to these ethical principles and standards, this research upheld the quality and integrity of the overall results.

IV. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Academic institutions are vital in implementing, navigating, and contesting language policies and ideologies. However, it appears that scholars of LL have not given enough attention to learning institutions as critical areas for their investigation (Brown, 2012). On a positive note, over the past few years, there has been a notable surge in interest in schools, as evidenced by the April 2018 special issue of Linguistics and Education, which centered on the material and visual aspects of learning and education (Gorter, 2018; Lai-honen & Szabó, 2018), as well as other LL studies conducted in schools (Andriyanti, 2019; Bernardo-Hinesley, 2020; Muriungi, & Mudogo, 2021).

This trend highlights a growing recognition of the significance of non-verbal elements in educational settings and the potential for such elements to enrich the learning experience. This development has given rise to a more specific area of study within the domain of LL, known as schoolscape or educationscape (e.g., Krompák, 2021; Martena & Marten, 2022).

In order to support LL studies in schools, this research enhances existing scholarly efforts by examining how language usage either reinforces or challenges established language ideologies. It recognizes that school settings possess the potential to perpetuate or disrupt these ideologies. Studying the availability or presence of languages in the LL of the school environment is crucial, providing insights into language ideologies and power relations within the school community. This study’s endeavor, in turn, sheds light on language learning, teaching, and education in general.

Researchers can gain deeper insights into the material deployment of language, such as languages used on signs, posters, and bulletin boards, and its implications for prevailing language norms and hierarchies within the school environment. Understanding this information is vital for developing more inclusive and equitable language policies and practices in schools.

Moreover, studying the LL of schools aids in identifying language gaps and barriers that impede students from accessing essential information or participating fully in the school community. Educators and policymakers can use this understanding to design more inclusive and supportive learning spaces for all learners, despite their linguistic backgrounds.

Languages Used

In this research, the LL of academic institutions comprises the various languages used in the school buildings, facades, perimeter fences, waiting areas, information centers, activity centers, school playgrounds, and other places in academic institutions visible to the eyes and can be accessed and navigated by the public.

In the context of the study, academic institutions encompass a wide range of learning establishments, ranging from formal to non-formal, and including both private and government-owned institutions. It includes English conversation schools (eikaiwa), cram schools (juku), nursery schools, elementary schools, junior high schools, high schools, colleges, and universities, among other institutions within the LL of the area of study. These academic institutions are within the survey area and access of the researcher during the data gathering.

Figure 1 explicitly projects the different languages used in academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan.
Based on Figure 1, only two languages are present and used in the LL of academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan. Japanese and English were observed in different schools. However, it was also observed that most of the signs found were in Japanese, and fewer were in English. Additionally, most of the signs were in monolingual Japanese and no monolingual signs in English. There were also a few signs in bilingual Japanese and English where the Japanese texts were written first or above, and English texts were written below as translations.

These findings corroborated the findings of previous studies conducted by Backhaus (2006, 2007), which found that the Japanese language still overwhelmingly dominated the signs found in public spaces in Japan. Backhaus further posited that the prevalence of the Japanese language in signs in the country implies that Japanese is the language of power. Conversely, the availability of other minority languages, such as English, suggests linguistic diversity for solidarity rather than power.

Traditionally, when considering languages in educational institutions, people's minds would race directly to reading and writing. Given time, a whole landscape of classrooms and corridors may unfold, leading to assembly spaces, playgrounds, and pitches, all occupied by learners, teachers, parents, school leaders, and other educational stakeholders doing their duties and functions. They might even pause at signs on doors, designated areas for staff or students to work, and spaces for males and females to gather. They might also observe writings on boards and walls instructing silence or encouraging speech, as well as placards and posters combining pictures with different languages to provide information, instructions, or influence them.

Absorbed into this maelstrom, they have become participant observers of the interconnections between the languages, signs, spaces, and practices constituting an educational space's LL. A central theme of inquiry concerning schools' LLs relates to the way the writings and signs people put on walls both shape and saturate the public spaces they create and how they behave in them, and how these writings and signs, in turn, are shaped by their behaviors and the spaces they inhabit.

How school signs are designed and presented can reflect the value placed on languages and their speakers. The use of a specific language as the dominant language can be reinforced through various aspects of the signs, such as their positioning, shape, and color, which can have a negative impact on individuals from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds, especially language learners. This issue is significant in Japan due to the increasing number of foreign individuals visiting, working, studying, and living there.

In the academic sphere, how different languages are displayed and used can convey implicit messages about their status and those who speak them. For instance, if a school only shows signs in the dominant language and does not provide any support or at least recognition for other languages spoken by some students, this can send a message that those languages are not valued or important. On the other hand, if a school takes steps to provide multilingual signage, resources, and instruction, this can send a message that all languages and the students who speak them are appreciated and respected.
The significance of language status in schools must be considered, as it can significantly affect students' academic outcomes and self-perceptions. Several studies (Flores & Rosa, 2015; Pennycook, 2017) have shown that students whose languages are not widely recognized or valued by the school can experience feelings of marginalization and exclusion, leading to decreased motivation, engagement, and achievement. Conversely, when students feel that their languages are respected and valued, they are more likely to experience a sense of belonging and increased confidence in their abilities.

In order to fully address multilingual and multicultural education within the context of LL, it is essential to consider the concept of raciolinguistics, which explores the relationship between language and perceptions of race (Alim, 2016). Challenging the hegemony present in particular representations of language and culture on school signs is crucial and needs to be more critically examined.

Japan has long been known as one of the prototypes of a monolingual and homogenous society (Backhaus, 2006). The implications of Japanese monolingualism, monocultural ideologies, and being a homogeneous society are significant in academic institutions. In the context of language learning, Japanese monolingualism limits the exposure of Japanese students to different languages, which can hinder their ability to communicate and collaborate effectively with people from different cultural backgrounds. This situation can potentially limit job opportunities in the global marketplace, as many companies require employees to be proficient in multiple languages.

Japan's monocultural ideologies in academic institutions can lead to a lack of diversity among students, faculty, and staff, limiting perspectives and hindering innovations. It can also lead to cultural barriers that may make it difficult for international students to integrate into the academic community.

To address these issues, Japan should embrace linguistic and cultural diversity. Integrating English, which is considered the de facto international language of the world, into the educational landscape can go a long way. This policy would involve providing school signs in English and promoting cultural exchange programs for teachers and students, especially in English-speaking countries, to expose Japanese students and teachers to different cultures and languages. Additionally, academic institutions should actively seek to recruit or accept diverse students and faculty members to foster a more inclusive and innovative learning environment.

Although there is a belief that all languages are potentially equal, social factors significantly shape their status. Several studies have highlighted how language hierarchies can shape access to resources and opportunities (Blommaert, 2010). For example, the exclusive dominance of a specific language can result in the devaluation and marginalization of other minority languages, particularly in educational contexts (Pennycook, 2017). This scenario can significantly impact students' identities and academic outcomes. Additionally, several studies have highlighted the role of the LL in perpetuating or disrupting language ideologies in educational settings (Blackledge & Creese, 2014; Duchêne & Heller, 2012).

In Japan, the potential integration of multilingualism and multiculturalism gives rise to a unique analysis lens. Through this lens, it becomes apparent that language planning and policymaking have been overlooked, normalized, and taken for granted in a constantly evolving multicultural and globalized society. As a result, these aspects still need to be critically analyzed and improved upon.

The LL of academic institutions offers valuable insights into how spaces are deliberately organized and how linguistic messages are explicitly and implicitly conveyed to students, educators, and parents through the signs they encounter. The landscaping concept of schools provides a framework for analyzing and comprehending the current knowledge of multicultural education.

Knowing the languages used or present in a particular area offers numerous benefits. Firstly, it promotes effective communication and understanding among the community members, fostering a sense of unity and inclusivity. It enables individuals to interact confidently with people from diverse linguistic backgrounds, facilitating cultural exchange and cooperation. Secondly, language proficiency opens up new opportunities for personal and professional growth, allowing individuals to access a broader range of educational and employment prospects.

Moreover, it enhances cross-cultural awareness and sensitivity, encouraging mutual respect and appreciation for different traditions and customs. Lastly, being aware of the languages prevalent in an area empowers individuals to actively participate in local activities, events, and societal functions, strengthening social bonds...
Types of Signs

This study critically analyzed both top-down and bottom-up signs in the LL of Japanese academic institutions. Investigating the creators of signs in public spaces enhances people's understanding of language as a dynamic social construct, reflecting the intricate connections between language, culture, identity, and power in a given society.

Figure 2 projects the types of signs observed in the LL of academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan.

The analysis revealed more top-down than bottom-up signs in the different schools surveyed. Top-down signs garnered a whopping dominance compared to bottom-up signs. In simpler words, there were more government signs observed than private signs. There were more makers, creators, or agents of official signs than non-official signs in different schools in the target environment.

In the LL of academic institutions, two primary categories of signs exist and can be identified: top-down and bottom-up signs. Top-down signs are created and imposed by those in positions of power or authority, such as the government or authorized organizations under legal and official functions. These signs are more standardized and formal, often conforming to official language policies or regulatory requirements. Examples of top-down signs include official road signs used to regulate traffic and ensure road safety. The government authorities create, control, and manage road signs.

In contrast, bottom-up signs are created by individuals or communities for their own purposes. These signs are more informal and diverse, reflecting the local language practices and identities of the people who made them. Examples of bottom-up signs might include graffiti, lost pet signs, protest banners, community event posters, or handmade signs advertising local businesses.

One key difference between top-down and bottom-up signage is the degree of control and authority exerted over their creation and use. Top-down signs are often subject to more formal regulation and oversight. In contrast, bottom-up signs are typically created and used without official sanction. As a result, top-down signs tend to be more consistent and predictable, while bottom-up signs can be more spontaneous and creative.

Another difference between top-down and bottom-up signage is the level of linguistic diversity they exhibit. Top-down signs tend to prioritize a standardized or official language, which can limit the linguistic diversity of the LL. In contrast, bottom-up signs often reflect the linguistic diversity of the local community, incorporating different languages and dialects into the landscape. The distinction between top-down and bottom-up signs highlights the complex interplay between language policy, community identity, and linguistic diversity in the LL.
Landry and Bourhis (1997) emphasized that the language used in official and non-official signage can vary significantly, ranging from being quite similar to drastically different. When the language is identical, the LL appears "consistent and coherent," but when there are radical differences, it indicates social tension or conflict (p.27). In contrast to top-down signs, bottom-up signs better represent the current linguistic diversity of society.

There are several possible reasons why there are more top-down signs in academic institutions in Japan than bottom-up signs. One reason is that the production and distribution of signage in schools are often controlled by school administrators, local authorities, and government officials, who may have specific control, policies, and guidelines regarding the use of language in signage. This context can lead to a standardized, top-down approach to creating and deploying signs. Most schools in Japan, especially in the research environment, are government-owned, thus managed and controlled by the government. This specific result is in congruence with the findings of the study completed by Backhaus (2009), which highlighted and discussed some public spaces or areas in Japan with specific policies, rules, and regulations that are maintained, controlled, and mandated by the government.

Additionally, there may be a need for more time, effort, resources, or incentives for students and teachers to create and display bottom-up signs in schools. In some cases, students and teachers may not see the value, need, or importance of creating and displaying their signs or may need more resources or skills to do so. Furthermore, cultural factors, such as a preference for orderliness and conformity, may be at play. Japanese society is known for conforming to the norm (Franger, 1970; Kondo et al., 2010). Japanese culture also strongly emphasizes group harmony and consensus-building (Konishi et al., 2009). These socio-cultural factors may translate into a preference for standardized and centrally controlled signage. In connection to the LL of schools, Japanese people may favor a top-down approach to signage creation and deployment.

In Japan, signs are often designed to focus on functionality and ease of understanding rather than elaborate decoration or design. Japanese are influenced by the philosophy and culture of simplicity and minimalism (Agrawal, 2023; Morais, 2022). This context is reflected in the use of simple and clear fonts, concise language, and minimal text. This preference for simplicity and minimalism in signage may also be related to broader cultural values and aesthetics. For example, the Japanese concept of "wabi-sabi" highlights the beauty in imperfection, transience, and simplicity (Juniper, 2011; Karaali & Uehara, 2020; Kempton, 2018; Keskin, 2022). This philosophy is reflected not only in art and design but also in the everyday life of Japanese people, including the design of public signs in the LL.

Furthermore, in the context of LL, this cultural preference for simplicity and minimalism may manifest in using a limited number of languages on signs, focusing on clear and concise communication rather than elaborate or decorative language use. This context highlights the importance of considering cultural factors when analyzing the LL and understanding how language and culture intersect in the public space.

Studying the types of signs in the LL of academic institutions in Japan, whether top-down or bottom-up, is essential to understand the language dynamics and cultural expressions within the educational context. Top-down signs offer insights into formal language policies and institutional communication strategies, helping people grasp the language hierarchy and power structures at play. Meanwhile, exploring bottom-up signs provides valuable information about grassroots language practices, student-led initiatives, and subcultural identities thriving within the academic community.

This multifaceted approach allows researchers and educators to appreciate the complex interplay between official language usage and spontaneous linguistic expressions, fostering a more inclusive and culturally sensitive learning environment. By comprehending the nuances of both sign types, stakeholders can effectively promote linguistic diversity, intercultural exchange, and a deeper appreciation for the rich tapestry of languages within academic institutions in Japan.

Knowing the creators of signs provides insights into the language practices and preferences of different groups within a community. It helps identify linguistic patterns, language choices, and cultural influences unique to specific social, ethnic, or demographic groups.

The creators of signs can reveal power dynamics and hierarchies in society. For instance, signs made by government authorities or dominant institutions might reflect official language policies and exert control over
linguistic representation. In contrast, signs created by marginalized communities may demonstrate resistance or assertion of their cultural identities. It allows researchers to understand the context and intent behind the language displayed. Signs made by businesses, educational institutions, or community organizations may serve different purposes and have distinct linguistic characteristics based on their objectives and target audience. Knowledge of the nature of the creation of the signs helps assess the inclusivity and diversity of language representation in public spaces. It allows researchers to determine if certain linguistic groups or voices are underrepresented or excluded and if efforts are needed to promote linguistic equity. On a larger scale, studying signs made by various cultural and ethnic groups contributes to documenting and preserving cultural heritage and linguistic diversity. It helps recognize and appreciate the contributions of different communities to the LL.

Understanding the creators of signs can inform language policies and planning. Policymakers can use this information to create more inclusive language policies that consider the needs and aspirations of diverse linguistic communities. Delving into the origins of signs in public spaces enriches people's comprehension of language as a constantly evolving social phenomenon. It unveils the intricate interplay among language, culture, identity, and power within a specific society, providing valuable insights into the diverse linguistic fabric that shapes a country's shared spaces.

**Implications to English Education**

Kachru (1986) provides an overview of The Three Concentric Circles Model of World Englishes (Inner, Outer, and Expanding Circles) and its significance for comprehending the diversity of English language usage worldwide. Kachru emphasizes the importance of embracing English's linguistic and cultural diversity as it is used in different areas of the globe. He argues that a more inclusive approach to English language education is needed, especially in teaching and learning.

The Inner Circle countries are primarily English-speaking nations where English is considered as the native language. These countries include the United States, the United Kingdom, Canada, New Zealand, and Australia. In these countries, English is the first language for most of the population and is deeply rooted in their history and culture. It is used in all aspects of daily life, including education, government, media, and business. English language norms and standards are well-established, and linguistic variations, such as British and American English, are commonly recognized.

In countries belonging to the Outer Circle, such as the Philippines, English is not merely considered a foreign language; it is also an integral part of their cultural heritage and is an official language. Due to historical ties and colonization, English became integral to the country's linguistic and cultural heritage. It is crucial in various domains, including education, government, media, and business. Other countries belonging to the outer circle include India, Malaysia, Singapore, Kenya, Ghana, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and Nigeria.

Similarly, students from the outer circle model may have prior exposure to English through historical and colonial ties. While they may be familiar with the language, formal education is still needed for proficiency. Compared to students in the expanding circle (e.g., Japan, China, Indonesia, etc.) with limited exposure, those in the outer circle have more language input opportunities through media and cultural interactions. However, they may also face pressure to conform to standardized English instead of expressing their cultural identity.

Japan falls under the expanding circle. The Expanding Circle includes countries where English is learned as a foreign language and used primarily for particular purposes, such as international communication, tourism, business, or academic pursuits.

In Japan, English is now taught as a compulsory school subject and is widely studied in the education system. While it is not an official language, English is significant in the country due to its importance in global communication and trade. Many Japanese people aim to attain proficiency in English to enhance their career prospects and engage in international exchanges.

English usage in Japan focuses more on functional purposes, such as passing school entrance examinations, reading academic literature, preparation for foreign trips, participating in international conferences, or conducting business with foreign partners. While there is a growing interest in English as a means of global communication, it is not used as extensively as in inner circle countries where English is the native language or at least in outer circle countries where English has an official or legal bearing.
The accessibility of the target language is crucial for language learning. Still, many students studying English as a foreign language in Japan need more opportunities to engage with it beyond the classroom. Various factors, such as the lack of English-speaking environments and cultural connections to the language, contribute to this situation. As a result, students may struggle with language proficiency due to limited exposure to authentic language use and materials. This situation can significantly impact their ability to use English effectively in real-life situations. In order to support their language development, it is essential to consider the availability of the target language in their environments and provide diverse opportunities for engagement.

The role of input in language learning and acquisition has been traditionally recognized, and it gained significant importance when Krashen (1982, 1985, 1994) formulated the Input hypothesis, a popular yet somewhat controversial hypothesis. Language display in the LL provides valuable input for learners. Input, which includes reading and listening to language, is essential for language acquisition and learning as it exposes learners to the language in meaningful contexts. Conversely, output, comprising speaking and writing, allows learners to practice the language acquired from input, test their comprehension, and receive feedback. Both input and output are critical components of language learning, working together to enhance learners' language proficiency.

Input is defined by Ellis and Shintani (2014) as the language data learners process and comprehend to acquire a language. With access to language input, language learning can commence. Therefore, learners must be exposed to the language to understand it and establish associations between language forms, meanings, and contexts. Language input can be in various forms, including reading, listening, and interacting with native speakers. The significance of input must be considered since it lays the foundation for language learning. Learners need ample and frequent language input to achieve effective language learning, a principle widely recognized in language acquisition research. Ellis (2005) includes this concept among the ten practical language learning principles. The importance of quality and quantity of comprehensible input must be emphasized. Learners must be immersed in language-rich environments, reading signs and comprehending their meanings, enhancing proficiency in the target language. Ample L2 input significantly contributes to successful language acquisition and overall learning experience.

In Japan's school environment, the amount of time dedicated to language learning may be similar to that of other subjects or even less in some cases. This lack of prioritization of language learning is due to curriculum constraints and traditional practices rather than considering what would be most effective in terms of pedagogy. Decisions regarding the amount of time allocated to language learning are not typically based on what learners require to attain satisfactory proficiency or fluency. As a result, learners may need more exposure to the language to develop the necessary language skills to function effectively in real-life situations.

The foundation of language learning lies in the linguistic input that learners are exposed to, such as through signage. Signage displaying common words in English such as welcome, gym, library, staff room, and toilet gradually become integrated into the learner's language system as they process sign after sign. The language system notes how frequently the signage is read, the words and phrases that appear alongside it, and other relevant factors. As a result, patterns and models for using particular aspects of language are established in the learner's developing language system over time.

An enriched learning environment that includes diverse English signage and exposure to phrases such as good morning, good evening, and good afternoon can add to the development of language patterns. The significance of input in language learning is rooted in the notion that learning occurs gradually as learners are repeatedly exposed to language input. In other words, learners' language skills improve as they receive significant input. Every exposure to a linguistic item or word in input allows learners to reinforce their developing language system. For instance, beginner learners of English may come across a signage that reads 'Please be quiet' near their library. The more they see this signage, the more it reinforces their understanding of the phrase. Consequently, when they are being noisy and a teacher reprimands them by saying 'please...,' they can anticipate that 'be quiet' will follow.

As learners repeatedly encounter words or phrases in input, those words become associated with each other in their developing language system, a process referred to as "chunking." This chunking enables learners to anticipate the occurrence of specific phrases as they become automatic and easier to process.
This process is rooted in a usage-based language learning theory, which posits that language use and exposure play an essential role in language acquisition. Similarly, this theory can also be applied to other areas of learning, suggesting that the more an individual engages with a particular topic or concept, the more automatic and easier it becomes for them to process and understand.

Providing learners with ample language input is crucial because it allows them to comprehend language before producing it. The primary source of learning required for language production is comprehension. Learning new vocabulary or grammar structures begins with producing these forms rather than understanding them in language input.

The 'silent period' proposed by Krashen (1981, 1982) is often observed in Japanese English language learners, who are hesitant to produce language and prefer to acquire language through input only (listening and reading). During this period, learners absorb and process the new language before they feel confident enough to speak and participate in conversations (Granger, 2004; Roberts, 2014). Research studies have documented this reluctance to engage in language output due to fear, lack of confidence, lack of competence, anxiety, and reticence during the early stages of language learning (Hamouda, 2013; Liu & Jackson, 2008; Savaşçı, 2014).

Overcoming the silent period in language learning can be facilitated through input from the signs found in the LL. Some strategies to leverage the signs for language learning include visual cues, where learners are encouraged to pay attention to the visual cues provided by signs, such as symbols, images, and colors. These visual elements can help them associate meanings with words, aiding comprehension even if they are not yet confident in speaking.

Signs with English texts can also be used for vocabulary building, such as common words, phrases, or expressions. Students can practice repeating the words they found silently or in a low voice to build familiarity and confidence. Students can also read aloud silently; while reading signs, they can silently read the text to themselves repeatedly. This practice allows them to reinforce their reading skills and internalize sentence structures.

By utilizing the signs in the LL as a valuable resource for input, language learners can gradually overcome the silent period and progress toward more active language production and communication. Consistent exposure to the language through signs and engaging language learning activities can boost learners' confidence and proficiency in the target language.

According to Nation (2007), a balanced language curriculum should include four components, each making up approximately 25% of the curriculum. These four strands are meaning-focused input, meaning-focused output, language-focused learning, and fluency development. By incorporating meaning-focused input, such as English words and phrases displayed in school LLs, learners can benefit significantly in their language learning journey. In order to acquire or learn a language, learners need to be exposed to meaning-focused input, which can be spoken or written. The key is that learners must attend to the message or ideas being conveyed rather than just how they are expressed.

While Nations' guide applies to all language learning contexts, some may argue that at the beginning stages of language learning, there should be a greater emphasis on input (receptive ability) and less on output (productive ability). In contexts where language exposure outside the classroom is limited, such as in Japan, meaning-focused input is essential for learners to develop receptive language abilities. As learners are exposed to input, they gradually build up their language comprehension and develop the necessary language resources to produce output.

Research has shown that focusing on language instruction or input at the initial stages of language learning can substantially influence learners' overall language proficiency (European Commission, 2011; Jaekel et al., 2022; Kohler, 2017). This condition is particularly relevant when learners need more time to practice the language outside the classroom. Educators can help learners develop a strong foundation for language acquisition by emphasizing meaning-focused input, leading to more effective language output in the long run.

Language learners in the era of the advancement of technology and new form of media can acquire input from a variety of sources aside from their teacher (Bahrami & Sim, 2012). Recognizing that teachers cannot provide all the input needed for language learning is essential. Learners require large amounts of input to develop their...
language proficiency, which must come from diverse sources to reflect the different forms of language in the real world.

For instance, learners can benefit from input in language-rich environments like libraries, language labs, and multimedia resources. These resources can provide learners with different types of input, from spoken language to written language, from formal language to informal language. Furthermore, exposure to various input sources helps learners broaden their linguistic knowledge, which can help develop communicative competence.

Providing learners with significant input in the target language can be accomplished through direct exposure to their naturalistic surroundings while using the target language daily (Flege, 2009; Saito, 2015). The school environment provides opportunities to incorporate texts from the target language into the learning space, whether on walls, bulletin boards, the entrance, or the perimeter fence. In this way, students can benefit from increased exposure to the language, which is essential for language learning.

Multimodal signs in the learning environment, such as electronic billboards and moving pictures, can also contribute to this effort. These opportunities can not only provide learners with authentic language material, but they can also make language learning more engaging and enjoyable.

The display of English and several other languages in the LL potentially impacts language learning. Multilingual signs may expose Japanese students to various languages and varieties of English and give them opportunities to read and comprehend the meaning of signs to reinforce their language learning in a context with limited opportunities for them to practice and use the target language.

Providing students with authentic materials is crucial since they contain language that learners are likely to encounter in real-life situations where the target language is used (Akbari & Razavi, 2016; Joraboyev, 2021). Additionally, exposing learners to such materials can serve as a motivating factor in their language-learning journey. These materials offer a glimpse into the linguistic and cultural aspects of the target language, which can help learners better understand the language’s nuances and complexities. In essence, by exposing learners to authentic materials as comprehensible input, teachers can provide a more immersive and engaging language learning experience (Zhang, 2009).

The role of language is crucial in the emergent pedagogy of place, which is reflected in the LL of academic institutions (Brown, 2012). In Japan, English teachers and school administrators must recognize the potential for transformative change in school environments by creating spaces enriched with the English language. However, this should only come at the expense of inclusivity for some students. In other words, any decision or action taken to improve a situation or achieve a goal should not result in the marginalization or discrimination of specific individuals or communities. It highlights the significance of considering the needs and rights of all students and ensuring that everyone is included and treated fairly in the process.

The emergence of the pedagogy of place emphasizes the significance of the physical and social contexts in shaping students’ learning experiences. It is an educational approach that emphasizes learning through the local environment and the immediate surroundings of the learners (Algyani & Syahrin, 2021; Chesnut et al., 2013; Li & Marshall, 2020; Malinowski et al., 2021; Rowland, 2013). The LL framework considers the multiple dimensions of learning that occur in different spaces within and outside of classrooms or schools, such as graffiti, hallways, playgrounds, libraries, streets, and commercial shops, among other places. Therefore, language plays an essential role in shaping the LL of schools.

In Japan, English language education is now a priority for many schools, as it is considered an essential skill for students to achieve their short-term and long-term language goals to succeed in the globalized world (Chen et al., 2021; Isoda & Kondo, 2022; Ocampo, 2017). However, there is a need for English teachers and school administrators to recognize the importance of creating an inclusive and diverse learning environment. This context means promoting English language learning should not exclude students with limited English language abilities or learners from different cultural and racial backgrounds. Moreover, it should not set aside Japanese as the majority and national language of the people.

To achieve this goal, English teachers and school administrators should embrace innovative teaching approaches that are inclusive and culturally responsive. They should also strive to create physical spaces rich in English language learning opportunities, such as English and multilingual school signs, libraries, language
exchange programs, and English-immersion camps. By doing so, they can help to make a learning space that is conducive to the needs of all students, regardless of their background. The LL of schools can be intentionally designed settings that convey powerful messages about the target language(s) to learners through the guidance of local and national authorities.

On the other side, Japanese people must recognize the various benefits of understanding English, such as comprehending shop signs, road signs, commercials, TV shows, movies, books, and games, among others, English. Moreover, it is not limited to entertainment, as scientific journals, international business, and a significant portion of the internet are conducted in English and, above all learning English for communication and international understanding.

It is imperative to shift the existing paradigm towards offering ample opportunities for learning the target language. This change can be achieved by providing schools with the necessary resources, including high-quality language programs that are sufficiently long to offer comprehensive support for English language learning without compromising the instruction of the native language and minority languages. Adequate funding, superb instruction, and excellent teaching and learning materials are essential to support successful language learning and acquisition.

Developing coherent and compatible schoolwide language policies that cater to the community's needs is crucial. Policymakers may prioritize multilingualism, including English, by funding bilingual or multilingual education programs, promoting English and other languages in public spaces, and encouraging international communication. Additionally, they should create English language learning resources suitable for learners from diverse backgrounds, including authentic materials reflecting global English usage and World Engli. Offering access to learning materials in public spaces, promoting the use of English in signage, advertisements, and other domains, and cultivating partnerships with various organizations for language training can further enhance English language learning and teaching in Japan on a global scale.

V. CONCLUSION

In conclusion, the LL of academic institutions in Kagawa, Japan, has two leading languages: Japanese and English. Japanese dominated all the signs. Most signs are in monolingual Japanese, and no signs are found in monolingual English. English is found to be a mere translation of Japanese in a few signs. There are also more Top-down or government signs than Bottom-up or private signs. The findings of the study shed light on the importance of language education, planning, and policymaking in the location. Comprehending how language is employed and recognizing the types of signs in the realm of LL offers valuable perspectives that can guide choices aimed at promoting greater linguistic inclusiveness and a wider range of cultures within educational environments.

In an effort to create a more inclusive and diverse linguistic environment, educational authorities are urged to incorporate a higher number of English signs within academic institutions. Enhancing the presence of English signage can significantly improve language exposure for students and staff, encouraging the development of bilingual or multilingual proficiency and communication skills.

Additionally, the government can play a crucial role in promoting linguistic and cultural diversity by supporting the implementation of more multilingual signage, particularly including English. These efforts can significantly benefit international students by providing essential information and enhancing their safety, security, and ease of study in Kagawa. Furthermore, these initiatives will create a more welcoming atmosphere and pave the way for globalization, thus strengthening the region's international connections and collaborations.

By acting upon these recommendations, Kagawa can take proactive steps towards creating an inclusive, language-rich, and culturally diverse environment within academic institutions and the broader community. Such initiatives will benefit the local population and establish Kagawa as a more welcoming and globally connected region on the international stage. Moreover, further studies are also recommended, aiming to go beyond the variables investigated in this study and comprehensively analyze LLs in other institutions and locations.
VI. REFERENCES


